



Campus to Be Handcuffed

THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY
IN THE CONTEXT OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
ON CAMPUSES AFTER THE PANDEMIC

July 2023



Civic Space Studies
Association

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This report has been prepared by the Civic Space Studies Association. CSSA | July 2023



This report was created and maintained with the financial support of the European Union provided under Etkiniz EU Programme. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Civic Space Studies Association and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

While we were conducting the study, we were shaken by the news that we had lost Murat eki, a valuable member of the Etkiniz team and one of the consultants of our project. While we commemorate our dear Murat eki, who made precious contributions to civil society, we dedicate this work to his memory.

Summary

Freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right to peaceful assembly are the cornerstones of democratic societies and work very closely with each other. Freedom of expression includes the right of individuals to express their thoughts and exchange information. This freedom allows civil society to discuss different views and perspectives. On the other hand, the right of peaceful assembly and association guarantees individuals' right to form societies and assemble around common goals. Freedom of expression is intertwined with the right of peaceful assembly and association, as individuals' ability to organize and hold meetings is the most important means of expressing and defending their opinions. These rights form the basis of democratic participation and the formation of public opinion. Freedom of expression and the right of peaceful assembly and association come to the fore as essential elements that complement and reinforce each other in functioning democratic societies.

University campuses should be free and democratic spaces for students to express their opinions freely, hold peaceful meetings, and exercise their right to organize. Unfortunately, on university campuses in Turkey, these rights are frequently restrained. Government and university administrations can use every opportunity to hinder those rights. While restrictions on freedom of expression cause students to be punished for expressing different opinions and criticisms openly, restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly make it difficult for student societies or organizations to come together around common goals. Hindering the right to organize prevents students from participating in civil society activities and actively participating in democratic decision-making processes.

Such restrictions weaken the democratic and free atmosphere of university campuses, negatively affecting students' academic and social development. However, the participation and freedom of expression of various individuals with diverse views should be respected, and efforts should be made to provide an environment suitable for democratic values in universities.

We are going through a time in which the measures taken during the pandemic process are normalized, and in the post-pandemic period, restrictions are imposed on university campuses that prevent the use of the right to expression, organization, and peaceful demonstration. This situation, which we try to explain with examples below, has important effects on students' lives.

Administrative investigations and criminal cases are among the most common problems we encounter during our human rights monitoring work, especially against students who exercise their freedom of expression and participate in protests. As a result of these investigations and lawsuits, students face sanctions such as preventing access to the right to education, cutting scholarships, expulsion from the dormitory, suspension from school, detention or arrest, and imprisonment. These sanctions also have a financial cost on students' education life.

Punishments such as judicial pressures, disciplinary investigations, long-term lawsuits, travel bans, and suspensions against students, especially those organized to exercise their right to peaceful assembly, do not only stigmatize students. It results in students who have yet to participate in the organizing processes to avoid exercising their rights, creating a deterrent effect. Thus, while the sanctions for using rights lead to violating the right, students' reluctance to use their right to organize even without a concrete sanction makes it challenging to be detected by becoming a continuous and uncertain violation.

We found that the "ban on forming clubs for LGBTI+ students," which is widely applied in state universities, extends to event bans on campuses in recent years. Considering that universities are one of the last safe places where they can come together freely, as revealed in the interviews with LGBTI+ students, it is evident that the conditions for LGBTI+ societies to come together on campuses should be created foremost.

Having official club status is vital for many student societies in terms of prestige among students, and the benefit of university grants and campus facilities is among the findings of our study. We observed that the universities' administrative practices regarding student society or club formation differed. While it is possible to establish an LGBTI+ club in a foundation university^[1] In İstanbul, we can say that it is impossible to even communicate with the university administration in a state university. In addition, we have found that the problems experienced in universities in big cities are experienced in different dimensions, such as the intervention of law enforcement officers in campus life in Eastern Anatolia and Southeastern Anatolia regions. It is known that club and society events are frequently blocked during the pandemic period.

[1] Foundation Universities are the universities affiliated with foundations. In Turkey, the private universities have to be affiliated with foundations.

I. Introduction

As the Civic Space Studies Association (CSSA), we set out with the initiative of a group of young human rights defenders to protect and expand the civic space. We were founded in İstanbul in October 2018 to work mainly in freedom of expression, assembly, and association. We focus our efforts on defending young and student rights defenders, who are particularly at risk due to exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms. We also aim to create an environment for active, participatory, and direct participation for young people and to equip them with the skills and knowledge to eliminate the consequences of exclusion from democratic processes.

As the CSSA, in 2019, with the “Freedom of Expression on Campus” program, in line with the demands of the students, we started to carry out a study in which we aimed to record violations of rights in universities all over Turkey, to monitor the trials of student activists, to meet with university clubs to identify needs in freedom of association and other areas and support the student struggle in every sense. Within the scope of this study, we have published two reports, “Campuses as Civil Spaces: Three Fundamental Rights and Freedoms in Universities in Turkey - 2021” [2] and “University in the News: Media Monitoring Report-2021.” [3]

The 2022 Penal Statistics Report prepared by the University of Lausanne for the Council of Europe shows that as of January 31, 2022, among the 48 member countries of the Council of Europe, Turkey is the country with the highest number of prisoners and convicts in prisons in Europe. [4] According to the data of the General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Houses, as of March 31, 2023, there are 2,076 detainees and convicts under 18 in prisons. [5] With these figures, Turkey has the highest number of juvenile and young prisoners in Europe, the highest number of student prisoners in Europe, and the highest number of student and youth activists in Europe who are in prison and are on trial. [6]

One of the conclusions we have drawn from the lawsuits we monitor, the student groups we follow, and our media surveys shows that a significant portion of young people are faced with these measures only because they try to exercise their fundamental rights and participate directly in democratic processes.

University [student] activism has been the center or driving force of social opposition worldwide. Conservative or progressive, the establishment continually seeks to restrict student activism with legal or administrative practices. In Turkey, on the other hand, students face much more severe sanctions and harassment. The fact that younger generations and student initiatives face frequent detentions, investigations, and arrests poses a serious obstacle to exercising their freedoms of association, expression, assembly, and participation in political life. These student rights defenders are particularly at risk of detention and arrest, administrative or disciplinary measures, and criminal prosecution. Most importantly, they often do not have access to accurate information about their rights and the ways they can follow under threat.

CSSA is one of the few organizations working in the field of inclusion and democratic participation of young people, particularly youth activists, students, and a new generation of at-risk human rights defenders. Our working methodology is also based on involving representatives of our target groups in designing and developing our strategies and projects. As CSSA, our primary goal is to protect and expand the civic space. While doing this, our primary field of work is to develop tools that will enable young people, young activists, and students to participate directly, not indirectly, in the area of democracy and human rights and to work to eliminate the factors that prevent this participation or cause them to be excluded from these processes.

[2] Civic Space Studies Association (CSSA), [Sivil Alan Olarak Kampüsler: Türkiye'deki Üniversitelerde 3 Temel Hak ve Özgürlük](#), 2021.

[3] CSSA, [University in the News: Media Monitoring Report - 2021](#), 2021.

[4] The total number of prisoners in Turkey is almost close to the number of prisoners in all of Europe. Council of Europe & University of Lausanne, [SPACE I - 2022 – Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics: Prison populations](#), 2023.

[5] the General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Houses, [Ceza Infaz Kurumlarında Bulunan Tutuklu ve Hükümlülerin Yaş Gruplarına Göre Dağılımları](#), 2022.

[6] Children of Prisoner Europe, [Juveniles / minors](#). And also, as a relevant dataset, you can take a look at [this](#).



In the human rights monitoring study, we carried out with the support of Etkiniz, we aimed to determine the effects of the pandemic conditions and the transition to online education on the freedom of association in universities, which we estimated, but we wanted to hear the details from the subjects of the issue. We hope that the result of the survey and in-depth interviews that constitute our work that we shared with more than 60 student clubs that we are in regular contact with, through social media, and with other non-governmental organizations and networks we are in solidarity with contribute to the fight for the formal education, which is arbitrarily suspended at every opportunity.

