



# World Directory of Minorities

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## Laz

The Laz are a people of Caucasian origin sharing similar roots with the Migrels who live between Abkhazia and Georgia today. There are two main groups of Laz in Turkey. The first group lives in the eastern half of the Black Sea region, in Rize and Artvin provinces. The second group are the descendants of immigrants who escaped the war between the Ottoman and Russian Empires in the late nineteenth century and settled in Adapazarı, Sapanca, Yalova and Bursa, in western and eastern parts of the Black Sea and Marmara regions, respectively. Both of these groups were originally Orthodox Christians who converted to Sunni Islam during the fifteenth century. They speak Lazuri, a South Caucasian language related to Georgian and Abkhazian. According to the 1965 census, the number of individuals who declared themselves as Laz was 250,000.

Their number today is estimated to be between 750,000 and 1.5 million. The majority of Laz have immigrated to urban cities in western Turkey in the last 20 years.

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