

Khants and Mansi

Profile

According to the 2002 national census, there are 28,678 Khants and Mansi in the Russian Federation. Khants are culturally and linguistically close to the Mansi (11,432). Khants and Mansi together make up the Ob-Ugrian branch of the Ugrian division of the Uralo-Altai language family. They are mainly shamanist-animists. Khants and Mansi live mainly in the Khanty-Mansi AOk-Yurga (pop. 1,444,200) in Tyumen Oblast.

Historical context

The Khants and Mansi came under Russian influence from the sixteenth century. Their traditional economy was based on reindeer herding, hunting, fishing and trapping. The literary language of Khants was established in 1930 and that of Mansi in 1932. Both converted to a Cyrillic script in 1939-40.

The Khanty-Mansi AOk was established in December 1930. In March 1993 the okrug authorities decided to press for the status of a separate republic. Similar demands were also made in Yamalo-Nenets, but neither territory succeeded in acquiring republican status, a reflection of weak political nationalism.

Current issues

The Khanty-Mansi AOk is Russia's main oil-producing region and one of Russia's donor regions. Oil development in the region has endangered the ecology supporting the Khanty-Mansi, encouraging the formation of civic associations to defend land rights of the region's indigenous peoples and mobilize for ecologically sustainable development. Industrial development has progressively severed ties with traditional ways of life, and according to reports less than half of Khants and Mansi are involved in traditional activities today.