



Home Office

# Country Information and Guidance

## Turkey: Alevis

Version 1.0

February 2016

# Preface

This document provides country of origin information (COI) and guidance to Home Office decision makers on handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. This includes whether claims are likely to justify the granting of asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and whether – in the event of a claim being refused – it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under s94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers must consider claims on an individual basis, taking into account the case specific facts and all relevant evidence, including: the guidance contained with this document; the available COI; any applicable caselaw; and the Home Office casework guidance in relation to relevant policies.

## Country Information

The COI within this document has been compiled from a wide range of external information sources (usually) published in English. Consideration has been given to the relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability of the information and wherever possible attempts have been made to corroborate the information used across independent sources, to ensure accuracy. All sources cited have been referenced in footnotes. It has been researched and presented with reference to the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the [European Asylum Support Office’s research guidelines, Country of Origin Information report methodology](#), dated July 2012.

## Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve the guidance and information we provide. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this document, please [e-mail us](#).

## Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to make recommendations to him about the content of the Home Office’s COI material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office’s COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy.

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Information about the IAGCI’s work and a list of the COI documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector’s website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>

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# Guidance

Updated: 12 February 2016

## 1. Basis of Claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm at the hands of state or non-state actors due to the person's Alevi faith.

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## 2. Consideration of Issues

### 2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For further guidance on assessing credibility see sections 4 and 5 of the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision-makers must also check whether there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision-makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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### 2.2 Assessment of risk

- 2.2.1 Even when taken cumulatively, the treatment faced by Alevis does not in general amount to them being subject to action on the part of either non-state actors or the authorities which would amount to persecution or serious harm.

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#### Treatment by the state

- 2.2.2 The government considers Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect and Alevi places of worship are not officially recognised (see [Position in law](#)). This means that they do not receive financial support from the state and Alevis also experience difficulties in establishing new places of worship. This does not, however, prevent Alevis in practice from worshipping in buildings which do not have legal place of worship status (see [Places of worship](#)).
- 2.2.3 Alevis also face unequal treatment in education (see [Education](#)) and Alevis, along with a few other minority religious groups, are unable to state their religious identity on national identity cards because their groups are not listed as options (see [Religion on identity cards](#)).
- 2.2.4 There are also a small number of reports of ill-treatment by the authorities, primarily as a result of the police using excessive force in responding to demonstrations involving Alevis and the Alevi community's perception that they are subject to discriminatory language, including by members of the government (see [Treatment by authorities](#)).

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### Treatment by non-state actors

- 2.2.5 Although there are isolated incidents of societal discrimination and violence towards Alevi, these are few and most Alevi co-exist with other communities with few problems on a daily basis (see [Societal discrimination](#)).
- 2.2.6 For further guidance on assessing risk, see section 6 of the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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### 2.3 Protection

- 2.3.1 The Turkish Penal Code was amended in March 2014 to introduce crimes of 'hatred and discrimination,' with a penalty for hate/discrimination offences on religious, and other, grounds. Furthermore, a revision of Article 122 of the Turkish Penal Code introduced penalties for discriminatory, hate-based practices in economic activities and in employment (see [Anti-discrimination laws](#)). Avenues of complaint exist for persons to lodge complaints against police officers they accuse of ill-treatment (see [country information and guidance on Turkey: Background](#)).
- 2.3.2 Where the person's fear is of ill-treatment/persecution at the hands of the state itself, they will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities. Where the person's fear is of ill-treatment/persecution at the hands of non-state agents - or rogue state agents - then effective state protection is likely to be available.
- 2.3.3 Decision-makers need to consider each case on its facts. The onus is on the person to demonstrate why they would not be able to seek and obtain state protection.
- 2.3.4 See also country information and guidance on [Turkey: Background including actors of protection and internal relocation](#).
- 2.3.5 For further guidance on assessing the availability, or lack of availability, of state protection, see section 8.1 of the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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### 2.4 Internal relocation

- 2.4.1 There are Alevi communities throughout Turkey and in general where an Alevi does encounter local societal hostility they will be able to avoid this by moving elsewhere in Turkey, but only if the risk is not present there and if it would not be unduly harsh to expect them to do so.
- 2.4.2 Where the person's fear is of persecution or serious harm at the hands of the state they will not be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.4.3 Decision-makers must give careful consideration to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation on a case-by-case basis, taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person.

