



## SITUATION OF THE FINNO-UGRIC PEOPLES IN RUSSIA 2022-2024/2025

Report by the NPO Fenno-Ugria Foundation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
of Estonia

**Authors:** JAAK PROZES (historian, PhD candidate at the University of Tartu, Adviser of Fenno-Ugria), Fenno-Ugria Board Members MADIS ARUKASK (PhD, Associate Professor at the University of Tartu, folklorist, Chair of Fenno-Ugria) and SVEN-ERIK SOOSAAR (linguist, PhD, Senior Researcher at the Institute of the Estonian Language), VASILY NIKOLAYEV (editor of the MariUver portal)

**Compiled and edited by:** BARBI PILVRE (Director of Fenno-Ugria, PhD)



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## 1. Introduction

It would be wrong to ignore the political context surrounding our relations with the Finno-Ugric peoples living in the Russian Federation. Even Fenno-Ugria cannot currently limit itself to mere cultural exchange. Rather, we must ask painful questions: what is happening to our Finno-Ugric relatives in Russia, and what might come of all this? Külli Kapper, foreign news editor at Postimees, posed a question at the Fenno-Ugria panel at the Paide Opinion Festival in the summer of 2023: why have the Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia sided with Putin? We hear news reports that they are not resisting conscription and are calling for war on Russia's behalf. How has it come to pass that our small kindred peoples are not openly against the war and Putin? Tõnu Seilenthal confirmed at the same Fenno-Ugria panel at the Opinion Festival in Paide in August 2023 that we must bear in mind: Finno-Ugric peoples have a dual identity—their own national identity and a Russian civic identity (*rossiyanin*). The Russian Federation is the state of the Finno-Ugric peoples living in Russia.

If Russia's population is 147 million according to the 2020/2021 census, then of these, nearly 1.7 million people in total consider themselves representatives of Finno-Ugric-speaking ethnic groups, of whom only about 1 million consider their national language to be their native tongue. As recently as 2002, over 2 million people in Russia spoke Finno-Ugric languages.

Relations with the Finno-Ugric peoples have always been important to Estonia, from the beginning of the kindred movement in the 20th century, through the period of the Republic of Estonia, and during the era of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic in the 1960s and 1970s. Communication with the Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia gained new momentum in the 1990s with the reestablishment and activities of Fenno-Ugria Foundation.

How does the changed political situation affect Finno-Ugric cooperation and the kindred movement: are we Estonians, as Finno-Ugrians, also jointly responsible for the behaviour of our kindred peoples in Russia — one might provoke — and that the close kinship cooperation among intellectuals over the past 40–50 years has all been for nothing: has their national self-awareness not awakened sufficiently? The

situation is, of course, more ambivalent, given the violence of the Russian regime and the sanctions that accompany any manifestation of disloyalty in the current situation. Older people who lived under the Soviet system know what life under Russian rule means, but we still have to explain it over and over again.

In this situation, Fenno-Ugria Foundation has both the opportunity and the responsibility to engage in public debate, raising even sensitive issues and sharing information about events in Russia from the perspective of the Finno-Ugric peoples.

On 15 March 2022, Fenno-Ugria Foundation adopted a [statement](#) condemning the military action and severing cooperation with pro-war organisations. The statement was immediately published [in Russian](#) and is prominently displayed on the homepage of the Russian-language version of the Fenno-Ugria website, clearly articulating its position on the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. Communication with former partners now takes place only on a personal level, and many relationships have been severed for political reasons. The Kindred Peoples' Programme currently does not fund [projects](#) involving Finno-Ugric peoples taking place in Russia or directly related to Russia. This is a major change. Finno-Ugric students with Russian citizenship at the University of Tallinn and the University of Tartu have been able to continue their studies, but no new students are being admitted.

We will attempt to describe what has happened to the Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia since the start of Russia's aggression in Ukraine in February 2022 and present as much empirical material as possible based on available sources. In using official sources (media, news portals), we have taken into account that publications in Russia are subject to strict state control. The study draws on official reports on the activities of Finno-Ugric organisations, materials from national congresses, statements by representatives of these peoples, and content from social media channels — primarily the largest social network, VKontakte — as well as personal contacts in Russia.

The overview focuses on language policy and demographic changes in Russia's Finno-Ugric regions. It highlights signs of Finno-Ugric civil movements for autonomy and rights, potential protests on environmental issues, and positions on the protection of national languages. It also documents the persecution of protesters and

flight from the country. The Finno-Ugric resistance movement in exile and various marginal, including radical, movements are described.

We also ask what the prospects for Finno-Ugric cooperation are as of today.

We also bear in mind our own position, so that we, as Estonians, do not project our own concerns and dreams onto the small Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia, having ourselves successfully broken away from the Soviet Union in our time.

## **2. Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine and the Finno-Ugric minorities in Russia**

There are numerous facilities linked to the Russian military-industrial complex in the Finno-Ugric republics and regions, which have been affected by Russia's aggression in Ukraine and also by Ukrainian counter-operations. In Izhkar (Izhevsk), the capital of the Republic of Udmurtia, the defence industry has been developing for 200 years. It was in this notorious city that Mikhail Kalashnikov, a highly respected weapons designer in Russia, also worked. Another significant military-industrial complex on the republic's territory is located in Votkinsk, which apparently also houses nuclear weapons.

It is not known exactly what is produced in Izhevsk, but reports have appeared in newspapers stating that drone production is set to begin in Izhkar and that production has been ramped up. It appears that Shahed-type drones are also produced there. In Udmurtia, AI-controlled drones known as 'Italmas' (Udmurt for 'globeflower', the Udmurt national flower) are also manufactured, and these have reached the front lines.

The first Ukrainian attack on the military factories in Izhkar (Izhevsk) took place in November 2024, when a workshop at the military factory was hit and one person was wounded. However, a larger-scale attack on Izhkar took place on 1 July 2025, targeting the 'Kupol' electromechanical plant, which is one of the main drone manufacturers and also produces 'Tor' and 'Osa' missiles. As a result of the attack, three people were killed and 57 were injured.

[Украинские дроны атаковали Ижевск. Под удар попал завод «Купол», выпускающий ЗРК «Тор» и беспилотники Погибли три человека, более 30 ранены — Meduza, 1 July 2025](#)

Internet speeds in Udmurtia have been artificially slowed down since 18 June 2025. On 4 July 2025, several Ukrainian drones were spotted in Udmurtia, all of which were shot down. There are severe restrictions in the Republic of Udmurtia due to the drone threat. Mobile communications and the internet have also been restricted, with the latter being down in many areas. Wi-Fi hotspots have been set up in the city.

[Власти Удмуртии обещают ускорить процесс создания бесплатных точек Wi-fi в Ижевске — Izhevsk News, 30 July 2025](#)

In the Republic of Mari El, there were drone alerts practically every other day in July 2025. Mobile communications and the internet are restricted. Residents of the republic have been fined for flying drones themselves. As far as is known, no facilities in the Republic have been hit. However, oil refineries in the neighbouring Nizhny Novgorod and Kirov regions, as well as in the Republic of Chuvashia, have been struck on multiple occasions. There are believed to be defence industry facilities in Mari El, as this was an issue highlighted by leaders of the Mari national movement in the 1990s.

In the traditional territories of the Ingrians, Votyaks and Izhorians in the Leningrad Oblast, fuel tankers at the port of Ust-Luga have been hit. [INTERVJU > Ekspert Ust-Luga rünnakust: sadama juhtkond oli mures, ent neile öeldi: «olge kannatlikud» — Postimees, 25 January 2024](#)

Reports of large-scale drone attacks are coming in from the Leningrad Oblast. [Venemaa teatas 102 drooni tõrjumisest. Leningradi oblastis suleti lennuväli ning piirati mobiilsidet ja internetti — Delfi, 10 June 2025](#). As a result of one such attack, which took place on 28 July, one person was killed and three were injured. The regional governor described this attack as an unprecedented assault on military and industrial targets. [В Ленинградской области при пожаре из-за падения БПЛА погиб человек — Реальное время, 28 July 2025](#)

In the Republic of Mordovia, companies linked to the defence industry in Saransk – operating primarily in the electronics sector – were attacked on several occasions in 2025. Saransk is home to Lisma, the Russian Federation's largest manufacturer of lighting fixtures and optical cables. In April 2025, the 'Saransk Cable' and 'Saransk Cable-Optics' factories were hit. There was another attack in May 2025.

No drone sightings have been reported in the Komi Republic or the Republic of Karelia, nor have any attacks reportedly reached the oil and gas industries in the Yamalo-Nenets, Nenets and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrugs, which are known to account for the majority of Russia's oil and gas production. Nor is there any information yet on the reaction that might be triggered by the European

Commission's proposal to phase out imports of Russian gas and oil by the end of 2027 as a sanction against Russia. At the same time, it is known that auctions for oil fields have faltered. There has been a significant fall in oil prices on the global market, and Russian oil companies have become cautious. [Juba mitmendat korda kukuvad Siberis läbi naftaleiukohtade oksjonid — Fenno-Ugria, 19 May 2025](#)

It should be kept in mind that the majority of the larger Finno-Ugric peoples still live in rural areas, whilst drones are targeting facilities of military significance located in or around towns and cities. There is a certain degree of discontent regarding restrictions on internet and mobile communications. The closures of airfields by the Russian aviation authorities have also affected Izhevsk Airport in Udmurtia.

However, rising oil and gas prices or disruptions to the supply of these products could affect the mood of the rural population. For the time being, however, there is no information regarding any such problems.

What is the attitude amongst the Finno-Ugric peoples towards the war in Ukraine, whether at the organisational or individual level? Undoubtedly, the censorship and climate of fear prevailing in Russia have had their effect, and most people are simply keeping quiet. The punishment of dissent and the restriction of free speech and demonstrations over the last ten to fifteen years have fuelled a sense of frustration that has always been present, as memories of repressions dating back decades have not faded away.

As this is known, one must read between the lines. Thus, in the early days of the war, it was evident that posts featuring symbols of peace, icons of the Virgin Mary as a protector, serene white landscapes and, at times, allegorical stories had appeared on the VKontakte and Facebook pages of many Finno-Ugric civic activists. These signs suggest that the posters' minds are far from the bloodshed in Ukraine. However, there are also leaders of Finno-Ugric national movements who have signed a declaration of support for the military actions of the President of the Russian Federation.

The majority of Finno-Ugric organisations have not officially expressed their position at all, citing the fact that, on the recommendation of the state authorities of the

Russian Federation, they are apolitical and therefore, in accordance with their statutes, cannot express their views.

At the same time, there are also organisations which, although they have repeatedly claimed that Finno-Ugric peoples should not engage in politics – particularly at the state level – at all, have now come out in support of the Russian Federation’s military aggression in Ukraine. For example, the Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples of Russia (AFUN) states the following in a [declaration of support](#) dated 2 March 2022, entitled “Открытое заявление лидеров Федеральных национально-культурных автономий и институтов гражданского общества” (“Open Statement by the Leaders of Federal National-Cultural Autonomies and Civil Society Institutions”): “Expressing our solidarity with the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, we note that the resurgence of Nazi ideology is entirely unacceptable in modern society, as is discrimination on the grounds of linguistic, ethnic or religious affiliation.” The association signed the statement alongside the major autonomous entities representing national cultures within the Russian Federation, including the Federal Autonomous Entity of Ukrainians of the Russian Federation.

Following the example of this statement, other regions of the Russian Federation have also begun to act in the same way. For example, in the Komi Republic, almost all ethnic organisations and autonomous bodies operating in the Komi Republic have signed a [corresponding statement](#) entitled “В Коми лидеры НКА, общественных объединений и СМИ выступили с единой поддержкой решения президента о проведении спецоперации на Украине” (“In Komi, leaders of the NKA, public associations and the media have expressed unanimous support for the President’s decision to conduct a special operation in Ukraine”): the central Komi organisation Komi Voityr, the Izhma Komi national movement Izvatas, the Perm Komi cultural autonomy and the Hungarian cultural autonomy. The statement, published on 5 March 2022, states: “In support of the public statement by the federal cultural autonomies and civic institutions, we express our full agreement with the decision of Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, to conduct a special operation to protect the residents of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, the Russian population and the borders of our multi-ethnic state. We were taught as children that the world is a place of peace, love, kindness and justice. The residents of the

Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics have lived under shelling for eight years and have also faced discrimination for seeking to speak their native language. Tens of thousands of people have suffered as a result. An 'Avenue of Angels' has been created in Donetsk for the children who lost their lives." (It should be noted that the Cultural Autonomy of Ukrainians in the Komi Republic did not sign this statement.)

Similar appeals have been made by other major organisations, including those representing Finno-Ugric peoples. For example, RAIPON, the Association of Small Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation, whose members comprise Finno-Ugric peoples numbering fewer than 50,000, states in its [letter of support to Vladimir Putin](#) "Ассоциация КМНСС и ДВ РФ выступила в поддержку Президента нашей страны В.В. Путина" ("The Association of Small Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation has expressed its support for the President of our country, V.V. Putin") as follows: "The Association supports your efforts and the decision you have taken to protect the interests and rights of the inhabitants of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, as well as to ensure the security of multi-ethnic Russia. We, the representatives of 40 indigenous peoples, express our hope for mutual understanding in ensuring peace and harmony."

There are also other expressions of opinion. For example, in the Komi Republic – unlike in other Finno-Ugric republics – there have been much more active protests against the Russian Federation's military operations in Ukraine. Opposition to the war is also more pronounced at a higher level. For example, Viktor Vorobyov, chair of the Communist Party faction in the State Council of the Komi Republic, wrote in a post published on his VKontakte account on 28 February: "It has been clear from the outset that this military operation has nothing to do with peacekeeping. We were promised that the shelling of Donetsk would stop, but instead the bombing of Kyiv began. Hostilities have now been ongoing for five days. Whilst propagandists are brandishing weapons on television screens and Putin's children are hiding in flats in London, the blood of Russian and Ukrainian citizens is being shed in this war, shamefully dubbed a 'special operation'. In the 20th century, our grandfathers and great-grandfathers paid a high price for peace in Europe. Was it so that, in the 21st century, Russia might invade Ukraine? /.../ This war brings the people of Russia and Ukraine nothing but blood, tears and poverty. I unconditionally condemn the Russian

army's invasion of Ukraine and call for an immediate end to the hostilities.” (The post and a video with the same content have since been hidden from the wider public.)

Similar views have also been expressed by other deputies of the Communist Party of the Komi Republic. However, Vorobyov's post caused a huge outcry in the State Council of the Komi Republic, and there has been talk of bringing criminal proceedings against him. Divergent views on the Russia-Ukraine war are, in fact, also evident within [Komi Voityr](#), the Komi people's most important national organisation. Consequently, the organisation's leaders were compelled to issue the following statement: “We, the leaders of this organisation, representing the Komi public, declare that, in connection with the events in Ukraine, attempts are being made to play the Komi ‘card’ in order to further the interests of a certain group of people. This is, of course, unacceptable! This is because the Komi people, like all Russians, understand the urgent need to resolve the long-standing conflict in Ukraine and support the Russian President and government in their efforts to extinguish the flames of neo-Nazism.”

In the wider political landscape of the Russian Federation, the Yabloko party has criticised the military operations, and its representatives in local parliaments are also [calling for an end to the war](#). On 4 March 2022, the newspaper “Kommersant” published an article on this subject entitled “Единство без борьбы противоположностей” (“Unity without the struggle of opposites”). Yabloko is represented in the State Council of the Republic of Karelia, where its parliamentary group tabled a draft resolution calling for an immediate end to military operations, the commencement of negotiations and the withdrawal of troops.

The Komi organisation [Doryam Asnymös](#) (“Let's Defend Ourselves”, Защитим себя | Доръям асьнымӧс) wrote the following in a VKontakte post entitled “Only our children's graves will become our own”: “There is a wave of war hysteria and jingoistic patriotism sweeping the country, and even the leaders of pro-state nationalist movements are supporting the war. /.../ Those who speak of the ‘genocide of Russians in Ukraine’ seem to have gone blind and lost their wits: they fail to notice the genocide, ethnocide and ecocide being perpetrated against the Komi people in their own homeland.” (The post has since been removed.)

[Prozese ülevaade: sõda Ukrainas ja soome-ugri rahvad – Fenno-Ugria, 8 March 2022](#)

[Jaak Prozes. Soome-ugri rahvad uute väljakutsete eel – Keel ja Kirjandus 8–9, 2022](#)

### *Finno-Ugric peoples at war*

Since 2022, Putin's regime has mobilised people for its aggression against Ukraine, primarily from rural areas of Russia, including regions inhabited by Finno-Ugric peoples. The dwindling and increasingly Russified minority communities in these areas have, in some instances, officially adopted a pro-Putin stance. However, one must ask to what extent the authorities are manipulating these ethnic communities and to what extent support for the war is a position that has been forced upon them.

Critical thinking is more prevalent amongst representatives of Finno-Ugric peoples who live in larger towns and are better educated. It is also found amongst education and cultural workers, whose working language is their mother tongue. And, of course, amongst academics who have developed a critical mindset capable of analysing sources of information.

The most direct impact of the hostilities, however, is visible in the villages, where new graves are constantly appearing in the village cemeteries. New black noticeboards are constantly being affixed to the walls of school buildings. For the time being, however, there are no signs of protest: the financial gains from the war are substantial and there have not yet been enough fatalities. Furthermore, there is a strong sense of pride in the village that a fine man has either fallen or is fighting for his country. The prevailing belief is that they are fighting for a just cause and waging a war of defence.

Of course, the mobilisation of rural areas does not concern only the Finno-Ugric peoples. Owing to their economic circumstances and educational background, this is generally easier, and villagers are often unaware of their rights to contest a call-up. This has affected the already dwindling minority communities – which are facing an identity crisis and increasing Russification – including the Finno-Ugrians, in a purely physical sense, by reducing their numbers.

It should be noted that the average monthly wage in Russia is 15,000 roubles, or 150 euros, whilst contract soldiers receive 300,000 roubles, or 3,000 euros, in a single payment.

Ethnic battalions for military operations in Ukraine were formed as early as 2022 in the Republics of Mari El, Udmurtia and Mordovia, and in the Perm Krai. Although these battalions do not recruit exclusively from Finno-Ugric peoples – the battalions are formed on a territorial rather than an ethnic basis – there are presumably also sufficient representatives of these related peoples within them. The names of the battalions are linked to the mythology and cultural symbols of the Finno-Ugric peoples. For instance, the sub-units of the Mari battalion – ‘Iden’, ‘Poltysh’ and ‘Akpatyr’ – are named after mythological Mari heroes. The sub-units of the Mordvin battalion are ‘Siyazhar’ and ‘Aralai’. The former is a mythological Erzya hero, after whom the Erzya epic is named. ‘Aralai’ means ‘saviour’ in the Moksha language. Meanwhile, in the Republic of Udmurtia, the ‘Italmas’ (‘globeflower’) battalion was formed, named after one of the most important cultural symbols of the Udmurts. The Kola Saami, however, were made to ride in a reindeer sleigh, in which the reindeer – a central symbol of Saami culture – were fitted with vests bearing a Z-shaped design. [Oliver Loode > Kas hõimurahvad Venemaal ärkavad nõiutud unest? Postimees, 9 August 2022](#)

There is no data available for 2024/2025 regarding the combat operations of the Finno-Ugric peoples’ national battalions in Ukraine, and it is not known whether they still exist.

It is difficult to state precisely to what extent representatives of Finno-Ugric peoples are involved in the war, as data of this nature is classified. In Russia, people are drawn into the war in three ways: as conscripts, as mobilised personnel, and as mercenaries. Let us take the example of the situation in the Republic of Mari El, for which data is available from co-author Vasily Nikolayev (editor of the Mari publication [MariUver](#), who lives in Estonia).

On 15 November 2023, the head of Mari El, Yuri Zaitsev, announced that 1,748 people had been mobilised from the republic, whilst the population stood at 669,854 ([В Марий Эл сокращается население — MariUver, 10 February 2025](#)).

Specific examples illustrate the extent to which the Mari people have been drawn into the war. From a single village in Mari El called Koramas, 22 people have gone to war, six of whom have died, according to the GTRK Mari El programme “Poshkudem” (“My Neighbour”). On 5 October 2024, 25 people from the village of Kokshamary in the Zvenigovo District had gone to war, four of whom had died (Mari-language news on Mari El uver, 13 April 2024). The population of this village stood at 814 on 1 May 2024.

The [Idel.Realii](#) portal keeps a tally of residents from the regions along the Volga who have died in the war in Ukraine. As of 23 May 2025, 1,953 people from Udmurtia, 878 from Mari El and 450 from Mordovia have died. The actual death toll is likely to be higher. It is noteworthy that the number of fatalities in Mari El is twice as high as in Mordovia, even though its population is 100,000 smaller.

The dual identity of Russia’s small Finno-Ugric communities – their national identity and their Russian identity – was discussed at a panel at the Paide Opinion Festival on 8 August 2023 by Tõnu Seilenthal, a lecturer at the University of Tartu, one of the main propagators of Finnougristics in Estonia, and a member of the board of Fenno-Ugria; Aimar Ventsel, an ethnologist at the University of Tartu; Anna Kuznetsova, a project manager at Fenno-Ugria and a Komi native; and Jaak Prozes, an adviser to Fenno-Ugria. The conversation was published in text form in the Fenno-Ugria yearbook “Soome-ugri sõlmed” 2023 and is also available to view [online](#).

The starting point for the discussion was the notion that our Finno-Ugric kindred peoples, as loyal Russians, are somehow jointly responsible for the Kremlin’s policies, and we wanted to explain how it has come to be that these small nations are not, in fact, opposed to the war or to Putin.

Aimar Ventsel emphasised that support for Putin is not, in itself, a Finno-Ugric problem. “There is a stereotype that Russia’s non-Russian peoples – who, according to the latest census, make up 28 per cent of the population – are somehow opposed to the Kremlin, the Russian Federation or Putin. My experience shows that the majority of them are entirely loyal Russian citizens; they were born and raised there. A certain worldview is instilled from nursery school, school and later through the

media – there is no fundamental difference between who are ethnic minorities and who are Russians. There are certain ethnic tensions, but these are relatively insignificant... Why do certain officials and leaders of Finno-Ugric organisations, such as Komi Voityr and others, support the mobilisation? They are civil servants and follow the chain of command. It is their role to do so. For various reasons – one of which is fear – they do not wish to jeopardise their positions, their own well-being or that of their families.”

In the same conversation, Tõnu Seilenthal highlighted that the Finno-Ugric peoples have a dual identity. “We think they are staunch opponents of Russia, but in reality they are not. At the everyday level, at village level, they are still different nationalities; for example, boys get into fights. They have their own nationality – for example, Mari – but at the same time they are Russians (*rossiyanin*); their homeland is Russia and they are proud of it.” Seilenthal also emphasised that there are around one million speakers of Finno-Ugric languages, whilst Russia has a population of 147 million, and that the Finno-Ugric peoples do not pose a significant problem at all for the Russian central authorities compared to Muslims.

Anna Kuznetsova, who is of Komi origin, added that when Finno-Ugrians speak of war, they do not speak on behalf of their own nationality, but rather as Russian citizens... whereas previously the idea of a unified Soviet people prevailed, identity is now being constructed around being Russian (*rossiyanin*). Other peoples are not visible, and even the Finno-Ugrians themselves often confuse Russians with those from Russia: ‘*russkie*’ and ‘*rossiyane*’.

Kuznetsova confirmed that the influence of propaganda is indeed very strong in Russia. There is no general access to other channels, though young people do use VPNs and have access to other channels. Older people have only one channel – Pervyi Kanal. “If you use the word ‘war’ in Russia, there are consequences... people realise that something is wrong, that the media is shut down, that only the federal channels are open. But they find it hard to understand why their country is lying.”

Aimar Ventsel also explained why it is easier to mobilise people in rural areas. The army is seen as a school of manhood, and social pressure is strong: ‘Everyone’s sons are going – how come your son is not going to war?’ Mobilisation is not just a

problem for non-Russians, but the more peripheral the region, the greater the likelihood that the army is the only social ladder, offering a chance to leave the countryside, where one would otherwise remain a forestry worker. The sums paid to 'contract soldiers' are also substantial compared to local wages, and in Russia, people have historically joined the professional military for financial reasons as well. The Finno-Ugric issue cannot be taken out of its broader context: there is no mobilisation in cities because the spirit of protest is stronger there, but cities are also home to key economic sectors and factories. In rural areas, the proportion of non-Russians is higher, and mobilisation is more widespread there. It may well be that officers and others treat non-Russian soldiers more carelessly, but the more people return from Ukraine dead or wounded, the more convinced people in Russia become that Russia is indeed in trouble, Ventsel believes, and he does not think that minority groups will start rebelling in Russia because of the war.

[Jaak Prozes: Venemaa soomeugrilased pole pääsenud sõjast Ukrainas — Maaleht, 2 January 2023](#)

[Jaak Prozes. Venemaa Föderatsiooni soome-ugri rahvad ja sõda Ukrainas. KesKus, 16 October 2023](#)

[Fenno-Ugria Paide arvamusfestivalil 11.augustil 2023: "Venemaa agressioon Ukrainas ja soome-ugri rahvad"](#)

[Soome-ugri väikerahvad Venemaal: praegune olukord ja tulevikuväljavaated. — Estonian National Museum, 15 June 2024](#)

[Mis saab koostööst Venemaal elavate soomeugrilastega? Intervjuu Tõnu Seilenthaliga. — Sirp, 4 August 2023](#)

### *National celebrations in the spirit of Russian patriotism*

One key concept that characterises the activities of the Finno-Ugric peoples in the Russian Federation during the current war is, in fact, celebrations. Some festivals, such as the Mari 'Peledysh pairem' (Flower Festival), which dates back to the 1920s,

have even attained national status. [Marimaal toimus Peledõš pairem – Lillede pidu – Fenno-Ugria, 2 July 2025](#)

Another important aspect is the marking of their national cultural space with various commemorative plaques and monuments, as well as the commemoration of figures and heroes of the national movement. It is interesting to note that the Mari organisation Mari Ushem also lays flowers on Mari Sangari Day at the grave of Mamich Berdei – the prince who led the Mari people in their struggle against the Grand Duchy of Moscow between 1552 and 1556. Efforts are made to link long-past events to the present day, and it is said that today's Mari heroes are shedding blood in Russia's military operation in Ukraine. [Maride vabadusvõitluse juhi Mamitš Berdei mälestamine polnud soovitatav – Fenno-Ugria, 19 May 2025](#)

Issues of recognition remain topical for the Finno-Ugric peoples; both the Mari and the Udmurts are establishing new national awards and finalising designs for the medals associated with them. [Mordva vabariik tähistas erilise näitusega oma 92. sünnipäeva – Fenno-Ugria, 13 January 2022](#)

In 2023, the anniversaries of the Mari and Udmurt Republics were also marked on a grand scale in conjunction with the Russian Federation's newest public holiday on 4 November: National Unity Day. President Putin also sent his congratulations to the residents of Mari El and Udmurtia on the occasion of National Unity Day. The residents of the republics were greeted by their leaders, Yuri Zaitsev and Alexander Brechalov, whose messages were devoid of substance and focused primarily on how the two republics are united by different peoples living in harmony. This harmony makes them strong, which is necessary in these difficult times, as it contributes to new victories.

In his welcoming address, Anatoli Smirnov, Chairman of the State Council of the Republic of Mari El, felt it necessary to note: "It is our shared duty to assist the Russian soldiers who are fighting heroically against Neo-Fascism in Ukraine, as well as to support the regions that have recently rejoined the motherland as they restore a peaceful way of life." He also expressed the hope that, together, the war would be won.

Sergei Martynov, a senator from the Republic of Mari El in the Russian Federation Council, also chose to mark the birthday of the people of Mari El by dedicating half of his address to the military operations in Ukraine. “The sons of Mari El are currently continuing their grandfathers’ struggle against Nazism, a terrible scourge that has gripped the entire Western world. Our boys are fighting every day against true evil, which is being fuelled in abundance by the NATO countries.”

The leaders of the Udmurt Republic were not quite so bellicose: Vladimir Nevostuev, Chairman of the Udmurt State Council, modestly noted the republic’s contribution to ensuring that Russia remains protected and strong. He also highlighted the fact that 4 November marks the anniversary of the Udmurt flag and coat of arms.

Various events are dedicated to the national holidays of the Mari and Udmurt peoples, incorporating themes of war, support for Russian soldiers and recruitment. For example, in Yoshkar-Ola, Mari El, the 10th Youth Festival of National Cultures, ‘Strength Lies in Unity’, was launched at the newly renovated Youth Palace in 2023. Meanwhile, concerts were held to mark the anniversary in district centres across the republic, and themed exhibitions were opened in libraries. In Izhevsk, Udmurtia, a festival entitled ‘We Are United – We Are Invincible’ was held to mark the republic’s anniversary and Russia’s Day of National Unity. The festival featured performances by well-known artists from the republic, as well as representatives of various ethnic groups. A speech was given by Tatyana Ishmatova, Deputy Speaker of the State Council of the Udmurt Republic, who had long headed the Udmurt Kenesh – the Udmurt Council, the representative organisation of the Udmurt people. She noted that inter-ethnic relations in the republic are developing harmoniously, opportunities have been created for the study of national languages, and national celebrations are organised. Udmurt national leaders laid flowers at the memorials to the founders of Udmurt (Votyak) autonomy: Josif Nagovitsyn, Boris Trokai and Kuzebai Gerd. Humanitarian aid was also collected for the Lutuginsky District of the Luhansk People’s Republic, with which the Udmurt Republic has a cooperation agreement. On the day of the celebrations, a recruitment campaign was also held: instructors spoke about how successful the special operation in Ukraine is and how much money can be earned. [Mari El Vabariik ja Udmurdi Vabariik 103 – Fenno-Ugria, 8 November 2023](#)

However, not everyone is so unequivocally supportive of the regime. In the context of the war, it is amongst the Komi people that ethnic tensions and the struggle for the national language are most evident. On 29 March 2022, their organisation, Doryam Asnymös, published a letter from the Afghan War Veterans' Association protesting against Igor Norkin, head of the Izhma Komi district administration, who had said: "Russification has reached Izhma; there are more and more children on the streets speaking Russian." The veterans, however, reminded Norkin of which country's citizen he is, and pointed out that in Ukraine, it all began because the Russian language was not welcomed there. "The language of inter-ethnic communication is Russian." The veterans also lodged a complaint with the public prosecutor's office. Or take the case where a parent's letter was published protesting against the teaching of the Komi language: the parent does not want their child to have to learn Komi in Komi Republic, where nationalism is on the rise; they do not want it to be like in Ukraine, where it was also said that one must learn Ukrainian. Representatives of the organisation Doryam Asnymös engaged in a debate with the authors of both letters, which were published on VKontakte.

Furthermore, it has emerged from the social network that deputies of the Komi Republic set fire to a Nordic cross-style flag belonging to the Komi organisation Doryam Asnymös, calling it fascist. Both Komi organisations, however, protested against a new standard issued by the Russian Ministry of Education, which aims to reduce the number of lessons in the national language. Doryam Asnymös argued that legislation should be introduced to guarantee a minimum of four hours' lessons per week for learners of the Komi language as their mother tongue. And it is written: 'Languages are disappearing, yet here we are preoccupied with discrimination against the Russian language in Ukraine.'

Even during the war, the Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia have not ceased to address environmental issues. The Komi people, in particular, have been active in protesting against the construction of the Shiesi landfill site, as well as against the erection of new oil rigs and the continued operation of old ones. [Art Leete. Komi roheline, — Sirp. 4 August 2023](#)

Komi Voityr is the only organisation representing Finno-Ugric peoples that has the right of legislative initiative and is recognised by the state as the representative body

of the Komi people. They raise environmental issues in parliament, where they have tabled a bill calling for harsher penalties for those who pollute the environment, greater compensation for the damage they cause, and the closure of drilling rigs that are 20 years old. Linked to environmental issues is the desire of the Mari central organisation, Mer Kanash (Mari Council), to establish a Mari park in the city of Yoshkar-Ola, as well as their campaign against the expansion of the military training ground. The central organisation of the Udmurts, Udmurt Kenesh (Udmurt Council), however, wished to establish a birch grove in Izhkar (Izhevsk).

### **3. Russia's nationality policy and the Finno-Ugric peoples**

To understand the situation of the peoples of Russia, one can make use of the available data, although there is no certainty as to their reliability. Figures relating to languages and ethnic groups confirm a trend towards the assimilation of almost all the ethnic groups within the Russian Federation, where these groups seem to be losing their identity and language at an ever-increasing rate, as if in a melting pot. This assimilation is fuelled by the exclusion of the native languages of the Finno-Ugric peoples from almost all spheres of social life, particularly education. Over the past decade, there has also been a 'Campaign of Russian Citizenry', which has clearly made it more uncomfortable to identify as belonging to one ethnic group or another.

Due to their small numbers and territorial dispersion, the Finno-Ugric peoples are among the most vulnerable. The Finno-Ugric peoples are scattered, the boundaries of their autonomous regions are arbitrary, and the Russian-speaking population predominates throughout these regions. The proportion of Finno-Ugric peoples in their respective republics is as follows: the Mari (40 % of the population), the Erzya and Moksha (39 %), the Udmurt (25 %), the Komi (18 %), and, lowest of all, the Karelians (6 %). The proportion of indigenous peoples in their own autonomous territories is even smaller, at around 1 %, and they are also scattered.

In the 1990s, the larger Finno-Ugric peoples sought a bicameral parliament to protect their interests. One chamber was to be a chamber of nations, which would have had the right of veto. Unfortunately, not a single Finno-Ugric people achieved this, and as a result, these peoples are severely under-represented at the legislative level. This, in turn, allows laws to be passed that are not in the interests of the Finno-Ugric peoples, but rather work against them. It also means that Finno-Ugric peoples are not sufficiently represented in the organs of power. Russia's increasingly centralised state policy is bringing 'Varangians' to the helm of the autonomous Finno-Ugric republics – this is the term used for leaders who are appointed to head one republic or another. However, a new leader is unfamiliar with local customs and does not trust the locals, bringing his own team with him. For example, Aleksandr Yestifeyev, who stepped down as head of Mari El in 2022, brought a team from the city of Saratov with him when he came to power in 2017. Such typical cases,

however, show that locals are being marginalised from positions of power, and the already low self-esteem of the Finno-Ugric peoples is falling even further.

