

# TÜRKIYE

Attacks on education continued in Türkiye in 2022 and 2023. In addition to attacks on schools, GCPEA collected reports of attacks on school teachers and personnel. Attacks on higher education continued, mainly in the context of protest repression, with over 200 students and staff arrested or detained.

## CONTEXT

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) continued to govern the country after re-election in the May 2023 general elections.<sup>1</sup> Media restrictions were reported ahead of the 2023 parliamentary and presidential elections, according to Human Rights Watch.<sup>2</sup> LGBT protests were repressed and over 500 civilians were detained throughout the country during LGBT events in 2022, according to Amnesty International.<sup>3</sup> Authorities banned women's rights marches during the reporting period and used teargas on demonstrators on International Women's Day in 2023.<sup>4</sup>

Armed violence increased between Turkish forces, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and the People's Protection Units (YPG), a Syrian affiliate of the PKK, in southeast Türkiye, northern Iraq, and Syria.<sup>5</sup> In October 2023, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive device near a ministry building in Ankara; a group affiliated with the PKK claimed responsibility, and the Turkish armed forces reportedly carried out airstrikes in Iraq in response.<sup>6</sup>

Two earthquakes in February 2023 killed over 50,000 people, injured 107,000, and required that three million people be relocated, according to OCHA.<sup>7</sup> Syrian refugees were impacted by the earthquakes, since approximately half of those in Türkiye lived in affected areas.<sup>8</sup> In March 2022, the UN reported that Türkiye continued to host 3.7 million Syrian refugees.<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch reported that Syrian refugees were deported to northern Syria during the reporting period.<sup>10</sup>

Following the earthquakes in February 2023, schools were closed for at least two weeks nationwide, and for several months in some affected areas.<sup>11</sup> Save the Children reported that the earthquakes interrupted education for almost four million children, and over 2,400 schools were damaged or destroyed.<sup>12</sup> In addition, schools and universities were used to provide temporary shelter and services to civilians;<sup>13</sup> some universities ceased in-person learning and student housing was vacated to accommodate earthquake victims.<sup>14</sup>

## ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

GCPEA identified two attacks on schools during the 2022-2023 reporting period. This was similar to the 2020-2021 reporting period, during which three attacks were reported.<sup>15</sup>

GCPEA identified one attack on a school in 2022. On November 21, 2022, in Karkamış, Gaziantep province, shelling reportedly hit a contiguous kindergarten, primary, and secondary school, damaging all three buildings and killing a female teacher at the secondary school, as reported by ACLED and local media *Haberturk* and *Bianet*.<sup>16</sup> Several other people were allegedly injured, although it was not clear whether they were students or staff at the schools or the kindergarten. The schools were closed for at least one week following the attack.<sup>17</sup>

GCPEA collected one attack on a school in 2023. On May 28, 2023, police reportedly used teargas and rubber bullets at Metin Bostancıoğlu Primary School while forcing voters to leave the school in Cizre city, Şırnak province; it was not possible to establish whether the school sustained damages.<sup>18</sup>

## ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

GCPEA identified four attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel during the 2022-2023 reporting period. This marks a similar rate as compared to the previous reporting period, when GCPEA identified at least two incidents in 2021 and one in 2020.<sup>19</sup>

GCPEA identified four attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel in 2022, all of which involved protest repression.<sup>20</sup> For example:

- As reported by ACLED and Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, on August 30, 2022, police allegedly used pepper spray to disperse a teacher demonstration against low salaries in Çankaya district, Ankara. At least seven people were reportedly detained by police, although it was not possible to establish whether they were teachers.<sup>21</sup>
- On September 8, 2022, police reportedly used force to prevent over 40 teachers from reaching the Ministry of Education building in Çankaya district, Ankara, during a protest against new legislation relating to teachers, according to ACLED and local media *Cumhuriyet*.<sup>22</sup>
- On November 2, 2022, in Fatih district, Istanbul, police reportedly used force and detained at least one teacher during a protest against new legislation relating to teachers, according to ACLED and local media *Duvar*.<sup>23</sup>

GCPEA did not identify any attacks on school students, teachers, and other personnel in 2023.

## ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

GCPEA identified at least 25 attacks on higher education during the 2022-2023 reporting period, a slight decrease as compared to the prior reporting period, when GCPEA identified 25 such incidents in 2021, and seven in 2020.<sup>24</sup> Similar to previous years, incidents involved arrests, detentions, and the use of excessive force against protesting students. Scholars at Risk reported that peaceful student demonstrations over LGBT rights and education-related grievances were met with police repression including arrests.<sup>25</sup>

GCPEA identified 13 attacks on higher education students and staff in 2022, during which over 100 students and staff were arrested.<sup>26</sup> For example:

- On May 20, 2022, at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, police reportedly arrested at least 30 students who were marching peacefully on campus towards an LGBT university club that had been closed, according to Scholars at Risk and international media outlet *AP News*.<sup>27</sup>
- On May 26, 2022, in Tunceli city and province, police allegedly detained 11 students from Munzur University with force, as reported by ACLED and Scholars at Risk; the students were demonstrating on campus against a politically-affiliated center at the university.<sup>28</sup>
- On June 10, 2022, at Middle East Technical University in Ankara, police reportedly used excessive force, including pepper balls, during an on-campus LGBT demonstration calling for equal rights, as reported by Amnesty International and Scholars at Risk.<sup>29</sup>
- On July 18, 2022, police allegedly arrested 20 cleaning staff who were peacefully protesting over working conditions outside Koç University in Sariyer district, Istanbul, as reported by Scholars at Risk, ACLED, and *Bianet*.<sup>30</sup>
- On November 8, 2022, students from Middle East Technical University held a protest in Cankaya district, Ankara, against plans to build on university land. Police reportedly beat protesters and used pepper spray to disperse the group, and arrested at least six protesters, according to Scholars at Risk and Human Rights Foundation of Turkey.<sup>31</sup>

GCPEA identified 12 attacks on higher education students and staff in 2023, which also involved the arrest or detention of over 100 students and academics.<sup>32</sup> For example:

- On January 13, 2023, police reportedly detained seven students at Van Yüzüncü Yıl University in Tuşba district, Van province, during celebrations of Kurdish New Year, according to ACLED and Human Rights Foundation of Turkey.<sup>33</sup>
- On February 17, 2023, Scholars at Risk and local media reported that police detained 22 students at Dokuz Eylül University in Konak district, Izmir province, during a demonstration against the government's decision to make university courses remote and for students to vacate state-run dormitories to provide emergency accommodation for people affected by the earthquakes.<sup>34</sup> In a separate incident on February 20, 2023, police reportedly detained 23 students who were protesting the same grievances in Kadıköy district, Istanbul.<sup>35</sup>
- On May 19, 2023, police reportedly detained students as they were leaving Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, as reported by Human Rights Foundation of Turkey.<sup>36</sup> Local media *Bianet* reported that students were strip-searched while in custody.<sup>37</sup>
- On June 9, 2023, police reportedly detained around 15 students on campus at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara; the students were engaged in a peaceful LGBT demonstration, and two students sustained injuries, as reported by Amnesty International and Scholars at Risk.<sup>38</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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