

**ALTERNATIVE REPORT  
on Tajikistan's Implementation  
of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination  
in Connection with the UN CERD Consideration of the Republic of Tajikistan's Ninth  
to Eleventh Periodic Reports for 2012–2015**



*The kishlak of Abduloobod in Hisor District, where Jughis live in a densely populated community without a water supply. Jughis children have to go far from home for water. 2017.*

**NATIONLESS ETHNIC GROUPS OF TAJIKISTAN  
(Pamiri, Jughis, Yaghnobi):  
FROM NON-RECOGNITION TO DISCRIMINATION**

For the 93rd session of the CERD, 31 July–11 August 2017

# SUMMARY

This report by the Anti-Discrimination Center Memorial (a human rights organization defending the rights of discriminated minorities, migrants, and other vulnerable groups) examines the problems faced by some of Tajikistan's ethnic minorities who (unlike, for instance, Uzbeks, or Kyrgyz, or Russians who also live in Tajikistan) do not have their own state: Jughi, Pamiri, and Yaghnobi.

For reasons of history, geography, and politics, these minorities each face substantially different challenges in Tajik society. Although each of these groups has its own particular situation, they share a number of common problems: their ethnic distinctiveness and the value of their languages and culture have not been recognized by the government, they lack government support in the area of education, and they are little represented within government bodies. In combination with government clannishness, Tajikistan's declared policy of creating a "unified nation" (with emphasis on the tragic consequences of disunity as a cause of civil war) has led to neglect of the cultural and social needs of ethnic minorities, giving rise to overt or subtle discrimination that can take different forms in the case of each of these ethnic groups.

**Jughi** (sometimes spelled Dzhugi and also known as Lyuli or Central Asian Gypsies/Roma, with the autonym Mugat or Mughat) formerly led a nomadic life and even now often migrate in search of work, both within and beyond the borders of Tajikistan. According to the 2010 census, there were approximately 2,500 Jughi living in Tajikistan, however there is reason to believe that the real number is significantly higher. Typical problems faced by this community include structural discrimination, lack of education, extreme poverty, unemployment, unregistered housing and the associated risk of expulsion or demolition, harmful traditional practices (early arranged marriages, polygamy, the exploitation of children, and begging), and multi-discrimination against women and girls. The Jughi remain a despised and marginalized group, and the government of Tajikistan denies the existence of discrimination against this community and the need to adopt a complex of government programs to improve its situation.

**Pamiri** are made up of a number of peoples (Shughni, Rushans, Wakhi, Ishkoshimi, Yazgulami, and several others) populating a vast mountainous area in eastern Tajikistan who speak their own languages and are visually and culturally distinct from the ethnic majority. They primarily practice Ismailism, a branch of Shia Islam, unlike the majority of Tajiks, who are Sunni Muslim. As of 2015, approximately 214,000 people were living in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, where most Pamiri live.<sup>1</sup> Pamiri, both in the region and throughout Tajikistan, are greatly influenced by the activities of Aga Khan IV (investments in education and culture, humanitarian aid), a major leader within Ismailism. The population of Pamir took part in conflicts during the civil war of 1992–1997, and in 2012, in Khorugh (the capital of Gorno-Badakhshan Region) and surrounding areas, there were clashes between the Tajik Army and the local population, which perceived the confrontation as repression against them. Because of the Pamiri traits described above, prejudice against them has ethnic, cultural-linguistic, religious, and political dimensions: they are visually and linguistically distinct and are looked on as the "wrong kind of Muslims" and suspected of separatist leanings. Many Pamiri feel like outsiders in the country, and Pamiri are generally more liable to migrate than people in other regions.

**Yaghnobi** have historically lived in isolated settlements in the mountains around the Yaghnob River Valley. In the 1970s they were forcibly resettled to other parts of Tajikistan, where an absolute majority of Yaghnobi still live (the number of Yaghnobi ranges from 5,000 to 15,000, depending on the source). The Yaghnobi language and culture are under threat of extinction, and the small population remaining in the Yaghnob Valley (less than 1,000 people) does not receive the government support it needs.

