

REPORT 2024

**HATE CRIMES MOTIVATED BY BIAS AGAINST RELIGION, BELIEF, OR
NON-BELIEF IN TÜRKİYE 2023 REPORT – SUMMARY FINDINGS**



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**Hate Crimes Motivated By
Bias Against Religion, Belief, or
Non-Belief in Türkiye 2023 Report**

– Summary Findings



Norwegian
Helsinki Committee

Hate Crimes Motivated by Bias against Religion, Belief, or Non-Belief in Türkiye 2023 Report
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Norwegian Helsinki Committee's Freedom of Belief Initiative

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Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) is an Oslo-based human rights organisation established in 1977 that works internationally to strengthen the protection of human rights in practice. To this end the NHC's activities include monitoring, reporting, human rights education, and supporting civil society and democratic structures. The NHC's work is based on the human rights instruments adopted in the context of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Freedom of Belief Initiative (FoBI) has promoted freedom of thought, conscience, and religion as a fundamental human right since 2011. The Initiative's activities include monitoring, documentation, reporting, making policy recommendations, and advocacy. FoBI also works on combatting religion or belief-based hate crimes by monitoring and reporting on these as well as working on capacity building, and awareness-raising activities.

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1. Executive summary and introduction

Hate crimes targeting individuals, communities, or institutions based on their religion, belief, or non-belief constitute a significant human rights challenge in Türkiye. These crimes, when compared to crimes committed without a bias motive, tend to have more serious and multifaceted impacts on victims, those directly and indirectly connected to them, and society at large. They send a message to the victims and their associated groups that they do not have equal rights with the rest of society. They also pose a significant obstacle to social cohesion.

However, the relevant legal framework, and its implementation, in Türkiye are far from adequate in addressing these crimes. They are also not in alignment with international human rights law. The Human Rights Action Plan of April 2021 included objectives for new regulations in the Turkish Penal Code concerning discrimination and hate crimes, as well as for improvements on databases and statistics on these crimes. After three years, however, these important steps are yet to have been implemented.

This summary report of "Hate Crimes Motivated by Bias against Religion, Belief, or Non-Belief in Türkiye 2023" aims to provide an overview of the full Turkish report, which seeks to contribute to the prevention of these crimes and to combat the impunity granted to perpetrators of hate crimes. **Within the scope of the report, 47 hate crimes or incidents that occurred in 2023 were identified. The targeted groups in these incidents were, respectively, Christians, Jews, Alevis, Muslims, Yazidis, and atheists.** It is important to note that the data in the report do not reflect the true extent of these crimes. This is due to significant barriers to individuals reporting them to the police and notable limitations to the monitoring process.

States have the obligation to both take necessary measures to prevent hate crimes that interfere with the equal enjoyment of human rights by all and to investigate bias motives. However, as observed in our monitoring activities of hate crimes and incidents since 2020, **the hate crime dimension was not effectively investigated in most of those occurring in 2023 either; these crimes often went unpunished.**

When evaluated together with monitoring data from previous years, some prominent findings related to hate crimes motivated by bias against religion, belief, or non-belief in Türkiye have emerged:

- Certain localities associated with religious or belief communities are repeatedly targeted.
- Attacks on venues and locations related to religious or belief communities, such as cemeteries, places of worship, homes, or schools are among the most frequently encountered incidents.

- Certain individuals or groups are systematically, and continuously, subjected to threats or pressure. Upon examination, incidents of hate crimes targeting Protestants, Assyrians, and Yazidis in particular have become systematic.
- In 2023, an increase in hate crimes against Protestants and Jews was observed.
- In 2023, there were two separate incidents where antisemitic symbols were displayed in schools. This demonstrates the need for an inclusive, pluralistic, and anti-discriminatory education system and curriculum.
- Since 2020, the most frequently targeted groups have been Christians, Alevis, and Jews.

The data presented in the report underscore the urgent and multifaceted need to strengthen the fight against these crimes in Türkiye. To this end, prominent needs include:

- effective investigation of these crimes;
- systematic monitoring and reporting of hate crimes motivated by bias against religion, belief, or non-belief by public officials and civil society;
- provision of effective compensation for harm;
- adoption of a holistic approach to the support of victims;
- multistakeholder activities to combat hate crimes.