In summary, the influence of the Finno-Ugric peoples in their own republics is steadily diminishing and is, in reality, dependent on the whims of the appointed head of state. Usually, a local figure is appointed as Minister for Culture or Nationality Policy, and is allocated a certain amount of money to organise celebrations. The key themes in national policy over the last three years have been Russian unity and the cessation of external contacts, as well as state management and control.

Almost all events organised by Finno-Ugric peoples' organisations take place under the auspices of Russian unity, whilst pro-authoritarian leaders add that they must base their actions not on the interests of their own people, but on those of the state. On 20 May 2022, Pyotr Tultayev, Chairman of the Russian Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples, delivered a [speech](#) in Petrozavodsk in which he said: 'The duty of every social organisation must be directed towards strengthening its own state and the unity of the Russian nation.' Consequently, the documents adopted by the representative organisations of the Finno-Ugric peoples have become, in a sense, petitions expressing a desire to alleviate one concern or another. They contain virtually no criticism of the state authorities.

To best achieve this unity, the State Duma of the Russian Federation adopted a legislative amendment in 2018 which effectively made the study of national languages optional. As a result, the number of young people learning their national language has fallen rapidly, and in effect this means that the playgrounds in ethnic villages, which are homogeneous in terms of ethnic composition, have become Russian-speaking. Until recently, Finno-Ugric peoples had three options: to study their national language as a mother tongue, as the official language, or as part of an integrated programme covering the region's history. The latter option amounts to no learning of the national language at all; the middle option involves basic language teaching and is also intended, for example, for Russians; the first option involves teaching the mother tongue for 4–5 hours a week. In 2022, guidelines were issued by the Kremlin recommending that the teaching of the national language as a mother tongue be reduced to 2–3 hours a week.

A major concern for the central government were the organisations of Finno-Ugric peoples, which were considered too independent, so it was decided to restrict their activities through funding. There are good organisations that work well and receive support, and there are bad organisations that are unable to cooperate. As organisations unwilling to cooperate could receive funding from foreign sources, the State Duma passed the Foreign Agents Act in 2012. In 2020, the law was extended to cover individuals as well, which essentially means that any Russian citizen can be designated a foreign agent if they receive funding or are rewarded, for example financially, by a foreign foundation. The implementation of various laws, including the [Russian Federal Law](#), shows that, through coercive measures, organisations representing Finno-Ugric peoples are under the control of local authorities and do not demonstrate any significant initiative in defending the interests of their peoples. They only undertake activities that have the direct approval of the authorities. For the most part, this takes the form of superficial national celebrations, at which the Russian language has become increasingly prominent over the years, against a backdrop of Russian flags and slogans such as ‘We are all Russia together’ – ‘Мы все вместе Россия!’. In this way, unity is created, along with a new nation and identity known as ‘Russian (citizen)’ – *россиянин*. Against this backdrop, it is clear that the cooperation between the Finno-Ugric peoples to date could in no way have been in line with Russia’s national policy interests.

In the view of the ideologues behind Russian national policy, this cooperation is underpinned by the construct of the ‘Finno-Ugric world’, which, in their opinion, merely purports to promote cooperation amongst Finno-Ugric peoples for the protection and development of their languages and cultures. In reality, however, the aim of this cooperation is said to be to damage Russia’s international reputation, to put pressure on the state, and to remove Finno-Ugric peoples from the Russian linguistic and cultural sphere – in other words, segregation. Thus, at the end of 2013, an article by Vasily Ivanov, a researcher at the Institute for Strategic Studies of Russia, entitled ‘National Separatism in the Finno-Ugric Republics and External Factors’ was published in the journal “Problems of National Strategy”. He claimed that the ‘Finno-Ugric map’ had emerged precisely so that the West could exploit the alleged violent assimilation of Finno-Ugric peoples by Russia to put pressure on the country. Why is the West focusing its attention on the Finno-Ugric regions? Because

that is precisely where Russia's military-industrial complexes are located, and there are also abundant natural resources there. The idea of linguistic and cultural unity within the Finno-Ugric world, and of kinship with Estonians, Finns and Hungarians, is Russophobic and anti-Russian in nature.

Above all, the author disapproves of the notion of Finno-Ugric events that might in any way unite these peoples. The idea of the Kindred Peoples' Day (third Saturday of October) is bad for Russia because it creates a barrier between the Finno-Ugric peoples and other peoples of Russia; the Finno-Ugric Youth Association (MAFUN) is bad because it was the source of the idea for a Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture, and, moreover, it is involved in "waving the Finno-Ugric flag". In general, a Finno-Ugric identity is a bad thing because it undermines Russia's unity – thus pulling the Finno-Ugric peoples out of the unified cultural space of the Russian Federation. In an October 2014 interview entitled 'What Estonia stands to lose due to the scandal involving Academician Tishkov', Academician Valeri Tishkov says of Estonian ethnographers: "They travel all over Russia and write a great deal of nonsense." But that is only half the trouble. The interviewer, Igor Shishko, continues, writing in a style reminiscent of the 1930s (with the USA now in place of Finland): "The problem is that Estonian scholarship on Finno-Ugric peoples has become an instrument of the Estonian state's anti-Russian foreign policy. By supporting Russia's Finno-Ugric peoples via Estonia, the US is in fact attempting to exert foreign policy pressure on Russia. By supporting 'persecuted peoples', the US actually seeks to divide the Russian population."

At a conference held at the UN in February 2016, dedicated to the International Day of Indigenous Languages and addressing the issues of national minorities, Sergei Naryshkin, former Speaker of the Russian State Duma, stated that support for the Udmurt language and literature does not come from Estonian funds, but rather from other countries. This was a response to the Udmurt poet Aleksei Arzamazov, who spoke of Estonia's support and of the fact that Russia itself, unfortunately, does not provide sufficient support for Udmurt literature. Based on this line of thinking, it was clear that cooperation amongst the Finno-Ugric peoples was to be brought under state control. These changes began to intensify following the occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014. Above all, the central government did not take

kindly to the World Congresses of Finno-Ugric Peoples, as these raised the national and international prestige of the Finno-Ugric peoples. The mere participation of the presidents of Estonia, Finland and Hungary in the congresses was of symbolic significance. Moreover, the welcoming speeches and presentations delivered at the congresses occasionally alluded to the fact that Finno-Ugric peoples face problems in Russia, particularly linguistic ones. The final documents of the congresses also referred to various international instruments concerning the rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities, including the right to self-determination.

The first attempt by the state authorities to bring the congresses under their control was made in 2008, when it was proposed that the congress headquarters be moved from Helsinki to Russia. Unfortunately, no decision could be reached at the time as to which city specifically, and so the headquarters remained in Helsinki. In 2012, the state authorities intervened in the formation of delegations from Finno-Ugric peoples to ensure that the delegations sent from the Russian Federation to the congress in Siófok, Hungary, would consist of loyal individuals whose message would be: 'Everything is fine here.' Careful steps were taken to ensure that they did not have too much contact with Estonians, Finns and Hungarians. In 2016, however, it was decided that the Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia would send reduced delegations (five delegates) to the congress held in Lahti, as there was no money. The lack of funds was allegedly due to the fact that Estonia, Finland and Hungary had joined in imposing sanctions against Russia.

In April 2021, the Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples of Russia – which, in the view of the Russian authorities, is the only legitimate union of Finno-Ugric organisations – stated in a [press release](#) that “in the international Finno-Ugric movement in recent times, destructive, clearly political tendencies have come to the fore particularly strikingly, which are also evident in the activities of the World Congresses of Finno-Ugric Peoples, where the ‘Finno-Ugric card’ is used as a means of exerting pressure on one country or another, whilst ethnic issues are exploited for the purposes of ethno-political speculation”. It was also noted that the congresses are not organised to find constructive solutions to problems, but are used as a tool to interfere in Russia’s internal affairs. For this reason, the association did not consider the participation of the Finno-Ugric peoples of the Russian Federation in the

Congress to be advisable, adding at the end of the statement: “We question the necessity of holding such congresses in the future.”

This brought an end to the hitherto fairly unanimous cooperation between the Finno-Ugric peoples. In fact, several forms of cooperation had already been discontinued earlier, such as the congresses of the Youth Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples (MAFUN), and the International Finno-Ugric Students’ Congress (IFUSCO) was not held in Khanty-Mansiysk in 2016.

#### [Jaak Prozes. Soome-ugri rahvad uute väljakutsete eel – Keel ja Kirjandus 8–9, 2022](#)

On 19 May 2023, a [meeting of the Council for Ethnic Relations](#) was held under the chairmanship of Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, at which the strategy for Russia’s state ethnic policy, the integration of newly occupied regions into Russia’s socio-cultural space, and changes to nationality policy were discussed, prompted by “external threats and dangers”. [Russian senator, president of AFUN Pyotr Tultayev: “Radical organisations are created in Europe acting in the name of Finno-Ugric peoples” – Fenno-Ugria, 13 June 2023](#)

The meeting was attended by leading experts on ethnic policy from the Russian Federation, State Duma deputies, senators (members of the upper house of the Duma) and leaders of cultural autonomies of ethnicities. Among the numerous speakers was Pyotr Tultayev, a Moksha-Mordvin and President of the Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples of the Russian Federation (AFUN), whose remarks concerning the Finno-Ugric peoples we present to our readers here.

Tultaev noted that at a time when the US and its allies, actively exploiting the issue of nationalities, are openly talking about dismantling Russia, it is entirely justified to speak of “protecting the value most important to Russia — inter-ethnic harmony and unity”.

In the case of the Finno-Ugric peoples, for example, there is said to be “deliberate action to discredit Russia’s state ethnic policy [ ... ] to stir up nationalist sentiments”. According to Tultayev, “radical nationalist organisations acting on behalf of the Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia” are being set up in Europe with the help of the US and its allies, under the banner of democracy. Tultayev noted that at various

international events, “one can hear accusations from representatives of these self-proclaimed organisations regarding violations of our peoples’ rights and the denial of the ethnic factor in personnel policy in the Finno-Ugric regions”. According to the senator, representatives of such organisations overlook the fact that Russia is a multi-ethnic state and position themselves as champions of the interests of their compatriots living in exile.

Tultayev refers to the Erzya congress held in Otepää (the Erzya National Congress took place in Otepää from 30 September to 1 October 2022): “Absolutely absurd things happen, such as the so-called national congress held in Estonia at the end of 2022, which brought together around 20 delegates – former Russians and current citizens of the USA, Ukraine and Estonia, who have long since forgotten their homeland. They hate and denigrate it.” Tultayev also criticised the fact that the Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia and other representatives of the Estonian authorities took part in the event, and that the Russian state was accused. According to Tultayev, the “former Russian citizens” present at the Erzya Congress spoke of “a state to be established on ethnic grounds, which would encompass the Republic of Mordovia, the Republic of Chuvashia, the Penza and Ulyanovsk Oblasts, parts of the Nizhny Novgorod, Ryazan and Samara Oblasts”, and that the current status of these regions was declared unlawful.

In his speech, he expressed his delight that “our peoples reject such ideas and monstrous plans” and noted that “there is a prevailing understanding and awareness, proven over the centuries, that our homeland is Russia, one and indivisible”. Tultayev affirmed that “the Finno-Ugric peoples and their social organisations support you, Vladimir Vladimirovich, as President, in the conduct of the special military operation and in other decisions aimed at defending our country’s sovereignty”. Tultayev also noted that, “due to excessive politicisation” of the World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples, the Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples (AFUN) considered further participation in the activities of the Congress to be inappropriate. He confirmed that the Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia and AFUN are open to international cooperation. “We are prepared to maintain contacts with both civil society organisations and government bodies within the framework of various

cultural and educational projects, whilst respecting the dignity and choices of our peoples and the national characteristics of the Russian Federation. Russia is unique in its multi-ethnicity and the richness of its folk traditions and culture.”

Pyotr Tultayev did not make a single appeal to the Russian President regarding the protection of the languages and cultures of the Finno-Ugric peoples, let alone their development. He made just one proposal – to establish a theatre in Moscow where theatrical productions from various regions of Russia could be staged!

Tultaev believed that the theatre would serve as a centre for the theatrical arts of all peoples, where national theatres could stage guest performances in a variety of languages. He suggested that various exhibitions would also be organised there, and that it could even house a museum of the peoples of Russia.

Putin thanked him and said, “As for the separation of the Russian and Finno-Ugric peoples, this is done by people who have absolutely no idea where they are or who they are. Slavic and Finno-Ugric tribes lived together even before the formation of the centralised Russian state and the state structures of certain Finno-Ugric peoples. This is fully confirmed by archaeological excavations, which show that these tribes lived in harmony and peace. Traces of the settlements of Finno-Ugric peoples can even be found south of present-day Moscow.”

Putin emphasised that, for this reason, these attempts to divide the Russian and Finno-Ugric peoples have no basis whatsoever and are doomed to failure. “They would do well to know that even the Mordvin people you mentioned, if I am not mistaken, have five dialects, and the people who speak these dialects cannot understand one another. In this sense, the Russian language is the natural language of communication both within one’s own ethnic group and in inter-ethnic communication. Those who believe or think that it can be otherwise are of limited understanding. It is good that we have such opponents.”

#### *Population according to the 2020/2021 census data*

The census, organised to assess the situation of the ethnic groups living in the Russian Federation, took place from 15 October to 14 November 2021, whilst in

areas that were difficult to access it was conducted from 1 October 2020 to 20 December of the following year. Originally scheduled for 2020, the census was postponed due to the nationwide pandemic.

According to preliminary results, the population of the Russian Federation was recorded as 147.2 million. Compared with the previous census in 2010, the population increased by 2.05 million or 1.4 %. The population growth is primarily due to an intensification of migration, which was evident throughout the period.

The net migration figure in the Russian Federation was +2.4 million, meaning that 5.4 million people migrated into the country and 3 million out. Migration into the Russian Federation was mainly from the CIS countries. The return of compatriots also contributed to the population increase, totalling 1 million. Most returned from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Armenia. Natural population growth, however, was strongly negative in the Russian Federation.

Compared with the 2010 census, the population increased in 28 regions of the Russian Federation. Large cities saw the greatest growth, and there was also a noticeable increase in the Caucasus republics. Urbanisation increased significantly; 75 % of the Russian Federation's population now lives in towns and cities. Four new cities with over a million inhabitants emerged: Krasnodar, Krasnoyarsk, Perm and Voronezh.

The largest population increase was in Sevastopol, at nearly 40 %. The populations of Chechnya and Ingushetia grew by more than 20 %.

The population of the regions of the Russian Federation with Finno-Ugric populations declined, particularly in the Republics of Karelia and Komi, where the decline was almost 20 %. The latter two were also among the regions with the fastest-declining populations in the entire Russian Federation.

| Region              | 2021 census | Change  |
|---------------------|-------------|---------|
| Republic of Karelia | 539,000     | – 17,2% |

|                                |           |         |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Republic of Komi               | 738,000   | – 18,1% |
| Republic of Mari El            | 677,000   | – 2,7%  |
| Republic of Mordovia           | 784,000   | – 6,1%  |
| Republic of Udmurtia           | 1,453,000 | – 4,5%  |
| Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug  | 1,711,000 | + 11,7% |
| Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug | 510,000   | – 2,5%  |
| Nenets Autonomous Okrug        | 41,000    | – 2,4%  |

*Предварительные итоги Всероссийской переписи населения*

Figures relating to languages and ethnic groups confirm a trend towards the assimilation of almost all the ethnic groups within the Russian Federation, where these groups seem to be losing their identity and language at an ever-increasing rate, as if in a melting pot. This assimilation is fuelled by the exclusion of the native languages of the Finno-Ugric peoples from almost all spheres of social life, particularly education. Over the past decade, there has also been a ‘Campaign of Russian Citizenry’, which has clearly made it more uncomfortable to identify as belonging to one ethnic group or another.

At the end of 2024, the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation published data from the 2020 census concerning ethnicity and proficiency in national languages, which, due to COVID-19, had been collected mainly between October and November 2021.

The results sparked a great deal of controversy and raised the question of how seriously the findings of the new census can be taken. There are numerous people who were allegedly not counted or could not be reached, whilst census takers speak of closed doors. It is also felt that the reliability of the data is undermined by the fact

that 16.6 million people left their ethnicity and mother tongue unstated. It is believed that this group includes, in particular, those ethnic groups who do not feel safe for ethnic reasons. However, 12.1 million people did not wish to answer the question regarding language proficiency. Representatives of the Tatar and Mordvin peoples have already drawn attention to these high figures, as the numbers of these peoples have declined significantly compared with the last census.

It must also be noted that the numbers of Tatars, and particularly Mordvins, had already fallen considerably by the time of the previous census. It also emerged that 1.4 million people were not included in the list of ethnic groups provided to the census takers. Of these, more than one million considered themselves Russian (россиянин), whilst 169 people identified as Finno-Ugric, Ugric or Ugric-Finnish. As is well known, such ethnic groups do not actually exist.

**Table 1. The eight largest ethnic groups in the Russian Federation**

| <b>Nationality</b>  | <b>2010</b>        | <b>2021</b>        | <b>Change %</b> |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Russians            | 111,016,896        | 105,579,179 (1)    | −4,9            |
| Tatars              | 5,310,649          | 4,713,669 (2)      | −11,2           |
| Ukrainians          | 1,927,988          | 884,007 (8)        | −54,1           |
| Bashkirs            | 1,584,554          | 1,571,879 (4)      | −0,8            |
| Chuvash             | 1,435,872          | 1,067,139 (5)      | −25,7           |
| Chechens            | 1,431,360          | 1,674,854 (3)      | +11,7           |
| Armenians           | 1,182,388          | 946,172 (7)        | −20,0           |
| Avars               | 912,090            | 1,012,090 (6)      | +11,0           |
| <b>Russia TOTAL</b> | <b>142 856 536</b> | <b>147 182 123</b> | <b>+3,0</b>     |

*Source: All-Russian census of 2020/2021*

Overall, the population of the Russian Federation has increased compared with previous figures, but the natural fertility rate is significantly negative. The growth has been driven by migration (2.4 million) and the annexed territories, Crimea and Sevastopol (2 million). Significant changes have taken place within ethnic groups, with the number of people who have migrated from the North Caucasus and Central Asia increasing once again. Among the larger ethnic groups, the numbers of Avars and Chechens have risen particularly sharply, the latter now being the third-largest ethnic group in the Russian Federation. Compared with 2010, there are significantly more Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Uzbeks amongst the immigrants. Contrary to rumours of an increase in the number of Chinese, their numbers have fallen to 21,000.

It is striking that the number of Russians has fallen significantly, by as many as 5.5 million. The natural fertility rate in the Russian population is also one of the lowest in the entire federation. For every 1,000 Russian women, there are 1,442 children, whereas, for example, there are 1,973 children per 1,000 Udmurt women and 1,906 children per 1,000 Mari women. However, this does not mean a decline in the proportion of Russians or the Russian language. Most ethnic groups are rapidly contributing to the Russian-speaking world. It thus transpires that more than 6 million people of other nationalities consider Russian to be their mother tongue rather than their national language. Ukrainians make a very significant contribution here; their numbers have fallen by more than half, and 70 % of them consider Russian to be their national language. In the case of Ukrainians, it is clear that both their nationality and language have been suppressed. There is also evidence that Ukrainians living in Russia are changing their surnames en masse. Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Kazakhs, the majority of whom have lived in Russia for a couple of generations, have now also begun to assimilate. It is therefore clear that almost all ethnic groups are rapidly becoming Russified, with the exception of the Chechens and a few other North Caucasian peoples.

In total, 1,649,635 people in the Russian Federation identified as belonging to Finno-Ugric ethnic groups in 2020/2021.

**Table 2. Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic peoples (listed in descending order by percentage change)**

| <b>Nationality</b>            | <b>2010</b> | <b>2021</b> | <b>Change %</b> |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Votes                         | 64          | 99          | +54,6           |
| Nenets                        | 44,640      | 49,646      | +11,2           |
| Khanty                        | 30,943      | 31,467      | +1,6            |
| Mansi                         | 12,269      | 12,228      | −0,3            |
| Selkup                        | 3,649       | 3,458       | −5,2            |
| Bessermans                    | 2,201       | 2,036       | −7,5            |
| Enets                         | 227         | 201         | −11,6           |
| Saami                         | 1,771       | 1,530       | −13,6           |
| Nganasan                      | 862         | 687         | −20,3           |
| Izhorians                     | 266         | 210         | −21,1           |
| Mari                          | 547,605     | 423,803     | −22,6           |
| incl. Meadow and Eastern Mari | 218         | 101         | −53,7           |
| incl. Hill Mari               | 23,559      | 14,077      | −40,2           |
| Veps                          | 5,936       | 4,534       | −23,6           |
| Udmurts                       | 552,299     | 386,465     | −30,0           |

|                     |                  |                  |              |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Mordvins            | 744,236          | 484,450          | –34,9        |
| incl. Moksha        | 4,767            | 11,801           | +147,6       |
| incl. Erzya         | 57,008           | 50,086           | –12,1        |
| Komi (Zyrians)      | 228,235          | 143,516          | –37,1        |
| incl. Izhma Komi    | 6,420            | 4,748            | –26,0        |
| Perm Komi           | 94,456           | 55,786           | –40,9        |
| Karelians           | 60,815           | 32,422           | –46,7        |
| Hungarians          | 2,781            | 1,460            | –47,5        |
| Estonians           | 17,875           | 7,859            | –56,0        |
| incl. Seto          | 214              | 234              | +9,3         |
| Finns               | 20,267           | 7,778            | –61,6        |
| incl. Ingrian Finns | 441              | 571              | +29,5        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>        | <b>2,371,398</b> | <b>1,649,635</b> | <b>–30,4</b> |

*Source: All-Russian census of 2020/2021*

As can be seen from Table 2, indigenous peoples whose numbers are either increasing or have declined only marginally have fared better. The number of Nenets is approaching 50,000. If the number of Nenets exceeds 50,000, the question of removing the Nenets from the Russian Federation's register of indigenous peoples will come to the fore, as under the neighbouring country's legislation, only those indigenous peoples numbering fewer than 50,000 are recognised as such. For

example, the Karelians are not considered an indigenous people, even though, based on the 50,000 threshold, they should meet this criterion. Similarly, the numbers of the Khanty and, somewhat surprisingly, the Votes have risen again. The main reason for this increase in numbers is likely to be the subsidies paid to indigenous peoples, as a result of which, there is a tendency to classify children from mixed families as belonging to an indigenous people. These subsidies have certainly also had an impact on the Seto of the Russian Federation, who, a few years ago, were busy appearing in court to testify that they really are Seto.

Large ethnic groups, by contrast, have fared very poorly during this short period. Particularly striking is the decline in the Mordvin population by 260,000 people, as well as the decline in the Udmurt population by 170,000 and the Mari population by 120,000. Behind this lies an ever-accelerating process of assimilation, fuelled by the displacement of the national languages of the Finno-Ugric peoples from virtually all spheres of social life, first and foremost, of course, education. In addition, a so-called 'Campaign of Russian Citizenry' was waged for a whole decade, which clearly made it more uncomfortable to identify as belonging to one ethnic group or another. Whilst the number of Mari, Mordvins and Udmurts fell by around 12 % between 2002 and 2010, the decline has now reached 30 %. Overall, the population of Finno-Ugric peoples fell by 14.2 % between 2002 and 2010, but by 30.4 % during the 2010–2020 period – the rate of assimilation has been 2.5 times faster than before. Somewhat surprisingly, the number of Moksha people has doubled, which is likely linked to a shift in the identity of some Mordvins, just as, for example, the number of Hill Mari people increased between 2002 and 2010.

[Uurali rahvad ja Venemaa 2020. aasta rahvaloendus – Fenno-Ugria, 13 February 2023](#)

[Jaak Prozes. Uurali rahvad ja Venemaa 2020. aasta rahvaloendus – Sirp, 10 February 2023](#)

#### 4. Finno-Ugric languages according to the 2020/21 census data

To generalise, 1 million, or two-thirds, of the Finno-Ugric people living in the Russian Federation – who number approximately 1.6 million in total – do not speak their own language.

**Table 3. Proficiency in Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic (Uralic) languages (ranked in descending order by percentage change)**

| Language                            | 2010    | 2021    | Change % |
|-------------------------------------|---------|---------|----------|
| Nganasan                            | 125     | 300     | +140,0   |
| Enets                               | 43      | 97      | +125,6   |
| Mansi                               | 938     | 1,346   | +43,5    |
| Nenets                              | 21,926  | 24,487  | +11,7    |
| Khanty                              | 9,584   | 9,230   | –3,7     |
| Selkup                              | 1,023   | 975     | –4,7     |
| Udmurt                              | 324,338 | 255,877 | –21,1    |
| Saami                               | 353     | 259     | –26,6    |
| Mari, incl. Meadow and Eastern Mari | 365,316 | 258,951 | –29,0    |
| Komi                                | 156,099 | 108,958 | –30,2    |
| Hill Mari                           | 23,062  | 15,352  | –33,4    |
| Perm Komi                           | 63,106  | 41,447  | –34,3    |

|              |                  |                             |                       |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Veps         | 3,613            | 2,173                       | –39,9                 |
| Votic        | 68               | 39                          | –42,6                 |
| Izhorian     | 123              | 70                          | –43,1                 |
| Mordvin      | 392,941          | 220,090                     | –44,0 (–28,7*)        |
| incl. Moksha | 1,529            | 19,911                      |                       |
| incl. Erzya  | 36,726           | 40,045                      |                       |
| Karelian     | 25,605           | 13,872                      | –45,8                 |
| Estonian     | 15,583           | 6,724                       | –56,9                 |
| Finnish      | 38,873           | 14,075                      | –63,8                 |
| Hungarian    | 6,888            | 2,469                       | –64,2                 |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>1,488,349</b> | <b>976,791 or 1,036,747</b> | <b>–34,4 or –30,3</b> |

\*The difference in the percentage stems from the fact that it is not entirely clear whether the Erzya and Moksha languages are included in the Mordvin language group here or not.

*Source: All-Russian census of 2020/2021*

Overall, an even more rapid decline in the number of speakers of Finno-Ugric languages can be observed. Just twenty years ago, in 2002, over 2 million people spoke Finno-Ugric languages. Now the figure is under 1 million. Government policy, technology that disregards smaller languages, and developments in the mass media have, in a very short space of time, led to the loss of more than a million speakers of

Finno-Ugric languages. Looking at the 2010 census data, the number of Hungarian and Finnish speakers had declined at almost the slowest rate compared with other Finno-Ugric languages at that time. Now, however, the number of speakers of the languages of Finno-Ugric peoples with their own states is declining the fastest. The number of speakers of the Mordvin languages and Karelian has also declined particularly rapidly. Once again, however, we can highlight the increase in the number of speakers of the languages of the Northern indigenous peoples, which is quite exceptional, as between 2002 and 2010 the number of speakers of any Finno-Ugric language did not increase. According to the 2010 census, the Mari language fared best, with the number of its speakers falling by 19 %. Interesting changes are taking place with the Mordvin language, which, as is well known, does not actually exist. There is the Republic of Mordovia, and there are the Erzya and Moksha languages. This likely reflects a growth in Moksha national identity, as the number of people identifying as Moksha has doubled.

In reality, the situation regarding languages is considerably worse, as the table does not solely reflect the language proficiency of Finno-Ugric peoples. The table also includes, for example, Russians, Tatars and others who are likewise proficient in Finno-Ugric languages. In accordance with census methodology, a speaker of a language is defined as someone who can speak, read and write in that language. However, there are few Russians and representatives of other ethnic groups in this category, so this does not significantly affect the overall picture.

The tragic nature of the situation becomes clear when we compare the number of Finno-Ugric peoples with the number of speakers of their languages. The result shows that, in percentage terms, the Komi and Perm Komi have the highest proficiency in their native language at nearly 75 %, followed by the Udmurts and Mari at just over 60 %. As for all other Finno-Ugric peoples, it can be said that more than half of them do not speak their mother tongue. Whilst we may previously have been pleased to note an increase in the number of indigenous peoples living in the north, as well as in the number of speakers of their languages, the reality is that 49 % of the Nenets, 29 % of the Khanty and 11 % of the Mansi are proficient in their native language. Thus, more than half of the Finno-Ugric peoples living in the Russian Federation do not know their native language, that is, they cannot speak it. Although

they consider themselves to be Mari or Mordvins, they are without a native language, which has been replaced by Russian.

In addition to language proficiency, the census asked for the first time in a long while which language people use on a daily basis. These figures are somewhat lower than the numbers of people who are proficient in a language. It turns out that it is mainly people living in rural areas who use a language every day. For example, 45,645 people use the Udmurt language in towns, compared with 177,141 in rural areas. The Mari language is used by 70,632 people in towns and 158,046 in rural areas. The differences between language proficiency and daily usage are considerably greater for Estonian, Finnish and Hungarian in the Russian Federation. For example, 2,457 people in Russia speak Estonian, 4,675 speak Finnish and 872 speak Hungarian – that is, almost three times fewer than the number of people who can speak the language.

There are more Finno-Ugric speakers who consider their national language to be their mother tongue than there are people who can speak the language.

**Table 4. Number and share of people who consider the national language to be their mother tongue**

| <b>Nationality</b> | <b>Nr. in 1989</b> | <b>Share %</b> | <b>Nr. in 2021</b> | <b>Share %</b> | <b>Change</b> |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Mordvins           | 740,048            | 69.0           | 332,829            | 69.6           | –407,219      |
| Mari               | 526,961            | 81.9           | 330,721            | 79.3           | –196,240      |
| Udmurts            | 506,169            | 70.8           | 265,531            | 69.2           | –240,638      |
| Komi               | 238,880            | 71.0           | 94,530             | 66.4           | –144,350      |
| Perm Komi          | 104,715            | 71.1           | 38,564             | 69.5           | –66,151       |
| Karelians          | 60,696             | 48.6           | 8,402              | 26.1           | –52,294       |

|           |        |      |        |      |         |
|-----------|--------|------|--------|------|---------|
| Nenets    | 26,553 | 77.7 | 38,015 | 77.7 | +11,642 |
| Khanty    | 13,542 | 60.8 | 13,691 | 44.3 | +149    |
| Mansi     | 3,037  | 36.7 | 2,093  | 17.3 | −944    |
| Veps      | 6,231  | 51.3 | 1,120  | 24.1 | −5,111  |
| Selkup    | 1,701  | 47.7 | 1,552  | 45.6 | −149    |
| Saami     | 771    | 42.0 | 247    | 16.2 | −524    |
| Nganasan  | 1,052  | 83.4 | 411    | 59.4 | −641    |
| Izhorians | 148    | 41.9 | 66     | 29.2 | −82     |
| Enets     | 95     | 45.5 | 67     | 33.7 | −28     |
| Votes     | N/A    |      | 16     | 15.3 |         |
| Seto**    | N/A    |      | 101    | 41.7 |         |

\*\* The Seto were apparently unable to specify the Seto language as their national language, as it was not listed in the language register. 101 Seto stated that their mother tongue was Estonian. The Russian Federation recognises the Seto as an indigenous people.

*Allikas: 2020. aasta ülevenemaaline rahvaloendus*

In several censuses, a question was included regarding the national language as a mother tongue, with the option to specify two mother tongues. As can be seen from Table 4, the number of Finno-Ugric peoples who consider their national language to be their mother tongue has fallen dramatically over the past 30 years. This is particularly striking in the case of the Mordvins, Komi, Perm Komi, Karelians, Veps,

Saami and Izhorians. Their numbers have fallen by more than half. The number of Karelians has fallen by a total of 7.2 times, making them the Finno-Ugric people living in the Russian Federation who are disappearing from the historical stage at the fastest rate. As an exception, the number of Nenets who consider their national language to be their mother tongue has increased, whilst the declines among other northern peoples are relatively small. The percentages of the larger ethnic groups who regard their national language as their mother tongue remain more or less stable, indicating, above all, the relative stability of language-based ethnic identity – the national language is equated with one's ethnic affiliation, whilst proficiency in the national language is not a key factor here. As regards more significant differences, I would point out here that the number of Votes, Karelians and Veps who regard their national language as their mother tongue is considerably lower than the number of speakers of those languages. Among them, therefore, there are more people who, whilst proficient in their national language, for some reason regard Russian as their mother tongue.

Nevertheless, even on the basis of this table, it can be argued that, over the course of a few decades, assimilation has intensified, as has the number of Finno-Ugric peoples who already consider Russian to be their mother tongue. This is particularly noticeable amongst the indigenous peoples of the North – the Khanty, Mansi and Nganasan – as well as the Karelians, Veps and Votes.

The data from the 2021 census conducted in the Russian Federation does not offer us any cause for comfort. Although the proportion of Finno-Ugric peoples who consider their national language to be their mother tongue has not decreased significantly compared to 2010, the Finno-Ugric peoples are undergoing very rapid assimilation into the Russian population, and the situation regarding their command of their national languages is poor. National autonomy within their own republic or oblast offers some protection to Finno-Ugric peoples and their languages. For example, according to the 1989 census, 29.2 % of the population in the Republic of Mordovia were Mordvins, 50.1 % of Mari people in the Republic of Mari El, and 69.5 % of Udmurts in the Republic of Udmurtia, which highlights the widespread dispersion of Finno-Ugric peoples and the arbitrary nature of the boundaries of their autonomous regions. However, looking at the 2021 data, it can be seen that currently

60 % of Mordvins living in the Russian Federation live in the Republic of Mordovia, 58.1 % of Mari in the Republic of Mari El, and 77.6 % of Udmurts in the Republic of Udmurtia. Thus, the proportion of Finno-Ugric peoples living in autonomous territories has increased significantly, particularly in the case of the Mordvins. Unfortunately, however, unlike in the 2010 census, the proportion of Finno-Ugric peoples in their respective republics has begun to decline; it is currently highest – at 40.1 % – amongst the Mari.

As for what the future might hold for the Finno-Ugric peoples and their languages, language proficiency among the 5–9 age group could help to predict this. In this group, there are 9,817 speakers of Mari, 7,635 of Udmurt, 4,149 of the Mordvin languages, 3,726 of Komi and 2,525 of Nenets. There are 49 children aged 5–9 who speak Karelian, whilst, for example, 677 speak Khanty.

Since 2018, the study of Finno-Ugric languages in the Russian Federation has been voluntary and is only possible upon a parent's request. Until 2021, pupils could study their mother tongue for two hours a week, but it is now recommended that this be limited to one hour a week. The result is both a decline in proficiency in the mother tongue and a reduction in the number of pupils learning their national language.