This report is based on field research performed in Tajikistan in 2017, and on publicly available sources. It quotes members of the minorities in question, as well as the ethnic majority.

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<sup>1</sup> «Population of the Republic of Tajikistan as of 1 January 2015,» a report from the Tajik statistical agency: [http://www.stat.tj/ru/img/65a709121baf8a64bf15d33f398aafde\\_1435736807.pdf](http://www.stat.tj/ru/img/65a709121baf8a64bf15d33f398aafde_1435736807.pdf)

# JUGHI

*“Jughi have very low status in society. Everyone avoids them;  
nobody wants anything to do with them.”*

*A resident of Dushanbe*

*“We are Gypsies, and we call ourselves ‘Mughat.’ But in our passports, look:  
they wrote ‘Jughi’ as the nation, and in the Russian translation, ‘Gypsies.’  
And we don’t reject this. Why should we reject our nation?”*

*A Jughi man living in Khujand*

Jughi (also Lyuli or Central Asian Gypsies /Roma, with the autonym Mughat) live in many parts of Tajikistan, sometimes in densely populated settlements and sometimes among the ethnic majority. The overall situation of Jughi in Tajikistan can be described as exclusion: they are isolated, surrounded by a population that believes negative stereotypes about them (that they are “dirty,” “beggars,” “the men never work”); false information about their lifestyle, customs, and culture are common and are spread by the media and mass culture (“when Jughi women are married, they vow to financially support the men,” “Jughi are actually very wealthy,” among others).

The Tajik government fails to see that there is discrimination against Jughi or the need to adopt government programs to improve their situation. For example, in the current state report to the CERD, in response to the Committee’s previous recommendations (paragraph 13 of the Concluding Observations) it is stated, citing a specially conducted study, that “there is no need to draw up and adopt a strategy to improve the situation of the Roma, protect them from discrimination and stigmatization and promote their rights to education, employment, housing and health care, since discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity or faith is prohibited in Tajikistan, and the members of every ethnic group and race, irrespective of their nationality, have the same rights under the law as nationals of Tajikistan.”<sup>2</sup>

This response, among other evidence, suggests that the Jughi are perceived as sufficiently alien to enjoy “the same rights under the law as nationals of Tajikistan.” Our field surveys show that indication of the “Jughi” nationality in passports is considered self-evident and even required of them, both by Tajiks and by the Jughi themselves, and Jughi are never blamed for the fact that they are not listed as Tajiks in their passports (unlike, for example, the Pamiri, who are often challenged for their non-Tajik identity and do not describe themselves as “Pamiri” in passports). It is the opposite situation that causes surprise and raises objections: when Jughi give “Tajik” as their nationality. During the 2010 census in Tajikistan, “Roma” were given their own separate category, while Pamiri (and Yaghnobi) were included among Tajiks.

Whatever the Tajik authorities may say, Jughi face discrimination in all spheres: their lack of proper papers, education, sufficient employment and access to resources, social services, and health care form a vicious cycle that cannot be broken without proactive measures. Women and children are particularly vulnerable and, in addition to discrimination from the outside, face the pernicious effects of harmful traditional practices (early arranged marriages, polygamy, the exploitation of children, and the occupation of begging).

Still unresolved is the problem of providing Jughi with personal documents. Obtaining children’s documents is complicated by the fact that their parents lack passports; by home births; by families’ inability to pay taxes and fines for failing to obtain required documents at the proper time; by the fact that they are not registered at their place of residence or even lack permanent housing; and by the fact that when they do have housing they are unable to pay taxes, without which local government offices will not issue the certificates needed to register a child. Fines for the late registration of births and application for passports grow with time, so this problem only becomes harder to solve.

