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DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AND POPULATION DYNAMICS OF KAZAKHSTAN: 1990–2023¹

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Abstract: *This study analyzes demographic trends in the Republic of Kazakhstan from 1990 to 2023, focusing on key indicators such as age-specific fertility rates, mortality rates, natural population increase, total fertility rates, life expectancy at birth, and infant mortality rates. Special attention is given to fertility, mortality, and natural increase rates in the southern and northern regions of Kazakhstan. The study also examines the demographic burden and fertility trends across the years 1991, 1999, 2009, and 2022. Infant mortality and average life expectancy are highlighted as crucial indicators for assessing the overall demographic situation.*

The research further explores the age and sex structure of the population, emphasizing the dynamics of age groups and aging trends based on United Nations criteria, including the aging coefficient. To provide a comprehensive overview of the demographic landscape, the study also considers migration processes such as emigration, immigration, interregional migration, and urbanization. Additionally, the analysis incorporates the influence of socioeconomic and legislative factors, including state benefits, child allowances, and related support mechanisms.

Understanding demographic trends is critical for effective policy formulation, long-term planning, and sustainable development. This study offers a comprehensive assessment of the population dynamics in the Republic of Kazakhstan over three decades, providing valuable insights into fertility, mortality, migration, and aging processes. By analyzing and comparing regional patterns across the southern and northern regions of the country, this study identifies significant demographic disparities that could contribute to the development of region-specific policy strategies. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the implications of demographic shifts for social services, healthcare, labor markets, and national development.

Keywords: demography, migration, fertility and mortality rates, population aging, socioeconomic implications

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DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

Demographic trends are a crucial determinant of a nation's socioeconomic trajectory, influencing labor markets, social security systems, and long-term economic sustainability. Demographic processes in the post-Soviet period have emerged as critical indicators of the socioeconomic conditions across various regions of Kazakhstan. Understanding Kazakhstan's population trends over the past three decades requires an examination of the broader demographic transformations, including shifts in migration, urbanization, and age structure, which collectively shape the country's long-term social and economic development. In addition to natural population growth, these transformations are influenced by regional disparities, patterns of return migration, and changes in fertility and mortality rates. The interaction of these factors determines the labor force composition, dependency ratios, and the distribution of human capital, which are critical for formulating effective policies aimed at sustainable economic growth, social welfare, and balanced regional development. Divergence of the Turkestan and North Kazakhstan regions underscores the territorial polarization of demographic dynamics, shaped by fertility rates, mortality patterns, migration flows, and structural economic challenges. While southern regions, characterized by a youthful population and predominantly rural lifestyle, sustained high fertility and rapid natural increase, northern territories faced demographic contraction due to population aging, outmigration, and economic stagnation. These contrasting trajectories not only reflect regional disparities but also lay the foundation for long-term demographic asymmetry, which continues to influence Kazakhstan's socioeconomic development strategies today.

The study places particular emphasis on the analysis of primary sources, including the results of national censuses conducted throughout the entire period of independence, archival materials of regional demographic statistics, and resolutions of executive authorities concerning the socio-demographic development of Kazakhstan. The historiography of the demographic situation in Kazakhstan is both extensive and highly politicized; therefore, the authors deliberately refrain from engaging in polemics, focusing instead on an impartial examination of statistical materials that remain independent of researchers' subjective interpretations.

