



Input For United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences Country Visit: Turkey

June 2022

By Zinat Asadova & Kate Ryan

Broken Chalk is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 and focused on raising awareness and minimizing human rights violations in the educational field.

This report was drafted by Broken Chalk to contribute to the call for inputs based on the invitation of the Government of Turkey for the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences in preparation for the visit by Ms. Reem Alsalem on 18 - 27 July 2022. Broken Chalk is an organisation that fights against violations of Human Rights and improving the quality of education around the globe. This report will discuss the main challenges Turkey faces in regards to women's rights violations, what are some issues that could be improved, and finally Broken Chalk will offer some recommendations for Turkey based on the raised issues.



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Introduction

This report was drafted by Broken Chalk to contribute to the call for inputs based on the invitation of the Government of Turkey for the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences in preparation for the visit by Ms. Reem Alsalem on 18 - 27 July 2022. Broken Chalk is an organisation that fights against violations of Human Rights and improving the quality of education around the globe. This report will discuss the main challenges Turkey faces in regards to women's rights violations, what are some issues that could be improved, and finally Broken Chalk will offer some recommendations for Turkey based on the raised issues.

In Turkey, discrimination and violence against women has cultural, sociological, and legal causes. Education, health, employment, and social life carry traces of gender discrimination. Gender inequality also occurs in the legal field. Especially in the criminal justice system, women experience disadvantages compared to men. Despite the gender-neutral laws, discrimination is widespread and affects law enforcement, which is dominated by patriarchal social codes and prejudices. Turkey recently increased punishments for crimes against women in the wake of backlash from the international community and at home for its withdrawal last year from an international treaty on domestic violence. The status of incarcerated women in Turkey's prisons is a wider reflection on how women are treated in Turkish society. Women's institutions are overcrowded, lack sufficient food and sanitation facilities, and are located in remote locations a substantial distance from the women's families. It was also found that there is a sexist approach that underscores the treatment of women prisoners, and women with children are struggling with the separation from their children.

Death of Women in Turkish Prisons

1. There are sick women who lost their lives due to lack of treatment and due to deprivation of their medications that they use to treat their illness.¹
2. Women have lost their lives in suspicious deaths, where the authorities declared these deaths as "suicide deaths" without investigating into the case of their death, as there are eye witnesses which they have stated that these deaths are not suicide, rather these victims have been threatened and have been killed by authorities.²³

¹ Staff. (2018). Thirty-year-old woman dies of pneumonitis in Turkish prison. Stockholm Center for Freedom. Retrieved from <https://stockholmcf.org/thirty-year-old-woman-dies-of-pneumonitis-in-turkish-prison/>

² Bianet - Bagimsiz Iletisim Agi. (2021). Aysel Tuğluk, hundreds of ill prisoners left for dead in Turkey. Retrieved from <https://m.bianet.org/english/human-rights/254888-aysel-tugluk-hundreds-of-ill-prisoners-left-for-dead-in-turkey>

³ Staff. (2022). Activists demonstrate against high number of female inmates in Turkish prisons. Stockholm Center for Freedom. Retrieved from <https://stockholmcf.org/activists-demonstrate-against-high-number-of-female-inmates-in-turkish-prisons/>

3. Most of the women who lost their lives in prison were due to chronic diseases, harassment, violence, abuse, torture, and suicide. In 2021 alone, 18 women lost their lives in prison due to their diseases. In total, approximately 165 of women lost their lives in prison between 2016 and 2022 due to the poor conditions in Turkish prisons, as this includes harassment, torture, diseases, and suspicious deaths covered under “suicide” cases.⁴
4. Women from ethnic and religious minorities that are citizens of Turkey have been the victims of torture, abuse, and murder, especially human rights activists. There have also been reports of murder covered under “suicide”. In 2021, Garibe Gezer, a Kurdish woman who spoke up about sexual harassment, torture and rape, has lost her life in suspicious death, as the death was ruled “suicide” by Turkish authorities. While the cause of her death is unclear, as the autopsy was conducted without her attorney and many human rights activists have questioned the nature of her death, as they believe she was murdered for speaking up about the torture and sexual harassment she endured in the prison.^{5 6}
5. In Turkish-controlled areas of Syria, there have been many reports of abuse in prisons towards women, including rape, sexual harassment, and torture. Due to these abuses, many women took their own lives after being raped by members of Turkish-Backed militias, and many pregnant women have lost their lives after being abused till death by the same militia members in prisons. In 2021, it was reported that a pregnant woman was murdered in Afrin (one of the areas occupied by Turkish military) after being tortured till death in Turkish Intelligence Organization prison.^{7 8}
6. There are many cases where pregnant women and their babies have lost their lives in Turkish prisons due to the poor conditions in the prisons. In 2017, a pregnant woman has lost her life with her baby in prison because of the negligence of the prison administration.⁹
7. Since Broken Chalk is an NGO that fights for human rights, it is concerned that the death toll and the murder of women prisoners due to abuse and violence these prisoners endure will get higher if there won't be concrete actions taken