2.4.4 See also country information and guidance on [Turkey: Background including actors of protection and internal relocation](#).

2.4.5 For further guidance on internal relocation, see section 8.2 of the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.5 Certification

2.5.1 Where a claim falls to be refused, it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

2.5.2 For further guidance on certification, see the [Appeals Instruction on Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under Section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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## 3. Policy summary

3.1.1 Alevis are considered a heterodox Muslim sect by the state and their places of worship are not officially recognised, but they are nevertheless able to worship.

3.1.2 Alevis may experience unequal treatment in education. Their faith is not recognised on national identity cards.

3.1.3 There is a small number of reports of ill-treatment of Alevis by the authorities.

3.1.4 There is a small number of reports of societal discrimination and violence towards Alevis, but they generally live peacefully with other groups.

3.1.5 In general, a person will be able to relocate internally to escape societal persecution, but internal relocation will not be an option if ill-treatment is at the hands of the authorities.

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## 4. Background

### 4.1.1 Minority Rights Group International state:

'Alevi is the term used for a large number of heterodox [holding unorthodox opinions] Muslim Shi'a communities with different characteristics. Thus, Alevi constitute the largest religious minority in Turkey. Technically they fall under the Shi'a denomination of Islam, yet they follow a fundamentally different interpretation than the Shi'a communities in other countries. They also differ considerably from the Sunni Muslim majority in their practice and interpretation of Islam.

'The vast majority of Alevi are probably of Kizilbash or Bektashi origin, two groups subscribing to virtually the same system of beliefs but separately organized. The Alevi (Kizilbash) are traditionally predominantly rural and acquire identity by parentage. Bektashis, however, are predominantly urban, and formally claim that membership is open to any Muslim.

'Linguistically, they consist of four groups: Azerbaijani Turkish, Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish (both Kurmanci and Zaza). The last two categories constitute the largest Alevi groups. Politically, Kurdish Alevi have faced the dilemma of whether their prior loyalty should be to their ethnic or religious community. Some care more about religious solidarity with Turkish Alevi than ethnic solidarity with Kurds, particularly since many Sunni Kurds deplore them. Some fear such tensions may lead to new ethno-religious conflict.

'Alevi share a way of truth unavailable to the uninitiated, and like Sufis claim that the Koran has both an open and a hidden meaning. There are progressive levels of divine understanding from obedience to shari'a Islam through tarika (brotherhood) to ma'rifa (mystical understanding of God) and ultimately to hakkika (immanent experience of divine reality). Their profession of faith includes Ali along with God and the Prophet Muhammad. Alevi differ outwardly from Sunni Muslims in the following ways: they do not fast in Ramadan but do during the Ten Days of Muharram (the Shiite commemoration of Imam Husayn's martyrdom); they do not prostrate themselves during prayer; they do not have mosques; and do not have obligatory formal almsgiving, although they have a strong principle of mutual assistance.'<sup>1</sup>

### 4.1.2 According to the US Department of State's 2013 International Religious Freedom report, 'academics estimate there are 15 million to 20 million Alevi, followers of a belief system that incorporates aspects of both Shia and Sunni Islam and draws on the traditions of other religious groups

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<sup>1</sup> Minority Rights Group International. 'World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples,' undated. <http://www.minorityrights.org/4402/turkey/alevis.html> Date accessed: 30 July 2015.

indigenous to the region. Alevi foundation leaders report higher numbers, estimating 20 million to 25 million Alevi in the country.<sup>2</sup>

4.1.3 The US Commission on International Religious Freedom's Annual Report 2014 reported that:

'Alevi comprise 15 to 25 percent of Turkey's total population. Although the Turkish government and many Alevi view them as heterodox Muslims, many Sunni Muslims do not accept that definition and consider them non-Muslims. Some Alevi identify as Shi'a Muslim, while others reject Islam and view themselves as a unique culture. Alevi worship in cemevi (gathering places), which the Turkish government does not consider legal houses of worship and thus cannot receive the legal and financial benefits associated with such status.'<sup>3</sup>

4.1.4 The US Department of State's Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2014 noted that Alevi are underrepresented in the state bureaucracy and held none of the country's 81 provincial governorships appointed by the central government.<sup>4</sup>

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## 5. Position in law

5.1.1 US Department of State's 2013 International Religious Freedom Report stated: 'The government considers Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect and does not financially support religious worship for Alevi Muslims.

