

Monitoring Pride in Turkey 2023

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A month after the Turkish elections, for which the winner, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan scapegoated LGBTI people, activists and allies have been rallying at Pride marches across the country. In this blog, we present an up-to-date account of the latest events, as reported by LGBTI activists on the ground in Turkey.

LGBTI activists in Turkey are determined to stand up for human rights. The government, led by President Erdoğan, has been intensifying its systematic attacks on LGBTI individuals since 2015, when Istanbul Pride march was banned for the first time. A month after the re-election of Erdoğan on a ticket that instrumentalised LGBTI people as an enemy, it is Pride season once more in Turkey.

Hate speech, prohibitions, and systematic attacks by Turkish authorities on Pride events have been ongoing ever since that first ban. [In 2019](#), 19 activists were charged with unlawful assembly for participating in a peaceful Pride March at METU University. After a trial that was delayed several times, the METU 19 were eventually acquitted in 2021.

Following his re-election as President of Turkey for another five years, Erdoğan again directed his hostility towards the LGBTI community, targeting LGBTI+ people throughout his campaign and the previous nine years in office. During the election campaign, the ruling bloc expanded its coalition with the New Welfare Party and HÜDAPAR, which are known for their anti-LGBTI+ stance and the ruling party signed a protocol with the New Welfare Party which has been demanding the closure of LGBTI+ associations.

Instead of being discouraged by these daunting events, or the fear of increased pressure from the government, LGBTI activists are working harder than ever to ensure their right to assemble and to be seen. As risks and repression grow, activists on the ground are closely monitoring this Pride season. We will continue to develop this list as news comes in.

Saturday, June 2 – Bilkent University Pride, Ankara: No intervention or arrests occurred.

Friday, June 9 – METU Pride, Ankara: Police intervened and made 15 arrests, but all were released by 03:00.

Sunday, June 12 – Sabancı University of Istanbul: Peaceful event with no arrests or police intervention.

Sunday, June 12 – Cins Klüb: The LGBTI+ student community at Sabancı University, one of the most prestigious universities in Turkey, organised a Pride march on campus despite attempts by the private security unit to prevent it.

June 16-18 – Aydın LGBTI+ Pride Week: No march, only events were held.

Sunday, June 18 – Adana Colors of Resistance organised an event for trans visibility day called “Trans visibility in the struggle of LGBTI+ rights”.

Sunday, June 18 – Trans Pride Istanbul: The newly appointed Istanbul Governor, Davut Gül, had previously

targeted Trans Pride and the LGBTI+ Pride March, issuing a threatening message on Twitter with an emphasis on “family”. Although no official ban was issued by the Governorate, the police blocked the Taksim area with barricades on Sunday morning. The police attacked those gathered in the Harbiye district of Beyoğlu and also targeted press workers who were documenting the events. Despite these challenges, activists delivered their press statement and marched for the 9th Trans Pride.

Sunday, June 25 – Istanbul Pride: The march took place without police intervention, but the police intervened after the march had concluded and the number of detainees has reached 64, including foreign nationals in danger of deportation. Relevant UN agencies, LGBTI+ and refugee organizations are following the process.

Sunday, June 25 – Izmir Pride: A ban was announced the night before the march. There was violent police intervention, resulting in the detention of approximately 50 individuals. Protesters were handcuffed behind their backs, manhandled, and kept in detention cars without fresh air for an extended period.

On Sunday 9 July – Eskişehir Pride: Police blockaded the Hasan Polatkan Cultural Center, where the march was to take place. Stating that the Governorate of Eskişehir had issued a ban on 14 June, the police announced that they would not allow the march to go ahead. Those who had gathered for the march asked for time to disperse. The police intervened harshly and detained 18 people, two of whom are lawyers. The detainees were released on the same day.

3-9 July – Adana for LGBTI+ Pride Week: The police intervened during a press statement organised for Pride Week. 18 people, including HDP Provincial Co-Chair, Helin Kaya, were beaten and detained. Green Left Party Mersin MP Perihan Koca was beaten and reverse handcuffed. The detainees were released by midnight.

It is not just Pride marches that face repression and obstruction. LGBTI-themed gatherings and events are also facing similar treatment.

In June, the second Aegean Pride Picnic, organised by LGBTI students at Ege University in Izmir, received open threats from Turkish Youth Union (TGB), the youth branch of the Patriotic Party, Grand Family Platform (Büyük Aile Platformu), TÜGVA and the New Welfare Party and was eventually postponed after the police stated that they could not ensure the safety of LGBTI+ students. When the organisers attempted to read a public statement in front of the Izmir Bar Association, a professional organisation of lawyers defending human rights, the police attacked activists and assaulted lawyers. Despite these challenges, the activists managed to read their statement.

The Pride Picnic of Direnişin Renkleri (The Colors of Resistance), a local student initiative at Izmir Democracy University, had planned their own Pride Picnic on June 13. However, hours before the event, the police initiated a blockade both on the university campus and in the picnic area. The police threatened LGBTI+ students and detained two students by beating them. The detained students were taken to Balçova Police Headquarters but were later released after providing their statements.

On June 14, the Patriotic Party and its youth branch, Turkish Youth Union (TGB), targeted an LGBTI+ Pride Month event scheduled to take place at the Ankara Bar Association. A group of ten people gathered before a gender equality panel and insulted those attending. The police did not intervene, and the event proceeded despite the provocation.

On June 15, the Eskişehir Governorate banned all kinds of LGBTI+ themed public events across the city for a month, citing “public morality”.

Also on June 15, the ‘Tea & Talk’ event for English speakers in Istanbul, organised by Lambda Istanbul, one of the oldest LGBTI+ associations in Türkiye and held in various café’s for years, was banned by the Kadıköy District Governorate. The ban was communicated to the café where the event was supposed to take place. According to

the Kadıköy District Governorate, it is “inappropriate” for LGBTI+ individuals to sit in a café, drink tea and engage in conversation.

The concerts of singers Melike Şahin and Mabel Matiz in Bursa and Denizli, respectively, were cancelled due to their LGBTI+ supportive award speeches and celebration pride at the stage at the Elle Style Awards. Denizli’s municipality cancelled Mabel Matiz’s concert without providing any reason. Melike Şahin is known for her support to LGBTI+ movement while Mabel Matiz is an openly queer singer.

As a human rights organisation, ILGA-Europe are deeply concerned about the ongoing challenges faced by LGBTI activists and the repression of LGBTI events in Turkey.

During a recent study visit organised by ILGA-Europe, activists discussed the protection of LGBTI rights in Turkey at different EU institutions. We will continue to follow Prides in Turkey in close contact with activists and to mobilise international support to ensure the freedom of assembly and all human rights of LGBTI people in the country.