1. Introduction
Just as the invisibility of minorities in general, minorities in urban and metropolitan areas are also invisible to a large extent. Today, at least half of the global population lives in an urban area, while it is estimated that, by 2030, two-thirds of the world’s population will reside in this type of settlement space (Gottdiener, Hohle and King, 2019: 1). As for Turkey, almost 70% of Turkey's population resides in urban areas (TUIK; 2022), which is higher than the current global average for urban population. These striking rates of urbanization are driven by various factors, including the search for better employment, education, and healthcare services, as well as the allure of urban lifestyles; they bring about significant social, political, cultural and economic impact too. While urban areas can offer opportunities, minorities may also face significant challenges, including poverty, discrimination, segregation, and inequality. Despite a large literature on these issues, there is no specific study or report on Circassians or Abkhaz-Abazas living in metropolitan cities of Turkey. Likewise, although the State of the World’s Minorities and Indigenous Peoples report by MRG was published with a thematic focus on the urban areas in 2015, it did not have any mention of Circassians or Abkhaz-Abazas in Turkey.

Against this backdrop, this study aimed to investigate the sociolinguistic situation of Circassian and Abkhaz-Abaza communities’ living in two important metropolitan cities of Türkiye- Istanbul and Ankara. To this end, a mixed-method research incorporating a survey and focus-group discussions was carried out. This report will first present a brief introduction to these communities and an overview of urbanization in Turkey as they relate to them. The following sections will provide the methodology and results of the research. Finally, it will conclude with a discussion of the results and suggestions.

2. Circassians: History and Language
The Circassians, who refer to themselves as 'Adyghe,' are one of the indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus. As a result of Russia's wars to invade the Caucasus for over a century, the majority of Circassians were exiled to the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. From the
1850s onwards, the Circassians, settled within the Ottoman borders in the Balkans, Anatolia, and the Middle East, found themselves within different states following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Today, they live in Turkey, Jordan, Syria, and Israel. The population of the Circassian diaspora is much larger than that in the Caucasus. With the exile, Circassian speakers were thus geographically dispersed.

Given that there are approximately 550 Circassian settlements in Turkey and the population that arrived in the 19th century is estimated to be about 1,200,000-1,500,000, it can be projected that the Circassian population in Turkey is today between 2 to 3 million. The dispersed settlement of Circassians in Turkey, the migration from villages to cities starting from the 1960s due to intense urbanization, pressures and bans on the language, and the lack of socio-economic benefits of speaking Circassian have resulted in a low rate of language proficiency among those below middle age today. Among children, proficiency in Circassian is an exceptional case.

The first Circassian language education in Turkey was indeed provided in 1910 at the Circassian Benevolence School opened in Istanbul. The Circassian Girls Model School, opened again in Istanbul in 1919 by the Circassian Women's Benevolence Society, continued Circassian language instruction until it was closed in 1923. In the early years of the Republic, Circassian was confined to villages and homes due to the "Citizens, Speak Turkish!" campaigns and prohibitions. During this period, when relations with the Caucasus were completely severed, no activities related to Circassian were carried out for 50 years, and the number of speakers significantly declined.

Circassians in Turkey began to establish contact with the Caucasus for the first time in the 1970s, visiting the region and becoming acquainted with Circassian books printed in the Cyrillic alphabet. The publication of alphabets in the Yamçı magazine by the Ankara Caucasian Association in 1978 was the first step taken on the subject of the language after a long hiatus. However, within the political atmosphere of the time, books from the Caucasus with Russian letters were viewed by the state as both tools of separatism and 'communist propaganda'. As a result, learning to read and write in Circassian remained the idealistic effort of a small circle.
The 1980 military coup marked the beginning of a new dark period for Circassian, as it did for other languages spoken in Turkey, with bans imposed on languages other than Turkish. The 1982 Constitution included the articles "The language of the State is Turkish" and "No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at educational and teaching institutions". With Turkey's acceptance as a candidate for the European Union in 1999, the bans on languages began to be lifted. The developments following it can be listed as follows:

- In 2002, broadcasting in "different languages and dialects" on radio and television was permitted. TRT started broadcasting 30-minute Circassian television and radio programs once a week in 2004. When TRT Kurdi was established in 2009 and began broadcasting 24 hours a day, Circassian radio and TV broadcasts were discontinued.
- Since 2006, the Federation of Caucasian Associations has begun offering Circassian language courses. Educational materials were prepared, and training for teachers was organized.
- In 2011, the Department of Circassian Language and Culture was opened at Kayseri Erciyes University, and it started admitting students in the 2018-2019 academic year.
- In 2011, elective Circassian language courses were included in the curriculum at Boğaziçi University, and in 2023 at Bahçeşehir University.
- In the 2012-2013 academic year, a two-hour elective Circassian language course per week was added to the middle school (grades 5-6-7-8) curriculum.
- In 2013, the Department of Circassian Language and Literature was established at Düzce University. Later, its name was changed to Circassian Language and Culture. The department also offers master's and doctoral programs.

