

Evaluating The Role of the Ombudsman Institution in the Oversight of Public Administration in Türkiye: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

This study evaluates the role of the Ombudsman Institution in overseeing public administration in Türkiye, using a mixed-methods approach based on qualitative and quantitative data. It examines how far the Institution fills gaps in existing oversight mechanisms, how public bodies respond to citizen applications, and how effective it is compared with other oversight actors. A literature review traces its historical development, structure and functions, while statistical data from annual reports for 2013–2023 are analyzed and presented with graphs. The findings show that the Institution protects citizens' rights in administrative decision-making, promotes legal compliance and strengthens the accountability of public institutions. The high rate of implementation of its recommendations by public bodies enhances its legitimacy and effectiveness. The study concludes that, with improvements in its legal mandate, the Ombudsman could become a more functional mechanism of public control and that it already plays a complementary and transformative role in promoting transparency and accountability.

Keywords: Ombudsman, Public Oversight, Public Administration, Accountability, Transparency.

Türkiye’de Kamu Yönetiminin Denetiminde Ombudsmanlık Kurumu’nun Rolünün Değerlendirilmesi: Karma Yöntemli Bir Çalışma

Öz

Çalışma, Türkiye’de kamu yönetiminin denetiminde Ombudsmanlık Kurumu’nun rolünü değerlendirmek amacıyla, nitel ve nicel verilerin kullanıldığı karma bir yöntem benimsemiştir. Araştırmada kurumun denetim mekanizmalarındaki boşluğu ne ölçüde doldurduğu, vatandaş başvurularının kamu kurumları nezdinde nasıl karşılandığı ve diğer denetim mekanizmalarıyla kıyaslandığında etkilik düzeyi sorgulanmıştır. Literatür taramasıyla kurumun tarihsel gelişimi, yapısal özellikleri ve işlevleri incelenmiş; 2013–2023 yıllarına ait yıllık raporlardaki istatistiki veriler analiz edilerek grafiklerle sunulmuştur. Bulgular, kurumun idarenin karar alma süreçlerinde vatandaşların haklarını koruma, hukuka uygunluğu gözetme ve kamu kurumlarının hesap verebilirliğini artırma yönünde etkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Tavsiye kararlarının önemli ölçüde kamu idareleri tarafından yerine getirilmesi, kurumsal meşruiyet ve etkinliği güçlendirmektedir. Kurumun yasal yetkilerinde yapılacak iyileştirmelerle daha işlevsel bir denetim mekanizmasına dönüşebileceği ve kamu denetiminde şeffaflık ile hesap verebilirliği destekleyen tamamlayıcı ve dönüştürücü bir rol üstlendiği sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ombudsman, Kamu Denetimi, Kamu Yönetimi, Hesap Verebilirlik, Şeffaflık.

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Introduction

Since the 20th century, the expansion and growing complexity of public services have increased the need for expertise within the state structure, strengthening the role of the executive and administrative branches. At the same time, the global spread of democratic governance has heightened citizen expectations regarding rights, freedoms and state accountability. In response to the growing power of public administration and the need to prevent injustices, the Ombudsman Institution emerged in Sweden in 1809 as a constitutional oversight tool designed to address the limitations of traditional control mechanisms. Its accessibility and practical functioning contributed to its rapid adoption worldwide (Efe ve Demirci, 2013: 52–53). While ombudsman institutions emphasize impartiality and independence, they do not possess sanctioning authority over public administration.

In Türkiye, the Ombudsman Institution gained constitutional recognition through the 2010 amendment and was formally established in 2012 by Law No. 6328, beginning its activities in 2013 (Ombudsman, 2020). The institution, led by the Chief Auditor elected by the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT), operates on behalf of the parliament with deputy ombudsmen, experts and administrative staff. Functioning alongside existing judicial, political and administrative oversight bodies, it offers an alternative and accessible means for citizens to resolve grievances.

Since its establishment, the institution has become a significant component of Türkiye's oversight framework, receiving more than 225.000 applications. This increase, together with high compliance rates, indicates both public trust and administrative recognition, suggesting that targeted reforms could further strengthen its effectiveness.

This study employs a mixed-methods design to examine the role of the Ombudsman Institution in overseeing public administration between 2013 and 2023. The qualitative analysis is based on a comprehensive literature review of national and international studies, legal frameworks and official documents. The quantitative dimension draws on annual activity reports, analyzing applications, complaint categories, decision types, compliance levels and regional trends using descriptive statistics and visual tools. By integrating legal, institutional and statistical data, the study provides a multidimensional assessment of the Ombudsman Institution's contribution to transparency, accountability and citizen–state trust in Türkiye.

The Concept and Organizational Structure of Public Administration

Although the concept of public administration—often associated with the executive function among the tripartite powers of the state (legislative, executive and judiciary)—has deep historical roots, its recognition as a scientific discipline is relatively recent. Public administration encompasses both theoretical and practical approaches aimed at analyzing and improving bureaucracy and its interaction with the public who benefit from its services. It also focuses on the management of human and material resources within the state apparatus to achieve public goals (Eryılmaz, 2000: 8–11).

In societies governed by a functioning set of social norms, public administration refers to the organizational and functional structure of public power, excluding purely legislative and judicial activities. In this respect, it includes a broad range of actors such as national governments, local administrations, state-owned enterprises and even certain international organizations (Ergün ve Polat, 1988: 6). While in its narrower sense public administration includes only the executive branch and its institutions, in a broader interpretation it encompasses the operations of all three branches of government (Gözübüyük, 2008: 1).

For any bureaucratic activity to be considered a public service, it must be carried out using public administrative procedures and serve the collective interest, rather than individual benefit. The notion of the public interest is therefore central to evaluating the legitimacy of services. In this context, public organizations that coordinate both human and material resources are essential in the delivery of services to the populace (Özdemir, 2008: 180).

Centralized and Decentralized Models:

The organizational framework of public administration typically takes one of two basic forms: centralized or decentralized. In centralized systems, authority is concentrated in a central governing body and responsibilities are assigned to ministries and other central institutions. In such systems, public services are carried out by units under the control and hierarchy of the central authority, often through provincial branches without legal autonomy (Gözler, 2012: 30).

Key features of centralized administration include:

- A single legal entity: the state;

- Distribution of service responsibilities among ministries;
- Centralized budgeting for revenues and expenditures;
- Decision-making authority concentrated at the center and distributed hierarchically;
- Uniformity in service delivery across the country (Gözübüyük, 2008: 94–95).

Centralized administration can be further categorized into political centralization—where legislative and executive power is unified—and administrative centralization, where public service planning and execution remain under central control (Berkün, 2017: 642).

In contrast, decentralized administration enables legally autonomous public institutions—such as municipalities, special provincial administrations and village administrations—to deliver public services using their own resources and authority. These entities operate independently from the central government, though they may still be subject to regulatory oversight (Eren, 1994: 145; Aydın, 2009: 139; Nalbant, 1997: 39).

Characteristics of decentralized units include:

- Legal personality and administrative-financial autonomy;
- Establishment and dissolution regulated by law;
- Internal governance through their own organs;
- Independent revenue sources and budgetary control (Berkün, 2017: 642–643).

Decentralization can also be divided into political and administrative types. Political decentralization involves distributing legislative and executive powers among regional or local authorities, as seen in federal systems. Administrative decentralization, on the other hand, concerns the delegation of specific functions to semi-autonomous public entities, which may vary by geographic or functional focus (Berkün, 2017: 644).

