

TABASARAN

Quick Facts

- Population: 150,000 living in 98 villages in Southern Russia
- Progress: 100+ Believers
- Language: Tabasaran
- Scripture: NT completed & OT in progress; Christian music recordings
- Location: Dagestan, Stavropol Krai, Krasnodar Krai, Rostov Oblast



"Come visit us anytime!"...

...the warm-spirited invitation was given on the village paths in the highland Tabasaran village. The year was 1996. The unusual thing about this invitation was that the invitation was being given by local Tabasarians to the first international family to ever live in this mountain region in southern Dagestan. Furthermore, the international family at first didn't know what to do—maybe when they would go to visit it would be an inappropriate time, or not convenient? But eventually this family discovered that in this culture to go and visit "without an invitation" is an even higher honor to the hosts than if something is pre-planned. Why is this? In village Tabasaran culture, friendship & hospitality is placed at the highest value. If a person has many friends, they are a 'wealthy' person.

The Tabasaran people consider that "they are the most hospitable of all Dagestani people." This claim might be argued by other Dagestani cultures, because once you are inside any Dagestani village culture hospitality functions at an amazingly high level.



Other salient features of ancient Tabasaran culture were also evident: respect to the elderly, mutual aid in daily life through the seven-generation 'tookhoom' structure, local artisanry such as carpet-making and Tabasaran music, the 'godekan'—the male collective decision-making body at the center of each village, societal care for the sick and the poor, and warm responsiveness to all weddings and funerals.

Not all was easy, however, in Tabasaran culture. Male drunkenness has reached alarmingly high levels since the introduction of Russian vodka in the late 1800s. Lack of historical sources of grace, either in the culture or in (Sunni) Islam (which came to Tabasaran in the 8th Century), results in a noticeable harshness at many levels of society—both in the home and in the school. Fear and shame are widely felt as controlling forces of traditional conformity. Cycles of vengeance and violence beset the region, along with fierce power struggles—capped by the omnipresent corrupt bribery demands, emanating from those in power.

This striking combination of factors yields the following observation, "The Tabasaran culture, like other mountain Dagestani cultures, has many outstanding cultural historical strengths; but also a tragic deficit of grace, forgiveness, and agape love."

But, for the Tabasarans, new hope is springing forth!

In 1997 the first Tabasaran-speaking person came to Jesus. There are now more than 100 Tabasaran believers. Two thrilling Tabasaran Christian music recordings, in authentic Tabasaran style, have also widely circulated through the culture. In the midst of the fierce Muslim tensions of Dagestan, loving relationships—coupled with widespread prayer—hold the hope for further redemptive impact into the Tabasaran world.

(Profile Information from Joshua Project & North Caucasus Regional Partnership)



Engagement Opportunities

- Get informed: [Mountain of Languages](#) / [Village Life](#)
- Explore access strategies to serve long term in Russia
- The University language study program (Russian) remains the most effective way for foreigners to get visas and become immersed in the culture.
- Very closed to Westerners, but more open to workers from Ibero-America and Asia.

Pray

- for the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers among the Tabasaran
- for strong, multiplying, local churches to be raised up among the Tabasaran.
- that God will open Tabasaran hearts to hear and be receptive to the gospel.
- for people of peace who will boldly declare the gosple to their own people.
- for the complete Bible to be translated into Tabasaran, and that people will be hungry to read and accept God's Word.

Is God calling you to serve in the Caucasus?
Let us help you respond. Contact us.