We are witnessing that the pressure on universities and university students in Turkey is increasing daily, and they are being targeted. We see that the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, which are defined and protected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights[7], and Article II of the European Convention on Human Rights[8], are violated in a widespread and systematic manner. This situation has become even more severe under the conditions of the global epidemic. Our aims in the human rights monitoring work, under the sub-title of "The right to organize and peaceful assembly in the context of freedom of expression on campuses after the pandemic," are to record the events that have taken place in the last three years, to reveal the obstacles to freedom of assembly and association in the context of freedom of expression in universities, to identify trends in preventing the use of these rights. As a result, it is to contribute to the students and universities to continue their existence in a more liberal field regarding these rights.[9]

While we were doing the aforementioned work:

- Higher education was **suspended** in 10 provinces affected by the earthquake with the decision of YÖK due to two Kahramanmaraş-centered massive earthquakes on February 6, 2023, and the destruction they caused. On the same day, higher education was **suspended** in 11 surrounding provinces so that the dormitory and campus facilities could be used for those affected by the earthquake.
- On February 11, 2023, after President Erdogan of AKP gave the **order** to switch to remote education in the whole country and to allocate KYK dormitories to earthquake victims during his visit to the earthquake region, on the same day, YÖK **decided** to continue the spring semester of the 2022-23 academic year into remote education. In the following days, students at many universities organized and **voiced** their objections against the decision.

[7] the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, [Medeni ve Siyasi Haklara İlişkin Uluslararası Sözleşmenin Onaylanmasının Uygun Bulunduğuna Dair Kanun Tasarısı ve Dışişleri Komisyonu Raporu \(1/589\)](#), 2003.

[8] the European Court of Human Rights, the [European Convention on Human Rights](#).

[9] To document the different manifestations of this [pandemic and many] problems that we think hinder the relationship between student generations and the transfer of experience, with a more inclusive monitoring and reporting study, and to make how these [transmission] mechanisms work in different regions of Turkey visible will be the second output of this study

- There have been many protests against [remote education](#): On February 13, 2023, upon the call of [İstanbul University](#) student clubs, a press statement was held before Beyazıt Campus, demanding that the remote education decision be reversed and that earthquake victims should be provided with better shelters than the KYK dormitories. On February 15, 2023, [Yıldız Technical University](#) students submitted a collective petition following the press release. On February 16, 2023, [Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University](#) made a press statement against the burden of the destruction caused by the politics of student rent and plunder that loaded on their shoulders.
- On February 17, 2023, YÖK President Erol Özvar [announced](#) that it was decided that the higher education could restart as of February 20, 2023.
- On February 20, 2023, [two protests](#) were against remote education. In the first one, the police intervened and [detained](#) the students. On the same day, as the Performing Arts Student Solidarity began to read the press statement, the police surrendered the students and removed the press and citizens from the area. After the press statement was over, the students were dispersed.
- On February 20, 2023, just after the METU Senate took the [hybrid education](#) decision, the students learned via an e-mail on the same day that they would be [evicted](#) from the dormitory if they did not come to the dormitory within 7 hours. Students stood guard before the Rectorate on February 21-22, 2023. After the objection, on February 22, 2023, the students were called to a meeting by the administration, and as a result of the meeting, the students had the decision [withdrawn](#).^[10]



[10] CSSA, the [Student News Bulletin: #KampüsteNeOluyor - February 2023](#), 2023.

2. Why do we monitor freedom of association on campuses?

After the decision to close universities during the pandemic, most students returned to the cities where their families lived from the cities where they studied at university. Thus, it was predicted that student demonstrations would weaken as the possibility of students coming together would be considerably reduced, but the situation was the opposite.

For example, the Boğaziçi Resistance, the most widespread, longest-lasting, and most massive student protest since the state of emergency 2016, started on January 4, 2021. In the second year of the pandemic, Melih Bulu, who formerly ran for the candidacy for the AKP Deputy, was appointed as the Rector of Boğaziçi University. Students of other universities, alums, and supporters, especially Boğaziçi University students, opposed the appointment decision by saying #KayyumRektörİstemiyoruz (We Don't Want a Trustee Rector), and this protest that has been going on for years today marked the beginning of the Boğaziçi Resistance.^[1] Although the Boğaziçi Resistance includes different components from within and outside the university in the later stages, it started with the call of the Boğaziçi Solidarity. Boğaziçi Solidarity is a group of Boğaziçi University students who came together to protest the cafeteria price hikes at Boğaziçi University due to the effect of the İstanbul University cafeteria protests, which was the last student protest before the pandemic. After the call of "#KayyumRektörİstemiyoruz" protests, the Solidarity became an open platform to organize for democratic participation of Boğaziçi University students who embrace the principles and demands. Solidarity dissolved itself on October 1, 2021, and became the Boğaziçi Student Council as of October 4, 2021, and developed its decision mechanisms and determined its sub-committees.

The most widespread organizational experience that stood out during the pandemic was the solidarities established in other universities with the influence of the Boğaziçi Solidarity. Although the student solidarities found in almost all major cities and universities contributed to the spread of the Boğaziçi Resistance and its transformation into a nationwide movement, they were largely unsuccessful in establishing themselves in the universities they were founded.

Three main problems arose for students who usually had to return to their families after the remote education decision. The first was about access to education. Due to the inadequacies in the university infrastructures and not all students having suitable conditions to access remote education, an estimated 36% of the students could not access education, and participation in the courses remained at 20%.^[2] The second main problem was related to the economic effects of returning to the family home. Although this phenomenon first emerged by eliminating students' expenditures in big cities, later, it became a necessity to work because remote education was not perceived as a primary responsibility like face-to-face education. Some of the students had to work full-time to support the family budget. That not only affected student relations negatively but also hindered the formation of sustainable organizations among students (for example, clubs meeting new members). The third main problem was related to safe areas. The living conditions of students who can create safe and relatively free spaces in big cities, especially women and LGBTI+s, or who live in the relatively egalitarian environment of campuses, have changed. This problem manifested as the inability to realize itself, intellectual and social erosion, and security concerns.

[1] CSSA, [Boğaziçi Direnişi Kronolojisi](#).

[2] CSSA, [#HerHaldeHaklarımızVar](#), 2023.

The dormitory problem, one of the critical topics that the pandemic has massively affected students, has come to the fore as one of the main agendas of the student movement in the period we left behind. We Can't Find Shelter, which organized the shelter vigils that started on September 19, 2021, brought up the problems that students experience in dormitories, apartments, and student houses. In the protests that drew attention to the excessive increase in the prices of rents and private student dormitories and the quota problem in KYK dormitories, students slept in the parks of 10 cities for seven nights, and shelter demonstrations were organized in 24 provinces in total. According to the officially announced figures, albeit with a targeted approach, at least 2,243 people participated in the demonstrations, which were on Turkey's and the world's agenda with the hashtag [#Barınamıyoruz](#) ([#WeCannotFindShelter](#)). The shelter vigils in the parks were followed by protests in the dormitories after the start of the school term. Although it can be clearly seen that it emerged under the influence of the We Can't Shelter Movement, no concrete organizational ground formed in the dormitory protests. In these protests attended by thousands of students, demands such as cleanliness, security, nutrition, and internet quota in dormitories came to the fore.

During the remote education period, dozens of efforts, mostly social media-oriented, were carried out on topics such as inequality of opportunity in accessing education, problems arising from the application of online exams, and insistence on the demand for the practice of face-to-face exams. These campaigns, some of which resulted in accomplishments, were generally organized by the above-mentioned student solidarity groups. In addition to these problems, struggles about tuition fees have also emerged in the foundation universities. Regarding the responsibilities of the authorities in this process, we included the following statements in our report "Campuses as Civil Spaces: Three Fundamental Rights and Freedoms in Universities in Turkey":

With the spread of the pandemic in Turkey in March, universities switched to remote education, and students left campuses and dormitories. Universities, which were announced to be closed for three weeks, have never been opened since then. This situation created many problems as the students left the cities where they studied without taking most of their belongings, especially the course materials. Continuing education remotely during the pandemic has led to many violations of the right to education. Instead of trying to find solutions to the problems faced by students in this process, YÖK granted them the "right to freeze registration" and also left the discretion to the university administrations to manage the process. That led to stratified inequalities and violations among students.