When it comes to Russian statistical data, the question naturally arises as to how reliable it is. The main reason for scepticism is the conduct of the census under COVID-19 conditions; secondly, the use of different technologies; and thirdly, the significant discrepancy between place of residence and official registration. At the same time, the figures relating to languages and ethnic groups confirm the general trend – clearly observable since as far back as 1979 – towards the assimilation of almost all ethnic groups in the Russian Federation, a trend which, according to each census, is accelerating ever more rapidly. The only group to have resisted this trend are the Chechens, 98.8 % of whom consider their national language to be their mother tongue.

Anna Kuznetsova, a project manager at Fenno-Ugria of Komi origin, has examined language policy in Russia using the examples of the Karelians, Komi and Saami in her forthcoming doctoral thesis, looking at which federal laws exist and how they are implemented in practice. The implementation of language-related laws is largely

nominal, with the result that the national language is used merely for decorative purposes. For example, in Syktyvkar in Komi, street names are in two languages; there is a monument to the letter 'Ö' in the Komi language; and at the airport, the greeting 'Welcome!' is in Komi.

Unfortunately, it is the families themselves who make decisions to the detriment of their mother tongue, as Kuznetsova confirms: "Some Komi families choose English, arguing that a child will have better educational opportunities if they know English – so why do they need the Komi language? Some headteachers are concerned: how am I supposed to draw up a curriculum when only a few children at the school – one in Year 5, another in Year 7 – want to learn Komi? Komi is not a compulsory subject at school." Ten years ago, there were language nests in Komi kindergartens where only the local language was spoken, and there were language immersion groups. Now, however, language nests no longer exist in Russia, because the Russian government's position is that this system is unsuitable for Russia as it leads to separatism: if children start speaking their own language – Mari, Komi or Karelian – in nursery, it means that these children will no longer be able to speak Russian.

Aimar Ventsel emphasised in the same discussion that one must also bear in mind the proportion of ethnic minorities in one's own country: whilst Finno-Ugric territories appear as large areas on the map, nowhere do they constitute a majority as an ethnic group: the Komi make up 20 %, the Tatars 40 %, and the Buryats 25 % of the population in these territories.

This, too, is subject to significant pressure from the local Russian population; these discussions began in 2010–2011.

[Jaak Prozes. Uurali rahvad ja Venemaa 2020. aasta rahvaloendus – Sirp, 10 February 2023](#)

[Introduction to the Opinion Festival panel "Russian aggression in Ukraine and Finno-Ugric peoples" – Fenno-Ugria, 16 August 2023](#)

[Fenno-Ugria at Paide Opinion Festival 11 August 2023: "Russian aggression in Ukraine and Finno-Ugric peoples" – Fenno-Ugria, 16 August 2023](#)

## 5. Finno-Ugric language corpora and machine translations

A language corpus is an electronic collection of texts that contains grammatically annotated texts. The importance of large language corpora has grown significantly in recent years, as large language models based on artificial intelligence use language corpora for training; the larger and more diverse the content of these corpora, the better the results. Only a few of Russia's Finno-Ugric languages have language corpora of any significant size, and consequently most large language models are unable to communicate in these languages.

The corpora for the Mari (Meadow Mari and Hill Mari) languages are of a relatively high standard, containing texts from many different fields and spanning several periods. The most important corpora are as follows:

- [Корпус марийского языка](#) (Mari language corpus): 21.2 million words (dictionaries, press, fiction)
  - [Корпуса лугового марийского языка](#) (Corpus of Meadow Mari): 5.53 million words from the web and 3.59 million from social media
  - [Korp](#) of 57 million characters (c. 10 million words) in Meadow Mari and 6.25 million characters (c. 1 million words) in Hill Mari, also containing fiction, press articles and academic texts, hosted by the University of Tromsø
  - The [Mari-Russian parallel corpus](#) contains 405,000 sentences.

Major corpora of the Erzya language:

- [Korp](#) contains 14 million characters (c. 3 million words)
- [Корпуса эрзянского языка](#) (Corpus of Erzya): 2.3 million words (press, fiction, blogs, Wikipedia, Bible translation) + 830,000 words from social media

The Moksha-language corpora are:

- [Korp](#): 12.8 million characters (c. 3 million words), comprising press and fiction
- [Корпуса мокшанского языка](#) (Corpus of Moksha): 1.75 million words, comprising press articles, Bible translations and blogs

The largest Udmurt corpora are:

- [Национальный корпус удмуртского языка](#) (National Corpus of the Udmurt Language), containing 6.2 million words (prose, poetry, drama, press, educational literature, folklore)
- [Корпуса удмуртского языка](#) (Corpus of Udmurt) contains nearly 10 million words, mainly journalistic texts, and 2.7 million words of social media texts
- [Korp](#): 270,000 characters (c. 50,000 words, Udmurt Wikipedia only)

The Komi language corpora are:

- [Корпус Коми языка](#) (Komi National Corpus), containing 88.5 million words (prose, poetry, drama, journalism, educational literature, scientific texts)
- [Korp](#): 960,000 characters (c. 200,000 words)
- [Корпуса коми-зырянского языка](#) (Corpus of Komi (Zyrian)): 1.75 million words from the press and 1.85 million words from social media

[BenKap](#), the Olonets dialect corpus of the Karelian language, contains 1.2 million words.

The corpora for the other languages contain fewer than a million words. For example, the Veps language corpus of [BenKap](#) consists mainly of dialect texts, texts from the magazine Kodima and a translation of the Bible, and contains approximately 760,000 words.

Among the digitised language materials, the [Fenno-Ugrica](#) project by the National Library of Finland is particularly noteworthy. As part of this project, around 1,500 monographs and over 110 periodicals in more than 20 Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic languages from the early to mid-20th century were digitised.

### *Machine translation*

Machine translation is available for only some languages: [Google Translate](#) translates the Meadow Mari, Udmurt and Komi languages.

[Yandex Translate](#) offers a ready-to-use translation service for Komi, whilst translations for Udmurt, Hill Mari and Meadow Mari are currently in the beta phase.

[Neurotõlge](#), an AI-based translation portal being developed at the University of Tartu, covers 23 Finno-Ugric languages, but the translation quality for smaller languages is still poor.

AI applications based on large language models are capable of communicating to a limited extent in the Finno-Ugric languages of Russia. For example, Anthropic's Claude model (Sonnet 4, <https://claude.ai>) is capable of translating and responding in Mari, Udmurt and Komi, and to a limited extent also in Erzya, Moksha, Karelian and Veps. The widely used AI application ChatGPT is able to communicate to some extent in Mari, Udmurt, Komi and Karelian, and to a very limited extent in Erzya, Moksha, Khanty and Mansi.

In terms of language corpora and language technology support, Mari, Udmurt and Komi are in a better position. The largest text corpus is in Komi (88 million words), but compared to Hungarian, Finnish and Estonian, this is still very small. For example, the Estonian unified corpus currently in use contains 3.8 billion words (40 times more than the largest Komi corpus). The Erzya, Moksha and Hill Mari languages are in an even worse state, with corpora containing fewer than 10 million words. For Finno-Ugric languages with smaller numbers of speakers, such as Veps, Karelian, Ludic, Kildin Saami, Khanty, Mansi and Samoyedic, language technology support is very limited and corpora are either non-existent or very small.

## 6. Finno-Ugric organisations

### **Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples (AFUN)** ([Ассоциация финно-угорских народов, АФУН](#))

The Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples (AFUN) is currently the most influential of the organisations uniting the Finno-Ugric peoples of the Russian Federation and organising cooperation amongst them. It represents regions such as the Republic of Mari El, the Kemerovo Oblast and the Republic of Crimea. The organisation comprises a total of 32 regions, from which the 51 members of the council are appointed. Each of the Finno-Ugric republics is represented by four council members, with the exception of Karelia and Crimea, which each have two members. For example, Crimea is represented by Olga Skripchenko (Salman), an ethnic Estonian. The association is headed by senior government officials from the Finno-Ugric republics of Russia. Its leader is Pyotr Tultayev, a Moksha native and Senator for the Republic of Mordovia in the Federation Council of Russia, his deputies are Mikhail Vasyutin, a Hill Mari, Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Mari El, and Tatiana Ishmatova, an Udmurt and Deputy Speaker of the Udmurt Parliament.

The organisation emphasises its close ties with the authorities, highlighting that everything is done in accordance with state policy and stressing that its activities support Russian identity.

In 2021, the association effectively split the Finno-Ugric peoples' movement with its statement that it considered the participation of Russia's Finno-Ugric peoples in the 8th World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples, held in Tartu in 2021, to be inadvisable.

The organisation has fully justified Russia's invasion of Ukraine, repeatedly emphasised the support of the Finno-Ugric peoples for the war, and maintained that the invasion of Ukraine was justified. Naturally, the organisation strongly supports all nationwide initiatives that consolidate Russian society in the spirit of the Russian language and militarism. Tultayev himself sits on the Russian Federation President's Council for Ethnic Policy, where he speaks out, condemning compatriots who have organised themselves in foreign countries and are attempting to discredit Russia's ethnic policy and divide ethnic communities. In his view, Estonia, Finland and

Hungary are doing the same by supporting compatriots who have fled abroad and their organisations. Tultayev is critical of Russian linguists of Finno-Ugric languages who believe that the situation of the Finno-Ugric languages is poor.

In November 2024, the organisation established a Youth Council, intended as an alternative to the Association of Young People of Finno-Ugric Peoples (MAFUN), which was active in its day. The organisation's activities are organised through congresses, which take place every four years – the most recent one was held in December 2021. The organisation's largest undertaking is the organisation of forums, which take place every two years. The forums are intended as an alternative to the World Congresses of Finno-Ugric Peoples, which take place every two years; the most recent forum was held in Yoshkar-Ola, the capital of the Republic of Mari El, in 2025.

[Soome-Ugri Rahvaste Konsultatiivkomitee vastus AFUNi avaldusele – Fenno-Ugria, 28 April 2021](#)

[“Välismääraja” võttis vaatluse alla AFUNi avalduse ja sellega kaasneva – Fenno-Ugria, 3 May 2021](#)

[AFUNi kongress tegi kummarduse riigivõimule ja rõhutas soome-ugri rahvaste osa ühtses Venemaa Föderatsiooni kultuurikoodis – Fenno-Ugria, 21 December 2021](#)

[Russian senator, president of AFUN Pyotr Tultayev: “Radical organisations are created in Europe acting in the name of Finno-Ugric peoples” – Fenno-Ugria, 13 June 2023](#)

It is not clear to what extent the decision to split the Finno-Ugric peoples' movement was taken by AFUN itself. Rather, the association appears to have acted in accordance with relevant guidelines from the Russian Federation's Agency for Ethnic Affairs, which in turn received these from President Putin's administration. These guidelines stated that, at a time when the Russian Federation wishes to exacerbate tensions with the European Union and NATO in line with its geopolitical interests, the Finno-Ugric peoples are cooperating, and this cooperation must be brought to an end.

[“Finno-Ugric space: reality and contemporary challenges” – Speech by Pyotr Tultayev, Chairman of the Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples of Russia, at the 2nd Forum of Finno-Ugric Peoples – Fenno-Ugria, 7 September 2023](#)

We would like to reiterate here that Fenno-Ugria has, for its part, severed all official ties with Finno-Ugric organisations and published a statement to this effect on its website in March 2022, including a version in Russian ([Учреждение Фенно-Угрия осуждает военные действия России на Украине – Fenno-Ugria, 17 March 2022](#)).

**The Cultural Centre of Finno-Ugric Peoples** in Syktyvkar, Komi ([Финно-угорский транзит 2025 | Вконтакте](#))

There has been some strange going on for some time regarding the Cultural Centre of the Finno-Ugric Peoples of the Russian Federation, based in Syktyvkar in the Komi Republic: its website, [www.finnougoria.ru](http://www.finnougoria.ru), which provided information on cultural events taking place in the Finno-Ugric regions of Russia, was no longer working. Nor could the usual information about Finno-Ugric peoples be found on the centre's page on the social network VKontakte. Consequently, by 2025, rumours that the centre was to be closed began to spread increasingly widely among Finno-Ugric communities in Russia. In June 2025, the centre's director, Tatyana Barakhova, was required to provide an explanation, in which she stated that the centre would not, in fact, be closed down but would be restructured: “As part of this process, the centre's activities will become more centralised and it will become part of the Russian Centre for the Culture of the Peoples, to be established in Moscow. Previously, the centre was one of the branches of the Russian State House of Folk Art (Государственный Российский Дом народного творчества), just as the forthcoming Cultural Centre of the Peoples of Russia will be.” Barakhova's words essentially mean that the Centre for Finno-Ugric Peoples is no longer a legal entity and will not continue to operate in Syktyvkar, but will be absorbed into the Cultural Centre of the Peoples of Russia. The closure of the centre and the dismissal of its current staff have been linked to the need to save money, but also to the fact that cooperation between Finno-Ugric peoples is no longer considered as important. It is now known that some part of the

centre (a few people) will remain as part of the V. Polenov Russian State Centre for Folk Culture, based in Moscow.

Before the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war, the centre was a key partner organisation of Fenno-Ugria Foundation, helping to identify and send folklore ensembles from Finno-Ugric peoples to ethnic festivals. The centre also facilitated a significant proportion of cultural exchange amongst Finno-Ugric peoples, and its website served as a key source of information on Finno-Ugric culture. The centre helped to coordinate cooperation amongst the Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia and was one of the main organisers of the Kindred Peoples' Days held in the Russian Federation. On the other hand, the centre served as a mouthpiece for the Russian Federation's propaganda machine, tasked with portraying the pleasant and carefree lives of the Finno-Ugric peoples living in Russia, accompanied by celebrations, songs, dances and handicrafts. In the last couple of years, however, there has been a vigorous push to develop cooperation projects with representatives of Finno-Ugric peoples living in the occupied territories of Ukraine, to emphasise Russia's unity and to promote the superpower's military ambitions.

The Centre of Finno-Ugric Peoples itself was established in 2006 on the initiative of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and the relevant decree was approved in April 2007. It could be said that the establishment of the centre was, in a sense, a response to the report compiled by Katrin Saks for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2006, which highlighted the poor and unjust situation of the Finno-Ugric peoples. Through its activities, the centre was intended to demonstrate the Russian Federation's care for the Finno-Ugric peoples.

One of the organisation's strengths was its fairly well-functioning website, which regularly featured 10–15 news items a month on the cultural life of the Finno-Ugric peoples, as well as overviews introducing the Finno-Ugric peoples and a collection of useful links for those interested, including access to the Fenno-Ugria website. Admittedly, the news items lacked political topics; they did not reflect the situation of the Finno-Ugric peoples or offer assessments of events taking place in the country. The organisation published compilations introducing the Finno-Ugric peoples and produced documentary films on almost all of the Finno-Ugric peoples.

But what were its activities in 2025? It mainly promoted patriotism, the glorification of the Great Patriotic War, and the popularisation of the Russian language and culture. Finno-Ugric topics became a secondary concern for the centre.

On 15 May, educational events were held in Moscow, Volgograd, Syktyvkar and Moscow, at which, for example, the heroic deeds of reindeer herders and soldiers during the Great Patriotic War were discussed. 24 May was celebrated as the Day of Writing and Culture of the Slavic Peoples. Publications dedicated to Victory Day appeared on the website in all Finno-Ugric languages. Komi Language Week invited people to take part in the patriotic song festival 'My Motherland – My Russia', whilst the festival 'Animals in War' also addressed the theme of war. Victory Day was marked with the 'Windows of Victory' campaign, and articles were published on the 6 May celebrations of St George's Day, honouring the Slavic saint, the valiant dragon-slayer and warrior. 1 May was celebrated as a day of respect and also marked as International Dance Day. For the exhibition 'Reindeer Battalions in the Rear', the centre's director, Tatyana Barakhova, received an award from the all-Russian movement 'Comrades in Arms'. The centre took part in an exhibition on the reindeer battalions at the Komi Representative Office in Moscow.

In April, the centre commemorated Karelian and Veps Alphabet Day, Mordvin Languages Day, and the Day of the Union of the Peoples of Russia and Belarus. The 'Mentor's Day' project was once again dedicated to the army and the Special Military Operation (SVO).

In March, information was published about an expedition to the tundra near Salekhard; a call was made to mark National Guard Day, the history of which dates back to the time of Ivan the Terrible; publications by the Mordvin State Publishing House were presented: encyclopaedias for children in the Erzya and Moksha languages; lectures were held on the theme of '80 Years Since Victory', and Poetry Day was also celebrated, commemorating Alexander Pushkin.

To mark Arctic Day, we have a news item from Novy Urengoy: the head of the organisation has attended the 'Arctic Heritage' song festival for the indigenous peoples of the Arctic. A great deal of material is being published in connection with 2025 being designated the 'Year of the Defenders of the Motherland', but

International Mother Language Day was also celebrated. National-language dictation exercises were promoted, with topics linked to the 80th anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic War, and proverbs in Finno-Ugric languages were also featured. We learn that a film is in the making about Aleksander Ossipov, the first Komi composer. Alongside the celebration of the Saami National Day in February, the Siege of Leningrad is commemorated.

[Kreml hakkas lõhkuma soome-ugri rahvaste kultuurikeskust – Postimees, 21 June 2025](#)

### **The Centre for the Cultures of the Finno-Ugric Peoples on the Volga** ([Поволжский центр культур финно-угорских народов](#))

The Centre for the Culture of Finno-Ugric Peoples on the Volga was established in Saransk, Mordovia, by a decision of the Government of the Russian Federation in 2006. Whilst its activities were initially overshadowed by the centre operating in Syktyvkar, in recent years the organisation's income has increased and its website has taken on a very fresh look. It has now taken over the functions of the Syktyvkar Finno-Ugric Centre, particularly with regard to the publication of news. However, the centre does not have the same network of cooperation partners as the Finno-Ugric Centre in Syktyvkar, which had concluded cooperation agreements. The news primarily concerns events in the Republics of Mordovia and Mari El, but also covers other regions through which the River Volga flows. In May–June 2025, however, the centre's news began to appear on its page on the social network VKontakte, [Поволжский центр культур финно-угорских народов](#), and material from other sources has also been added. Thus, it is possible that the functions of the centre formerly based in Syktyvkar have indeed been transferred to the Volga-based centre. It is evident that, with regard to news coverage, there is collaboration with the Moscow-based 'House of the Peoples of Russia' (Dom Narodov Rossii), and one can surmise the centre's ambitions to become the coordinating centre for cooperation amongst the Finno-Ugric peoples. As early as 2008, tensions were evident between Syktyvkar and Saransk, with Saransk aspiring to become the centre uniting the Finno-Ugric peoples. This is also a point of contention between the

regions and Moscow: Syktyvkar, the capital of the Komi Republic, being a remote location away from the centre, is in a sense a symbol of socio-political cooperation amongst Russia's Finno-Ugric peoples, where matters have been handled shrewdly in the interests of those peoples. Saransk in Mordovia, however, has tended to be a pro-Russian place, where the message has been clear – Russia comes first.

Initially, however, the Saransk Centre's activities have been limited to Mordovia. Among Finno-Ugric topics, folklore features most prominently; one finds no news or information regarding the situation of these peoples. There is, however, plenty of news on folk culture. The main event organised by the organisation is the expedition 'Volga – River of Peace. Dialogue between the Peoples of the Volga Region', which takes place on the riverboat 'Fyodor Dostoevsky'. This is attended primarily by Mordvins, though there have also been representatives of other Finno-Ugric peoples, totalling around 100 people. During the expedition this year, for example, participants visited memorials to those who fell in the Patriotic War, laid flowers and discussed historical memory.

### **Association of Finno-Ugric Universities “Organisation” (not a legal entity)**

[Ассоциация финно-угорских университетов](#)

[Члены Ассоциации](#)

[Новости АФУУ | Ассоциация финно-угорских университетов](#)

[Университет Восточной Финляндии](#)

The association was founded in 2007 in Yoshkar-Ola, with the aim of bringing together the resources of universities to carry out research, teaching and educational activities. The founding members were the universities of Syktyvkar in Komi, Udmurtia, Mari El and Yugra (in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug), and the Szombathely Pedagogical Institute in Hungary. Others have since joined, including the University of Eastern Finland, based in Joensuu, Finland.

Between 2022 and 2024, the association was led by Syktyvkar University, which in turn handed over coordination to Mari State University (Rector Mikhail Shevtsov) for the years 2025–2027.

The most significant milestone in the association's activities was the founding of the Finno-Ugric Students' Association in 2013. The most successful, or perhaps most beneficial, form of cooperation has been the launch of summer schools for learning Finno-Ugric languages. Another interesting initiative is the organisation of Finno-Ugric sports games, where participants compete in the traditional sports of the Finno-Ugric peoples; the first games took place in 2021. The most recent major event to have taken place was the 3rd International Forum 'The Finno-Ugric Vector in the Creative Economy', held in December 2023.

The most recent event reported on in relation to the association's activities was the approval of its logo. Incidentally, one of the centre's most popular events was the Finno-Ugric student beauty pageant.

Although the centre's activities appear to have stalled, a memorandum of cooperation between universities was signed in early 2025, involving 11 universities from the Russian Federation; however, the Hungarian and Finnish universities that had previously participated in the cooperation are now absent from the list.

### *Forum of Finno-Ugric Peoples*

The Forums of Finno-Ugric Peoples were established as a counterbalance to the tradition of the [World Congresses of Finno-Ugric Peoples](#), which began as early as 1921 with the Education Congress and continued until 1992, but with which cooperation soon ceased to suit the Finno-Ugric organisations in Russia. The most recent forum, the Second Forum of Finno-Ugric Peoples of the Russian Federation, entitled 'Ethno-cultural Diversity in the Russian Federation: Contemporary Challenges and Prospects for Development', took place from 16 to 19 August 2023 in Saransk, the capital of the Republic of Mordovia.

Shortly before the forum, the event's chief organiser, Pyotr Tultayev, President of the Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples of Russia, gave an interview to the newspaper "Komsomolskaya Pravda", in which he described the forum as one of the key events in the country's ethnic policy.

He expressed his delight that a large number of delegations had registered for the forum. "For the first time, delegations from Kazakhstan, Crimea, Sevastopol, as well as from the new territories incorporated into Russia, are taking part," he noted.

He said that 27 Finno-Ugric peoples live in Russia and that there are no disputes amongst them, despite the fact that the collective West has sought to drive a wedge between the various ethnic groups. "We are aware that our enemies have concrete plans to exploit the Finno-Ugric factor in these dirty games. But we, the Finno-Ugric peoples of the Russian Federation, stand for the unity of our country, and this has been our choice for centuries," said Pyotr Tultayev.

The all-Russian forum is primarily aimed at working to preserve and develop the native languages, traditions and intangible cultural heritage of the Finno-Ugric peoples living in the country. According to data from the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, 14 Finno-Ugric languages are studied as mother tongues, with a total of 60,000 Finno-Ugric pupils learning their mother tongue. In addition, 116,000 pupils study Finno-Ugric languages as state languages.

A distinctive feature of the forum is the high number of university students taking part, as there has been a surge of interest in national movements amongst young people compared to the previous forum. "We have set up a separate IT section where ambitious projects for the digitisation of Finno-Ugric languages can be submitted; these could be used throughout the country in the future, not just amongst the Finno-Ugric peoples," said Tultayev.

"I find it unacceptable that some colleagues seek to rely on foreign countries and organisations based there. We have repeatedly had to recognise that, under the guise of assisting our organisations, the real motives are quite different: hostility and a desire for destruction. We must stand by our country's positions...", noted Tultayev.

As you may recall, the first Forum of Finno-Ugric Peoples took place in June 2021 in Izhkar (Izhevsk), shortly before the World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples — as an alternative to the congress planned for Tartu in June 2021. The forum was convened by the Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples of Russia (AFUN), whose council had recommended in April of the same year that its members should not take part in the congress planned for Tartu. In reality, this recommendation meant not only that some Finno-Ugric peoples were forced to participate virtually, but also that their participation in the Congress was actively obstructed. The Association had hoped that the World Congress in Tartu would be cancelled; in reality, however, the World Congress held in Tartu proved to be legitimate, meaning that the majority of representatives of the Finno-Ugric peoples took part in the congress.

However, almost none of the publications of the Finno-Ugric peoples living in the Russian Federation published the materials, resolutions, press releases and so on from the 8th World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples held in Tartu.

The opening day of the 2nd Forum in Saransk was marked by a festive atmosphere and a packed cultural programme. Delegations from 36 regions of the Russian Federation were in attendance, along with representatives from other regions, bringing the total number of participants to 2,500.

Several regions were represented at local government level, such as the Republic of Mari El. The forum was attended by a number of senior officials from the Russian Federation, including Magomedislam Magomedov, Head of the Presidential Administration, who read out a message of greeting from Vladimir Putin, which stated: “Over the centuries, the Finno-Ugric peoples, together with other nations, have made a significant contribution to the development of our multi-ethnic state. The outstanding achievements of these peoples in a wide variety of fields have become an integral part of our richest historical, scientific, cultural and spiritual heritage. And today, representatives of the Finno-Ugric peoples are demonstrating courage and heroism in battle during the special military operation, drawing on the patriotic traditions of their ancestors. I would like to emphasise that the state will continue to prioritise the preservation of ethnic and cultural identity, as well as the safeguarding of civic unity, peace and harmony within the country. It is heartening that such authoritative organisations as the Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples of

the Russian Federation are actively participating in this vast and demanding endeavour. I am convinced that this meeting will be creative and constructive, and that it will lay the foundations for new and promising educational and cultural projects. I wish you every success and all the best.” Also present were Sergei Neverov, Deputy Speaker of the State Duma, Igor Barinov, Head of the Agency for Ethnic Affairs, and others.

Their speeches were more or less formal; some of the proposals put forward were very sensible, such as focusing on particularly endangered languages and educational materials in those languages, but the need to digitise languages with a small number of speakers was highlighted particularly frequently. At the same time, however, issues relating to Finno-Ugric peoples with their own states came up time and again. For example, Igor Barinov, who heads the Russian Federation’s ethnic policy, said: ‘The geopolitical changes that have taken place over the last year and a half mark a special period for our country; pressure from unfriendly states on relations between the peoples of Russia has intensified. This applies above all to Estonia and Finland, which are led by people from across the ocean. Since the start of the special military operation, ideas of separatism and extremism have been actively propagated, including in relation to Finno-Ugric peoples. Emphasis is being placed on violations of civil rights, whilst constructively minded citizens are being discredited. The executive authorities must ensure the highest possible level of communication with local citizens and keep the situation under strict control.’

The forum’s work this time took place in three sections: cultural heritage, IT technologies in the cultural and linguistic sphere, and youth project activities.

A separate discussion was held on cooperation to resolve current issues in state ethnic policy.

The forum recognised the best youth projects; for example, first place went to Bogdan Anfinogenov, who created the online TV channel ‘Daur TV’. “It is the only TV channel for the Finno-Ugric peoples of the Russian Federation that operates round the clock and is broadcast entirely in the national language”, Anfinogenov confirmed.

The forum concluded with the ‘We Are Together’ youth festival of national cultures, featuring performances by the ‘Aikai’ dance and song ensemble of the Udmurt

National Theatre, the Mordvin folk ensemble 'Merema', the Tatarstan folk ensemble 'Agidel', the ensemble 'Skrynya' from Krasnodar, the Ossetian ensemble 'Ritmy gor' and the academic song and dance ensemble 'Donbass'. In addition, there were various folk ensembles from villages across the Republic of Mordovia.

The forum was a spectacular event, notable even on a Russian scale, and was covered by almost all media outlets. At the same time, there was also discussion of how the countries of the Finno-Ugric peoples, having achieved national independence, are dividing the Finno-Ugric peoples.

On the other hand, the nature of the Russian Federation's national policy, which is geared towards consolidation, is clearly evident. This major event for the Finno-Ugric peoples is attended by representatives from the Donbass, as well as the Ossetians, Tatars and the city of Krasnodar. It is clear from Tultayev's interview – and indeed from other sources – that we no longer speak of nations, but rather of ethnic groups. The topics of the sessions are more or less the same as they were at the First Forum of Finno-Ugric Peoples, but even more succinct. There is no longer any mention of the problems or rights of Finno-Ugric peoples, nor of the obligations and responsibilities of state authorities. The Finno-Ugrians, however, are brave; they are fighting for Russia in Ukraine — that is how one might interpret Putin's greeting. Putin does not explain why these peoples among the smallest in number must shed blood in Ukraine and "defend" Russians (the Russian language) — this was presumably not discussed at the forum either.

Of course, it is a separate question to what extent the division of the Finno-Ugric peoples' movement was a decision taken by the association (AFUN) itself. Rather, it is clear that the association acted on the basis of relevant guidelines from the Russian Federation's Agency for Ethnic Affairs, which in turn received them from President Putin's administration. These guidelines stated that, at a time when the Russian Federation, in accordance with its geopolitical interests, wishes to exacerbate tensions with the European Union and NATO, the Finno-Ugric peoples are cooperating, and this must be brought to an end. Russia had previously disrupted cooperation amongst the Slavic peoples, as well as amongst the Turkic peoples. The state's interests – one might say its imperial ambitions – took

precedence over the linguistic and cultural cooperation of kindred peoples belonging to different language groups.

We must also take into account the context here – what it is, and how it is even possible to speak of it in today's Russia. All of the above is reflected in Pyotr Tultayev's presentation, which aimed to demonstrate how the Finno-Ugric peoples strengthen Russia's unity, stand in solidarity with the Russian President and, having formed national battalions (totalling around 300 men), fight against Ukraine as part of the Russian army. The main concern, however, is the national intelligentsia of the Finno-Ugric peoples, who speak of violations of the rights of the Finno-Ugric peoples and of ethnic discrimination in personnel policy. Some of them even accuse the Russians! There are also separatist sentiments that have arisen amongst compatriots who have either left or fled Russia.

It was only towards the end of his speech that Tultayev mentioned how, quite unexpectedly, the teaching of the national languages of the Finno-Ugric peoples has been reduced to one lesson a week in Year 9 and to two lessons a week in primary school. He also complains about insufficient funding and notes that the print runs of books published in the national languages have fallen. For example, in 2022, eight books were published in the Udmurt language. The lack of digitisation of Finno-Ugric languages is also a cause for concern; Estonia, Finland and Hungary, too, criticise Russia for this. In conclusion, he believes that the main task of the Finno-Ugric Association is to strengthen the unity of the Russian people, and that the Finno-Ugric peoples owe a debt of gratitude to the Russian language and the Russian state.

In his speech, he devotes considerable attention to the contradictions between the USA and the Finno-Ugric peoples who have statehood (Finland, Estonia, Hungary) and those without, without giving any specific examples apart from manifestations of separatism, such as the creation of the Idel-Urals. At the same time, he paid little attention to the concerns of the Finno-Ugric peoples, let alone saying a word about their rights. What was missing, however, was any criticism directed at the authorities; instead, the representative organisation of the Finno-Ugric peoples of the Russian Federation expressed gratitude for Russification. (See ["Finno-Ugric space: reality and contemporary challenges" – Speech by Pyotr Tultayev, Chairman of the](#)

### *National congresses*

The activities of national organisations are reflected in the documentation of the congresses organised by these organisations.

All the major Finno-Ugric peoples living in the Russian Federation – the Komi, Mari, Karelians and Mordvins, with the exception of the Udmurts – held their own congresses in 2024. Such large gatherings are held every four years, but the number of congresses held has varied. The first congress of the Finno-Ugric peoples – in fact, of all Russia's national minorities – following the collapse of the Soviet Union was organised by the Komi in January 1991. The Karelians followed in June of the same year. The Mordvins managed to hold their first congress in March 1992, and the Mari in October. As the Mari people attached great importance to continuity, their 1992 congress was immediately designated as the third, since the first had taken place in Birsik in 1917 and the second in Kazan in 1918. It is striking that the Komi have organised the most national assemblies of their people, as, unlike the others, they have also held so-called 'extraordinary congresses'.

### **XIII Komi People's Congress**

The 2024 Komi People's Congress took place over three days, from 4 to 6 July. Never before has it lasted so long, nor has it been held in two different locations. The decision to hold the Congress sessions in the village of Kuratovo, 130 kilometres from the capital, was linked to the 185th anniversary of the birth of Ivan Kuratov (1838–1875), the founder of Komi literature and a literary classic.

Prior to the congress, the customary election of delegates took place in the district centres. Meetings were also held between Komi people's representatives and local administrative leaders, as well as representatives of republican authorities, so that the latter could present the congress decisions implemented over the past four

years. In essence, however, this was an attempt to pre-empt criticism from the delegates at the forthcoming Congress. Compared with other Finno-Ugric peoples, the Komi Congress plays a significantly greater role in society, as the Komi Voityr, the body that organises the Congress, has the right of legislative initiative, as well as a cooperation agreement with the local parliament. This means that representatives of Komi Voityr are officially involved in the work of the legislative assembly's committees, and they also address the plenary session of the parliament.

On 4 July, over 200 delegates gathered at the Komi National Drama Theatre. In addition to the Republic of Komi, delegates had travelled from Moscow, St Petersburg, the Perm Krai, the Murmansk Oblast, and the Khanty-Mansi, Nenets and Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrugs. In keeping with the times, there was also one delegate from Crimea.

The congress was welcomed by leaders from various levels of the republic, led by Vladimir Uiba, who is of Estonian descent and whose Russian-language speeches have become characterised by a few words of greeting in the Komi language – *bur lun!* (good day!). Uiba noted that the republic's leadership has taken "significant steps to preserve and develop the Komi language", as from 2023, the Komi Republic will have an official national holiday – Komi Writing and Language Day – and many textbooks on the Komi language and literature have been included in the Russian Federation's list of approved textbooks, which allows them to be used officially. Funding has also been secured for the renovation of the national drama theatre, for which Uiba thanked the theatre's director, Svetlana Gorchakova, by presenting her with a Monomakh's cap – the traditional headdress of the tsars. The underlying meaning of the gift was not made clear in the reports. For his part, Uiba thanked Komi Voityr for constructive dialogue, emphasising in particular that the organisation has supported the Russia-Ukraine war and will not allow external forces to speculate on national issues.