⁴ Deaths Caused by Rights Violations on and After 15 July 2016. Solidarity with OTHERS. Retrieved from <https://www.solidaritywithothers.com/deaths>

⁵ Tremblay, P. (2021). Turkey rules suicide in death of Kurdish prisoner who alleged torture, rape. Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East. Retrieved from <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/12/turkey-rules-suicide-death-kurdish-prisoner-who-alleged-torture-rape>

⁶ Staff. (2021). Garibe Gezer's suspicious death after months of torture in prison: 'This is a murder,' HDP MP says. Medya News. Retrieved from <https://medyanews.net/garibe-gezers-suspicious-death-after-months-of-torture-in-an-istanbul-prison-this-is-a-murder-hdp-mp-says/>

⁷ Staff. (2021). Afrin: Pregnant woman murdered in prison. Medya News. Retrieved from <https://medyanews.net/afrin-pregnant-woman-murdered-in-prison/>

⁸ Wilkofsky, D., Zaman, A., & Hardan, M. (2021). Turkish-backed rebels leave trail of abuse, criminality in Syria's Afrin. Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East. Retrieved from <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/07/turkish-backed-rebels-leave-trail-abuse-and-criminality-syrias-afrin>

⁹ Staff. (2017). Authorities' negligence kills a pregnant woman and her baby in Turkish prison. Stockholm Center for Freedom. Retrieved from <https://stockholmcf.org/authorities-negligence-kills-a-pregnant-woman-and-her-baby-in-turkish-prison/>

to punish these abusers and if there won't be reforms to combat these abuses and the human rights violations.

Violence Against Women and LGBTQIA+ Community

8. Broken Chalk is concerned with the high rates of femicide, Homophobic, Biphobic, and Transphobic crimes in Turkey. In March of 2022 alone, 25 cases of femicide and 3 cases of rape was reported¹⁰. In research done in 2019, out of 150 people, 120 people (80.0%) were victims of Homophobic and Transphobic hate crimes, and 30 people (20.0%) witnessed the Homophobic and Transphobic hate crime incidents.¹¹
9. In 2021, Turkey has withdrawn from the Istanbul Convention, a human rights treaty aimed at protecting women from abuse, domestic violence and gender-based violence. Government officials justified the withdrawal claiming that the treaty "normalizes homosexuality"¹². From 2008 until 2022, approximately 3762 women, including ethnic minorities and women from immigrant backgrounds, have lost their lives in femicide crimes, and most of these women have been killed by their husbands¹³.
10. With Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul convention, gender-based crimes are increasing each year. In 2022 alone, 162 women have been killed in femicide crimes¹⁴. According to a study done in 2015, 68% of married women are victims of physical violence, while 27% of married women are victims of physical and sexual violence together.¹⁵
11. There have been many cases of Kurdish women and children being sexually abused and raped by Turkish Gendarmerie Command, senior officers, prison officers, guards and soldier as a means of torture and to enforce fear and humiliation to silence Kurdish women's resilience. These Kurdish women have been forced into 'virginity tests' by Turkish government officials.¹⁶

¹⁰ Staff. (2022). Turkey saw 25 femicides in March. Ahval News. Retrieved from <https://ahvalnews.com/femicide-turkey/turkey-saw-25-femicides-march>

¹¹ Kaos GL Cultural Research and Solidarity Association. (2019). Homophobia and Transphobia Based Hate Crimes in Turkey (pp. 8-9). Ankara: Kaos GL Cultural Research and Solidarity Association. Retrieved from <https://kaosglidernegi.org/images/library/2020nefret-sucdari-raporu-2019-eng.pdf>

