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# The AKP's War on Women

A dossier on the AKP government's  
(hostile) policy towards women in  
Turkey

July 2020

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## Introduction

As a member state of the Council of Europe and NATO, and a candidate for EU membership, Turkey has been governed for 18 years by the Islamic-conservative Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP). The AKP's dictatorial-autocratic style of government at home and its aggressive-imperial policies abroad are watched with great – although insufficient – concern and criticism worldwide. Its patriarchal-femicidal policies, however, receive hardly any attention. Under the AKP, all achievements of women are gradually but systematically abolished and women are forced into traditional gender roles. Anyone who opposes this is met with violence.

Under the AKP, which represents political Islam, the country is increasingly taking on an Islamic-conservative character. As patriarchy becomes ever more deeply institutionalised, already limited freedoms are increasingly restricted, and women are increasingly unable to lead a self-determined life. Women are declared objects and are assigned a place in the family accordingly. Laws, decrees, measures, manipulation, prohibitions, intimidation and violence are all vehicles of this process.

Women's organisations in Turkey state that violence against women has increased by up to 1400% under the AKP government.<sup>1</sup>

Organised women are a key target for the AKP, and in particular the Kurdish women's movement. Their organisations are banned, their members arrested and tortured. Since

2013, political women have been systematically murdered. In January 2013 in Paris (Sakine Cansız, Fidan Dogan, Leyla Saylemez), 2016 in Cizre (Seve Demir, Fatma Uyar, Pakize Nayir) and June 2020 in Kobane (Zehra Berkel, Hebûn Mele Xelîl and Amina Waysî) political women have been targets of extra-judicial executions.

This dossier has been created in response to the targeted execution of three leading activists of the women's movement Kongra Star in Kobane by Turkish drones and the renewed wave of arrests on July 14, during which dozens of members of the Free Women's Movement (Tevgera Jinên Azad, TJA) were arrested in Diyarbakır.

With this dossier, we will set out the misogynist policy of the AKP.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bpb.de/internationales/europa/tuerkei/184972/frauenrechte>



## What is the AKP and what does it stand for?

The AKP was founded on 14 August 2001 by the current President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, among others. The AKP was a kind of melting pot for politicians from different parties and political factions. The core of the party was formed by a group which split from the Islamic Virtue Party (FP) and the Islamist-oriented Millî Görüş (National Vision) movement. In the November 2002 General Election, the AKP won 34.26% of the vote (and almost two-thirds of the seats) and became the sole governing party.

When the AKP came to power in Turkey in 2002, expectations and hopes were high. It presented itself as a liberal, democratic-conservative party. The party program's stated aims included EU membership, overcoming the predominance of the military, development of democracy and human rights, rule of law, and the abolition of discrimination policies against different ethnic and religious groups such as the Kurds and Alevis. Equality for women was also a stated aim. In addition to these political goals, prosperity and an economic upturn were also promised. The country had suffered for decades under the Kemalist elite, in which the military was dominant. "Zero tolerance of torture", "zero problems with neighbours" and "a political solution to the Kurdish question" were the AKP's most important political promises, with which the party won sympathy and support. But in time, the AKP's real political agenda came to light. Erdogan's true political objectives were indicated early on, by the now well-known quote "Democracy is like a train, you hop off once you reach your destination." And in 1998 he publicly read a poem for which he was briefly imprisoned, including the lines: "The minarets are our bayonets... the mosques are our barracks."

The AKP has passed more laws than any Turkish government before it. Many were presented as measures for improvement but were never implemented. In retrospect, it is evident that the AKP was expanding its influence more and more during this period and was successively infiltrating the state institutions. The AKP government's change of political course was accelerated by regional foreign policy developments.

The political upheaval and the deepening crisis in the region led to an abrupt change of strategy. The popular uprisings in the Arab world in 2011, often referred to as the Arab Spring, had a great impact, but of greatest salience was the war in Syria. The Kurds in northern Syria began to organize their territories in the form of a grassroots democratic autonomous self-government. For this they took advantage of the power vacuum that had arisen as a result of the war in Syria and attempted to find a third way beyond the Syrian regime and against the Islamist militias fighting it. These emancipation efforts of the Kurds caused panic in Ankara, because they feared that they could influence the Kurds in Turkey. Preventing Kurdish organization in Syria became the Turkish government's top priority, trying everything it could to obstruct it. Turkey's main aims were to prevent the Kurds from successfully implementing their grassroots democratic self-administration, and to increase its own influence by weakening the Syrian regime. The AKP used its Islamist reputation for its foreign policy offensive. In 2012, the former Prime Minister (current President) Erdogan, announced his neo-Ottoman foreign policy strategy, which aims to take back all the territories that were surrendered after the First World War. The AKP uses Islam as an instrument to implement its interests in the predominantly