'The constitution stipulates that no one shall be compelled to reveal his or her religious beliefs. National identity cards limit identification of one's religious affiliation as one of the following: Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Christian, Jew, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, no religion, or other. The applicant may also elect to leave the space blank. A few religious groups, such as Bahais, Alevi, and Yezidi, are unable to state their religious identity on national identity cards because their groups are not listed as options.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> US Department of State. '2013 International Religious Freedom Report,' Turkey, 28 July 2014 (Section I. Religious Demography).  
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222277> Date accessed: 30 July 2015

<sup>3</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. 'Annual Report 2014,' dated 1 May 2015 (page 147).  
[http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF\\_2014\\_Annual\\_Report\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_2014_Annual_Report_PDF.pdf) Date accessed: 30 July 2015.

<sup>4</sup> US Department of State. 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2014,' Turkey, 26 June 2015 (Section 6. National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).  
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=236586> Date accessed: 30 July 2015.

<sup>5</sup> US Department of State. '2013 International Religious Freedom Report,' Turkey, dated 28 July 2014 (Section II Legal/Policy Framework).  
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222277> Date accessed: 30 July 2015



5.1.2 Forum 18, a non-profit Norwegian-Danish-Swedish charitable foundation, stated in a January 2014 report that:

'Alevi and other Sunni Islamic groups cannot have legal personality under the 1925 Law No. 677 ("Closure of Dervish Convents and Tombs, the Abolition of the Office of Keeper of Tombs and the Abolition and Prohibition of Certain Titles"). This Law also, among other things, closed Alevi places of worship and prevents their leaders from using their religious titles. This Law is protected under the Constitution and cannot be amended. It is unlikely that the issue of legal personality can be resolved without addressing this very sensitive issue for the modern Republic's relationship with religious communities.'<sup>6</sup>

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## 6. Treatment by the state

### 6.1 Overview

6.1.1 In a June 2015 response to an information request, the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board citing various sources (see original document for details of sources) stated: 'Since the civil war in Syria [2011], Alevi in Turkey have faced increased discrimination... Sources note the following examples of the treatment of Alevis by state authorities:

- 'According to the Turkey Analyst article, AKP officials reportedly blamed a May 2013 car bombing in Reyhani which killed 53 people on the Alevis, claiming that the attack was carried out by Turkish Alevis based in Syria, even though no evidence was produced to this effect.
- 'Sources report that the request of a prison inmate to see an Alevi religious figure was rejected and an imam was sent instead.
- 'According to Freedom House, in 2014, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and "AKP officials" criticized members of the Alevi religious minority; in particular, Erdogan "made repeated disparaging remarks about Alevis". Al-Monitor, quoting a translated interview with the head of the Alevi-Bektashi Federation, Selahattin Ozel, similarly reports that Erdogan's rhetoric ... on the Alevis has been "very divisive, very ostracizing".
- 'According to Country Reports 2013, there was excessive use of force by police in responding to Gezi Park protests [2013 protests against the development of Istanbul's Gezi Park that escalated to involve larger issues like the "oppression of individual liberties" (Akdemir 2014, 72)] involving Alevi citizens. According to a 2014 article on the conflict between the Alevi and the AKP published in the Eurasian Journal of Anthropology, Alevi neighbourhoods were highly supportive of the Gezi Park protests and the majority of the

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<sup>6</sup> Forum 18 News Service. 'Turkey: Religious freedom survey, January 2014,' dated 16 January 2014. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1916](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1916) Date accessed: 30 July 2015

people killed during the protests were Alevi, as a result of "the harshness of the police violence in certain neighbourhoods populated largely by Alevis".