The socioeconomic indicators of the early 1990s highlight stark demographic contrasts between the Turkestan and North Kazakhstan Regions, with the former demonstrating strong natural growth and the latter experiencing population decline. For example, according to socioeconomic indicators (SEI) of the Turkestan Region, the demographic dynamics for 1991 reveal the following figures: "4,128 births, 907 deaths, and a natural population increase of 3,221 individuals. In per 1,000 population terms, this corresponds to a birth rate of 32.0‰, a death rate of 6.0‰, and a natural increase of 26.0‰" [*National Census*, 1991]. These indicators reflect the region's youthful population structure and high fertility rates, which are characteristic of southern areas with a predominantly Kazakh population and a largely rural lifestyle. Even amid the socioeconomic crises of the early 1990s, the region exhibited a strong demographic potential. In 1995, the data demonstrates the following: 4,951 births, 1,145 deaths, and a natural increase of 3,806 individuals. Per 1,000 population, this corresponds to a birth rate of 30.3‰, a death rate of 7.0‰, and a natural increase of 23.3‰" [*National Census*, 1991]. Comparative demographic data for the North Kazakhstan Region (NKR) in 1995 indicates the following: "2,092 births and 3,125 deaths, resulting in a negative natural population change of -1,033 individuals. Per 1,000 population, this corresponds to a birth rate of 8.9‰, a death rate of 13.2‰, and a natural increase of -4.3‰" [*National Census*, 1999]. The data clearly reflects negative population growth, with the mortality rate significantly exceeding the birth rate.

Demographic data from the early 1990s reveals a pronounced regional divergence in Kazakhstan, with southern regions maintaining population growth while northern regions faced

persistent depopulation. Although complete demographic statistics for the 1991–1994 period are only partially available, the overall trend remains consistent: birth rates fluctuated between 8–10‰, while death rates exceeded 12–14‰, [*National Census*, 1991] resulting in a persistently negative natural increase. Several factors contribute to this demographic decline: (a) an aging population and a high proportion of Russian-speaking residents; (b) large-scale migration to the Russian Federation and to major urban centers within Kazakhstan; and (c) prolonged economic stagnation in the rural areas of the North Kazakhstan Region. A five-year analysis (1991–1995) clearly demonstrates the territorial polarization of demographic processes in Kazakhstan. While the southern regions experienced steady population growth, the northern regions entered a phase of demographic depopulation. These divergent trends laid the foundation for a long-term spatial asymmetry that persists to the present day. These findings underscore the need for a comprehensive and long-term demographic policy aimed at supporting the northern regions and effectively harnessing the demographic potential of the southern territories.

The post-independence period in Kazakhstan was marked by significant demographic shifts, with fertility decline reflecting the broader impact of socioeconomic transition. The decline following Kazakhstan's independence, attributed to economic instability, migration trends, and health challenges, underscores the broader impact of socioeconomic transitions on demographic shifts. The reduction in the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) from 2.9 in 1989 to 2.1 in 1999 indicates a rapid transformation in reproductive behavior, similar to trends observed in other post-Soviet states.

As a result of the demographic crisis that began in Kazakhstan in the early 1990s, the country's population declined by more than 1.246 million people (7.7%) between the 1989 and 1999 censuses. In 1989, the natural population growth rate was 15.4 per thousand, but by 1995, it had dropped by 6.8 percentage points, more than twice the previous rate, reaching 4.6 per thousand in 1999. Additionally, the birth rate of the rural population declined significantly. In urban areas, the natural growth rate was 2.6 per thousand in 1995, but by 1999, it had fallen to -1.8 per thousand, indicating a negative trend. For rural populations, the natural growth rate dropped to -2.2 per thousand, whereas it should have been 7.9 per thousand. Moreover, the total fertility rate declined from 3.126 to 2.0 during this period” [Zhumasultanov, Ibraev, 2000, p. 97].

Table 1. Comparative analysis of the aforementioned demographic data for 1995

Indicator (1995)	Turkestan Region	North Kazakhstan Region
Birth rate (per 1000)	30,3‰	8,9‰
Mortality (per 1000)	7,0‰	13,2‰
Natural increase	+23,3‰	4,3‰

The difference in natural increase is almost 28‰, which demonstrates opposite demographic trends.

The authors' conclusion on the aforementioned data.