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Muslim Middle East. In all predominantly Sunni countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the AKP has tried to expand its political influence by strengthening the structures of the Muslim Brotherhood. In doing so, it tried to create political and social divisions in the countries in order to build a basis for the occupation. On the one hand, the AKP tries to turn society against the state leadership and on the other hand to bring it under its influence and control by instrumentalizing its Islamic identity. In all countries in which Turkey has occupied regions, such as in Syria in the Kurdish Afrin, Serekani and Gire Spi, as well as Idlib, Azaz, El Bab, it is introducing an Islamist model of society according to the Sunni-Ottoman Empire and is pursuing a practice of assimilation, i.e. Turkification, by building up infrastructure as part of Turkey or by introducing Turkish as the official language for instance. In doing so, it seeks above all to achieve male power via the brutal oppression of and discrimination against women. By strengthening patriarchy and the culture of rape, more and more jihadists and mercenaries are to be recruited as proxies for the Turkish state expansionist strategy.

Wherever the Turkish state intervenes - including in Libya, South Yemen, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, and Pakistan - it enforces its Ottoman-Islamic model, which is synonymous with the oppression of women. With the radical centralisation of power in one man, President Erdogan, the state sets out to be able to act quickly in an expansionist manner.

The more the AKP expanded its power within the state, the more it became an autocratic-

dictatorial party, waging war against its own people at all levels. And Kurds have become their primary enemy. During the 18 years of the AKP's reign, the list of "enemy forces" has been extended to all that do not agree with the AKP's course.

Ahead of the 2018 June Presidential and Parliamentary Elections, in February 2018 the AKP formed an electoral alliance called "Cumhur Ittifaki" (People's Alliance) with the extreme right-wing Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Halk Partisi, MHP).

Today, the AKP stands for nationalism, imperialism, neoliberalism and patriarchy, with Islamist colouring. This was further strengthened by the alliance with the MHP. The country is

governed autocratically and dictatorially. All the characteristics of autocracy and dictatorship, such as the reduction of the separation of powers, centralisation of power, media control, corruption, arbitrariness, nationalism, militarism and war and, of course, patriarchy, have become reality within the 18-year AKP government in Turkey. Turkey is currently ruled by a one-man dictatorship, posing a threat not only to Turkey but to the entire region.

**Turkey seeks above all to  
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## AKP - From the "women-friendly" party to open misogyny

The AKP's approach to women has undergone wide-ranging changes over the party's 18 years in power. In the period between 2002 and the 61st government period (between the elections on 12 June 2011, and 2014), women's issues were an AKP showpiece.

In terms of improving the social status of women, the early years of the AKP government saw the passing of laws, preventive measures, and institutional restructuring. Women's rights were addressed, the participation of women in politics and economics was declared a goal and corresponding election promises were made. During this period, EU funds were used to finance and implement projects on gender equality. Like other national issues, hopes were raised for meaningful progress on women's issues.

In addition to the general rights of women, the ban on headscarves in public institutions has been a predominant AKP concern. Lifting the headscarf ban was one of the few election promises it kept. In 2010, after eight years of government, the headscarf ban for female university students was lifted; two years later it was lifted for female students attending state schools, and finally in 2014 for all female students from grade 5 onwards.

The conservative conception of gender roles as well as the overemphasis on the importance of a strong family has been present throughout the AKP period of government. We can say that from 2011 onwards an obvious 'anti-' women's policy has begun. In 2011, for example, with Law 633, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was renamed the Ministry for Family and Social Policy.<sup>2</sup> This renaming shows that from now on women are no longer seen as independent individuals, but that their existence is only of

importance in the context of the family. The position of women in society was thereby redefined. Like all conservative parties, the AKP fears that the family as the main pillar of the state is disintegrating and therefore needs to be protected and strengthened by practical measures. To this end, the role of women in the family as daughter, sister, mother and wife should be reconstructed.

Government representatives are not afraid to publicly express their ideas about the role and tasks of women. For example, the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared that "women should bear at least three children". He later increased the optimal number of children from three to five.

In 2014, Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç declared "A woman has to be chaste. She should be able to distinguish between private and public. She will not laugh out loud among others. Where are our girls, who blush easily and lower their heads in shyness when we look at their faces?"<sup>3</sup>

In order to secure the existence of the traditional family, laws, regulations and state measures such as the introduction of family counselling centers were implemented to prevent divorce. With a new regulation called "ask the family counsellor", couples who are in the process of divorce are sent to counselling centers by family courts. The counsellors, in turn, are instructed to persuade the couples to change their decision. Judges then make their decision on the basis of their reports.<sup>4</sup>

Other regulations also disadvantage divorced women. For example, widowed women receive financial support, whereas divorced women who struggle financially do not.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/316233>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cnnturk.com/haber/turkiye/bulent-arinc-kadin-herkesin-icinde-kahkaha-atmayacak>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cnnturk.com/haber/turkiye/bulent-arinc-kadin-herkesin-icinde-kahkaha-atmayacak>

<sup>5</sup> <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/316233>

While attempts are being made to minimise divorces, concurrently it is predominantly young people who are encouraged to marry. For example, as of 2013, new regulations have been introduced to support marriage during school and university with financial offers and improved conditions.