- 'Without providing further details, Freedom House reports that in May 2014, "violence between Sunni and Alevi groups in Istanbul claimed two lives". Similarly, the Turkey Analyst article reports that on 22 May 2014, members of the militant leftist group the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C), which "almost exclusively" recruits Alevis, "clashed with police in the Alevi part of the mixed Sunni-Alevi neighbourhood of Okmeydani in central Istanbul," and two people were killed. Sources report that one of the victims was shot while waiting in a cemevi courtyard to attend a funeral. Human Rights Watch reports that the police had originally been targeting protestors after they threw a Molotov cocktail at a police vehicle.
- 'According to Religion News Service, a non-profit online news source that aims to "provide in-depth, non-sectarian coverage of religion", police responded to protests on 13 February 2015 by Alevis and other religious minorities regarding compulsory religion classes in primary schools with pepper spray, water cannons, and detaining and filing charges against protest leaders "for insulting the Turkish president."<sup>7</sup>

6.1.2 The European Commission's 2014 Progress Report noted that 'Hate rhetoric by some media targeted Christians, Armenians, Jews and to a lesser extent other non-Muslims and Kurds. Alevis community perception is that they are subject to discriminatory language, including by members of the government.'<sup>8</sup>

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## 6.2 Anti-discrimination laws

6.2.1 In its 2014 Progress Report on Turkey (which covers the period from October 2013 to September 2014), the European Commission reported that: 'In March [2014], the Criminal Code was amended to refer to "hatred and discrimination." The amendment increased the penalty for hate offences including those based on language, race, nationality, colour, gender, disability, political view, philosophical belief, religion or sect. The amendment

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<sup>7</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. 'Turkey: Situation of Alevis, including political and religious rights; treatment of Alevis by society and authorities; state protection (June 2012-May 2015),' 12 June 2015, TUR105167.E <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=455948&pls=1> Date accessed: 30 July 2015

<sup>8</sup> European Commission. '2014 Progress Report on Turkey,' 8 October 2014 (Chapter 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights, page 60). [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report_en.pdf) Date accessed: 30 July 2015

did not however include hate offences based on ethnic origin, sexual orientation or gender identity...<sup>9</sup>

'In the field of anti-discrimination, the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of disability was introduced into the national education law and the labour law. Furthermore, a revision of Article 122 of the Turkish Penal Code introduced penalties for discriminatory, hate based practices in economic activities and in employment. There is still no protective legislation regarding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or age...<sup>10</sup>

'The Turkish Criminal Code regulates anti-discrimination, listing language, race, colour, gender, disability, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion, sect and similar reasons as bases on which discrimination is not permitted. It was amended to refer to hate crimes and to increase penalties for discrimination. Refusing to sell or rent a movable or immovable property to a particular person, while this has been offered to the public, is considered discrimination and has become a crime. However, discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, sexual orientation and gender identity were not listed in the March [2014] revision of the Criminal Code. This affects especially important minorities as Roma and Kurds that are the most disadvantaged groups.... A draft law on the establishment of an Anti-discrimination and Equality Board remained pending at the Prime Ministry.'<sup>11</sup>

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### 6.3 Religious freedom

6.3.1 In its national report of October 2014 to the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, the Turkish government stated that:

'Freedom of religion and conscience is firmly guaranteed by the Constitution and relevant legislation. Everyone has the freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction. No one shall be compelled to worship, or to participate in religious rites and ceremonies, or to reveal religious beliefs and convictions, or be blamed or accused because of his religious beliefs and convictions.

'Dissemination of religious beliefs or convictions is not prohibited under the Turkish law. To the contrary, prohibition of expression or dissemination of religious belief through coercion or threat constitutes an offence.

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<sup>9</sup> European Commission. '2014 Progress Report on Turkey', 8 October 2014 (Chapter 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights, page 60).

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report_en.pdf)  
Date accessed: 30 July 2015

<sup>10</sup> European Commission. '2014 Progress Report on Turkey', 8 October 2014 (Chapter 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights, page 41).

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report_en.pdf)  
Date accessed: 30 July 2015

<sup>11</sup> European Commission. '2014 Progress Report on Turkey', 8 October 2014 (Chapter 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights, page 58 – 59).

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report_en.pdf)  
Date accessed: 30 July 2015

'In terms of promoting the environment of tolerance and mutual understanding, Turkish citizens belonging to different faith groups can freely hold their own religious ceremonies. Since 2010 religious ceremonies have been held at various places for worship including The Historical Sumela Monastery in Trabzon, Surp Hac Armenian Church on the Akhdamar Island of Lake Van, Surp Giragos Armenian Orthodox Church in Sur district of Diyarbakır and Aya Yorgi Church in Alanya.