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<sup>2</sup> “Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention: Combined ninth to eleventh periodic reports of States parties due in 2016 Tajikistan” (CERD/C/TJK/9-11), paragraph 33.



Surveys in Jughi communities in the districts of Vahdat, Hisor, and Shahrinaw, home to several thousand Jughi, indicate that often adults with children will, in the best of cases, have a certificate of their own birth, but no passport. This makes it difficult to obtain documents for the children. Often when children reach school age parents try to obtain birth certificates for them. Since education administrators monitor whether schools are covering all the children in their districts, school employees are forced to help families obtain documents to avoid being admonished by their superiors. When it comes to obtaining documents for children and parents, teachers essentially serve as intermediaries between the Jughi community and government offices, although this is not part of their job and they receive no compensation for their efforts in this area.

There are cases when what few documents members of the Jughi community have are destroyed by the police:

*A resident of one Jughi settlement, the father of six children, reported that in March 2017 his "metrika" (birth certificate) was taken and torn up by members of the police who detained him at the bazaar for begging. A teacher at the local school helped him replace his document. This man still does not have a passport.*

The lack of government support in obtaining personal documents leads to situations where far from every adult member of the Mughat community gets one, and children without documents are deprived of government benefits, healthcare, and education. It is not uncommon for Jughi children to be detained for begging and placed in a juvenile holding center, and it is difficult for parents to pick them up, since none of them have documents.

*In May 2017 the authors of this report witnessed an incident where Jughi women who lived in a Jughi neighborhood on the outskirts of Dushanbe attempted to pick up a 12-year-old boy from a juvenile detention center. He had been placed there the day before for begging on the street. The boy's mother did not have documents, and his grandmother, who claimed to be his caretaker, did not have any proof that she was related to him. Nobody could present documents for the child. The holding center employees explained that they would have to establish the child's identity and his relationship with his mother or other relatives by submitting an inquiry to the local authorities, meaning that the child might have to spend up to 30 days in the holding center.*

Another pressing problem often faced by Roma communities in the former Soviet Union that affects Tajikistan's Jughi is housing: they tend not to be legally registered where they live, often live in non-registered housing, and risk losing their home if a business becomes interested in the land on which they live. For example, in late 2014 plans were developed to build a hotel on a site occupied by Jughi in Panjakent District, and only 12 among 200 of the houses on the affected site were registered. The displaced were allocated plots in the rural jamoat of Sarazm that were poorly suited for the construction of new housing and lacked a water supply. Most residents were not offered even this alternative.<sup>3</sup>

A number of densely populated Jughi communities have inadequate access to resources. For example, residents of the settlement Abduloobod in Hisor District have to buy their drinking water and get water for other needs from a river rather far away.

The lack of access to quality education is still a serious problem for Jughi children. Typically, there is an elementary school near Jughi communities that is attended exclusively by Jughi children, however, as we observed firsthand, not all children get even an elementary education (including due to a lack of documents). Almost all of the school-age girls and young women we surveyed had never attended school, and the boys, at most, had attended only elementary school.

Instead of taking steps to integrate Jughi children with other children in secondary schools, in some settlements the authorities transform existing segregated elementary schools into secondary schools. For example, in one such places, fifth and sixth grades were added in an exclusively Jughi elementary school that had only gone through fourth grade. There are plans to gradually keep adding grades until the required nine grades are reached. However the school has only three small classrooms, and the school day is divided into two shifts.

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<sup>3</sup> Findings of a study within a project supported by Eurasia Foundation.

It is extremely rare for Jughhi children to attend secondary schools outside their communities. The reasons include the distance to such schools, poverty, lax monitoring of school attendance, and insufficient measures to integrate Jughhi children into a new school environment. Another crucial reason is that the education they receive in segregated schools is sub-standard, so Jughhi children tend to leave school en masse after the elementary grades. Even if they would have liked to continue their education they are often not supported in this by their families, who traditionally place little value on education, or by the schools or other government institutions.