¹² Roth, K. World Report 2022: Rights Trends in Turkey. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/turkey>

¹³ Anıt Sayaç : Şiddetten Ölen Kadınlar İçin Dijital Anıt (Digital Memorial for Women Who have been murdered in femicide crimes). Anitsayac.com. Retrieved from <http://anitsayac.com/>

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, i., Çavlin, A., & Akadlı Ergöçmen, B. (2015). Research on domestic violence against women in Turkey (p. 92). Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies & Ministry of Family and Social Policies of Turkey

¹⁶ Duzgun, M. (2013). Turkey: a history of sexual violence. the Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/jun/10/turkey-history-sexual-violence>

12. Turkish authorities are continuously persecuting women's rights activists through various ways. One of the most common ways of persecution is to arrest women who have participated in in any form of activism and framing them as "terrorists", "western agenda" or "traitors". In 2021, 18 women's rights activists have been arrested for shouting slogans at Women's Day assembly which Turkish authorities found it "offensive" and "insulting" for President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and one of the women who was arrested is a 17-year-old child.¹⁷In May 2022, Turkish Authorities detained 15 15 Kurdish women who political activists, and among the detained are the elected co-mayors of the city of Batman, the district of Kozluk, and the town of Bekirhan.¹⁸
13. Syrian refugee women have been victims of abuse and being used as sexual objects, as Turkish men take advantage of their poor economic situation and use them as their sexual objects (i.e co-wives, prostitution, sexual harassment and rape) since these women have no other choice of protection and can't afford food or a shelter, and are not offered to decent jobs because of their refugee status¹⁹. Syrian refugee women are also the target of stereotypes and negative xenophobic portrayals in media outlets and in society, such as being a threat to family and society in Turkey.²⁰
14. 14 .Many of femicide cases are covered up as "suicide" by the government officials and by murderers to cover up for their crimes and have less punishment, even in many cases these crimes go unpunished especially when these crimes are covered up as suicide, which makes it easier for murderers because they will frame the case as women "being mentally ill and psychologically unstable".²¹

Violence against women under the Turkish occupation of Northern Syria

15. After the Military occupation of arears of Northern Syria by the Turkish Armed Forces and its allies, Broken Chalk has since been concerned about the violence and abuse of women in the occupied areas by the Turkish Armed Forces.
16. There has been reports of femicide crimes being committed by the Turkish armed forces and its allies. According to report documented between 20 January 2018

¹⁷ Staff. (2021). Turkey: End Probe of Women Over Shouted Slogans. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/12/turkey-end-probe-women-over-shouted-slogans>

¹⁸ Staff. (2022). Turkey: 15 Kurdish women activists detained in Batman. Medya News. Retrieved from <https://medyanews.net/turkey-15-kurdish-women-activists-detained-in-batman/>

¹⁹ Dogutas, A. (2019). Gender Based Violence against Syrian Refugee Women in Turkey. *Border Crossing*, 9(2), pp. 114 -120. <https://doi.org/10.33182/bc.v9i2.811>

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Karakas, B. (2021). How many femicides in Turkey are covered up as suicides? Deutsche Welle. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/how-many-femicides-in-turkey-are-covered-up-as-suicides/a-56752194>

to 1 June 2020, 50 women have been murdered by Turkish armed forces and its jihadist militias in occupied Afrin.²²

17. Since Turkey's occupation of Afrin in 2018, cases of kidnap and enforced disappearance of women have been reported. More than 1000 women have been abducted and disappeared, including 290 cases of arbitrary arrests of women and children by Turkish Armed Forces and its jihadist militias between 2018 and 2020.²³
18. One of the most important laws that protects women and children from abuse and violence "the prohibition of forced marriage of minors", which the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria introduced in 2014 and was passed in the Afrin, Kobane and Cizîrê regions, was violated by Turkish Armed Forces and its jihadist militias after the occupation Afrin and other areas of Northern Syria in 2018. In 2019, two underage girls were forcefully married to Turkish backed jihadist militia members after these girls families received a lot of death threats and abuse, which they had no other choice but to give up and accept the forced marriage.²⁴