Oversight within Public Administration

Regardless of the organizational model, oversight mechanisms are vital to ensure efficient, lawful and accountable functioning of public administration. In centralized systems, hierarchical supervision is predominant, while decentralized systems necessitate a blend of internal audits and *administrative tutelage* to maintain coherence across entities with legal autonomy.

Oversight not only complements core administrative functions—such as planning, organizing, directing and coordinating—but also enables the measurement of actual outcomes against desired objectives. In doing so, it provides stakeholders with critical information on performance, compliance and institutional effectiveness.

All activities and services carried out by public administrative bodies must remain within legal limits and aligned with predefined goals. Periodic and situational oversight is therefore essential to verify that public institutions are fulfilling their legal responsibilities and effectively serving the public interest.

The Concept and Characteristics of Audit

The concept of management refers to a continuous process that includes planning, organizing, directing, coordinating and auditing. Just as the first four elements are essential to managerial functioning, auditing is equally indispensable. The audit function evaluates the extent to which managerial goals have been achieved and whether an effective administrative structure has been established. In this regard, auditing is critical for assessing how institutions utilize material and human resources and for determining their overall efficiency (Köksal, 1974: 51).

Functionally, management and auditing share similarities, particularly in terms of achieving predetermined objectives. Auditing provides an evaluative authority over both managerial structures and the activities carried out within them. Depending on organizational design, managerial and auditing powers may sometimes be vested in the same authority (Atay, 1999: 22).

Institutions and individuals are expected to operate within a legal framework that defines duties, authorities and responsibilities. The emphasis placed on transparency, accountability and participation in public administration—and the reinforcement of these principles through legislation—has further increased the importance of auditing. By ensuring compliance with legal norms, auditing helps prevent the misuse of resources and supports lawful administrative conduct (Akpınar, 2006: 16).

For managers to demonstrate competence and for institutions to achieve goals effectively and efficiently, an effective auditing system is required (Ertekin, 1998: 494–495). Public institutions rely on audit mechanisms to determine whether their activities align with legal responsibilities and established objectives, thereby enhancing organizational reliability.

According to the Turkish Language Association, auditing refers to examining whether a task is performed correctly and in accordance with regulations. In practice, auditing evaluates whether activities meet predetermined standards and objectives. Effective auditing enables institutions to identify errors, improve operational efficiency and ensure reliability and consistency (Court of Accounts, 2000: 15).

Ultimately, auditing assesses whether institutions achieve their intended goals and identifies gaps between expected standards and actual outcomes. These results are then communicated to relevant units for corrective action (Sanal, 2002: 4). Auditing mechanisms can be categorized by source, timing and subject matter.

Audit in Public Administration and Types of Audit

Audit is a fundamental component of the management process, used to assess whether actions align with predefined goals and objectives. It evaluates the extent to which administrative activities correspond to intended targets and whether the means employed are appropriate and effective.

In public administration, the classification of audit types depends on the source, subject and timing of the audit. Each type plays a vital role in identifying problems and ensuring that public institutions operate efficiently, effectively and accountably. Audits in public administration are broadly categorized into internal and external audits based on their source:

- Internal Audit is conducted within the institution, typically by individuals or units that are part of the administrative hierarchy. It includes:
- Hierarchical Audit, which occurs when superiors monitor the actions of subordinates to ensure legality and appropriateness. Though a superior can oversee, correct, or halt subordinate actions, they cannot act in their place.
- Inspection Audit, performed by specialized inspection units without direct hierarchical authority. These units observe and report but lack the power to enforce decisions. With the enactment of Law No. 5018 on Public Financial Management and Control in 2004, inspection audits were institutionalized as part of the internal audit framework.
- Internal audit units are expected to operate independently and objectively. Their duties include evaluating internal activities, compiling reports and making recommendations for improvements (Yörüker, 2004).
- External Audit is carried out by entities independent of the audited institution's organizational structure. It often involves the evaluation of

performance, financial records and management practices. Auditors may be public institutions or private sector actors (Köse, 2000; Sanal, 2002).

According to Law No. 5227, external audits review whether the decisions and activities of public institutions align with legal mandates, strategic plans and accountability principles.

External audits are further divided into the following categories:

- Political Audit
- Administrative Audit
- Judicial Audit
- Public Opinion and Pressure Groups
- Ombudsman Audit

In the context of this study, special emphasis is placed on Ombudsman oversight, which is examined as one of the key types of external audit.

Political Oversight

Political oversight is a key control mechanism in public administration, monitoring how powers granted to administrative units are exercised. It is primarily conducted by the government, holding executive authority and the legislature, ensuring compliance with legal norms and objectives. Key actors include members of parliament, ministers, government officials and locally elected representatives. In local administrations, oversight is exercised by provincial councils, executive committees, mayors, municipal councils, municipal boards, village heads (muhtars) and councils of elders (Tortop, 1974: 31).

The legislative body is one of the central institutions performing political oversight and shares this authority with the government and ministries responsible for executing parliamentary decisions (Akın, 2000: 92). Although the judiciary has the final say in oversight processes, parliamentary scrutiny remains essential for preventing unlawful administrative actions, supervising high-level authorities and ensuring informed decision-making (Özer, 1999: 26).

In Türkiye, the parliament employs several tools to obtain information and oversee the executive, including written questions, general debates, parliamentary investigations and parliamentary inquiries. Unlike the parliamentary system, where both written and oral questions existed, the presidential system allows only written questions and the motion of no confidence has been abolished.

These mechanisms aim to ensure political accountability: written questions seek information on ministers' responsibilities; general debates require governmental statements on public issues; parliamentary investigations address specific matters; and parliamentary inquiries scrutinize individuals or groups. Additional oversight tools also exist. For instance, the Human Rights Inquiry Commission of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, established by Law No. 3686 in 1990, examines human rights-related issues by collecting information and summoning relevant parties (Atay, 1999: 73).

The constitutional right to petition allows citizens—and, under reciprocity, foreign nationals—to submit requests and complaints to parliament, reinforcing accountability through public participation. This tendency expanded with the 2003 Right to Information Act, which strengthened transparency (Eryılmaz, 1999: 323). Furthermore, members of parliament respond to citizens' administrative grievances and the Court of Accounts conducts financial audits on behalf of parliament, contributing to political oversight.

Public policies prepared by the government are implemented by public administrations, which act under governmental directives and remain subject to legislative oversight. In the parliamentary system, both the government and the administration were collectively accountable to parliament for their actions (Tortop et al., 1993: 175; Örnek, 1989: 243).

Administrative Oversight

Administrative audit is a type of oversight carried out directly by the executive branch. It ensures that public institutions act according to the law, internal regulations and their formal responsibilities (Atay, 1999: 77).

There are two main types of administrative audit: hierarchical audit and tutorship (guardianship) audit. In hierarchical audit, superiors monitor the actions and decisions of their subordinates within the same organization. This includes reviewing decisions for legality and appropriateness. Superiors can also take personnel actions such as appointments, promotions, disciplinary sanctions, or cancellations of decisions (Sanal, 2002: 31; Gözübüyük, 1999: 307).

Tutorship audit refers to the central government overseeing local administrations. This type of audit ensures legal compliance but not the appropriateness of decisions. It is based on laws and applies to separate legal entities. Unlike hierarchical audit, which covers both legality and appropriateness, tutorship focuses only on legality (Sanal, 2002: 8; Eryılmaz, 1999: 309–310).

