

TURKMENISTAN

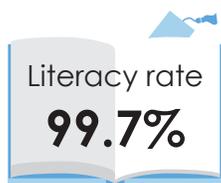
Turkmenistan is a country in Central Asia bordered by the Caspian Sea and largely covered by the Karakum Desert. It shares borders with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. It is known for archaeological ruins that were once major stops along the ancient Silk Road trade route. Ashgabat, the capital, was rebuilt in the Soviet style in the mid-20th century and is filled with grand monuments honoring former political leaders. Turkmenistan has been at the crossroads of civilizations for centuries. Known for its large gas reserves, Turkmenistan also has a reputation as an island of stability in restive Central Asia. Despite its gas wealth, much of Turkmenistan's population is still impoverished. After independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the country entered a period of isolation that has only recently begun to end. Turkmenistan produces roughly 70 billion cubic meters of natural gas each year and about two-thirds of its exports go to Russia's gas monopoly. The government has sought out gas deals with several other countries, including China and neighboring Iran, to reduce its dependency on Russia. The official language is Turkmen, with Russian widely-spoken, and the currency is the manat.



Population
5,411,012



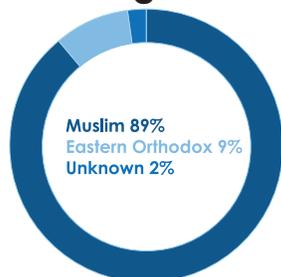
187,684 MI²
Slightly larger than
California



Ethnicities



Religions



FAMILY LIFE

Turkmen families generally consist of parents, children, and grandparents. The average number of children is 2-3, and more in rural areas. In cities, both parents usually work and are financially responsible for the family, while in rural areas, families generally have a single income provided by the father. Usually the father is seen as the head of the family and decision-maker. Families usually eat meals together.

It is common for siblings to share clothing, shoes, and electronics, and they do not always ask for permission. Parents give teenagers spending money, since teenagers usually do not work. Teenagers often interact informally with family members and are responsible for focusing on their studies and managing their own free time. Personal space is not a common concept, especially within the family.

Some families assign duties to individual members of the family. Men usually do not do family chores, and, while members of the family have time to spend on personal interests, free time for women is limited since they are expected to be busy with housework. Cooking is mainly done by the females of the family. Punctuality is respected in Turkmenistan, but being a few minutes late is common in informal situations.

Parents usually limit their children's use of the internet. Some parents are actively involved in supporting or helping to arrange their children's extracurricular activities, and most parents are in contact with their children's school and are kept aware of their academic progress. Generally teenagers are not very independent and rely on their parents in most aspects of life. They usually share their plans with their parents and take their parents' opinion into account when making decisions.

It is uncommon to have pets, and they would usually not be allowed in the home.

FRIENDSHIP

Many teenagers have peer groups and friends and use social media to interact with each other. Teens from cities tend to be open to mixed gender socializing, while teenagers from rural areas are more segregated. Turkmen teenagers interact with their friends at school, in the neighborhood, or through common activities. While they may have many friends, they spend most of their time with one or two close friends. They may share or borrow from each other, but paying back borrowed money is expected.

Eye contact is important when socializing and talking to others, but in some traditional families, teenagers do not make direct eye-contact with adults as a sign of respect. It is common for Turkmen teenagers to show negative emotions to their peers, but not to display them to others. Older people are highly respected and children are taught to listen to and obey them.

SCHOOL LIFE

Students take 15 to 17 subjects at a time which do not meet every day and they study the same subjects as a group. Students are evaluated on homework, special assignments, and periodic exams. To maintain good grades, students must turn in daily homework, participate verbally in class, and perform well on exams. Most Turkmen students are required to wear a school uniform. Cheating is not allowed but is a common practice where students try to help each other. Fighting and bullying are also prohibited at schools, and can result in warnings and parent notification.

Parents have parent-teacher meetings to discuss their child's progress once every 2-3 months. If any misbehavior or absence occurs, schools contact the parents directly.

Turkmen students study with the same students in all lessons and do not change classrooms. Subjects are not offered at varied levels of difficulty and students are not able to choose which courses they take. Students are expected to show respect to their teachers and usually have a formal relationship with them. They must raise their hand to make or argue their points.

Opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities are not commonly offered by schools. Students may have private music, sport or other activities through clubs or other organizations in the community for a fee.

FOOD

Most people in Turkmenistan are Muslim and follow a halal diet. Families typically eat traditional foods and do not try new dishes. Vegetarianism and other special diets are very uncommon.

RELIGION

The population is predominantly Muslim and the practice of religion is an individual or family event, and is solely for worship rather than for a sense of community.

PERSONAL CARE

Teenagers may shower once or more a day, especially in the summer. Teenagers often change their clothes daily and it is acceptable to wear the same clothes two or more days before washing. Students are not used to washing their own clothes and are unfamiliar with washers and dryers. Bathrooms are shared by all family members, and teenagers are expected to keep the bathrooms clean after use. Each family member has their own towel that is usually replaced every other day.



The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. FLEX provides competitively selected secondary school students from 21 countries in Europe and Eurasia with the opportunity to spend the academic year in the U.S. living with a volunteer host family and attending a host high school. Begun in 1993, FLEX now has over 27,000 alumni.