

# WRITTEN COMMENTS

BY THE EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTRE AND ROMANI GODI  
CONCERNING TÜRKIYE

For Consideration by the United Nations Committee Against Torture, at  
its 80th Session (08 July to 26 July 2024)

CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATION PROMOTING EQUALITY



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## INTRODUCTION

In its 2016 concluding observations on the **fourth periodic report** of Turkey, the Committee expressed the following concerns about impunity for acts of torture and ill-treatment:

- it had not received sufficient information on prosecutions for torture, including in the context of cases involving allegations of torture that have been the subject of decisions of the European Court of Human Rights.
- The Committee was also concerned about the significant disparity between the high number of allegations of torture reported by non-governmental organizations and the data provided by the State party in its periodic report, suggesting that not all allegations of torture have been investigated during the reporting period.
- While the State party undertook many investigations into allegations of ill-treatment and excessive use of force by its officials, they resulted in relatively few cases of disciplinary sanctions, and in fines and imprisonment in only a small number of cases.

This joint submission by the European Roma Rights Centre (the ERRC)<sup>1</sup> and Romani Godi<sup>2</sup> highlights a number of issues concerning acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of Romani communities by State parties in Turkey. The concerns raised by the Committee in 2016 remain very pertinent to this day.

1 The ERRC is a Roma-led an international public interest law organisation working to combat anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma through strategic litigation, research and policy development, advocacy and human rights education. The ERRC has consultative status with the Council of Europe, as well as with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. More information is available at: <https://www.errc.org/>.

2 Romani Godi, The Association for Roma Memory Studies is a Roma civil society organization that works and advocates in the fields of Roma social memory, Roma language, culture, and history, as well as rights violations, inequalities, and discrimination experienced by Roma in Turkey.

## **AFTER THE QUAKE: CRUEL AND DEGRADING TREATMENT OF ROMA VICTIMS**

In Turkey, poverty and social exclusion are widespread among Roma and similar social groups: the majority continue to be subjected to discrimination especially with regards education, employment and housing. In terms of cruel and degrading treatment, in the wake of the massive earthquake of 6 February 2023, the NGO Romani Godi confirmed cases of aid supplies being purposely cut to areas with known populations of Roma, Dom, and Abdals, leaving many on the verge of starvation without access to basic aid. These groups often lived in the poorest housing and consequently have been amongst the worst affected, and had also to contend with outright discrimination from the authorities, from volunteers, and from members of the public. At the same time, cases of racism, discrimination, and hate crimes have exploded against those identified as 'Gypsies' in Turkey. Romani activists in the region have documented numerous forced evictions from emergency shelters, denial of access to accommodation, removals of families from houses of mourning, and denial of food and water to families who volunteers referred to as "dirty gypsies".

The District President of Hatay Dörtyol, Veysel Demir, who is Abdal himself described how the police denied his community access to aid, and filed a criminal complaint against the police who racially abused his family, and attacked them with pepper spray. Elsewhere, Romani Godi activists have documented numerous violent hate crimes against Roma, Dom, and Abdals to which the authorities seemingly turn a blind eye.

## POLICE VIOLENCE AGAINST ROMA

“Police violence has been routinised and has become a part of daily life” according to the [Human Rights Foundation of Turkey’s](#) documentation centre. Police target and routinely attack public demonstrations by the LGBTQ community, feminists, environmentalists and the Kurds with excessive violence.

In April 2023, in the earthquake region, [Human Rights Watch](#) described credible reports of police, gendarmes, and military personnel subjecting people they suspect of crimes to violent and prolonged beatings and arbitrary, unofficial detention, as a shocking indictment of law enforcement practices in Turkey’s earthquake region: “Law enforcement officials are treating the state of emergency for the natural disaster as a license to torture, otherwise ill-treat and even kill with impunity.”

What is less apparent and most overlooked is violence against Roma in Turkey, where Romani communities face extreme poverty and social exclusion and continue to be subjected to discrimination especially with regards education, employment and housing. The following examples cited by the ERRC and Romani Godi are illustrative of a wider pattern of routine violence, torture and intimidation by law enforcement against Roma.

### **9 January 2024: ROMANI PRISONER IN ISTANBUL JAIL: BRUISED, BATTERED, THEN DEAD IN CUSTODY**

The family of prisoner Vahdet Akın have called for justice following his ‘suspicious’ death in Maltepe No. 1 Closed Prison in Istanbul. [As reported on 4 December](#), on the news portal *Cumhuriyet*, the family’s lawyer claimed that Akın had clearly been beaten, and that injuries to his left eye and legs were recorded in the examination reports. According to an official statement Akın died of a brain haemorrhage, the prosecutor has reportedly declared it to be a ‘suspicious death’, and according to the lawyer, has initiated the necessary investigations. The family is awaiting the official autopsy report from the Forensic Medicine Institute. For more details see: <https://www.errc.org/news/romani-prisoner-in-istanbul-jail-bruised-battered-then-dead-in-custody>.

### **26 June 2023: ROMA IN TURKEY: MORE POLICE BRUTALITY**

A group of police officers attacked a wedding party in the Çerkezköy Roma Neighbourhood in the city of Tekirdağ in the Marmara region. The police alleged the celebrations had gone over time. They cautioned the wedding guests in abusive terms and then set about beating those present with batons. Many of those injured took medical reports from a hospital affirming that their injuries were inflicted by police. The officers did not want their actions recorded, and attacked those who attempted to take videos of the incident, as can be seen from the short video posted by the media outlet *Roman Haber* on their Facebook page.