The spread of remote education during the pandemic also marked a new chapter in the teaching of Circassian. Numerous online courses were organized by Circassian civil society organizations and private initiatives. The Circassian diaspora also benefits from the significant accumulation of knowledge in the field of language that has been established to date in the Circassian republics.

3. Abkhaz-Abazas: History and Language

Although the Abkhazians and Abazas originate from the same ethnic root, they are referred to by separate names in the literature due to geographical separations dating back centuries. The
homeland of the Abkhazians, who call themselves Apsuva, is present-day Abkhazia. Like the Circassians, around 100,000 Abkhazians were exiled to the Ottoman territories in Anatolia and the Balkans in the 1860s. During the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian war, the Abkhazians living in the Balkans were forced to move to Anatolia. The Abkhazian population in Turkey is concentrated in the provinces of Sakarya, Düzce, Eskişehir, Bilecik, and Bursa and there are 110 Abkhazian villages in these regions. The total population in Turkey is estimated to be around 400,000, while, in Abkhazia, according to 2022 data, there are 124,500 Abkhazians living. The Abazas are ethnic kin of the Abkhazians living in the North Caucasus. Today, they reside in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, which is part of the Russian Federation (according to the 2020 census, there are 41,793 people). In Turkey, there are 40 Abaza villages, most of which are located in Central Anatolia.

In Turkey (in Turkish), unlike in written literature, the distinction between Abkhaz and Abaza is not commonly made. The name Abaza, which has been established in Turkish for a long time, is commonly used for both groups. The term 'Abkhaz,' which has become widespread in recent years, is also frequently used to refer to both groups. Both in the Caucasus and in the diaspora, due to their coexistence, the Abazas share similarities with the Circassians in terms of culture, traditions, and customs. Especially in Syria, Jordan, and some regions of Turkey, they are considered Circassians. Due to their small population, mixed Circassian-Abaza settlements, and intermarriages, language shift (to Circassian) or bilingualism also occurs.

The history of Abkhazian and Abaza education in Turkey is quite brief. Although the director of the Circassian school opened during the Ottoman period (1919-1923), Mustafa Butbay, was Abkhazian, there was no education in Abkhazian at the school. Mustafa Butbay prepared a common alphabet for Circassian and Abkhazian in 1919, but it did not find a field of use.

Since the early 2000s, as a result of the EU candidacy process, the Federation of Caucasian Associations has organized educator training for Abkhazian and opened courses in associations for the first time. While Circassian radio and TV broadcasts began, there were no broadcasts in Abkhazian-Abaza. The elective course in Abkhazian that was opened at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul during the 2011-2012 academic year is still ongoing. In the 2012-2013 academic year, Abkhazian was added a year later to the elective course "Living Languages and Dialects" that started in middle schools (grades 5-8). However, due to
the condition of "at least 10 students," only one class could be opened in Sakarya, where there is a dense population of Abkhazians. In 2013, the Department of Caucasian Languages and Literature was established at Düzce University, including a department named 'Abkhazian Language and Literature' for Abkhazian studies. However, due to Abkhazia not being recognized as a state by Turkey and other political reasons, the problem of finding teaching staff could not be solved for 10 years, and the department did not become operational. Finally, three faculty members were appointed to the department for the 2023-2024 academic year, and it is expected to start admitting students from the 2024-2025 academic year.

The advent of video communication applications and online education during the pandemic that started in 2020 led to a revival in Abkhazian language learning as well. The ability to organize courses independently of location enabled the utilization of expert Abkhazian teachers for language instruction. Today, Abkhazian language courses are mostly conducted as online classes, with teachers joining from Abkhazia and students participating from anywhere in the world. In face-to-face language courses organized by associations, women teachers born in Abkhazia who have moved to Turkey through marriage often teach.

The amount of Abkhazian language material produced in Turkey is extremely limited. Four textbooks used in middle schools were prepared by a commission within the Federation of Caucasian Associations. Apart from a few textbooks and a conversation guide prepared through individual initiatives, the Turkish Language Association published the first Abkhazian-Turkish dictionary in 2023. It must also be noted that, in Turkey, although limited, every activity related to the language is conducted under the name 'Abkhazian'. There has been no initiative to date for the language of the Abazas, who have a very small population and have largely lost their language.