The AKP's efforts to lower the age of marriage should also be seen in this context. Religious officials or alleged academics make public statements advocating child marriage. In 2018, Diyanet (Office for Religious Affairs) published on its website that children could be married religiously during puberty. The lower age limit would be nine-years-old for girls, and 12-years-old for boys. Early marriage would prevent people from entering into extramarital sexual relations and would guarantee reproduction.<sup>6</sup>

After heavy criticism, the department did pull back, but such discussions about the age of marriage are still being held in public in order to familiarize society with this idea. For example, in May of this year, Prof. Dr. Muttalip Kutluk Özgüven, Professor at Aydın University Istanbul, speaking on a TV show, declared that

the ideal age for having a first child was between 13 and 16 years.<sup>7</sup>

Another discussion that will have a negative impact on the lives of girls and women is the plan to reduce the sentence for rapists if they marry their "victims". The AKP has been trying to introduce this law since 2016. It is mainly focused on sexual violence against minors. Resistance against it is rightfully strong, because it would legalise rape and force girls and women to marry their torturers. This law was put back on the agenda at the beginning of this year.

Another intervention concerned the legal regulation of abortions. Government representatives publicly declared abortion to be "murder" and "haram" (impure). A decree was issued that abortion was no longer considered a medical measure and therefore it would no longer be a state-funded procedure. Again, the AKP had to withdraw this decree following a public outcry. However, it remains the case that every abortion is verbally criminalised and women who have had abortions are defamed.

6 <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diyanet-9-yasina-giren-kiz-evlenebilir-gebe-kalabilir-897196>

7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PuMTf6uEyo>



## The AKP tries to build a society that corresponds to its ideology

A conscious state intervention in social life is also carried out via the media. The conservative family model is also projected onto society via schools (e.g. by propagating certain gender roles in textbooks) and via role models in series. Both the way people think and act are manipulated in this way, forming a reactionary, patriarchal society.

Examining 2018 schoolbooks in comparison to those of previous years, Dr. Canan Aratemur and Dr. Sezen Bayhan found an increase in religious references and patriarchal views in the 2018 textbooks.<sup>8</sup>

Mixed-sex student dormitories were described as immoral places and converted into gender-separated dormitories on instruction of the Prime Minister. Erdogan said in 2013 “We will not allow girls and boys to live together in state-run student dormitories.” In response, the Ministry of Education issued a decree to the state dormitories to restructure the dormitories by gender.

Employing a justification of “immorality”,

women are deprived of the basis for building a life outside the traditional family. In June of this year, for example, the so-called guards (auxiliary policemen) were authorised to observe the homes of women living alone, in addition to their other responsibilities, for the purpose of preventing possible prostitution.<sup>9</sup>

Single women are branded as potentially “immoral” persons and made targets of attacks. Similarly, women who dress liberally and have an un-conservative lifestyle are also targeted. More and more women are verbally and physically attacked by men in the street, because their lifestyles allegedly violate social values. The perpetrators remain unpunished – which in turn leads to a further increase in these crimes.

With the AKP, women are deprived of their already limited freedom and the right to a self-determined life, the state and the family are given the power to dispose of their lives, effectively giving them the right to kill. A life determined by others, in which the woman is no longer a subject of herself, is gradually being prepared.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dw.com/tr/rapor-t%C3%BCrkiyede-okul-kitaplar%C4%B1nda-dini-ve-cinsiyet%C3%A7i-%C3%B6geler-art%C4%B1/a-50605416>

<sup>9</sup> <https://artigercek.com/haberler/bekciler-bekar-veya-yalniz-yasayan-kadinlarin-evlerini-gozetleme-yetkisine-sahip-oldu>





## Gender inequality in the world of work

According to a report of the World Economic Forum “Global Gender Gap Report”, Turkey is one of the countries with the greatest inequalities in terms of economic participation, equal opportunities in education, health and political empowerment. According to the 2014 report, Turkey ranks 125th out of the 142 countries surveyed.

According to the AKP, there should be no choice for women between work and family life. In 2015, discussing the compatibility of managing both a career and a family, the then AKP Health Minister Müezzinoğlu stated that the best career for a woman was being a mother.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, women usually work without legal security and are underpaid. Women are the first to lose their jobs, forcing them into economic dependence. The examples given here demonstrate that for the AKP the labour market is actually something for men. Women should only enter paid work if necessary and in accordance with conservative ideas. This mentality was expressed in 2008 by the then Minister of State, Mehmet Şimşek, when he blamed working women for rising unemployment.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, this statement underlines the ideas of the AKP’s gender roles. While men are ascribed the role of earning money and protecting the family, the woman’s role is to bear children and do unpaid reproductive work.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the participation of women in the labour market in Turkey in 2015, 2016 and 2017 is the lowest among OECD countries.

