



World Directory of Minorities

Europe MRG Directory → Turkey → Caucasians

Print Page

Close Window

Caucasians

Mistakenly referred to as Circassians, this group consists of various peoples of Caucasian origin: Abkhazians, Chechens, Circassians, Daghistanis, Ossetians and various Turkic groups.

‘Caucasia’ refers to the original homeland of these groups, whose ancestors immigrated from Russia in the mid-nineteenth century. Each group has its own language. The mother tongues of Abkhazians, Chechens, Circassians and Daghistanis belong to the Iberian-Caucasian language family, whereas Ossetians speak an Indo-European language and Turkic groups speak Turkic languages. Ninety per cent of Caucasians in Turkey are Circassian, while the majority of the remaining 10 per cent is Abkhaz. All Caucasians are Muslim. Chechens and Daghistanis belong to the S’afi denomination of Islam, whereas the rest are Hanefi. Caucasians live in 15 provinces in north-west, central and southern Turkey.

According to the Federation of Caucasian Associations, the number of individuals who self-identify as Caucasian is 3 million. With the opening of the border with Georgia in 1988, the break-up of the Soviet Union and the global rise in identity politics, a differentiation has emerged within Caucasians. Unlike other groups, Circassians and Abkhaz aspire to return to their historical homelands, where they had left behind a small minority. With the development of relationships between these two groups and their homelands across the border, non-Circassian and non-Abkhaz ethnic groups started to form their own associations.

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