This was followed by an overview of Komi Voityr's activities by the organisation's acting head, Oleg Lazhanev, and the delegates declared its work to be satisfactory. It remained unclear why Aleksei Gabov, the businessman who had been actively leading the organisation in the meantime, stepped down from his position in November 2023. Official channels merely stated that he had 'retired'. Indeed, in the

Komi Republic, where the harsh northern conditions are taken into account, women retire at 50 and men at 55. However, there may have been other reasons. A decision by the Audit Committee revealed that the organisation's income had fallen: between 2016 and 2019, ten million roubles were received in project grants, whereas between 2020 and 2023, the figure was just eight million (80,000 euros). If this is spread over four years, the annual amount works out at just 20,000 euros. Most of the funding comes from the republic's budget and has been spent on carrying out various projects, including the installation of Komi-language road and place-name signs, the organisation of language courses, and so on. It is interesting to note that the sums allocated to the organisation also included funds intended for Komi delegates to attend the World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples, from which one might conclude that the call by the Russian Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples (AFUN) to consider the participation of Finno-Ugric peoples in the 2021 World Congress in Tartu inadvisable came as a surprise!

Following Aleksei Gabov's surprise resignation as head of the organisation, his acting successor, Oleg Lazhanov, has now been elected as the new chairman. This was not prevented by the fact that a criminal case had been brought against Lazhanov in 2018, which resulted in a one-year suspended prison sentence and an obligation to repay 8.5 million roubles to the Syktyvdir District Administration. Oleg Lazhanov is a lawyer by training who previously worked as a local government official in Syktyvdir.

Following the plenary session, the congress continued its work in sections: education and socio-economic development; health, demography and sport; culture and the media; nature conservation and ecology; Komi Voityr and cooperation with local authorities. Round-table discussions were also held, for example on youth policy, at which Ksenia Taskayeva, deputy head of the Komi youth organisation Mi, spoke: "The standard at which the Komi language is taught in today's schools leaves much to be desired. Consequently, the status of the Komi language is declining in the eyes of children, young people and parents, and the language is losing its social influence. The result is that we are losing our national elite. The entire teaching staff agrees with my view. If things continue like this, it will happen in just a few years' time." She went on to reflect that the Komi language must also be spoken at home. Especially

in the countryside, because, according to her, there is nothing left to be done in Syktyvkar – the Russian-speaking urban culture is all-powerful. Unfortunately, Taskayeva failed to mention that more than half of Komi families today are mixed families and, as far as is known, only Russian is spoken in them.

On the final day of the congress, a 15-page draft resolution was adopted, containing recommendations for both the republic's leadership and its government departments. Among other things, it was recommended that the Komi Republic's revenue base should be increased: more money should be channelled into the republic's development, as too large a proportion currently goes to Moscow. It was also recommended that Komi Voityr should receive core funding from the republic and that schoolteachers proficient in the Komi language, as well as staff involved in the cultural development of nursery and school pupils, should receive a 15 % pay rise. There is little criticism in the draft resolution; it merely notes that no mechanism has been established to incentivise parents and educational institutions to ensure the continuity of the Komi language and culture. It is also noted that there is a lack of modern Komi language textbooks, as well as teaching materials and games for nurseries. The legislative initiative was reflected in proposals to legalise the establishment of shelters for stray domestic animals and to prohibit mining operations within 15 kilometres of settlements.

The presentations and reports at the plenary session were delivered in the Komi language, which was simultaneously interpreted into Russian. As a rule, the Russian leaders of the republic address Finno-Ugric congresses in Russian; occasionally, speakers also express a wish to speak in Russian. For example, when presenting Vladimir Uiba with the Monomakh Cap, theatre director Gorchakova spoke in Russian. Russian is also frequently used when amendments are made to the congress's resolutions. Documents adopted by the congress are generally in Russian, and this is the case for all Finno-Ugric peoples.

## **X Karelian People's Congress**

The Karelian People's Congress took place under the control of the state authorities, whose representatives head the organising committee for the congress and ensure

that no one says anything against the state. No specific national demands, no criticism whatsoever.

The 10th Karelian People's Congress took place on 20–21 September 2024 at the Piter Inn hotel in Petrozavodsk (Петрозаводск). The congress was attended by 150 people, including 66 delegates from the districts, as well as guests from the republic's authorities, St Petersburg, and the Tver and Leningrad Oblasts. There were quite a few distinguished guests at the congress, and they all delivered welcoming speeches. Artur Parfentchikov, head of the Republic of Karelia, noted, for example, that historically the Karelians have defended Russia, having adopted Orthodox Christianity and tied their fate to that of Russia. They are defending Russia even now by supporting the 'special military operation' in Ukraine. He suggested that the delegates might consider celebrating the 800th anniversary of the Christianisation of the Karelians in 2027. He stated that Russian President Putin had personally made the decision to mark this occasion, as he considers it to be of great importance.

The congress was organised into three sections: the Karelian ethnic territories: present and future; the modern Karelian family; and the Karelian language and culture. A distinctive feature of Karelia is that the republic comprises three ethnic districts: Uhtua (Kalevala), Prääsä (Pryazha) and Aunus (Olonets), where the Karelians still live in compact communities, making up more than half of the district's population. The establishment of the family section was prompted by the fact that the President of Russia declared 2024 to be the Year of the Family. The language and culture section, however, is a traditional feature of Finno-Ugric peoples' congresses, as there is widespread concern regarding the preservation of national languages.

The speeches were measured and carefully worded. Nevertheless, criticism was levelled at officials who are planning to reduce the size of "Oma Mua", the only Karelian-language newspaper, and revert it to black and white. The issue of unethical businessmen who wish to build a ski resort in the Karelian villages of Törökkä (Tereki) and Mundjärvi (Munozero), thereby destroying Karelian culture and the memory of famous Karelians from these villages, was also raised.

Following the presentations in the sections, discussions began on a rather toothless draft resolution, to which a number of additional proposals were, however, put forward. One might have expected that a clause declaring the Karelians to be a small indigenous people would also have been included. The number of Karelians in the Russian Federation has fallen by almost half compared with the previous census (60,815 in 2010 and 32,422 in 2020; of these, only 25,901 live in Karelia). The Republic of Karelia is the first constituent entity of the Russian Federation whose titular people have, in numerical terms, become a ‘small indigenous people’ – a term defined by law as a people with a population of fewer than 50,000.

The authorities did not wish to include this point in the resolution, nor did they wish to discuss the matter. At the same time, some delegates again wanted it included, as they believed it would provide the Karelians with state protection and the right to preferential treatment in the use of land, water and forest resources. However, in the view of the vast majority of Karelians – a view also supported by officials – such a proposal would signal the abolition of the Republic of Karelia, that is, its merger with other oblasts. It would also permanently remove from the agenda the question of granting the Karelian language the status of an official or state language.

The Karelian language still does not have the status of an official language. Consequently, this point was once again included in the resolution. To date, the granting of official language status has not been realised, although the Karelians have been demanding it since 1991. According to Article 11 of the Constitution of the Republic of Karelia, Russian is currently the official language of the republic, although another language could be granted this status, but only by means of a referendum. However, it is unlikely that the Karelian language would attain official language status in this way, as Karelians make up around 5 % of the republic’s population.

The resolution also addressed other language-related issues; for example, it objects to the reduction in the circulation of the Karelian newspaper “Oma Mua” and its switch to black-and-white printing. This is understandable, as the newspaper was founded by the congress itself. Another point worth mentioning is the one drawing attention to the use of Karelian place names and the fact that numerous errors are made in them. The resolution emphasises the need to continue training teachers of

the mother tongue, but for some reason the discussions failed to mention that the training of Karelian language teachers at Petrozavodsk University has just been completed. Also omitted was the clause obliging the Ministry of Education to increase the number of Karelian language lessons in schools to three per week. At present, Karelians can study their mother tongue, at best, twice a week, and even then only with their parents' consent. At the same time, the resolution did succeed in including provisions on the need to support language nests and on ethnological expertise to protect Karelian settlements from industrial encroachment.

Discussions on granting the Congress legal status as an organisation representing the Karelians went nowhere, whereupon several delegates felt that this was yet another formal gathering, funded as a 'project' by the Ministry of National and Regional Policy of the Republic of Karelia. However, the Congress should not be treated as some sort of project. As long as the Congress lacks legal status, it cannot take legislative initiatives to protect the Karelian language and culture. The Komi representative body does have such status, but they are also the only Finno-Ugric people in the Russian Federation to whom such a right has been granted. The resolution merely noted that the Congress is 'the legitimate representative body of the Karelians'.

New members were elected to the Congress's governing bodies. The number of council members increased significantly and now stands at 35, meaning that more than half of the Congress's 66 delegates are members of the governing body. Eleven people were in turn elected to the Council's Executive Committee, and Inga Gurilova, an activist from the Aunus Karelians (Ludes), was elected chair. There was fierce competition for the chair's position this time, but the previous chair, Raisa Samodayeva from the White Sea Karelians, did not stand for re-election. The new chair immediately made an unprecedented proposal that the chair of the Council should be rotated annually and that an 'interim conference' should be held between congresses (the next one being in 2026), at which a review would be conducted of how the points set out in the resolution had been implemented.

## **VIII Congress of the Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha) People**

From 9 to 11 October 2024, the Congress of the Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha) People took place in Saransk. More specifically, the 8th Congress of the Inter-Regional Organisation of the Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha) People 'Consolidating the Mordvin People and Strengthening the Unity of the Russian People in the Face of Contemporary Challenges'.

The congress was attended by 332 delegates from 36 regions of the Russian Federation, as well as members of the organisation from Estonia and Kazakhstan. The latter took part remotely. However, we were unable to identify any Estonian-Mordvin delegates who were reportedly present. A total of 700 people attended the congress. In keeping with established tradition, on the first day of the congress, the delegates gathered at the Pushkin National Library in the Republic of Mordovia to approve the organisation's report and elect the executive committee. The report was read out by the organisation's leader, Yuri Mishanin, who noted that the decisions adopted in the resolution of the previous congress, held in 2019, had been 'practically 100 % implemented'. Among other things, the organisation's name was changed: its official name became the Inter-Regional Organisation of the Mordvin People. The reference to the Erzya and Moksha peoples was thus removed from the name.

This was followed by the election of the chair, executive director and members of the Executive Committee. Yuri Mishanin, who is the deputy director for ethnic relations at the Institute of Humanities attached to the Government of the Republic of Mordovia, was unanimously re-elected as chair. He previously served as Dean of the Faculty of Linguistics at Mordovia State University. Tatyana Larina, a former television presenter, was re-elected as Executive Director of the Executive Committee. A total of 58 members were elected to the Executive Committee: 29 Erzya and 29 Moksha.

The second day of the congress began with the laying of flowers at the monument 'Centuries Together with Russia'. The delegation then proceeded to Saransk's most impressive building, the State Opera and Ballet Theatre, where the plenary session took place. It was opened by the organisation's chairman, Yuri Mishanin, and the head of the Republic of Mordovia, Artyom Zdunov. "It is important for us to know that

there are people who live far from Mordovia and yet, despite this, remember their roots and preserve their native language and customs”, said Zdunov. “The aim of the congress is to develop practical solutions for preserving the ethnocultural heritage of one of Russia’s largest ethnic groups. Let us recall that active work is being carried out in Mordovia to support national culture and languages. Three years ago, a corresponding state programme was adopted and a reliable partnership was established with the Mordvin Inter-Regional Organisation. Much has been done to expand the network of national cultural centres, support the Mordvin diaspora, and strengthen ties with Finno-Ugric peoples and regions densely populated by the Moksha and Erzya peoples.” At the same time, according to the Head of State, it is necessary to carry out local history educational projects together with children, to study nature, the native languages, folk poetry, and the local history and customs of the Erzya and Moksha peoples: “Let us also talk in schools and universities about the true heroes of the Great Patriotic War and special military operations!”

The Mordvin leader also noted that there are many active and caring young people in nationwide civil society organisations. Their initiatives are supported. In recent years, efforts to engage with the diaspora—including the Mordvin communities in Moscow and St. Petersburg—have also intensified. However, new challenges have emerged: our opponents are openly calling for the division of Russia along ethnic lines. “There is a deliberate effort to discredit the state’s ethnic policy, incite nationalist sentiments, and make false accusations of civil rights violations,” said Zdunov. “Together, we must strike back hard against them. We must protect our people—our children, our youth, and ourselves! I am pleased to note that the leaders of Mordovia’s ethnic associations share a unified position on these issues and agree that the future of our people lies in supporting the President of Russia, in our unity in upholding traditional values, and in the successful achievement of the objectives of the special military operation!”

Following the speech, the head of state presented various awards, the highest of which—a certificate of appreciation from the President of the Russian Federation—was awarded to Tatyana Larina, executive director of the Executive Committee of the Inter-Regional Organisation of the Mordvin People. Through her efforts, the publication of “Erzyan Mastor”—essentially the last independent

newspaper—was discontinued in 2024, and in 2019, the activities of the Foundation for Saving the Erzya Language were restructured, after which it became known as the Fund for the Preservation and Development of Erzya National Cultural Heritage. In her acceptance speech, Larina noted that “we are all children of Mother Russia! The Mordvins have never let us down, and we will continue to contribute with our love to the welfare of our homeland and Mordovia.”

Following Larina’s acceptance speech, Pyotr Tultayev, a senator of the Federation Council and chairman of the Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples of Russia, took the floor and read a greeting from Valentina Matviyenko, Chairwoman of the Federation Council of Russia: “The Mordvin people, together with the Slavic and other peoples, form the unified civilizational and cultural code of our country. The Congress helps strengthen the unity of the Russian nation.” Tultayev added: “I am confident that the Congress’s decisions will be balanced, truly national in spirit, and wise—as befits the Mordvin people. The strength of our nations, and the strength of Russia, lies in inter-ethnic unity!”

The Congress was also greeted by Stanislav Bedkin, Deputy Chairman of the Agency for Ethnic Relations of the Russian Federation; Anatoly Gulin, the federal inspector overseeing the republic; and Zinoviy, Metropolitan of Saransk and Mordovia. Even Maria Zakharova, the notorious official spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sent a video greeting in which she spoke about the importance of unity among the peoples of Russia, adding that her own grandmother is Mordvin. The day’s plenary session concluded with a festive national concert titled “Vastoma”.

The main work of the congress took place in the following sections: the Mordvin people in Russian society: all-Russian civic identity and ethnic self-awareness; the region’s ethnocultural strategy: factors in the preservation of traditional spiritual values and vectors of development; the native language in a multicultural environment; education and communication; and the Mordvin people’s traditional family values: history and the present.

On the final day, a closing plenary session was also held, during which presentations by section leaders and proposals for the preservation of languages and culture were heard. Participants at the congress proposed stepping up the work of public

organisations to implement federal and regional programmes aimed at strengthening the unity of the 'Russian nation' and its ethno-cultural development. Among the proposals was also support for the initiative by the Rector of Moscow State University to organise a monthly 'folk costume day' across the republic. Also, 23 March could become the day for Mordvin national games or "tyushtyan nalksema". It was also proposed to review the system for assessing pupils' knowledge of their native languages and literature, to encourage the activities of education professionals and the state media, to support the publication of books in the state languages, and to promote the development of federal educational programmes in the Moksha and Erzya languages.

A resolution was adopted with a clarifying amendment entitled 'Recommendations of the 8th Congress of the Inter-Regional Organisation of the Mordvin People'. The resolution reiterates that action is being taken solely for the purpose of 'strengthening the unity of Russia'. In order to preserve the Mordvin language, culture and traditions, cooperation must be developed with all constituent entities of the Federation and state authorities. The 2025 state budget must include funding to enable the publication of works in the Mordvin language, as well as research into the history and traditions of the people. To promote the use of national languages in a multicultural environment, it was proposed to establish a republican centre for innovative language technologies; to step up efforts to digitise the Erzya and Moksha languages; to create electronic dictionaries and textbooks; and to make use of machine translation. It was also proposed to monitor the use of the Erzya and Moksha languages in educational institutions attended by Mordvins; to use the Erzya and Moksha languages as official languages at public events, as well as on government websites; to support the publication of translated literature in Erzya and Moksha, particularly children's literature; ensure the correct spelling of advertisements and notices in Erzya and Moksha, and increase motivation to learn the Erzya and Moksha languages.

In the field of family and demography, it was agreed that the role of the family in teaching children the Mordvin languages, culture and traditions should be strengthened, and that family values should be promoted, with particular attention paid to rural youth. The delegates to the congress also decided to appeal to public

organisations to strengthen harmony in inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations within Russian society and to preserve Russian spiritual and moral values amongst the Mordvins. The congress expressed the hope that the decisions taken would help to consolidate the Mordvin people, strengthen a pan-Russian civic identity and mutually enrich the cultures of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

## **XII Congress of the Mari People**

From 31 October to 2 November 2024, the 12th All-Russian Congress of the Mari People took place at the National Drama Theatre of the Republic of Mari El. Representatives of the Mari people from 19 regions of Russia attended, totalling 430 delegates. The largest delegation (82 delegates) was that of the Mari people from Bashkortostan. A total of 250 delegates were elected from the Republic of Mari El. The youngest delegate was 19 years old, whilst the oldest was Aleksander Tanygin, the 81-year-old leader of the *karts*, priests of the Mari Traditional Religion. 145 delegates worked in the field of education, 130 in culture and the arts, and 40 were representatives of state authorities. There were 18 economists amongst the delegates. Mer Kanash, the Mari Council, elected at the previous congress, also convened on the first day.

On the morning of 1 November, the Mari Park was officially opened in Yoshkar-Ola, where numerous wooden sculptures of figures from Mari folk culture had been erected, and a small song and dance square in the national style had been built.

The first half of the day was taken up by the Congress's plenary session, which traditionally began with a prayer by Mari *karts*. This was followed by the national anthem and welcoming addresses by senior officials. In his speech, Yuri Zaitsev, Head of State of the Mari Republic, said that the Congress is the Mari people's main social forum, which discusses issues concerning the Mari ethnic group in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres. The Congress adopts important decisions and draws up documents and projects that help to raise national consciousness and consolidate the Mari people ethnically and spiritually. Zaitsev expressed the hope that the Congress's decisions would contribute to the prosperity of Greater Russia and presented awards to the most deserving individuals. For example, Eduard

Aleksandrov, *Onyozha* or Chairman of the Mari Council – who is also a deputy of the Legislative Assembly of the Mari Republic and Chairman of the Committee on Culture, Tourism and Sport – was awarded the Order of the Mari People, 2nd Class, ‘for services to the Mari people’.

Following Zaitsev, the floor was given to Mikhail Vasyutin, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Mari Republic, who was convinced that the congress “is working to improve various areas of the ethnic group’s life, based on current legislation” and that “this contributes to strengthening inter-ethnic friendship and ties with other regions of the Russian Federation”. He, too, presented awards from the Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Mari El to the most deserving Mari people who championed language and culture. The majority of those honoured were education professionals, and more than half of the awards went to recipients outside the Republic of Mari El.

This was followed by work in the various sections, and as President Putin had proclaimed 2024 the ‘Year of the Family’, all the sections were related to the family: family and religion; family and culture; family and health; family, science and digitalisation; family and education. In the evening, the National Theatre staged ‘Kengesh yüd’ (‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’).

On the final day, a new Mer Kangash or Congress Council was elected, with the *Onyozha* as its chair. Eduard Aleksandrov, who has held the post since 2016, was re-elected to this role. Of the 385 delegates present, as many as 346 voted in his favour. The *Onyozha* was presented with the traditional headdress, the *terkupsh*, and given a loaf of bread as a symbol of endurance. Sixteen members were elected to the Council, three of whom are the *Onyozha*’s deputies. The Congress adopted a resolution and heard the summaries presented by the section leaders. The Congress concluded with a festive closing concert at the Academic Ballet and Opera Theatre, featuring performances by Mari children’s and youth ensembles.

The Congress was planned with the utmost precision; there were no impromptu speeches, nor were there any debates or discussions. The entire agenda, as well as the speakers, had been approved in advance by the congress organising committee. Representatives of the opposition complained in the corridors that the congress’s

governing body had not stood up for the Mari people very much. For example, there had been no response to the public insults directed at the Mari people over the past four years by both journalists and businesspeople. Nor did the leaders of the Mari people protest when memorial plaques for soldiers killed in the conflict with Ukraine were made in Russian only. Among other things, views were expressed that it would be better to spend money directly on military operations against Ukraine rather than on organising such pointless congresses that achieve nothing.

The Congress adopted a resolution reflecting the spirit of the times, which tells us the sad story of the Mari people – or rather, defined something that has absolutely nothing to do with the problems faced by the Mari people. Thus, the resolution states that “the new world order has presented serious challenges – both objective ones, linked to technological and socio-economic restructuring, and artificial ones, created by the collective West, which seeks to impose its dominance by any means necessary. [...] The spiritual foundations of our society – Orthodoxy, traditional Mari beliefs and other religious views, which for centuries have reliably protected our society from destruction – have come under brutal and technologically sophisticated attack. Today, it has become the duty of everyone, young and old alike, to defend the sovereignty of our country, its politics, economy, culture and civilisation. We express our resolute protest against Nazism and misanthropic policies in all their manifestations, and we shall provide all-round assistance to achieve the objectives of Russia’s special military operation in Ukraine’. The resolution concludes with the statement: ‘The world is changing rapidly, revealing true friends and exposing enemies, and in this world we must become strong. Our traditional spiritual and moral values, shared by all the peoples of Russia and the state authorities, the heroic past and present of Russia, its geographical and economic unity, and the ideals aimed at spiritual and national sovereignty, enable us to plan our future as an integral part of Russian civilisation.”

But what did the Mari people themselves consider it necessary to emphasise in this resolution? The points concerning faith are particularly striking. For example, faith is regarded as a means of developing and strengthening spiritual values, as religion helps to shape identity. It is felt that religious rituals and norms should be regarded as essential building blocks of the Mari people’s cultural heritage. Furthermore, the

Mari people consider the use of digital technologies in all areas of culture to be important, particularly in libraries, museums and archives. State support for national culture and rural areas is also considered important. In the field of national human resources policy, teacher training is regarded as vital. Furthermore, the promotion of the Mari language, the development of terminology and digitisation must continue. Several points are devoted to family policy, which should be responsible for ensuring the continuity of Mari language and cultural values.

But who should deal with these issues? Reading the resolution, it becomes clear that this role falls to Mari Mer Kangash (the Mari Council). Compared with previous congresses, this represents a major change, as in the past very specific proposals were addressed to the republic's ministers, the government or even the President of the Russian Federation. Resolutions might also have contained criticism. Now, however, the situation is simply stated and the view is expressed that we must manage on our own. The main stance here is that we should focus on consolidation and, for heaven's sake, not write anything anti-state in the resolution.

During the congress, a meeting of the Federal Council of the 'The Mari of Russia' National Cultural Autonomy was also held, at which Larissa Yakovleva, a member of the Parliament of the Mari Republic, was re-elected as its chairperson. The Autonomy was established in 2014 and registered in 2015. It comprises the regional Mari cultural autonomies in the city of Simferopol, and in the Kirov, Leningrad, Nizhny Novgorod and Sverdlovsk Oblasts, as well as in Udmurtia, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. The national cultural autonomies of Dagestan and the Altai Oblast were admitted as new members.

If we now compare the four congresses, it must be acknowledged that they are in many ways similar. Everything was coordinated with the leaders of the republics, who often also head the organising committees. In a sense, this is inevitable, as funds for holding all the congresses are allocated from the state budget. It is noteworthy that, when it came to the allocation of funds, the Karelian Congress was formally reclassified as a project, for which funding was ultimately approved.

Looking at the substance, the activities of the Komi remain the most substantive. This can also be seen from their resolution, which is quite extensive and contains a great many very specific proposals. The activities of the Komi representative organisation over the past four years have also been significant. They are actively drafting various laws and meet with the Republic's leaders as required. This is no doubt due to the Komi representative organisation's right to legislative initiative, which the Congress has, however, never once officially exercised. Specificity and a clear articulation of positions can also be found in the Karelian resolution. The course of the debate on one or another point of the resolution is also evident there.

What is truly exasperating, however, is the conduct of the congresses of Russia's larger Finno-Ugric peoples – the Mordvins and the Maris – as well as their speeches and final documents. The latter are full of superficial rhetoric, within the froth of which one can barely discern the problems facing their own people. Solutions are no longer expected from the leadership of the so-called republic or the Russian Federation; instead, it is acknowledged that 'we must manage on our own'. No longer is such an unambiguous view expressed there that the teaching of the mother tongue should be compulsory and that it should be possible to study it for (at least) two hours a week, nor that the volume of programmes in the national language on radio and television should be doubled, nor that the publication of literature in the national language should be supported, and so on. What is far more striking is the prevailing loyalty to the state in the resolutions, and the unreserved support expressed for the Russian Federation's foreign policy, military operations and the President.

### **Congress of the Indigenous Peoples of Russia**

At the end of April 2025, the Congress of the Indigenous Peoples of Russia – more specifically, the 10th Congress of the Association of Small Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East (RAIPON) – took place at the 'Rossiya' Centre for Nationalities in Moscow. The Congress was attended by 250 representatives of indigenous peoples from 28 regions of the Russian Federation. The Congress reviewed the work carried out, set out future directions and elected a president.

President of RAIPON Grigory Ledkov, a member of the Nenets people and a deputy in the State Duma of the Russian Federation, reported on the organisation's activities over the past four years. In his address, he praised the fact that a register of indigenous peoples had finally been established. Amendments have also been made to the Russian federal law on indigenous communities, which, he said, have helped to regulate the rights of indigenous peoples to their natural resources in such a way that only representatives of indigenous peoples benefit from them. For example, he said, there had previously been cases where a community had been formed by newcomers who then began catching and selling valuable fish.

At the congress, Aleksandr Novyukhov, a member of the Khanty people, was elected as the new president. He is currently a senator representing the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug in the Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian Federation. Previously, from 2016 to 2021, he was a deputy in the Duma of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, and from 2001 to 2016 he headed the indigenous peoples' association 'Save Yugra'. He was also the only candidate for the post. The previous president, Ledkov, had held office for 12 years, and many considered his close ties to the state authorities to be the guiding principle of his tenure. In 2013, he became president because Pavel Sulyandziga, a candidate of Udege ethnicity who had received the most votes and criticised the state authorities, withdrew his candidacy. Sulyandziga had, in fact, received a threat that his family would be destroyed if he took office. He currently lives in the USA and criticises both the situation of indigenous peoples in Russia and the association's activities.

The anniversary congress marked the 35th anniversary of the association, and many representatives of indigenous peoples were presented with certificates of appreciation from the President of Russia, as well as from various ministries and agencies. Both the association's former president, Grigory Ledkov, and its new president, Aleksandr Novyukhov, received letters of appreciation from the President. Congress delegates, meanwhile, had the opportunity to view an interactive exhibition dedicated to the 95th anniversary of the formation of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug.

The congress lasted one day and was a solemn occasion; at the start, there was a standing ovation for the distinguished leaders of indigenous national movements,

who marched onto the stage in a ceremonial procession. There was also a minutes-long round of applause for indigenous soldiers who are fighting as volunteers in the Russia–Ukraine war in defence of Russia’s interests. A message from Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, was read out at the congress. He congratulated the association on its 35th anniversary and noted that Russia prioritises harmonious relations between nationalities, as well as the national characteristics and identity of all peoples. Putin emphasised that the association is also participating in this process, and that he is pleased about this and holds it in high regard. In particular, Putin singled out those indigenous peoples who “bravely defend their homeland”. The congress concluded with a gala concert featuring the finest ensembles from Chukotka, Tuva, Yakutia, and the Yamal-Nenets and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrugs.

Pavel Sulyandziga sharply criticised the anniversary congress of the association, noting in an interview that the congress had essentially lasted two hours, whereas previous congresses had lasted three days, with the election of the president and vice-presidents alone taking up one day. However, this time, both Ledkov and Novyukhov were summoned to the Kremlin before the congress and told: ‘Novyukhov, you are standing for president,’ claimed Sulyandziga. According to him, problems were not discussed at the congress at all. For example, why, in July 2024, 55 organisations of indigenous peoples in Russia were declared extremist, and later as many as 172 organisations were labelled terrorist. Nor was anything said about the rights of indigenous peoples. Sulyandziga lamented that the association had become a puppet of the Russian authorities, now required to spread Russian propaganda at an international level and, for example, to speak at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues about the lives of indigenous peoples in ‘paradise’ and of the Russian state’s all-round care for indigenous peoples.

In 2022, RAIPON supported Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, whilst in 2023 it backed Vladimir Putin’s candidacy for the office of President of Russia. The association has been criticised on several occasions for putting pressure on dissident activists. In the spring of 2022, the association lodged a complaint with the Russian Prosecutor General’s Office, requesting an investigation into material on the ‘Indigenous Russia’ information portal, which it claimed bore traces of ‘extremist’ activity. This portal was

run by activists from the organisations 'Абориген Форум' ('Aboriginal Forum') and 'Россия коренных народов' ('Russia of Indigenous Peoples') — organisations which also condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In 2024, the organisations were placed on the Russian Ministry of Justice's list of extremist organisations. This means, however, that they cannot operate in Russia, nor can they operate entirely freely abroad.

[Ižmas toimus regionaalne ühiskondliku liikumise Izvatas X kongress – Fenno-Ugria, 1 October 2022](#)

[The II Forum of Finno-Ugric Peoples of the Russian Federation was held in Saransk, Russia – Fenno-Ugria, 2 September 2023](#)

[Komi rahva XIII kongress rõhutas materiaalse heaolu, aga ka komi keele oskuse tähtsust – Fenno-Ugria, 9 July 2024](#)

[Vene Föderatsioonis toimus Karjala 10.kongress – Fenno-Ugria, 25 September 2024](#)

[12th All-Russian Mari Congress was inexpressive – Fenno-Ugria, 21 November 2024](#)

[Moskvas toimus Venemaa põlisrahvaste assotsiatsiooni RAIPON 10. kongress – Fenno-Ugria, 22 May 2025](#)

### *Finno-Ugric organisations in 2025*

This summary is based on information published on VKontakte in 2025.

### **Mari organisations**

The central organisation of the Mari people, **Mer Kangash – Mari Council**, [Мер Канаш](#) (709 followers on VKontakte, which is few compared to the size of the Mari population), chaired by Eduard Aleksandrov, who is also a member of the Parliament of the Republic of Mari El.

Key events: the 100th anniversary of Andrei Eshpai, the most famous Mari composer; assistance in organising the Peledysh Pairem (Festival of Flowers);

celebrations for the Day of the Mari Herp; and celebrations for the Mari national festival Semyk. Flower-laying ceremonies, speeches and expressions of gratitude on Russia Day and 9 May, as well as the celebration of the 110th anniversary of the Mari newspaper 'Mari El'. The events also include meetings between the politician Aleksandrov and his constituents. Efforts are also being made to ensure the Mari language is more visible and audible in Yoshkar-Ola. For example, there has been a goal to add Mari-language names to bus stops. The anniversaries of Mari theatre figures have also been marked, such as the 70th birthday of theatre director Oleg Irkabayev and the 125th anniversary of Yyvan Kyrlya.

Mer Kangash has agreements with ministries, as well as cooperation agreements with other regions. Attention is also drawn to problems, such as the lack of students wishing to train as Mari language teachers. Information is provided about a gathering – or camp – for young people of Mari ethnicity, attended by 30–40 young Mari activists, with members of the Parliament of the Mari Republic posing in the background. In the most recent elections, several figures from the Mari national movement were also elected as members of parliament.

At the same time, the organisation's activities emphasise that they are part of Russian civilisation and that by defending Russia they are defending themselves: it is not possible for the Mari people and Russia to be separate.

The Mari children's organisation **Tylat Kidem** [Тылат кидем](#), which has over 3,000 followers on VKontakte, reports on the activities of Mari children and young people and organises gatherings for Mari young people. Mari national youth organisations such as U Vi (У Ви, 'New Force') appear to have ceased their activities.

**Mari Ushem** [Мари ушем](#) (1,275 followers on VKontakte) actively promotes participation in the Russia–Ukraine war, and its main activity is channelling various forms of humanitarian aid to the front line in support of Russian soldiers. This is done under the guise of nationalism. For example, protective insignia featuring the Mari pictographic script (tamga) are sewn onto uniforms. Newspapers and other literature in the Mari language are delivered to the soldiers. They also organise activities for young people and sports. In summary: no other Finno-Ugric organisation is as

actively involved in channelling humanitarian aid to Russian (Mari) soldiers fighting in Ukraine.

**Mariy Ushem** [Марий ушем | Союз Мари](#) (1,585 followers on VKontakte) is the only organisation representing the Finno-Ugric peoples that is in opposition, or at least voices some form of opposition and criticism of the authorities. Their main focus is the celebration of the Day of the Mari Hero, during which flowers are laid at the memorials of prominent Mari cultural and educational figures, as well as Mari freedom fighters. This year, the head of the Orshanka administration did not allow local council staff to take part in the memorial ceremony, which took place at the memorial to the Mari national hero Mamich Berdei. Mamich Berdei led the Mari people in the First Cheremis War (1553–1556) against the Grand Duchy of Moscow. Like other Mari organisations, Mariy Ushem commemorates various national anniversaries, both Semyk and Peledysh Pairem.

In 2025, the organisation held its annual general meeting and elections. The leadership of the organisation remained unchanged, though it was decided to send an open letter to the head of the republic, Yuri Zaitsev, concerning the republic's demographic situation. Last year, 5,067 children were born in the Republic of Mari El, whilst 9,000 people died. As the Mariy Ushem website is partly administered from Estonia, it also features news from Estonia, such as updates on Narva 2025, the Cultural Capital of the Finno-Ugric Peoples.

In 2024, the organisation was fined 50,000 roubles for using information from the Uralic Centre, which operates in Estonia, as a news source to report that Narva had been chosen as the cultural capital of the Finno-Ugric peoples. The Uralic Centre is, in fact, on Russia's list of undesirable extremist organisations. The website also features other news items relating to Estonia. For example, it offers congratulations to the Republic of Estonia on its anniversary and recalls that on 24 May 1992, a wide-ranging cooperation agreement was signed between the Republic of Estonia and the Republic of Mari El. There is also criticism of the new language law recently adopted in the Russian Federation, which essentially states that Russian is now the mother tongue for everyone and that schools no longer teach the mother tongue, but rather one of the languages of the Russian Federation. The organisers of the Mari youth camp are also criticised, as there were few young people in attendance; the

view was also expressed that if the aim is to nurture the future leaders of the Mari people, then is it really necessary to focus on ensuring that these future leaders can sing and dance and bow down to the authorities, or should the emphasis be on training true Mari national patriots? The website marks the birthdays of Mari activists and congratulates Mari theatre directors Sergei Tanygin and Vassili Pekteyev, who were awarded the 'Medal for Work in the Field of Culture and the Arts' by decree of Putin. There are also differing viewpoints: on 9 May, one of the organisation's leaders, Vladimir Kozlov, wrote an article entitled 'They Remained Silent', in which he recalls his father and grandfather, who did not take part in the 9 May events and for whom the victory was a time of mourning.