4. Urbanization in Turkey with a Focus on Circassians and Abkhaz-Abazas

Until the mid-19th century, the Circassians and Abkhaz-Abazas, compelled to leave their homeland and settle in the territories of the Ottoman Empire, were unfamiliar with urban life and urban culture. They lacked a centralized administrative system, developed trade networks, and organizations. Their languages had not been put into writing, thus no standard language had emerged. Due to Ottoman settlement policies, they were dispersed across the vast territories of the empire. Ottoman settlement rules prohibited immigrants, except for high-ranking nobles and craftsmen, from settling in cities, especially Istanbul. In this manner,
until the Republic was established in 1923, while the Circassian and Abkhaz-Abaza elites (mostly nobles) were placed in the palace circles, the army, and the bureaucracy in Istanbul, the majority of the population lived a rather secluded life in villages.

With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the new government implemented several methods to distribute the population across specific regions, with the goal of addressing the demographic deficit and creating a source of population that would be the force of development. These methods included establishing factories in several cities in Anatolia, creating transportation links between many towns and cities, as well as railways, and setting up industrial establishments (Keleş, 2008: 406). In the 1950s, a rapid urbanization process began as a result of the population moving to urban centers through internal migration, due to rapid population growth and fundamental changes in agricultural technology and production in rural areas. In the following years, the process accelerated even further with the development of transportation means and industrialization, leading to a continuous increase in the population, especially in certain urban centers. The transition to mechanized agriculture after 1950 and the migrations from rural to urban areas shaped this rapid urbanization, which continues to this day.

Furthermore, following World War II, as was the case worldwide, Turkey saw democracy, human rights, and welfare state principles gain prominence, leading to significant changes in the country's political landscape. The transition to a multi-party system began to replace statist policies with liberal ones. Changes in economic policy also reflected on agricultural activities in rural areas. This liberalization in the economy facilitated population mobility within the country, accelerating urbanization (Niray, 2002: 12). The urban population, which was 5 million 244 thousand in 1950, increased by 69% in a decade, reaching 8 million 860 thousand in 1960. The share of the urban population within the total population also rose from 25.1% to 31.9% during the same period (Başol, 1984: 61).

A significant characteristic of this period was the lack of sufficient housing compatible with individuals' economic incomes, due to the state not allocating resources for housing construction under the threat of World War II. Groups without regular jobs and incomes, mostly those who had migrated from rural to urban areas, began building homes on treasury lands, and impoverished neighborhoods known as "squatter houses (gecekondu)" emerged in the distant areas of cities. However, over time, those residing in squatter houses gained
bargaining power as voters and managed to acquire ownership (often without compensation) of the lands where they had illegally built their homes (Tekeli, 2009: 119).

In the literature on urbanization process experienced in Turkey, there is no scientific research or statistical information available regarding the situation of the Circassians and Abkhazians since, during those times, discussing different ethnic groups within the 'Turkish nation' was a sensitive issue, and conducting such research could lead to charges of 'separatism'. It can still be argued that the situation of the Circassians and Abkhazians in the urbanization process aligns in many respects with the general situation in the country, but also diverges in some aspects due to socio-cultural differences. The two main determinants of migration from rural to urban areas are economic reasons (insufficiency of lands for agriculture and livestock, infertility of the soil) and distance to cities. While economic reasons were more decisive in the early periods, the development of cities and the growing importance of education made distance a determining factor in migration to cities as well.

During the 1950-1970 period, when urbanization was intense, the socio-economic development gap between Turkey's Central Anatolia and Black Sea regions and its west (Marmara and Aegean regions) was even larger. Therefore, the Circassians living in these areas preferred to settle in major cities like Ankara and Istanbul rather than the less developed urban centers to which their villages were attached. In the western regions, where relatively developed cities and easier access to these urban centers were available, the Circassians showed less inclination to migrate to cities. Due to this difference, today, while Circassian villages in Central Anatolia are largely deserted, the villages in the Marmara Region have a higher population.

For the Abkhazians living in the western regions, where developed urban centers such as Düzce, Sakarya, Kocaeli, Bursa, and Eskişehir are located, the urbanization process has been different from that of the Circassians in Central Anatolia. The proximity of Abkhaz villages in these regions to their own urban centers, as well as to Istanbul and Ankara, has enabled them to urbanize without completely abandoning their villages, thus maintaining a dual life in both the city and the village.