In 2019, the participation rate of women in the labour market (which includes those who are currently employed as well as those seeking work) was 34.2%, while the participation rate of men was 72.7%.

Only 29.4% of women are in employment compared to 65.7% of men. The unemployment rate for women is 13.9% compared to 9.5% for men.

The unemployment rate for women in Turkey doubled compared to EU Member States and tripled compared to OECD Member States between 2014 and 2019. The number of unemployed women has increased by 52% in the same period, totalling almost two million women.

There is a large difference in gross income for the same work between men and women. Participation in different professions is not balanced and the number of women in management positions is very low.<sup>12</sup>

Many women cannot take up paid employment because reproductive work in Turkey is entirely the responsibility of women, and facilities such as childcare and nursing care, which could compensate for this, are not widely available or are unaffordable for many.

**Women should only enter paid work if necessary and in accordance with conservative ideas.**

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cnnturk.com/video/turkiye/muezzinoglu-annelik-bir-kariyerdir-asla-tartisilmaz>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/issizligin-nedeni-is-gucune-katilan-kadinlar-49636>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.ikv.org.tr/images/files/%C4%B0KV\\_Degerlendirme\\_Notu\\_AB\\_Kat%C4%B1l%C4%B1m\\_S%C3%BCre-cindeki\\_T%C3%BCrkiyenin\\_Kad%C4%B1n\\_%C4%B0stihdam%C4%B1\\_Karnesi\(2\).pdf](https://www.ikv.org.tr/images/files/%C4%B0KV_Degerlendirme_Notu_AB_Kat%C4%B1l%C4%B1m_S%C3%BCre-cindeki_T%C3%BCrkiyenin_Kad%C4%B1n_%C4%B0stihdam%C4%B1_Karnesi(2).pdf)



According to a March 2020 report by trade unions<sup>13</sup> on the labour force of women in Turkey, in 2019, 500,000 women gave up paid employment for reproductive work. Twelve million women were unable to take up paid work due to parenting and household responsibilities.

In Turkey, as is true worldwide, the feminisation of poverty is a pressing concern.

The AKP's neoliberal policy has led to the collapse of agriculture in Turkey. This has deprived many people, especially women, of the basis of their livelihoods, forcing them into unemployment, and to move to the cities in search of work.

The AKP is using the millions of refugees who live in Turkey, or hope to continue their journey through Turkey, as a means of political pressure, especially with the EU. But how the AKP's

refugee policy promotes the exploitation of women is too often unreported. The labour and sexuality of refugee women are exploited, with many women forced to prostitute themselves illegally in order to survive.

A report by the human rights association "Mazlum" gives an insight into the position of refugee women living in Turkey, focusing on those in camps.<sup>14</sup> This report states that women are exploited as cheap workforces, second-wives and as prostitutes. The data on the age of the girls is alarming: many are forced into prostitution from as young as 12-years-old.

<sup>13</sup> <http://cloudsdomain.com/uploads/dosya/21031.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> [https://istanbul.mazlumder.org/webimage/files/The%20Report%20on%20Syrian%20Women%20Refugees\(1\).pdf](https://istanbul.mazlumder.org/webimage/files/The%20Report%20on%20Syrian%20Women%20Refugees(1).pdf)



# The state deliberately uses violence against women and promotes it through impunity

Violence against women in Turkey goes hand in hand with the aforementioned legislation and state-sanctioned measures.

Necati Tıgılı, Member of Parliament of the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP), and member of the Equality Commission for Women and Men in the Turkish Parliament, has published a report on femicide, sexual violence and child abuse for the period from 1.01.2016 to 31.12.2019. The report states: "In Turkey, women continue

to be murdered by men. In 2019 alone, 474 women were killed. At least 166 women were subjected to sexual violence and at least 96 children were abused. A steady increase in the number of women being murdered can be seen. In 2016, the number was 329 women, in 2017 it was 409, in 2018, 440. According to the platform 'We will stop the murders of women', 474 women were killed in 2019. The number of women killed in 2003 was 83."<sup>15</sup>

As previously noted, violence against women has increased by 1400% during the AKP's time in government. While violence against women is directly promoted by political measures, violence perpetrated by men is tolerated by the state through impunity. Under the AKP, women's refugee and advice centres for women were closed. There are 145 women's shelters in Turkey (as of 2019)<sup>16</sup>. In comparison, there are 353 women's shelters and about 40 shelters or

sheltered housing units in Germany.<sup>17</sup>

There are many cases in Turkey where murders of women are not or insufficiently investigated and the perpetrators are brought to justice. For example, in October 2019 the 23-year-old Nadira Kadirova from Uzbekistan was found dead in the apartment of the Istanbul AKP member of parliament Şirin Ünal. She worked as a housekeeper for the member of parliament. Although there was sufficient evidence that she had been exposed to

## Violence against women has increased by 1400% during AKP's time in government.

sexual violence and was killed with a weapon belonging to the MP, the public prosecutor's office concluded it was suicide and proceedings were dropped.