Pregnant Women/ Mothers in Turkish prisons

19. There are also many concerns for the welfare of pregnant prisoners/mothers and their children in Turkish prisons. If a child is under the age of six then mothers who are convicted or detained upon arrest have three options to have their children placed with them (1) if the women have relatives outside to take care of them, the child can stay with the family; (2) if there is nobody to take care of the children then they can stay in the prison facility with their mother; or, (3) if their mothers refuse to take the children into the prison facility then the children will be placed in nursery houses which are under government protection.²⁵
20. In the Parliamentary Humanity Commission, the Director of GDP& DH stated that the number of children who stayed in prisons with their mother was 743; 543 of these children were between 0 years and 3 years of age and 200 children were between 4 and 6 years of age. As of the date of the commission meeting (November 14th, 2018), the number of pregnant women was 35. Some female

²² Kongra Star Statistics, Research Committee Qamişlo , Women Defend Rojava campaign. (2020). Women Under Turkish Occupation: Femicide and gender-based violence as systematic practice of the Turkish occupation in Afrin (pp.24-28). Women Defend Rojava, Kongra Star. Retrieved from <https://womendefendrojava.net/en/2020/06/30/new-dossier-women-under-turkish-occupation/>

²³ Kongra Star Statistics, Research Committee Qamişlo , Women Defend Rojava campaign. (2020). Women Under Turkish Occupation: Femicide and gender-based violence as systematic practice of the Turkish occupation in Afrin (pp.13-22). Women Defend Rojava, Kongra Star. Retrieved from <https://womendefendrojava.net/en/2020/06/30/new-dossier-women-under-turkish-occupation/>

²⁴ Kongra Star Statistics, Research Committee Qamişlo , Women Defend Rojava campaign. (2020). Women Under Turkish Occupation: Femicide and gender-based violence as systematic practice of the Turkish occupation in Afrin (p.23). Women Defend Rojava, Kongra Star. Retrieved from <https://womendefendrojava.net/en/2020/06/30/new-dossier-women-under-turkish-occupation/>

²⁵ <https://www.tandfonline-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/doi/pdf/10.1080/08974454.2019.1673875?needAccess=true>

inmates have more than one child but the number of children incarcerated women have is not known.

21. Despite the fact that there are family members to look after their children many women choose to keep their children with them despite the dire and harsh prison conditions as mothers do not want to be separated from their young children because they want to oversee their children's security or because they are breastfeeding their infants.²⁶ This is an issue and a cause of serious concern for the welfare of both the mother and children

Recommendations

22. The ruling government in Turkey should take responsibility to improve prisons conditions and punish everyone who participated in the torture of prisoners, as well as pay reparations to the families of the prisoners who lost their lives due to the abuse and ill treatment these prisoners went through.
23. Pregnant and sick prisoners with serious health conditions released from prison given the seriousness of their health conditions.
24. Human rights activists from different backgrounds, ethnicities, religious or political beliefs should not be arrested or punished. Human rights activists who are imprisoned because of their beliefs or their ethnicity or religion should be released immediately and their abusers (including prison officials) must be punished by law.
25. Turkey must immediately join the Istanbul Convention because the treaty is one of the essential ways to provide protection to women and LGBTQIA+ community, and without this treaty, the cases of rape, femicide, sexual harassment, gender-based discrimination, Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia will continue to increase without the perpetrators getting punished for their crimes.
26. Perpetrators who committed crimes such as femicide, rape, sexual harassment, Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic crimes should be given strong punishment, and the victims of these crimes should be provided with emotional, physical and financial support by the government.
27. Refugee women should be provided with financial and emotional support by the government, and discrimination based on their status and their ethnicity should be criminalized, and companies providing job opportunities should be more inclusive to include refugee women in their job offerings.
28. Freedom of speech should not be punished, and peaceful protests should not be banned, as people have the rights to express their dissatisfaction of how the

²⁶ <https://www-tandfonline-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/doi/pdf/10.1080/08974454.2019.1673875?needAccess=true>

government operates and they have the rights to ask for serious changes in the country, especially with women and LGBTQIA+ rights.

29. Turkish Armed Forces must withdraw its forces from Northern Syria, and Turkey must end its occupation of Northern Syria and pay reparations to the inhabitants of the area, including the victims of the occupation.
30. Since education plays as essential role to open people's eyes and get people more educated on human rights and freedom of speech, Broken Chalk urges Turkey's Ministry of Education to make systemic changes in education and be more inclusive in their system and what they want to pass to the current generation.



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