One of the main characteristics of migration from Anatolia to major cities like Istanbul and Ankara is the settlement of individuals from the same region within the same areas of the
city, a practice framed by the concept of "fellow townsmanship." Although occupying state lands to build illegal houses ('squatter houses' or 'gecekondus') was a common trend, it was not observed among Circassians and Abkhazians, even though they may form dense communities in certain areas of the city. Those who migrate to Istanbul and Ankara for economic reasons usually prefer neighborhoods where they have acquaintances, while those who come for education, work, and other reasons choose their living areas based on their own specific circumstances. The traditional inclination of Circassians and Abkhaz-Abazians to work in state positions also plays a significant role in the urbanization process.

Thus, as a result of intense urbanization starting from the 1950s, a considerable Circassian and Abkhaz-Abaza population has formed in Istanbul and Ankara. Since data on ethnic minorities is not kept, it is impossible to discuss the exact number of the population. The distribution of 550 Circassian and 160 Abkhaz-Abaza villages in Turkey, which is concentrated in the Central Anatolia, Middle and West Black Sea, and Marmara regions, can be seen on the following map.

*Figure 1: Abkhaz-Abaza & Circassian Settlements (Circassians in red, Abkhaz-Abazas in blue)*

4.1. Community Associations as Cultural Spaces in Urban Areas

In the 1950s, as Istanbul and Ankara began to develop an educated and urbanized populace, the partial democratization of Turkey also paved the way for the emergence of the first Circassian and Abkhaz organizations. In 1952, the Caucasian Cultural Association was
founded in Istanbul, followed by the Caucasus-Abkhazia Cultural Association (today known as the Istanbul Abkhaz Association) in 1967. In Ankara, the first association was established in 1961 under the name North Caucasus Cultural Association (today’s Ankara Circassian Association). Today, the associations in Ankara and Istanbul include, but are not limited to, various Circassian and Abkhaz cultural and social organizations as listed in the following table. They organize cultural events, language courses, dance classes, and community gatherings to maintain their traditions and support their communities in urban settings, thereby fostering a sense of community and identity among their members and contributing to the preservation and promotion of their heritage, language, and culture. Yet, even the membership numbers of these associations do not provide a clear idea regarding the population of these communities.

Table 1: List of Circassian and Abkhaz-Abaza Associations in İstanbul and Ankara

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>İstanbul</th>
<th>Ankara</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 1864 Kafkas Muhacirler Derneği</td>
<td>1. Birleşik Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Abhaz Dernekleri Federasyonu</td>
<td>2. Birleşik Kafkasya Konseyi Derneği</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Çerkes Dernekleri Federasyonu</td>
<td>5. Ankara Abhaz Kültür Derneği</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Çerkes Hakları Derneği</td>
<td>6. Ankara Çerkes Derneği</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Çerkes Kadınları Teavün Cemiyeti Derneği</td>
<td>7. Uluslararası Kafkas Derneği</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Çerkes Kültür Evi Derneği</td>
<td>8. Şimali Kafkas Kültür Eğitim ve Yardımlaşma Derneği</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Fk 1864 Spor Kulübünü Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Güneşli Kuzey Kafkas Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. İstanbul Abhaz Kültür Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. İstanbul Çerkes Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. İstanbul Kafkas Halk Dansları Topluluğu Gençlik ve Spor Kulübü Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. İstanbul Kafkas Kültür Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Kafkas Çerkes Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Kafkasevi Sosyal ve Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Kafkasoloji Araştırmaları Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Maltepe Çerkes Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Marmara Çerkes Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Silivri Kuzey Kafkas Kültür Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Uzunyayla Kafkas Kültür ve Yardımlaşma Derneği</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Methodology
This report is based on a mixed-method research carried out in Istanbul and Ankara, in January and February 2024. For the data collection, first a survey consisting of five sections was administered online with the participation of 403 respondents. The aim of the survey was to gather quantitative data on the cultural and linguistic practices and opinions of the participants. Following the survey, in order to gather further insights and detailed information on the same topics and issues, two focus groups discussions were carried out with a total of 13 participants, including 9 female and 4 male with an age range between 23 and 48, on a voluntary basis. The discussions were semi-structured in nature; that is, a set of prepared questions were utilized to guide the discussion, ensuring all relevant topics were covered while allowing flexibility for spontaneous reflections. It was also made sure that the setting allowed an open and interactive dialogue and discussion with the moderation of the authors. The discussions were recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

The analysis of the survey data was descriptive, involving the calculation of frequencies and percentages. The qualitative data collected with the focus group discussions was analyzed inductively. Emergent categories were identified with respect to the recurring topics, they were then matched with the key themes and trends that emerged from the survey data for further interpretation. To comply with ethical considerations, all participants were first informed about the background and purpose of study by the researchers and then provided written consent to participate in the research. In the present report, the identity of the participants have been removed and code numbers were used.