In Türkiye, administrative audit also includes oversight by the President and the State Supervisory Council (DDK). The President can conduct audits directly or assign the DDK to inspect and evaluate public institutions. Article 108 of the 1982 Constitution gives the DDK authority to audit all public bodies, affiliated organizations and NGOs that serve the public (Atay, 1999: 117; Constitution, 1982; Tan ve Gözübüyük, 2001: 936).

At the local level, audits carried out by municipal staff are considered internal or hierarchical. However, when the central government audits local administrations, it is called tutorship audit. These audits aim to ensure coherence and consistency in public service delivery (Öner, 1997: 190–191).

Audits of local governments may focus on legality (whether actions comply with laws) or appropriateness (whether services meet local needs). When decisions are evaluated only by central authorities, this may limit local autonomy (Keleş, 1997: 13).

Administrative audit also includes independent regulatory agencies. These autonomous public bodies operate outside ministries but still exercise public authority. They monitor specific sectors using legal powers and public resources (Kaya, 2022: 334).

Another part of administrative audit is the performance evaluation of civil servants. Public employees are regularly assessed by their supervisors. These evaluations affect promotions, rewards, or disciplinary actions. This type of audit, also called career auditing, aims to improve employee motivation and administrative efficiency (Tortop, İşbir ve Aykaç, 1993: 138).

Judicial Oversight

In democratic societies, public administration must operate within the law. This means it should consider legal consequences when acting and adjust its behavior accordingly. Disputes between the administration and citizens can be resolved in court, ensuring a clear and lawful outcome (Gözübüyük, 1989: 235).

The rule of law, a key principle of the Constitution, ensures all administrative actions are subject to judicial review. This oversight does not give courts the power to govern but ensures administration stays within legal limits. Judicial review protects citizens, maintains peace and security and keeps administrative actions lawful. Judicial review prevents arbitrary behavior and guarantees citizens' legal protection. It evaluates the legality of actions, not their effectiveness (İnaç & Ünal, 2007). Courts check whether an administrative act follows the law, rather than judging its quality or efficiency.

Because public authorities have power and privileges, judicial review ensures they are not misused and that administrators remain accountable (Köse, 2004: 69). Unlike other oversight forms, judicial decisions are binding and must be implemented within legal deadlines. A key difference between administrative and judicial oversight is initiation: administrative bodies can act on their own, while judicial review requires a formal request. Administrative oversight examines both legality and efficiency, whereas judicial review focuses only on legality.

Pressure Groups and Public Opinion Oversight

Transparency and accountability are key principles of democratic governance. Sharing administrative data and audit results with the public is crucial for this. Informing citizens about the use of public resources increases accountability and strengthens democratic oversight (Köse, 2004: 82). Pressure groups are organized around shared interests and aim to influence government and administrative actions. They monitor decisions and try to shape policy to meet their goals. Besides direct pressure, they influence public opinion, which in turn affects political and administrative behavior (Eryilmaz, 2000: 318–319).

Citizens also use associations, unions, political parties and media platforms to express their views on public matters. Collective platforms amplify voices, making the administration more likely to consider them. In this way, public opinion can hold the administration accountable and ensure actions remain within legal limits (Tortop et al., 1999: 189). Technological advances and widespread internet and social media access allow faster, two-way communication between citizens and government, enhancing public oversight. Increasing education and awareness further improve monitoring. Public reactions on social media have sometimes led to decision changes, postponed implementations, or even dismissal of officials, showing the real impact of public opinion oversight (Köse, 2004: 73–82).

Ombudsman Oversight

Among the modern oversight mechanisms of states, the emergence of the Ombudsman system has aimed to ensure the effective and efficient execution of public services, increase public satisfaction with these services and reflect the influence of the people on administrative structures. Despite the existence of various oversight mechanisms, the need for an Ombudsman arises due to factors such as the inadequacy of classical audit tools and the complexity of the modern state structure. As a form of independent and impartial

oversight within public administration, the Ombudsman mechanism constitutes the main focus of this study and will therefore be examined in detail.

The Concept Of Ombudsman

The term Ombudsman, originating from Swedish, means “representative, spokesperson, delegate, lawyer, officer, protector” (Ataman, 1997: 779) and refers to a public official who investigates complaints arising from administrative acts to protect individuals with justified claims (Pugh, 1978: 132). The Ombudsman functions as a mediator between citizens and the administration, receiving complaints, acting with a protective instinct and promoting principles such as impartiality, independence, efficiency, transparency, participation and human rights (Doğan, 2022: 1196). Across countries, the term has different equivalents: in Spain, “Defender of the People”; in Austria, “People’s Advocate”; in France, “Republican Mediator”; in Canada, “Citizen’s Protector”; in Portugal, “Justice Representative”; in Italy, “Civil Advocate”; in Poland, “Defender of Human Rights”; and in Türkiye, “Public Auditor” (Efe & Demirci, 2013: 51).

Legally established and independent from the administration, the Ombudsman provides fast, accessible and low-cost procedures. It investigates complaints, criticizes administrative practices and recommends corrective actions, though its decisions are advisory and non-binding (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 1996: 195). It can also propose reforms to improve public services while acting independently from both the executive and legislature (Yılmaz et al., 2003: 54; Avşar, 2007: 68). Definitions vary across countries due to cultural, religious and societal differences. The International Bar Association defines it as an independent office accountable to parliament, receiving complaints, investigating, recommending remedies and reporting findings without enforcement power (Babüroğlu & Hatipoğlu, 1997: 15).

Originating in Sweden and Finland, the Ombudsman was first established to ensure administrative actions remained within legal boundaries. While Scandinavian ombudsmen may oversee both administrative and judicial authorities, in the UK, oversight is limited to general administration (Gözübüyük, 1989: 234). The institution has since expanded to over 200 countries, driven by democratic and capitalist systems and global developments (Doğan, 2022: 1196-1199). Its historical and philosophical significance includes bridging liberal and Marxist ideologies, promoting citizen participation, trust, legitimacy and social responsibility (Doğan, 2024: 20–23; Parlak & Doğan, 2016: 21).

Modern Ombudsmanship integrates transparency, accountability, responsibility and human rights, contributing to administrative reforms, anti-cor-

ruption measures and democratic governance. Its evolution is closely linked to developments in social sciences, combining historical and societal innovations with theoretical, methodological and epistemological foundations (Parlak & Doğan, 2021: 50–52). By supporting merit-based, equitable and participatory governance, the Ombudsman continues to strengthen citizen rights and democratic practices worldwide (Doğan, 2023: 13–14).

The Emergence and Historical Development of the Ombudsman Institution

Although the modern Ombudsman was formalized in the 19th century, similar roles existed in earlier administrative systems. In Turkic-Islamic states such as the Anatolian Seljuks, Mamluks and Ottoman Empire, offices like the Kadı'ül Kudat (Chief Judge) mediated disputes between citizens and officials, including cases against the Sultan. The Divan-ı Mezalim provided a platform for individuals to raise complaints and seek justice (Sanal, 2002: 63; Tayşi, 1997: 108).

The modern Ombudsman was first established in Sweden in 1809 to oversee the executive branch and ensure parliamentary accountability. The model spread to Finland, Denmark and Norway, sharing the goal of improving administrative oversight and protecting citizens' rights (Tutal, 2014: 115). Its effectiveness made it a permanent part of the Swedish constitution (Sanal, 2002: 65).