'Dialogue with different faith groups has intensified since the first cycle of the review. Accordingly, high level Turkish authorities met with representatives of different faith groups and spiritual leaders of the communities. Priority was given to tackling the problems faced by these groups.'<sup>12</sup>

6.3.2 At a meeting of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review on 27 January 2015, the head of the delegation of Turkey stated that consultations continued to be conducted with representatives of the Alevi community to address their demands.<sup>13</sup>

6.3.3 The annual report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom noted:

'While the Turkish government has implemented some reforms in recent years to improve religious freedom, including regarding minority communities' property rights, religious dress, and education, significant concerns remain. Turkish secularism, as codified in the 1982 constitution, requires absolute state control over religion, which leads to governmental interference and restrictions that hinder full religious freedom in the country. As a constitutional secular state no religious community, including the Sunni Muslim majority, has full legal status. The government limits all religious groups' rights to own and maintain places of worship, train clergy, and offer religious education. This has been particularly detrimental to the smallest minority communities and their ability to transmit their faith to future generations.

'Despite the significant constitutional impediments to full religious freedom protections, the Turkish government has shown that some improvements, such as relating to property rights and religious dress, are possible without a new constitution as long as there is sufficient political will.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> UN Human Rights Council. National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21: Turkey, 30 October 2014, A/HRC/WG.6/21/TUR/1 (paragraphs 55 – 59). <http://www.refworld.org/country,,UNHRC,,TUR,,54c108254,0.html> Date accessed: 30 July 2015

<sup>13</sup> UN Human Rights Council. 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Turkey,' 13 April 2015, A/HRC/29/15 (paragraph 50, page 6). <http://www.refworld.org/docid/557172914.html> Date accessed: 30 July 2015

<sup>14</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. 'Annual Report 2014,' dated 1 May 2015 (pages 145 – 146) [http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF\\_2014\\_Annual\\_Report\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_2014_Annual_Report_PDF.pdf) Date accessed: 30 July 2015

## 6.4 Places of worship

### 6.4.1 US Department of State: 2013 International Religious Freedom Report stated:

'Alevi continued to face obstacles when attempting to establish cemevis. Those constructed had no legal status as places of worship and received no financial support from the Diyanet [the Presidency of Religious Affairs]. Alevi leaders reported there were approximately 2,500 to 3,000 cemevis in the country, an insufficient number to meet their needs; they stated that if their communities had the same number of cemevis per capita as Sunni Muslims had mosques, there would be more than 40,000 cemevis in the country.

'Some Alevi foundations argued the Diyanet should be reformed so that support would be available to all religious groups or, alternatively, that it be funded in such a way that allowed non-Sunni Muslims to opt out of supporting the Diyanet. Other Alevi argued that the Diyanet should be abolished altogether. At year's end the second appeal of a lower court's dismissal of a complaint to shut down the Cankaya Cemevi Building Association awaited a final verdict by the country's highest court, the General Assembly of the Court of Cassation. The Ankara Governor's Office Provincial Directorate in charge of associations had filed a complaint against the building association for refusing to remove a description from its charter referring to cemevis as houses of worship. Alevi continued to petition the courts to have cemevis legally recognized as places of worship.

'While the lower court had determined, in November 2011, that Alevi were entitled to designate their own houses of worship, the Supreme Court of Appeals overturned that decision in July 2012, ruling that no places other than mosques and mesjids could be considered Muslim places of worship under the law. The Supreme Court of Appeals returned the case to the lower court, which reaffirmed its original verdict in November 2012. The judge's decision stated that for hundreds of years cemevis had been known as places of worship for Alevi and that the charter's reference to cemevis as places of worship was not in contravention of the constitution or prohibited by law.'<sup>15</sup>

### 6.4.2 In January 2014 Forum 18 reported that: 'It is in fact, if not in law, possible for Alevi and other communities, such as Protestants, to worship in a building not having legal place of worship status. But there are legal, financial and social consequences.

'Legally, gathering for worship in a building that is not legally recognised, or calling it a cem house (cemevi), church or similar name may - albeit seldom - result in prosecution. In Istanbul a Protestant was prosecuted on 25 May 2010 for calling his association (established for running seminars on

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<sup>15</sup> US Department of State. '2013 International Religious Freedom Report,' Turkey, 28 July 2014 (Section II Government Practices).  
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222277> Date accessed: 30 July 2015.