6. Participants and Demographic Information
From Ankara and Istanbul, 403 participants responded to the survey. The following figures present demographic information from the survey with findings on gender, age, education level, occupations, household income, and marital status. Figure 2 presents the gender distribution among respondents. It indicates three categories: "Other" with 3%, "Female" with 53.5%, and "Male" with 46.3%. This shows a slight majority of female participants over male, with a very small percentage not defining their gender. As for the marital status of the participants, 67.4% are married. As can be seen in Figure 3, the findings highlight an age distribution where the majority falls within the age ranges of 46-55 and 56-65, accounting for 24.6% and 24.1% respectively. Younger age groups (18-25 and below 18) represent a smaller fraction, at 7.8% and 0.3% respectively. Overall, the average age of the participants is 46.
Figure 4 shows the education level of the respondents, with a significant majority of undergraduate and graduate degrees, accounting for 58% and 23.5% respectively. Figure 5 presents the occupations of the respondents. 12.6% of the respondents are retired, 5.4% are students and only 2.2% are housewives. 79.8% of the participants are currently employed, majority of which are high-skilled professions including doctors, teachers, engineers, attorneys, academicians and the like. Regarding the household income, only 14.4% of the respondents have an income around or below minimum wage. The majority of the participants represent the middle-class economically.
7. Results

7.1. Identification and Belonging

The issues of identification and belonging were asked in a variety of questions in different sections of the survey in order to corroborate the findings. The respondents were first asked about their primary identity in a question whereby they are given a set of identity options and asked to choose the one that best defines their identity. In response to this question (see Figure 8), 63.9% of the participants chose Circassian/Abkhazian while 27.5% of them rejected to identify themselves with one single identity. As can be seen in Figure 9, in response to a different question, 74.8% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that Circassian/Abkhazian identity is more important than their other identities. Furthermore, Figure 10 demonstrates that almost 60% of the respondents stated they only identify with Circassian/Abkhazian culture. Overall, these results indicate that a significant majority of the participants identify themselves strongly or merely with the Circassian/Abkhazian community.

Figure 8: Primary Identity 1
Figure 9: Primary Identity 2

Figure 10: Identification with Circassian/Abkhazian Culture
Figure 11 shows the extent to which the respondents view themselves as Turkish. The findings indicate that 41.4% of the respondents do not see themselves as Turkish at all and 31.6% of them see themselves as Turkish very little or little. The participants who view themselves as Turkish substantially or completely amount to 13.7%. Yet, interestingly, when we compare this with the percentages in Figure 8, it can be seen that only 1.1% chose Turkish identity as their primary identity. This seemingly contradiction might explain why 64.7% of the participants responded ‘yes’ when they were asked if they see themselves as bicultural though, as can be seen in Figure 12.

*Figure 11: Identification with Turkish Identity*
As Figure 13 demonstrates, when the participants were asked about the best defining element of their Circassian/Abkhazian identity, 56.7% chose common culture, which overwhelmingly surpassed the total percentage of other elements. Furthermore, almost half of the respondents
stated that they have been to the Caucasus, which indicates a strong identification with their homeland.

Figure 13: Defining Features of Circassian/Abkhazian Identity

![Pie chart showing the distribution of responses to the question of which feature best defines Circassian/Abkhazian identity. The largest segment is for common culture (56.7%), followed by common ancestry (19.5%), and common language (9.9%).]

Figure 14: Identification with Homeland

![Pie chart showing the distribution of responses to the question of whether the respondent has ever been to the Caucasus or their homeland. The largest segment is for no (54.3%), followed by yes (45.7%).]
7.2. Language Issues and Rights

7.2.1. Language Ability

In order to identify the self-perceived language proficiency of the respondents in Circassian and Abkhaz-Abaza languages, 3 questions were asked about the four skills of speaking, writing, listening and reading. As is clear from the table below, the listening comprehension and speaking ability of the participants are above 50%. Yet, it includes a wide range of ability from rememberers and passive speakers to semi-speakers and fluent speakers, as is usually the case with the speakers of minority and/or endangered languages.

As for the reading and writing ability, 63.4% of the respondents reported no ability to read and write. This finding is significant but not inconceivable. Circassian became a written and literary language in the Caucasus only in the 1920s, long after the exile. Therefore, it was only the spoken language which was used and transmitted by the Circassians in Türkiye in the post-exile era. The situation was more or less the same for Abkhazian. Although the first alphabet was created in 1862, numerous subsequent attempts at creating an alphabet delayed the establishment of a standard writing system (1928-1937 Latin, 1938-1953 Georgian, 1954 – present Cyrillic). Coupled with the monolingual language policies of the republican period, use of Cyrillic in both alphabets and other factors obstructed the teaching and learning of reading-writing skills.