The birth rate dynamics in the Turkestan region from 1991 to 2023 are characterized by a stable and high birth rate. In 1991, “the birth rate was 32.0‰, which was already significantly higher than the average for the Republic. The birth rate reached its highest values in 2021 – 39.48‰, and in 2019 – 38.04‰” [*National Census*, 2022].

An analysis of causal relationships in regional demographic trends reveals several key factors: ethnocultural composition, migration dynamics, and age structure. The Turkestan Region is predominantly inhabited by ethnic Kazakhs, among whom the cultural norm of large families

remains strong. In contrast, “the North Kazakhstan Region has historically maintained a high proportion of Slavic populations – according to the 1989 census, approximately 60% of the population identified as Russian,” which has contributed to lower birth rates [*National Census*, 1989].

An analysis of the above demographic data from 1991 to 2023 reveals that the birth rate in the Turkestan Region remained consistently high throughout the entire period. For instance, “in 1991 it stood at 32.0‰; between 2007 and 2009, it ranged from 33 to 36‰; and by 2021, it has reached 39.5‰. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic years (2020–2021), the birth rate remained above 36‰. The average birth rate for the 1991–2023 period is approximately 30–35 births per 1,000 population. In contrast, the situation in the northern regions – particularly the North Kazakhstan Region – differs significantly, with substantially lower fertility rates. In 1995, the birth rate was recorded at 8.9‰; during 1999–2000, it ranged between 8.0 and 8.7‰; in 2018, it rose modestly to 12.9‰; and in 2022, it declined again to 10.96‰. The average birth rate for the 1995–2022 period ranges between 9 and 12 births per 1,000 population” [*National Census*, 1991–2022]. These figures indicate that the birth rate in the southern region is approximately 2.5 to 3.5 times higher than in the northern region. This disparity is largely attributable to cultural, ethno-demographic, and social factors, including the predominance of large families and a younger population structure in the south.

These interregional differences between southern and northern Kazakhstan are not merely statistical, but represent deeper sociocultural and economic processes. The Turkestan Region serves as the demographic engine of the republic, whereas the North Kazakhstan Region is facing acute demographic and social challenges. Regional development policies must therefore be differentiated and region-specific, with particular emphasis on stimulating fertility in the north, supporting youth, reducing mortality, implementing internal migration programs, and undertaking broader demographic rehabilitation efforts.

Based on the demographic data and the aforementioned contextual information, an annualized analysis of birth rate trends in Kazakhstan reveals the following patterns: 1991–1995: A consistently high birth rate was maintained, ranging from 30 to 33‰, despite the socioeconomic disruptions following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. 1996–2000: A modest decline in birth rates to approximately 24–25‰ was observed, largely attributed to the economic crisis and a significant decline in living standards. 2001–2008: A notable increase in fertility, reaching 36.7‰ in 2008, reflected the stabilization of the national economy and the initial effects of pro-natalist demographic policies. 2010–2021: A period of steady growth culminated in a peak birth rate of 39.48‰ in 2021, marking the highest level recorded during the post-Soviet period. 2022–2023: A slight decline in birth rates to 28.16‰ is evident, likely due to the lingering social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic [*National Census*, 1991, 1999, 2000, 2009, 2022].

In contrast to the demographic trends in the southern regions, the North Kazakhstan Region consistently displays markedly lower fertility indicators. In 1995, the birth rate was recorded at just 8.9‰, rising modestly to 12.93‰ in 2018, before declining again to 10.96‰ in 2022. This rate remains more than three times lower than that of the Turkestan Region. “Several factors contribute to this persistent disparity: a high degree of urbanization, ongoing outmigration of the youth population, progressive demographic aging, and significant ethnocultural differences – notably, the presence of a large proportion of non-indigenous populations historically associated with lower fertility rates” [Dave, 2007, p. 3–5]. Persons aged 60+ accounted for 11.6% of the population in early 2019 [*Kazakhstan is at a relatively early stage.*, 2020].