2. Methodology

This summary report, based on the full Turkish version, is an important resource presenting a comprehensive monitoring work on hate crimes motivated by bias against religion, belief, or non-belief in Türkiye. The report is based on a survey of legislation related to hate crimes.

To identify hate crime incidents, media monitoring was conducted covering the period of January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023. Additionally, our prepared form was widely disseminated for the purpose of reporting hate crimes committed with bias motives based on religion or belief. The information obtained was analysed based on the hate crime definition of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the data were evaluated for inclusion in the report. Finally, the relevant people and institutions were contacted to verify and access up-to-date information about reported incidents.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) uses the following definition for hate crime:

"Any criminal offence, including offences against persons or property, where the victim, premises, or target of the offence are selected because of their real or perceived connection, attachment, affiliation, support, or membership of a group. A group may be based upon a characteristic common to its members, such as real or perceived race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or other similar factor."¹

This monitoring work is based on motives of bias against Jews, Christians, Muslims, Alevis, individuals wearing headscarves, atheists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Yazidis, and any other religion or belief.

Throughout this study, limitations were encountered in accessing statistics and judicial decisions on hate crimes motivated by bias based on religion or belief. The fact that hate crimes are generally underreported and underrepresented in the media continues to be a significant limitation. In addition, the information in the report reflects only part of the picture, because our monitoring work could not be sufficiently disseminated among the relevant religious or belief communities and non-believers.

Significant barriers in obtaining information from public institutions have also continued to limit access to data that would serve as a source for the report. The lack of relevant accessible and detailed statistical information from public institutions, pri-

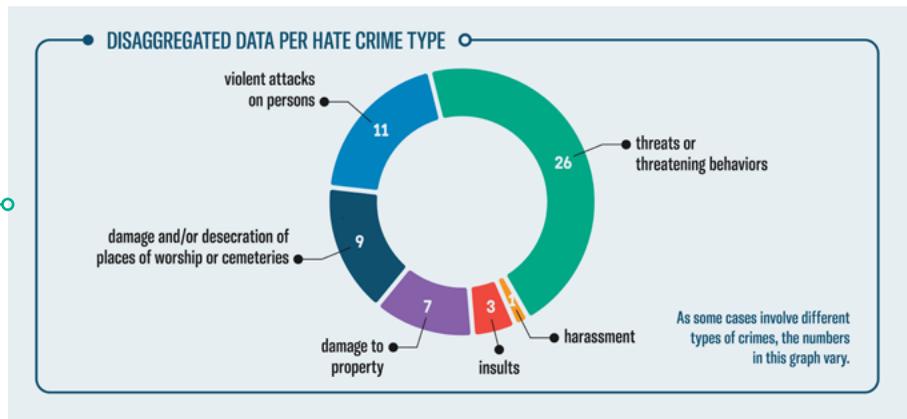
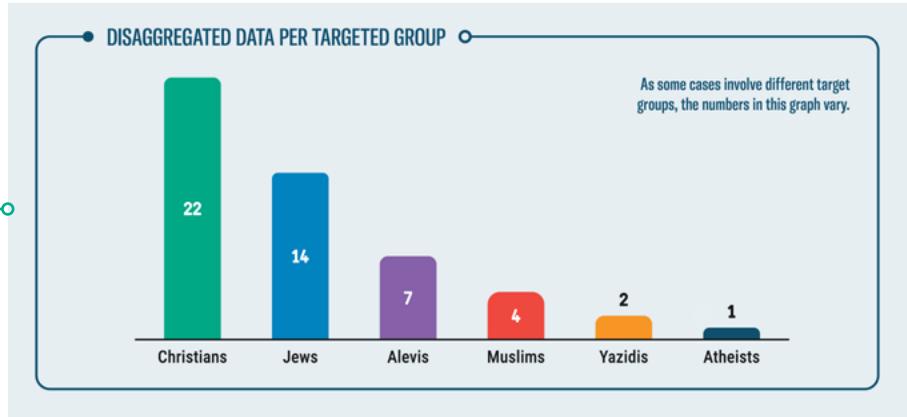
1 OSCE/ODIHR (2005), *Combating Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region*, Warsaw, p. 12.

marily the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior, is a systematic obstacle to the monitoring of hate crimes. Lastly, although we aimed to conduct a more comprehensive monitoring study by giving attention to how hate crimes were handled in judicial decisions, our access to these decisions was limited.