After World War II, the Ombudsman institution expanded globally alongside the growth of public administration, particularly in parliamentary systems where it derived legitimacy from legislatures (Göküş & Çubukçu, 2019: 220; Tortop et al., 1993: 180). Initially, the presence of administrative courts was seen as reducing the need for Ombudsman offices. However, successful examples in Sweden and Finland demonstrated their value, influencing other countries, such as France, to adopt similar institutions (Temizel, 1997: 777).

The Structure and Functioning of the Ombudsman Institution in Türkiye

A state's reputation depends not only on its economic, military, political and diplomatic strength but also on its commitment to fundamental rights, freedoms and the rule of law. A state governed by law must apply rules equally to all, including executive authorities (Küçüközyiğit, 2006: 93). Human rights, democracy and legal development have led to the emergence of institutions like the Ombudsman, which protects individuals' rights and has spread globally.

As public administration grew more complex, traditional oversight mechanisms proved insufficient. The Ombudsman offers an accessible, cost-effective and efficient solution, ensuring public services comply with legal norms, promoting democratic governance and protecting citizens from administrative misconduct (Küçüközyiğit, 2006: 94). While its structure varies across countries, the Ombudsman is typically accountable to parliament, though in some cases executive authorities may appoint it. Dismissals should involve parliamentary approval to preserve democratic legitimacy (Akın, 1998: 524).

Independence is a defining feature of the Ombudsman, shielding it from both the executive and the appointing parliament (Mutta, 2005: 56). Transparency is maintained by justifying decisions to complainants and public bodies. Lacking enforcement power, the Ombudsman relies on public support and media visibility (Küçüközyiğit, 2006: 99).

Beyond resolving complaints, the Ombudsman improves public administration, fosters fairness and ensures legal compliance. It protects citizens from arbitrary actions, promotes transparency, raises legal awareness and contributes to democratic accountability (Sezen, 2001: 79; Temizel, 1997: 22). Simple procedures, low costs and rapid decisions make it an effective alternative to judicial mechanisms, reducing administrative court caseloads. Globally, Ombudsman institutions share independence, impartial complaint evaluation, lack of coercive power and a mandate for fair oversight (Kestane, 2006: 133). In Türkiye, the Ombudsman supports democracy by safeguarding rights and offering solutions to administrative problems. It contributes by:

- Reducing conflict between citizens and public authorities,
- Enhancing the quality and accountability of public administration,
- Supporting and alleviating the burden on administrative courts,
- Encouraging democratic participation,
- Ensuring the realization of individual rights within the legal framework (Erhürman, 1998: 101–102).

Nonetheless, the Ombudsman's oversight authority is limited, with legislative actions, judicial decisions and purely military activities of the Turkish Armed Forces being excluded from its scope of supervision (Law on the Ombudsman Institution (m.5), 2012).

The Function and Importance of the Ombudsman Institution in the Audit of Public Administration in Türkiye

In recent decades, global emphasis on human rights has led to mechanisms safeguarding these rights through declarations, conventions and institutional reforms. As modern states became more complex, traditional administrative oversight often proved insufficient, creating the need for independent institutions to ensure transparency and accountability. Türkiye recognized this need and sought to establish a complaint mechanism to protect individuals from arbitrary state actions (Şahin, 2020: 115).

Historically, the “Right to Petition” allowed individuals to submit administrative complaints. Under the 1961 Constitution, both individual and collective applications were permitted, but current law allows only individual submissions. During the 1982 Constitution drafting, studies, including the TODAIE-led Public Administration Research Project (KAYA), proposed Ombudsman-like mechanisms. Although bills were prepared and included in development plans, the 2006 law was vetoed and annulled. The Ombudsman Institution was finally established following the 2010 constitutional referendum under Law No. 6328 and became operational in 2012, guaranteeing the “Right to Petition, Right to Information and Right to Apply to the Ombudsman” (Şişman, 2023: 43–44).

Table 1: Comparison of the 2006 Ombudsman Law with Law No. 6328 on the Ombudsman Institution

Feature / Criterion	2006 Ombudsman Law	Law No. 6328 on the Ombudsman Institution
Institutional Structure	Limited structure; roles of the Ombudsman and supporting auditors were unclear	Clear structure: Chief Ombudsman, Auditors, expert staff and administrative support
Powers and Duties	Oversight and complaint investigation powers were limited	Powers clearly defined: oversight, issuing recommendations and advisory decisions
Scope of Oversight	Areas excluded from oversight were not clearly specified	Presidential actions, legislative and judicial functions and purely military activities of the Turkish Armed Forces are excluded
Application and Procedural Mechanisms	Limited application methods and procedural timelines	Electronic and written applications allowed; expedited evaluation and processing procedures established
Independence and Impartiality	Weak independence; accountability to the Parliament unclear	Chief Ombudsman appointed by Parliament; term and reappointment regulations strengthen independence

Human Rights and Democratic Participation	Limited emphasis	Emphasizes human rights, transparency and democratic participation; Ombudsman's role expanded
Alignment with International Standards	Low	Enhanced compliance with European and international Ombudsman standards

The 2006 Ombudsman Law, later annulled, had a limited structure, unclear roles and narrowly defined oversight. In contrast, Law No. 6328 established a clear institutional framework, including the Chief Ombudsman, auditors, expert staff and administrative support, while explicitly defining powers to examine complaints, issue recommendations and provide advisory decisions. It excluded presidential, legislative, judicial and purely military actions from its jurisdiction and improved application procedures, including electronic submissions, expedited processing and strengthened independence through parliamentary appointment and term regulations. The law also emphasized human rights, transparency, democratic participation and aligned with European and international standards, enhancing legitimacy and effectiveness.

The Turkish Ombudsman Institution investigates complaints regarding administrative acts in light of the Constitution, laws, justice principles and fundamental rights. Its structure includes a Chief Auditor, a council of five public auditors, expert staff, assistant experts, a secretary general and administrative personnel. The Chief Auditor, elected by the Grand National Assembly for a renewable four-year term, represents the institution nationally.

Since 2013, the Ombudsman has played a key role in auditing public administration, receiving approximately 226,720 applications by 2023. Decisions include referral, non-reviewable, invalid, consolidation, separation, amicable resolution, recommendation, rejection, or partial rejection/recommendation (Uz, 2023: 89–90). Complaints are admissible only after exhausting legal and administrative remedies, with substantiated claims leading to recommendations and unfounded claims to rejection. General information regarding the applications made to the Ombudsman Institution since its foundation by Law No. 6238 in 2012 is as follows:

In 2013, the Ombudsman Institution received a total of 7,638 applications through hand delivery, e-mail, mail, fax and the e-application system, with the latter being the most commonly used method (4,356 applications). The complaints predominantly concerned public personnel management, education-youth-sports, labor and social security, economy-finance-tax, justice-national defense-security and related administrative fields, representing over 85% of all applications. The highest number of complaints pertained

to public personnel management (2,186), followed by education-youth-sports (1,288) and labor and social security (888), while the fewest were filed regarding science-art-culture-tourism (32), food-agriculture-livestock (32) and family protection (13). Regarding administrative bodies, the Ministry of National Education (954), Ministry of Labor and Social Security (844) and universities/faculties (432) were the most frequently reported, whereas the Ministry of Economy (10), General Command of the Gendarmerie-Coast Guard (10) and Undersecretariat of Treasury (7) received the fewest complaints. Of the 7,638 applications, 6,097 were processed, resulting in 2,155 referrals, 2,240 non-reviewable decisions, 329 invalid applications, 522 consolidations, 307 “no decision needed,” 432 referrals to local administrations, 64 recommendations, 37 rejections and 11 partial rejection/partial recommendation decisions. Geographically, the Marmara, Aegean and Central Anatolia regions, along with Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir, accounted for the highest application numbers (Ombudsman Institution, 2013).

