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Jews

The Jewish community in Turkey dates back to the Roman Empire. The vast majority of Jews in Turkey are descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. Their language is Ladino, a variant of Fifteenth Century Spanish. There is also an ethnic Ashkenazi minority, who speak Yiddish.

Jews are protected under the Treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923, but this essentially amounts to being considered second class citizens by the State. Despite this official protection, and alongside other non Muslim minorities, they have been subject to a series of policies since 1923 that have lead to their near eradication as groups; State tolerance of mob attacks, such as those suffered by Jews in Thrace in 1934, and in Istanbul against non Muslims in 1955, the exclusive military conscription of non-Muslims to serve in labour battalions in 1941 and 1942, the levy on non-Muslims of a disproportionate and discriminatory wealth tax in 1942 and the systematic confiscation of properties belonging to non-Muslim foundations since 1960s.

There are around 23,000 Jews, in Turkey, 600 of whom are Ashkenazi. The vast majority live in Istanbul, there are around 2,500 Jewish people in Izmir and the rest live in very small numbers elsewhere. There are 19 synagogues in Istanbul, one of which belongs to Ashkenazis.

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