Long-term demographic data reveals a persistent natural increase in the Turkestan Region, in stark contrast to the sustained natural decline observed in northern Kazakhstan. Natural population growth in the Turkestan Region has remained consistently positive over the past decades. In 1991,

the rate stood at 26.0‰; in 2021, it peaked at 33.18‰; and in 2023, it was recorded at 24.01‰. At no point during the observed period did the region experience a natural decline. By contrast, the northern regions of Kazakhstan have experienced sustained natural population decline. Between 1995 and 2000, the natural growth rate ranged from -4.3‰ to -6.3‰. A brief reversal was observed in 2018–2019, with rates of +1.13‰ and +0.33‰, respectively; however, a renewed decline followed in 2020–2022, reaching -3.57‰ in 2021 [*National Census, 1991–2022*].

These figures indicate that southern Kazakhstan is undergoing sustained demographic growth, while the northern regions are facing long-term demographic decline. This divergence is driven by a combination of factors, including lower birth rates, higher mortality rates, and substantial outmigration from the northern areas. A critical determinant of these regional disparities is the population age structure: the south has a relatively younger demographic profile, whereas the north is characterized by an aging population. Moreover, the north is experiencing a net population loss due to internal migration toward the more economically dynamic southern and central urban centers, such as Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent. Ethnic and cultural factors also contribute significantly to these trends. The Turkestan Region is predominantly inhabited by ethnic Kazakhs, among whom traditional norms favor large families. In contrast, the north, while more urbanized, faces persistent economic challenges and a declining appeal to younger generations. These demographic disparities between the southern and northern regions of Kazakhstan are not transient but systemic and enduring. The southern regions – exemplified by Turkestan – serve as demographic reservoirs, compensating for natural population losses in the north, such as in the North Kazakhstan Region.

MIGRATION

In the contemporary economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, migration policy occupies a significant position. Since gaining independence, the evolution of Kazakhstan's migration policy can be broadly divided into three major periods: "The first period (1991–2000) was marked by a deterioration in the socioeconomic situation, primarily due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transition from a centrally planned to a market-oriented administrative system. During this phase, the country experienced substantial demographic shifts driven by large-scale migration processes. The second period (2001–2010) coincided with a phase of economic growth and dynamic sociopolitical reforms. State-led initiatives aimed at supporting motherhood and childhood, reducing poverty, providing targeted social assistance to low-income families, and facilitating the repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs (Oralmans) had a favorable impact on the country's demographic indicators. The third period (2011–2022) was shaped by the conditions of globalization and increasing external social and economic influences. This phase was characterized by a decline in the rate of ethnic repatriation and a rise in the outmigration of highly qualified professionals. Recent trends in migration flows reveal an increasing number of emigrants with higher education and a simultaneous decrease in the influx of highly educated immigrants. Over the past decade, the number of incoming migrants with higher education has declined by more than half, amounting to only 1,900 individuals in 2020" [*Resolution of the Government No. 961, 2022, Section 2*].

Archival records provide data on population migration for 1992. According to these records, Kazakhstan had a substantial outflow of 12,060 individuals, exceeding the 10,174 arrivals, suggesting a net population decline, likely influenced by economic instability, political transitions, and socioeconomic uncertainties following the dissolution of the USSR. [F. 709, in. 20, wr. 15, c. 131, Migration Table. 1992, vol. 2, p. 1]. A key observation is a higher migration rate from rural areas compared to urban settlements, reflecting the broader trend of rural depopulation due

to limited economic opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and declining living conditions. The higher number of urban departures compared to arrivals further indicates urban economic distress, possibly linked to industrial decline and job losses in the post-Soviet economic restructuring.

To overcome negative migration trends, it was decided to initiate the resettlement of compatriots from abroad. The program was launched in 1992 and provided assistance in the resettlement of tens of thousands of families of compatriots from abroad. For example, in accordance with Presidential Decree No. 1508 of the Republic of Kazakhstan, issued on December 27, 2004, titled “On the Immigration Quota of Oralmans for 2005–2007”, the South Kazakhstan Region was allocated the following quotas: 2005: 2,710 families; 2006: 2,710 families; 2007: 2,615 families.