When Jughhi children do go to school with other children, they continue on to the upper classes. For example in a such school in Khujand, there are several Jughhi boys in the tenth and eleventh grade. However, even in these cases, Jughhi – especially Jughhi girls, who almost never reach the upper grades – are underrepresented.

Jughhi children are the victims of harmful traditional practices: exploitation (they are drawn into begging and work inside and outside the home, including collecting scrap metal and dried bread, and scavenging through refuse), early marriages, and polygamy.

*The authors of this report saw clear evidence that polygamy exists in Jughhi communities; furthermore, according to our sources, a religious marriage ceremony is performed with all wives. The wives in polygamous families do not understand the legal aspects of their situation, the consequences of a possible divorce, or the difficulties of registering children. For example, one of our respondents, a first wife, was certain that both her marriage and that of her husband's second wife were registered with ZAGS (the civil registry office). The situation of second and third wives in a polygamous family is deplorable: we determined that in one such family, the second wife never left the home and was a virtual prisoner to her domestic duties. In another family, when the second wife, a minor, had to leave the house (to go to the store or for water), she covered her face completely and did not speak with anyone.*

Tajikistan's current Criminal Code (1998) is rather severe in regard to the unlawful behaviors described above and contains articles penalizing “obstructing the completion of a basic, required, general (nine-grade) education” (Article 164), “the involvement of a minor in anti-social actions,” including begging, vagrancy, and prostitution (Article 166), “the marrying off of a girl who has not attained marriageable age” (Article 168), “marrying an individual who has not attained marriageable age” (Article 169), “bigamy or polygamy” (Article 170), and “failure to fulfill obligations entailed in the upbringing of a minor” (Article 174). These articles provide for penalties in the form of fines, correctional labor, and restrictions on liberty, but they are almost never enforced in regard to Jughhi. In one sense, it is convenient for the government to view these practices as part of a “national tradition” that should not be interfered with. Furthermore, depriving girls of their right to an education, forcing them into early marriages, and polygamy are widespread throughout Tajikistan, especially in rural areas. Public opinion does not view these practices as crimes against children.

International experience has shown that when children are integrated into schools they are less likely to be involved in an early marriage, exploited, or involved in anti-social acts. The most effective way to end these harmful traditional practices, therefore, is not repression, but positive measures to support children's education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Adopt and implement a government program of comprehensive support for the Jughhi ethnic minority – guarantee their ability to obtain personal documents, registration at place of residence, legalization of their housing, and access to medical and social-assistance resources. Special attention should be paid to the rights of children, especially girls, by ensuring their access to quality education and providing protection against exploitation and harmful traditional practices. It is essential that educational programs be developed aimed at overcoming the alienation of Jughhi and their exclusion from Tajik society and at fighting harmful traditions, not through repression, but through education and persuasion. Civic organizations' programs to promote tolerance and solidarity with vulnerable population groups should be encouraged.**

# PAMIRI

*"There are many people who would like to list themselves as 'Pamiri'; alas, they cannot. We absolutely cannot do this because they believe we have been Tajiks from time immemorial. That's how it is. At the passport office they just write in 'Tajik,' and that's that. They believe that there is no such thing as 'Pamiri' – there is no such nationality, although we are distinct in every way and have our own language."*

*A Pamiri man*

*"I'm just generally afraid here: even though we live in a large city in a multistory building, they know everything about us, who's who. I don't wear a headscarf, I dress like a European – and the neighbors look at me askance, they notice this. The children went out to play in the courtyard – some boys beat my older son, shouting 'Pomiri, Pomiri!' ('Pamiri, Pamiri!'). And in school they sometimes tease him. There are no 'friendship lessons' taught. For now, things seem to be nice and calm, but if riots start, we'll be the first to be shot."*

