

**Dr. Ahmad Shahidov**  
**Azerbaijan Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (AIDHR)**  
**[www.aidhr.org](http://www.aidhr.org)**  
**[office@aidhr.org](mailto:office@aidhr.org)**  
**+99450 372 87 30**

## **NATIONAL MINORITIES IN SOUTH CAUCASUS**

Today, Azerbaijan is distinguished with ethnic diversity. Besides Azerbaijani Turks, Mountain Jews, Tats, Talysh, Kurds, Molokans, Ingiloys, Tsakhurs, Avars, Lezgins, Khynalygs, Buduqlus, Grysz and other ethnic groups live in its territory. Although the representatives of ethnic groups consider themselves as Azerbaijanis but each group has retained distinctive elements of their different culture. This culture is reflected in domestic life, crafts, in kitchen and various ceremonies.

Despite the difficulties being experienced by Azerbaijan, due to the unresolved armed conflict that continues more than a decade with neighboring Armenia, which occupies 20 percent of the Azerbaijani territory and the presence of about one million refugees and forcibly displaced persons - victims of ethnic cleansing organized by the Armenian armed forces and terrorist groups, among whom in addition to Azerbaijanis there are persons belonging to various minorities (Kurds, Russians, Jews and others), as well as problems connected with transitional period, the Government of Azerbaijan continues to pursue a consistent policy towards protection of minorities rights.

National minorities constitute 9.4 % of the population of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Here is a structural composition of population, languages and places of compact living of persons belonging to national minorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan:

Lezgins - 178 thousand, compactly live in the Northern regions of Azerbaijan. Language of communication is Lezgins, relating to the Daghestan branch of the Caucasian languages, as well as Azerbaijani and Russian languages.

Russians - 141,7 thousand, compactly live in the industrial cities, as well as a number of rural regions. Language of communication is Russian relating to the Eastern-Slavonic group.

Armenians - 120,7 thousand, compactly live mainly in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Reportedly, about 30 thousand live outside of Nagorno-Karabakh region, including Baky city, in spite of armed conflict with Armenia and continued occupation by the latter of the part of Azerbaijan. Language of communication is Armenian, relating to Indo-European linguistic family.

The vast majority of Armenians in Azerbaijan live in territory controlled by the separatist regime of Nagorno-Karabakh. Non-official sources estimate that the number Armenians living on Azerbaijani territory outside Nagorno-Karabakh is around 20 000 to 30 000, and almost exclusively comprises persons married to Azeris or of mixed Armenian-Azeri descent. They feel themselves free and comfortable in Azerbaijan.

Talyshes - 76,8 thousand, compactly live in the Southern regions of Azerbaijan. Language of communication is Talysh, relating to Iranian group of Indo-European linguistic family, as well as Azerbaijani.

The Jews presently live in Baku, Sumgayit, Guba, Oguz and Goychay regions.

Presently Kurds live in the regional center of Sadarak of Nakhchivan AR, in the Teyvaz village of Julfa region and darakand village of Sharur region, as well as before the Armenian occupation they lived in Lachin (Garakechdi, Minkend, Chiraqlı villages), in Kelbajar (Agjakend, Zar villages in full and in other rural villages in mixed environment), in Gubadly (Zilanly village) region. Kurds speak in Kurd language belonging to Iranian languages.

Avars is one of ethnic minorities living in the Republic of Azerbaijan, in Zagatala and Balakan regions. They speak in Avar language, belonging to the family of the North Caucasus languages.

The khynalyqs have unique features among the aboriginal ethnic minority peoples of Azerbaijan. This ethnicity belongs to Caucasian language family, and in historical and ethnographic literature for their settlement around Shahdag is called as "Shahdag peoples".

Full-effect is given to the right of minorities to establish their own national cultural centers, associations and other organisations.

There are dozens of national-cultural centers functioning in Azerbaijan at present. They include "Commonwealth" society, Russian community, Slavic cultural center, Azerbaijani-Israeli community, Ukrainian community, Kurdish cultural

center "Ronai", Lezgin national center "Samur", Azerbaijani-Slavic culture center, Tat cultural center, Azerbaijani-Tatar community, Tatar culture society "Tugan-tel", Tatar cultural center "Yashlyg", Crimean Tatars society "Crimea", Georgian community, humanitarian society of Azerbaijani Georgians, Ingiloyan community, Chechen cultural center, "Vatan" society of Akhyska-Turks, "Sona" society of the women of Akhyska-Turks, Talysh cultural center, Avar society, mountain Jews community, European Jews (Ashkenazi) community, Georgian Jews community, Jewish women humanitarian association, German cultural society "Kapelhaus", Udin cultural center, Polish cultural center "Polonia", "Mada" International Talysh Association, "Avesta" Talysh Association, Udin "Orain" Cultural Center, "Budug" Cultural Center, Tsakhur Cultural Center. In areas with compact minority populations there are club-based amateur societies, national and state theatres, amateur associations and interest-focused clubs. For example the Lezgin State theatre operates in the Gusar region of Azerbaijan, the Georgian national theatre in the Gakh region, Talysh folkloric groups in the Astara and Lenkoran regions.

Dozens of newspapers and magazines are published in language of minorities. Radio and television programs in their languages are daily broadcasting.

The Republic Radio Station regularly organizes broadcasts in the Kurdish, Lezgin, Talysh, Georgian, Russian and Armenian languages, which are financed from the State budget. The local radio station in the Belokan region organizes broadcasts in the Avar language, while in the Khachmaz region they broadcast in the Lezgin and Tat languages. In the Gusar and Khachmaz regions local television broadcasts in the Lezgin language. In Baky newspapers are published in Russian,

Kurdish, Lezgin and Talysh languages. In particular, the newspapers "Samur" and ""Dengi Kurd" are published in the Lezgin and Kurdish languages respectively, while the Jewish Society "Sokhnut" publishes the newspaper "Aziz".

In state structures of Azerbaijan different national minorities are widely represented. In areas of compact living of national minorities' representatives of local population hold leading positions in local authorities, institutions of local government and other structures. Persons belonging to national minorities work in Executive Office of the President of Azerbaijan, in Parliament, in Cabinet of Ministers, in Constitutional court, Central Election Commission, law-enforcement bodies and other state bodies. Representatives of national minorities are chairmen or deputies of chairmen of some Standing Commissions of the Milli Majlis (Parliament).

The Azerbaijanis community in Armenia in the 20th century, represented a large number but have been virtually non-existent since 1988–1991. Most Azerbaijanis fled the country as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh War and the ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. UN estimates the current population of Azerbaijanis in Armenia to be somewhere between 30 and 50 persons, with majority of them living in rural areas and being members of mixed couples (mostly mixed marriages), as well as elderly and sick. Most of them are also reported to have changed their names and maintain a low profile to avoid discrimination.

## National minorities in Armenia – facts and realities

<b>Years</b>	<b>1959<sup>[8]</sup></b>	<b>1970<sup>[9]</sup></b>	<b>1979<sup>[10]</sup></b>	<b>1989<sup>[1]</sup></b>	<b>2001<sup>[3][6]</sup></b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1763048</b>	<b>2491873</b>	<b>3037259</b>	<b>3304776</b>	<b>3213011</b>
Armenians	1551610	220 8327	272 4975	308 3616	314 5354
Azerbaijanis	107748	148 189	160 841	84 860	29
Kurds	25627	37486	50822	56127	1519