Over a three-year period, “a total of 8,035 families were planned for resettlement under the immigration quota. In 2005, 2,653 families were included in the quota. In accordance with Government Resolution No. 225, dated February 25, 2004, repatriate families received financial assistance for housing purchases, amounting to 100 times the monthly calculation index (97,100 tenge) per family member [TRSA, F-1454, In-5, C-39, p. 304–305].

An important dimension of Kazakhstan’s repatriation policy is not only the scale of population return but also the educational characteristics of Oralman households. These indicators provide insights into the integration potential of repatriates and their contribution to the country’s socioeconomic development: “In 2008, 45,452 families comprising 154,833 individuals were recorded. Among them, 25,091 (16.2%) were of school age, 41,850 (26.8%) of working age, 29,579 (19.1%) preschool children, 58,579 (37.9%) of retirement age, and 6,987 (4.5%) students. In terms of education, 38,194 individuals were enrolled in various educational institutions.” [TRSA, F. 1454, In. 1, Fi. 18, C. 144, p. 72].

This distribution highlights two key patterns. First, the relatively high proportion of working-age individuals and schoolchildren reflects the long-term demographic potential of repatriates. Second, the uneven educational attainment – where the share of specialized and higher education remains modest compared to general secondary education – indicates both challenges and opportunities for Kazakhstan’s education and labor market policies. The presence of nearly 38,200 repatriates engaged in education further underscores the critical role of state support in enhancing human capital formation among returnees.

The resettlement of Oralman in the post-Soviet period represents a key element of Kazakhstan’s demographic and socioeconomic transformation. By examining regional data, it is possible to assess not only the quantitative scale of migration but also the mechanisms of state support and independent settlement strategies. For example, “from 1991 to July 2008, a total of 11,007 families comprising 37,023 individuals migrated to the district, seeking to improve their socioeconomic conditions and establish livelihoods. Of these, 2,844 families (25.8%) were resettled under the state migration quota, while the majority – 8,163 families (74.2%) – settled independently outside the quota system” [TRSA, F. 1454, In.1, Fi.18, C.144, p. 60].

This distribution illustrates two significant trends. First, while the state quota system provided institutional support to a quarter of incoming families, the predominance of independent migration indicates a high degree of self-reliance and adaptability among repatriates. Second, the integration of over 37,000 individuals into the district’s social and economic life underscores the demographic contribution of Oralman to regional development. The combination of state-assisted and self-organized settlement strategies highlights the dual structure of Kazakhstan’s migration policy during this period, balancing formal institutional mechanisms with grassroots-level migration dynamics.

In general, between 1991 and October 1, 2011, more than 860,000 ethnic Kazakhs returned to their historical homeland as part of Kazakhstan’s resettlement program. According to the official report of the Presidential Commission on Human Rights, “this period witnessed the

repatriation of 221,300 families, or 860,400 individuals. Of these, 127,700 families were resettled under the state migration quota, while 94,200 families settled independently outside the quota system, indicating both state-supported and self-organized migration channels. The regional distribution of repatriates highlights clear settlement patterns, with the majority concentrated in the southern part of the country. The South Kazakhstan Region accounted for 21.4% (183,400 individuals), followed by Almaty Region with 15.2% (130,700 individuals), Mangystau Region with 12.5% (107,500 individuals), and Zhambyl Region with 9.3% (80,300 individuals), but only 34,265 Oralman were registered in North Kazakhstan [NKSА, F. 998, V. 1, C. 66, p. 191]. This settlement structure reinforced the already youthful demographic profile of southern Kazakhstan while leaving northern and central regions comparatively less affected by the influx of repatriates [*Over 860 thousand ethnic Kazakhs...*, 2012].