3. Hate crime or incident data for 2023

From January to December 2023, information was received in regards to 47 hate crimes or incidents related to religion, belief, or non-belief.²

REPORTED
HATE CRIMES IN 2023
MOTIVATED BY BIAS
AGAINST RELIGION,
BELIEF, OR
NON-BELIEF
47

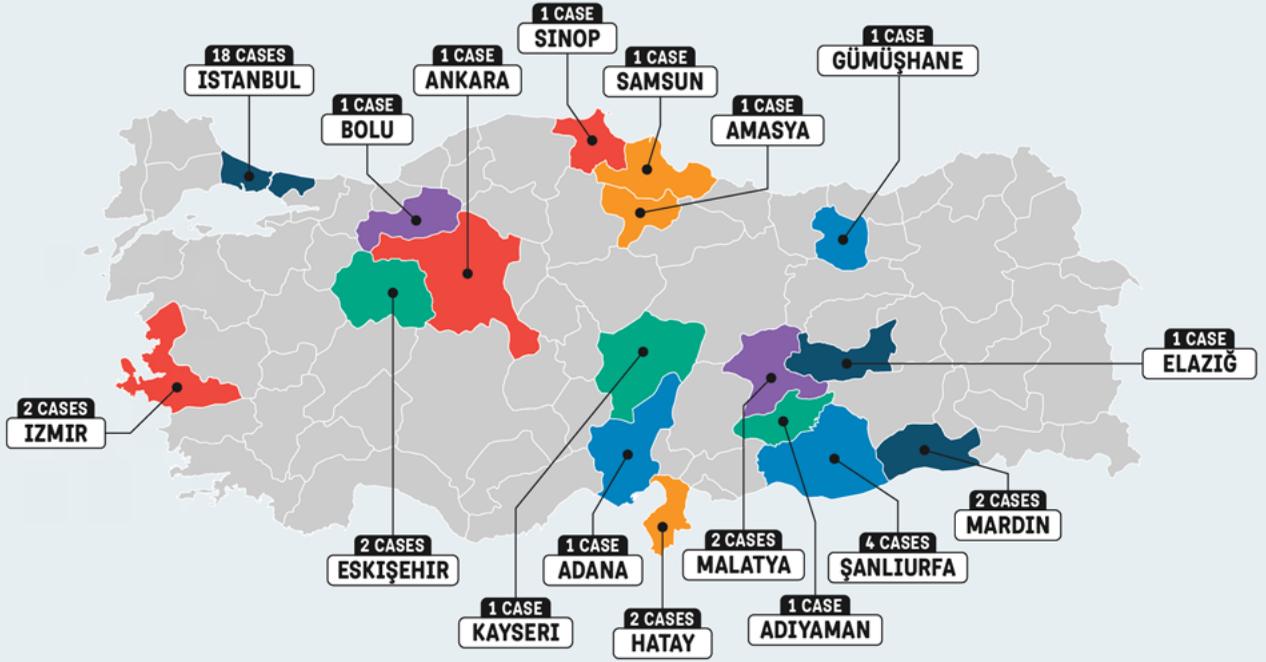


It is known that hate crimes are generally under-reported. Therefore, these numbers reflect only a portion of the actual hate crimes that occur. The primary barriers to reporting hate crimes can be summarised as follows:

- victims have become accustomed to bias-motivated actions and have high thresholds for reporting or notifying authorities;
- individuals prefer not to report due to fear of exclusion or ostracization;
- victims have concerns that their allegations will not be taken seriously or will lead to greater victimisation even by local police officers.

² It should be noted that incidents may not amount to crime in national legislation. However, the potential hate crime dimension should be investigated by judicial authorities. In the graph below, the individuals targeted in cases categorised as bias against Muslims were those who were critical of certain interpretations of Islam or did not participate in rituals or wear clothing deemed normative by some interpretations of Islam.

