



# TURKMENISTAN

## BACKGROUND

Following independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the economy of Turkmenistan has developed significantly, outperforming its Central Asian neighbours. With a GDP per capita of US\$6,947.80 in 2015,<sup>1</sup> Turkmenistan is now considered an upper-middle income country. Much of this economic growth is due to large reserves of oil and gas, including the world's fourth largest natural gas reserves. This has enabled the Government to invest significantly in nation-building and renovating its cities, particularly the capital Ashgabat. However, with the fall of commodity prices in 2015 and 2016,

a lack of economic diversification is expected to lead to a significant slowdown. To some extent this can already be seen in the country's GDP growth, which fell to 6.5 percent in 2015, significantly down on the greater than 10 percent growth rates seen between 2011 and 2014.<sup>2</sup> To counter the problem, the Government is prioritising economic diversification, announcing a plan to increase revenues from non-hydrocarbon sources to 70 percent by 2030.

A participant in international human rights mechanisms, Turkmenistan is only now looking to establish a NHRI in accordance with the Paris Prin-

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<sup>1</sup> The World Bank, "Turkmenistan GDP per Capita (current US\$)": Available from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAPCD?locations=TM> (accessed 14 July 2016)

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank, "Turkmenistan". Available from <http://data.worldbank.org/country/turkmenistan> (accessed 6 October 2016)

ciples, with the Law on Ombudsman adopted in late 2016. All issues pertaining to the obligations of Turkmenistan under the UN treaty bodies are coordinated by the National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan. As the result of the constitutional review process, in 2016 Turkmenistan adopted a new Constitution that was widely commented on by the UN, OSCE and other international partners.

In December 2015, Turkmenistan celebrated the 20th anniversary of its UN-recognized status of positive neutrality. This policy has provided Turkmenistan with stability in foreign policy, but in the early 2000s also contributed to international isolation. In recent years, Turkmenistan has increased engagement with the international community, as is reflected by its election to a number of international boards and committees. In addition, for the first time in 12 years, Turkmenistan sent a delegation to the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the OSCE in 2015. Turkmenistan has also taken steps towards a climate-friendly future, with the Government declaring an intention to approve an action plan to move toward a green economy.

## ASSISTANCE AND IMPACT

UNDP continues to advocate for improvements in human rights and the freedom of expression in Turkmenistan. On this front, 2015 was a milestone year with reports to three human rights treaty bodies, and the finalization a National Human Rights Action Plan for 2016–2020 based on the recommendations of the 2013 UPR and other treaty bodies. UNDP also provided technical support to the Parliament and the National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights (NIDHR) on the development of legislation for an Ombudsman Institution, and the establishment of an Institute of the Ombudsman as the NHRI. For the benefit of NIDHR and the Parliament, UNDP also worked jointly with OHCHR and the EU to present the best practices for the Institute of the Ombudsman to forty members of the working group, and provided suggestions for what model could best function in Turkmenistan. In efforts to improve the quality of governance, as well as decentralize



University students debate sustainable development, human rights and strengthening rule of law at the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual UN Debate Cup in Ashgabat

Photo by: UNDP Turkmenistan

*“The quality of the national reports of Turkmenistan has significantly improved in recent years. This is due to the combined efforts of the Inter-agency commission on implementation of international obligations in the field of human rights and humanitarian law and the reforms implemented in the Turkmenistan and support of UNDP Turkmenistan Office.”*

– **Ms. Shemshat Atajanova**, Head of the democracy and human rights department of the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan

decision-making, UNDP assisted the Parliament to conduct a review of the administrative, legal, and financial systems of local governments in order to develop a list of proposals for improvement. The resulting recommendations focused on providing more independence to local communities and their representative bodies, strengthening their ability to participate in the formation of local plans for socio-economic development, and giving them the ability to approve and monitor public spending at the local level. The proposals

were received by the Parliament and will serve as a basis for a planned revision of the local governance system. Furthermore, UNDP supported the Government in preparing a road map for the development of the Civil Service Academy, a project that will be co-funded by the Government as part of the 2016-2020 programme.

UNDP has also been working to address the under-representation of women in politics and leadership

Study visit by the Parliament to the Republic of Tatarstan of the Russian Federation to promote direct exchange of experience in the fields of legislation, local self-governance, and IT technologies



Photo by: UNDP Turkmenistan

positions. To this end, UNDP helped to facilitate the active participation of the chairwoman of the Assembly of Turkmenistan, Akja Nurberdiýewa, at several international events, including the 10th Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliaments and the 4th World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.

Finally, assisting the Government with the constitutional review, UNDP engaged international experts to provide information and guidance on the best practices of constitutional democracies. The resulting draft Constitution was published for public discussion in the national newspaper. UNDP is providing an extensive review and recommendations on the new draft of the Constitution, which was adopted in 2016.

## CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND THE WAY FORWARD

The immediate challenge facing Turkmenistan is the economic impact of the fall in commodity prices. With declining tax revenues and a likely increase in unemployment, efforts will be needed to ensure vulnerable groups are not left behind and that important reforms continue to be implemented. As such, UNDP will continue working with the Government to further initia-

tives started in 2015, such as the establishment and strengthening of the Civil Service Academy, the creation of an Ombudsman Institution, and the implementation of the Human Rights Action Plan.

UNDP will also work with the Government to strengthen its employment and labour policies, improve training for public servants, and develop the Government's capacities to deliver services to the population in a modern, effective, and transparent way. At the same time, UNDP plans to continue providing the Government with assistance to empower people with disabilities, focusing both on policy development and creating national mechanisms that promote the social integration of this section of the population.

UNDP will also continue to support the Turkmen authorities to engage with the international community. Particular importance will be placed on encouraging cooperation and coordination with neighbouring governments in Central Asia to solve regional challenges, and on drawing lessons from successful examples of programmes and reforms in those countries.

Lastly, UNDP will continue working with the Government to incorporate the SDGs, which were approved by the Government of Turkmenistan in September 2016, into the broader vision of national development – particularly SDG 16. One high priority in this area will be supporting the integration of SDGs into the new President's socio-economic development plan for 2017-2021. Overall, UNDP will continue advocating for a more open society which, evidence suggests, will encourage an innovative and entrepreneurial culture that could provide large benefits to the Turkmen people and their economy.

## Key results



*Human rights action plan developed based on the recommendations from the 2013 UPR and approved by the Presidential Decree in January 2016*

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*Completed a review of administrative, legal, and financial systems of the local governance in order to develop a list of proposals for improvement*

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*Provided expertise and guidance on the drafting of a new Constitution*

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