3. Method

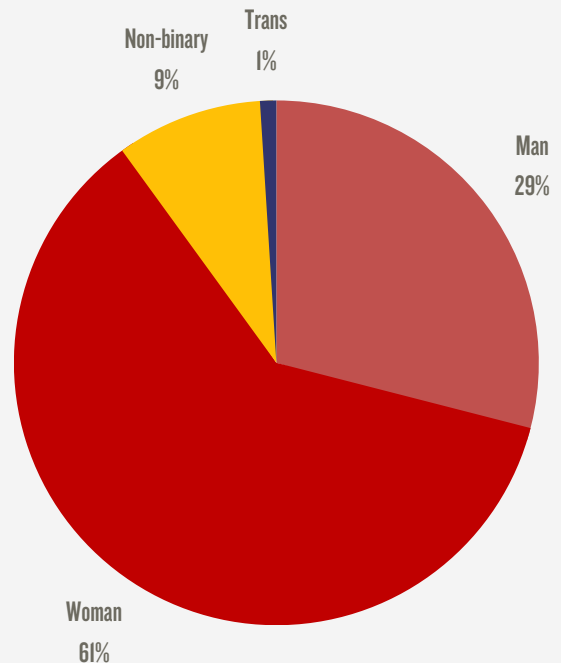
Within the scope of our study, we conducted an online survey open only to students aged 18 and over, citizens of the Republic of Turkey, and studying at a university under formal education in Turkey, as well as semi-structured interviews conducted through the Zoom application and face-to-face. We acted to identify the violations of the rights of students on the right to freedom of expression, freedom of association, and peaceful assembly on campus, to measure their knowledge of their rights, and to determine their needs on campus.

We disseminated the survey, which was conducted between January 2023 and May 2023, online. We shared it via our social media accounts, the mail groups of the networks we are members of, and the mail accounts to which we send the monthly Student News Bulletin. In addition, we informed the students about the survey and interviews in the meetings and events we held face-to-face and via the Zoom application.

Before starting the survey and interviews, we benefited from our monitoring analysis of student clubs, societies, and initiatives for the report "Campuses as Civil Spaces: Three Fundamental Rights and Freedoms Reports in Universities in Turkey." We have updated the report's list of clubs that we got from the official pages of the universities and of the societies/initiatives that are not officially recognized or do not prefer to be recognized by the university administrations. With this update, we tried to communicate with 276 clubs, 63 societies, and 77 initiatives on the list via e-mail and social media.

The increasing pressure at universities, the inability of clubs and societies to express themselves in universities, the earthquake disaster on February 6, 2023, and the subsequent transition to remote education in universities can be considered factors that prevent us from communicating with more societies/clubs and students. However, we can say that our target audience, whom we want to reach are women, LGBTI+, culture-arts, and thought societies and clubs that have lost rights on the campuses, are not allowed to be founded, and are forbidden to organize events. By the end of this work, we had collected more than 30 online meetings, and 71 students participated in our survey. When we asked about gender identity, 43 people were female, 20 were male, six were non-binary, and one person was trans, and one left this question unanswered.

Participants by gender



Forty-four people from the Marmara Region, 11 people from the Central Anatolia Region, seven people from the Southeastern Anatolia Region, five people from the Aegean Region, two people from the Eastern Anatolia Region, one person from the Black Sea Region and one person from the Mediterranean Region participated in the survey.

We planned the monitoring process in two phases and ensured that the person participating in the interview should have completed the questionnaire. Our aim here was to create the opportunity to listen to the answers given by the students to the questionnaire in more detail. If the student who filled out the survey wanted to be included in the interview phase, we sent an e-mail to the address they specified in the survey. We reached 25 people who stated that they wanted to participate in the interview via e-mail, and after reminders, we finalized the interview phase with ten students between May 2023 and June 2023. We conducted the interviews online and face-to-face via the Zoom application, and we also obtained verbal consent for registration from each participating student. We have anonymized the names of the students who participated in the interview in our report.

To ensure the anonymity and security of the students, we will report the results by giving the names of the universities where the students participating in the survey and interview are located and the names of the regions of the cities where the universities are located (such as Central Anatolia Region or Aegean Region.) Since these are the three provinces with the highest number of universities, we will give the names of the cities for the interviews in the universities in İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir.

3.1

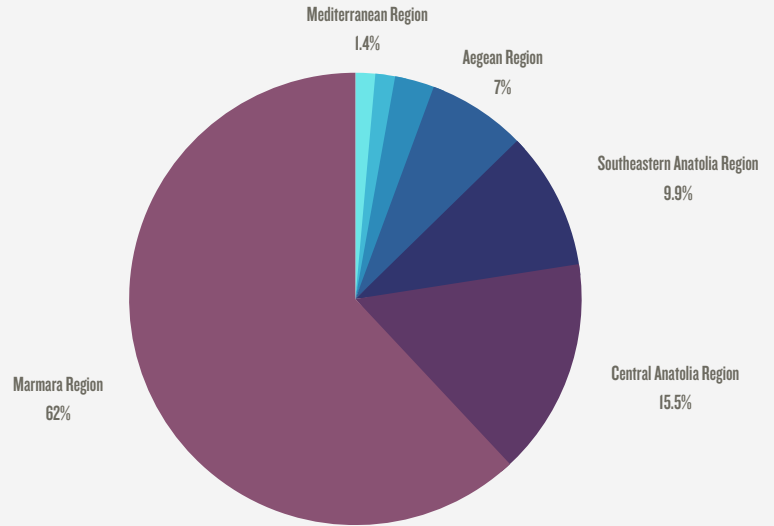
About the survey study

Students from 25 different universities participated in the survey of the study. 81.7 (n:58) were students from state universities, and 18.3 (n:13) were from foundation universities. 71.8% of the students stated that they enrolled in their universities between 2019-2022.

When we look at the age breakdown of 71 students, 85.9% (n:61) are between the ages of 18-24, 11.3% (n:8) are between the ages of 25-29, and 2.8% (n:2) are over 30 years old.

We gave the students who participated in the survey a list from which they could choose more than one option, titled "Where you politically position yourself." According to the answers given by the participants, socialist with 57.7%, feminist with 42.3%, leftist with 36.6%, anti-capitalist with 35%, anti-imperialist with 31%, and communist with 29.6%.

Participants by regions



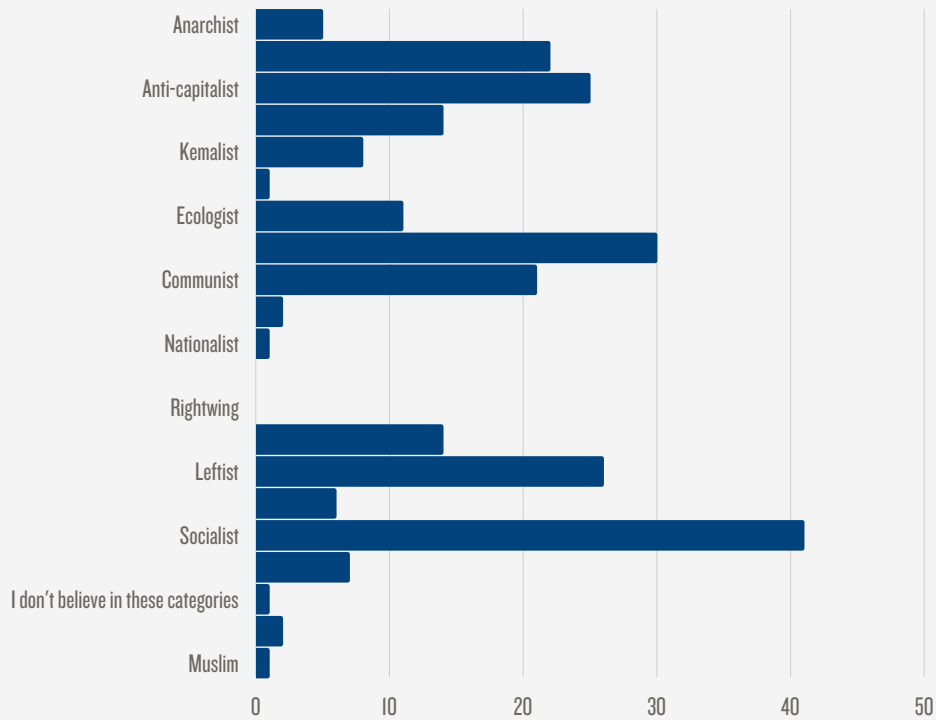
Your enrollment year at the university you are currently studying at

71 yanıt



Due to the post-earthquake conditions and return to remote education, the change in the student agenda and our inability to reach the targeted number of survey participants negatively affected the representativeness of the surveys. Since almost all of the sample who agreed to participate in the interview within the survey were students who preferred to share their experiences of violation, our data on good practices was limited. Since it is our primary goal to listen to and document the violations of rights that students are exposed to, we believe the data presented by this sample is very valuable.