In 2014, the Ombudsman Institution received 5,639 applications through hand delivery, mail, e-mail, fax and the e-application system, with 2,978 (52.8%) submitted electronically. Complaints primarily concerned public personnel (1,349), education-youth-sports (1,056) and economy-finance-tax (440), while issues related to food-agriculture-livestock (18), civil registry and citizenship (17) and science-art-culture-tourism (13) were least frequent. Local governments, the Ministry of National Education and private entities were the most frequently reported institutions, whereas the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, the General Directorate of PTT and the Turkish Employment Agency received the fewest complaints. Considering the 1,528 carry-over applications from 2013, the Institution concluded cases with referrals, non-reviewable decisions, invalid applications, consolidations, “no decision needed” rulings, local government referrals, recommendations, rejections and partial decisions. The highest number of applications originated from Central Anatolia, Marmara and Black Sea regions, particularly Ankara, Istanbul and İzmir (Ombudsman Institution, 2014).

In 2015, the Ombudsman Institution received 6,055 applications through in-person submission, mail, email, fax and the e-application system, with 3,516 submitted electronically. The majority of complaints concerned the public personnel regime (1,584), education-youth-sports (1,296) and labor and social security (385), while the least frequent complaints related to family protection (37), science-art-culture and tourism (22) and food-agriculture-livestock (14). The most reported institutions were the State Personnel Presidency, Local Governments and the Social Security Institution, whereas

the Housing Development Administration (TOKİ), the Ministry of Science, Industry and Technology and the Presidency of Religious Affairs received the fewest complaints. Including 819 carry-over files from 2014, the Institution issued a variety of decisions, such as forwarding, inadmissibility, invalid applications, consolidations, no-ground-for-decision rulings, recommendations, rejections and partial decisions. Geographically, complaints were concentrated in Central Anatolia, Marmara and Black Sea regions, particularly in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir (Ombudsman Institution, 2015).

In 2016, the Ombudsman Institution received 5,519 complaints, with 3,631 submitted via the e-application system. The most frequent subjects were the public personnel regime (1,759), education-youth-sports (669) and labor and social security (556), while the least common complaints concerned food-agriculture-livestock (20), family protection (17) and science-art-culture-tourism (15). Considering 977 carry-over cases from 2015, a total of 6,496 complaints were evaluated, resulting in 1,976 forwarding decisions, 1,723 inadmissibility rulings, 53 invalid applications, 354 consolidations, 428 no-ground-for-decision rulings, 62 recommendations, 191 rejections and 32 partial rejection/partial recommendation decisions. Local Governments (558), the Ministry of National Education (489) and the Social Security Institution (479) were the most frequently reported entities, while the General Directorate of PTT (6), the Turkish Employment Agency and the Presidency of Religious Affairs (4 each) received the fewest complaints. Regionally, most complaints originated from Marmara, Central Anatolia and the Black Sea regions, with Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir being the most active cities (Ombudsman Institution, 2016).

In 2017, the Ombudsman Institution received 17,131 applications, with 13,312 submitted via the electronic application system. The most frequent complaint subjects were the public personnel regime (4,803), education-youth-sports (4,480) and labor and social security (1,953), while the least common subjects included food-agriculture-livestock (68), science-art-culture-tourism (56) and women's rights (26). Institutions receiving the highest number of complaints were the Ministry of National Education (2,665), the Social Security Institution (1,469) and local governments (1,424), whereas the Ministry of Youth and Sports (22), natural gas-related entities (19) and the Energy Market Regulatory Authority (15) received the fewest. Regionally, most applications originated from the Marmara, Central Anatolia and Eastern Anatolia regions, particularly Istanbul, Ankara and Şırnak. Of the total 18,808 files (including 1,677 carried over from 2016), 14,746 were resolved, comprising 4,629 referrals, 4,381 inadmissibility decisions, 2,861 consolidations, 245

recommendations, 353 rejections and 1,575 friendly settlements (Ombudsman Institution, 2017).

In 2018, the Ombudsman Institution received 17,585 applications, of which 13,489 were submitted via the electronic application system. The most frequent complaint subjects were the public personnel regime (4,705), labor and social security (4,319) and education-youth-sports (2,079), while the least common included family protection and science-art-culture-tourism (59 each) and women's rights (31). Institutions receiving the highest number of complaints were local governments (1,851), the Ministry of National Education (1,762) and universities (1,734), whereas ÖSYM (108) and the Union of Chambers of Certified Public Accountants (101) received the fewest. Regionally, most applications originated from Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. Of the total 21,647 files, including 4,062 carried over from 2017, 17,615 were resolved, comprising 4,812 referrals, 6,517 inadmissibility decisions, 2,043 consolidations, 677 recommendations, 662 rejections and 1,916 friendly settlements (Ombudsman Institution, 2018).

In 2019, the Ombudsman Institution received 20,968 applications, 15,555 of which were submitted electronically. The most frequent complaints concerned the public personnel regime (5,170), justice-national defense-security (3,250) and labor and social security (2,366), while women's rights (9), science-art-culture-tourism (65) and food-agriculture-livestock (76) were the least common. Local governments (2,278), the Ministry of Justice (2,223) and the Social Security Institution (1,808) were the most complained-about bodies. Of the 25,000 files processed, including 4,032 carried over from 2018, 21,170 were resolved, resulting in 8,112 referrals, 6,981 inadmissibility decisions, 860 recommendations, 893 rejections and 1,607 friendly settlements (Ombudsman Institution, 2019).

In 2020, the Ombudsman Institution received a record 90,209 applications, 86,129 of which were submitted electronically. The majority of complaints concerned economy-finance-tax issues (72,418), reflecting public concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by the public personnel regime (3,703) and justice-national defense-security (3,032). The least reported topics included women's rights (6), science-art-culture-tourism (63) and family protection (70). Banks and financial institutions (68,720), the Ministry of Justice (2,205) and local administrations (2,013) were the most complained-about bodies, while the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure (108), the Turkish Employment Agency (103) and judicial bodies (101) received the fewest complaints. Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir remained the cities with the highest

application numbers. Out of 94,039 files processed, including 3,830 carried over from 2019, 91,100 were concluded, resulting in 8,555 referrals, 9,254 inadmissibility decisions, 1,242 consolidations, 68,128 recommendations, 941 rejections and 1,808 friendly settlements (Ombudsman Institution, 2020).

In 2021, the Ombudsman Institution received 18,843 applications, 15,118 submitted electronically. Most complaints concerned the public personnel regime (4,419), justice-national defense-security (3,625) and education-youth-sports (2,064), while science-art-culture-tourism (67), family protection (16) and women's rights (12) were least reported. The Ministry of Justice (2,568), local administrations (2,457) and universities/faculties (1,701) received the most complaints, whereas the Turkish Employment Agency (58), the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (57) and TOKİ (56) received the fewest. The majority of applications came from Marmara, Central Anatolia and Aegean regions, especially Istanbul, Ankara and Manisa. Out of 21,782 total files, including 2,939 carried over from 2020, 19,740 were concluded, resulting in referrals (7,144), inadmissibility decisions (5,514), invalid applications (426), consolidations (1,488), no-decision rulings (280), recommendations (1,201), rejections (1,320), partial rejection/recommendation (403) and amicable settlements (1,928) (Ombudsman Institution, 2021).