Table 2: Ability in Four Skills in Circassian/Abkhazian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Speaking Ability in Abkhazian/Circassian (at any level)</th>
<th>Listening Comprehension Ability in Abkhazian/ Circassian (at any level)</th>
<th>Reading and Writing Ability in Abkhazian/ Circassian (at any level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>59.1 %</td>
<td>52.1 %</td>
<td>36.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>40.9 %</td>
<td>18.7 %</td>
<td>63.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTLY</td>
<td>not an option</td>
<td>29.1 %</td>
<td>not an option</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative data from the focus group discussions has provided further details and insights on this issue. Two participants, in describing their own language histories, brought up the issue with reference to the differences between city life and village life:
“I was born in the city. We didn't go to the village very often either. I didn't have a childhood where we spent our summer vacations in the village for long periods. When we went to the village, Circassian was spoken, but we weren't interested. There was no effort or awareness from my parents to teach us the language in city life. Actually, they spoke it at home. I gained language awareness, the significance of language during my university years at the association. Then I made some personal efforts, but it can be said I hardly know the language. I can only follow a conversation in broad outlines through the words. When I compare myself to friends who were born in the village or spent a lot of time in the village as children, I see that they were able to acquire Circassian, at least to some extent.” (Participant 7, female, age 45)

“I was born in the village and actually acquired Circassian effortlessly in a natural setting. The language we learned in the village was very basic though, similar to what is referred to as basic English. It was actually a very simple form of Circassian. Since I started attending courses, I've realized that Circassian can also be spoken at an advanced, academic level. There are things I struggle with and don't understand, because we continued speaking in the way we learned and used in the village even after coming to Istanbul. Now that I've started to engage more with reading and writing, I've seen that Circassian is not as limited as what we learned in the village. Frankly, I haven't come across many people in the city who were born here and can speak the language fluently.” (Participant 3, male, age 48)

When we analyze the data along these lines, it has become clear that the acquisition of listening and speaking skills- albeit at different degrees, has been attached to the ties with the villages by all the participants. As for reading and writing skills, it seems that city life has provided more opportunities to learn them, mostly through the courses organized by the associations.

Figure 15: Attendance at a Circassian/Abkhazian Language Course
7.2.2. Beliefs and Opinions in Language Issues and Rights

In order to understand the positions of the participants about the Circassian/Abkhazian languages, 3 more questions were asked in the survey. When asked if Circassian/Abkhazian language should be preserved and passed on to the following generations, 89.3% of the participants strongly agreed and 8.3% agreed, there was no one who disagreed. Similarly, if they have/had a child 89.6% of the participants stated that they would want them to study Circassian/Abkhazian in addition to Turkish at school; yet, this time, 2.9% stated that they would not and 7.5% were undecided. In another question which asked them if they agree that Circassian/Abkhazian must be taught at schools as well as Turkish and foreign languages, 2.9% strongly disagreed, 4.3% disagreed and 5.3% were indecisive. Despite these high rates of reported plea for Circassian/Abkhazian classes, In Istanbul and Ankara, no elective course in Circassian or Abkhazian at secondary schools has been opened to date, mostly due to the 10-student in the same school requirement for the opening of these classes.

*Figure 16: Opinions about the preservation of Circassian/Abkhazian languages*
Figure 17: Personal choices about their children’s studying Circassian/Abkhazian languages

Figure 18: Opinions about the teaching of Circassian/Abkhazian languages at schools
When we analyze the qualitative data from this perspective, further details and intricacies have emerged. As for the acquisition of Circassian by the children in the city context, participants all noted that even if the parents, one of them or both, speak the language at home since their birth, the kids develop the listening comprehension skills but they do not or can not speak, as can be seen in the following extract:

“I have two nephews, and their parents always speak Circassian at home. They understand but do not speak it. Perhaps they don't speak it because they never witness the language being spoken outside of their home, but that's the situation.” (Participant 4, female, age 45)

In addition to this, despite the high levels of importance attached to the maintenance of Circassian/Abkhazian and their teaching at schools, the participants mostly reported pessimism about the future of them, as is clear from the following:

“Our associations, in my opinion, do not prioritize the language issue. It is obvious that language classes are not sufficient. They must do more. They must develop long-term policies. More and frequent visits to the homeland where Circassian is spoken, materials design, the application of modern language teaching methods must be the priority. Instead of organizing, for example, ten different dance courses, they can organize three different language courses rather than placing everyone, despite the differences in level, into the same
classroom at least. I don't underestimate the efforts made, but we still have a lot to do and improve.” (Participant 7, female, age 45)

