

TURKMENISTAN

In Turkmenistan there are 42 distinct people groups. Following are two of the groups.

Azerbaijani, North



Although the origin of the Azerbaijani (also known as the Azeri) is unclear, the region and the people have been the focus of numerous invasions throughout their history. The homeland of the Azeri was conquered first by the Persians in the sixth century B.C. However, by the eleventh century A.D., Persian influence over the area was overpowered by Turkic influence. During the thirteenth century, the region fell under the dominion of Genghis Khan.

Most of the Azeri are Muslims. Arab Muslims first introduced Islam to the region during the seventh century A.D.; and it has been practiced there ever since.

In 1979, a significant number of Azeri formed emigrant colonies in the Central Asian nations. The Azeri colony in Turkmenistan consists almost entirely of urban oil specialists. In other Central Asian nations, the communities are divided between rural farmers and city dwellers who are mainly technicians and engineers.

What are their lives like?

In the past, the clan-type family structure was common among the Azeri. The clan, or *hoj*, was usually named after a common ancestor. Clan members shared pasture land and were bound to provide mutual aid to each other. They frequently acted as a unified entity in business dealings. It was also common for up to forty members of an extended family to live together in large dwellings called *gazma*.

The development of petroleum resources in the region has changed the living conditions of many Azeri. While some still farm the rich soils, many have moved into the cities and towns to work in industry. There they find themselves occupying the lower skilled jobs and taking direction from "foreign" managers.

In a desire to protect their culture, marriage within the family was encouraged. Unions between first cousins were considered the most desirable. Marriage to a non-Azeri was almost unheard of prior to the Soviet period. Polygyny (having more than one wife) was only allowed in cases of infertility.

The Azeri diet consists mainly of rice pilaf and a variety of grilled and boiled meats including beef, goat, and lamb. Traditional dishes include bozartma (mutton stew), dovga (a soup made from yogurt), meat, and herbs. Tea and wine are popular drinks.

The Azeri language belongs to the southwestern (Oguz) branch of the Turkic language family. There are two main subgroups of Azeri: Azerbaijani North and Azerbaijani South. The main differences are in the sounds and basic grammatical structure of the languages. Azeri has a written tradition that dates back to the fourteenth century. Arabic script is used in Iran and the Cyrillic alphabet is used in Azerbaijan. Azeri serves as the somewhat hybrid, yet common, language of eastern Transcaucasus, southern Dagestan, and northwestern Iran.

What are their beliefs?

Turkmenistan's Azeri are primarily Muslims of the Shi'ite tradition, but there are many Hanafite Muslims as well. Azeri shi'ism is a reflection of the historical ties that exist between Azerbaijan and Iran. Until the twentieth century, most Azeri identified themselves as Muslims rather than Azerbaijani or Turks. They believe that being a "spiritual community of Islam" was much more important than being a nation.

Among the Azeri, religious practices are less restrictive of women's activities than in most of the other Muslim countries. The majority of Azeri women have jobs outside the home, and a few have attained leadership positions. However, some evidence of the traditional, restrictive female role remains.

What are their needs?

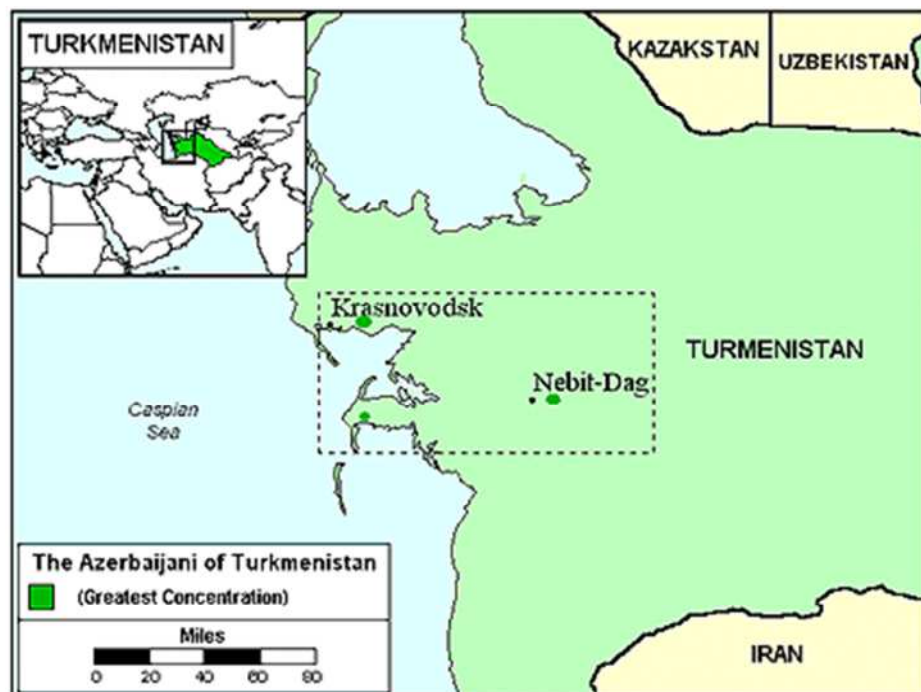
The Azeri living in Turkmenistan are very resistant to the Gospel. Progress has been slow. The New Testament and the Jesus film are available in Azeri. Christian broadcasts and literature are needed to help reach them with the Gospel.

Prayer Points

- * Pray that the doors of Turkmenistan will soon open to missionaries.

- * Ask the Lord to call people who are willing to go to Turkmenistan and share Christ with the Azeri.