### **Komi organisations**

**Komi Voityr** [КОМИ ВОЙТЫР](#) is the page on V Kontakte of the Finno-Ugric ethnic organisation with the highest number of followers (10,500). Komi Voityr is an active representative organisation of the Komi people, which convenes the Komi People's Congress. Unlike other representative organisations of Finno-Ugric peoples, Voityr has the right to initiate legislation.

Posts appear very frequently: Russian Language Day and Pushkin Day are celebrated, as well as, more broadly, Komi Language and Writing Day. The Komi language is promoted, and efforts are made to secure Komi language lessons. Discussions take place on how to achieve this in Syktyvkar, for example, and it is concluded that meetings with parents are necessary. Critical information is shared from Ussinsk, where the Komi language is neither learnt nor taught in any school because parents do not want it. Once again, the fact that the Komi language is very difficult for learners is highlighted. Ethnic sports competitions are organised, such as Lyampiada. International Women's Day is celebrated on 8 March and Victory Day on 9 May. Birthdays are also celebrated, such as the 60th birthday of Noskov, the Komi Minister for National Policy.

There are plans to participate actively in the 2025 parliamentary elections; the organisation's leader, Oleg Lazhanev, has been put forward as a candidate for the Komi Republic Parliament in the autumn elections and is standing as an independent

candidate. There are other nationalist activists standing as candidates in the 2025 national parliamentary elections, such as members of the Voityr executive committee: the United Russia candidates are Aleksei Gabov (a businessman and long-standing leader of Komi Voityr) and Anastasia Mikhailova (deputy chair of Komi Voityr). It is not impossible that they will be elected and that local national activists will be 'bought off' by the central government. The same could be observed in the 2024 Mari Parliament elections.

The Komi Voityr website reports on meetings with heads of various republican ministries and district leaders. It announces when and where the organisation's board meets and what is discussed; in June 2025, for example, issues relating to tourism and traditional cuisine were discussed.

The Komi Voityr website organises support for those taking part in the 'military operation', raises funds to send drones to Kherson in Ukraine, and also praises Russian soldiers of Komi ethnicity and those who speak the Komi language.

**The Komi National Youth Organisation Mi kotyr/Komi Youth Union** [МИ котыр | Союз коми молодёжи](#) (over 2,000 followers on Vkontakte).

The organisation promotes the Komi language, with many posts in Komi. It introduces the Komi language and Komi music, and organises visits to the Perm Komi people. Komi Language Day is celebrated, though this has also drawn criticism as events related to this national holiday are publicised in Russian. There are calls to increase subscriptions to Komi-language literature.

Activities at children's and youth camps are promoted, where there are so-called 'ethnic corners' at Komi Kerka (Komi House). There, visitors can learn about everything and everyone related to the Komi people, such as films and recordings by Mi. The community takes part in patriotic events: the Day of Remembrance for those who fell in the Great Patriotic War and Victory Day on 9 May. On Victory Day, the Komi were visited by the Izhorians, who also brought an exhibition with them. Russia Day was also celebrated on 12 June.

They took part in the 'Pera-Bogatyr' competition, which celebrates patriotism and manliness, and collaborated with the Izhorians of Shoikula, led by Dmitri

Harakka-Zaitsev, Chair of the Consultative Committee of Finno-Ugric Peoples. A photo exhibition was also organised as part of the competition. On International Mother Language Day, 21 February, the Komi language was celebrated as a mother tongue.

A post remains on the website criticising the new Russian Federation law on mother tongues, which seeks to Russify all languages spoken in the Russian Federation, and calling for protests.

## **Udmurt organisations**

**Udmurt Kenesh (Udmurt Council)** [УДМУРТ КЕНЕШ official](#) (VKontakte page with 4,400 followers) is the most important national organisation of the Udmurts, elected by the Udmurt Congress. The website [udmurtkenesh.ru](#) has become inactive (the latest news in July was from April 2024). In particular, it has marked the birthdays of various Udmurt national cultural figures and politicians, and has helped to promote a subscription campaign for the Udmurt newspaper “Udmurt Dunne”. 1 May and 9 May have been celebrated. Support has been provided for the organisation of the Udmurt national festival Gerber, and National Mother Tongue Day and International Mother Language Day have also been celebrated. Prior to the 2024 congress, the website also published reports on meetings between the central Udmurt organisation and the district administrations of the Udmurt Republic; amongst other things, these provided an overview of Udmurt language teaching in the districts.

**The Udmurt youth organisation Shundy** [УМОО “ШУНДЫ”](#) (4,100 followers on VKontakte) publishes very little news. In the past, it has actively organised Finno-Ugric children’s camps. Currently, information has been published about a competition for patriotic songs in the Udmurt language. However, there is also information about this year’s camp. Furthermore, cultural events in the Udmurt language are featured as well as the magazine “Invozho”.

**Udmurt Nylkyshno Kenesh (Udmurt Women’s Council)** [Удмурт нылкышно кенеш](#) (5,500 followers on VKontakte) is a national women’s organisation in Udmurtia. A distinctive feature of Udmurt society is the organisation of women and

their significant role in the republic's socio-political life, with activities focused on valuing the roles of women and mothers. Various festivals are organised, such as the necklace festival, the zither festival and the harvest festival. There are also educational events on the role of the mother, postnatal trauma and recovery. Birthdays are celebrated. The organisation took part in the celebrations for Gerber, the largest Udmurt national event, and also marks 9 May. The oldest Udmurt women who were affected by the war were tracked down and visited. Video clips have been published featuring Udmurt women who heroically served as medics on the front line. In one post, the organisation's leader, Yelena Minnigarayeva, editor-in-chief of the newspaper "Udmurt Dunne", is also seen dressed in a Soviet Army uniform. The organisation also helps to promote the circulation of the newspaper "Udmurt Dunne".

### **Mordvin organisations**

The central organisation of the Erzya and Moksha, the **Executive Committee of the Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha) People's Social Organisation** (Ispolnitel'nyj komitet obshchestvennoyi organizatsii mordovskogo (erzyanskogo i mokshanskogo) naroda), does not have its own website or a VKontakte account, and the website <https://mordvarf.com/> is inactive. To a certain extent, the page "Yalgat" ("Friends", 400 followers) covers the activities of the Erzya and Moksha. The page states that the organisation's motto is "We are all part of Russia", which sums up the essence of the organisation's activities: even if we preserve and develop our own language and culture, it is because we are part of Russia. The posts are in Russian. The activities covered include folk songs, handicrafts and traditional costumes, a memorial conference for a certain writer, but one can also read about meetings of the executive committee with the district and republican administrations, during which the situation regarding national languages and cultures has been discussed, and thanks have been extended to both the administration and nationally active figures in the district.

## Erzya organisations

Mordvin organisations in the Russian Federation are essentially in a state of limbo, and the media in the national language is virtually non-existent. However, you can read about the activities of national activists on other pages. For example, the Erzya have a VKontakte page called [Kudoras'ke | ЭРЗЯ](#) (4,300 followers), whose motto is 'Let us not allow the Erzya language to die out'. Most of the posts, however, are in Russian. The page has taken an active stance against the use of the terms 'Mordvin' and 'the Mordvin language', stating that the Erzya are not a sub-ethnic group of Mordvins. The page features many posts on history and traditional dress, whilst Finno-Ugric topics are also prominent. The Finno-Ugric language tree and the Finno-Ugric flag are featured. The nature-based beliefs of the Erzya are also highlighted.

The Erzya website [ЭРЗЯНЬ ЛОМАНЬ](#) (Erzya Person) (1,500 followers on VKontakte). The page focuses on Erzya culture: it features folk songs and showcases handicrafts, particularly woodwork. There is also a great deal of material on the work of Torama, the most famous Erzya-Mokshan ensemble, and its founder, Vladimir Romashkin. The site also features visitor statistics in one section, which show that the website is mainly visited from Nizhny Novgorod and Moscow.

The Erzya women's organisation **Litova**, formerly known as Erzyava, is also active in the Republic of Mordovia. It does not have its own page on VKontakte. However, information appears in other VKontakte posts indicating that members of this organisation are active.

One of the long-standing organisers of the Erzya community, **Boris Yerushov**, an Erzya officer living in Murmansk, has 486 followers on his VKontakte account: [Борис Ерюшов | Вконтакте](#). In his most recent post, he recalls that the Erzya Congress, which convened 30 years ago, decided that the Erzya people exist and that they have the right to be recognised as such. His posts also feature numerous poems in the Erzya language.

The Erzya have had a page called [MASTOR | Эрзянь мель](#) (1,049 followers), a closed group where Erzya nationalists and anti-war activists have their say.

A distinctive feature of the Erzya national movement is that, as far as is known, they are the only Finno-Ugric people in Russia to have managed to organise themselves whilst in exile. In September 2022, the Erzya convened the Erzya People's Congress in Otepää. (See Prozes's overview (in Estonian): [Prozese ülevaade: Otepääl toimus Ėrzäń Promks – Fenno-Ugria, 5 October 2022](#)). Furthermore, two Erzya national leaders have been found guilty by a court in the Russian Federation, having been accused of participating in the activities of an organisation deemed undesirable and extremist by Russia.

[Erzya national activists convicted and given suspended sentences – Fenno-Ugria, 2 June 2025](#)

[Ersamordva rahvuslased kuulutati tagaotsitavateks, osad tunnistasid väidetavalt kaaslaste vastu – Fenno-Ugria, 31 March 2025](#)

## **Moksha organisations**

**Oksana Belkina** (2,100 followers) is an active figure in the Moksha community on VKontakte. She also manages the Moksha-language website [BAPMA | OKCAHA БЕЛКИНА](#) (over 1,600 followers, over 500 subscribers on her Telegram channel). Her main focus is on promoting the Moksha language and national culture. She previously ran a vlog where she posted videos in Moksha.

As for organisations, the only page dedicated to the Moksha people on VKontakte is that of the women's association **Yurkhtava** [Юрхтава | Общественная организация Республики Мордовия «Ассоциация мокшанских женщин «Юрхтава»](#) (325 followers). Theatre news is published, and there is discussion of the Erzya and Moksha translation features added to the Yandex search engine. The 384th anniversary of Saransk is celebrated, and the Moksha national festival 'Aksha kelu' is organised. There are posts about television broadcasts in the national language, traditional costumes, and the promotion of the language. The cultural magazine "Moksha" is featured, and mention is made of the state prize awarded to the Mokshan writer Valentina Mishanina. The posts are in the Moksha language.

The best insight into the activities of Erzya and Moksha national organisations is provided by the Moksha women's organisation Yurkhtava. National activism amongst the Mordvins appears to be based increasingly on civic activism rather than on institutions.

## **Karelian organisations**

**The Assembly of Karelians of the Republic of Karelia** [KARJALAN TAZAVALLAN KARJALAZIEN KERÄHMÖ](#) (433 followers on VKontakte) is the highest representative body of the Karelians in Russia. The VKontakte page is managed by the authorised Assembly of Karelians, elected by the Congress, which serves for four years until the next Congress. It publishes materials from the Congresses and information on its work, as well as other information.

The page covers cultural life, genealogy, information on project development and fundraising, as well as anniversaries and birthdays of folklore groups, such as the 105th anniversary of the Republic of Karelia and the 190th anniversary of the Kalevala. One of the site's contributors is Aleksei Tsykarev, who serves as Russia's representative to the UN Forum on Indigenous Peoples and provides updates on its activities. The site commemorates the Winter War and the Great Patriotic War, marks 22 June and 9 May, and mourns the fallen. It reports that children learning the Karelian language are sending humanitarian aid to the Russian army at the front. The 35th anniversary of the Karelian-language newspaper "Oma Mua" is also celebrated. It reports on ongoing lectures in the Karelian language and on Karelian culture, as well as concerts by various ensembles. Articles appear on history, particularly on the former autonomy of Karelia, but also on the establishment of the Karelian Soviet Socialist Republic in March 1940. There has also been a discussion of the census results, the new members of the authorised Karelian Council have been introduced, and meetings with legislators have been reported on. Efforts are being made to oppose the closure of the Vuokkiniemi (Voknavolok) school. A Karelian Poetry Day is organised, and articles are published on the wider adoption of Karelian place names. There is also a section on news from the national districts, which is a distinctive feature of Karelia within the Russian Federation.

The **Karelian People's Union** [Karjalan Rahvahan Liitto](#) | [Союз карельского народа](#) (2,500 followers on VKontakte) is an active Karelian organisation that organises the cultural life of Karelians in the Russian Federation. The website reports that promotional posters introducing the Bank of Russia and financial discipline have been successfully translated into the Karelian language. The organisation is also taking part in the competition 'Heroes of the Finno-Ugric Peoples of the Russian Federation. A Bridge Between Generations' – in which other organisations representing Finno-Ugric peoples are also taking part – which is dedicated to the Great Patriotic War, drawing parallels with compatriots fighting in the Russia–Ukraine war. There is a great deal of focus on the 80th anniversary of the Second World War and Victory Day. The culture of Karelian songs and song festivals is promoted, and folklore ensembles are showcased. The 105th anniversary of the Republic of Karelia (the oldest Finno-Ugric autonomous region within the Russian Federation) and the 35th anniversary of the Karelian-language newspaper "Oma Mua" are being celebrated. Support is provided for the publication of Karelian-language literature, and the organisation arranges for books to be printed or raises funds. The epic 'Kalevala' is introduced, and dictation competitions in the national language are organised to mark both International Mother Language Day and Karelian Language Day. The Karelian-language folk theatre 'Čičiliušku', which has been active for 20 years, has been promoted. In March, the organisation held its annual general meeting and elections, at which Anna Yakovleva, who had previously led the organisation for three years, was re-elected to the post. At the start of the year, half a year after its actual anniversary, the Karelian People's Union celebrated its 35th anniversary.

The **"Young Karelia" Centre**, formerly also known as the *Karelian Youth Union* [Центр «Молодая Карелия»](#) / [Nuori Karjala](#) (271 followers). Frequent posts were made up until October 2020, e.g. on the subject of indigenous peoples, language issues, children's rights, etc. It is known to have received warnings from supervisory bodies of the Russian Federation. The main issue is the organisation's funding from Finland, as well as from other countries. The organisation was actually founded as early as 1993 and was an active organisation bringing together Karelian students, which attached great importance to cooperation amongst Finno-Ugric peoples. By

now, many members of the centre have moved to Finland, whilst some continue the struggle within the group 'Official Status for the Karelian Language'.

**'Official Status for the Karelian Language'** (471 followers on [Facebook](#), 3,500 followers on [VKontakte](#)), a highly active community launched by Karelian national leaders. They are actively campaigning for the Karelian language to be granted official status. Of all the republics within the Russian Federation, only the Republic of Karelia's titular language does not have the status of an official language. It features numerous analytical articles, news items, historical overviews and critiques, and is undoubtedly one of the best-functioning known sources of information on Finno-Ugric topics within the Russian Federation.

The **Home of the Karelian Language** [KARJALAN KIELEN KODI / ДОМ КАРЕЛЬСКОГО ЯЗЫКА](#) – is an interesting and informative organisation, with a website at [karjalankielenkodi.com](#) (3,183 followers on VKontakte). Its active work is focused on promoting the Karelian language, showcasing books, films and theatre productions. The Karelian Language Home was supported and organised by Finns. This intensive and effective work, particularly amongst children, did not sit well with the Russian authorities: the so-called 'Karelian language nest' project was deemed undesirable, as it isolates the Karelians from the Russian cultural sphere.

## **Veps organisations**

In the Republic of Karelia, the **Veps Cultural Society** [КРОО 'Общество вепсской культуры'](#) (2,164 followers on VKontakte) is also active. The 35th anniversary of the Veps newspaper "Kodima" and the Veps Cultural Society is being celebrated; with features on the Veps folk festival 'Elonpuu' and special occasions in Veps villages. There is also information on the activities of Russia's indigenous peoples, as the Veps are officially recognised as an indigenous people in Russia. The Veps language and the only Veps folk-rock band, Noid, are introduced. There is an article on the law allowing the Veps to develop traditional fishing practices. Information is provided on how to register on the list of indigenous peoples in order to benefit from the permits and incentives granted to them. It is noted that literature on the Veps

language can be read online, and several Veps books are already available in e-book format. Posts on the website are regular and numerous.

In addition to the organisation's page, there is also a VKontakte page called **Vepski krai** [ВЕПСКИЙ КРАЙ](#) (9,000 followers), one of the oldest groups on VKontakte (since 2007). It features content on Veps celebrations, traditional cuisine, handicrafts and history.

### **Khanty, Mansi and Nenets organisations**

The 'Yamal to Our Descendants!' Association [Ассоциация 'Ямал-потомкам!'](#) (a regional civil society organisation representing small indigenous peoples, with 5,500 followers on VKontakte). This includes the indigenous peoples of the Yamal Peninsula: the Nenets, Khanty and Selkup.

Anniversaries are celebrated and the passing of prominent indigenous leaders is marked, whilst meetings with representatives of the oil and gas industry are reported on. For example, at a meeting held in February 2025, it was agreed that everything was in order between the indigenous peoples and the oil processors, but there is a critical comment below: everyone is having a good time at the moment, but how much land has been given away again? The immediate response is that indigenous peoples should not be pushing for their own narrow interests, because 'these are difficult times; all the countries of the European Union and the USA are at war with the Russian Federation'. The reply, however, is: but where does all the revenue go? Only the oligarchs stand to gain from this, whilst indigenous activists are busy 'picking insects and maggots out of manure'. [Here](#), for example, is a complaint posted online from which one can conclude that the reindeer herding and fishing practised by the Khanty and Nenets peoples do not generate enough income to feed a family. Subsidies for indigenous peoples in the region have either been completely withdrawn or their payment suspended. One topic is the participation of indigenous peoples in the Russia–Ukraine war; those returning from the front lines are being met, and, of course, humanitarian aid is being sent and the families of those who have fought are being supported. President Putin is also praised for declaring 2025 the Year of the Defenders of the Fatherland, and good luck is wished to those fellow

countrymen who are defending Russia's sovereignty, with the hope that the set objectives will be achieved. Both 1 May and 9 May were celebrated.

The **Nenets People's Association 'Yasavei'** [“ЯСАВЕЙ” Ассоциация ненецкого народа НАО](#) brings together the Nenets people in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. They celebrate the anniversary of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug and take part in national events, such as the celebration of International Reindeer Herders' Day. They are delighted with the new law (as are all indigenous peoples' organisations) that on 24 June, the Russian State Duma adopted legislative amendments known as the 'no-notification' principle, which applies to representatives of indigenous peoples: representatives of indigenous peoples who are natural persons may fish freely and without charge within the annual quota established for a specific body of water. This applies to those representatives of indigenous peoples who are included in the Register of Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation (which currently comprises around 100,000 people). All significant Russian public holidays are celebrated: 1 May, 9 May, and Russian Unity Day on 12 June. Support is given to the Russian President, who wishes to mark 8 September as the Day of the Languages of the Peoples of Russia; the International Mother Language Day is also celebrated. The Nenets language is promoted, and congratulations are extended to the dozen or so graduates of the Nenets language school 'Ненэй вада' ('Настоящее слово'), which operates at the Nenets National Cultural Centre in Naryan-Mar. The project was supported by Lukoil and implemented by Yasavei. Indigenous peoples' sports games are introduced. A notable event and piece of good news in early 2025 was that the television channel Rossiya 1 broadcast the first news programme in the Nenets language, 'Nerm syo' (12 mins), in which the Nenets language reportedly sounded a little rough. The programme is broadcast once a week. In December 2024, Yasavei's 35th anniversary was celebrated. It was noted that 'yasavei' means 'guide' in the Nenets language – a person who knows the environment. This encapsulates the association's aim; the organisation actively participates in all events concerning the Nenets people: the development of language and culture, support for reindeer herding, further education and inter-regional cooperation.

**'The Salvation of Yugra'** [Общественная организация «Спасение Югры»](#) (1,200 followers on VKontakte) is one of the oldest and largest organisations representing

the indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation, with 2,500 members. It primarily brings together the indigenous peoples of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (Yugra). Much of the page is filled with congratulations, but also with obituaries. The close ties of the organisation with the authorities are highlighted, as is the number of ethnic leaders who have emerged from its ranks. Quite a few of them have become members of the Khanty-Mansi Duma or have even made it to the State Duma of the Russian Federation. The organisation held its congress in July 2025, and a rather tense election for the new president took place, with Viktor Bank being elected. The organisation's previous leader, Ludmila Alfeyorova, was appointed on 11 July as the first Ombudsman for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug. The organisation also has its own youth council, whose representative, Natalia Kolobova, spoke at a UN forum in Geneva. Questions were raised as to why a Russian was representing the Khanty and Mansi peoples, to which the response was that Kolobova's mother was, after all, Khanty, whilst her father was Russian. The website also features articles on Fisherman's Day, Ethnologist's Day, handicrafts, traditional foods, the museum and the development of ethno-tourism, as well as material from Khanty-Mansi newspapers. Interestingly, an increasing number of tourists from Hungary are visiting the Khanty and Mansi, though there are reportedly no researchers amongst them. According to Vitali Sigiletov, a linguist who welcomes Hungarian tourists, efforts must be made to bring these kindred peoples closer together. A great deal of attention is being paid to the celebration of the birthday of the Mansi poet Yuvan Shestalov, with flowers and readings of poems and verses. There are a great many posts, which reflects a very active cultural life and good communication: all national cultural events are featured on the page.

## **Organisations and activity of Finno-Ugric peoples of Leningrad Oblast**

### **Ingrian Finns**

According to the 2020 census, there were 3,000 Ingrian Finns in the Leningrad Oblast and in St Petersburg. On 16 July 2025, pursuant to a court ruling in the Leningrad Oblast, the activities of the Leningrad Oblast Ingrian Finns' Central

Organisation (chaired by Dmitri Polyakov) were terminated, i.e. the organisation was dissolved. The organisation had eight members. To date, there remain three Ingrian Finnish organisations in the oblast that are duly registered.

In St Petersburg, the **Ingrian Union**, a non-governmental organisation of Ingrian Finns led by Yelena Tikka, is active; as is the **Gatchina Society of Ingrian Finns**, chaired by Valery Toiko; and the **Cultural Autonomy of Ingrian Finns in the Leningrad Oblast**, chaired by Lyubov Severikova.

The Ingrian Union that operated in the Republic of Karelia has ceased its activities. The most recent post on the [inkeri.ru](http://inkeri.ru) website was about Juhannus in 2025 – that is, Midsummer's Day – which is the most important festival for the Ingrian Finns. The portal also covers topics relating to the Siege of Leningrad and the battles on the Karelian Isthmus. It features information on the activities of the book club, new book releases (such as "The History of the Ingrian Finns"), and libraries, such as the Juhan Aalto Library in Vyborg.

The latest issue of the magazine "Inkeri" (print run: 300 copies) is available to read on the portal. The magazine covers the activities of the Ingrian Finns in St Petersburg in recent years. Much attention is paid to history, genealogy and family history; readers are looking for relatives and information about churches. The Ingrian Church is the most important guardian of identity for the Ingrian Finns. Nowadays, more and more services are held in Russian, but the Lutheran faith remains important. Other Lutheran communities in the region, such as Estonians, Latvians and Germans, also attend the Ingrian church. Father Christmas is also featured. It is known that, as late as 2024, a Finnish amateur theatre group was still active in St Petersburg and the last Finnish-language books were being published. Complaints are made about the poor condition of Finnish cemeteries in the Tuutari and Hietämäki areas, where desecration and grave robberies are taking place. There is also discussion of Ingrian history (place names, the Tsarist era).

The **St Petersburg Ingrian Finnish Society** ([Pietarin Inkerin Liitto](#)) has nearly 4,000 followers on VKontakte. [A post about the board meeting on 25 March 2025](#) reveals that Ingrian Finns are not permitted to use their national flag because some citizens of the Russian Federation who are not Ingrian Finns have used the flag at unlawful

gatherings. Consequently, the flag cannot even be used at the Midsummer celebrations, the summary states. The issue of the flag is a recurring theme for 2024/2025. The organisation has also encountered financial difficulties and is no longer able to organise Finnish language courses. Membership fees are the main source of income. There are no longer any donations either, as donors are required to provide their personal details, and the taxation of donations also causes problems. Nevertheless, the society continues its work to preserve the language and culture of the Ingrian Finns.

The main portal, [Pietarin Inkerin Liitto](#), has essentially come to a standstill. The portal bears witness to how a community is quietly fading away. Ingrian Finnish organisations are among the few Finno-Ugric organisations that have not taken any stance on issues relating to the Russia-Ukraine war. Nor have they been particularly involved in promoting the anniversary of the Soviet Army on 23 February, Victory Day on 9 May, or 12 June.

[Инкери](#)

[Pietarin Inkerin Liitto](#)

[Pietarin Inkerin Liitto \(VKontakte\)](#)

[На целый месяц позже в этом году прошла ежегодная конференция... | Вконтакте](#)

## **Votes**

According to the latest census, there are 99 Votes and 39 speakers of the language. Sixteen Votes consider Votic their mother tongue.

The **Votic Cultural Society** [Общество Водской Культуры](#) (1,178 followers on VKontakte). Led by Marina Ilyina. In Luuditsa (Luzhitsa), the Votic Cultural Centre has been established at the port of Laugasuu (Ust-Luga). They teach the Votic language and read texts in Votic. On the table are books by Paul Ariste, who researched the Votic people, and a Votic dictionary. They meet regularly on

Thursdays. On 21 February, International Mother Language Day was celebrated. The centre takes part in organising various celebrations; schoolchildren visit the centre, and guided tours are held. The centre is promoted as the only place in the world where one can hear the Votic language. Traditional food and folk costumes are showcased.

The Votic children's ensemble **Linnut** ([Водский ансамбль "Линнуд"](#)), 294 followers on VKontakte) performs songs in the Votic language in the Leningrad Oblast as well as in Moscow. The ensemble is based at the Jõgõperä (Krakolye) school; in addition to Votic songs, the young people's activities have a military-patriotic focus. Since 2001, the ensemble has been led by Marina Petrova, whilst Zinaida Savelyeva, who is Votic herself, has helped to improve the pronunciation of the language. They celebrate 9 May and have formed the 'Votic Immortals' Regiment' to commemorate the Votes who fought in the Second World War.

## **Izhorians**

According to the latest 2020 census, there were 210 Izhorians, 70 speakers of the Izhorian language, and 66 people who considered Izhorian their mother tongue.

The only organisation representing the Izhorians is the Izhorian community '**Shoikula**' ([Ижорская община 'Шойкула'](#)), founded in 2005, chaired by **Dmitri Harakka-Zaitsev**, who was also elected Chair of the Consultative Committee of Finno-Ugric Peoples at the 8th World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples held in Tartu in 2021. He remains in office to this day, although he does not actively participate in cooperation amongst the Finno-Ugric peoples of the Russian Federation (having been excluded), but does take part in various events that contribute to the development of cooperation amongst the Finno-Ugric peoples in the Leningrad Oblast. A photographic exhibition introducing Komi was opened at the institutions for Finno-Ugric peoples in the Leningrad Oblast, and he visited Komi himself. He has also sent local children's groups, such as the aforementioned 'Linnud' and the theatre studio 'Lauluema', to take part in all-Russian competitions with songs in the Izhorian and Votic languages: they made it through to the final, which took place in

Moscow in autumn 2025. At a major book festival held in Moscow, an exhibition of books introducing the Izhorians and Votes was organised.

The Izhorian community in the Leningrad Oblast is very active, organising singing and games, as well as lectures introducing the Izhorian people. This year, 12 July marked the village day of Viistina (Vistino), whilst 13 July was celebrated as Izhorian Culture Day. They actively collaborate with various cultural institutions, such as the Izhorian museum and library in Vistino. They produce animated films and will take part in the [TUYVEZH](#) Finno-Ugric Peoples' Film Festival in September 2025. They celebrated International Mother Language Day and organised an Izhorian-language dictation competition. The formation of Soikkolapset, an ensemble bringing together Izhorian children, was announced.

#### Persecution of national activists

The Russian authorities label any information about the war in Ukraine that differs from that provided by the Ministry of Defence as 'fabrications'. The provision on 'fabrications' relating to the military was added to the Russian Criminal Code immediately following the invasion of Ukraine. This offence is punishable by up to ten years' imprisonment or a fine of up to five million roubles.

A court in Yoshkar-Ola, Mari El, fined local blogger Andrei Filippov 1.8 million roubles (around 18,000 euros) for a video covering the war in Ukraine. The blogger was found guilty of spreading "false information" about the Russian army with the aim of inciting hatred. The criminal case against Filippov was triggered by a video on his YouTube channel entitled "The war between Russia and Ukraine: a view from the Ukrainian side". In it, the blogger analyses news reports relating to Russia's full-scale invasion and highlights discrepancies with information from the Russian Ministry of Defence. In his video, Filippov urges viewers to be cautious about information regarding the war and to check it against various sources. Legal proceedings against the blogger were initiated as early as 2022. He spent nearly a year in pre-trial detention. Filippov claims that whilst there, he was not allowed to visit his relatives or telephone them.

### [Blogger from Mari El fined for war video – Fenno-Ugria, 24 July 2023](#)

It is also important to note the increase in repression against activists. [On 17 October 2023, Russian security services carried out brutal raids on 16 flats in Mordovia](#), as well as in other regions of Russia, during which communication devices, documents and other data storage media were confiscated. Criminal proceedings were initiated against Erzya nationalists, culminating in charges of establishing an extremist organisation. According to the charges, they face between six and ten years' imprisonment. The first court hearing took place on 17 February 2025.

On 10 April 2025, the Saransk October District Court found two well-known Erzya activists guilty: 91-year-old writer and founder of the 'Foundation for Saving the Erzya Language', Yevgeny Chetvergov (Nuyany Vidyaz), and his 76-year-old nephew, social activist Mikhail Chetvergov (Yogan Minka). Both were found guilty of "participating in the activities of an extremist organisation" and sentenced to two years' suspended imprisonment with a probationary period.

In 1993, Yevgeny Chetvergov founded the Anatoly Ryabov Foundatin for Saving the Erzya Language, which began publishing the newspaper "Erzyan Mastor" in 1994. From 1994 to 2016, he also served as its editor. The newspaper was the last independent publication of the Finno-Ugric peoples, dedicated to the consolidation of the Erzya people; it actively opposed the classification of Erzya and Moksha as Mordvins, even considering the name 'Mordva' to be derogatory. The newspaper's senior editors believed that referring to the Erzya and Moksha as Mordvins implied assimilation, as an Erzya or Moksha person who called themselves a Mordvin did not, in fact, know their native language. The editorial team also took the view that the Republic of Mordovia should be renamed the Erzya-Moksha Republic.

### [Два эрзянских активиста получили от суда два года — MariUver](#)

### [Ersamordva rahvuslased kuulutati tagaotsitavateks, osad tunnistasid väidetavalt kaaslaste vastu – Fenno-Ugria, 31 March 2025](#)

Two criminal cases have been brought against 23-year-old Dmitri Toktarov, from Mari El, on charges of vandalism in connection with anti-war writings criticising Vladimir

Putin. According to the investigation, between the end of October and the end of November 2024, Toktarov left graffiti reading ‘Putin – hujlo. No to war!’, “Russia without Putin” and “Putin – puštedõše!”, which translates from the Mari language as “murderer”. According to experts, he is being charged, somewhat unexpectedly, under a section of the law concerning vandalism, which in turn is attributed to his political anger, rather than, for example, the typical charge of ‘discrediting the Russian armed forces’.

[Против жителя Марий Эл возбудили два уголовных дела о вандализме из-за надписей о Путине | ОВД-Инфо](#)

[Sõjavastase Mari El Vabariigi kodaniku vastu algatati kaks kriminaalasja – Fenno-Ugria, 22 May 2025](#)

## 7. Finno-Ugric resistance movement in exile

The Finno-Ugric resistance movement operates mainly abroad. The Russian authorities divide organisations they regard as undesirable into two categories: 'undesirable organisations' and 'terrorist and extremist organisations'.

The Russian Federation's Ministry of Justice lists four organisations among its ['undesirable organisations'](#) that are actively involved in issues concerning Finno-Ugric peoples.

The [Free Nations League](#) (FNL) is an international association of national and regional movements that supports the break-up of Russia into separate states. The League has its own website and is widely represented on social media: YouTube (232,000), Instagram (20,700), Telegram (6,600) and Facebook (1,400). The League regularly publishes content, including YouTube videos, which attract between 10,000 and 800,000 views. FNL members organise public events around the world and take part in international forums on the decolonisation of Russia. For example, on 30 September–1 October 2022, the League, in collaboration with the Estonian NGO URALIC Centre, organised an independent Erzya National Congress in Otepää, Estonia, where the future of the independent state of Erzän Mastor was also discussed.

[Free Idel-Ural](#) is an organisation based in Ukraine and a civil society movement amongst the peoples of the Volga-Ural region. According to the slogan on its website, its aim is to bring about the disintegration of Russia and the establishment of independent states on its ruins: the independence of the Republics of Mordovia, Chuvashia, Mari El, Tatarstan, Udmurtia and Bashkortostan, as well as the integration of these six republics into a single union with a common border, economic area and collective security system. The movement is active online and on social media, and participates in international forums. Turkish-Tatar activists belonging to the movement frequently organise protests in various cities around the world. Finno-Ugric topics are regularly covered in publications on the website and on social media.

The Estonian NGO [URALIC Centre](#). It is best known for its [Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture](#) programme. Its inclusion on the list of 'undesirable' organisations is likely

linked to the activities of its leader, Oliver Loode, in defending the rights of indigenous peoples, particularly the Crimean Tatars.

[KKL-Stop the Occupation of Karelia](#) (SOK). A faction of the Karelian National Movement (KNM), which split in 2023. It is led by Dmitri Kuznetsov. The organisation seeks the secession of Karelia from Russia and the establishment of the Karelian People's Republic. The KNM became a member of the Free Nations of PostRussia Forum, and its representative spoke at the European Parliament building in 2023. In January 2023, the formation of the Levonen Karelian National Battalion was announced as part of the International Legion of the Ukrainian Territorial Defence Forces. In 2023, the KNM joined the pan-Finno-Ugric organisation *Suur-Suomen Sotilaat* (Soldiers of Greater Finland), whose aim is to divide Russia into several Finno-Ugric republics. SOK is actively present online and on social media, and cooperates with right-wing parties in Estonia and Finland.

