



TURKEY

BACKGROUND

Over the past 15 years, Turkey has experienced rapid improvement across a number of economic indicators. Extreme poverty fell by approximately two thirds to 4.5 percent between 2002 and 2012, per capita incomes increased by 300 percent over the same period, and, in 2014, GDP per capita exceeded US\$10,000.¹ This level of GDP per capita gave Turkey an estimated GDP of just under US\$800 billion that year, making it the 18th largest economy in the world.²

In 2015, Turkey continued to be impacted by the war in Syria and accompanying refugee and mi-

grant crisis. Turkey has invested heavily in providing humanitarian support to Syrians and others fleeing violence, with more than 2.7 million refugees now registered.³ However, large numbers of refugees are also leaving the country for the EU, occasionally with tragic consequences. In response to the loss of life and the large numbers of asylum seekers entering Europe, the EU and Turkey entered negotiations in November 2015, reaching an agreement for Turkey to help stem the flow of people to Europe in return for funding for the response to the refugee and migrant crisis, visa-free travel for Turkish citizens, and renewed talks on joining the EU.

¹ The World Bank, "Turkey Overview". Available from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview> (accessed 10 June 2016)

² The World Bank, "Gross domestic product 2014". Available from <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2016)

³ UNHCR, "Syria Regional Refugee Response". Available from <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> (accessed 9 June 2016)

Domestic tensions also increased in 2015. The peace process with the armed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was suspended in July, resulting in a number of violent incidents, predominantly in the southeast of the country. This breakdown came in the aftermath of the first of two general elections held in 2015. The first election resulted in a hung Parliament, leading to a second election being called in November, with the AKP returning to power.

Despite the political situation, Turkey has continued to push for reforms in key areas. The challenging reforms required for EU alignment, particularly those aimed at strengthening rule of law, fostering human rights and democracy, are further complicated by increasingly polarized political and social settings. Recent developments, many of which were addressed in the Outcome Document of the 2015 UPR, have also led to concerns over the adequacy of checks and balances, the independence of institutions such as the judiciary, protections of freedom of speech, privacy, and restrictive censorship.

ASSISTANCE AND IMPACT

One of UNDP's major initiatives in 2015 has been working with the Ombudsman Institution. This includes supporting the drafting of the first strategic plan for the Ombudsman Institution. Drafted in a consultative process involving a range of actors, including government institutions, the judiciary and human rights focused civil society organizations, the strategic plan addresses the needs of the national human rights architecture, and incorporates international best practices. Many of the recommendations provided by UNDP were reflected in the draft, including a proposal for a specific target for the handling of gender-based complaints. A capacity assessment of the Ombudsman Institution was also conducted, contributing to the Strategic Plan development process and was communicated to the Prime Minister's office. The draft strategic plan is currently being reviewed by the Ombudsman Institution and the Ministry of Development. The UNDP and the Ombudsman Institution's joint project is considered an important step forward on the eve of the establishment of new institutions that will focus on anti-discrimination and equal-

ity, as well as independent oversight for law enforcement. The knowledge and experience gained during this process also resulted in long-term cooperation agreements being signed between the Turkish Ombudsman Institution and five similar institutions in Europe

To further improve the existing public administration, UNDP remains a strong advocate for the use of technology in expanding the effectiveness and efficiency of government services. As part of a wider effort to support e-governance, UNDP supported the enhancement and expansion of the e-visa system, with the number of users reported to have increased significantly to over 6 million. The e-consulate system, which was also developed with the support of UNDP, has also shown significant improvements, and improved the speed of services even as demand has increased.

UNDP also invested considerable resources into promoting the human rights of disadvantaged groups. Under a grant program aimed at empowering women, 20 projects involving 8,646 people across 11 provinces enhanced the ability of civil society to support the effective implementation of gender-related policies at the local level. Building the capacity of local NGOs and universities enabled the establishment of independent monitoring mechanisms for gender-related policies, and improving communication and cooperation between different organizations and communities. Efforts to push for gender-sensitive policymaking and anti-corruption were also implemented at the local level, where grassroots women groups were enabled to provide feedback on the integrity plans of their local municipalities.



Local activists embrace the '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence' campaign

Photo by: UNDP Turkey

Given the impact of the conflict in Syria and the large numbers of refugees being hosted, providing assistance with this challenge is a UNDP priority. UNDP's support was expanded in 2015, with three new partnerships that will increase the technical and physical capacities of the local municipalities hosting refugees. This included urban waste management; socio-economic empowerment of women; vocational training services; and skills development programmes. In addition, in late 2015, a large-scale project was launched to support legal aid services targeting disadvantaged groups such as women, children and Syrian refugees. The project aims to design and implement specific legal aid approaches based on the gender, age and location of applicants. In order to enable this effective targeting, the project started with a detailed assessment of the legal needs of Syrians in five provinces in southern Turkey. The results of the assessment will contribute to the improvement of the system through capacity development and awareness raising programs, as well as possible legislative changes.

