

Türkiye: Protect freedom of expression and stop internet censorship now

IPI, ARTICLE 19, Freedom of Expression Association (İFÖD), Human Rights Watch and the undersigned human rights and media freedom organisations are deeply concerned by the severe escalation of internet censorship in Türkiye in the past month. We urge social media platforms to take meaningful steps immediately to uphold their human rights responsibilities and avoid contributing to the suppression of independent media and violations of the right to freedom of expression. We call on the Turkish government immediately to cease the use of blocking orders and other restrictive measures that violate the right to freedom of expression, and to ensure that any restrictions on online content fully comply with Türkiye's obligations under international human rights law.

In the month of September 2026 alone, İFÖD documented Turkish authorities and courts ordering the blocking of access to at least 1270 accounts on the social media platform X, which had a combined following of 35 million. X complied with at least 90 percent of the orders by geo-blocking them (withholding access to them in Türkiye only). In many cases, the accounts were blocked in the context of an ongoing and wide-ranging crackdown on associations and activists defending the rights of LGBTQ+ people. In other cases, the authorities cited unspecified 'national security and public order' grounds.

Accounts withheld include news outlets such as soL Haber and Mezopotamya Ajansı; rights organisations including Amnesty International Türkiye and the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA); LGBTQ+ and women's rights organisations such as Kaos GL and the Federation of Women's Associations, as well as those of numerous journalists and academics.

X also withheld the accounts of the Freedom of Expression Association (İFÖD), its co-founder, Yaman Akdeniz, and its Engelliweb account, which monitors and documents internet censorship in Türkiye. This account plays a critical role in enabling civil society, journalists, and the public to monitor and track websites, social media accounts and content subjected to access restrictions.

The blocking T24, one of Türkiye's biggest and oldest remaining independent news outlets, is particularly troubling. On 29 September, access was blocked to the T24 website and X account, which has 1.9 million followers, with a court order citing 118 news articles published on the site. The order claimed that the content was 'aimed at disrupting and weakening the Turkish family structure' and of a nature 'that would adversely affect the developmental process of young and underage individuals concerning sexual orientation and gender identity'.

The order cited preventing crime and protecting public order as grounds for the measure, but provided no explanation about how the cited content posed a threat to either objective, or why blocking an entire news website and social media account was necessary and proportionate. The website has been inaccessible in Türkiye since 30 September. T24 changed its X handle in an attempt to prevent the account from being withheld in Türkiye, then changed it again, after another order blocked access to its second handle. Bianet, another online news outlet that focuses on human rights, also changed its X handle to escape censorship after its account with 400,000 followers was blocked.

The court order blocking access to T24 was taken in the context of the ‘my family is safe’ criminal investigations – a crackdown on LGBTQ+ people that targets activists, associations, and a journalist advocating for their rights. The websites and social media accounts of at least 96 organisations and individuals were blocked on the same grounds.

While most of the cases concern X, Meta has also withheld access to the Instagram and Facebook accounts of several media and civil society organisations including Kısa Dalga, Kaos GL, and the Civic Space Studies Association as part of the same operation.

Türkiye’s long-standing abuse of Article 8/A of its Internet Law

Most of the blocking decisions in September and October invoked Article 8/A of Türkiye’s Internet Law. Article 8/A, used as a tool for internet censorship since its introduction in 2015, provides that online content deemed a threat to national security, public order or presenting a risk on other grounds listed in the Article can be removed or blocked on orders of the executive in urgent cases, subject to review later by a Criminal Peace Judgeship, the court assigned such cases.

Major examples include blocking access to Wikipedia for 2.5 years in 2017, and to Türkiye’s leading user-generated online discussion platform Ekşi Sözlük for a year in 2023. The Constitutional Court eventually restored both, finding that blocking the entire sites had violated freedom of expression. The use of Article 8/A intensified sharply from 2025, with few safeguards or independent oversight and limited redress for those affected. The Constitutional Court has not ruled on any restrictions under Article 8/A since 2023.

Concerning developments aimed at expanding censorship

There is no indication that this pressure will ease. On the contrary, the government is taking further measures to accelerate and centralise internet censorship.