Your political position



3.2

About interviews

In the interviews consisting of three main parts, we first asked the interviewed students general questions about their university experiences. We asked about their expectations of the university before they started their education and their current thoughts. Since they are inseparable rights, we formed the questions in the second part on "Freedoms of Expression, Association, and Assembly on Campus," however, we focused more on freedom of association. If there is club experience in students' responses to our survey, we talked about this experience in depth. In the third and final part, we asked questions about their needs as a student and their expectations from civil society.

We asked questions in which they could detail their answers in the questionnaire. We asked questions about whether they were prevented from forming clubs or if their scholarships were cut. If we had no data from the questionnaire on these, we would not direct these questions to the students again.

We reached 32 students who stated wish to participate in the interview, and we conducted interviews with ten students who returned our e-mail. Students from 6 different cities and nine universities participated in the online and face-to-face interviews, which lasted an average of 30 minutes.

4. Freedom of expression, assembly and association on campus

Freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly are the cornerstones of democratic societies and work very closely with each other. Freedom of expression includes the right of individuals to express their thoughts and exchange information. This freedom allows civil society to discuss different views and perspectives. On the other hand, the right of association and peaceful assembly guarantee the right of individuals to form societies and gather around common goals. Freedom of expression is intertwined with the right of association and peaceful assembly, as individuals' ability to organize and hold meetings is the most important means of expressing and defending their opinions. These rights form the basis of democratic participation and the formation of public opinion. Freedom of expression, the right to association, and peaceful assembly come to the fore as fundamental elements that complement and reinforce each other in the functioning of democratic societies.

Considerable problems and restrictions stand out regarding freedom of expression, the right to organize, and the right to peaceful demonstrations on university campuses in Turkey. It is seen that the safe and free environment that needs to be provided for students to exercise their democratic rights and express various opinions is faced with pressures and obstacles from time to time. Financial threats, judicial intimidation, criminal sanctions, and prohibitions that prevent the formation of societies, especially on critical issues, are in conflict with the democratic vision of university campuses. As a result, it can be said that students avoid exercising their right to freedom of association and expression, thus creating an environment where democratic participation is weakened, and diversity is prevented.

University campuses should be free and democratic spaces for students to express their opinions freely, hold peaceful meetings, and exercise their right to organize. Unfortunately, on university campuses in Turkey, these rights are frequently restricted. Government and university administrations can use every opportunity to implement hindrances to rights. While restrictions on freedom of expression cause students to be punished for expressing different opinions and criticisms openly, restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly make it difficult for student societies or organizations to come together around common goals. Thwarting the right to organize prevents students from participating in civil society activities and actively participating in democratic decision-making processes. Such restrictions weaken the democratic and free atmosphere of university campuses, negatively affecting students' academic and social development. However, the freedom of expression and participation of many different individuals with diverse views should be respected in universities, and efforts should be made to provide an environment suitable for democratic values.

4.1

Expression on campus

Freedom of expression is a freedom that is guaranteed in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and defined and protected in Article 26 of the Constitution as the "liberty of receiving or imparting information or ideas without interference by official authorities" that in the foundation of other freedoms that establish the civil space.



Freedom of expression is a right closely related to freedom of assembly and association. While freedom of expression is a general provision, other freedoms are special and can be applied in cases where freedom of expression is used differently. Freedom of assembly, within the scope of freedom of expression, protects the expression of an opinion in different forms, such as meetings and demonstrations, while freedom of association ensures that individuals come together to achieve a common goal and carry out activities to achieve a common goal under the umbrella of an organization. Freedom of association is also one of how freedom of expression is used collectively. [13]

The results we obtained from the interviews reveal that the right to freedom of expression has been violated in many instances on the campuses that we consider civic spaces. Among the primary conditions that must be met in campus life are continuing campus life without being subject to discrimination and violence, being able to express their views in classes without being subject to self-censorship or censorship, using critical thinking skills, conducting original discussions in studies such as homework and thesis, being free in choosing a topic, being able to express oneself without being subjected to pressures such as disciplinary investigation and cutting scholarships, using communication opportunities, and enjoying the right to freedom of expression without facing any sanctions inside and outside the campus.

In our study, the most obvious result was that universities in Turkey could not meet these conditions. Students who enroll in a university in the hope that they will find a more free and productive educational environment say that they are disappointed with the negative results of their expectations in a short time:

I came here thinking there would be more liveliness, and I was hopeful about it. But when I arrived, I was very disappointed. Because I saw that the classes were taught in an unscientific way and that there was a severe conservative structure. When I thought of the university, something like this came to my mind where I can be a little more free and comfortable, disengaged from the family, and this is actually an essential threshold for me. Along with it, I was expecting a space where I could move a little more comfortably and maybe less afraid or intimidated if I was involved in an organizing activity. (Neslihan, Eastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Pressure from the government and university administrations creates significant difficulties for students to exercise their right to freedom of expression. That prevents students from developing in a university campus environment based on diversity and critical thinking.

[13] the Joint Project on Supporting the Individual Application to the Constitutional Court in Turkey, [Anayasa Mahkemesine Bireysel Başvuru El Kitapları Serisi – 2: İfade Özgürlüğü](#), 2018.

First, the government's political pressure and stance on specific issues force university administrations to limit students' freedom of expression. Government pressure on university administration due to particular political views or ideologies suppresses critical thinking, dissent views, and discussion, preventing students from freely expressing their ideas and encountering different perspectives. Secondly, pressure from university administrations restricts students' freedom of expression and causes them to censor themselves. As we have seen in many examples, discussing specific issues or policies is prohibited, or students can be oppressed. Students may refrain from freely expressing their ideas and avoid exercising their rights due to fear of punishment or sanctions, which can reach the point where students cannot develop their ideas, participate in discussions, and use their critical thinking skills.

We have mentioned that being able to express one's views and use critical thinking skills in classes without self-censorship or censorship, to conduct original discussions in academic studies such as homework and thesis, and to be free in choosing a topic constitutes the basis of freedom of expression on campus. In the interviews we conducted, Ezgi and Deniz, who studied in Southeastern Anatolia, describe how they felt the existence of self-censorship as follows:

For example, I am a Kurdish woman. Let's say I wanted to write something about Kurdishness or Kurdish history. I'm 100% sure that I would face fear or the teacher would down my grading. That is my self-censorship. Maybe the teacher wouldn't say, "Did you write that?" so blatantly and wouldn't take my points off, but they would note it, you know what I mean. I would cut a swathe. (Ezgi, Southeastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

There is a class called XXX. There, for example, when I want to discuss animal husbandry in Mesopotamia, I inevitably have to refer to Kurdish communities, civilizations, and tribes existing in the region. I can't discuss them impartially. That is because I do not know the teacher very well. They may give my writing to the policeman who is in the classroom. They would say; Look, this person has prepared this assignment in this way. Keep an eye on them. (Deniz, South East Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Suzan describes her experience with self-censorship in the following words:

When choosing a thesis topic, I thought that the school would not cause any problems, but the possibility of YÖK may have led me to change my study subject. If there is no problem today, there could be tomorrow; after all, it will remain in the archive. (Suzan, İzmir, State University, Master's Degree)

As a result, pressure from government and university administrations leads to severe difficulties in exercising students' rights to freedom of expression. These pressures hinder the development of diversity, critical thought, and free debate. For students to express their ideas freely and develop academically in a free environment, students should be supported and strengthened with various tools against the practices of the government and university administrations that restrain freedom of expression.