In 2022, the Ombudsman Institution received 17,816 applications, 13,696 of which were submitted electronically. The most frequent complaints involved the public personnel regime (4,324), justice-national defense-security (3,663) and local government services (1,839), while complaints on science-art-culture-tourism (17), family protection (12) and women's rights (7) were least common. The Ministry of Justice (3,333), local administrations (2,378) and universities/faculties (1,185) were the most complained-about institutions. Most applications came from Marmara, Central Anatolia and Aegean regions, especially Istanbul, Ankara and Manisa. Of 19,858 total files, 18,094 were resolved, including referrals (6,708), inadmissibility decisions (5,975), consolidations (704), recommendations (1,097), rejections (1,017), partial rejection/recommendation (625) and amicable settlements (1,419) (Ombudsman Institution, 2022).

In 2023, the Ombudsman Institution received 19,317 applications, 16,022 of which were submitted electronically. The most frequent complaints were related to the public personnel regime (4,995), justice-national defense-security (3,398) and labor and social security (2,573). The least common topics were family protection (28), science-art-culture-tourism (19) and women's rights (16). The Ministry of Justice (2,777), local administrations (2,268)

and the Ministry of National Education (1,897) received the highest number of complaints, while TOKİ (60), the General Directorate of PTT (59) and the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK) (58) received the fewest. Most applications came from the Marmara, Central Anatolia and Aegean regions, particularly Istanbul, Ankara and Manisa. Out of 21,081 total files (including 1,764 carried over from 2022), 19,289 were resolved, including referrals (6,570), inadmissibility decisions (5,407), consolidations (2,494), recommendations (1,384), rejections (1,066), partial rejection/recommendation decisions (588), no-decision rulings (291), separations (36), invalid applications (67) and amicable settlements (1,386) (Ombudsman Institution, 2023).

Table 2: Annual Applications and Case Outcomes (2013–2023)

Year	Total Applications	E-Application	Most Frequent Topic	Least Frequent Topic	Most Complained Institution	Least Complained Institution	Cases Finalized
2013	7.638	4.356	Public Personnel Regime (2.186)	Family Protection (13)	Ministry of National Education (954)	Undersecretariat of Treasury (7)	6.097
2014	5.639	2.978	Public Personnel Regime (1.349)	Science-Art-Culture-Tourism (13)	Local Administrations (511)	Turkish Employment Agency (22)	6.348
2015	6.055	3.516	Public Personnel Regime (1.584)	Agriculture-Food-Livestock (14)	Presidency of State Personnel (685)	Presidency of Religious Affairs (22)	5.897
2016	5.519	3.631	Public Personnel Regime (1.759)	Science-Art-Culture-Tourism (15)	Local Administrations (558)	Turkish Employment Agency (4)	4.819
2017	17.131	13.312	Public Personnel Regime (4.803)	Women's Rights (26)	Ministry of National Education (2.665)	Energy Market Regulatory Authority (15)	14.746
2018	17.585	13.489	Public Personnel Regime (4.705)	Women's Rights (31)	Local Administrations (1.851)	Student Selection and Placement Center (108)	17.615
2019	20.968	15.555	Public Personnel Regime (5.170)	Women's Rights (9)	Local Administrations (2.278)	Agriculture-Food-Livestock (76)	21.170
2020	90.209	86.129	Economy-Finance-Tax (72.418)	Women's Rights (6)	Banks and Financial Institutions (68.720)	Judicial Bodies (101)	91.100
2021	18.843	15.118	Public Personnel Regime (4.419)	Women's Rights (12)	Ministry of Justice (2.568)	Housing Development Administration (56)	19.740
2022	17.816	13.696	Public Personnel Regime (4.324)	Women's Rights (7)	Ministry of Justice (3.333)	Turkish Employment Agency (59)	18.094
2023	19.317	16.022	Public Personnel Regime (4.995)	Women's Rights (16)	Ministry of Justice (2.777)	Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (58)	19.289

Between 2013 and 2023, applications to the Ombudsman Institution showed a clear upward trend. Starting at 7,638 in 2013, the number steadily increased to 22,975 in 2023, reflecting growing public awareness and accessibility. The number of resolved cases also rose, approaching the total number of applications by 2023, demonstrating improved institutional experience, personnel capacity and effective workload management. Judicial outcomes largely align with the institution's decisions, with few overturned rulings, indicating strong legal foundations and consistent administrative practice. Variations in accepted or rejected cases over the years reflect the nature of applications and evolving societal expectations. Overall, the ten-year data highlights significant institutional progress, confirming the Ombudsman's central role in promoting accountability and citizen redress.

The "2013–2023 Annual Case Decision Distribution" table shows that recommendation and friendly settlement decisions were most frequent, with 73,867 (32.9%) and 11,639 (5.2%) respectively. This underscores the institution's advisory and conciliatory roles in public administration. Conversely, a notable share of applications fell outside its mandate or had procedural deficiencies: 55,189 referrals (24.6%), 51,898 inadmissible cases (23.1%) and 1,636 invalid applications (0.7%). These figures indicate limited public awareness of the institution's scope and the importance of directing applications appropriately.

Rejection decisions (6,739–3.0%) and partial rejection/partial recommendation decisions (3,271–1.5%) demonstrate independent and objective evaluation, as cases are assessed on their merits. Decisions related to local governments were few (512–0.2%), suggesting citizens either address local issues directly or have limited awareness of local governance. Overall, between 2013 and 2023, the Ombudsman effectively classified and resolved applications, promoted transparency through recommendations and friendly settlements and guided cases outside its jurisdiction, reinforcing its critical role in strengthening accountability in Türkiye's public administration.

Table 3: 2013–2023 Annual Case Decision Distribution

Year	Referral	Not Admissible	Invalid	Consolidation	Separation	No Action	Referral to Local Administration	Recommendation	Rejection	Partial Rejection	Amicable Resolution
2013	2,155 (35.3%)	2,240 (36.7%)	329 (5.4%)	522 (8.6%)	-	307 (5.0%)	432 (7.1%)	64 (1.0%)	37 (0.6%)	11 (0.2%)	-
2014	2,323 (36.6%)	2,147 (33.8%)	80 (1.3%)	806 (12.7%)	-	643 (10.1%)	80 (1.3%)	93 (1.5%)	150 (2.4%)	26 (0.4%)	-
2015	2,205 (37.4%)	1,759 (29.8%)	42 (0.7%)	1,025 (17.4%)	-	675 (11.5%)	-	56 (0.9%)	109 (1.8%)	26 (0.4%)	-
2016	1,976 (41.0%)	1,723 (35.8%)	53 (1.1%)	354 (7.3%)	-	428 (8.9%)	-	62 (1.3%)	191 (4.0%)	32 (0.7%)	-
2017	4,629 (31.4%)	4,381 (29.7%)	-	2,861 (19.4%)	-	-	-	245 (1.7%)	353 (2.4%)	-	1,575 (10.7%)
2018	4,812 (27.3%)	6,517 (37.3%)	-	2,043 (11.7%)	-	-	-	677 (3.9%)	662 (3.8%)	-	1,916 (11.0%)
2019	8,112 (38.3%)	6,981 (32.9%)	-	-	-	-	-	860 (4.1%)	893 (4.2%)	-	1,607 (7.6%)
2020	8,555 (9.4%)	9,254 (10.1%)	-	1,242 (1.4%)	-	-	-	68,128 (74.8%)	941 (1.0%)	-	1,808 (2.0%)
2021	7,144 (36.2%)	5,514 (28.0%)	426 (2.2%)	1,488 (7.5%)	36 (0.2%)	280 (1.4%)	-	1,201 (6.1%)	1,320 (6.7%)	403 (2.0%)	1,928 (9.7%)
2022	6,708 (37.1%)	5,975 (33.0%)	73 (0.4%)	704 (3.9%)	23 (0.1%)	453 (2.5%)	-	1,097 (6.1%)	1,017 (5.6%)	625 (3.5%)	1,419 (7.8%)
2023	6,570 (34.1%)	5,407 (28.0%)	67 (0.3%)	2,494 (12.9%)	36 (0.2%)	291 (1.5%)	-	1,384 (7.2%)	1,066 (5.5%)	588 (3.1%)	1,386 (7.2%)