By not pursuing charges, violent men who are reported by women to the authorities are able to murder women openly, in the street. This constant threat situation has an intimidating effect on women and they feel threatened rather than protected by state institutions. In order not to be murdered, they often undergo a life of torture and mistreatment.

At present, the AKP government is threatening to withdraw from the Council of Europe's Convention to prevent and combat violence against women, also known as the "Istanbul Convention".

A characteristic of authoritarian and fascist regimes is by definition the increase of state

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.sivilsayfalar.org/2020/01/10/meclis-komisyonu-kadin-orgutleriyle-ortak-akil-yurutmeli/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-50524072>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.big-berlin.info/news/414>

violence. De facto, the more a state uses violence as a means, the more gender-specific violence increases. Militarism generally promotes the willingness to use violence in society, which in turn increases the incidence of violence against women and children.

After the AKP had brought the army and the police completely under its control, it extended the powers of soldiers, police and special units, as well as “guards” (auxiliary police) and personal protection. Photographs and video footage of Erdogan’s bodyguards attacking demonstrators in the USA were widely shared around the world. The USA issued arrest warrants against the bodyguards they could identify. What happens in Turkey, however, remains mostly hidden from the world public. Police officers who beat, insult, rape, torture, threaten their own fellow citizens are no longer isolated cases. Thanks to social media, state attacks against the population do come to light. Disliked groups, be they ethnic, religious or political groups in opposition to

the AKP, are first declared terrorists in order to be able to prosecute them as such. After that, any kind of repression can be used in the fight against terrorism.

Turkish Justice Minister Abdülhamit Gül proudly announced on 18 July 2020 that the AKP had opened 94 new prisons in the last five years, bringing the total number of prisons nationwide to 355. He also stated that the number of convicted prisoners was 232,342 and the number of prisoners not yet convicted was 48,752 (as of 17 July 2020). It can be assumed that the new prisons were built in preparation for the mass imprisonment of so-called “terrorists”.

Almost all women’s demonstrations in recent years - whether on 8 March, the international women’s day of struggle; on 25 November, the day of struggle against violence against women; or most recently the demonstration in response to the murder of Pinar Gültekin - have been brutally attacked by the police. Turkey has the highest number of female political prisoners in





the world. The Turkish state apparatus' actions are mainly directed against organised women. For years, the Turkish state has consciously used sexualised violence against political women, in particular against Kurdish and organised women. While in 2004 Erdogan was still propagating the slogan “zero tolerance of torture”, today the torture practised by the state, both in frequency and in the variety of its use, surpasses that of the 1990s, a period widely known for its brutal practice of torture. Today it no longer takes place only in prisons and police stations, but on the street, in apartments, i.e. in public spaces. You can always hear security forces shouting that they are the state and therefore authorized to do anything.

Erdogan personally promised the special units and soldiers in the fight against the supposed “terror” freedom from guilt. In March 2016, Erdogan said that while the war in Kurdish cities such as Cizre, Nusaybin and Sûr continued with all its harshness: “Against all those who have made themselves the henchmen of terror, whether children or women, the necessary will be done.” During this period, numerous cases of war crimes committed by the Turkish state in the Kurdish areas have been documented. To date, not a single investigation has been opened in Turkey.

This also resulted in soldiers committing war crimes without ever being prosecuted for their actions. For example, Turkish soldiers filmed

their crimes of sexual violence and extrajudicial executions of Kurdish women and distributed recordings of them on the Internet. Even in the days that this dossier was being prepared, cases of sexual violence against children and young women in Kurdistan by Turkish security forces became known. Sexual violence is also systematically used as a form of warfare. Among other things, cases have become known in which the bodies of killed guerrilla fighters have been desecrated and mutilated.<sup>18</sup>

Considering these developments, Turkey has become increasingly lawless, especially for women.

During the corona pandemic, this development has been reinforced by the adoption of a law that released approximately 90,000 prisoners. Political prisoners were excluded from the release program.

Women's organisations in particular criticised this law as it released from prison sexual criminals and men who were a threat to women. Their fears have come true. Dozens of women were murdered by the released men, while political prisoners remained intentionally imprisoned, thus accepting an increased risk to their health and life from COVID-19.