4.2

Assembly and demonstration on campus

"Distributing leaflets, hanging posters and banners inside the higher education institution without permission" has been defined as one of the crimes that require a reprimand in the Disciplinary Regulation of the Higher Education Institution (YÖK). "Organizing meetings without permission from the authorities in closed and open spaces of higher education institutions" is regulated as actions that require suspension from one week to one month. The expressions in the 5th and 6th articles of the Disciplinary Regulation contradict the 34th and 26th articles of the Constitution, which define the right to expression, assembly, and demonstration.

In this section, we will discuss what difficulties students face when they want to hold meetings and demonstrations on campus and the variables that determine "which students" can or cannot hold demonstrations.

We asked the 71 student participants in the survey whether they had ever undergone a disciplinary or a legal investigation or faced consequences such as suspension, scholarship termination, or expulsion from the dormitory due to a demonstration they participated in on campus. Twenty students who responded to the survey stated that they had or were undergoing a disciplinary investigation, 16 students stated that they had or were undergoing a legal investigation, three students stated that they were suspended due to a demonstration they participated in on campus, and six students stated that their scholarships were terminated.

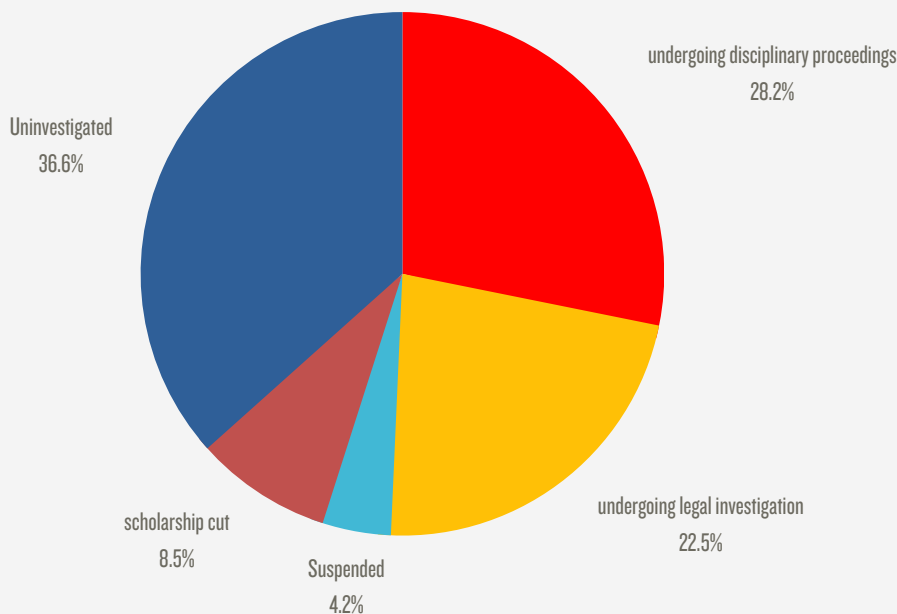
These disciplinary investigations and punishments not only violate the student's freedom of demonstration and right to education; as Deniz explains below, they sometimes cause violations of the right to shelter:

The cafeteria fees were increased, and sixty-seven of us gathered and protested with slogans in the dormitory garden. Security intervened. The director used expressions such as "they do not know the country, those who disrespect the flag" and turned us into a target. After that day, an investigation was launched against me and three of my friends, which took four months. In June, four of us were expelled from KYK indefinitely, and our scholarships were terminated. We immediately appealed to the court for a stay of execution. My scholarship was cut, but it restarted in January. (Deniz, Southeastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Derya said that she could not organize a protest even about her most basic needs on the campus, and moreover, she faced disciplinary investigation because of the protest she participated in outside the province where her university is located:

There was a crisis related to transportation within the campus at our university. Students could not even organize on this issue. I was detained because of a protest I participated in in another province. Despite not being in the school, even in the same city as the school, a disciplinary investigation was launched against me. While many teachers could conduct the investigation, they gave it to a newly appointed teacher, whom I guessed was close to the government. I have friends in a similar situation who have been suspended for a month; my investigation has not yet been concluded. (Derya, Mediterranean Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Due to participating in a demonstration on campus,



Neslihan, on the other hand, tells the police violence they encountered while protesting at a university in the Eastern Anatolia Region and the loss of rights afterward with the following words:

There was a big problem in the dormitories and meals. The students somehow organized and marched. As we gathered in men's and women's dorms and marched, they unleashed the riot police on us. These people pushed and knocked us down, and a lot of people were expelled from the dormitory. So this is putting the screws on. If you are expelled from the dormitory, you cannot continue your education. Many people are afraid that their scholarships will be cut off. I had a loan, not a scholarship, but they cut that too. (Neslihan, Eastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Suzan, who has a master's degree in İzmir, attributes the failure to organize any protests or demonstrations at her school to students' loss of communication skills after the pandemic:

We have been so far away that no one can gather and speak out against anything anymore. In the past, as we spent time together on campus, we knew each other, and we were meeting at events. Even though we didn't talk, we knew that one person was a student. With remote education, this has faded away. (Suzan, İzmir, State University, MA)

4.3

Organizing on campus

In this part of our study, in light of the data we obtained from surveys and interviews, we will discuss organizing on campuses, how the foundation of official clubs progresses, and the effects of club closure and application refusals on students' campus life.

As a group that shares student status and a common living space, namely campuses, university students should be able to come together over the problems they experience and produce solutions to these problems. The right to organize, which goes hand in hand with freedom of expression, comes with different dimensions and needs that we need to address. As a civic space, we will examine the conditions of student organizations on campus under this title.

The most common means of violations of freedom of association on campus are indirect and direct obstructions, threats, and pressure mechanisms against the existence of official clubs and (unofficial) student societies at the university.

While official clubs often encounter negations such as not allocating the place to hold events to students, monitoring and investigating the content of events and participants, profiling students, plainclothes police participating in events, and not permitting the event in the first place, student societies, on the other hand, face other inadequacies such as not allocating the venue for the event to students, not being able to benefit from the budget, and not being able to open a stand.

Since there is no regulation regarding forming clubs in the YÖK Law, it is left to the initiative of university administrations. In the report titled "Freedom of Association of University Students" by the Turkish Third Sector Foundation (TÜSEV), it is stated that the YÖK Law does not set a standard for establishing clubs, and it is pointed out that practices vary from university to university.[14]

We asked the 71 student participants of the survey whether they were members of an official club. While 71.8% (n:51) stated that they were members, 23.9% (n:17) said they were not club members. Seven students, corresponding to 9.9%, stated that their club was closed and/or not allowed to open.

4.3.1

Use of the campus

The appropriate and sufficient physical infrastructure of the campuses is another requirement for the use of rights and freedoms. Although the existence of green campuses where students can be together and carry out activities, not far from city centers or with adequate transportation facilities, seems to be indirect effects, it has important consequences for freedom of association.

Deniz states that faculties that are far from each other make it difficult to come together and create an obstacle for getting organized with the following sentences:

It is a university built on a large area. The faculties are far from each other. It is bad for student relations. Because for example, when I want to go to law school, I have to walk for an hour and a half. Or if I wait for the bus and want to go by bus, I lose about fifteen or twenty minutes. After the pandemic, we entered a busy curriculum that starts at 8 in the morning and ends at 5 in the evening. And since we had 15 minutes between lectures, our relationship between faculties was very weak. (Deniz, Southeastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

[14] Third Sector Foundation of Turkey, *Sivil Toplum İzleme Raporu 2013: Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Örgütlenme Özgürlüğü - Vaka Analizi*, 2013.