Between 1991 and January 1, 2016, a total of 261,104 families, comprising 957,772 ethnic Kazakhs, returned to their historical homeland and acquired the legal status of Oralman (repatriates). This group accounted for approximately 5.5% of the total population of Kazakhstan, according to data from the Ministry of Health and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The majority of repatriates originated from neighboring countries: 61.6% from Uzbekistan, 14.2% from China, 9.2% from Mongolia, 6.8% from Turkmenistan, 4.6% from Russia, and 3.6% from other states.

From a demographic and socioeconomic perspective, the program facilitated both population growth and the rejuvenation of labor resources. 55.6% of repatriates were of working age, 39.9% were children under 18, and 4.5% were retirees. In terms of educational attainment, among the working-age group 8.8% held higher education degrees, 20.6% had specialized secondary education, 60.8% had general secondary education, while 9.8% lacked formal education [*Over 957 thousand Oralmans...*, 2016].

From a demographic perspective, the resettlement program played a dual role. At the national level, it bolstered Kazakhstan's population growth during a period of natural decline and outmigration, thereby contributing to demographic stability. At the regional level, however, the concentration of Oralman in the south accentuated existing territorial asymmetries. While southern Kazakhstan benefited from population growth, labor force rejuvenation, and the preservation of ethnic identity, northern regions remained vulnerable to depopulation and aging trends.

Thus, the 25-year implementation of the resettlement program demonstrates its dual impact: on one hand, strengthening Kazakhstan's demographic potential and labor resources, and on the other, intensifying regional disparities, particularly through the concentration of returnees in the southern territories.

Recent decades in Kazakhstan have witnessed targeted efforts to address demographic and socioeconomic disparities through strategic population management, highlighting the importance of migration, labor mobility, and regional development policies in shaping national demographic patterns. In response to the intra-regional demographic imbalances, "a series of employment and resettlement programs were implemented from 2011 to 2021" [*Resolution of the Government*, 2022]. Notably, during the 2017–2020 period alone, approximately 32,000 individuals were resettled under these programs to the Akmola, East Kazakhstan, Kostanay, Pavlodar, and North Kazakhstan Regions, with around half of them being of working age. Relocation to the North Kazakhstan Region is "predominantly driven by family-related factors. Specifically, 7% of migrants moved due to marriage, 6% as a result of divorce, and 9% in order to provide their children with access to comprehensive education" [NKSА, F. 998, In. 1, C. 13, p. 6]. These resettlement and employment initiatives reflect a strategic approach by the Kazakhstani government to mitigate regional demographic imbalances by redistributing the population, particularly the working-age cohort, to areas with declining population density.

STATE MEASURES

The state has repeatedly taken measures to promote demographic development. Demographic policy is an integral part of the state policy of Kazakhstan. Since demographic measures are designed for the current period of stabilization of the socio-economic situation and the transition to sustainable economic development of the country in the long-term perspective. On August 17, 2000, the Concept of State Demographic Policy was adopted, which represents the basic principles, priorities and tasks of the country's demographic development. In this Concept, demographic development is understood as a set of political, administrative, economic and socio-psychological measures aimed at stimulating population growth, meeting current and future needs: "The state demographic policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan is implemented through a balanced ideological and well-founded financial and economic policy. Economic, administrative, legal and socio-psychological measures of influence are used as the main methods of demographic policy" [*Resolution of the Government No. 1272, 2000*].

Given the demographic situation, several national programs were introduced, including "Health of the Population", "Education", "Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Republic of Kazakhstan", "Protection of Maternal and Child Health in the Republic of Kazakhstan" and "Youth of Kazakhstan". These state initiatives aimed to improve public health and well-being, reduce unemployment, and support families. As a result, since 2000, Kazakhstan has achieved socioeconomic stability, leading to positive natural population growth. The birth rate increased to 4.9 ‰ in 2000, 8.05 ‰ in 2005, and 13.5 ‰ in 2009 [Zholdybekova, 2002, p. 35].