LOCATIONS OF HATE CRIMES MOTIVATED BY BIAS AGAINST RELIGION, BELIEF, OR NON-BELIEF IN 2023



5 ONLINE CASES (OR POLITICIAN STATEMENTS)

ISTANBUL	Graffiti on a church	HATAY	Targeting of a church aid tent
ISTANBUL	Armed attack on an Alevi lodge	HATAY	Attack on a woman in a mosque due to her attire
ISTANBUL	Nazi salute at a high school tournament	IZMIR	Threats against a church preacher
ISTANBUL	Use of antisemitic symbols in a school	IZMIR	Graffiti on a synagogue
ISTANBUL	Physical attack on a theologian	MALATYA	Desecration of and damage to an Alevi shrine
ISTANBUL	Attack on a Protestant foundation	MALATYA	Attack on a church member's car
ISTANBUL	Threats against Armenians	MARDIN	Physical attack on Syrians
ISTANBUL	Insult to a theologian	MARDIN	Murder of a Syriac
ISTANBUL	Marking of an Alevi's house	ADANA	Desecration of and damage to a Christian cemetery
ISTANBUL	Threats against and physical attack on Alevis	ADIYAMAN	Harassment of Christians
ISTANBUL	Threats from Nazi sympathizers	AMASYA	Attack on a church
ISTANBUL	Antisemitic placard	ANKARA	Desecration of and damage to Jewish and Christian cemeteries
ISTANBUL	Attack on a Greek church and school	BOLU	Throwing people into water for skipping prayer
ISTANBUL	Antisemitic flyer	ELAZIĞ	Attack on the car of a representative of an Alevi foundation
ISTANBUL	Physical attack on an Alevi student	GÜMÜŞHANE	Attack on a Tunceli bus
ISTANBUL	Antisemitic protest near a Jewish hospital	KAYSERİ	Attack on church property
ISTANBUL	Attack on a church	SAMSUN	Threats against Jews
ISTANBUL	Antisemitic graffiti	SINOP	Threats against a church and pastor
ŞANLIURFA	Targeting of church members	ONLINE	Targeting of the Feast of Annunciation Day
ŞANLIURFA	Threats against a pastor	ONLINE	Targeting of a rabbi
ŞANLIURFA	Systematic attack on Yazidis	ONLINE	Targeting of a church
ŞANLIURFA	Physical attack on Yazidis	ONLINE	Insults to atheists
ESKİŞEHİR	Physical attack on a pastor	ONLINE/TV	Hostile statements against Jews
ESKİŞEHİR	Threats against a pastor		

TIMELINE OF HATE CRIMES MOTIVATED BY BIAS AGAINST RELIGION, BELIEF, OR NON-BELIEF IN 2023





* Date of reporting of the case.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

In 2023, the information on hate crimes/incidents according to targeted groups was as follows:³

- Christians: 22
- Jews: 14
- Alevis: 7
- Muslims: 4
- Yazidis: 2
- Atheists: 1

According to our monitoring work conducted systematically since 2020, the three most targeted groups have been Christians (52), Alevis (42), and Jews (23). The data demonstrate the continuation of entrenched prejudices and hostile attitudes towards these groups, which have been frequent targets of hate crimes over Türkiye's history.

It should be noted that in some cases against Christians, ethnic identities such as Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks were also targeted.⁴ It was found that, in some cases, Kurdish identity was also targeted intersectionally with bias motives against Alevis. Additionally, in some incidents, Christians were associated with "Judaism."

In cases categorised as bias against Muslims, the targets were individuals who were critical of certain interpretations of Islam, did not participate in practices considered normative according to some interpretations of Islam, or did not wear specific clothing. Therefore, it can be said that hate crimes or incidents against Muslims often occur when the targeted groups have different or critical views of Islam or show non-compliance with certain religious norms.

States are under the obligation to take necessary measures to prevent hate crimes and to investigate the bias motive so that they do not interfere with the equal enjoyment of human rights by all. However, according to available data, in 2023 as in previous years **most of the hate crimes or incidents were not subjected to an effective legal process conducted with the perspective of the hate crime dimension and were not granted the careful scrutiny these cases merit.** Necessary steps have not been taken to combat impunity.

³ Considering significant barriers to reporting hate crimes, it is important to recognize that the data in the report do not reflect the true extent of these crimes.

⁴ Especially in the context of Türkiye, the intersection of ethnic and religious identity makes it difficult to distinguish between the two. Therefore, in this report these events were categorised as bias against Christians within the framework of methodological limits.

Hate crimes take various forms and occur in many parts of Türkiye. These incidents include threats or threatening behaviours, violent attacks on individuals, damage and/or desecration of places of worship or cemeteries, damage to property, insults, and harassment. Compared to previous years, there has been an observable increase in the number and proportion of violent attacks against individuals in 2023.