<sup>18</sup> <https://yeniozgurpolitika.net/gewalt-gegen-kurdische-kampferinnen-hat-tradition/>

## Sexual abuse of children

Sexual violence against children in prisons for children and adolescents<sup>19</sup> as well as in children's homes is known and widely discussed. Apart from these crimes, which take place in institutions under state control, sexual violence against minors is also widespread in society in general. According to a report of the Children's Rights Commission of the Human Rights Association (IHD) in Istanbul, a total of 440,000 minors have given birth to a child during the entire reign of the AKP (up to 2018). 46% of all sexual offences were directed against children. Turkey therefore ranks third in the world among the countries with the highest figures of child abuse.<sup>20</sup>

To a large extent this violence is also racially motivated. In the Kurdish areas, sexual violence against Kurdish children is deliberately carried out by security forces.

At the time of writing, four different cases of sexual abuse in Batman, Sirnax and Agirî were known. In Sirnax, a special officer abused a 13-year-old girl.<sup>21</sup> In Batman, a special officer abducted and raped an 18-year-old woman for 20 days. During the same period, a 17-year-old girl attempted suicide after being raped by a Turkish soldier.<sup>22</sup> In Agirî, a 13-year-old girl was also raped by a man. These four sexual crimes occurred within one week. Most of the military personnel stationed in the Kurdish cities are also members of special task forces that share fascist-racist ideas. In this context, sexual violence against Kurdish children and women is carried out in a systematic manner and in accordance with the racist ideology of the Turkish state.

19 [https://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/isku/erklaerungen/2012/04/Informationsdossier\\_Pozanti.pdf](https://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/isku/erklaerungen/2012/04/Informationsdossier_Pozanti.pdf)

20 <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201806101033803155-ihd-turkiye-cinsel-istismar-cocuk-dogum/>

21 <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/409449/sirnakta-13-yasindaki-cocugu-istismara-maruz-birakan-uzman-cavus-tutuklandi>

22 <http://yeniyasamgazetesi1.com/sirnaktan-sonra-batman-bir-uzman-cavusun-cocuga-tecavuz-ettigi-iddia-edildi/>



## Nationalism and fascism are based on patriarchy - Organised women in particular are a thorn in the side of the AKP

Women are today among the main targets of the AKP government. This is directly related to the AKP's ideological orientation. We observe that in Turkey, patriarchal politics are deepening in parallel with nationalism, fascism and imperialism, and these are mutually reinforcing. Just as the AKP shed its initial pretence of aiming to fortify democracy in Turkey, over time it revealed its true misogynist face in terms of women's politics. Women who question the ruling system - be it capitalism, nation state or patriarchy - are quickly targeted by the AKP.

In 2011, the AKP has started to openly express its misogynistic attitude. On March 8, 2008, Diyanet (Office for Religious Affairs) published on its website a document regarding its foundation, stating: "Feminism has negative consequences from an ethical and social point of view. As soon as a woman falls victim to the feminist movement, with the idea of unconditional freedom, she declares many rules and values that are indispensable for the family null and void"<sup>23</sup>

Erdogan's brand of populism creates terrifying images of the enemy, stirring up fears in order to manipulate and control people with

nationalistic and religious feelings. Kurds are enemies, whose aim is to divide the country. According to Erdogan, western countries are also enemies who are envious of Turkey and seek to destroy it. They all want to weaken Turkey and harm it. According to AKP mindset, the state does not exist to serve the people, the people exist to serve the state. Erdogan equates his position with that of the state and thus propagates the idea that an attack on the AKP is equivalent to an attack on Turkey as a country/state. Within this logic, to criticize the AKP is to criticize the state, and consequently every criticism is considered and persecuted as treason. Erdogan uses war as a means to maintain his power. Therefore, the AKP is waging wars both at home and abroad, and on different levels.

The Kurds and their struggle for a democratic, ecological and gender-liberated social system are the biggest threat to the AKP today. They cannot be defeated militarily; their democratic and emancipatory worldview is an antidote to the AKP.

Kurdish women have problems with the AKP government at all levels. On the one hand their Kurdish identity exposes them to a policy of



Pakiize Nayır

Fatma Uyar

Sêvê Demir

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/diyanet-feministleri-kizdirdi-8434696>

denial of rights and a war of annihilation. They fight this colonialist policy together with its ideological pillars of nationalism and fascism.

Kurdish women also oppose patriarchal ideology and struggle for the liberation of all genders.

The Kurdish women's movement also defines itself as anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist. In this context, it fights against capitalism's unlimited exploitation of nature and people. The Kurdish women's movement is fundamentally opposed to AKP policy and ideology on all levels.

The Kurdish women are not only being fought within the state borders of Turkey, but everywhere where they are organised. This includes northeast Syria/Rojava, in Maxmûr or Şengal in Northern Iraq, or in Europe.

As previously discussed, Turkey has been trying to destroy the revolutionary developments of the Kurdish people in Northern and Eastern Syria since 2012. In Northern and Eastern Syria, women are organized autonomously and have built their own social women's system. Under the umbrella of Kongra Star, women and women's organisations organise themselves autonomously at communal, municipal and regional level, and are thereby a leading social force. Through the

commitment of the women's movement, society is transformed from a patriarchal to a gender-liberated one. Through the autonomous organisation of women, women's rights are defended ideologically, politically and socially, at all levels of society.