Between 2013 and 2023, Türkiye’s Ombudsman Institution received 226,720 applications. Regionally, Marmara, Central Anatolia and Aegean had the highest numbers, with Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir leading at the city level. Electronic applications were most common, reflecting citizens’ digital literacy. Frequently reported issues included public personnel, education, youth and sports, labor and social security, economy, finance, taxation, justice, national defense and local government services, while topics like women’s rights, family protection, culture, agriculture and refugee matters were least reported.

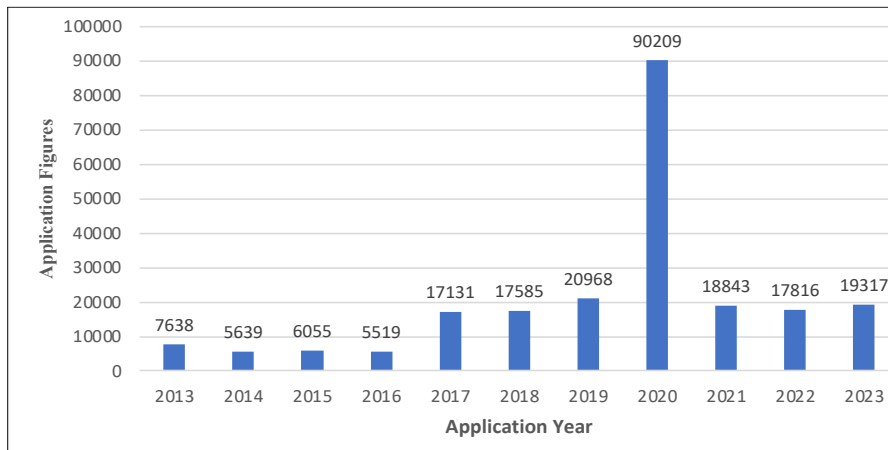
Complaints primarily involved the Ministry of National Education, local governments, the Ministry of Justice, universities, financial institutions, the Social Security Institution and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. Institutions with few complaints included PTT, İŞKUR, the Presidency of Religious Affairs, ÖSYM, TOKİ and certain ministries. Applications outside the Institution’s mandate were concluded with referral, inadmissibility, or invalidity decisions, while investigated cases led to recommendations, friendly

settlements, rejections, or partial decisions. By 2023, decisions had been issued in 224,536 cases. The distribution is as follows:

- 55.189 Referral Decisions
- 51.898 Inadmissibility Decisions
- 1.636 Invalid Applications
- 15.225 Consolidation Decisions
- 142 Separation Decisions
- 4.418 No Grounds for Decision
- 512 Decisions Related to Local Governments
- 6.739 Rejection Decisions
- 73.867 Recommendation Decisions
- 3.271 Partial Rejection and Partial Recommendation Decisions
- 11.639 Friendly Settlement Decisions

As of the end of 2023, the review of 1.792 applications was carried over to 2024 for further examination.

Figure 1: Annual Distribution of Application Files Submitted to the Ombudsman Institution between 2013 and 2023

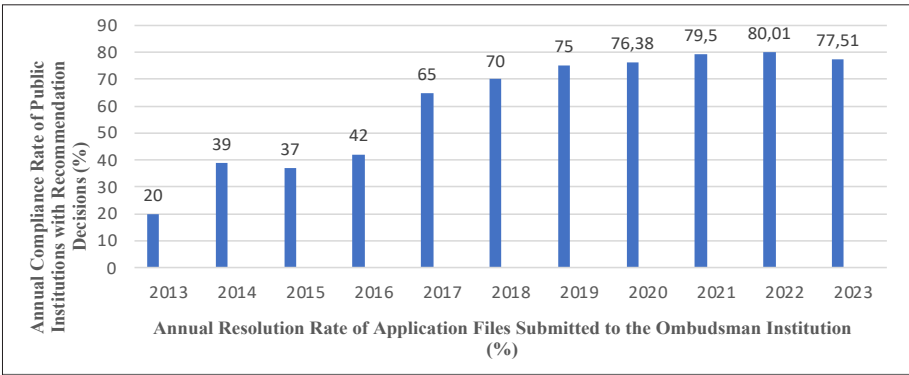


Source: The Ombudsman Institution of Türkiye, 2023.

When the applications submitted to the Ombudsman Institution between 2013 and 2023 are examined, it is observed that the number of applications in 2013 was higher than in any year up until 2017. In 2017, the number of applications increased by more than 300% compared to the previous year

and this upward trend continued in 2018 and 2019. However, the most significant increase occurred in 2020, with the number of applications rising by more than 400% compared to 2019. The reason behind the over 300% increase in applications in 2017 can be attributed to the Institution’s declaration of 2017 as the “Year of Effective Awareness,” during which it carried out extensive public information and outreach activities. The sharp rise in 2020, with an increase of over 400%, can be primarily linked to the surge in complaints in the fields of economy, finance and taxation—particularly due to applications concerning basic support loan requests during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, the number of applications in 2021 dropped by over 450% compared to 2020. Although there was a slight decline in the number of applications in 2022 as well, 2023 saw an increase of over 5%, exceeding nineteen thousand applications.

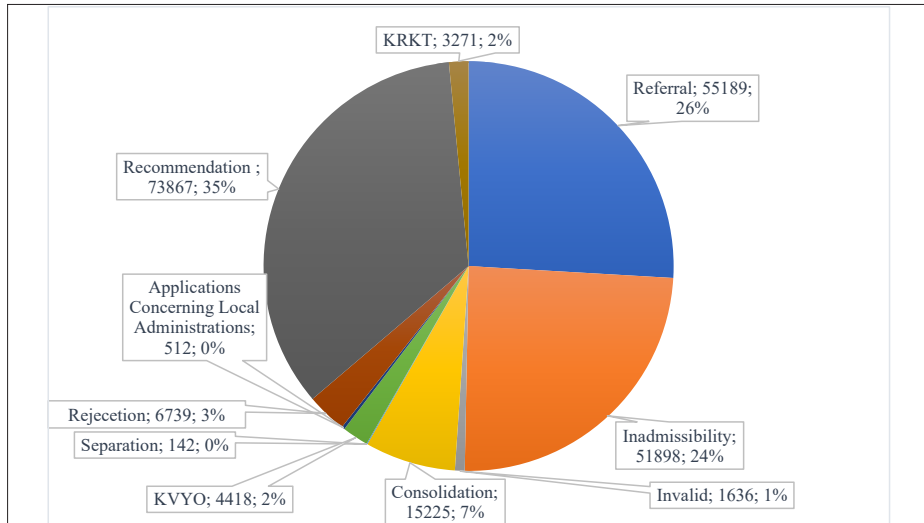
Figure 2: Public Administrations’ Compliance with the Ombudsman’s Recommendations, 2013–2023



Source: The Ombudsman Institution of Türkiye, 2023.