When evaluated together with monitoring data from previous years, it is evident **that attacks on places associated with religious or belief communities, such as cemeteries, places of worship, homes, or schools, are among the most frequently encountered incidents.**

Additionally, **it was found that some places associated with religious or belief communities are repeatedly targeted.** Similarly, when analysing the details of the incidents one may observe that some individuals or groups are systematically subjected to threats or pressure. This is particularly the case with hate crimes targeting Protestants, Assyrians, and Yazidis. These groups are continuously subjected to pressure and incidents against them have become systematic.

In 2023, an increase in hate crimes against Protestants was observed. Since 2019, 250 Protestants have been deported or had their visa applications rejected for "security" reasons.⁵ Parallel to this official stance, Protestants are often portrayed in traditional and online media as a "threat" to Turkish society due to "missionary activities." Occasionally local newspapers even publish the addresses of churches, targeting places of worship. Some of the incidents identified in this report may reflect the everyday impact of the media's hate speech against Protestants. In Türkiye, Protestant churches generally exist as apartment churches and tend to be concentrated in less secure areas of cities. Since most of these churches do not have the status of places of worship, security risks may be heightened. This apparent increase in hate crimes may also be a reflection of an increase in media reports and the broader reach of the monitoring work conducted for the Protestant Churches Association's Human Rights Violations Report.

Similarly, an increase in hate crimes against Jews was observed. These incidents particularly intensified after October 7, 2023, following Israel's large-scale and intense military operations in Gaza. Additionally, at the beginning of 2023, there were two separate incidents in schools where Nazi symbols were used. This highlights once again the need for an inclusive, pluralistic, and anti-discriminatory education system and curriculum, and a safe school environment.

The legal framework and law enforcement in Türkiye are far from adequate against these crimes and are not aligned with international human rights law standards.

The Human Rights Action Plan of April 2021 had included objectives for a new regulation in the Turkish Penal Code regarding discrimination and hate crimes. It also set out objectives for improving databases and statistics on these crimes within a year. However, as of June 2024, there has been no change in the legislation.⁶ Au-

⁵ Bianet, *AYM, Protestanların MİT'in raporuyla sınır dışı edilmesine "Din özgürlüğüne müdahale değil" dedi*, 7 June 2024.

⁶ OSCE/ODIHR offers multiple tools and resources for improving practices on monitoring and recording hate crimes, supporting hate crime victims, and strengthening cooperation between authorities and civil society.

thorities must urgently take comprehensive legislative action and steps to combat impunity policies. Regarding the data system improvement efforts, the Ministries of Interior and Justice are reported to be working on improving data collection systems.⁷ However, these efforts have not yet had a sufficient impact.

Obtaining detailed and bias-segregated data on hate crimes and sharing this information with the public are among the most important elements of efforts to prevent such crimes. However, official data on hate crimes in Türkiye are extremely limited and inaccessible. Additionally, the data are not segregated by bias motive. The Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye recommends transparency in sharing data under Article 122, titled "crime of hate and discrimination," in order to achieve deterrence, determination of problems, and resolution of issues.⁸ Although it does not take the place of official data, civil society's systematic monitoring and reporting are critical. These efforts will be beneficial for determining targeted groups, characteristics of the crimes, and urgent measures needing to be taken.

Hate crimes target various groups due to bias against religion, belief, ethnicity, language, colour, gender, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or other similar characteristics. The legal and practical issues regarding this significant human rights issue in Türkiye are similar for each group. Various civil society organisations in Türkiye conduct data-based research and awareness-raising activities on hate crimes related to their fields of work. These organisations can utilise their knowledge and experience for multi-stakeholder advocacy activities. In this way, they can contribute to the improvement of legislation, practices, and impunity policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

→ **In order to prevent and combat hate crime, including those motivated by bias against religion, belief, or non-belief, public officials must adopt new legislation, ensure the disaggregated registration of hate crimes, conduct effective investigations and prosecution, and enforce appropriate sanctions:**

- ↳ **Public authorities must carry out a transparent reform process with greater and more diverse participation, including that of relevant experts, to develop an integrated strategy for combating hate crimes.**
- ↳ **Hate crime legislation and policy framework must be adopted based on international human rights standards including the following key elements:**
 - hate crime must be included in the definitions section of the Turkish Criminal Code;
 - comprehensive, proportionate, and deterrent legislation on hate crime, including provisions on civil, criminal, and administrative law, must be adopted;
 - a general aggravating circumstances provision for hate crime must be put in place;

⁷ The Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye, *Ayrımcılıkla Mücadele ve Eşitlik 2021 Raporu*, 2023, p. 58.