4.3.2

“Security” problem on campus

The “Human Rights Reports” prepared annually by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TIHV) include data on detention, oppression, and violence in universities. The data they disclose on the 2020^[15] and 2021^[16] reports and the cases they access for the first 11 months of 2022^[17] provide essential information regarding violations. The fact that the interventions regarding the freedom of assembly and association at universities are evaluated under a separate heading in the reports also indicates the systematic nature of the pressure and violence against campuses. According to the 2020 report, the protests organized by the students were intervened by the police at least ten times, and at least 143 students were detained by torture. In 2021, an increase was observed in the police and security interventions against the protests in many provinces, which started with the appointment of a “trustee” rector to Boğaziçi University and against the housing problem. In the 2021 report, there is information that “the police and private security units intervened in 65 peaceful meetings and demonstrations.” As a result of these interventions, 1,122 people were detained, 13 people were arrested, and at least 25 people were injured. In the report, which includes the data for the first 11 months of 2022, it is stated that 192 people were detained during the protests organized by the students. It is seen in the survey and interviews that police and security interventions towards demonstrations and events on campuses, and detention and violence during interventions pose a serious obstacle to the freedom of assembly and association of students:

After the protests, police presence at the school increased significantly. That’s why I don’t feel as safe on campus as I used to. We constantly see some men in suits around the Rectorate. Or people are entering and leaving in luxury vehicles. It’s a bit disturbing. Ugly men in suits can gad about, or plainclothes police can easily enter. I don’t feel safe that way. (Ayça, İstanbul, State University, Undergraduate)

First of all, we asked the students whether there was private security, police and/or gendarmerie at their university. 94.3% (n:67) of 71 students stated that there was private security at their universities, and 53.5% (n:38) said police and/or gendarmerie. 1.4% of the students marked that they did not know whether private security was at their university, and 8% did not know whether there was police and/or gendarmerie.

To understand what kind of effect the security on campus has on students, we submitted three different premises to the students. 60% (n:43) of the students strongly disagreed, and only 46% (n:33) strongly agreed with the first statement, “If I am attacked at events or demonstrations on campus, private security, gendarmerie and/or police will protect me.” Regarding the second premise, “I think security forces followed me during the student activities I attended on campus,” while 33.8% (n:24) of the students strongly agreed, 21% (n:15) strongly disagreed. While 31% (n:22) of the students stated that they strongly agreed with the premise of “I am against the obligation to show ID and pass through the turnstile when entering the campus,” which we asked to understand how students react to the stricter control of entrances and exit to universities through turnstiles, 15.5% (n:11) stated that they strongly disagreed.

[15] Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TIHV), [İnsan Hakları Raporu](#), 2020.

[16] TIHV, [İnsan Hakları Raporu](#), 2021.

[17] TIHV, [Verilerle 2022 Yılında İnsan Hakları İhlalleri](#), 2022.



Regarding security measures at the university, it has been a frequently repeated issue that security discriminates against students.

There were shelter protests last year. Our friends, who were very prominent in the shelter protests, were not allowed to enter the school after they had their ID cards read on graduation day. We learned later that they have a list, as we understand that they were afraid that those students would protest. Our student friends could not enter the campus that day. At midnight, the cards were reactivated. I participated in all of those protests. I could enter the school that day, but our friends who are Kurdish, darker colored, and more socialist could not enter the school that day precisely. In fact, there was such profiling in the school, and this was what triggered and annoyed us the most. They separate the activist from within. (Sezgin, İstanbul, a Foundation University, Undergraduate)

We could not feel free because of the oppressive environment of the security forces. I learned in the second grade that there were two or three police officers in every classroom disguised as students. I realized we could not move around our campus easily when we got to know them. There are always three or four pairs of eyes on us. Likewise, the dean's office constantly tries to create an oppressive environment. (Deniz, Southeastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

4.3.3

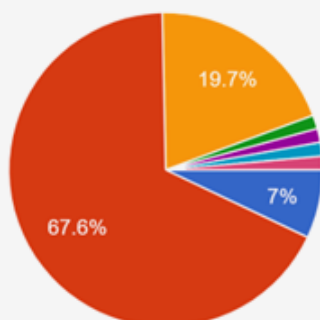
Holding events on campus

In this section, we will evaluate the difficulties that clubs and/or societies face in organizing their events based on what the students who participated in our survey and interviews reported.

We asked the question, "Can you easily get permission from university administrations when organizing club or society events?" to 71 students who participated in the survey. Those who answered "No" to the question make up 67%.

Can you smoothly get permission when organizing a club/society event?

71 responses



- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- I don't know much since I'm not involved, but I know getting permission from the rectorate is hard.
- With the pandemic, conditions have changed and it has become very difficult to get permission.
- It depends on the type of event. political events are banned by both the club management and the school administration.
- Since we are not official, we organize events outside the school.

Derya, who attended the interview and continues her education at a university in the Mediterranean Region, said the following about the opportunities to organize events on campus:

We are holding events, but none occur inside the school. There are even a few safe places to do activities outside of school. We use the office of an association. (Derya, Mediterranean Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Deniz, who studies at a university in the Southeastern Anatolia Region, stated that they encountered obstacles and were under surveillance in on-campus activities:

I was uncomfortable in the classroom, as there were three police officers in my class. Extracurricular activities or lectures, student organizations, or to let's sit down, discuss something, talk something... When we want to do activities such as getting to know each other, we are constantly under surveillance by both the dean's office and these police officers. (Deniz, Southeastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Bilge states that the measures taken regarding the pandemic conditions are used to prevent their activities arbitrarily:

We may encounter various obstacles, such as minuting our event or society activity, trying to prevent it, blocking with some official, bureaucratic processes, or preventing the foundation of the society or the activities after its foundation. But I can say that this is less than other schools. After the pandemic, health concerns began to be used as an excuse. We encountered many obstacles, such as "You do not maintain your social distance, so events are prohibited; you cannot hold large events; this place is closed until a certain time; you cannot hold events in closed areas; we cannot offer classrooms." However, it was obvious that these were arbitrary. For example, those venues were not given to students. Still, they could provide the huge congress center to TÜBİTAK or any government event, and no social distance was definitely not maintained. (Bilge, Ankara, State University, Undergraduate)

Melis, who continues her education in İstanbul, mentions that club and event activities are interrupted due to physical inadequacies:

The campus is very small, and there is not much space for many clubs to carry out their activities. For example, I was in the theater club; the school didn't even have a stage. That's why there was no stage to rehearse. They have to do their rehearsals on smaller stages like conference rooms. Since there is little space, clubs can overlap when they want to hold events. Some clubs have to be preferred to other clubs. Career-oriented clubs, rather than art-culture clubs, clubs such as business clubs, are in the foreground. Also, they are preferred because they are good for the school's reputation. (Melis, İstanbul, State University, Bachelor)

4.3.4

Closure of the clubs and their sustainability

Official clubs often try to operate and maintain their existence under the threat of being closed down by university administrations. In this section, we will discuss the threats of closure and sustainability based on the experiences that participants shared in the interviews.

Hayal, studying at a state university in İstanbul, conveys what the club she is a part of means to her:

My expectations when I entered the school were like... Since I knew this club existed, I thought I could live comfortably here and be more of myself. It happened that way, indeed. There was no problem in this respect, but later on, the club was closed, and at some point, that living space, the comfortable living space, began to shrink. (Hayal, İstanbul, State University, Undergraduate)

When comparing state universities and foundation universities, Ayça states that the difference is getting smaller:

Frankly, I would have thought that foundation universities had a little more freedom. But recently, I've started to see that this is also a little more inhibited in foundation universities. That's why I think it is more difficult to establish or organize a club in state universities than in foundation universities, but the gap has gradually narrowed. I think it gets more difficult in foundation universities as well. (Ayça, İstanbul, State University, Undergraduate)

Ezgi, on the other hand, explaining the conditions of her university located in the Southeastern Anatolia Region, mentions that there is a system that allows clubs to be closed at any time:

For example, LGBTI+ rights. For instance, if I distribute a brochure about LGBTI+ rights, let's say I put up a poster, or if I do something like a movie screening, they will close the club. There will be no club, and our efforts will be wasted. (Ezgi, Southeastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)



4.3.5

Not being able to found a club

In our previous section, we shared students' experiences about the clubs that tried to exist under the threat of being closed or closed for various reasons. In this section, we will present examples of student organizations that were blocked at the beginning of the road or that did not attempt to establish a club because they thought that they would not be allowed to open.

In our study, we observed that the official clubs (LGBTI+, gender equality, etc.) with rights-oriented activities were few in number, while official clubs such as career clubs were more numerous and could open and operate without any problems.

Ege University Gender and Queer Research Society, which applied for the first time in 2020-2021, stated that they were constantly delayed and stalled when they asked for answers about the process. Last January, the society, which did not give up its struggle, applied again. [18]

A participant who continues their education at a university in Ankara stated that they attempted to establish a society last year and made the official application. Still, when they asked whether their official society applications were accepted, they received the answer, "There was no such application."

