

Nenets

Profile

According to the 2002 national census, there are 41,302 Nenets in the Russian Federation. Nenets are the most numerous of the Samoyedic peoples and speak a language of the Uralian division of the Uralo-Altaic language family. The Nenets literary language was created in 1932 using the Cyrillic script.

Nenets are mainly shamanist. They live in the Yamalo-Nenets AOk, the Nenets AOk and the former Taimyr (Dolgano-Nenets) AOk.

Historical context

The Nenets are an indigenous Siberian people, whose traditional economy was rooted in nomadic reindeer herding, fishing and hunting. They came under Russian influence from the sixteenth century onwards. Under Soviet rule they were forcibly collectivized and the Nenets shamanist religion was attacked. A number of Nenets rebellions took place in the 1940s. The Nenets were subsequently largely sedentarized in the 1950s, and the region later saw a large influx of Slavic settlers employed in industry.

In March 1993, encouraged by the secession of the Chukchi AOk from Magadan Oblast and by the prospect of controlling the oil resources of the area, Yamalo-Nenets and Khanti-Mansi, also within Tyumen Oblast, decided to press for the status of separate republics but neither was successful.

Current issues

The main problems confronting the Nenets are ecological damage deriving from exploitation of the Yamal region's natural gas deposits, unemployment and alcoholism. The construction of gas pipelines have disrupted annual migration routes, and according to one account, herding now contributes less than 10 per cent of the region's economy. The Nenets reportedly suffer from high death and suicide rates. Nenets activists have called for the protection of traditional economies in the Yamal-Nenets AO, but political nationalism among the Nenets remains weak.