



Turkey - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 6 February 2013.

Information on the treatment of Alawites/Alevis in Turkey.

A *BBC News* article from November 2004 mentioning both Alawites and Alevis points out that:

“...15-20% of Turkey is Alawite (rather than Sunni) Muslim. Alawites (also known as Alevis) take a more relaxed view of religion than Sunnis.” (BBC News (19 November 2004) *Turkish journey: A town called Trouble*)

An article in the *New York Times* published in August 2012 referring to both Alevis and Alawites states:

“As Syria’s civil war degenerates into a bloody sectarian showdown between the government’s Alawite-dominated troops and the Sunni Muslim majority, tensions are increasing across the border between Turkey’s Alevi and Alawite minorities and the Sunni Muslim majority here. The Alevis, mostly ethnic Turks estimated at 15 million to 20 million strong and one of the biggest minorities in this country. The Alawites are of Arab ethnicity and closely related to Syria’s Alawites. Their population less than a million is concentrated in the Hatay province bordering northern Syria.” (New York Times (4 August 2012) *As Syria War Roils, Unrest Among Sects Hits Turkey*)

This document also points out that:

“The Alawites, of Arab ethnicity, are closely related to Syria’s Alawites and are concentrated in Hatay province bordering northern Syria. Their population is believed to be less than 1 million. The Alevis, mostly ethnic Turks, total between 15 million and 20 million and are spread throughout Turkey. While both sects are offshoots of Shiite Islam and are sometimes confused as the same, even by some of their own members...” (ibid)

The *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* cite the following research in a report issued in April 2005, noting both Alevis and Alawites:

“Differences Between Alevis and Alawis (Nusayris)

In 1996, an article in the Middle East Report explained that the term 'Alevi' is ... a blanket term for a large number of heterodox communities whose beliefs and practices differ significantly. In the eastern province of Kars, there are communities speaking Azerbaijani Turkish and whose Alevism closely resembles orthodox Twelver Shi'ism of modern Iran. The Arabic speaking Alevi communities of southern Turkey (especially Hatay and Adana) are ethnically part of Syria's 'Alawi (Nusayri) community and have no historical ties with the other Alevi groups. The large Alevi groups are the Turkish and Kurdish speakers; both appear to be descendants of rebellious tribal groups that were religiously affiliated with the Safavids...According to the Encyclopedia of Religion, "[t]he name Alawi (Turk., Alevi) is frequently ... applied to other extremist Shi'i communities in Anatolia"...An Introduction to Shi'i Islam indicated that "the Arabic-speaking Alawi (Nusayri) community centred on the

Mediterranean coast between Antakya and Mersin" is one of four main Shi'ite groups in Turkey...However, according to Contemporary Religions, Turkey's Alevis "are sometimes confused with the 'Alawis, some of whom are also found in Turkey, but the distinction remains clear if the latter are referred to by their other name, Nusayris..."(Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (7 April 2005) *Turkey: The Alevi faith, principles, beliefs, rituals and practices (1995-2005)*)

The *Wall Street Journal* in April 2012 mentions both Alawites and Alevis in a report stating:

"There are marked cultural and religious differences between Turkey's Alawis and the more numerous Alevis—including language and religious rituals, where Alevis place more prominence on the role of music and dance. Turkish and Kurdish-speaking Alevis also share less affiliation and family ties with the Syrian regime than do the Arabic-speaking Alawis—but people from both groups have become unsettled by Ankara's increasingly hawkish Syria policy." (Wall Street Journal (9 April 2012) *Turkey's Shiites Fear Contagion*)

The *Financial Times* in October 2012 mentions both Alevis and Alawites stating:

"Turkey has its own sectarian fault lines, which concern not just the small Alawi minority but also millions of Turkish Alevis, a similarly named but separate sect that is also outside Turkey's Sunni majority." (Financial Times (15 October 2012) *Syria conflict exposes Turkish fault line*)

A publication released by *Reuters* in October 2012 refers to the Alawites stating:

"In the Turkish frontier province of Hatay, home to the Antioch of the Bible and a mix of confessional groups rare in an overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim country, Turks of Arab origin who share Assad's Alawite beliefs are increasingly critical of Ankara's open support for rebels fighting the Syrian leader." (Reuters (22 October 2012) *On Turkey's Syrian frontier, fears of a sectarian Spillover*)

This article also states:

"While most Alawites said the conflict had not yet divided Hatay's indigenous communities, some fear reprisals and spoke of isolated incidents between Sunnis and Alawites." (ibid)

A report issued in February 2012 by *Voice of America* comments on both Alawites and Alevis noting:

"While the Turkish government is among those at the forefront of condemning Syria's brutal crackdown on dissent, the country's large Alawite minority, known as Alevis in Turkey, has a different perspective." (Voice of America (15 March 2012) *Turkey's Alawite Community Worried About Syria Conflict*)

This document also states:

"There are no official figures for the Alevi population in Turkey, as their religious beliefs are not recognized by the state. But it is believed that they make up as much as a quarter of the Turkish population." (ibid)

It is also noted in this document that:

“Turkish Alevis have been the victims of persecution and widespread killings. The most recent, in 1993, took place when dozens of Alevis attending a cultural festival died when their hotel was set on fire by a pro-Islamic mob.” (ibid)

In March 2012 *Eurasia Net* states commenting on both Alawites and Alevis that:

“Once part of Syria, Turkey gained control of Hatay in 1939 following a referendum deemed invalid by Damascus. Although Syria has not officially recognized Hatay as part of Turkey, in recent years the two countries had largely set aside the dispute. The province’s historical connection to Syria is still seen in its ethnic make-up. Hatay is home to a large number of Alawites, members of the same Shi’a Islam sect as the Assad family. Called Arab Alevis in Turkey (although Alevis are a separate religious group from Alawites), local Alawites in Hatay say they fear friends and family members in Syria are at risk of reprisals at the hands of the largely Sunni opposition forces. To underline that concern, several pro-Assad demonstrations have been held in Antakya, the province’s central city.” (Eurasia Net (12 March 2012) *Turkey: Syrian Strife Could Have Unsettling Impact on Southern Province*)

An article in the *Washington Post* from September 2012 mentions the Alawite stating:

“Here in the Hatay province, where Turkey’s small Alawite population is centered, critics of the government’s role in the 18-month conflict next door are especially vocal.” (Washington Post (14 September 2012) *In Turkey, Alawite sect sides with Syria’s Assad*)

This report also notes:

“In Antakya, with its large Alawite population, Turks have staged street demonstrations, their most recent Tuesday, in support of their co-religionist Assad. Protesters are calling on the Turkish government not only to oust the 40,000 displaced Syrians living in houses across Turkey but also to empty the 11 refugee camps along the Turkish-Syrian border, where an additional 80,000 Syrians languish in tent cities. Most of the Syrian refugees, and most of the Syrian rebel fighters, are Sunni Muslims. Many Alawites, like the Christians in Syria, have seen Assad as a bulwark against a Sunni Islamist takeover.” (ibid)

This document also states:

“Alawites in Turkey are a tiny minority, historically ignored or oppressed, while their counterparts in Syria make up 10 or 12 percent of the population and form the governing and business power elite.” (ibid)

In February 2012 a report noting the Alawites in *The Independent* states:

“In Turkey, Alawites live largely in Hatay, a Turkish province that was once part of Syria. There are close ties between people that live on both sides of the border, and the local economy has suffered as a result of Turkish sanctions on Syria.” (The Independent (24 February 2012) *Rising sectarianism sees Alawites lose their sense of security*)

A report published in December 2007 by *Minority Rights Group International* states regarding the Alevis that:

“Alevi is the term used for a large number of heterodox Muslim Shi’a communities with different characteristics. Technically falling under the Shi’a denomination of Islam, yet following a fundamentally different interpretation than the Shi’a communities in other countries as well as the Caferis in Turkey, Alevis constitute the largest religious minority in Turkey.” (Minority Rights Group International (11 December 2007) *A Quest for Equality: Minorities in Turkey*, p.12)

Research issued by the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* in June 2012 states referring to the Alevis that:

“According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, the beliefs and practices of Alevis are debated both within the group, as well as within Islam...The Ministerial Advisor and Coordinator of the Alevi Initiative noted in an article published in the journal *Insight Turkey* that, as a group, the Alevis do not have a "unified discourse" and there is disagreement among them about whether Alevism is a "religion, a culture, an ethn[icity], or an ethno-religious structure"... An article in the academic journal *Peace and Conflict* indicates that there is a "wide variety of beliefs and practices among those who call themselves Alevi"...” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (1 June 2012) *Turkey: Treatment of Alevis by society and government authorities; state response to mistreatment (2008-May 2012)*)

This report also notes:

“The 2011 OSCE report noted that the Alevi religious community is not "officially recognised" by the Turkish state...The Turkish government has interpreted the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 as giving official minority status to three non-Muslim groups, excluding the Alevis...” (ibid)

Research issued in March 2012 by the *Australia: Refugee Review Tribunal* notes commenting on the Alevis that:

“Alevis are seeking greater equality in Turkey; as Alevi places of worship are not officially recognised, they lack the state assistance that mosques received.” (Australia: Refugee Review Tribunal (13 March 2012) *Turkey: 1. Please provide an update on the situation of Kurds and Alevis in Turkey. 2. Is there any available information about a ceremony to unveil a statue of Seyid Riza in Dersim (Tunceli) in August 2010? 3. Is there any information about recent (since 2008) incidents involving Kurds or Alevis in Erzincan? 4. Do Kurds generally have difficulty getting passports in Turkey and is it common to be able to bypass the usual channels by paying for a passport?*, p.3)

In July 2012 the *United States Department of State* mentions the Alevis pointing out that:

“Many Christians, Baha'is, Jews, and Alevis faced societal suspicion and mistrust...” (United States Department of State (30 July 2012) *2011 Report on International Religious Freedom - Turkey*)

This report also notes:

“The government considered Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect and did not financially support religious worship in this belief system.” (Ibid)

It is also stated in this report that:

“Alevi children received the same compulsory religious education as all Muslim students, and many Alevis alleged discrimination in the government's failure to include any of their distinct doctrines or beliefs in religious instruction classes in public schools. A 2007 ECHR decision allowed an Alevi parent to request that his daughter be exempted from her school's compulsory religious education. However, parents faced difficulties obtaining these exemptions. During the year, Alevis had nearly 20 court cases pending against the Ministry of Education alleging discrimination. Material on Alevism was added to the religious course curriculum after the ECHR decision, but many Alevis believed it to be inadequate and, in some cases, incorrect.” (Ibid)

This document also notes:

“Alevis freely practiced their beliefs and built cem houses (places of gathering), although these have no legal status as places of worship. Representatives of Alevi organizations maintained they often faced obstacles when attempting to establish cem houses. They said there were approximately 1,000 cem houses in the country, which was an insufficient number to meet their needs.” (ibid)

A report issued in October 2012 by the *European Commission* which refers to the Alevi states:

“A court of first instance in Ankara rejected a request to ban an association which helped build cem houses, Alevi places of worship. However, this decision was reversed in June by the Court of Cassation. The case has been brought to justice by the Ministry of the Interior. New religious education textbooks containing information on the Alevi faith have been prepared by the Ministry of National Education for the academic year 2012-2013.” (European Commission (10 October 2012) *Commission Staff Working Document: Turkey 2012 Progress Report*, p.24)

This report also points out that:

“Concrete follow-up of the opening made in 2009 to the Alevis is lacking. Cem houses were not officially recognised and Alevis experienced difficulties in establishing new places of worship. Alevis were concerned by the marking of many houses of Alevi citizens in a number of provinces and by incidents against them. Complaints were submitted to the prosecutors' offices by Alevi associations; judicial and administrative investigations are continuing. A demand to open a cem house in the parliament was rejected on the grounds that Alevi MPs could go to the mosque. Several commemoration ceremonies by Alevis were prevented by police, some through the use of force as was a demonstration against the closure.” (ibid, p.25)

It is also noted in this report that:

“A legal framework in line with the ECHR has yet to be established to ensure that all non-Muslim religious communities and the Alevi community can function without undue constraints.” (ibid, p.26)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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