⁸ The Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye, *Ayrımcılıkla Mücadele ve Eşitlik 2021 Raporu*, 2023, p. 120.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES (CONTINUE)

- existing legislation must be effectively implemented;
 - the option of community service should be envisaged along with criminal sanctions;
 - non-governmental organisations working and advocating on the subject should have the right to file lawsuits and to be involved in legal proceedings.
- ↳ **A new public institution should be authorised and tasked by legislation to carry out the process of monitoring hate crimes, the collection and evaluation of statistical data, and the data's dissemination to the public in the form of regular reports.**
- ↳ **Since the collection of evidence of bias motivation by law enforcement officers will directly affect the subsequent criminal proceedings:**
- deficiencies in the current recording system and method and content of data collection must be identified;
 - the data collection and analysis system must ensure that data collected on hate crimes can be disaggregated by bias motive, type of crime, and gender;
 - law enforcement personnel should receive regular training on hate crimes and the detection and recording of bias motivation;
 - a list of bias motivations and an appropriate database should be put in place so that law enforcement personnel can record bias motivation.
- **Multidimensional measures must be taken to meet the needs of the victims:**
- ↳ **The safety and security needs of individuals or communities must be met; regardless of their status, places used for worship and communal spaces should be effectively protected;**
- Victims must be provided with:**
- practical assistance
 - short- and long-term emotional and psychological support
 - information and advice
 - treatment with respect and dignity
 - protection of personal information and trust
 - assistance (for those who report hate crimes) in accessing the judicial system.
- **The ongoing mutual exchange of information and cooperation between law enforcement officers, civil society, and religious or belief communities must be strengthened.**
- **Victimisation surveys must be conducted, keeping in mind that the reporting of hate crimes by victims is, as of yet, insufficient.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society should:

- strengthen contact and cooperation with the media to disseminate accurate information about hate crimes and raise awareness;
- work closely with other organisations and religious or belief groups to develop policies, advocacy strategies, and tools for change in the fight against hate crime; build coalitions or platforms to expand advocacy on the issue;
- raise public awareness and contribute to the formation of public opinion about hate crimes and their consequences for a community via a variety of activities, including campaigns, forums, conferences, workshops, and the production of visual or written material;
- organise activities in collaboration with religious or belief communities with the goal of strengthening communities against hate crime;
- run programs aimed at youth as a useful strategy for the prevention of hate crime and to empower communities against hate crime;
- provide training for professionals such as law enforcement agencies, lawyers, social service providers, teachers, and health care professionals;
- provide direct support to victims, including the establishment of support and counselling centres;
- monitor and report hate crimes as well as official responses; both the authorities and the public can be mobilised as a result;
- develop further collaboration with academicians and experts on hate crime;
- plan monitoring, reporting, advocacy, and awareness-raising activities against hate speech to strengthen the fight against hate crimes.⁹

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS OR BELIEF COMMUNITIES

Religious or belief communities should:

- carry out awareness raising activities within religious or belief communities about hate crime;
- report hate crime, create their own registry database, and share data which may increase the visibility of hate crimes;
- participate in joint monitoring and reporting initiatives;
- offer practical support and share information with victims;
- cooperate with organisations that work on hate crimes with motives beyond those motivated by a bias against religion or belief.

⁹ Some of these recommendations are adapted from the guide titled, "Nefret Suçlarını Önleme ve Karşılama" prepared by the OSCE/ODIHR and translated into Turkish by KAOS GL Association.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

Media and journalists should:

- handle hate crimes with a non-sensationalist approach and show sensitivity toward victims and affected communities;
- refrain from using language or images that reinforce biases or stereotypes against a specific identity;
- provide context about broader issues such as historical and social factors behind hate crimes;
- focus on the impact of hate crimes on individuals and groups;
- use their wide reach to inform about the nature of hate crimes, the importance of reporting them, and available support services;
- ensure the voices and representation of targeted communities are heard and represented in news coverage;
- cooperate with experts to provide accurate information and resources on human rights, hate crimes, and victim support.

#SayNoToHateCrime

*We know that hate crime can be prevented,
take action against hate crime and
stand up for equality!*



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