Two organisations have also been added to the 'undesirable' list which do not deal directly with Finno-Ugric peoples but are indirectly linked to them, as they raise issues concerning the decolonisation of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

The [Free Nations of PostRussia Forum](#) operates in Poland.

[Open Estonia Foundation SA](#) (Estonia)

The [FSB list of 'terrorist and extremist organisations'](#) contains 27 entries relating to Finno-Ugric peoples. All of these were added to the list by a ruling of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation dated 22 November 2024, which came into force on 28 December 2024.

Among them are the Free Nations League, Free Idel-Ural and the Karelian National Movement, as mentioned above. It is noteworthy that the names of the Republic of Karelia in the Karelian languages have even been included among the variants of the latter's name: Karjalan Tašavalta/Tazovaldkund/Tazavaldu.

[Free Ingria](#) (Svobodnaya Ingriya). The declared aim of this movement, founded in 1998, is to unite St Petersburg and the Leningrad Oblast into a single federal subject – Ingria. Some activists are calling for the creation of an independent Ingria as the

fourth Baltic state, should Moscow refuse to genuinely federalise Russia. With the outbreak of war in 2022, representatives of 'Free Ingria' openly declared their support for Ukraine and the prospect of the disintegration of the Russian Federation at the Free Nations of PostRussia Forum. In July 2023, the formation of an armed volunteer unit – the 'Free Ingria' group – within the International Legion of the Ukrainian Armed Forces was announced.

The [Moksha National Committee](#) (Mokšen Kalkon Komitetes) declares not only its aim to establish an independent Moksha Republic (Mokšen Mastor), but also its intention for the new state to join the European Union and NATO in order to defend itself. They have a Facebook group called '[Toramanj terdemasj](#)' (135 members), which, amongst other things, posts actively in the Fenno-Ugria Kindred Club's Facebook group.

It is often assumed that 'extremist organisations' consist solely of groups of people who have created separate communities on social media. For example, the 'Movement for the Independence of the Republic of Mari El' exists exclusively as social media groups, such as the Telegram channel 'Škešam – Mari Channel' (391 members as of 4 July 2025).

Some 'extremist organisations', such as Nezavisimaya Vepsiya (Independent Vepsia), Udmurt Eriko and others, exist only on the FSB lists – searching for their names online yielded no results. It is likely that such communities previously existed on Russian social media platforms, such as VKontakte, but were shut down after being added to the list of 'extremist' communities.

At present, there are no strong, widespread or numerous organisations outside Russia that deal specifically with the Finno-Ugric peoples. There are, however, more or less established organisations with a broad range of activities, such as the Free Nations League and Free Idel-Ural. For the most part, however, these are fragmented, small-scale groups, many of which have not even formalised themselves as organisations. Their activities are largely confined to the internet; occasionally they take part in international forums on the decolonisation of Russia, or organise small-scale protests or commemorative events.

It is known that, according to the Russian Ministry of Justice, the non-profit organisation Fenno-Ugria Foundation had been on the list of extremist organisations since the summer of 2024, but, as it has transpired, it was removed from that list again in 2025.

See also [Vadim Štepa: Vene rahvusvabariigid on veelgi sõjakamad kui keskvõim. Neid Kreml kartma ei pea – Eesti Päevaleht, 10 June 2025](#)

## 8. Use of Finno-Ugric languages in cultural life

For each set of data on the use of a national language, information is also provided on the population, ethnic affiliation and proficiency in that national language, which should help to explain the data on the use of languages in cultural life.

Alongside traditional media, channels for the use of national languages are increasingly found online. In Russia, the most popular social network is VKontakte, followed by Telegram and Instagram. Facebook's role has diminished significantly following Meta's ban within the territory of the Russian Federation, and a YouTube channel, for example, can only be accessed via a VPN.

### Mari

As of 2021, the population of the Republic of Mari El stands at 677,000. Mari people make up 40 per cent of the population, totalling 246,560, of whom 79 % – or 261,270 people – consider Mari to be their mother tongue.

#### *Media in Mari El*

From 2024, the republic's print publications and their online versions became part of the large media group InfoAgency Mari El. The newspaper Mari El has been published weekly since 2025, but in a larger format of 30 pages.

| Name of publication                                     | Print circulation |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Mari El, weekly                                         | 2,300             |
| Mari El extra, practical magazine<br>Surt-petše, weekly | 2,800             |
| Youth newspaper Kugarnya, weekly                        | 4,210             |
| Hill Mari children's newspaper Yamde<br>Li, weekly      | 1,550             |
| Children's newspaper Yamde Liy,<br>weekly               | 108               |

|                                                |       |
|------------------------------------------------|-------|
|                                                |       |
| Hill Mari-language newspaper Zherä, weekly     | 854   |
| Literature magazine Onchyko, monthly           | 1,300 |
| Hill Mari literature magazine U Sem, quarterly | 300   |
| Newspaper Cholman of the Mari of Bashkortostan | 1,800 |

The website of the Mari El Republic's National Library named after Sergei Chavain contains a list of newspapers in the Mari language as of 2 May 2017 and a list of magazines as of 3 May 2017. Some of these publications are available in digital format.

[Газеты | Национальная библиотека имени С.Г. Чавайна Республики Марий Эл](#)

[Список журналов на марийском языке. | Национальная библиотека имени С.Г. Чавайна Республики Марий Эл](#)

Most Mari cultural institutions and public-sector organisations have their own websites and are actively present on social media. In the 2010s, national print publications began to move online in earnest. Editorial teams frequently changed their domain names and content management systems, which led to the loss of data and readership, as well as the partial loss of the editorial teams' own databases of electronic materials. This gap has been filled by the Mari language corpus, developed by the Valerian Vasilyev Institute for Scientific Research into the Mari Language, Literature and History in collaboration with the Republican Centre of Mari Culture and Mari State University.

The technical design of the websites of national newspapers is fairly simple, and current material is published infrequently and in limited quantities. The situation is better on social media, particularly on VKontakte, where publications actively organise live broadcasts with guests, provide overviews of the latest newspaper issues, run competitions, and use modern social media formats such as flash mobs and other events.

The VKontakte and Telegram social media apps have been translated into the Mari language.

The most popular groups on VKontakte are three communities containing the words 'МАРИЙ МЫРО' (Mari song), with between 26,000 and 42,200 followers. These channels are similar in content, offering audio recordings of (new) Mari songs accompanied by photos of the performers and, less frequently, music videos.

Among the residents of Mari Eli, the blogger Kacheri Bavai (Grandma Katya) has gained popularity, with 27,700 followers on Instagram and 9,420 on VKontakte. She posts humorous videos in a mixture of Russian and Mari, as well as advertisements.

Mari singer Volodya Matveyev has 19,900 followers on VKontakte. He writes in the Mari language and uploads videos in Mari.

The group 'Mariytsy Rossii' has 24,300 followers. It mainly reposts content from other users, organisations and media outlets, and the majority of the information is in Russian.

One of the most popular Mari youth blogs was the Instagram page 'Mariy-vlak umylat' (The Mari Understand). In June 2021, it had 25,000 followers. Following the administrator's death, the page has not been updated frequently enough, which is why the audience is dwindling.

Among media outlets on VKontakte, the most popular is Mari El Radio with 24,800 followers (the audience for Mari newspapers ranges from 7,000 to 9,200).

The online magazine Unagudo is one of the few publications published exclusively in the Mari language. It has its own website, [Унагудо](#), which is updated up to three times a month, and a VKontakte group with 4,500 followers. The magazine was founded by the non-governmental organisation Tamga (Sign).

Among cultural institutions, the Mari Youth Theatre is the most popular online, with 11,400 followers, whilst the M. Shketan National Theatre trails slightly behind.

Most of the aforementioned resources on VKontakte serve an entertaining or informative purpose, whilst remaining neutral and loyal to the authorities. They are

often bilingual, with Russian predominating in some cases. Critical material is published by individual authors and, for example, by the ethnic organisation 'Mariy ushem'. It should be noted that the social network VKontakte may artificially restrict users and communities deemed undesirable by the authorities of the Russian Federation, as well as limit clicks on links in their posts and the display of their content to other users via topic feeds.

The situation is slightly better on the Telegram channel, where there are also a few opposition publications. The independent Mari website [MariUver](#), whose administrator lives in Estonia, was classified as 'extremist' by Roskomnadzor on 14 January 2025 and is blocked by Russian internet service providers.

The online magazine [Kidsher](#) highlights problems with Mari-language media: dependence of projects on specific individuals; projects often rely on the enthusiasm of language activists, who frequently lack sufficient financial resources to carry them out. This leads to a situation where, if the author's interest wanes, the project may, at best, be 'put on hold'. There is no leading Mari-language online media channel that publishes information continuously, 24/7. Print media, as well as television and radio companies, are not always the primary sources of information in the national language. Mari-language internet projects are characterised by weak funding, and the content offered to users in their mother tongue does not always meet modern media standards.

### *Theatre in Mari El*

There are three theatres in Mari El that can be regarded as national theatres. Their season begins in September–October and ends in April–May. In the summer, the M. Shketan Mari State Drama Theatre and the Youth Theatre stage performances in areas with a high concentration of the Mari population.

As of May 2025, the M. Shketan Mari State Drama Theatre had 50 productions in its repertoire, of which 31 were in Mari and 19 in Russian. On average, 15 performances take place each month, a third of which are in Russian. The repertoire also includes three Mari musicals.

According to information on the Mari Youth Theatre's website, as of May 2025, the repertoire for adults comprised 28 performances in Mari and 10 in Russian. For older school pupils, there were 19 performances in Russian and one in Mari. For children, there were 32 performances, of which only one was in Mari and one in Russian on a Mari theme. Of musical poetry performances, all seven were in Russian, with one on a Mari theme.

This means that, in total, only a third of the productions in the repertoire are in Mari. In March 2025, the Youth Theatre staged 14 performances, five of which were in Mari. The theatre's repertoire also includes one Russian-language production, which promotes Russia's war in Ukraine, entitled 'The Sun Over My Donbass'.

As of May 2025, the Hill Mari Drama Theatre's website listed 46 performances, of which 13, that is, one third were in Hill Mari. The theatre does not have its own building and is based at the J. Eshpai Folk Culture Centre in Kozmodemyansk. Performances take place in this building or in cultural centres in other Mäemari villages. Three to six performances are staged each month, and Hill Mari-language productions are mainly shown in cultural centres in rural areas.

In addition, there are two other theatres whose repertoires include a few productions in the Mari language: The Erik Sapaev Mari State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre, where out of 27 ballets, one is in Mari, and out of 14 operas, two are in Mari. These are staged very rarely.

Of the 52 children's performances at the Republican Puppet Theatre, only one is on a Mari (Finno-Ugric) theme: 'Yüksalche' ('Songs of the Heavenly Bird'). Of the four productions intended for adults, one is an ethno-futuristic mystery with a Mari theme, 'Yüd orol' ('The Night Watchman').

An analysis of the repertoire of the Mari El National Theatre reveals a persistent trend towards a decline in the number of performances in the Mari language and an increase in the number of Russian-language productions. This trend is particularly noticeable in performances aimed at children and older school pupils, where up to 90 % of the repertoire is in Russian.

This is due to the need for theatres to cover part of their costs through their own revenue. The decline in the number of Mari speakers across the republic as a whole, and particularly in towns, has a direct impact on audience demand. The situation is most worrying amongst children and young people living in towns, which jeopardises the future of Mari-language theatre.

The development of Mari-language cinema is characterised by a limited number of projects and insufficient systematic support. The only and, to date, last Mari-language television series, “Chonyshtem ilet” (“You Live in My Heart”), consisted of 13 episodes and was produced by the state television and radio broadcaster ‘Mari El’ in 1997 under the direction of Oleg Irkaev.

The production of full-length feature films in the Mari language is extremely sporadic.

The film that has received the most attention is the 2012 film by Russian director Aleksei Fedorchenko, “Olykmari-vlakyn kavase vatyšt” (“Celestial Wives of the Meadow Mari”). The film provoked mixed reactions, including threats of legal action from representatives of the Mari people, as some erotic scenes were perceived as a violation of traditional cultural taboos.

The films “Salika” (2010) by Mari director Vassili Domrachev and Oleg Irkaev’s “Yal ümbalne — muzhyr yüksö” (“A Pair of Swans Above the Head”, 2013) were considered artistically and technically weak. The situation is slightly better with short films, mainly thanks to private initiatives. One well-known young documentary filmmaker is Alena Ivanova. Until 2021, she worked for the state television and radio broadcaster in Mari El. She has directed 11 films: among her more recent works are “Shochmo mlande üzhyn uzhat. Cheremis rhapsody” (2022, 24 mins) and “Krai utrennei zari” (“Land of Morning Light”, 2024).

In 2021, director Denis Shabli made the film “Ne Ivan, ili Kak priruchit bogatyrya” (“Not Ivan, or How to Tame a Hero”), which deals with the problem of school bullying directed at a pupil of Mari ethnicity. In 2023, the films “Irga” and “Chotkar” were released. All three films are linked by the theme of Mari heroes and form the basis for the feature-length film “Mariyskiye skazki” (“Mari Fairy Tales”, 2025). Shabli’s films make active use of Mari themes and linguistic elements, but are not entirely in the Mari language.

Andrei Ogorodnikov has directed the documentaries: “Onayeng” (“The Spiritual One”, 2021, 60 mins) on the traditional Mari religion, and “Evseev: Priznaniye tsenoyu v zhizn” (“Evseev: Recognition at the Cost of Life”, 2022, 25 mins).

It is interesting to note that the Diocese of Yoshkar-Ola released a short film, “Yesh — tide izi cherke” (“The Family Is a Small Church”, 2022, 11 mins), which promotes the Orthodox faith.

Previously, the state-run television and radio broadcaster in Mari El regularly produced documentaries in the Mari language. At present, however, the number of programmes in Mari is decreasing every year, which is linked to staff lay offs, leading to a decline in the production of such films.

There is a lack of systematic development in Mari-language cinema, particularly in the major genres. Between one and three films in minor genres (short films, documentaries) are released each year, mainly on the initiative of the filmmakers themselves, who seek funding in the form of grants. The Republic of Mari El lacks a targeted programme for supporting and developing national cinema.

Over the last quarter of a century, a systemic crisis has been observed in the training of professional Mari composers, musicians and singers.

From 1960, Music and Art Boarding School No. 1 operated in Yoshkar-Ola, aimed at educating gifted children of Mari ethnicity, mainly from rural areas. The more talented pupils who graduated from the school continued their studies at the Yoshkar-Ola Music School. The most gifted, however, were sent by the republic to the Kazan Conservatoire, where special places were allocated to them. This system formed the core of professional Mari music.

Over the last 30 years, this system has undergone changes. Nowadays, pupils are no longer admitted to the boarding school on the basis of their ethnic origin, and no special places are allocated at the Kazan Conservatoire.

As a result, only two or three professional composers trained under the previous system remain, all aged around 70. Among the youngest composers, only Elina Arkhipova (aged 65) and Grigory Arkhipov (aged 42) are still active. The Mari El

State Opera and Ballet Theatre has only two professional Mari singers left. Composers complain about the lack of publications of their works and the absence of productions, which forces some of them to work outside the republic.

Mari popular music has also undergone significant changes. Traditionally, songs were composed by professional composers within the framework of established genre traditions. Nowadays, amateur creativity dominates, leading to the loss of the Mari people's distinctive character and a growing influence of Russian pop music.

The launch of the radio station Mari El Radio (MER) in 2005 stimulated the development of Mari pop music. A weekly Top 10 chart is compiled, and since 2015 an annual competition, 'Idalõkõse muro' ('Song of the Year'), has been held. MER's annual concert is very popular, and around 200 new songs are submitted to the MER fund each year.

Mari music groups and performers actively give concerts both in Yoshkar-Ola and in the regions of the republic, as well as in areas outside the republic where Mari people live in compact communities. Income from concert performances constitutes a significant part of the artists' earnings. Mari disco events are also organised in major Russian cities, including Moscow, St Petersburg, Yekaterinburg and even Khanty-Mansiysk.

The future of professional Mari music is uncertain, as there is no systematic training of new talent and no support mechanisms for composers and performers. There is a noticeable trend towards the loss of the distinctive Mari character in popular music, due to the influence of Russian pop culture.

### *Peledysh Pairem and other mass events*

In Mari El, Mari national mass events are organised primarily by the State Mari Cultural Centre and the Centre for Folk Art.

The nationwide Peledysh Pairem festival is usually held in two languages: Mari and Russian. Officials who speak Mari perform in Mari; those who do not speak it perform in Russian. Similarly, various competitions and concerts are also held in

both languages. As part of the festivities, the Mari El Radio concert is usually held in the Mari language.

The Mari Cultural Centre organises republic-wide Mari folk festivals such as Shorykyol, Üyarnya, Kugeche and others in the Mari language.

At the 2024 Mari Semyk celebrations in Tatarstan, both the speakers and the compères delivered their remarks in Russian. Similarly, in Izhevsk and the Perm Krai, representatives of other ethnic groups are required to attend Mari events, which is why these events are conducted in Russian.

### *Support for national culture*

In the Republic of Mari El, as in other constituent entities of the Russian Federation, national cultures – including Finno-Ugric cultures – are supported within the framework of both federal and regional legislation and state programmes.

State-funded, pan-Russian Finno-Ugric events take place on the territory of Mari El. For example, on 15–16 May 2025, the [12th International Finno-Ugric Student Forum, 'The Richness of the Finno-Ugric Peoples'](#), took place at the Mari State University in Yoshkar-Ola. This forum, established by the Russian Federation as an alternative to the international student conference IFUSCO, covered topics including 'the preservation of historical memory, countering attempts to falsify history' and 'heroism in the fight against Nazism and neo-Nazism'.

The 3rd All-Russian Forum of Finno-Ugric Peoples, entitled 'Finno-Ugric Youth in a Changing World: Reality and Challenges', took place in Yoshkar-Ola on 9–12 September 2025. The main themes of the forum were: 'Traditional values as the foundation of Russian unity; contemporary challenges facing Finno-Ugric peoples'.

The Republic of Mari El has established a national programme entitled 'Culture of Mari El 2013–2030'. In 2024, planned expenditure from the republic's budget on the cultural sector amounted to approximately 1.51 billion roubles (16.7 million euros), supplemented by federal funding of 253.8 million roubles (2.8 million euros). It is

difficult to determine the exact amount of this sum that was spent specifically on Mari culture.

In addition, there is the state programme 'State Ethnic Policy of the Republic of Mari El 2013–2025'. Funds from the programme 'Patriotic Education of Citizens of the Russian Federation' are used to implement this programme: the total funding for the programme's activities amounts to 1,682,042,770 roubles (approximately 18.6 million euros). Of this sum, 64,135,770 roubles (approximately 705,000 euros) came from the federal budget. The average annual funding for culture over the last four years has been approximately 180 million roubles (approximately 2 million euros).

Events and programmes at both federal and republican levels are used not so much to strengthen national self-awareness or improve proficiency in the native language, but rather to reinforce a pan-Russian, citizen-centred identity, to 'foster patriotism' amongst citizens of the Russian Federation and to deepen a pan-Russian identity. These events and programmes are utilised to disseminate pan-Russian narratives and propaganda, including for the purposes of propaganda relating to the war in Ukraine.

### *Ethnotourism in the territories of Finno-Ugric peoples*

Ethnotourism in the regions of Russia inhabited by Finno-Ugric peoples focuses on the culture, way of life and traditions of the peoples living in those territories. Tourist destinations in the Finno-Ugric regions include the Republic of Mordovia, the Republic of Mari El, the Republic of Komi, the Republic of Karelia, the Republic of Udmurtia and the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug.

In the Finno-Ugric regions, ethnocultural parks serve as sites for ethnotourism. For example, the Finno-Ugric ethnocultural park in the village of Yb in the Komi Republic is a complex comprising a conference hall, a hotel, a hostel, a café, a Komi farmstead and various areas for organising events. It hosts masterclasses in the preparation of traditional dishes and gastronomic festivals, such as ShangaFest.

The Mari Open-Air Ethnographic Museum in Kozmodemyansk has become a repository of architectural monuments and the everyday, working and cultural artefacts of Hill Mari farmers and craftspeople. Its creators have sought to recreate the original details of the architecture and way of life of the Hill Mari people.

Torum Maa is an open-air ethnographic museum in Khanty-Mansiysk. The museum's exhibition features a Khanty summer camp on the Aganka River, a winter settlement of the Northern Mansi, an Ob-Ugric shrine and a hunting trail. Traditional Khanty and Mansi festivals and rituals are held regularly on the museum's grounds.

In recent years, there have been reports of an increase in the number of tourists in Mari El. Around 1 million people visit the region each year. Ethnotourism makes a significant contribution to the growth of tourism. Employees in the tourism industry have repeatedly won national awards in the field of ethnotourism.

The main attractions of ethno-tourism are ethnographic museums, including open-air museums, which showcase the way of life and culture of the local people. Taking part in traditional rituals and festivals allows tourists to immerse themselves more deeply in the local culture, learn the language and songs, and participate in events. Tasting traditional dishes is popular, such as Mari tuara (dried curd cakes) and podkogylyo. In applied arts workshops, tourists can learn basket weaving, embroidery using traditional Mari patterns, or glass painting.

Popular ethno-tourism sites in Mari El include the Valeri Romanov Open-Air Ethnographic Museum in Kozmodemyansk, which showcases the life and culture of the Hill Mari. The Shorunzha ethnocultural complex in the village of Shorunzha, on the border with the Republic of Tatarstan, comprises a farmhouse, workshops for Mari embroidery and basket weaving, as well as the ethnographic complex 'Old Mari Farmhouse' within the museum.

The 'Mari Ethnographic Village Vizimbir' tourism and leisure complex in the Kuzhner District preserves the traditions of the Mari people. The area features springs and a sauna built directly over a spring.

Trips along the Mari El ethnographic routes are organised in Russia through tour operators and excursion groups. Many companies offer specialised tours covering routes that include Yoshkar-Ola, Kozmodemyansk and Vizimir.

### **Karelian, Finnish and Veps**

As of 2020/21, the Republic of Karelia in the Russian Federation has a population of 533,121, of whom over 80 % are Russian. According to the 2020/2021 census, there were 32,000 Karelians, or 6 % of the population, and 6,500 speakers of the Karelian language in the republic. Only just over a quarter of Karelians and Veps consider Karelian and Veps to be their mother tongue.

The Karelian language is not the official language of the Republic of Karelia, as in a constituent entity of the Russian Federation, only a language using the Cyrillic alphabet may be an official language (the law was passed because the Tatars had finally decided that the Tatar language should be written using the Latin alphabet). The Karelian language is written in the Latin alphabet, and the arguments against granting it official language status include the fact that there are three Karelian languages in the Republic of Karelia, as well as the fact that Karelians make up less than 10 % of the population. Granting the Karelian language the status of an official language has been regarded as the most important task by the Karelians and Karelian organisations since as early as 1991.

They endeavour to organise cultural and educational activities in their native language, primarily in ethnic districts, which are comparable to those of other Finno-Ugric peoples.

There are three Karelian ethnic districts in Karelia: Uhtua (Kalevala), Prääsa and Aunus (Olonets), where the proportion of the indigenous population is relatively high. However, the proportion is less than 50 % of the population everywhere, with the highest figure in the Aunus District. Between 1994–2004, there was also the Veps Sheltozero ethnic municipality, which was reportedly dissolved on the grounds that it was economically unviable.

### *The Karelian language and education*

According to Ministry data from 2022, 16 % of pupils learn Karelian during school lessons, whilst the remaining 84 % learn it outside school hours. As of 2022, the Karelian language is taught in 25 schools across the republic. A total of 1,927 pupils are learning Karelian and there are 33 language teachers. In addition, there are 1,474 pupils in these 25 schools, 78 % of whom learnt Karelian outside school hours. The Olonets Karelian (Livvi) language is the main form of the language taught. Parents' desire for their children to know and learn the Karelian language is declining. A survey conducted in 2022 with 900 respondents revealed that over half of parents of Karelian ethnicity wanted their children to be educated exclusively in Russian, whilst nearly half wanted their children to speak only Russian.

At the Elias Lönnrot Finno-Ugric School (secondary school) in Petrozavodsk, the capital of the Republic of Karelia, Karelian, Finnish and Veps are taught on the basis of Russian from Year 1 onwards. The school was founded on the initiative of Karelian, Finnish and Vepsian community organisations, and it was hoped that all subjects would be taught in these languages there.

Since 2016, it has no longer been possible to train as a Karelian language teacher at Petrozavodsk University. Previously, 20 students graduated in this specialisation each year. The programme is now called 'Primary School Teacher', and the state funds the education of 10 students. At the university, students can specialise in Karelian, Finnish or Veps philology, and there is a Department of Finno-Ugric Languages. Students studying Karelian or Veps receive a scholarship. Graduates of Finno-Ugric philology go on to become translators, television and radio presenters, journalists, researchers and teachers. However, there has been a steady decline in the number of state-funded places, and the issue has also been discussed at the level of the republic's government. Unfortunately, the relevant decisions are made in Moscow.

A distinctive feature of Karelia is the Petrozavodsk Conservatoire, where students learn the Finnish, Veps and Karelian languages and the folk music of these peoples.

Karelian language courses for adults are held in villages thanks to a project by the Karelian People's Union. The language is taught at Karelian folk culture centres, which are located throughout the republic. All three Karelian dialects can be learnt. The Vielijärvi (Vedlozero) Karelian Language Centre operates in the republic and has been highly effective in promoting the Karelian language. It also runs a 'language nest' for children, where only Karelian is spoken. The centre also introduces visitors to music, traditional games and national cuisine.

### *The Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages in the media of the Russian Federation*

The TV channel 'Rossiya 1' broadcasts, in all three languages and following the same format, the 15-minute programme 'Oma vaade' and news four times a week, excluding weekends. There are also half-hour radio programmes.

Both the volume and circulation of publications in the national languages are declining. In 2014, the newspaper "Viena Karjala" merged with the newspaper "Oma Mua", which is currently the only Karelian-language publication in Russia. As of 2024, the newspaper's circulation stands at 300 copies. It is published once a week and has over 2,000 followers on the social media platform VKontakte. From time to time, a Karelian-language page is also published in the newspapers of the national districts under the editorial supervision of 'Oma Mua'.

The cultural and literary magazine 'Carelia' was previously published in Finnish, but in 2016 it became a trilingual publication in Finnish, Veps and Karelian. The magazine is published quarterly, with two issues in Finnish and one issue each in Karelian and Veps. The Karelian-language issue was published in June 2025. The Finnish-language edition has a print run of 300 copies, whilst the Karelian and Veps editions have a print run of 200 each. They have 712 followers on VKontakte.

The Finnish-language newspaper "Karjalan Sanomat" is published once a week with a circulation of 500 copies and has over 2,000 followers on VKontakte.

The children's magazine "Kipinä" ("Spark") is published in identical editions in Karelian, Finnish and Veps, and has nearly 800 followers on VKontakte. As of 2024,

the magazine is published monthly with a print run of 2,000 copies in Finnish, 900 in Karelian and 300 in Veps.

The Veps-language newspaper “Kodima”, distributed free of charge at universities, schools and cultural institutions, is essentially bilingual and is published once a month with a print run of 600 copies.

Books in Karelian, Veps and Finnish are published infrequently – 3–4 times a year – including both textbooks and fiction. None were published in 2023.

On 24 October 2024, the publication of newspapers and magazines in Karelian, Finnish and Veps in Karelia was suspended due to a lack of funds. The publishing house Perioodika, which published the newspapers and magazines, had accumulated debts to the printing house. The publishers of the newspapers are the Government of the Republic of Karelia, the Legislative Assembly, the Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of National and Regional Policy, and the Karelian People’s Congress.

Previously, the OmaMedia portal had reported that the volume of publications in national languages would decrease significantly in 2025. For example, the Finnish-language newspaper “Karjalan Sanomat” was to be published as a 12-page edition instead of 16, whilst the Karelian-language “Oma Mua” was to be published as an 8-page edition instead of 12. Newspapers that had previously been printed in colour were to be published in black and white.

The 10th Karelian People’s Congress, held in September, spoke out against the reduction in the volume of newspapers and the decline in print quality. The issue was addressed in the resolution of the congress.

The publishing house Perioodika publishes the newspapers Karjalan Sanomat, Oma Mua and the Veps-language newspaper Kodima, as well as the cultural magazine Carelia and the children’s magazine Kipinä. The magazines feature articles in Finnish, Karelian and Veps.

At present, the newspapers and magazines are published in black and white.

The Finnic languages spoken in Karelia are also supported by various institutions. The Karelian Institute of Language, Literature and History conducts research into the Finnic languages, history and folk culture.

In cultural life, the theatre supports the Finnic languages, but there have been repeated embarrassing incidents here because the actors' command of the Karelian language is not up to standard. This has been highlighted by Karelian national leaders, for example during meetings with the republic's leadership. There are also problems with simultaneous interpretation into Russian. Attention is also drawn to the fact that Karelians themselves do not understand the Karelian language.

In the stand-up comedy 'The Struggle for Time', broadcast on a federal television channel, the actress Valeria Lomakina mocked the Karelian language, describing it as a funny 'atavism, like a man's nipple'. The actress also said that the only place where the Karelian language is spoken is the Karelian National Theatre, where Karelians watch performances in Karelian whilst wearing headphones to listen to the Russian simultaneous translation.

The video clip in question went viral on social media and caused outrage amongst Karelian nationalist activists, leading to a flood of letters of complaint being sent to the Head of State. Many of the letters called for the actor to be condemned and given a severe punishment.

The Council of the Karelian People's Congress has condemned Valeria Lomakina's performance, demanded an apology from the actress and asked the authorities to assess the incident.

Karelian national activists have emphasised in their statements that everyone must work to raise the prestige of the Karelian language and that the scandal that has erupted should be used to good effect, as it draws society's attention to the Karelian language.

Lomakina has since apologised, stating that it was not her own monologue but that of the character she was portraying.

Local Finno-Ugric languages are supported in Karelia through various events. In particular, the UN International Day of the World's Indigenous Languages is celebrated on 21 February, whilst 20 April marks the Day of the Karelian and Veps Alphabets. On both days, recitals in the national languages take place and folk culture is showcased. Recently, however, events relating to the Finnish language and cultural sphere have been absent. The 'Elonpuu' festival is important to the Veps people. It takes place in July in many Veps villages and promotes the consolidation of the community around the Veps language and traditions.

A number of folk music ensembles are performing very successfully both within the Republic of Karelia and beyond its borders. The conservatoire has contributed to this: Toive operates under the Finno-Ugric Department at Petrozavodsk University, as do the folk ensemble Sattuma and Talvisovat. The Veps, meanwhile, have the ensemble Noid.

Song festivals are also held in Karelia, and among the local choirs, Uma Pajo is particularly noteworthy.

## **Tver Karelian**

According to the 2020/21 census, 2,764 people live in the Tver Oblast, and their numbers have declined rapidly in recent decades. In the late 1980s, nationalist ideas reached them too, and in 1990 the Tver Karelians' Society was founded, one of whose main aims was to establish a Tver Karelian autonomous region, as had existed in the 1930s.

In 1997, the Tver Karelians' Cultural Autonomy emerged from the association. It currently has 12 branches across the districts. Since 2024, the Cultural Autonomy has been led by the musician and social activist Oleg Yevgrafov.

As of 2023, the Tver Karelian language is taught as an optional subject in two schools in the Tver Oblast: the village school in Aleshino in the Rameshkovsky District and the village school in Kozlovo in the Spirovsky District. Furthermore, the Tver Karelian language is present to a certain extent in two nursery schools: in the

village of Maksatikha in the Maksatikhinsky District and in the village of Kozlovo, where events celebrating national culture are held and the nursery schools have corners dedicated to local heritage.

In the city of Tver, however, a storytelling club for pre-school children called 'Chicks' (Lapšin paginakluba 'Tipazet') began operating in 2023. Karelian language courses are held at three locations: Tver, Likhoslavl and Rameshki. In November 2002, a methodology seminar for Karelian language teachers was held at Tver State University. Since then, no teachers of the Tver Karelian language have been trained in the oblast.

The last radio programme in the Tver Karelian language was broadcast in 2005, and the last publication in the Karelian language in the oblast appeared in 2017. However, a supplement dedicated to the Karelian language and culture is published once a quarter as an insert in the Rameshkovsky District newspaper "Rodnaya Zemlya". In the Republic of Karelia, a Tver Karelian-language supplement is published from time to time as part of the newspaper "Oma Mua", featuring, for example, articles on the Tver Karelian language and the activities of the Tver Karelian community. There are a few Karelian-language publications in the libraries of Likhoslavl and Tver, but they are not available for sale. In 2022, Lyudmila Gromova's teaching resource "Terveh! Terveh! A Communication Course in the Tver Karelian Language" was published.

The Tver Karelian language can be seen in some places in the tourism sector or at memorials, for example at the memorial to runo singers in Likhoslavl or at the 'Karelian farm' in Chashkovo. The Tver Karelian language can also be seen to some extent on street signs, as well as on shop signs or at cultural events, such as the 'Kurchin-Murchin' festival held in Tver. The Tver Karelian language can also be heard in performances by some of the region's choirs and ensembles. In total, there are nearly 20 groups whose repertoire includes Karelian songs, and there are also two kantele ensembles.

In 23 museums across the Tver Oblast, there are sections dedicated to the history of the Karelians.

There is a Tver Karelian House in Tver, where the Tver Karelian language is occasionally used at events. The Tver Karelian language can also be found on social media, and online language courses are held from time to time.

Despite the efforts made by the local administration and civil society organisations to preserve the Tver Karelian language, it is at serious risk of extinction. There are virtually no young people who speak Tver Karelian.

Those working to promote the Tver Karelian language have their own page on VKontakte, [‘Карельский язык в Твери’ / ‘Karielan kieli Tverissä’](#), with nearly 900 followers. There were around a dozen posts in 2025.

The Tver Karelians’ Society, however, runs the website “Tver Karelians” ([Тверские карелы / Tverin karielat](#)), which has nearly 2,500 followers. The website features posts about radio and television programmes in the Tver Karelian language, as well as historical content. They take part in International Mother Language Day and encourage people to reflect on their mother tongue. The society’s and the cultural autonomy’s main initiatives have included organising Karelian cultural days.