*A Pamiri mother of several children*

*"If you ask a Pamiri who he is, he'll never say, 'I'm Tajik.' He doesn't see himself as a Tajik – he's a Pamiri, even though he has a Tajik passport. They are generally different – it's hard to explain the difference: for example they receive guests in a different way. Maybe it's that we Tajiks are more respectful. With them, everyone studies, the women have higher education and behave more freely. Sometimes there are mixed marriages, but they don't last – the differences in upbringing are too great. My sister was married to a Pamiri, but they quickly divorced."*

*A Tajik woman living in Dushanbe*

Prejudice against Pamiri and stereotypes about them stem from a number of factors. **On one hand**, according to those we surveyed, it is easy to recognize members of the Pamiri people: visually, based on anthropological traits; based on language (they speak Tajik with an accent and speak in their native language among themselves); based on the fact that they do not openly express their religiosity (Pamiri women often do not wear headscarves and dress like Europeans), and, in situations where they have to show their documents, based on their place of birth, which is listed in their passports.

*"How do we recognize them? If you see a woman without a headscarf, she's definitely a Pamiri. And men – you can just see that they're not one of us."*

*A Tajik man*

*"Of course, now it's not as bad as it was during the civil war, when you could be killed for speaking your native language. After the war, Pamiri were generally afraid to speak their language on the street, in busses, at the bazaar. For example, now, in Dushanbe, we have no trouble speaking Shughni, and Pamiri even less so. But sometimes you can hear people call us names: 'You're krauts!' (literally: 'You are Gansy', from the German name Hans) That's because our language sounds like German, it's even easy for us to learn German, since the sounds are similar. But they identify us by our accent – we speak Tajik with a very recognizable accent."*

*A Female Pamiri teacher*

*"We are often called 'Krauts,' (lit. Gansy) even in perfectly everyday situations. For example, I was at the bank (it was considered a 'Pamiri' bank), and there was a long line. And one man, a Tajik, got really angry at having to wait so long, and he cried out: 'You're bank is small-time, and in general you people here are all Krauts!' He slammed the door and left. I have to admit that I had trouble restraining myself from responding."*

*A Pamiri man employed by a commercial firm*

**On the other hand**, disapproval of the way Pamiri women dress and behave and Pamiri attitudes towards women is just part of a set of stereotypical views of Pamiri traditions and Ismailism, about which, as we could clearly see, ethnic Tajik Sunnis have only a very hazy and often distorted understanding. Widespread stereotypes include the belief that “Pamiri drink vodka,” “Pamiri are not circumcised,” and even “they don’t condemn incest.” Disapproval extends as well to the fact, under Ismailism, men and women pray in the same room (although they sit apart from one another).

*“People say all sorts of foolish things about us, nobody knows anything about our culture, our religion. Yes, we don’t pray five times a day, and women pray together with men, and we don’t observe fasts. For this they call us ‘Kafir’— ‘infidels.’*

*A Pamiri businessman*

The messages the religious leader of Ismailism regularly sends out extols the virtue of education and urges particular focus on the education of girls and women. Tajikistan’s patriarchal society takes a dim view of the relative freedom enjoyed by Pamiri women and their greater freedom compared with the situation in a typical Tajik family.

*“I am 35, and my parents are not forcing me to get married and approve of the fact that I received a higher education, that I am developing myself, that I have learned English and am working. This is not typical for Tajiks: for them, what’s most important is for a woman to get married and be a homemaker and mother.”*

*A Pamiri woman, Dushanbe*

*“My daughter is friends with some Tajik girls next door, and all they talk about is marriage. That’s how their parents have raised them. And they are only 10! I think I should protect my daughter from such conversations. I had a talk with the mothers: you’re teaching the children, why is it nothing but ‘marriage, marriage’? And they say, ‘It’s you Pamiri who are used to learning, but for us, it’s not customary.’”*

*A Pamiri housewife*

*“Among us Pamiri, a woman is not property, not something that’s part of the man; she can express her own opinion. That would be impermissible for Tajiks.”*

*A Pamiri woman who works for an international organization*

The Pamiri that we surveyed support efforts by the government of Tajikistan to counteract radical Islam, which they consider a threat to the peaceful coexistence of religious groups in Tajikistan and specifically to their own safety.

