

# Purge victims' lives in shambles years after Turkey's failed putsch



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On July 15, 2016, a group from within the Turkish army attempted to take control in the country. The putschists were thwarted within a few hours, and the attempt failed. Five days later, on July 20, the government declared a state of emergency for three months, which was later prolonged several times to last for a total of two years.

During the two-year long state of emergency, Turkey enacted 32 decrees, **according to official statements**. With these presidential decrees a total of **125,678** individuals were dismissed from public service.

The emergency decrees targeted people ad hominem, and the lists of names were offered no individualised justifications, or explanations, or reasoning for the sanctioning. Likewise, the assessment criteria used to determine whether a specific person would lose several rights were not included in the decrees.

Those sanctioned were permanently and indefinitely dismissed from public service. **The decrees** also stated that the dismissed:

- (i) shall be deprived of their ranks and their positions as public officials;
- (ii) may not use their titles, if any, e.g., ambassador, governor, etc;
- (iii) shall not be re-admitted to the organisation in which they had previously held office;
- (iv) shall be stripped of rank (for the already retired public servants), and of combat medals;
- (v) may not be re-employed and assigned, either directly or indirectly, to any public service;
- (vi) may not become the founders, partners and employees of private security companies;
- (vii) shall be evicted from public residences or foundation houses; and
- (viii) Moreover, **their passports**, gun licenses, seamanship or pilots' licenses, shall be cancelled.

Besides the direct consequences, mentioned above, there are at least 22 types of deprivations or discriminations, to which the purge victims have been exposed, as indicated in a report called **“No Country for Purge Victims!”**

For instance, Turkey's **High Election Board decided** on April 10, 2019 that the dismissed public servants could not be elected to offices within local administrations, e.g., as mayor, alderman or mukhtar (local elected administrator for villages).

Furthermore, a dismissal actually results in the prohibition of the right to work in the private sector, as well as for the public.

Namely, the Ministry of Education would refuse to issue a working license for a dismissed teacher, and this is necessary to work in private educational institutes. Likewise, the Ministry of Justice would refuse to issue a lawyer's license to dismissed judges, prosecutors and law school academics.

What is worse, the purged civil servants are blacklisted based on a circular dated Aug. 2, 2016 in the databases of employment and social security agencies with the code 36/OHAL/KHK, which means that any private sector employer who might otherwise hire them is urged to avoid doing so.

Other severe consequences of being dismissed under an emergency decree are as follows:

1. The database of the General Directorate of the Land Registry includes a list of suspicious people, which consists of those dismissed under emergency decrees. **Those included on this list cannot participate in real estate transactions, either as a party or as a witness,**
2. The database for the Social Relief Program includes the list of those dismissed under emergency decrees. Disabled people whose primary caregivers (such as parents, sons, daughters, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law) are dismissed under an emergency decrees **cannot benefit from social benefits,**
3. **Those dismissed under emergency decrees, and their spouses and children, cannot benefit from the General Health Insurance and social rights offered to disabled people,**
4. The dismissed public servants are also blacklisted in the database of the Turkish Employment Agency **with code of 36/OHAL/KHK,** and they **are not accepted to vocational courses.**

Some of other deprivations or discriminations are as follows:

1. The purged civil servants cannot be a foster family,
2. The purged civil servants cannot be lawyers, accountants, sailors,
3. The purged civil servants cannot work as architects, engineers, laboratory workers, or technicians in building inspection companies,

4. The purged civil servants cannot work as an on-site (workplace) doctor or as an occupational safety specialist,
5. The purged public servants cannot hold passports or travel documents,
6. The purged civil servants are denied the license needed to run businesses,
7. Upon an instruction by the Ministry of Justice, the Union of Turkish Public Notaries produced a list of suspicious people, which consists of those dismissed under emergency decrees. People included in this list cannot carry out any procedure as notaries other than giving a power of attorney. This means they cannot carry out hundreds of legal procedures, including selling their cars or signing construction contracts,
8. The purged public servants cannot open bank accounts and are discriminated against in financial transactions and procedures,
9. The purged public servants are discriminated against in regard to insurance services,
10. The purged public servants are discriminated against in business development and incentive credits,
11. The purged public servants are discriminated against in relation to mandatory military services,
12. The purged academics are discriminated against in academic publishing.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that emergency decrees have significantly dented the purged officials' ability to earn their livelihood in a decent way. Recently, on Oct. 18, **23 people were detained in Antalya** for helping the purge victims to work under the table, as they couldn't find a regular registered job due to blacklisting in the Social Security Database.

Entire layers of daily life are under the ever-growing grip of a prohibitive mindset that denies the most basic aspects of livelihood to the dismissed officials. Even opening a bank account becomes a difficult challenge as laws are tailored to make banking inaccessible to them.

Turkey's mandatory military service, which is clearly defined in law, is imposed on purge victims in different ways, in a clear departure from the procedure.

The list of bans or practices, as documented by the report, illustrates the depth of agony and sufferings inflicted on sacked workers as private companies increasingly collaborate with authorities or act in fear of political backlash to deny the basic services to people in the post coup era.

To sum up, almost two years after it ended, the emergency rule remains in place with dire consequences for its targets. This reality, often overlooked and ignored by observers, needs to be taken into account when analyzing the state of political and legal affairs in Turkey.