“Learning a language is indeed a challenging process. While people might spend around 1000 hours of English classes over a year in a prep school, engaging in regular English lessons for 2-3 hours a week, continuously exposed to English online and in their surroundings, they still only reach a certain level of proficiency. In contrast, Circassian isn't commonly heard in daily environments, there's a scarcity of materials, and no media exposure. Is it realistic to expect fluency from just 2-3 hours of lessons a week?” (Participant 3, male, age 48)

7.3. Daily Life Practices

7.3.1. Affiliation with Circassian/Abkhazian Associations
The first group of questions regarding the daily life practices of the Circassians/Abkhazians focused on their affiliation with the civil society organizations. In this regard, 78.9% of the respondents stated that they have a membership in Circassian/Abkhazian associations. While they were asked about their frequency of attendance in the activities or events organized by these associations, only 38.2% reported that they attend all or most of the activities/events. In a similar vein, in a further question which asked their frequency of participation in Circassian/Abkhazian activities and events, excluding weddings and funerals, in the last year, 36.1% reported that they attend all or most of the activities/events.

*Figure 19: Membership in Circassian/Abkhazian Associations*
Figure 20: Attendance at the activities/events by Circassian/Abkhazian Associations

Figure 21: Participation in the Circassian/Abkhazian activities/events in general
7.3.2. Cultural Practices

Another set of questions was geared towards their affiliations with cultural practices. In this regard, when they were asked about the extent to which the participants follow Circassian/Abkhazian traditions and customs, almost half of the respondents reported that they either always or usually follow them. The total percentage of the respondents who stated that they never or rarely follow them is 14.1%. The participants’ habits of eating Circassian/Abkhazian food follows a similar pattern, as can be seen in Figure 23.

*Figure 22: Rates of following Circassian/Abkhazian Traditions and Customs*
7.3.3. Daily Friendship Practices

The next group of questions focused on the participants’ daily friendship practices. Strikingly, 72.5% of participants responded that they have many or a lot of...
Circassian/Abkhazian close friends. In addition, as is clear from Figure 25 and 26, the frequency of face-to-face meetings with Circassian/Abkhazian close friends every day is almost identical. Indeed, the overall frequency of meetings with the Circassian/Abkhazia ones is higher than the Turkish friends.

Figure 24: Number of Circassian/Abkhazian Close Friends

![Pie chart showing the number of Circassian/Abkhazian close friends people have where they live.](image)

Figure 25: Frequency of Face-to-Face Meetings with Circassian/Abkhazian Close Friends
7.4. Maintaining Culture in Urban vs. Rural Areas

The first question in this group aimed to find out their ties with their home villages. The following figure shows that Circassians/Abkhazians living in metropolitan areas still maintain
high levels of identification with their home villages. The total percentage of the respondents who always, usually and often visit them amounts to 62%, while the percentage of those who never or rarely visit their villages is about 20%. In order to understand if they have a sense of belonging to their home villages, the participants were asked to what extent they feel foreign during their visits and almost 80% of the respondents rejected any sense of foreignness. In another question which asked about their opinions regarding which setting provides the conditions that are conducive to the maintenance of their culture, 65.3% of the participants pointed at villages.

Figure 27: Frequency of Hometown/village Visits

![Pie chart showing frequency of hometown/village visits]

Figure 28: Sense of Belonging to Home Villages

![Pie chart showing sense of belonging to home villages]
7.5. Expression and Practice of Culture and Identity in Türkiye

Two different questions in two different sections were asked in the survey to find out the opinions of the participants regarding if Circassians/Abkhazians can freely express and
practice their culture and identity in Turkey. When they were asked directly if they can express their identity freely and openly under any circumstances, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (i.e. 89.6%) responded positively (see Figure 30). Yet, the same participants, when they were asked if they agree with the statement that Circassians/Abkhazians freely express and practice their own culture and identity, only 52.4% provided a positive response (see Figure 31). This difference may be attributed to that the second question included ‘practice’ in addition to ‘express’, if ‘express’ is perceived as saying or articulating their identity only. Still, the percentage of those who were undecided (i.e. 26.2%) is lower than those who disagreed strongly or somewhat (i.e. 21.4). This finding is of significance in that it might be interpreted as an inclination towards disagreement or reluctance to express opinion on the matter. Such interpretation gains further significance when juxtaposed with the results of another question which seeks to put forward their perception if this environment of free expression and practice of culture and identity applies to everyone in Turkey. As can be seen in Figure 32, the above mentioned rates of agreement regarding Circasian/Abkhazian identity significantly decreases to 30.8 when it comes to everyone in Turkey.