*“On an everyday level, we face a lot of contempt specifically because we are Ismaili. They use the words ‘Shiite, sectarian, Ismaili’ as abusive words. After the war and crises, we now have entire generations of uneducated lumpens, and this educational vacuum is being filled by religious ideologies, especially Salafist influence. They are very intolerant toward our religion.”*

*A Pamiri businessman*

The Pamiri are prepared to reconcile themselves with Tajikistan’s government system so long as the government does not interfere in the practice of the Ismaili religion, especially as, in his messages, the Ismaili spiritual leader urges his coreligionists to be law abiding and avoid conflict with the authorities. Our respondents greatly appreciated that the authorities in Tajikistan have permitted construction of an Ismaili center in Dushanbe and are not opposing its educational activities.

**Finally**, another facet of the negative stereotypes affecting perceptions of Pamiri in Tajikistan has to do with recent historical events: the country’s 1992–1997 civil war and armed conflict between the army and the population of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region during a military operation in July 2012. A certain proportion of Pamiri view the events that took place in Khorugh as an attempt at ethnic cleansing and aggression against their people in general. For their part, Tajiks often view Pamiri as rebels who threaten the country’s “national security” and territorial integrity.



Independent monitoring by Tajikistan's human rights organizations after the Khorugh events in early 2013 has identified serious human rights violations: the region's population was kept in an informational vacuum, with mobile phone service cut off during the military operation, and members of the civilian population were used as "human shields." The deaths of noncombatants was never effectively investigated, there was no legal review of the actions of the military and government officials who sanctioned the military operation and took part in it, and no compensation was made for damages.<sup>4</sup>

The consequences of the 2012 standoff are still being felt, and there is mistrust between the Pamiri and the ethnic majority, which has furthered the already large outflow of Pamiri from Tajikistan (both in search of work in neighboring countries and to emigrate).

At an international conference in Brussels in 2015, members of the ADC Memorial witnessed a statement by a representative of Tajikistan that the government favored as much migration of Pamiri from Tajikistan as possible. No statements of this sort have been made at the official level, but our respondents assume that the forcing out of the Pamiri population from Tajikistan might be a secret government objective.

*"Badakhshan really is perceived as Tajikistan's Achilles' heel, just as the North Caucasus is for Russia: the small population united by Ismailism that self-identifies as 'Pamiri' is better educated and capable of quickly mobilizing. In other parts of Tajikistan there's nothing like this – opposition leaders were destroyed there long ago. Plus, there's the patronage of Aga Khan. All of this is extremely irritating for the authorities, and I'm not surprised that they wanted to send us all into migration. In Moscow and Moscow Oblast alone, by unofficial estimates, there are as many as forty thousand Pamiri – a huge population segment. If they were all to return and demand changes, it would be explosive. The people who migrate are working age and potentially mobile – they could go out and protest. Overall, it's very bad that migration has become the only way to develop the Tajik economy, although there is no true development in the areas of wages, social benefits, job creation. If Russia closes the border, the crisis here will be as bad as the one in the nineties. Our government blames everything on the civil war, but 25 years have passed, and since then nothing has changed in the economy! And from history we know that after the Second World War the European countries were back on their feet after ten years."*

*A Pamiri man living in Moscow and working at a commercial firm*

Respondents commented that Gorno-Badakhshan's autonomy is largely nominal: the local parliament has little power, even in the economic sphere. Most of our informants believe that Pamiri are underrepresented in the government, taking particular note of the fact that ethnic Pamiri are not allowed into posts in security forces and law enforcement, even within Gorno-Badakhshan.