Based on the data provided, it can be stated that, with the exception of a few years, there has generally been an upward trend in the compliance of public administrations with the Ombudsman Institution’s recommendation decisions. While the compliance rate was around 20% in 2013, it rose to 77.51% by 2023. Overall, it can be said that the compliance rate with the Institution’s recommendations remained above 50% throughout the 2013–2023 period.

Figure 3: Distribution of Decision Types Issued by the Ombudsman Institution (2013–2023 Total)



Source: The Ombudsman Institution of Türkiye, 2023.

The analysis of decision types issued by the Ombudsman Institution between 2013 and 2023 shows that recommendation decisions were the most common, accounting for 35% of all decisions. These were followed by referral decisions (26%) and inadmissibility decisions (24%), which together made up about 85% of the total. Less frequently issued decisions included invalid applications, separation and referrals to local administrations, each under 1%. Rejection decisions accounted for 3%, “no ground for decision” rulings for 2%, partial rejection and partial recommendation decisions for 2% and consolidation decisions for approximately 7%.

The high proportion of inadmissible and referral decisions suggests that many applications fall outside the Institution’s mandate, requiring time and effort to transfer such files to the appropriate bodies. Despite this, the high rate of recommendation decisions indicates the Institution’s active role in resolving citizen complaints. Another important finding is the increasing compliance of public institutions with recommendation decisions. While the compliance rate was around 20% in 2013, it exceeded 80% by 2022 and was 77.51% in 2023. Given that these recommendations are not legally binding, the high compliance rate reflects the Institution’s growing influence and institutional credibility.

Overall, the Ombudsman Institution has proven to be an effective oversight mechanism that operates through individual complaints. Its decisions are increasingly respected by public bodies and its work contributes to promoting accountability, accessibility and transparency in public administration.

Conclusion

The state, as the largest institutional structure in political and administrative life, has undergone significant transformations over time. Alongside these changes, individuals' evolving expectations have expanded and diversified the areas in which the state operates. This growth has necessitated specialized personnel in public administration, increasing their political, administrative and social influence. As bureaucracy gained power, the importance of oversight mechanisms also grew, leading to their diversification.

Parallel to changes in public administration, oversight mechanisms have been renewed to ensure flexibility, transparency, participation, performance and accountability. Traditional oversight, including administrative, political, judicial, pressure group and public oversight, has often proved insufficient, creating a space for the Ombudsman mechanism. Globally recognized for its effectiveness, the Ombudsman is preferred in Türkiye due to its accessibility, low cost and practical nature.

Established as a constitutional body through the 2010 amendment and operationalized by the 2012 law, the Turkish Ombudsman Institution allows individuals to file complaints and seek justice against a specialized administration. While its name varies internationally, the mechanism investigates complaints, maladministration and rights violations, reporting findings to parliament and relevant parties. Unlike other oversight forms, it mediates within administrative operations, proposes practical solutions, protects individuals against administrative power, fills oversight gaps and delivers rapid, independent and impartial decisions.

Effective functioning requires the Ombudsman to operate within defined areas, request legislative amendments through TBMM, access necessary administrative information and serve terms longer than parliament. It must maintain legally sound, respectful relations with the administration, manage media appropriately and avoid actions that could victimize complainants. Its decisions, often involving recommendations, affect wide social and economic audiences. By identifying errors, deficiencies and irregularities in administrative practices, the Institution improves governance quality, strengthens

state-citizen relations and provides guidance while respecting judicial independence by refraining from investigating matters under court review.

The Ombudsman Institution in Türkiye responds to complaints filed by individuals rather than acting *ex officio*. It investigates issues while preserving complainants' privacy, proposes solutions and shares findings with relevant authorities and the public. Although it lacks enforcement power, the Institution provides oversight by offering administrative solutions, mediating between the administration and citizens, helping individuals assert their rights and contributing to the development of improved management models in public administration.

The Institution has become a respected mechanism for redress, with a high proportion of recommendation decisions and increasing compliance by public authorities reflecting its credibility and effectiveness. By addressing maladministration, the Ombudsman protects individual rights, promotes democratic accountability, reduces the workload of courts and other oversight bodies and encourages public participation. The widespread use of electronic applications demonstrates improved access to digital services and rising digital literacy.

Looking forward, the Institution's impact could be enhanced by clearly defining its authority, potentially introducing limited sanctioning powers and strengthening independence and impartiality. Sanctioning would ensure injustices identified through applications are remedied, prevent administrative arbitrariness and reinforce a culture of oversight. These improvements would further protect fundamental rights and build public trust.

Between 2013 and 2023, the Ombudsman received 226,720 applications through multiple channels, with electronic submissions dominating. Application volumes grew steadily, peaking in 2020 at 90,209, reflecting concerns over the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regionally, Marmara, Central Anatolia and Aegean recorded the most applications, with Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir leading at the city level. Frequently reported issues included public personnel, education-youth-sports, labor and social security and justice-national defense-security, while women's rights, family protection, culture-tourism and agriculture-livestock received fewer complaints. This distribution highlights public perception of pressing administrative challenges and areas where oversight is most needed, confirming the Ombudsman's critical role in promoting transparency, accountability and efficiency in Türkiye's public administration.

Between 2013 and 2023, the Ombudsman Institution in Türkiye received the highest number of complaints against the Ministry of National Education, local governments, the Ministry of Justice, universities and the Social Security Institution, while institutions such as PTT, İŞKUR, TOKİ and certain ministries (e.g., Energy and Natural Resources, Youth and Sports) received fewer complaints. This distribution highlights the Institution's focus on areas with frequent or contentious citizen-administration interactions.

Applications are first evaluated for admissibility, with non-jurisdictional cases resulting in referral, inadmissibility, or invalidity decisions. Investigated cases lead to recommendations, friendly settlements, rejections, or partial decisions. From 2013 to 2023, the Institution issued 224,536 decisions, including 73,867 recommendations, 11,639 friendly settlements, 55,189 referrals and 51,898 inadmissibility rulings. The predominance of recommendations and settlements, despite being non-binding, demonstrates the Institution's influence as a corrective and guiding authority, encouraging administrative compliance and reform.

Beyond complaint resolution, the Ombudsman mediates between citizens and administrative bodies, strengthens democratic accountability, promotes transparency and supports rights-based governance. By identifying systemic deficiencies and proposing legislative or procedural remedies, it fosters responsive public administration, reduces the judiciary's workload and enhances citizen trust. Its model emphasizes preventive, participatory and solution-oriented oversight through recommendations, mediation and amicable settlements.

In conclusion, between 2013 and 2023, the Ombudsman Institution has become a central and respected mechanism in Türkiye, enhancing administrative quality, protecting individual rights and promoting democratic accountability. Strengthening its authority, independence and potential sanctioning powers could further increase its effectiveness and public trust.

Ethics Statement: In this study, no method requiring the permission of the "Ethics Committee" was used.

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