

Country Report: Abkhazia September 2021

Abkhazia is a semi-autonomous, breakaway region of Georgia, currently recognized by [most of the international community](#) as Georgian territory occupied by Russia. Abkhazian leadership and Russian occupying forces have done little to protect the rights of the Georgian minority remaining in the region.

In 1989, Georgians made up the plurality of people living in Abkhazia at an estimated 240,000 people. The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict of 1992-1993 led to [mass expulsion and massacres of Georgians](#) by Abkhazian separatists, reducing the Georgian population to [less than 50,000](#). Abkhazian authorities inhibit the rights, language, culture, and ethnic identity of those who remain.

In the Gali district, one of the few remaining districts with a substantial Georgian community, Abkhazian authorities have closed [Georgian language schools](#). In 2008, there were 31 Georgian language schools in Gali; by 2020, only ten remained. Russian is now the primary language of instruction, while the Georgian language is only used in grades 9-11. Abkhazian authorities plan to [fully eliminate](#) the Georgian language from schools by 2023.

Abkhaz authorities have done little to protect Georgian cultural heritage. In 2017, Russian forces [bulldozed](#) a 19th-century Georgian church in Tsebelda to construct a training facility in its place.

In 2019, Abkhaz authorities required Georgians to give up their ethnic identity to vote and participate in local politics. In Abkhazia, one [must be a citizen in order](#) to graduate high school, work in the public sector, and buy or sell property. Citizenship is contingent on Abkhazian ethnic identity. The only way for Georgians and other ethnic minorities to have civil rights or suffrage is to abandon their ethnicities, which requires announcing in official documentation that one's ancestors were Abkhazian rather than Georgian. Authorities also forced at least [400 Georgians](#) to adopt Abkhazian surnames. Despite these policies, Georgians who adopt Abkhazian surnames and ethnicities are still not guaranteed an Abkhazian passport.

Abkhazian authorities acknowledge the discrimination against Georgian citizens. The head of the Abkhazian authority in the Gali district, Timur Nadararia, [allegedly said](#) he was surprised Georgians stayed in Abkhazia when they “do not have any rights there and are humiliated every day.” Armenians and Greeks do not face [equal pressure to change their ethnic identity](#), which further suggests that these policies intend to drive Georgians out of Abkhazia in particular.

Genocide Watch considers the situation in Abkhazia to be at **Stage 3: Discrimination, Stage 4: Dehumanization, Stage 5: Organization, and Stage 6: Polarization.**

Genocide Watch recommends:

- The Abkhazian authorities recognize the civil rights of all residents regardless of ethnicity.
- The Russian government uses its influence in the region to protect the rights and cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, such as making their financial aid to Abkhazia conditional on their respect of minority rights.

- Georgian and Abkhazian authorities create an open forum to discuss the protection of ethnic minorities in both regions.