Christianity) a church. He was acquitted when he stated that his poor Turkish as a foreigner led him to wrongly describe his legal association as a church. On occasion, local police have formally warned a number of self-described churches without legal place of worship status, but with a link to legal status as associations that worship in their buildings is unlawful. The reason given is that the buildings are association buildings and not appropriate for worship purposes.

'Financially, legally recognised places of worship enjoy certain exemptions from a number of taxes, for instance, property tax, and electricity and water charges. Belief communities whose buildings do not have legal place of worship status cannot enjoy these benefits.'<sup>16</sup>

- 6.4.3 According to the European Commission's 2014 Progress Report on Turkey, 'No concrete steps have been taken to address problems of the Alevi community. Cem houses were not officially recognised as places of worship and Alevis experienced difficulties in establishing new places of worship. The Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) expressed the view that mosques are the only place of worship in Islam.'<sup>17</sup>

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## 6.5 Education

- 6.5.1 In January 2014 Forum 18 reported that:

'The right to teach a religion or belief is not protected in the Constitution, and is by far the most restricted part of freedom of religion or belief in Turkey. Instead, the Constitution regulates religious instruction and education saying that "Education and instruction in religion and ethics shall be conducted under state supervision and control." The state has the monopoly on both opening religious schools and determining obligatory or optional courses regarding religious education.

'Private institutions cannot open Institutions to provide religious education. Under Article 3 of Law No. 5580 on Private Educational Institutions, "education institutions identical or similar to ones which provide religious education cannot be opened".

'The compulsory Religious Culture and Knowledge of Ethics (RCKE) school course continues, including Sunni Islamic religious instruction, even though the ECtHR in Strasbourg and Turkey's Court of Cassation have held that RCKE lessons are incompatible with the country's human rights obligations. In the October 2007 ruling on the Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey case (Application no. 1448/04), the ECtHR ruled that Turkey should either change the course curriculum or introduce a real possibility of exemptions for all who wanted this.

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<sup>16</sup> Forum 18 News Service. 'Turkey: Religious freedom survey, January 2014,' dated 16 January 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1916](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1916) Date accessed: 30 July 2015

<sup>17</sup> European Commission. '2014 Progress Report on Turkey', dated 8 October 2014 (Chapter 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights, page 54). [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report_en.pdf) Date accessed: 30 July 2015

'In 2010 the Education Ministry introduced some changes to the RCKE curriculum and textbooks. But in June 2012 the Reform in Education Initiative found in a report that it is still incompatible with Turkey's human rights obligation to allow parents or legal guardians to raise their children in line with their religious or philosophical views.

'Exemptions from the RCKE course are available only for those who can prove – by showing a copy of their identity card - that they are Christian or Jewish. No exemptions are allowed for atheists, agnostics, Islamic minorities, or followers of other faiths such as the Baha'is, Yezidis or Alevis. Choosing exemption from RCKE classes can be difficult even for those who are formally entitled to this, as in practice some children who do gain exemption have experienced ostracism and bullying from other children and discrimination from teachers - particularly in small towns and cities.

'In the 2012-13 school year, the AKP introduced additional optional religion courses on the Koran, Basic Religious Knowledge (Islam), and the life of the Muslim Prophet Mohammed. In this first year of these courses some school administrations made them effectively compulsory by not offering other optional lessons due to a lack of teaching staff. Many parents did not feel that they could publicly protest at this, as they did not want their children to be discriminated against. The Education Ministry has taken some action to correct this, but whether these formally optional lessons will become truly optional nationwide remains to be seen.

