

State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2015 - Uzbekistan

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With just under 30 million inhabitants, Uzbekistan is Central Asia's most populous country. According to official figures, ethnic Uzbeks make up approximately 80 per cent of the country's population. Russians, Tajiks and Kazakhs each make up a significant proportion of the population, and other minority groups include Karakalpaks, Kyrgyz and Tatars. However, some claim that the proportion of ethnic Tajiks, as well as native Tajik speakers who may classify themselves as ethnic Uzbeks, is much larger than the official figures suggest, particularly in and around the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. Though the law provides for non-discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and national origin, in practice key government and business positions are typically occupied by ethnic Uzbeks. Members of ethnic minority groups, including larger groups such as Karakalpaks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Tatars and Russians, appear under-represented in the judiciary and the public administration.

As in other countries in the region, opportunities for ethnic minorities to study in their native languages have diminished since the fall of the Soviet Union. In February 2014, CERD expressed concern that insufficient support was given to the promotion of minority languages, including the Tajik language, and at a decrease in the number of schools providing education in minority languages. It also expressed concern that the authorities do not adequately support education in minority languages at all levels, including preschool education. At the same time, limited remedial Uzbek-language instruction has meant that many non-native speakers of Uzbek now face greater academic barriers due to their lower levels of proficiency.

Uzbekistan, officially designated a Country of Particular Concern by the US State Department, continued to persecute and obstruct religious minorities during the year. Besides restrictive registration requirements, prosecution and other forms of harassment, Uzbekistan's state-sponsored print, online and broadcast media regularly attacks named individuals belonging to certain minority faiths, including Protestant Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses. The victims are not given a right of reply and media staff avoid answering questions about the attacks. Allegations made in 2014 include 'making zombies out of children', improperly associating with young girls and drug dealing. Faith communities believe the purpose of these media attacks was to publicly discredit and intimidate them.

Like most of the other Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan's cities have a markedly different ethnic composition than rural areas. Tashkent, the capital, has a large Russian and Ukrainian population, though this has shrunk rapidly since the end of the Soviet Union. There has been large-scale migration from primarily Uzbek-speaking rural areas to the country's cities, particularly Tashkent, since independence in 1991. However, rural to urban migration remains problematic. The

government has used a carrot and stick approach to encourage the rural population to remain in the countryside and discourage migration to cities, with some experts suggesting this is because of a fear of urban unemployment, and the need for a rural workforce. Although authorities in Tashkent do not officially restrict the number of temporary residents, administrative problems and prohibitive costs discourage most migrants from registering. Consequently, many migrants face poor working conditions and low pay, with little bargaining power to improve their situation. Meanwhile, the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara are largely Tajik-speaking, though as most of the population of the cities is bilingual and no census has been conducted since 1989, the exact proportions are not possible to judge. The status of Tajiks is considered precarious, in part due to tensions between the leaderships of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

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