Figure 30: Expression of Circassian/Abkhazian Identity

![Figure 30: Expression of Circassian/Abkhazian Identity](image)

Figure 31: Expression and Practice of Circassian/Abkhazian Culture and Identity

![Figure 31: Expression and Practice of Circassian/Abkhazian Culture and Identity](image)
To further explore these issues, one more question was included in the survey to explore if the participants have ever been discriminated against or mistreated because of their
Circassian/Abkhazian identity. As is seen in Figure 33, only one fourth of the respondents reported that they have been discriminated against or mistreated due to their cultural identity.

**Figure 33: Discrimination/Mistreatment**

![Pie chart showing discrimination/mistreatment](image)

Have you ever been discriminated or mistreated because of your Circassian/Abkhazian identity?

- Yes: 25.1%
- No: 74.9%

**7.6. Political Positioning**

When the participants were asked if they would agree with the statement that different cultural and linguistic groups harm the unity and solidarity of Turkey, almost 90% of the respondents disagreed with it strongly and somewhat. This implies a relatively liberal and democratic position regarding linguistic and cultural diversity, rather than an ethnocentric one. It can be interpreted that their democratic position regarding their own culture and identity extends to other linguistic and cultural communities.

**Figure 34: Perception of cultural and linguistic diversity**
However, this democratic, liberal positioning regarding diversity gets complicated to some degree when juxtaposed with the findings regarding their positions on basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. As can be observed in the following table, the general tendency towards them is highly positive in the sense that an overwhelming majority of the participants report that they should never be restricted. Yet, their position on the right to hold meetings and demonstration marches is relatively more conservative in that 22.5% report that it can be restricted in certain times and conditions.

Table 3: Opinions on the restriction of human rights and freedoms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Should never be restricted</th>
<th>Can be restricted in certain times &amp; conditions</th>
<th>Should be restricted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of Thought</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of Expression</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of Religion</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Conclusion and Suggestions

The study aimed at a comprehensive exploration of the sociolinguistic situation and cultural identity of Circassian and Abkhaz-Abaza communities residing in the metropolitan cities of Istanbul and Ankara. The research suggests a strong sense of identity among the participants, coupled with a desire to maintain linguistic and cultural practices, as evidenced by their participation in language courses, cultural events and the like, despite the pressures of urbanization and assimilation into the broader Turkish society.

However, it also highlights the barriers to language preservation and the need for supportive measures to sustain these minority languages in urban contexts. Urbanization seems to pose challenges to cultural practices and language use, while at the same time offering new platforms and opportunities for cultural expression and community support. The study reveals the intricate balance these communities attempt to maintain between assimilation into the broader urban landscape and the preservation of their distinct identities. The establishment and active participation in community associations have emerged as a significant topic in this context, enabling the Circassian and Abkhaz-Abaza communities to maintain their own cultural practices in urban settings. These associations not only serve as cultural repositories but also as vital support networks for community members. However, the study also highlights significant challenges in language transmission, especially among younger generations, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to support language learning and usage.

In addition, the study also reveals a complex interplay between cultural identity, political positioning, and social integration. The communities' experiences and perspectives on cultural and linguistic rights highlight the broader societal challenges faced by minority
groups in Turkey. These insights call for a more inclusive and multicultural approach to national identity and social policy.

Overall, despite the considerable populations of Circassians and Abkhaz-Abazas in Turkey, they lack the means to preserve and sustain their languages. Even for those living in villages, language shift is occurring at the highest level, and in relatively sparse and scattered populations like in Istanbul and Ankara, their mother tongues are in danger of disappearing entirely in a short time. While it might not be possible to eliminate this danger completely, we can make a number of suggestions to the Turkish government for the preservation of the Circassian and Abkhaz-Abaza languages:

- Developing inclusive and pluralistic regulations for the learning and public use of the mother tongues.
- Establishing Circassian and Abkhaz-Abaza language departments and institutes at universities in Istanbul and Ankara.
- Reorganizing elective courses opened in middle schools under the name of Living Languages and Dialects and making them applicable in big cities.
- Repealing Article 42 in the Constitution stating, "No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens in education and teaching institutions".
- Removing reservations to articles related to the mother tongue in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Finally, official recognition that Turkey is a multilingual and multicultural country and making political and social arrangements and regulations accordingly would be a fundamental step in solving all these problems.

References


Mustafa Butbay - Biyografya (https://www.biyografya.com/biyografi/11750)