'But the inclusion of the possibility to establish schools to teach in a child's mother tongue in the October 2013 Democratisation Package was a positive step. Before 2013 only the so-called Lausanne minorities (recognised in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty) could open such schools. This development was particularly welcomed by the Syriac Orthodox community which has long suffered from being unable to teach its language to younger generations in school. The language is important for the continuation of their religious practices, as ancient Aramaic is used in this community's worship.'<sup>18</sup>

#### 6.5.2 The US State Department's 2014 human rights report noted that:

'On September 16 [2014], the ECHR [European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)] found the state had violated the right to education of 14 Alevi students by compelling them to participate in mandatory Sunni religious education classes. The ECHR [ECtHR] called on the government to remedy the situation immediately by introducing a system whereby students could be exempted from religion and ethics classes without having to disclose their religious or philosophical convictions. In response Foreign Minister Davutoglu justified the compulsory religious education system, stating: "It is a requirement even for an atheist to have knowledge about religious culture, just like I should know about Marxism even though I am not a Marxist." He asserted that religious knowledge was essential to understanding social events in Turkey and the Middle East and that a lack of proper religious

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<sup>18</sup> Forum 18 News Service. 'Turkey: Religious freedom survey, January 2014,' dated 16 January 2014. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1916](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1916) Date accessed: 30 July 2015

education contributed to radicalization. He added that he had not seen any element of religious pressure placed on non-Muslims in the curriculum of the compulsory course.<sup>19</sup>

6.5.3 The US Commission on International Religious Freedom - Annual Report 2014 stated that:

‘The constitution makes religious and moral instruction compulsory in public primary and secondary schools, with a curriculum established by the Ministry of National Education. In recent years the course, which had primarily focused on Islam, has been expanded to include all religions and atheism. [Note: The USCIRF delegation was unable to verify representations about the content of these courses.] Non-Muslim children can be exempted, although there are reports of societal and teacher discrimination against children who opt out. Additionally, after complaints by religious minority communities, the Ministry of Education states that it has made an effort to revise textbooks so as not to portray minorities in a derogatory manner.’<sup>20</sup>

6.5.4 In that regard the European Commission’s 2014 Progress Report recorded that ‘some Alevi organisations were consulted on preparations for Ministry of National Education textbooks for compulsory religious culture and ethics classes. However, a number of these organisations regretted that the end result did not meet their expectations.’<sup>21</sup>

6.5.5 In its national report of October 2014 to the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, the Turkish government stated that:

‘Positive steps have continued to be taken in favor of different faith groups in the area of education and culture. In this context, Ministry of National Education (MoE) annually reviews course materials to remove connotations that might be perceived as discriminatory by different faith groups. Moreover, Ankara 13th Administrative Court ruled that there is no obstacle before the request of the Assyrian citizens towards delivery of Assyrian courses along with the curriculum of the MoE in certain days or hours of the week in a pre-school to be opened under a community foundation.’<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> US Department of State. ‘Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2014;’ Turkey, dated 26 June 2015 (Section 6. National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=236586> Date accessed: 30 July 2015

<sup>20</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. ‘Annual Report 2014,’ dated 1 May 2015 (pages 145 – 146).

[http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF\\_2014\\_Annual\\_Report\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_2014_Annual_Report_PDF.pdf) Date accessed: 30 July 2015

<sup>21</sup> European Commission. ‘2014 Progress Report on Turkey’, dated 8 October 2014 (Chapter 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights, page 54).

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report_en.pdf) Date accessed: 30 July 2015

<sup>22</sup> UN Human Rights Council. National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21: Turkey, 30 October 2014, A/HRC/WG.6/21/TUR/1 (paragraphs 55 – 59). <http://www.refworld.org/country,,UNHRC,,TUR,,54c108254,0.html> Date accessed: 30 July 2015



## 6.6 Religion on identity cards

### 6.6.1 Forum 18 reported in January 2014 that:

'On identity cards citizens must either declare themselves as following one of a limited number of religions – atheism is not a possible choice - or leave the religion part of identity cards and the corresponding part of the Public Registry blank. This is despite a February 2010 ECtHR decision urging Turkish authorities to eliminate this section entirely (Sinan Isik v. Turkey - Application No. 21924/05).

'Such a public declaration of religious identity makes people vulnerable to discrimination. This is because of the very many situations in daily life requiring identification to be shown, including: entry into certain buildings; dealings with the police; enrolling at school and university; voting in elections; applying for a mobile phone line; enlisting for compulsory military service; getting married; starting a new job; and withdrawing money in person from a bank. This means that many people can access this information, and in the Turkish context it therefore risks coercing people into declaring a religion or belief. There is an absolute prohibition on such coercion in international human rights law.