Ezgi, who studies at a state university in Southeastern Anatolia, states that they were stuck with the procedures in club formation. Although they wanted to, they could not start the process because they could not find a consultant academician:

Our department teachers did not want us to carry out work on this. They always give that answer. "Open it, just do it". A lead, a guide, an orientation? There was nothing. We did our research by ourselves. We said, okay, let's do it. This time, we were told there should be an adviser, a consultant teacher. We can't find an advisor. Because there must be a professor from our department, they will not support us because of our views. (Ezgi, Southeastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Derya, who is studying at a university in the Mediterranean Region, talks about the obstacles in front of founding clubs with the following words:

Since an environment is not created where stands are opened and societies and clubs are introduced, students are not aware of the societies. Clubs that discuss ideas or work in the field of gender or LGBTI+ do not have the chance to be official, and since they are not official, they do not have the opportunity to open a stand. (Derya, Mediterranean Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Neslihan tells about the resources they benefited from while establishing a community at her university in Eastern Anatolia, the difficulties they experienced, and how they practiced self-control, especially when writing statutes:

At that time, Ekmek and Gül published an issue, and I stumbled upon them... They interviewed each of the women's studies groups at the universities, and they described the process. All of them had social media accounts. When we saw this, we said that we should write to all of them individually, and they would send us their statutes. While I was writing the statute, I probably never had this much difficulty in anything. Because we can only do what is written there, and if we write too harshly for them, they won't open the society, and if we don't write inclusive, we can't do anything. We wrote it with such fine scrutiny. Then we needed to find fifteen people. And we needed to find twenty more on top of that for every document. It was challenging then because people were afraid. In other words, when I wandered around the dorm and said, "We will do such and such a thing; will you be included?", they were hesitant. They said, "I think like you, but" they did not want to sign. I remember we had a hard time there. (Neslihan, Eastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

[18] C SSA, [Ege Üniversitesinde LGBTIQ+lar Resmî Tanınırlık İstiyor!](#), 2023.

5. the Effects of the pandemic and the online education decision

The transfer of lessons, events, solidarity, and socialization online due to the pandemic had a negative impact on clubs and students' right to organize. This situation, which paved the way for university administrations to ban events without stating a reason, made it difficult for students who could not meet each other in the physical environment to establish a climate of trust, as well as having a negative impact on the organizing in terms of societies and clubs.

Continuing her education in İstanbul, Hayal conveys the effects of the pandemic on founding clubs with the following words:

With the pandemic, a huge generation gap emerged. Our term and the previous term were very interactive. They constantly shared their experiences with us. That is how we would do it. Since everything was done manually, for example, when I would go to submit documents, I'd go with someone from my senior level. Everything changed during the pandemic period. So suddenly, distance came in between. People no longer meet via Zoom. Because this is partly related to the special situations of LGBTI+ people, and they may not want to talk about it at home. Or they may not want to be there because of the possibility of leaving evidence electronically. We could almost never reach LGBTI+ people who entered the school after us or during the pandemic period. There was a gap between us and them when we returned to school. So, this difference is not a difference in consciousness. Our areas of intimacy, distance, or coming together were very different, creating a disconnection. We started to have continuity problems. Where will we find new members? For example, it created issues such as how to reach these people. (Hayal, İstanbul, State University, Undergraduate)

While touching on the difficulties experienced by LGBTI+ students in their online club meetings, Hayal points out that security is the top priority:

Electronic media seems more dangerous. An example of this would be cyberbullying. Secondly, being there face to face actually means being able to control the security risks around. Like if there is a camera here? Will people be able to watch over my safety? We used to pay attention to this before. But you can never control it in cyberspace. You can't see where people are putting their cameras. It can create such distrust. Another reason is the environment in which they live. Therefore, they may not want others to hear what is said or will be spoken. (Hayal, İstanbul, State University, Undergraduate)

Hayal talks about the disconnection between them and the newly arrived classes during the pandemic period and how the rights gained are lost when there is no information transfer:

People are unaware of what has been achieved in the last two terms. And in the past, two years ago, I don't remember ever getting a permit. We did not receive permission to open a booth or distribute leaflets. Now we're. Because they would block it. And no one is making a sound. None of the people around have any idea what's going on. People who have been compelled to be apolitical. (Hayal, İstanbul, State University, Undergraduate)



Sezgin, studies at a foundation university in İstanbul and shares similar experiences with Hayal, expresses the effects of the disconnections in knowledge transfer on his organizational experience with the following words:

Every year, at the beginning of school, there is an orientation. There was a website with all the names of the clubs and promotional videos. I saw my club here. Each club had a set hour. I went to my club time and met them. Afterward, since it was the online term, I attended the activities of the LGBTI+ club occasionally and spoke into the microphone in a low voice since my family did not know most things. I won the school during the pandemic period; then, I met everyone in online meetings. I learned how to do activism and how to do club activities online. Back then, we had to learn from scratch how to do things. The upper classes had graduated, and no one had contacted us with the associations. We had to meet the associations from scratch. (Sezgin, İstanbul, a Foundation University, Undergraduate)

Deniz, who continues their education at a state university in the Southeastern Anatolia Region, stated that when they were just getting used to the university and joining clubs, staying home destroyed their dreams and interrupted their development.

Neslihan mentions that the activities they wanted to do after the pandemic were tried to be prevented on the grounds of health precautions and that these reasons were actually used as a pretext:

Once, we were far from each other. And it has a significant effect. So we actually left a space we knew and came back. Now, we can continue in digital. But I guess we didn't know much about it then. That's why our activities were interrupted significantly and a big time came in between. As a pandemic precaution, they said, "You can't dance the halay" or something. When we said, "We will gather," they said, "You can't be this many due to pandemic precautions" as a pretext. (Neslihan, Eastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Referring to the economic consequences of the pandemic, Ezgi mentions that they had to struggle to survive economically rather than struggle for rights at that time, and the most crucial problem was to reach the course materials, meet their basic needs such as scholarships and accommodation:

Another issue was the economy; it has gone very badly during the pandemic. How could we buy a laptop for our friends who can't afford it? Organizing, advocating for rights, etc. We went way back in the pandemic. Organization... We haven't gotten there yet. Our aim then was, "How can we make money?", "How can we get a scholarship?", "How can we provide the laptop, the internet?", "What will we do in the lessons?" That period passed by thinking about these needs. (Ezgi, Southeastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Bilge, studying at a state university in Ankara, tells how they overcame this obstacle with an innovative method on the internet when they could not hold club promotion meetings during the pandemic:

Students' coming-together practices were usually society events or acquaintance meetings. The most important way to enter a club is to attend a society meetup. What we call society orientation is an event where stands are set up and promoted by all societies, which is really important for students. Both in terms of getting together and getting to know the societies. We couldn't do this during the pandemic, but something like this happened: Students could prevent this with channels over Discord, almost as if it was a booth. But nothing was offered in terms of school. I want to say this, too. It was made entirely by the students' own efforts. (Bilge, Ankara, State University, Undergraduate)

Ayça describes the disconnection in relations after the pandemic as follows:

The fact that people do not know each other affects both club activities and causes you to be alone when a situation needs to be organized at some point. Now you don't know. So even if you want to stand next to someone, even if you want to stand up for something. There is a question for me, "Okay, I'm standing against something, but who am I standing next to?" And I'm in an environment where I don't know who I'm standing next to. (Ayça, İstanbul, State University, Undergraduate)

Remote education decisions, which have been taken frequently in recent years and repeated in the course of this study, are one of the policies that lead to violations reported by students. In the 4th headline, we discussed the adverse effects of policies regarding freedom of association, such as security policies, violence that has become commonplace, making it difficult to organize events, restrictions on the use of the campus, and club closure. In this part, we saw that the decisions taken during the pandemic and after the earthquake not only deteriorated all these adverse effects but also produced brand new problems.

We see that all the mechanisms that we consider in the context of getting organized and organizations, such as "togetherness," "freedom of expression," "common interest," and "common policy production," have weakened. Leaving students to remote education and isolation instead of producing regulations that can meet the needs of students while taking care of society's and the individual's health has negative consequences on students. We saw that with remote education, equality of opportunity is not observed, fundamental rights and freedoms are restricted, opportunities for socialization are reduced, and students cannot freely share and discuss their ideas. For this reason, we can say that the pandemic is experienced as a process that weakens the organization and the functionality of the organization.