This contrasts with territories occupied by Turkey. On the one hand, these areas are governed de facto according to Sharia law and, on the other, women are kidnapped, raped, sold and murdered. The women's movement Kongra Star has published a dossier on this subject.<sup>24</sup>

On 23 June 2020, three women were murdered by a targeted Turkish drone attack in the northern Syrian and Kurdish city of Kobane, which became known worldwide for its successful resistance against the Islamic State (IS). The women were 60-year-old homeowner Amina Waysî and Zehra Berkel and Hebûn Mele Xelîl from the women's umbrella organization Kongra Star in the Euphrates region.

On 12 October, Hevrin Khalaf - secretary general of the Future Syria Party (Partiya Sûriya Pêşerojê - PSP) - was killed on the M4 highway in northern Syria by Turkish-backed militias during the Turkish military offensive in 2019 as she was on her way to a political meeting and was ambushed.



<sup>24</sup> „Women under turkish occupation - femicide and gender-based violence as systematic practice of the turkish occupation in Afrin“ <https://womendefendrojawa.net/en/2020/06/30/new-dossier-women-under-turkish-occupation/>





Fidan Dogan

Sakine Cansiz

Leyla Saylamez

Also the attack of the so-called IS on the Yezidi settlement in Şengal (Iraq) on 3.08.2014 took place in cooperation with the Turkish state. The attempted genocide and femicide resulted in 5000 Yezidi women being abducted, raped and sold as sex slaves.<sup>25</sup>

The Turkish state already began with the targeted murder of three political Kurdish women in Paris. On 9 January 2013, Sakine Cansiz (a founding member of the PKK), Fidan Dogan (a member of the Kurdish National Congress KNK) and Leyla Saylamez (a member of the Kurdish youth movement) were executed by an agent of the Turkish secret service on the premises of the Kurdistan Information Center (CIK). Although the murderer Ömer Güney was arrested, no court case was brought because he died in prison.

Especially in Kurdistan, the Turkish state applies the strategy of femicide in addition to the strategy of political and cultural genocide. The Kurdish women's movement in Kurdistan democratizes society above all by overcoming patriarchal structures. In northern and eastern Syria, the Kurdish women's movement also has an influence on Arab women and women from other social groups. The revolution in Rojava, which the Kurdish freedom movement calls the Women's Revolution, offers women throughout

the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region hope for a free life. By defeating IS, the most extreme form of male domination, the Kurdish women's movement has empowered and motivated women not only in the region but throughout the world. Erdogan's femicides against Kurdish women are an act of revenge, punishing them for breaking the cult of men represented by jihadist proxy forces. Moreover, the Kurdish women's struggle is an ideological counterbalance to Erdogan's patriarchal ideology and thus a threat to his retention of power.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.dw.com/de/die-jesiden-f%C3%BCnf-jahre-nach-dem-genozid/a-49839355>

## The Kurdish Women's Movement in Turkey/Northern Kurdistan

Today's Kurdish women's movement (TJA - Free Women's Movement) in Turkey/Northern Kurdistan is building on the foundation of the Kurdish people's struggle for freedom that has been ongoing for 40 years. While the struggle against colonialism and oppression politicised many women, at the same time the traditional social role of women was challenged. As women discovered military and political resistance, their awareness of oppression as women also developed. For many women, the guerrilla opened up a new alternative to their previous way of life. With the enormous participation of women in the people's uprisings in the 1990s, they became a leading force of resistance. Women resist on many levels - as guerrilla fighters, political prisoners, demonstrators, members of parliament, mayors, party leaders, journalists, trade unionists, and as members of fallen fighters or "disappeared" persons.

As a result of the development of the resistant potential of thousands of women in the 1990s,

hundreds of women's associations were banned and their board members arrested.

The first Kurdish women's association was opened in 1990 and was called "Patriotic Women's Association" (YKD - Yurtsever Kadın Derneği). It was banned in 1993. Then followed the "Free Women's Association" (ÖKD - Özgür Kadın Derneği), which was banned in 1998. In the same year the "Dicle Women Cultural Centre" (Dicle Kadın Kültür Merkezi) was opened. In 2002 "Selis" and in 2003, the "Regenbogen Frauenverein" (Gökkuşağı kadın derneği) were founded. In September 2003 the women's movement took on a new level. Twenty women's organisations and associations founded the "Democratic Free Women's Movement" (DÖKH - Demokratik Özgür Kadın Hareketi) in order to be able to lead their struggle in an even more organised and diverse way. With this step, women came together with their identity as women in order to expand their organisation further. Under the DÖKH women's councils



were founded as grassroots organisations. At the same time, the DÖKH sought to share and connect the experiences and achievements of Kurdish women with the experiences of other women worldwide. With DÖKH, the women's movement succeeded in becoming even more visible and active in both social and political life.