The second incident occurred in Hendek, in the city Sakarya, close to Istanbul, where a large number of Roma, including Ferdi Sepetçioğlu, the president of the Hendek Roma Association, were beaten by police and security guards. A video of this second incident, also shared on Facebook by *Roman Haber*, appears to show people fleeing from baton-wielding uniformed officers as they violently wade into the crowd. See: <https://www.errc.org/news/roma-in-turkey-more-police-brutality>.

### **11 May 2023: TURKISH POLICE SHOOT AND KILL A ROMANI MAN IN IZMIR**

A 33-year-old, father-of-three [Semih Gürler](#) was shot shot dead by a police officer while he stood outside on the balcony of a house in the Konak district of Izmir. According to the [official statement](#) made by the İzmir City Governorate, a police team was dispatched to the Romani man’s address at 8:30pm, after receiving a report of domestic violence. When the officers arrived, they encountered Semih on the balcony and attempted to persuade him to come down. He allegedly went into the house and came back with a shisha pipe in his hand, which the police officers say they believed to be a weapon. For more details see: <https://www.errc.org/news/turkish-police-shoot-and-kill-a-romani-man-in-izmir>.

**16 January 2023: ROMA TORTURED BY POLICE FACE CRIMINAL CHARGES BEFORE AN ISTANBUL COURT AFTER SEEKING JUSTICE AGAINST THEIR ABUSERS**

Resül Bayır, aged 43, and his son Hüseyin, aged 25, were detained by police and subjected to prolonged torture over the night of 30 May 2022. Resül was forced to lie face down on the floor while officers tortured him for hours. Hüseyin was also subjected to torture, had his eye socket fractured, and was left with bruises and cuts all over his body. The following morning both men obtained medical certificates from the hospital and filed complaints against four police officers for Misconduct, Defamation, Actual Bodily Harm, and Torture. The police responded by stating that Resül had suffered his injuries during an attempt to escape police custody. The public prosecutor dismissed this complaint, although another complaint of Hüseyin's remains under investigation. Resül and Hüseyin were both charged with Defamation for comments made towards officers at the wedding and the station, and Resistance and Obstruction of Performance of Duty for allegedly attempting to escape police custody. For more details see: <https://www.errc.org/news/roma-tortured-by-police-face-criminal-charges-before-an-istanbul-court-after-seeking-justice-against-their-abusers>.

**22 September 2022: TORTURE AND DEATH IN CUSTODY:** Turkish media, reporting on the suspicious death of Romani prisoner Mehmet Bozan six weeks earlier, revealed that he had written 12 letters detailing the human rights violations he experienced, how he had been repeatedly beaten and tortured by prison authorities prior to his death.

Bozan, in a letter to the Civil Society Association in the Penal System detailing his experiences, explained that although he was a tuberculosis patient, he was not taken to the infirmary and that he was subjected to constant pressure, torture and ill-treatment by correctional officers and the administration. Additionally, Bozan said that there was no safety in the prison he was in and said, "They will kill me by torture."

In his final letter Bozan said: "I started a hunger strike on Tuesday, June 28, due to pressure, threats and lack of life safety. Because I was a Roma prisoner, I was subjected to ill-treatment by the prison administration and correctional officers. I was constantly exposed to discrimination, oppression and violence. The competent authorities are responsible for my death."

The Civil Society Association in the Penal System made several applications to the Ministry of Justice, the Presidential Communication Center, and the Turkish Human Rights and Equality Institution to investigate violations of rights in the prison before Bozan's death. The association applied to the Ministry of Justice on 9 September 2021, requesting that Mehmet Bozan be transferred to the hospital, but did not receive a response. For the last time, the association applied to the Ministry of Justice on 3 January 3, 2022 and 19 July 19 to examine the rights violations suffered by Bozan. No investigation has been undertaken.

For more details see: <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/olmeden-once-12-mektup-yazdi-bana-iskence-edecekler-haber-1581833>.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In its [last monitoring report on Turkey](#), ECRI drew attention to the prevalence of hate speech and described its increasing use by officials, including senior representatives of the state, as a major concern. This is not only deeply damaging for social cohesion, but creates an enabling environment for the use of violence against stigmatized minorities and increases the likelihood that state actors will engage in cruel, degrading and inhumane treatment of Roma and other minorities. A culture of impunity and a lack of accountability on the part of law enforcement when it comes to the policing of Roma and other minorities means that the use of torture, violence, abuse and intimidation has become routinised in Turkey

- Security practices by law enforcement in Romani neighbourhoods that have no legal basis and criminalise Roma and Romani neighbourhoods should be put to an end and practices to prevent these interventions must be established. Social policies should be implemented in these areas to support confidence building and social integration.
- State officials and political leaders at all levels must stop using hate speech. The Parliament and the government should adopt codes of conduct prohibiting hate speech and the authorities should encourage political parties to do likewise. These codes of conduct should provide for complaints mechanisms and adequate sanctions for breach of the codes, including suspension of mandate and unambiguous condemnation of hate speech.
- The establishment of a body fully independent of the law enforcement services is essential to investigate ill-treatment by police and other security forces. Such a body, alongside the public prosecutor, must ensure that all allegations of torture and ill-treatment are investigated promptly, effectively and impartially and that the perpetrators are prosecuted and convicted in accordance with the gravity of their acts.
- Law enforcement bodies must ensure that alleged perpetrators are immediately suspended from duty for the duration of the investigation, particularly when there is a risk that they might otherwise be in a position to repeat the alleged act, to commit reprisals against the alleged victim or to obstruct the investigation.
- Turkey should provide statistical data on allegations of torture and ill-treatment, disaggregated by relevant indicators, including ethnicity of the victim, and information on cases in which individuals alleging torture or ill-treatment by the authorities have subsequently been charged with an additional criminal offence.