There is also the ‘House of Tver Karelians’ ([Дом тверских карел](#)) with 743 followers, which provides a very good overview of the activities of the Tver Karelians, their national cuisine and celebrations, ensembles and events, and, above all, their contacts with Karelians living in the Republic of Karelia. The Tver Karelians hold two or three seats in the Karelian People’s Congress.

[Не устарел! – Учительская газета](#)

[Рекомендации по сохранению и развитию карельского языка в Тверской области](#)

[Кириленко, С. В. 2024. Карельский язык: языковое планирование и языковые установки](#)

[Языковые процессы в Карелии](#)

[Тверские карелы: народ, вымирающий из-за головотяпства властей – an\\_babushkin, Livejournal, 6 January 2018](#)

[Тверская региональная автономия тверских карел](#)

[Язык и идентичность в условиях языкового сдвига: Республика Карелия](#)

[Языковая ситуация в Республике Карелия: актуальные этноязыковые процессы – Выпускные квалификационные работы студентов НИУ ВШЭ](#)

[Взяли за язык. В Карелии кончились деньги на выпуск изданий на карельском, вепсском и финском языках – Новая газета, 30 October 2024](#)

[Vene Föderatsiooni Karjala Vabariigis katkestati rahvuskeelsete ajalehtede ja ajakirjade väljaandmine – Fenno-Ugria, 24 October 2024](#)

[Отчет о выполнении государственного задания](#)

[Actor accused of insulting Karelian language and extremism – Fenno-Ugria, 22 December 2024](#)

## **Udmurt**

According to the 2020/2021 census, the Republic of Udmurtia has a population of 1,493,356, of whom 299,874 – nearly a quarter – are Udmurts. There are a total of 386,465 Udmurts in the Russian Federation, including in Udmurtia, and 255,877 speakers of the Udmurt language. 265,531 people – over two-thirds of the Udmurt population – consider Udmurt their mother tongue.

### *The Udmurt language in education*

In the 2020/21 academic year, one-tenth of pupils studied the Udmurt language. In total, the Udmurt language is taught in one-third of schools in Udmurtia: 90 % of pupils in Udmurtia do not study the Udmurt language. Of this tenth, in turn, nearly half of the pupils studied Udmurt as their mother tongue and more than half as the

state language, which means there is a difference in the number of lessons. Udmurts whose mother tongue is Udmurt also study Udmurt as the state language.

In 2023, there were 613 schools in the Republic of Udmurtia. Of these, the Udmurt language is taught in 163 schools, whilst 93 schools run Udmurt language clubs or offer it as an optional subject.

However, in those schools where Udmurt is included in the timetable as a mother tongue, Udmurt literature is taught for two hours a week. The Udmurt language is not taught in the towns of Udmurtia, with the exception of the Udmurt Lyceum in Izhevsk. In 2020, there were also Udmurt language classes in a couple of schools in the towns of Mozhga and Glazov.

In Sarapul, there was a desire to open an Udmurt language class, and a huge amount of explanatory work was carried out amongst parents. In the end, three parents agreed that their child should learn the Udmurt language.

The situation regarding the teaching of the Udmurt language is dire, noted Tatyana Ishmatova, a member of the Parliament of the Udmurt Republic and long-standing Chair of the Udmurt Council, in 2023. “We have lost a great many children – or rather, parents who choose to have their children learn their mother tongue (Udmurt, Mari, Tatar) – we have lost a great many of them. The reason is the closure of village schools. Rural children, predominantly Udmurts, are being taken to larger centres, where they are split into different classes. And they are not even offered the opportunity to learn their own language as their mother tongue. Secondly, our mindset has become commercialised. People do not understand what a child gains from their mother tongue. It is better to learn Russian, as there is a state exam in it.” There is no one at the Republic’s Ministry of Education who oversees and is responsible for education in the national language. At the same time, a government decision currently allows Udmurt language teachers and nursery school teachers to receive a 15 % higher salary.

It is not possible to study other subjects in the Udmurt language in Udmurtia, unlike in Tatarstan, for example, where it is possible to study mathematics or biology in the Tatar language.

The Udmurt language is virtually absent from higher education, and the only place where it is taught is the Institute of Finno-Ugric Studies and Journalism at the Udmurt State University. The institute trains Udmurt language teachers, journalists proficient in Udmurt and linguists. There have been major changes, as just 15 years ago, some subjects at the Udmurt State University were taught in Udmurt, and even coursework and dissertations were written in Udmurt.

Teacher training in the Udmurt language also takes place at Glazov Pedagogical University, which has a department of Udmurt language. However, the online courses in Udmurt have 1,700 participants.

The leading newspaper in Udmurtia is “Udmurt Dunne” (“The Udmurt World”), published once a week with a circulation of 2,600. In 2017, the paper was published twice a week with a circulation of 3,500. In 2004, it was published four times a week with a circulation of 12,500. The publication has 9,800 followers on the social network VKontakte.

The magazine “Vordskem Kyl” (“Mother Tongue”) has become bilingual, with a circulation of 550. The magazine has 3,300 followers on the social network VKontakte.

The youth culture magazine “Invozho” (“Sunwheel”) has become bilingual. The magazine has a circulation of 500 copies and 1,037 followers on VKontakte. It publishes articles from Finland, Hungary and Estonia. For example, in 2023, the magazine published an interview with Arvo Valton and translations of poems by Jürgen Rooste. The circulation has fallen sharply: in 2017 it stood at 1,300 copies.

The literary magazine “Italmas” (“Globeflower”) no longer exists.

The socio-political magazine “Kenesh” (“Council”) is published 10 times a year with a circulation of 800 copies and has 1,600 followers on the social network VKontakte.

The children’s newspaper “Zechbur” (“Hello”) is four pages long and is published once a week with a circulation of 700 copies.

The children's magazine "Kizili" ("Little Star") has a circulation of 2,500, which has actually increased: in 2017, it was 1,950 copies. The magazine has 2,079 followers on the social network VKontakte.

The development of the media landscape is illustrated by the launch of the internet-based TV and radio channel Daur TV [ДАУР ТВ + ФМ](#). The channel has 21,000 followers on VKontakte. It mainly features music and shows village life. Daur TV has also been active on YouTube, where some concerts have garnered more than 30,000 views.

The Udmurt youth creative organisation 'Kuara' is active on VKontakte, posting interviews and music, and has more than 6,200 followers.

Television programmes in the Udmurt language are broadcast on national channels for a couple of hours a day on weekdays, whilst radio programmes total four to five hours a day across various radio stations. The republican radio channel 'My Udmurtia' also offers round-the-clock programming, consisting mainly of music and repeat programmes.

In 2021, 55 books were published in Udmurt in Udmurtia.

Although Udmurt is an official language, it is not used in the republic's institutions. Parliamentary sessions are held in Russian, Udmurt is used only on rare occasions. Unlike in Komi, sessions are not interpreted into Udmurt. With the exception of the Constitution, all laws are printed in Russian. The Udmurt language is not used on the websites of state authorities (with the exception of the Ministry of National Policy), in official records or in other administrative matters. The Udmurt language is found only on forms issued by state bodies and on information boards at local government offices, but not on the boards of federal representative offices. Only Udmurt civil servants use the Udmurt language when speaking amongst themselves. One recent change has been the use of the Udmurt language in street advertisements and on posters for special occasions.

An interesting phenomenon amongst the Udmurts is the role of the Udmurt language in urban culture, for example in the repertoires of numerous pop artists who perform in Udmurt, as well as in literature, art, theatre and fashion. As the only Finno-Ugric

people, the Udmurts have a pop music scene in their own language, featuring a wide variety of musical styles: electronic, hip-hop, rap, ethno-futurism. The best-known artists and groups include Paul Shoner, Bobolenin, IVINAVI, MORT, Darali Leli, Zhon-Zhon Sandyr.

Udmurt Kylburch is a poetry portal in the Udmurt language that organises poetry competitions – slams. It also features literature in the Udmurt language. Relatively few followers.

Organisations reflecting social activity among the Udmurt people include the Udmurt Kenesh, the Udmurt youth organisation Shundy, and the Udmurt Women’s Council – Удмурт нылкышно кенеш, led by Elena Minnigarayeva, who is also editor-in-chief of the newspaper Udmurt Dunne (these were mentioned above).

[Udmurtias tähistati riigikeele staatuses oleva udmurdi keele päeva tagasihoidlikult – Fenno-Ugria, 29 November 2022](#)

[Udmurdi keele päeval Vene Föderatsioonis keskenduti tehisaru võimalustele – Fenno-Ugria, 28 November 2024](#)

[«Изучать математику, географию или биологию на удмуртском языке невозможно — эта опция утрачена с 1958 года» - Реальное время, 24 June 2022](#)

[«Трата человеческой энергии и денег несоизмеримы»: чего не хватает преподавателям удмуртского языка и их ученикам – IzhLife, 21 February 2024](#)

[«Подозрительно и опасно». Российские школьники стали вдвое реже учиться на родных языках – Такие дела, 9 September 2024](#)

[Ситуация с изучением удмуртского языка в школах Удмуртии плохая – Сусанин, 17 February 2023](#)

## **Mordvin languages – Erzya and Moksha**

The Republic of Mordovia has a population of 783,552, and the Mordvins make up nearly 39 % of the republic’s population.

According to the 2020/2021 census, there are 484,450 people in the Russian Federation who identify as Mordvins, 11,801 Moksha and 50,086 Erzya. 220,390 people speak the Mordvin language, 19,991 speak Moksha, and 40,045 speak Erzya.

This overview of Mordovia draws on material provided by Moksha activist and philologist Lii Sarankina. The Moksha language is taught in schools in Mordovia under two programmes: as a mother tongue, primarily in village schools, and as a state language, the latter being taught regardless of the pupil's ethnicity.

The study of Moksha or Erzya as a state language begins in Year 2 and continues until Year 7. One lesson per week is taught. In practice, it is an optional subject. No marks are given and academic performance has no bearing whatsoever on the pupil's progression. Teaching depends on the school and whether there is an Erzya or Moksha language teacher available.

In ethnic schools – for example, those located in Moksha villages – there has been a noticeable decline in the teaching of the ethnic language, the scope of the curriculum and the quality of teaching: one lesson of language and one lesson of literature are taught. Local teachers consider this to be extremely insufficient.

There are no Moksha-language nurseries where teaching and communication take place in the Moksha language, but the educational programmes of nurseries do include a regional and ethnic component. For example, in the city of Saransk, efforts are made to introduce nursery children to the ethnic cultures of the Erzya and Moksha peoples. However, this is mostly limited to individual words and folk dances. In a few places, attempts have also been made to organise performances in the native language. The language is not taught.

In nurseries located in villages, the carers speak to the children in Moksha, but Russian is used during lessons. If there is even one Russian-speaking child in the group, the language switches to Russian. The same trend continues at school, even in schools where subjects were until recently taught in the Moksha language in the lower years. There are various reasons for this: small class sizes, pupils coming from different villages, and the fact that there are still Russian-speaking pupils in the classes.

In 2021, the Moksha language was taught as a mother tongue in 32 schools in Mordovia, with 1,485 pupils. There were 50 Moksha language teachers and 51 Erzya language teachers. The Erzya language was taught in 27 schools, with approximately 2,000 pupils.

The Moksha language was taught as an official language in 104 schools in Mordovia, with a total of 16,206 children. There were 121 teachers. The Moksha language is also taught to some extent in regions outside Mordovia, but not as an official language. The Erzya language is taught to a slightly greater extent, as there are more Erzya people living outside Mordovia.

At the higher education level, the Erzya and Moksha languages are taught at Mordovia State University, Mordovia State Pedagogical University, and the Zubovo-Polyana and Ichalkovo teacher-training colleges. A few years ago, Erzya and Moksha were taught as official languages across all faculties and specialisations at the university. Currently, they are taught in the Faculty of Linguistics, within the Department of Mordvin and Finno-Ugric Languages. Until a few years ago, Mordovia State University also trained journalists to write in the national languages. Students on the journalism course were divided into three groups: Russian, Erzya and Moksha. Ten years ago, however, all these were merged into a single Department of Public Opinion and Contemporary Journalism, and the national component disappeared. The journalism programme has always been highly regarded, with fierce competition, but young people from the villages have no chance of making it through because their results in the state examinations are weaker. These days, one can no longer see any Moksha students in the department, but there are more and more foreigners.

### *The Erzya and Moksha languages in state institutions*

Despite the fact that Moksha and Erzya have the status of official languages in the Republic of Mordovia, they are not used in state institutions or in the republic's socio-political life. Occasionally, the Head of State of Mordovia deems it necessary to utter the greeting 'Shumbratada jalgat', and at national events, officials of Moksha ethnicity deliver part of their speeches in the Moksha language. No government

agency has a website in Moksha, the use of the language is limited to signage in public buildings. These are trilingual everywhere, from nurseries to polyclinics. In the capital, street names are trilingual. Proficiency in the Erzya and Moksha languages is not taken into account when recruiting civil servants.

There are currently three publications in the Moksha language in the Republic of Mordovia: the weekly newspaper “Mokshen Pravda” (16 pages), the literary magazine “Moksha” and the children’s magazine “Yakster tyashtenya”. Circulation figures as of 2022: “Mokshen Pravda” 2,500; both monthly magazines have a circulation of 500 copies each. All publications are in the Moksha language, although the newspaper has featured Russian-language articles in recent years, and Moksha-language pages appear from time to time in district newspapers. The ‘Moksha Language’ page on VKontakte has 880 followers.

In the Erzya language, the main newspaper “Erzyan Pravda” is published once a week, comprising 16 pages with a print run of 2,000 copies. The literary magazine “Syatko” is published once a month with a print run of 500 copies, and the children’s magazine “Chilisema” has a print run of 1,300 copies. The magazine has partly switched to Russian. The situation is somewhat better when it comes to following Erzya-language content on the social network VKontakte: Syatko has 1,138 followers, the magazine Chilisema has 1,757, and the newspaper Erzyan Pravda has 4,250.

The television programme Kulyat, broadcast in Moksha and Erzya, airs for 30 minutes on weekdays, whilst the themed programme Siyazhar runs for 22 minutes. The programmes feature news alternately in Erzya and Moksha. On shortwave radio at 100.6 FM, the music and information programme “Vaigel” (“Voice”) is broadcast from Monday to Friday between 7 and 8 am in the Erzya and Moksha languages. Previously, this programme had lasted three hours.

The cable television channel ‘Mordva People’s Television’ broadcasts the programme ‘Mokshen val’ in the Moksha language, as well as in the Erzya language. The channel also features a short programme entitled ‘Let’s Learn Moksha’. ‘Tele Set Mordovia’, Channel 10, is the only private television channel that broadcasts ethnic programmes. It used to have several Erzya and Moksha journalists, now there is one

Erzya and one Moksha journalist. The programme 'Od pinge' ('New Era') is broadcast three times a week for 20 minutes, alternating between Erzya and Moksha. On public holidays, there are no Erzya or Moksha-language programmes on radio or television.

The bulk of Moksha-language literature is published by the Mordovia State Publishing House and the 'Book' Publishing House. Print runs are negligible: books are published mainly from the republic's budget, on the grounds that they have social significance. Some works are also self-published by the authors. The Mordovian National Drama Theatre's programme features five or six performances in both Moksha and Erzya. The theatre also tours the regions.

There is virtually no contemporary original music in the Erzya and Moksha languages. Instead, Moksha-language covers are made of Russian or English songs. Whilst the Erzya were previously active in this regard – their native language was even heard in films – this is not the case for the Moksha language. The Moksha language is not particularly common on the internet. The best-known figure is the blogger Oksana Belkina (2,108 followers). Moksha people generally do not post in their own language. Belkina also runs a Russian-language page on VKontakte dedicated to ethnic fashion, the Varma website (3,700 followers).

The best-known group in the Erzya and Moksha folk song tradition is the Erzya ensemble Toorama, which has now shifted entirely to war-themed songs and performs in the occupied territories (1,573 followers on VKontakte). The Toorama ensemble, named after Vladimir Romashkin, has 2,000 followers on VKontakte. The ensemble is one of the few Finno-Ugric groups that has not endorsed the war. They perform seldom and have expressed the view that it is inappropriate to perform during this war. They have performed songs of the dead, and the ensemble members are dressed in black. However, the ensemble with the largest following is Ojme, based in Moscow (over 8,000 followers on VKontakte). Also worth noting is the ensemble Merema (3,500 followers on VKontakte).

An interesting feature of Erzya and Moksha-speaking culture is the Lutheran church in Saransk, where prayers are read in both languages and services are held (1,500 followers on VKontakte).

The status of the Moksha language in Mordovia is poor, as the perception – instilled over time through the education system and general attitudes – that this language is a sign of cultural backwardness, ignorance and rural life has taken its toll. Consequently, people are turning their backs on their own language and registering both their children and themselves as Russian. Even in Moksha villages, people have spoken to their children in Russian so that no one at school would think the child was behind, and so that the child could get ahead in life. The situation is now changing, however, and the language is regarded as valuable, but it is difficult to change ingrained ways of thinking. The language needs to be promoted, but there is no money for this. The poor economic situation is driving people who speak Moksha out of the Republic of Mordovia, with the result that there are not enough Erzya- and Moksha-speaking journalists for publications in the national languages.

[«Мокшанский язык в первую очередь не нужен самим мокшанам» – Реальное время, 10 July 2022](#)

[Использования мордовских языков и культуры в жизни Мордовии и российских регионов – «АО Центр Информатизации РМ»](#)

[Об утверждении государственной программы Республики Мордовия "Сохранение и развитие национальной культуры, государственных языков](#)

## **Komi**

According to the 2020/2021 census, the population of the Republic of Komi stands at 820,473, of whom 148,264 are Komi, accounting for 18 % of the republic's population. Together with the Komi-Permyak people living in the Kirov Oblast, there are 199,302 Komi people, and a total of 150,405 Komi and Komi-Permyak people speak their own language.

Komi is the only republic where local Russians have twice taken the right to compulsory teaching of the Komi language to the Constitutional Court and lost on both occasions. A petition in 2017 gathered 2,126 signatures. The main reason given by Russian-speaking parents was that pupils should not be required to learn the Komi language. However, the court, citing the Constitution of the Komi Republic –

which designates Komi and Russian as the state languages – ruled that the republic has the right to make the teaching of the Komi language compulsory.

In the 2016/2017 academic year, the Komi language was taught as a non-native language in 108 nurseries in the Komi Republic, that is, to all children attending nursery, regardless of their ethnicity. However, in 76 nurseries, the Komi language was taught as a mother tongue (there are 349 nurseries in the republic in total), whilst 165 nurseries did not offer any Komi language teaching at all.

During the same academic year, the Komi language was taught as a mother tongue in 68 schools and as the state language in 271 schools. In the latter case, a few words are taught, but the focus is primarily on introducing the nature, traditions and cultural characteristics of Komi. In total, 97 % of Komi schools were involved in teaching the Komi language, with 66 % of pupils taking part in the lessons.

Even then, the number of schools teaching Komi as a first language was showing a downward trend compared with 2010: the number of schools fell by 30 and the number of pupils learning Komi by 800.

In 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin made the study of national languages optional. His decision was backed by a corresponding law on native languages passed by the Russian State Duma in 2018.

The study of national languages in Russia began to decline rapidly. In 2020, nearly a third of pupils studied the Komi language, as was also the case in 2021. 85 % of pupils were exposed to topics relating to ethnic culture (Komi traditions, local history, etc.). In 2021, there were 558 teachers of the Komi language and culture. Across the entire republic, there are 67 schools where the Komi language is taught as a mother tongue, with a total of 4,088 pupils. Komi activists note that the number of pupils learning the Komi language as their mother tongue has fallen by almost four times.

The most recent data relate to the 2022/23 academic year. According to figures published by the Ministry of Education in 2023, the Komi language is taught as a mother tongue, along with literature, in 66 schools, with a total of 3,585 pupils. This accounts for 3.5 % of the total number of pupils. The Komi language is taught as a

mother tongue primarily in small schools in rural areas: on average, there are 54 pupils per school.

The Komi language is taught as an optional subject to pupils of all ethnic groups; there are 151 such schools in the Komi Republic, with a total of 28,309 pupils, which in turn accounts for 28 % of the total number of schools.

82 % of all school pupils studied subjects with a focus on national culture.

The main struggle centres on Komi language lessons: pupils learning Komi as their mother tongue have two or three lessons in Komi language and literature per week, though there are also schools where there are up to five lessons.

Unfortunately, there are not enough young people wishing to train as Komi language teachers. Due to a lack of students, the very existence of the Faculty of Komi and Finno-Ugric Languages at Syktyvkar has been under threat on several occasions. Even the existing Komi language teachers face a difficult problem, as in village schools they often cannot fill the required teaching load and are forced to teach other languages as well. This often results in teachers moving to larger towns, where, in turn, there is no one to teach the Komi language as a mother tongue. In rural areas, the Komi language is learnt primarily where the proportion of Komi people is higher and their ethnic linguistic identity is stronger. For example, in the Izhma District, over half of the pupils study Komi as their mother tongue; in the Kotkeros District, a third; whilst in the capital, Syktyvkar, for instance, only one in a hundred pupils do so. In the mining region, however – in the towns of Uhta and Vorkuta – as far as is known, no one studies Komi as their mother tongue, and the number of pupils studying Komi as a state language remains at around 10 %.

### *The Komi language in state institutions*

The Komi language has low prestige within the republic. In 2023, when MP Ekaterina Dyatchkova sought to put a question in the Komi language in the State Council, the Speaker replied: “We’re not on a kolkhoz here.” Similarly, the desire of some Komi

activists to defend themselves in court in the Komi language has provoked many sharp remarks.

The Official Translation Bureau operates as a sub-unit of the Centre for Innovative Language Technologies, which is based at the House of Friendship of Peoples in the Komi Republic. It previously operated as a department within the Ministry of National Policy of the Republic of Komi. The Bureau is responsible for translating laws and various regulatory acts, as well as, for example, election bulletins, into the Komi language. It also provides simultaneous interpreting services to the State Council and the courts. In recent years, there has been an increasing number of cases in the Komi courts where there is a need for simultaneous interpretation between Komi and Russian, and Russian and Komi. The agency's staff also monitor the correct spelling of place names, job titles, advertisements and product names in the Komi language, and are involved in lexicography, particularly with regard to socio-political vocabulary in the Komi language.

#### *Libraries, books and periodicals*

There appear to be problems with literature in the national language in the Komi Republic. For example, there is a report from the Ussinsk District Library where a reader of Komi ethnicity wished to borrow Komi-language literary classics both at the district centre and in village libraries, but there were no Komi-language literary classics available in the region. Allegedly, Komi-language books are not made available because the libraries lack both the publishers' permission and the funds to do so.

However, books in the Komi language are published: 43 in 2021, 14 in 2022 and 21 in 2023. The majority of the literature consists of textbooks, including teaching materials. Poetry is also represented, whilst prose is almost entirely absent.

The Syktyvkar bookshop Ordym sells publications in the national language. It is the only shop in the Komi Republic where one can buy national literature and periodicals. Keeping the shop running is problematic, as incomes are low and opening hours have been reduced.

### *The Komi language in the press, literature, radio and television*

The Komi-language weekly newspaper “Komi Mu” (“Komi Land”), with a circulation of 2,800 copies in 2022, was published once a week, on Thursdays. It has 2,380 followers on VKontakte.

The youth magazine “Iyöloga” (“Echo”) is published once a month. In 2020, its print run was 314 copies, and it has 2,400 followers on VKontakte. The publication, which had been appearing as a newspaper since 1991, became a magazine in 2020.

The children’s magazine “Bi Kiny” (“Little Spark”) is published once a month (3,078 followers on VKontakte), with a circulation of around 1,000 copies.

The literary magazine “Voivyv Kodzuv” (“The North Star”) is published once a month, with 1,700 followers on VKontakte. Circulation: 320–430 copies. The issue of 2025/5 had a print run of 430 copies.

The humour magazine “Chushkanzi” (“Wasp”) is published once a month. It has 2,900 followers on VKontakte. The print run is 300 copies. In 2022, there were 500 subscribers to the digital version.

### *Television and radio programmes*

The Komi Republic’s television channel ‘Yurgan’ broadcasts predominantly Komi-language programmes from 06.00 to 11.00, totalling 3 hours, as well as in the evening from 18.00 to 19.15, totalling 4 hours a day. On Saturdays and Sundays, there are almost no Komi-language television programmes, with airtime limited to 6.00–7.45. Programmes in the national language are primarily broadcast in the morning between 6.00 and 9.00, during periods of low viewership. The television channel has nearly 8,700 followers on VKontakte.

News in the Komi language is broadcast via the federal television channel Rossiya 1 for half an hour on weekdays, provided by Komi Gor (the Komi Republic’s Television and Radio Committee). In addition, the same channel airs ‘As mu vylyn’ three times

a week, a programme introducing Komi culture and society. Komi Gor has 33,000 followers on VKontakte.

The Republic of Komi coordinates the unique project 'Finno-ugorski mir' ('The Finno-Ugric World'), which primarily showcases events highlighting the folk culture of the Finno-Ugric peoples, as well as their traditional costumes, handicrafts, musical instruments and languages. The programme is produced in collaboration with Komi, Yugra, Mari, Udmurt and Karelian TV stations. The format has been running for 30 years. Whilst the programmes originally lasted 30 minutes, this has now been reduced to 10–15 minutes.

Radio programmes in the Komi language are also broadcast by the Komi Gor radio station, from Monday to Friday, from morning until lunchtime, for no more than four hours a day.

There is an internet radio station, Yurgan, broadcasting in Komi and Russian (1,900 followers on VKontakte).

[Коми язык: в Яндексe есть, в школах — нет, библиотекари разводят руками – Усиснк-Новости, 5 March 2025](#)

[Замминистра образования Коми: «Вопрос - изучать или не изучать коми язык в школе - не обсуждается» – БНК, 24 December 2014](#)

[Почему стоит учить коми язык в наше время? – Национальный акцент, 22 October 2023](#)

[В школах Коми сохранится обязательное обучение национальному языку – 7x7, 1 November 2017](#)

[В Минобрнауки намерены сохранить часы изучения коми языка и литературы – БНК, 22 April 2022](#)

[Сохраняя и развивая коми язык: Бюро официального перевода Республики Коми расширяет возможности – Комиинформ, 17 November 2023](#)

[Лидерами по изучению коми языка как родного в школах остаются Ижемский, Усть-Куломский и Корткеросский районы – Комиинформ, 28 September 2023](#)

[В трех муниципалитетах республики отказались признать коми язык родным – Finugor](#)

[Радио и телевидение на коми языке | komikyv.ru](#)

[Коми история: почему мы не говорим по-коми – Komi Daily. 30 January 2025](#)

[В приоритете – семья, молодежь и коми язык – Регион. 7 November 2024](#)

[Телевизионная программа на неделю телеканал Юрган](#)

[Ас му вылын – ГТРК «Коми Гор»](#)

## **Khanty and Mansi**

Khanty-Mansia (the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug–Yugra) is a constituent entity of the Russian Federation, situated in the Ural Federal District and forming part of the Tyumen Oblast. 70 % of the population is Russian. The Khanty and Mansi peoples each account for approximately 1 % of the territory's population. According to the 2020 census, there were 12,228 Mansi, 1,346 speakers of the Mansi language, and 2,093 people who considered Mansi their mother tongue – that is, 17 % of the Mansi population. Thus, more people considered Mansi their mother tongue than there were speakers of the language.

According to the 2020 census, there were 31,467 Khanty, 9,230 speakers of the language, and 13,691 Khanty – or 44 % of the Khanty population – who considered Khanty their mother tongue. Thus, more people considered Khanty their mother tongue than there were speakers of the language.

Both peoples are rapidly becoming Russified. Among the Mansi, approximately one-tenth are speakers of the language, whilst among the Khanty, the figure is one-quarter.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that the total population of the Mansi and Khanty showed an upward trend between 2010 and 2020. There are several factors at play here. Firstly, the number of children in Mansi and Khanty families remains high. Secondly, the preferential treatment afforded to indigenous peoples is also influencing parents in mixed families to register their children as Mansi or Khanty. As

regards language proficiency, there are also reports that Khanty or Mansi who know a dozen or so words of Khanty or Mansi, respectively, are registering themselves as speakers of an indigenous language.

The Khanty and Mansi languages are taught, as with other indigenous languages in Russia, for two hours a week, with one hour a week devoted to literature, up to Year 8. Since 2018, these indigenous languages have been taught on an optional basis outside the official curriculum, subject to the consent of parents or authorised persons. For those who do not speak the language, an introduction to the Khanty or Mansi language and literature is provided, totalling two hours a week. The languages are not taught throughout the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, which has a total population of 1.47 million, but primarily in areas where the Khanty and Mansi people live – a total of 43,000 people – in five and three districts, respectively.

As regards the Mansi language, it is known that in 2024 the language was taught in two nursery schools. Mansi was taught in three primary schools, and the number of language learners is on a steady downward trend.

The biggest problem with language teaching is considered to be the fact that neither children nor their parents wish to learn these languages, nor do they want the indigenous languages to be taught; the reason given is that these languages have no future prospects. Another concern is the lack of state-approved teaching materials, as the state's expert assessment process takes a long time.

The Khanty and Mansi languages are taught at Nizhny Vartovsk State University, Surgut State University and Surgut State Pedagogical University, but no longer at the region's most important institution, Yugra University. All of the aforementioned institutions offer a teacher training programme and prepare teachers. The curriculum includes Khanty philology, the Khanty language and teaching methodology, as well as the Khanty and Mansi languages.

In addition, the Khanty and Mansi languages are taught, just like all other indigenous languages, at the A. Herzen State Pedagogical University of the Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation in St Petersburg. The university primarily produces linguists, but also teachers.

The indigenous languages are not particularly noticeable in everyday use in the region, nor are they used in official documents or street names.

### *Press, radio and television*

In the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, however, there are radio and television programmes in the Khanty and Mansi languages. For example, in 2024, there were radio programmes in both languages twice a week, including news and talk shows.

The publication “Khanty Yasang” (“The Khanty Word”) is published twice a month in the Khanty language, with a circulation of 2,166 in 2025 (compared to 1,700 in 2017). Circulation has risen, and this is likely due to the fact that the newspaper is now distributed free of charge.

The publication “Luima Seripos” (“Dawn”) is published in the Mansi language twice a month. In 2025, its print run was 1,710 copies (compared to 400 copies in 2017). The newspaper is distributed free of charge.

Until recently, the children’s magazine “Vitsam” ([ВИТСАМ](#)) was also published in the Mansi language four times a year. The last post on VKontakte was in 2024.

Both Mansi newspapers are readily available in PDF format on their [website](#). The VKontakte page [Ханты Манси Мир | Хӧнты ясӧн | Лӱимӧ сӕрипос](#) has 4,200 followers.

In the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, another newspaper is published in the Khanty language: Lukh Avt (“Angal Peninsula”) [«ЛУХ АВТ» - газета на хантыйском языке](#), with 2,200 followers. Articles in the Khanty language also appear in the monthly publication Krasnyi Sever (circulation 1,340).

A Russian-language group dedicated to Khanty life, ‘I Love the Khanty Language’ ([Я люблю хантыйский язык](#)), created on the initiative of Khanty language activist Larissa Milyakhova, has 2,700 followers.

In recent years, the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug has also regularly hosted All-Russian Finno-Ugric literary events, see: [III Conference of Finno-Ugric Writers took place in Khanty-Mansiysk – Fenno-Ugria, 4 June 2025](#)

## **Nenets**

The Nenets people live on the northern coast of Russia in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug of the Arkhangelsk Oblast, the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug of the Tyumen Oblast and the Taimyr (Dolgan-Nenets) Autonomous Okrug. For example, the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug in the Tyumen Oblast has a population of 516,000, of whom 5 % are Nenets. In total, 49,646 Nenets people were recorded in the Russian Federation in 2021. The Nenets language was spoken by 24,487 people and 38,015 considered it their mother tongue.

In the 2022/23 academic year, there were six Nenets-language nursery schools in the district, attended by 222 children. The number of Nenets language lessons in nursery schools is unknown.

From Year 1 to Year 4, the Nenets language is mostly taught as an optional subject in some schools, in a total of 34 rural (tundra) schools and three urban schools. Of these, 19 schools were in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. In the 2022/2023 academic year, there were 9 such schools in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, where 655 children were learning the Nenets language. The number of lessons per week is 1–2, and Nenets language teachers are entitled to a 15 % higher salary. The Nenets language is generally not taught at the following school levels, e.g. in Years 10–11, but is offered as an optional subject at one school in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug and one in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, and at as many as four schools in Taimyr.

At a more advanced level, it is possible to study the Nenets language at the A. Herzen State Pedagogical University for Indigenous Peoples in St Petersburg, where Nenets language lessons are held eight times a week. Among secondary specialised educational institutions, the Nenets language is taught at the Naryan-Mar College of Humanities, the Nenets Autonomous Okrug Agricultural Technical College, the

Yamalo-Nenets Agricultural Technical College in Salekhard, and the Taimyr College in Dudinka. At these educational institutions, the number of lessons per week varies between 2 and 4.

It has been stated at conferences and meetings that there are not enough Nenets language teachers in the Yamalo-Nenets region, and particularly in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. Furthermore, when a Nenets language teacher teaches the language as an optional subject, they do so without the prescribed additional remuneration.

In some cultural centres, however, there are courses in the Nenets language, and there is a Nenets language school. For example, at the Naryan-Mar National Cultural Centre, there is a Nenets language school called 'Ненэй' вада' ('The Real Word'), which had around ten graduates in 2025. It is noted that all those mentioned can converse in the Nenets language, talk about their homeland, their profession and their relatives, and know the names of numbers. Among the school's graduates is, for example, a young Nenets man who reads the news from the Nenets Autonomous Okrug on local television, which began broadcasting in 2025.

### *Television, radio and newspapers*

In January 2025, the first 12-minute news programme in the Nenets language, 'Nerm syo', was broadcast on the Rossiya 1 television channel in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. The Nenets language sounded rather halting in the programme, none of the interviewees appeared to be fluent in Nenets. The programme is broadcast once a week and lasts 10–15 minutes. The programme has 3,000 viewers on VKontakte. In the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the television channel Yamal-Region broadcasts the news programme "Ялэмдад нумгы" twice a week and the news programme "Тасу ява" twice a month for residents of the Tazov District of the Okrug. Both programmes are 30 minutes long.