The DÖKH declared gender to be the main contradiction of the 21st century and declared war on racism, nationalism, militarism, sexism, environmental destruction, exploitation of labour and male domination.

In 2015, the DÖKH reorganised at its 8th congress and adopted the name "Congress of Free Woman" (KJA). All women's associations, organisations, and initiatives were represented in the KJA, in order to develop solutions for the socio-political problems with the help of the democratic, ecological, women-liberating paradigm of the Kurdish freedom movement. Less than two years after its foundation, on 12 November 2016, the women's association Selis, women's association Regenbogen (Gökkusagi) as well as the KJA, were banned by decree and many women activists were arrested. Only 10 days after the ban of the KJA, a new organization called "Movement of Free Women" (TJA - Tevgera Jinên Azad) was founded.

One of the achievements of the Kurdish women's movement is the principle of co-presidency, where all institutions, the party as well as the municipalities are led by a double leadership, a man and a woman. The principle of co-presidency works in conjunction with the parallel organisation of all women in the autonomous women's movement.

Thanks to the strong women's movement, measures against polygamy, child marriage and violence against women could be developed.

Men who engage in polygamy are not allowed to hold office. If an employee in a municipality run by the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP) uses violence against his family, his

salary is paid not to him but to his life partner, and an investigation is initiated.

Thanks to the Kurdish women's movement, the number of female MPs and mayors in Turkey has increased significantly. In the municipalities led by the HDP, the co-mayor principle is being implemented. This is also one of the reasons why the AKP is deposing the mayors and replacing them with - male - forced administrators. Due to the 50% female representation in the HDP, the other parties in Turkey were forced to appoint more women themselves.

The fact that the Turkish state will explicitly take action against the women's movement could be seen from previous statements by government representatives. At the beginning of the year, the Turkish Minister of the Interior, Süleyman Soylu, declared that "the PKK is a women's organisation, it is building on this. The participation of women in all PKK actions amounts to 56%".<sup>26</sup> This statement by the Minister of the Interior of a country that tries to crush any opposition with the pretext of fighting terrorism is a clear indication that it will take targeted action against women.

Since this statement, a systematic increase of state attacks against Kurdish women has been observed.

## One of the achievements of the Kurdish women's movement is the principle of co-presidency

<sup>26</sup> <https://t24.com.tr/haber/icisleri-bakani-soylu-pkk-bir-kadin-orgutudur,863470>



Repression against the TJA has increased in recent months. On July 14, the apartments of women activists in Amed/Diyarbakir were stormed in the early hours of the morning, and 33 of them were arrested, including the TJA spokeswoman. Turkey is the country with the most female political prisoners worldwide including female MPs, mayors, trade unionists, journalists, lawyers, activists, human rights and women's rights activists, peace mothers, academics and many more. They are organized women who are an effective opposition against the oppressive policies of the AKP-MHP government. The AKP government is taking action against any opposition and tries to silence all dissent. So the women's movement is a thorn in its side because it tries to save the country from ruin, despite facing repression, prohibition and torture.

On June 26, a TJA activist was tortured for three hours in her apartment during a house search and then arrested. Police dogs were also used for the torture.



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## As women together against the AKP

The AKP has long been a threat to the MENA region, to its peoples and to all women. For it is pursuing a policy of political, cultural and military expansion with which it intends to spread its misogynist ideology beyond Turkey's borders. In this sense, it is pursuing a hegemonic policy that pours hot oil onto external conflict zones. Thus, it does not stand for peace and conflict resolution, as it likes to claim, but on the contrary for neo-colonial occupation and war. The Kurdish women's movement, on the other hand, has the potential to make the future of the Middle East more democratic, more free, more ecological and above all more gender-liberated. In order that this struggle is not suffocated, but rather is able to develop further, everyone must work together. We must fight against any patriarchal politics anywhere in the world. That is why it is necessary to attack the AKP's misogynist politics not only by solidarity with the Kurdish women's movement but also by public actions and campaigns.

- Turkish state and government representatives should not be able to make foreign visits without being confronted by strong protests from women.
- Turkey's women's policy should be a basis for evaluation when deciding on political, economic and military support for our governments. Women's organisations should have a say in bilateral relations, so that they can also take account of the women's policy of these countries.
- We should pressure our governments so that the aggression against women in Turkey does not occur without consequence. We should explain the reasons for the boycott of holidays, especially with regard to Turkey's misogynist policy.
- We should observe the trials of women activists internationally and, if possible, participate in them as trial observers and make the demand for freedom of political prisoners heard.
- We should draw the attention of the press to the AKP's women's policy.
- We should organise campaigns to demand the clarification of Turkey's gender-specific war crimes.



## REPAK

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