- * Pray that prayer teams will be called to go and to break up the soil through worship and intercession.
- * Ask God to reveal Himself to these Muslims through dreams and visions.
- * Pray that God will open doors for Christian businessmen to share Christ with the Azeri.
- * Ask the Holy Spirit to soften their hearts towards Christians so that they will be receptive to the Gospel.
- * Pray for God to give favor and strategies to the missions agencies that are focusing on the Azeri.
- * Ask the Lord to raise strong local churches among the Azeri.



Country: Turkmenistan

Continent: Asia

Region: Central Asia

Persecution Rank: 15 (Only top 50 ranked, 1 = highest persecution ranking)

10/40 Window: Yes

People Name in Country: Azerbaijani, North

Population in this Country: 53,000

Affinity Bloc: Turkic Peoples

People Cluster: Azerbaijani

Primary Language: Azerbaijani, North (53,000 Speakers)

Primary Dialect: Zaqatala

Primary Religion: Islam

Religion Sub-division: Shia

% Christian Adherents: Data not available

% Evangelical: 0.00 %

Turkmen, Trukhmeny



The majority of Turkmen live in Turkmenistan, which is located in south Central Asia along the Caspian Sea. Many others live in the surrounding Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Iran, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan. Their culture has been strongly influenced in the past by both the Turkic conquerors, who imposed their language on them, and the Arabs, who forced them to convert to Islam. Long ago, they developed a strong ethnic identity as "children of the desert" because they would plunder rich caravans of Persian traders.

In the 17th century, the Turkmen, or Trukhmens as they were called in Russia, migrated into the Caucasus. Turkmen use Russian as their literary language.

What are their lives like?

For centuries the Turkmen lived as nomadic herdsmen. Their society was characterized by a distinct economic division between the cattlemen and farmers. This division was present in almost every tribe, settlement, and family. However, the past seventy years of Soviet rule has virtually eliminated their nomadic life-style. The socialization of farmland has changed their traditional settlement patterns, and movement into the cities has naturally weakened their customs and traditions.

Tribal loyalties continue to have a strong influence over the people. The largest descent group is the tribe, then the clan, then the family. Members of a tribe are bound by a strong sense of family loyalty. Tribal loyalty is reinforced by the fact that the Turkmen will only marry within their tribes. Arranged marriages are common, and families often intermarry to preserve wealth. Although there have been political and economic changes through the years, less changes have occurred in the areas of family life and religion.

The Turkmen are especially known for their brisk trade in the bazaars, where many samples of their handicrafts can be found. Some of these include metal and wooden household utensils, tools, and furniture. Many have also supplemented their income by producing intricately designed carpets. Oil and gas production are the major sources of wealth.

The Turkmen are generally tall and thin. They are physically strong and easily able to endure the harshness of the environment. They are characterized by their hospitality, sincerity, and trustworthiness; however, they are also known as being hot-headed and revengeful.

Men usually wear baggy trousers, coarse shirts, boots, and wool hats. Women love wearing jewelry, especially anklet and bracelets. They cover their heads with cloth, like turbans that are also adorned with jewelry.

What are their beliefs?

The Nestorian Christians entered Turkmenistan in the fourth century A.D.; by the beginning of the fourteenth century, though, any lingering trace of Christianity had been totally replaced by Islam. This transition gradually came to influence the political, civil, and economic lives of the people.

In 1928, the Soviet authorities launched an anti-religious campaign aimed at the complete destruction of Islam among the Turkmen. The campaign was the harshest and most violent of all anti-Islamic attacks in Central Asia. Today, despite the outward conformity to Islam, mysticism and other past religious traditions are still prevalent.

What are their needs?

There is little awareness of Christianity among the Turkmen, and few believers. Christian churches have been closed, and members told they cannot meet. Believers face scrutiny from the government. Hostility to evangelistic activities has increased since 1997.

Although there is only a small population of Turkmen who have crossed the northwestern border of Turkmenistan and are living in Kazakhstan, the Bible League is using Project Philip there and training church planters effectively.

The New Testament was published in 1994, but more laborers and evangelistic tools are desperately needed for the Turkmen.

A Gospel witness to Turkmen will be most effective coming from other Turkmen who are culturally sensitive. Turkmen pastors face great hardship and persecution. Some have been fined, beaten and put in jail. Their sacrifice will be the seeds of the Kingdom sown into Turkmen lives.

Prayer Points

- * Pray that God would raise up strong, bold Turkmen believers that will preach the Gospel without fearing for their lives.
- * Pray that persecution will bring unity and stronger faith to the Turkmen Christians.
- * Ask the Lord to anoint His Word to the Turkmen believers.
- * Ask the Lord to call people who are willing to live among the Turkmen and share with them the love of Christ.
- * Pray that Christian radio broadcasts and literature will be made available to the Turkmen.
- * Ask God to strengthen, encourage, and protect the small number of Turkmen believers.
- * Pray that they will have opportunities to share the Gospel with their own people.
- * Pray that the Holy Spirit will soften the hearts of the Turkmen towards Christians so that they will be receptive to the Gospel.
- * Ask God to raise up prayer teams who will begin breaking up the soil through intercession.
- * Ask the Lord to raise up strong local churches among the Turkmen.
- * Pray for completion of Bible translation in this people group's primary language.



Country: Turkmenistan

Continent: Asia

Region: Central Asia

Persecution Rank: 15 (Only top 50 ranked, 1 = highest persecution ranking)

10/40 Window: Yes

Population in this Country: 4,068,000

Largest Provinces: Ahal, Balkan, Dashhowuz, Lebap, Mary

People Name in Country: Turkmen, Trukhmeny

Affinity Bloc: Turkic Peoples

People Cluster: Turkmen

Primary Language: Turkmen (4,068,000 Speakers)

Primary Religion: Islam

Religion Sub-division: Sunni

% Christian Adherents: Data not available

% Evangelical: Data not available