6. Needs

The interviews we conducted revealed data on the needs and other problems of students, in addition to the use of the right to freedom of expression and related freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and the obstructions and violations of these rights. The last of the questions we asked the ten students who participated in our interview study was to share the three topics they need most as a university student with us. We can consider the needs arising from the answers to this question concerning the exercise of the right to organize.

In the answers we received, it was seen in this study, as in other studies, that the biggest problem of the majority was financial needs. The deepening of material needs adversely affects exercising the right to organize. First of all, because students are not organized at any level, neither central nor local public budgets have a sufficient share; the funding required to exercise the right to organize (for example, club expenses, the budget needed for activities, the promotion of clubs and societies and the creation of materials used to meet with other students) are borne the students themselves. That method is challenging to maintain and causes the organization to be cut off during increased economic problems. On the other hand, due to the exercise of their right to organize, the threat of cutting off resources, such as scholarships, that students use to make a living poses an obstacle as an unacceptable risk.

Not being on campus was also a critical problem the majority expressed. The campus is a public space that allows students to meet each other as part of a similar cluster to exercise their right to organize. As with the remote education decisions, due to the fact that the campuses are not designed in a way that encourages students to spend time and the wear of the public character due to privatizations, students cannot be on campus.

We cannot describe the housing problem, one of the hottest issues of recent years for students in general, with economic difficulties only. Students' demand is to provide more dormitories in healthy conditions and to find a solution to the housing problem with the means of the state. Drawing attention to the issue with the shelter vigils they held in the past years, the "We Can't Find Shelter" movement continues its organized struggle nationwide to eliminate the problem that continues and affects many students' choice of university and city.[19]

The housing problem similarly affects the right to organize as other economic problems. However, in addition to these, the decrease in accommodation opportunities makes the danger of being expelled from the dormitories if the students staying in KYK dormitories express their opinions or use their right to organize and peaceful demonstration become a more critical threat. The fact that students who exercise their right to organize in the dormitories within the framework of the shelter actions are subject to disciplinary proceedings by the dormitory administration creates an invisible deterrent effect. The disciplinary regulation applied in KYK dormitories contains more stringent regulations than in universities. It constitutes the administrative and legal basis for important violations, including the authority of the dormitory administrations to suspend students from the dormitory for 1 or 2 months without any penalty.[20]

[18] BBC News Türkçe, [#Barınamıyoruz diyen üniversite öğrencileri anlatıyor: "Memleketlerimize dönmek zorunda kalabiliriz"](#), 2021.

[19] the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Turkey, [Öğrenci Disiplin İşlemleri Uygulama Usul ve Esasları Hakkında Yönerge](#).

Melis who is studying at a state university in İstanbul, states that as a university student, housing, freedom of expression, and being on campus are her top needs:

Campus life is very important for a university student. Because the process of creating a life, that is, one's own life, is actually a process of transition, and it is in university. You shouldn't be too far from there. That's why building that bond is so important. For example, schools have dormitories. Our school does not have a dormitory. That is something that makes bonding difficult. In this context, the second thing is financial difficulties. So, if you're lucky, you'll stay in an apartment, especially if you're studying at a school that doesn't have a dormitory. Maybe you can stay in KYK, the municipalities' dormitories, or the private dormitory, which is currently the same price as houses. That's a big problem, too. Thirdly, ensuring freedom of expression within the campus is very important. It is essential to be able to express. While we are building our new life, it is crucial to be able to express, open, and experience that we have a say in our own lives. (Melis, İstanbul, State University, Bachelor)

Derya's demands from the Mediterranean Region were as follows:

Quality education, free dormitory, free dining hall, a free democratic campus. (Derya, Mediterranean Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Sezgin, bir öğrenci olarak gereksinimlerini sıralarken yine parasal ihtiyaçlardan ve aktivizmin önünde engel oluşturan burs kesintisi tehdidine vurgu yaptı:

Ensuring the equipment in the applied courses is provided and my scholarship will not be cut off as a result of my actions. Especially in foundation universities, cafeteria fees are very expensive, and the regulation of these fees. (Sezgin, İstanbul, a Foundation University, Undergraduate)

Deniz reminded us that in addition to the most basic needs, cultural needs and socialization are the most important needs of university students:

What we need the most are shelter, nutrition, social life, and cultural needs. (Deniz, Southeastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

Bilge, who lives in Ankara and continues their education at a state university, says that the most essential needs of university students are financial problems, accommodation, and nutrition:

Because I participated in a protest -which is my Constitutional right- and was detained, they cut my KYK loan, which is my own money, which I will pay with interest. Especially dissident students experience such things. So I think the most important thing is financial. Apart from that, accommodation is one of students' most common problems. In other words, the accommodation spaces are not enough. I do not know whether I should call it a way or a method, but the government does such things as not opening quotas in dormitories to attract students to dormitories of various religious sects, choosing students according to their identities, and students having great difficulty in housing. The third is nutrition. (Bilge, Ankara, State University, Undergraduate)

When we asked her what the three things she needed the most, university students replied as follows:

The first is freedom of expression, and the second is equality, that is, an equal environment. It can be an education in an equal and fair environment. Education, training. Also, money, in other words, future anxiety and scholarship anxiety. (Ezgi, Southeastern Anatolia Region, State University, Undergraduate)

7. Conclusion

As a result of 71 surveys and 10 interviews, it is seen that the remote education decision and other restrictions given during and after the pandemic reveal a situation where almost all the rights of students are violated. While the suspension of club applications by university administrations, the prolongation of the processes, and the pandemic period create severe obstacles to freedom of association, online learning currently creates great difficulties for students to come together, organize, use their right to protest, and freedom of expression.

The most recurring problems we encountered during our human rights monitoring work were the difficulties created by financial needs and the inability of students to find a space to express themselves. These two problems constitute obstacles to the right of association, peaceful assembly, and other rights and freedoms. We see that the possibilities that may deepen financial needs, such as the threat of cutting loans or scholarships and expulsion from the dormitory, create deterrent reservations in exercising their right to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

Punishments such as judicial pressures, disciplinary investigations, long-term lawsuits, travel bans, and suspensions against students, especially those organized to exercise their right to peaceful assembly, do not only stigmatize students. It results in students who have yet to participate in the organizing processes to avoid exercising their rights, creating a deterrent effect. Thus, while the sanctions for using rights lead to violating the right, students' reluctance to use their right to organize even without a concrete sanction makes it challenging to be detected by becoming a continuous and uncertain violation.

We found that the "ban on forming clubs for LGBTI+ students," which is widely applied in state universities, extends to event bans on campuses in recent years. Considering that universities are one of the last safe places where they can come together freely, as revealed in the interviews with LGBTI+ students, it is evident that the conditions for LGBTI+ societies to come together on campuses should be created foremost.

We have seen that being able to exist and work as an official club is vital for many societies, both in terms of reliability among students and for benefiting from the grants and campus facilities in most universities.

We observed that the process followed by each university regarding the procedures for establishing a club is different; while it is possible to establish an LGBTI+ club in a foundation university in İstanbul, it is not even possible to discuss this with the university administration in a state university. Likewise, the problems experienced with university administrations in metropolitan cities such as İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir are experienced in different dimensions in the Eastern Anatolia Region and Southeastern Anatolia Region, where the law enforcement officers have intense interventions in campus life. We understand that the activities of clubs and societies are often blocked due to the pandemic.

Another result of the transition to remote education with the pandemic is that the transfer of knowledge between classes has stopped, and students who have been in the same club before graduated without being able to transfer their knowledge and experience to their friends who have just started university. This situation creates problems in terms of both following the procedures and knowing and protecting the acquired rights.

In the light of the results we obtained in our human rights monitoring study, we recommend that first of all, remote education, which is arbitrarily decided and implemented, should be abandoned and that the decision should be subject to regulation, and secondly, the club formation processes, which are left to the initiative of universities, should be tied to regulation in line with constitutional rights.

This report
has been prepared by
the Civic Space Studies Association.
CSSA | July 2023



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