'Although individuals may leave the religion section in their identity cards blank, this does not solve the problem as the overwhelming majority of Turkish people do not do this. This leads to people who are not Muslim thinking that they must declare themselves as Muslim to avoid discrimination based on their religious or non-religious beliefs.'<sup>23</sup>

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## 7. Societal discrimination

7.1.1 According to US Department of State, Alevis regularly faced societal discrimination. For example, on March 26 [2014], in Tusba subprovince of Van, vandals marked the home of Erkan Gur with red paint, in an echo of similar warnings in 1978 before a massacre of dozens of Alevis in Kahramanmaras Province.<sup>24</sup>

7.1.2 In a June 2015 response to an information request, the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board citing various sources (see original document for details of sources) stated:

'In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor at the Department of History, Anthropology & Philosophy at Georgia Regents University, who specializes in the political history of Turkey, explained that some "who consider themselves to be devout Sunni Muslims feel that Alevis are non-believers or 'devil worshippers'". Other sources state that "many"

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<sup>23</sup> Forum 18 News Service. 'Turkey: Religious freedom survey,' January 2014, dated 16 January 2014. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1916](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1916) Date accessed: 30 July 2015

<sup>24</sup> US Department of State. 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014,' Turkey, dated 26 June 2015 (Section 6. National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities). <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=236586> Date accessed: 30 July 2015

Sunni Muslims regard some Alevi practices as "heresy".....The Professor similarly stated that discrimination of Alevi "both subtle and more overt, takes place throughout the country". In contrast, a 2014 article in the Turkey Analyst, a bi-weekly publication of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Joint Center that focuses on news and analysis of domestic and foreign policy issues in Turkey, states that the "increasing frequency of anti-Alevi prejudice" comes from "members of the AKP leadership," that there has been no major increase in anti-Alevi sentiment "amongst the Sunni population as a whole" and that most Sunnis and Alevis co-exist with relatively few problems on a daily basis.<sup>25</sup>

7.1.3 The same Canadian IRB response to an information request stated that sources report on incidents of violence against Alevis, including the following:

- 'During the month of Ramadan in 2012, the home of an Alevi family was surrounded by local residents after the family tried to stop drum noise used to wake people for a predawn Ramadan meal (The New York Times 4 Aug. 2012; Hurriyet Daily News 25 Aug. 2012; Akdemir 2014, 69). Sources report that the home was stoned and a stall next to the house was set on fire (ibid.; Hurriyet Daily News 25 Aug. 2012).
- 'According to Hurriyet Daily News, in August 2012 "[a]rsonists attempted to set fire to a cemevi ... in Istanbul's Kartal district" (ibid.). According to the same article, the day before the attempted arson, the houses of 25 Alevi families were "marked" by unknown individuals in the same neighbourhood (ibid.).
- 'In December 2013, the homes of 13 Alevi were marked with red paint, similar to that which occurred prior to the 1978 killings of Alevis [1] (US 27 Feb. 2014, 45; MRG July 2014, 181-182). Minority Rights Group International (MRG) indicates that this took place in Adiyaman province (ibid.).
- 'According to an article in Today's Zaman, in October 2014, nine apartment buildings in an Alevi-majority area in Istanbul were marked with the message "Death to Alevis and Kurds. ISIL" (13 Oct. 2014).
- 'In November 2014, Deniz Naki, a footballer playing for a Turkish club, was physically attacked and "insulted" for his Alevi and Kurdish origins (AFP 6 Nov. 2014; Reuters 6 Nov. 2014). Hurriyet Daily News reports that he had experienced past abuse for being

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<sup>25</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. 'Turkey: Situation of Alevis, including political and religious rights; treatment of Alevis by society and authorities; state protection (June 2012-May 2015),' 12 June 2015, TUR105167.E <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=455948&pls=1> Date accessed: 30 July 2015

an Alevi (4 Nov. 2014). As a dual Turkish and German citizen, he left the club and returned to Germany (Reuters 6 Nov. 2014).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. 'Turkey: Situation of Alevis, including political and religious rights; treatment of Alevis by society and authorities; state protection (June 2012-May 2015),' 12 June 2015, TUR105167.E <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=455948&pls=1> Date accessed: 30 July 2015.

# Version Control and Contacts

## Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email [the Guidance, Rules and Forms Team](#).

## Clearance

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was cleared:

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