*"We have some Pamiri ministers—the minister of culture, for example, but that is not a very important post. They say that the transportation minister was appointed because there were serious problems to solve, they needed a true professional, and we Pamiri are well known for being educated. For the most part, if there are Pamiri in government posts, it's no higher than the first deputy, and these are the officials on whom everything actually relies. They don't let us into the security forces or law enforcement at all – even in Pamir. They don't trust us and think that we are some sorts of separatists, although there are absolutely no grounds for this. They think that if a force-majeure situation were to occur, the Pamiri could take the other side. These suspicions came to a head in 2014, when Russia grabbed Crimea and war broke out in Ukraine. This made a big impression on our government. Pamiri generally have a lot of sympathy for Russia and toward Russians – that has developed over history."*

*A female Pamiri teacher*

*"Personnel policy infringements don't just affect Pamiri – in our country certain clans are generally in power, mostly based on geography. There was even a saying: 'Khujand governs, Kulob protects, Pamir dances.' This means that the agencies of government and the security and armed forces – those aren't for us. Pamiri are given nominal positions, just for show."*

*A Pamiri entrepreneur in Dushanbe*

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<sup>4</sup> "Monitoring observance of human rights in connection with a special operation on 24 July 2015 in Khorugh, GBAR," Dushanbe, 2013, in Russian: [http://www.notorture.tj/sites/default/files/articles/2015/files/monitoring\\_ru11\\_09.pdf](http://www.notorture.tj/sites/default/files/articles/2015/files/monitoring_ru11_09.pdf)



In Tajikistan, a national policy based on the idea of reconciliation and smoothing out conflict among various population groups within a unified political nation of “Tajiks,” references to the 1992–1997 civil war, and the need to avoid confrontation that could lead to a new civil war are still part of the socio-political discourse. Furthermore, our informants believe the cultures of ethnic minorities are not sufficiently appreciated, which, given the declared equality of all ethnic groups, means that the concept of “Tajiks as a political nation” is essentially being replaced with the concept “Tajiks as an ethnic group.”

*“A political nation of ‘Tajikistani’ has not taken shape; people here talk about ‘Tajiks.’ But Tajiks are an ethnic group, a people. So we wind up with Tajiks and everyone else. Here, they say: ‘I’m a Tajik by nationality.’ We are not willing to be ‘Tajiks,’ we are an ethnic and religious group and need recognition. At the official level, we are very carefully being pushed toward assimilation, the unique features of our culture are not being emphasized, and they are trying to make it so that we don’t stand out, don’t stick out.”*

*A Pamiri man living in Moscow and working for a commercial firm*

The Pamiri view the lack of government support for Pamiri languages, the fact that Pamiri languages are excluded from the educational system and the official sphere (state institutions, courts, documents), as threatening intentional, gradual assimilation.

*“Our languages are not encouraged, so there is no demand for them among the people; some people are beginning to see Pamiri languages as ‘second rate.’ As we say, ‘our languages are needed until you get to the airport in Khorugh and no further.”*

*A Pamiri intellectual*

While some languages with relatively few native speakers lack a writing system and teaching tools, in the case of Shughni – the strongest Pamiri language in terms of the number of speakers, used as the form of communication among a number of Pamiri peoples – all this exists, but is never used in schools (children are taught in Tajik, or in English in some private schools). The only academic study of the languages and culture of the Pamiri peoples occurs with support from the private Aga Khan Foundation.

*“I didn’t know the Tajik language when I went to school; I was like a foreigner. Little by little, I switched to using Tajik. A primer on the Shughni language was adopted in schools, but not for long. Although, ideally, of course, primary education should be in the native language – scholars have proven this.”*

*A Pamiri businessman living in Dushanbe.*

*“We’re probably some sorts of geniuses: we go to school knowing only our native language, are classes are all in Tajik, a foreign language, then we learn Russian, then English... It’s strange: the pupils are Pamiri, the teachers are Pamiri, and at school we speak to each other in Tajik since all subjects are taught in Tajik.”*

*A Pamiri woman who works for an international organization*

The government’s attitude toward the problem of languages and literatures of limited diffusion is illustrated by Dodikhudo Saimiddinov, the former chairman of the Committee on Language and Terminology, who was quoted in the media in 2011 as saying: “They’re always saying that there isn’t enough funding. These languages have existed for thousands of years—was anybody funding them? I know that experts on these languages receive grants from international organizations to develop dialects. There are a lot of grants the government does not even know about. If you want to preserve your languages – take action. The law gives you the opportunity.”<sup>5</sup> Obviously, his reference to legislative opportunities to support languages without funding for such measures is absurd.