On 31 July, Law No. 7590 transferred the powers previously exercised by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) under the Internet Law to the Cybersecurity Directorate. This includes the authority to block sites on the request of the presidency or relevant ministries based on Article 8/A. This transfer of authority is troubling. The Cybersecurity Directorate is directly attached to the presidency, consolidating executive control over information and serving as the command centre for Türkiye’s censorship regime.

Separately, on 24 September, the justice minister announced the establishment of new ‘Digital Space Security and Countering Disinformation Bureaux’, where specialised public prosecutors will closely monitor ‘criminal content and activities encouraging crime on digital platforms’ including ‘spreading disinformation’. They are tasked in particular with identifying suspects and initiating criminal proceedings to intervene ‘more swiftly’.

Social media platforms should take urgent action to uphold their human rights responsibilities

The conduct of social media platforms forms an essential part of internet censorship in Türkiye.

In September and early October, account holders reported receiving only a notification from platforms stating that their account had been withheld in Türkiye under Article 8/A, without any reason or explanation of why or how the Article had been applied. Some were unable to access the underlying blocking orders even after repeatedly requesting them from the platforms.

Without access to the orders, users cannot examine the legal basis for the restriction or even identify to which Criminal Judgeship of Peace they must submit their objections. Even when users were able to obtain the orders, the orders often failed to identify the specific content allegedly justifying the blocking of the entire account.

Neither X nor Meta have provided public explanations about their responses to the September-October censorship waves. Human Rights Watch wrote to the two platforms requesting comment on their compliance with Turkish courts' recent blocking orders. Neither platform has responded by the time of publication.

Under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, companies have a responsibility to respect human rights by avoiding causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts and by addressing impacts directly linked to their operations, products, or services. This responsibility should also inform social media platforms when they respond to government requests that violate international human rights law, and in particular freedom of expression.

We therefore urge X, Meta and any other platform faced with such orders from the Turkish government to also follow these recommendations:

Resist complying with arbitrary 8/A requests

- Refuse to comply with account blocking requests under Article 8/A of the Internet Law unless Turkish authorities identify the specific content at issue and provide sufficient reasoning and evidence demonstrating that the content gives rise to a clear, serious, and imminent danger to the right to life and property, national security and public order, public health or other grounds listed in the provision.
- Where account blocking orders provide sufficient information to enable a meaningful assessment, assess them against international human rights law and resist complying with blocking orders that restrict access to protected expression. This includes but is not limited to legally challenging such orders. Where relevant, limit restrictions in scope and duration, for example by restricting access only to the specific content identified in the order rather than withholding the entire account.

Ensure transparency

- Immediately notify users when their accounts are withheld in Türkiye, and provide them with the orders on which the restriction is based. This allows account holders to take necessary steps to challenge the orders.
- Provide transparency concerning account blocking measures, at least by publicly sharing the number of orders received, the number of orders complied with, and publishing case studies. This information is essential for enabling public scrutiny of government censorship and platforms' role in it.

Engage with Turkish civil society

- Meaningfully engage with Turkish civil society to understand the human rights implications and broader impact of platforms complying with account blocking measures, including the significance of the accounts targeted and the potential consequences of withholding them in Türkiye.

Urgently review appeals to restrictions

- Review user appeals to account restrictions imposed in Türkiye in September and October 2026 and immediately restore access to accounts if the underlying orders fail to meet the requirements of identifying the specific content at issue, establishing a link between that content and the alleged threat to national security, public order and other grounds listed in article 8/A, and providing adequate reasoning demonstrating that blocking the entire account is necessary and proportionate.

We call on Turkish authorities to take urgent steps to end internet censorship and uphold freedom of expression, including by

- Immediately halting new restrictions on online content that violate freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information as protected under international law and Türkiye's human rights obligations.
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- Restoring access to content which has been restricted in violation of international law and Türkiye's freedom of expression obligations.

Signatories:

ARTICLE 19

Freedom of Expression Association (İFÖD)

Human Rights Watch

Amnesty International

Association of European Journalists (AEJ)

Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN)

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

Çağdaş Gazeteciler Derneği (ÇGD, Progressive Journalists Association)

Foreign Media Association (FMA Turkey)

IFEX

International Press Institute (IPI)

Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA)

Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC)

Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT)

P24 Platform for Independent Journalism

PEN America

PEN Denmark

PEN International

PEN Norway

South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)

Turkey Litigation Support Project (TLSP)