UNDP Administrator
Helen Clark speaks
with Syrian refugees
in Turkey



Photo by: Ariel Rubin/UNDP

As a result of the migration crisis and visa liberalisation discussions with the EU, border governance and management has been a focus. In addition to the launch of a demining programme in the eastern border regions, UNDP is supporting the establishment of effective, legitimate and sustainable institutions in the justice and security sectors, border control and the coast guard. UNDP's approach also focuses on building the capacities of its partners to prevent and manage crises, while building awareness that the borders in question represent one of the greatest security and developmental challenges for the wider region. Overall, the current migration crisis on Europe's southern and eastern flank is a terrible reminder of the need

to work collaboratively to build the resilience of communities and institutions, including integrated border management capacities.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND THE WAY FORWARD

The political environment in Turkey is expected to remain turbulent going forward. Violence as a result of the suspension of peace talks with the PKK appears likely to continue, along with attacks from extremist groups such as ISIS. It is also expected that the debate over moving to an executive presidential system will continue. The political, social and economic environment is therefore expected to make the implementation of needed institutional reforms challenging.

This is also expected to be true of human rights protections where additional measures are needed, particularly to address discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation. Although the legislation for a National Human Rights and Equality Institution is drafted, there are concerns about its compliance with international standards, especially with regard to its structural independence.

UNDP has several strategic priorities, including continued support for reforming and strengthening institutions. With the strategic plan of the Ombudsman Institution expected to be officially adopted, UNDP plans to support the implementation of the plan and provide ongoing expert advice. Similarly, UNDP will support a new initiative for the adoption of a code of ethics and increasing transparency in the functioning of the Court of Cassation. Furthermore, UNDP plans to facilitate the incorporation of the SDGs into national targets and the Government's reform agenda, with technology and entrepreneurship expected to play an important role. This includes a planned follow-up project to integrate a number of the e-services established in recent years, including e-notary.

Improving local governance systems and effective public service delivery will remain a priority, with plans to introduce a new generation Local Administration Reform Programme and pilot initiatives on local integrity systems. For UNDP, ensuring local service delivery meets the needs of disadvantaged groups will be key in developing and implementing initiatives in cooperation with local authorities. Gender equality and women's rights will also be a focus, and plans are in place

to continue working with local governments and civil society to ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of gender related policies, as well as improving the coordination and cooperation between different groups with aligned interests.

With the Syrian conflict continuing, UNDP plans to continue supporting initiatives to assist Syrian refugees and the communities that are hosting them. This will include scaling-up and replicating previous work to improve livelihoods, local economic development and capacity development, and new interventions targeting the design of active labour market programmes. The large-scale project started in 2015 to provide legal aid services for disadvantaged groups such as women, children and Syrian refugees will also continue to collect and utilize information on these populations to effectively target legal aid services.

With increased migration flux, border governance and management also continue to be a high priority. Work will continue to improve integrated border management capacities to address the increased risk of ISIS operatives and other extremists seeking to cross the border and launch attacks in Turkey and Europe. This makes effective border management a high priority, not just for UNDP and Turkey, but for the wider region. Finally, in more recent events, the failed coup on 15

July 2016 represents both a victory and a new trial for Turkish democracy, and also reveals the current level of political polarization. This political polarization, in combination with the opportunity to prosecute political rivals, has given UNDP's inclusive and democratic governance interventions a new level of importance. In particular, UNDP will refocus its efforts on supporting the establishment and/or improvement of independent and accountable mechanisms that protect and foster human rights and the rule of law. To this end, the restructuring process underway in the Turkish public administration system provides a new opportunity for UNDP to ensure that changes are adopted and implemented in line with international norms and standards, with one example being the improvement of civilian oversight of internal security sector under the new structure of gendarmerie and police in Ministry of Interior. UNDP's role in this new environment will be critical in settling the relations between the responsible institutions and developing the accountability of security forces in order to prevent casualties in the current challenging environment.



Key results

Strategic plan drafted for the Ombudsman Institution through a consultative process

8,646 men and women directly benefitted from civil society's active role in implementation of gender related policies

Initiated programme to provide legal aid services to disadvantaged groups in southern Turkey, including Syrian refugees

Launch of large demining programme in eastern border regions