In 2015 the current chairwoman of the Tajikistan government’s Committee on Language and Terminology, Gavkhar Sharofzoda, recognized the danger that the Pamiri and Yaghnobi languages could disappear and announced the creation of a workgroup to study these languages and courses open to anyone interested.<sup>6</sup> Nothing is known, however, of further action by the government in this area.

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<sup>5</sup> “Tajikistan Is Losing Its Ancient Languages,” 28 April 2011: [http://www.bbc.com/russian/society/2011/04/110427\\_tajik\\_dying\\_languages](http://www.bbc.com/russian/society/2011/04/110427_tajik_dying_languages)

<sup>6</sup> Reporting on a press conference held by the Committee on Language and Terminology,

The lack of Pamiri-language books and periodicals and of television and radio broadcasts is also viewed by Pamiri as part of a government policy to reduce the use of these languages. Programs by a local affiliate of the Imruz radio station, which broadcast several hours a day in Shughni and other Pamiri languages in January-February 2014, were extremely popular in Gorno-Badakhshan, but the affiliate was soon shut down “for technical reasons.” Many Pamiri are convinced that the decision to discontinue the broadcasts was actually made by the central government.

*“I think this was a political decision made in Dushanbe, at the very top. The radio station was shut down for ideological reasons. They are afraid that if they allow the region to develop itself, it will declare independence and leave Tajikistan. That is ridiculous: there were broadcasts for two hours a day, a lot of music – who was bothered by this?”*

*A Pamiri man working in the arts*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**The government of Tajikistan should develop and systematically implement educational programs to tell the people of Tajikistan about the unique features of Pamiri culture and the Ismaili religion in order to overcome negative stereotypes about the Pamiri. Government support is needed to preserve and develop the Pamiri languages: funding of academic research, periodicals and books, textbooks; the development and support of existing writing systems and the introduction of teaching tools in Pamiri languages into the curriculum; and radio and television broadcasts in Pamiri languages.**

# YAGHNOBI

For the Yaghnobi, their forced mass resettlement in the 1970s from where they traditionally lived is a tragic page in their people's history, an event that placed Yaghnobi culture and language under threat of extinction. Up to now, the state has done very little either to support the Yaghnobi in the difficult conditions posed by their high-elevation home (the creation of infrastructure and access to transportation, health care, and social services) or to preserve and develop the Yaghnobi language or offer education in it. Plans to create a natural ethnography park in the Yaghnob Valley were never realized, and the physical and spiritual culture of the Yaghnobi is only being preserved through efforts by nongovernmental organizations.

No teaching is being done in the Yaghnobi language, and there are no lessons in Yaghnobi in schools outside the Yaghnob Valley (such as in Zafarobod District), although this language has its own writings and teaching tools, and there is a demand for Yaghnob-language education. In the Yaghnob Valley children have problems accessing a complete secondary education (as a rule, children only complete elementary school).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**The government of Tajikistan should take steps to support the Yaghnobi, both where they have historically lived (the Yaghnob Valley) and in places where most Yaghnobi wound up after the forced resettlement. Infrastructure should be developed in the Yaghnob Valley, and programs should be put in place to promote the local population's employment. Measures must be taken to preserve and develop the Yaghnobi language: funding of academic research, scholarly publications, and teaching tools, and the inclusion of the Yaghnobi language in the curriculum.**



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