The Nenets-language newspaper "Naryana Ngern" ("Red Tundra") is the only Nenets-language newspaper in the world. It is published once a week in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. It has a circulation of over 3,000, and on

Vkontakte, the newspaper [Няръяна Нгэрм – старейшая газета Ямала](#) has 5,500 followers. A small children's supplement, 'Myniko', is also published alongside the newspaper.

The newspaper of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, "Naryan Vynder" ("The Red Tundra Dweller"), used to be published three times a week in Russian and Nenets, with a circulation of around 5,000. Currently, the newspaper is in Russian, but an occasional Nenets-language insert, 'Yalumd', is published. This has little prestige and consists of material translated from Russian. The newspaper is published twice a week and is free for pensioners.

In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Radio Rossiya 1 broadcasts regional news in the Nenets language once a week. In the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the local radio station 'Yamal Region' broadcasts a one-hour news programme in the Nenets language, 'Yamal yun', once a week, as well as a one-hour cultural programme, 'Nedarma'. On the Taimyr Peninsula, the channel Rossiya 1 broadcasts a news programme in the Nenets language, which is on air for 30 minutes a week.

An interesting feature is 'Ненэй Вада' ([Neney Vada](#)) on YouTube, hosted by Albert Otoketto.

One might assume that the Nenets language is faring well compared to those of other peoples, but an expedition to the Nenets Autonomous Okrug in 2022 revealed that the Nenets language is actively used only in the Yamb To reindeer herding region in the eastern part of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. Of the 6,713 Nenets people living in the district, only 750 speak the Nenets language.

It is thought that the situation of the Nenets language was exacerbated by COVID-19, as many older people who spoke Nenets fluently passed away.

[Ученые: Ненецкий язык активно используют только в одной общине НАО – Национальный Акцент, 14 December 2022](#)

[Neenetsite mured ja mineviku kaja – Art Leete. Sirp 26 May 2023](#)

**Nganasan**

The Nganasan live in the southern and central parts of the Taimyr Peninsula, on the shores of the Arctic Ocean. In 1989, the Taimyr Peninsula (approx. 400,000 km<sup>2</sup>) had a population of 55,000. In 2020/2021, there were 687 Nganasan. There are a total of 300 speakers of the Nganasan language in the Russian Federation, and it is interesting to note that their number has increased. According to a few language enthusiasts, such as Svetlana Zhovnitskaya, there are also young people who speak the Nganasan language fluently.

It is possible to learn the Nganasan language in St Petersburg, at the A. Herzen State Pedagogical University for Indigenous Peoples, as well as on a voluntary basis at the Volochanka School. The Volochanka nursery school has a 'language nest' attended by 20 children, whilst at Dudinka School it is also possible to learn Nganasan as part of the school curriculum in primary school. A total of 78 children are enrolled. To date, a primer, textbooks and teaching materials have been published.

From time to time, the newspaper "Taimyr" publishes supplements in the Nganasan language, and Dudinka Radio also broadcasts programmes in Nganasan, reportedly including 15 minutes of news each day.

## **Enets**

According to the 2020/21 census, there are 201 Enets people, 97 of whom speak the Enets language, and over a third of the Enets population consider Enets their mother tongue.

The traditional homeland of the Enets people has been in the northern part of Krasnoyarsk Krai, on the Taimyr Peninsula, on the left bank of the Yenisei River near its mouth. There are fewer than a hundred speakers of the Enets language, mainly older people. However, the Enets language is taught at the nursery school in the village of Potapov on the Taimyr Peninsula, where there is an active language nest, and the Enets language is also offered as an optional subject at the primary and secondary schools in Potapov.

## Selkup

The Selkup, numbering 3,458 people according to the 2020/2021 census, are a Samoyedic people living in the northern part of Western Siberia, in the Tomsk and Tyumen Oblasts and the Krasnoyarsk Krai. They speak Selkup and Russian. 975 people are fluent in their native language.

It is possible to study the Selkup language in St Petersburg, at the A. Herzen State Pedagogical University for Indigenous Peoples. This is where the majority of Selkup language specialists are trained.

The Selkup language is also taught as an optional subject in five village schools in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, as well as in Tomsk Oblast. Salekhard is the only town where the Selkup language can be studied at the local boarding school. The Selkup language is also taught as a subject at the Salekhard Teacher Training College.

### *Newspapers, radio and television*

Radio programmes in the Selkup language have been broadcast intermittently since 1986. Since 1998, 15-minute radio programmes have been broadcast regularly in Salekhard.

The television company Alianss broadcasts programmes in the Selkup language for a total of 15 minutes a week from the village of Krasnoselkup, and the same applies to 15-minute broadcasts from the village of Tarko Sale.

There is a YouTube channel in the Selkup language, [‘Селькупский язык ТО \\* Южноселькупский язык’](#), with 135 subscribers.

The Selkup, or more specifically the Selkup Cultural Centre, have their own page on VKontakte: [МУК ЦКС «Центр селькупской культуры»](#), with 200 followers. The Selkup also belong to the Yamal Potomkam, an association of indigenous peoples.

There is no literature in the Selkup language, but school textbooks and dictionaries have been published in recent years.

[Языки и культуры — Мансийский язык](#)

[Методические рекомендации по итогам оценки качества подготовки по учебному предмету «родной \(мансийский\) язык и литература» среди обучающихся 5-х классов общеобразовательных организаций Ханты-Мансийского автономного округа – Югры – Ханты-Мансийск, 2016](#)

[Использование медиакорпусов в преподавании мансийского языка для развития познавательных интересов школьников \(из опыта работы учителя мансийского языка Л.Н. Карпенко\), 30 June 2024](#)

[Технологии повышения доступности ресурсов мансийского языка: аспекты применения цифровых платформ](#)

[ЯЗЫК И ОБЩЕСТВО. энциклопедия. Москва 2016](#)

[В некоторых школах Югры решили ввести курс мансийского языка](#)

[Suure Venemaa varaa ait toetab võimude väitel neenetseid heldelt – Eesti Päevaleht, 23 November 2010](#)

[Новости Югры: преподавание в университетах региона языков народов Севера и создание молодёжного правительства ХМАО – GoArctic 30 October 2024](#)

[Сергей Тайбарей: «Родной язык должен звучать с телеэкранов» – KMNSoyuz-News, 17 February 2025](#)

[Ненецкий язык](#)

[Изучать родной ненецкий язык важно с самого раннего возраста – Nenets Autonomous Okrug, 31 May 2023](#)

[Светлана Жовницкая: «Меня зовут Дизар» – KMNSoyuz-News, 1 May 2022](#)

[Лесной энецкий язык – PostNauka, 18 February 2021](#)

[Art Leete: Obi ugri sõjakunsti kujunemine ja hiilgus – ERR, 21 April 2024](#)

## Books and brochures in Finno-Ugric languages

| Language              | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Komi                  | 43   | 14   | 21   | 19   |
| Perm Komi             | 1    | -    | -    | 6    |
| Mari (also Hill Mari) | 31   | 25   | 33   | 33   |
| Udmurt                | 55   | 8    | 16   | 16   |
| Moksha                | 7    | 4    | 15   | 10   |
| Erzya                 | 7    | 4    | 13   | 7    |
| Karelian              | 3    | 8    | 2    | 2    |
| Veps                  | 3    | 5    | 1    | 3    |
| Khanty                | 20   | 7    | 13   | 12   |
| Mansi                 | 8    | 8    | 3    | 3    |
| Nenets                | 18   | 4    | 6    | 21   |
| Saami                 | 1    | -    | 1    | -    |
| Selkup                | -    | -    | -    | 7    |
| Votic                 | 1    | -    | -    | -    |
| Nganasan              | 1    | -    | -    | -    |

The data also includes textbooks and magazines. To a certain extent, bilingual books are also published, though these are not included in this table. Compared with the 1990s, the number of books and brochures published in the larger Finno-Ugric languages has fallen significantly. The number of books and textbooks published in the languages of indigenous peoples (the Nenets, Khanty and Mansi – peoples numbering fewer than 50,000) is proportionally high. The war in Ukraine has not had a noticeable impact on the volume of printed literature published in Finno-Ugric languages, but rather there is a steady decline.

By way of comparison: in 2023, 241 books were published in Tatar, 161 in Sakha (Yakut), 70 in Bashkir (compared with 150 the previous year), and 65 in Chuvash.

In the first half of 2024, only 812 books were published in the national languages of the Russian Federation (excluding Russian), compared with 1,760 in 2023. The number of books published in various languages has also decreased. The decline in the printing of books in national languages can be explained by the ongoing marginalisation and suppression of these languages in the educational, cultural and social life of the Russian Federation.

[Выпуск переводной литературы. 2024 г. \(01.01.2024 - 31.12.2024\)](#)

[Книгоиздание на языках народов России: проблемы и перспективы \(на основе статистики за 2019–2023 гг.\) | Сухорукова | Научные и технические библиотеки](#)

[Обзор книгоиздания в России: в лидерах снова Анна Джейн и Федор Достоевский](#)

## 9. Academic life among the Finno-Ugric peoples

The study of Finno-Ugric studies and the Finno-Ugric peoples and cultures has long-standing historical traditions dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries. In Estonian academia, this field experienced a new resurgence with the establishment of the national university teaching in the Estonian language in 1919. Before the Second World War, however, direct contact with Finno-Ugric scholars further east remained rare for political reasons. Only a few Estonian scholars (such as Julius Mark, 1925) were able to conduct research directly amongst the Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia. Cooperation between Estonia, Finland and Hungary formed the basis of research into related peoples and the kinship movement in general, drawing on previously collected material or new sources gathered, for example, from the Livonian coast, Estonian Ingria or elsewhere.

With the incorporation of Estonia into the Soviet Union, and particularly after the Second World War, direct contacts in Finno-Ugric studies with Russian Finnougrists, as well as with universities and research centres there, became closer. It became established which peoples and regions each particular region and university would focus on in their research. The primary focus of Estonian researchers remained on the Votic, Izhorian and Livonian languages. Nevertheless, expeditions by Estonian ethnologists also reached more distant kindred peoples in Central Russia or Western Siberia. From 1960, the tradition of international Finno-Ugric conferences (*Congressus Internationalis Fenno-Ugristarum* / CIFU) was also established, in which scholars from outside the Soviet Union (Finland, Hungary, etc.) were also able to take part.

In Soviet-era Finno-Ugric studies, the figure and work of Paul Ariste were of decisive importance. From the 1950s onwards, he began to bring together young researchers from the eastern Finno-Ugric peoples in Tartu for postgraduate studies. The work carried out with them was not limited to specialist academic research. During their years in Estonia, they experienced a different attitude towards their own nationality and the system. Under Paul Ariste's supervision, around fifty Finno-Ugric postgraduate students completed their postgraduate studies at what was then Tartu State University. It can be said that such contacts and the networks formed on their basis (for example, the all-Union cooperation network in the field of Finno-Ugric

ethnomusicology established by Ingrid Rüütli) did not immediately lose their significance even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Naturally, direct contacts began to dwindle following Estonia's restoration of independence and the re-establishment of national borders, as well as due to a generational shift. Nevertheless, the tradition of various Finno-Ugric forums has continued to the present day in both the West and the East, although it has changed significantly in light of developments in recent years. The scholarship system of the Kindred Peoples Programme also helped to maintain and re-establish these links. Particularly in the 1990s, it brought dozens of young Finno-Ugric students from the East to study at Estonian universities.

### *Finno-Ugric research centres and research policy in Russia*

The most important research centres in Russia dealing with Finno-Ugric linguistics, ethnography, folklore and other related subjects are, first and foremost, the universities of the constituent republics and regions, as well as the research institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences (in Petrozavodsk, Saransk, Yoshkar-Ola, Syktyvkar, Khanty-Mansiysk and elsewhere), as well as universities and institutes in major centres (Moscow, St Petersburg) where Finno-Ugric linguistics, folklore studies, ethnography, anthropology, history and similar disciplines are studied. It is known that the management of research institutes and universities have, from the outset, expressed their support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The joint appeal issued on 4 March 2022 by the Council of Rectors of Russian universities was also signed by the rectors of universities in the Finno-Ugric regions ([Обращение Российского Союза ректоров](#)). Such appeals also place rank-and-file staff at research institutions under ideological pressure. At the same time, it is known that representatives of the security services had already taken an interest in researchers in contact with foreign colleagues even before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

The Russian research system is hierarchical and, at the same time, 'parallel'. On the one hand, this hierarchy can be understood as the progression through a natural research career and the positions and advantages arising from corresponding achievements. At the same time, given limited resources and preferential policies,

this has resulted in relatively limited opportunities for (younger) researchers in more local areas and those further from the centres (including the Finno-Ugric regions) to establish direct contacts with other (let alone foreign) colleagues. The system also expects them to publish and present at conferences, yet this is only possible on a few occasions each year – for example, at certain key conferences – and attending these requires the use of personal resources. Whilst attending conferences in Russia, stories have been heard of how a low-paid researcher has to wait until the end of the year and hope that their institute has some funds left over to reimburse the conference expenses incurred during the year. It may happen, however, that there is ‘not enough money’ and the funds allocated by the institution cover only the travel expenses and other associated costs of the director and/or senior researchers (and, in the case of male researchers, their wives).

By ‘parallelism’, one may mean that the Russian academic community is divided, in terms of its orientation, research methods and findings, into those whose research expertise is on par with that of their Western colleagues (a characteristic primarily found amongst researchers at universities in major centres) and those whose is not. In the latter case, this primarily means a lack of proficiency in English (and other languages) and a confinement to the Russian-language and Russian-minded academic sphere. It is paradoxical, but it is possible to rise quite high with Russian-language competence alone. Over the decades, a vast number of studies by Western scholars have been translated into Russian, and so it is possible to remain broadly up to date with Western research tradition without ever having had direct contact with them. However, there are also numerous cases where the expertise of Russian (including Finno-Ugric) humanities scholars, even today, is limited to knowledge acquired during the Soviet era and shortly thereafter, in which Western research findings are reflected only superficially and sporadically. This is often characteristic of Finno-Ugric scholars, including younger ones, for whom the most interesting aspect of their background is precisely their specialised knowledge of local specifics.

### *A shifting relationship with the West*

Around a decade ago, Russia's research policy also saw a growing, institutionally driven shift towards greater internationalisation. Russia set about reorienting and formalising its research landscape in line with Western standards. This meant, for example, a desire to raise the international ranking of its scientific journals, but for researchers, it also meant that, unlike before, they could no longer focus on writing labour-intensive (though often more substantively interesting) research monographs. Instead, they had to start 'churning out' articles that would somehow fit into Western journals. This requirement has evidently not disappeared even now, as can be inferred from the publications sent by Russian researchers to the West, including high-ranking journals published in Estonia (such as "Linguistica Uralica", "Folklore" and others).

These efforts are often merely formal and lacking in substance. The knowledge of Western sources and methods among researchers at local centres (often working on Finno-Ugric topics) is neither substantive nor up to date. At the same time, it appears that Russian researchers are still expected, in some way, to be internationally oriented. Given the high standard of Western scholarship, they cannot limit themselves solely to academic forums and publications in third countries.

At the same time, in light of the events of recent years, direct regret has also been expressed regarding the previous 'waste' of resources that went towards bringing the country's scientific community into line with the West, whereas 'now' the focus should be solely on the 'Russian world' in science as well, both in the Russian Federation and in 'friendly countries' (cf. Vitebsky 2025: 250). This trend may well intensify, particularly given that hundreds of Russian researchers – often the more progressive and internationally oriented ones – have in recent years found opportunities to leave Russia and take up positions at Western research centres, if they were not already working there.

Of the researchers who have left Russia, anthropologists are perhaps the most active in their new circumstances, as they are directly affected by being cut off from their physical fields of research. Political issues and new choices are also under discussion in joint forums between them and their Western colleagues (cf. Melnikova

& Vasilyeva 2024). There is a strong political motivation. Dmitri Arzytov, an associate professor at Ohio University who has studied the Nenets, initiated an anti-war petition by Russian anthropologists addressed to Vladimir Putin immediately following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This petition has been signed by over 1,000 researchers (including some in Russia;

<https://www.easaonline.org/news/russiapetn.shtml>;

[Петиция · Российские антропологи против военных действий России на территории Республики Украина - Финляндия · Change.org](#)).

### *Academic events in Russia*

In the field of Finno-Ugric studies, a number of regular conferences have become established in Russia in the fields of linguistics, ethnology, folklore and social sciences. The largest of these is the All-Russian Conference of Finno-Ugricists, now in its seventh edition, which took place from 27 to 30 June 2024 at the Mari National Theatre in Yoshkar-Ola, the capital of the Mari Republic – ‘Contemporary Finno-Ugric Studies: Science – Society – Culture’ ([VII Всероссийская научная конференция финно-угроведов «Современное финно-угроведение: наука – общество – культура» открыла свою работу – Bez Formata, 29 June 2024, Russian Finnougrist conference – Fenno-Ugria, 11 July 2024](#))

The conference was attended by 300 researchers from 19 regions of the Russian Federation. The researchers were welcomed by the head of the republic's government, Yuri Zaitsev; the speaker of the republic's legislative assembly, Anatoly Smirnov; the first deputy head of the government, Yevgeny Kuzmin; the Minister for Information, Culture and Ethnic Policy, Konstantin Ivanov; and the acting mayor of Yoshkar-Ola, Anton Trudinov. The republic's leadership presented many distinguished Finno-Ugric scholars with high honours and certificates of appreciation.

Greetings to the conference were sent by the Chair of the Committee of Finnougrists of the Russian Federation, Academician Anatoli Rakin (Komi), Pyotr Tultaev, Chairman of the Russian Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples and Senator of the

Federation Council of the Russian Federation; and Tatyana Barakhova, Director of the State Cultural Centre of the Finno-Ugric Peoples. A moment's silence followed to commemorate the Finnougrists who had passed away over the past five years.

At the plenary session, Lyudmila Grigoryeva, Director of the Institute of Mari Language, Literature and History and Candidate of Philological Sciences, delivered a presentation entitled 'Modern Finno-Ugric Studies: Achievements and New Directions'; Praskovia Mizina, Adviser at the All-Russian Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, Doctor of Pharmaceutical Sciences and Professor, with a presentation entitled "Conventional Medicine and the Traditions of Finno-Ugric Peoples in the Use of Medicinal Plants"; Nadezhda Shutova, Senior Research Fellow at the Department of History of the Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature, Doctor of History, with a presentation entitled "Current Prospects for Research into the Ethnogenesis of the Udmurts: Sources, Approaches, Problems"; Sergei Myznikov, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Head of the Department of Uralic Languages, Folklore and Literature at the A. Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, with a presentation entitled "Some Aspects of the Etymological Analysis of Turkic Elements in Finno-Ugric Languages"; Yuri Antonov, Head of the Department of Finno-Ugric Languages at Mordovia State University and Doctor of Linguistics, with a presentation entitled "Ideological and Genre-Specific Features of Contemporary Mordvin Literature".

The conference participants then continued their work in parallel sessions held at Mari State University on the following topics: 'Current issues in the historical and contemporary lexicology of Finno-Ugric languages and their dialects', 'Problems in the morphology and syntax of Finno-Ugric languages', 'The history of the written languages of the Finno-Ugric peoples', 'Folklore as a reflection of the ethnocultural worldview', 'Theoretical and methodological aspects of contemporary Finno-Ugric literary studies', 'Issues in the history of the Finno-Ugric peoples', 'The cultural sphere and education of the Finno-Ugric peoples', 'Experience in the scientific interpretation of the artistic content of Finno-Ugric literature', and others.

During the conference, a meeting of the Committee of Finnougrists of the Russian Federation was held, at which new leaders were elected for the organisation and the venue for the next conference was decided. Oleg Sergeyev, a senior researcher and

linguist at the Institute of Mari Language, Literature and History, was elected as the new chair. Oleg Sergeyev undertook postgraduate studies at the University of Tartu from 1986 to 1989, and he was a student of Academician Paul Ariste. In 1990, he defended his PhD thesis at the University of Tartu on the topic 'Manuscript Dictionaries of the Mari Language in the 18th–19th Centuries', supervised by Paul Ariste and Eduard Vääri. Ivan Ryabov, Dean of the Faculty of Linguistics at Mordovia State University, was elected Deputy Chair of the Committee of Finnougrists. It was decided that the next conference would be held in Saransk in 2029.

Previous conferences have been held in Yoshkar-Ola (1994), Saransk (2000), Syktyvkar (2004), Khanty-Mansiysk (2009), Petrozavodsk (2014) and Izhevsk (2019). View photos from the 7th Conference of Finno-Ugric Scholars of the Russian Federation on [VKontakte](#).

Sessions focusing on Finno-Ugric research topics are also organised at major all-Russian specialist forums – such as the All-Russian Congress of Anthropologists and Ethnologists (Конгресс антропологов и этнологов России) or the All-Russian Congress of Folklorists (Всероссийский конгресс фольклористов). These are very well-attended and eagerly anticipated forums. The Russian Association of Anthropologists and Ethnologists has long been led by Valery Tishkov, one of the key architects of Russian national policy, as well as Aleksey Zagrebin, an ethnologist of Udmurt origin and a member of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, both of whom are also academically accomplished researchers. Madis Arukask, who had previously attended the forum twice before 2019 (in 2015 and 2017), still receives relevant information via the mailing list. Thus, there has been no specific effort to discreetly exclude Western researchers from the Russian academic community or, at the very least, to restrict their access to it in any way. One can, of course, speculate on the reasons behind this situation.

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, when institutional contacts with Russian research institutions and universities were generally severed in the West, a practice has emerged in Russia of organising conferences outside Russia, in third countries. Although this does not directly concern Finno-Ugric research, Madis Arukask, for example, received a circular a couple of years ago inviting him to an anthropology

conference in Armenia, organised by the Kunstkamera (or some other research institution in St Petersburg).

On the other hand – in connection with an earlier informal research network – Madis Arukask has participated on three occasions in conferences on epic studies in Kyrgyzstan, mostly as one of the few Western scholars present. On the most recent occasion, in Osh in 2023, prominent professors from centres in Russia (Moscow, St Petersburg) were also present, including figures of significance within the hierarchical official structure. It is true that the Soviet-era (Moscow) school of thought plays a significant role in the study of Turkic peoples and Central Asia, a role that has not diminished even now. However, whilst Madis Arukask was elected to the organising committee of the penultimate conference (in 2021), there has been no further mention of this since. Arukask did not, however, receive an invitation to the next conference that took place in May 2025. He learnt of the conference through a French colleague – he suspects that this omission is not entirely coincidental.

#### *Academic events in Estonia and personal contacts*

The key academic events in the Western world relating to Finno-Ugric studies are *CIFU*, which takes place every five years, as mentioned above, and the annual *IFUSCO* (International Finno-Ugric Students' Conference), which is aimed at and organised by young researchers. Both conferences are held in a rotating host country (including Russia, prior to the war in Ukraine), with the organisation led predominantly by Western scholars.

[Viinis toimuvat fennougristikakongressi varjutab sõda Ukrainas – Fenno-Ugria, 22 August 2022](#)

[CIFU XIII: Handi ja mansi teadlased osalesid Viinis kongressil – Fenno-Ugria, 2 September 2022](#)

The 2025 CIFU ([Congressus XIV Internationalis Fenno-Ugristarum](#)), the 14th in the series, took place at the University of Tartu in late August 2025. Although

researchers officially representing Russian academic institutions were not permitted to attend the conference, requests to participate in a hybrid format were received from around 30 researchers in Russia, the majority of whom also registered (Moscow – 4, Khanty-Mansiysk – 1, Saransk – 2, Syktyvkar – 4). Their participation was accepted provided they present as private individuals rather than as representatives of a research institution. This practice has become more widespread in recent years. In the Estonian context, in many cases these are colleagues with whom we are already acquainted, whose professional competence is beyond doubt and whose participation will rather enrich the conference. Thus, in recent years, joint seminars or conferences in a hybrid format with Russian Finno-Ugric scholars have also taken place at the Estonian Literary Museum ([Tulekul on folklorist Kristi Salve juubelikonverents – Fenno-Ugria, 1 April 2022](#); [Ersa ja mokša keelte päeva tähistamine kirjandusmuuseumis – Fenno-Ugria, 25 April 2025](#)) and at the University of Tartu, and presumably elsewhere too. Similar events also take place at major academic forums in the West.

At Narva College, however, international Finno-Ugric conferences have taken place without the participation of Russian scholars (depending on the topic).

[“Vabaduse kontsept. Sándor Petőfi Edith Södergranini: soome-ugri luulekunsti uuendamise läbi aegade” – Fenno-Ugria, 27–28 October 2023](#)

[Narva hõimupäevade rahvusvaheline konverents “Uralo-Indogermanica VI” – Fenno-Ugria, 18–19 October 2024](#)

[XII Mikael Agricola ehk soome keele päeva konverents – Fenno-Ugria, 11–12 April 2025](#)

Maintaining personal relationships with researchers at Russian research institutions whom I have known for some time is done with caution and on a personal level. It must be borne in mind that one must not put an acquaintance at risk. At the same time, people in Russia have always been characterised by very different attitudes and varying degrees of caution when it comes to maintaining relations with the West. One extreme of this may in fact be motivated by fear or, just in case, apprehension regarding potential threats arising from a totalitarian system. The other extreme, however, may be indifference or even ignorance of the possible consequences.

It must, however, be borne in mind that national scientific research may well have long been freely serving the interests of the regime.

[Vene Föderatsiooni soome-ugri rahvaste üliõpilased hakkavad võitlema natsismi ja neonatsismiga – Fenno-Ugria, 10 May 2024](#)

[Joškar-Olas toimus 12. rahvusvaheline soome-ugri üliõpilaste foorum „Soome-ugri rahvaste rikkus“ – Fenno-Ugria, 23 May 2025](#)

As already mentioned, the Russian academic landscape is characterised simultaneously by the openness and willingness of some researchers to engage with Western scholars, research findings and collaboration, and by the xenophobia of others towards anything non-Russian and Western. In the current situation, one can expect the latter attitude to intensify or be deliberately exacerbated. Just as began to happen more generally in the Finno-Ugric world during the years of the Covid pandemic – when, as a prelude to the war, a thinning of direct relations became apparent, along with the reluctance of some regions and peoples to participate in the Western-controlled Finno-Ugric World Congress movement – this may also occur within the Finno-Ugric academic community.

At the same time, it is precisely academics whose professional interests and the resulting apolitical stance (though other possibilities cannot be ruled out) keep the door open from East to West. Estonian research institutions have severed all official ties with Russian institutes and universities. Whilst the participation of Estonian researchers (including in hybrid formats) in Russian academic forums is, as far as is known, already non-existent, the opposite cannot be claimed despite everything. In the current situation, one must speak of a so-called ‘two-pronged’ strategy on the part of Russia, which oscillates between aligning with the West and adopting a more wait-and-see stance – depending on the target audience and as circumstances require.

Given that local Finno-Ugric research centres and their scholars tend to belong to a segment of Russia’s broader research landscape that is, so to speak, ‘local’ and less internationally oriented, their isolation and deliberate distancing from Western

(including Estonian) colleagues and the wider academic world may well increase in the future. This is further exacerbated by the dwindling of direct contacts, including the fact that the influx of postgraduate students from Russian universities to this country has now come to an end. This signifies a break precisely in the ethnically based academic contacts that have characterised the Finno-Ugric academic world since at least the era of Paul Ariste.

According to Jaak Prozes, the Russian state authorities are not only hindering the activities of organised representative and cooperative bodies of Finno-Ugric peoples, but are also seeking to stifle Finno-Ugric studies as an academic discipline. The teaching of Finno-Ugric languages and cultures has been reduced to a minimum in university curricula. Research and researchers, however, are being exploited in the interpretation of both the history of these peoples and the census data, always in a way that serves the state's interests. At the 7th Congress of the Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples, held in Saransk in December 2021, Dr Nikolai Arsentiev, a historian, stated: '[---] when looking back at their history, nations must think first and foremost of the interests of the union state, which is the most important thing. It is not language that unites a nation, but the state itself [---]. Some historians even write that the Russian Empire arose as a result of brutal conquests, thereby fuelling separatism.' However, ethnographer Sergei Melnikov stated that census statistics do not reflect the actual situation of the nationalities: "Those researchers and representatives of the Finno-Ugric peoples who, based on the 2010 census data, paint a bleak picture of the situation of the Finno-Ugric peoples are mistaken." The actual situation is said to be much better, as Finno-Ugrians living in mixed families registered themselves as Russians. Consequently, there are said to be far more Finno-Ugrians, and there is no need to worry about their situation. ([Jaak Prozes. Finno-Ugric peoples facing new challenges, Keel ja Kirjandus, 8–9, 2022](#)).

[Melnikova, Ekaterina & Zinaida Vasilyeva \(eds.\). 2024. \*Academia Across the Borders\*. Verlag der Kulturstiftung Sibirien, SEC Publicat.](#)

[Vitebsky, Piers 2025. In Place of an Epilogue / Вместо эпилога. \*A Fractured North – Maintaining Connections\*. Erich Kasten, Igor Krupnik, Gail Fondahl \(eds.\). Fürstenberg/Havel: Kulturstiftung Sibirien.](#)

## **10. The Russian community of Finno-Ugric origin in Estonia, the Finno-Ugric movement, and prospects**

The local Finno-Ugric community in Estonia with Russian roots is one way of obtaining information about what is happening in Russia, as personal contacts are maintained and people do travel there. Many members of Estonia's Finno-Ugric communities have families and acquaintances on the other side of the border, as well as Russian citizenship. At the same time, gathering and passing on any kind of information involves risks.

It must also be borne in mind that Russia's propaganda-driven information space may also influence the local Finno-Ugric community living in Estonia.

In this situation, what do the events in Russia mean for them, and how can they, on a personal level, make sense of the new political reality and adapt to it? The situation is confusing and there is a great deal of uncertainty.

The Finno-Ugric communities living in Estonia (Mari, Udmurts, Erzya, etc.) are mainly Russian citizens, totalling around 1,600 people, the largest of which, according to the 2021 Estonian census, are the Mari community of 225 people and the community of Mordvin (Erzya/Moksha) origin, numbering 368 people.

[Jüri Viikberg. Hõimurahvad Eestis. Pilguheit viimasele rahvaloendusele. Soome-ugri sõlmed 2022](#)

There are [eight Finno-Ugric cultural associations](#) in Estonia: Mari and Udmurt associations in Tallinn and Tartu, the Estonian Mordvin Association, the Erzya cultural association Sjatko, the Komi cultural association, and the non-profit organisation Hõimulõimed. Most of these are members of Fenno-Ugria Foundation, whilst several societies have also joined the umbrella organisation for Estonia's national minorities, the [Union of the Peoples of Estonia](#) (ERÜ). The leaders of these societies are predominantly open-minded young and middle-aged people who have received their education in Estonia with the support of the Kindred People's Programme of the Ministry of Education and Research. However, the membership also includes many people who live primarily in a manipulated, Russian-speaking online space.

Communication with relatives and acquaintances in Russia further increases the confusion and causes conflicts. All of this also places a heavy psychological burden on people when ideological rifts run through families. Several close relationships have also been severed.

Pyotr Tultayev, head of the Russian Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples (AFUN), stated clearly in 2022 that relations between organisations of Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia and abroad must be reviewed and redefined. In its statement, the association concluded that organising World Congresses of Finno-Ugric Peoples is not viable in the future.

Looking at the development of forms of cooperation among Finno-Ugric peoples over the last ten years, it seems increasingly that no single form is 'viable', particularly at the institutional level. Is cooperation amongst Finno-Ugric peoples only possible at the civic or grassroots level? Unfortunately, Russia is not a state of its citizens. According to sociologist Yuri Levada, this is a state that leaves its citizens no personal scope for action, resulting in individuals who are entirely dependent on the authorities and subject to control in every respect.

Tõnu Seilenthal has described and explained the stagnation of Finno-Ugric cooperation in his article [‘What will become of cooperation with the Finno-Ugric peoples living in Russia?’](#) (Sirp, 4 August 2023). This was discussed at the 2023 Paide Opinion Festival during the [panel ‘Russian aggression in Ukraine and the Finno-Ugric peoples’](#) (Fenno-Ugria, 16 August 2023), as well as at in the [Fenno-Ugria panel at the Tartu Opinion Festival on 18 May 2024, ‘How do we relate to each other?’](#).

At the Fenno-Ugria seminars, supported by the Open Estonia Foundation/Active Citizens' Foundation as part of the series [‘Democracy School for Estonia’s Finno-Ugric communities’](#), various experts – including Kadri Liik, Ivo Juurvee, Meelis Oidsalu, Andres Lember, Väino Koorberg, Liisa Past and others – have discussed topics relating to Russia, as well as Finno-Ugric cooperation in the current situation ([How to conceptualise Russia – Fenno-Ugria, 13 June 2023](#)).

In order not to abandon the Finno-Ugric movement's engagement with Russia, Fenno-Ugria is, of course, prepared to re-establish relations should the situation

change — this may become possible after the end of the war. In the new geopolitical situation, where relations with Russia have been severed, Fenno-Ugria Foundation has focused on cooperation with local Finno-Ugric communities linked to Russia, in order to influence — ideally — the kindred peoples living in Russia through them.

## **Short summary**

There are approximately 1.7 million members of Finno-Ugric ethnic groups living in Russia, of whom only around 1 million consider their native language to be their mother tongue. The Finno-Ugric peoples are scattered, and the Russian-speaking population dominates within the boundaries of their autonomous regions. Since 2018, language learning has been optional, which has led to a decline in proficiency in the mother tongue.

Language technology support is best for the Mari, Udmurt and Komi languages, but in general the corpora are small. The languages of smaller ethnic groups are in a particularly poor state. Assimilation is accelerated by the exclusion of national languages from education and society.

In 2022, Russia began a mobilisation, involving many minority ethnic groups. Ethnic battalions were formed, with an emphasis on cultural symbols. Military service is seen as a path to manhood and social advancement. Average wages are low, but military service offers a high remuneration.

Finno-Ugric organisations are under state control. Ethnic events and celebrations are subject to the ideology of Russian unity and military themes. In recent years, external contacts have been curtailed and the focus has been on strengthening central authority. Just as cultural exchanges with Russia have been severed on the Estonian side, so too has international Finno-Ugric cooperation been declared politicised and obstructed by Russia.

In order not to undermine the Finno-Ugric movement in relation to Russia, Fenno-Ugria is prepared to restore relations, within the limits of what is possible, once the war has ended.