

Udmurts

Profile

According to the 2002 national census, there are 636,906 Udmurts in the Russian Federation. Udmurts are linguistically and culturally close to Komi and Komi-Permyaks and share similar shamanist-animist beliefs with Maris. Their language belongs to the Permian branch of the Finno-Ugric language family. Most Udmurts live in the Udmurt Republic (pop. 1,570,316: Udmurts 29.3 per cent, Russians 60.1 per cent, Tatars 7 per cent; others 3.6 per cent) and Tatarstan, Mari-El, Bashkortostan, Kirov and Perm oblasts.

Historical context

Originally established as an AO (Votsk) in November 1920, Udmurtia became an ASSR in December 1934. It declared sovereignty in September 1990. The nationalist Demen Society of Udmurt Culture has pressed for the establishment of Udmurt as the official language. Russian is spoken by a sizeable percentage of the population. In 1992 the Supreme Soviet of the republic failed to elect a president because none of the candidates spoke Udmurt fluently.

In November 1992 the First World Congress of Finno-Ugrian peoples took place in the Komi Republic. Delegates called for self-determination for all indigenous peoples and national minorities and condemned 'Russian imperialism'. The Second Congress of Finno-Ugrian Peoples was held in July 1995 to demand new rights, including property rights in their traditional areas of settlement and language privileges.

Current issues

Securing Udmurt-medium tuition is a concern for ethnic Udmurts in the republic. In August 2005 a letter was sent by a parents' collective to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to protest the failure of republican authorities to provide Udmurt-medium education. Parents expressed concern that a school building made available for Udmurt pupils in the republican capital Izhevsk was too remote.