Kazakhstan's repatriation policy aligns with global trends seen in post-Soviet states, such as Russia's Compatriots Program and Germany's repatriation of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe. However, Kazakhstan's policy uniquely emphasizes reintegration within rural communities, thereby addressing labor shortages in the agricultural sector. The long-term demographic effects suggest that repatriates have contributed to reversing population decline, particularly in rural areas where birth rates were previously falling.

Compared with 1991, the population of Kazakhstan in 2020 has increased by 14.8% and today it is more than 19 million people. For men, life expectancy increased by 4.5 years and amounted to 67.1 years, for women it increased by 3.1 years and amounted to 75.5 years. To date, the total fertility rate is 3.13 births per woman, which is the highest figure since independence. [*National Census, 2023*]. Kazakhstan has created a multi-level social protection system, which consists of more than 40 types of payments and provides support to various vulnerable categories of the population. Due to the measures taken, Kazakhstan has achieved a significant reduction in poverty over the past 16 years. In 2006-2022, the absolute poverty rate decreased from 18.2% to 5.2% [*Decree No. 611, 2024*].

In conclusion, the population structure of Kazakhstan at the beginning of 2023 reflects the cumulative outcomes of demographic trends and population dynamics over the past three decades, highlighting urbanization patterns, ethnic composition, and the demographic dependency burden that continue to shape the country's socioeconomic development. As of early 2023, "the total population of Kazakhstan was 19,766,807, with 12,265,594 (62%) living in urban areas and 7,501,213 (38%) in rural areas. The gender composition indicates a slight predominance of females, with 10,119,106 women compared to 9,647,701 men. Ethnic composition data highlights a clear predominance of Kazakhs, who accounted for 13,965,938 individuals (70.7%), followed by Russians: 3,000,632 (15.2%) and Uzbeks: 643,376 (3.3%). Urbanization patterns show significant regional disparities. The highest share of urban population was observed in Karagandy (81.3%), Ulytau (79.1%), and Aktobe (74.6%), whereas Almaty (19.6%) and Turkestan (24.7%) Regions had the lowest urban population shares. The demographic dependency ratio at the beginning of

2023 was 740.05 per 1,000 working-age population, comprising 542.45 individuals under working age and 197.59 individuals above working age. This indicates a relatively high demographic burden on the labor force, with significant implications for social policy, healthcare provision, and labor market planning” [*National Census*, 2023].

CONCLUSION

The demographic evolution of Kazakhstan from 1990 to 2023 reveals a profound regional asymmetry shaped by historical, ethnocultural, and socioeconomic dynamics. The study’s comparative analysis of the Turkestan Region in the south and the North Kazakhstan Region in the north illustrates diverging demographic trajectories that reflect both structural and policy-driven factors. The Turkestan Region has consistently exhibited high birth rates and positive natural population growth, serving as a demographic engine of the republic. This growth is primarily attributed to a youthful population structure, cultural preferences for larger families, and low mortality rates. Even during periods of national crisis, including the economic downturns of the 1990s and the COVID-19 pandemic, the southern region maintained resilient fertility levels and demographic stability.

In contrast, the North Kazakhstan Region has experienced persistent demographic stagnation and decline, with low birth rates, high mortality, negative natural growth, and a steadily aging population. These challenges are further exacerbated by significant outmigration – particularly of youth – to more economically dynamic southern and central urban centers. The ethnic composition of the region, with a historically high proportion of non-Kazakh populations, has also contributed to lower fertility rates and weakened demographic renewal. From 1991 to 2023, while the south consistently recorded natural population increases above 20‰, the north frequently faced negative growth rates, peaking at -6.3‰ in the late 1990s and remaining negative or stagnant into the 2020s.

These findings confirm that demographic disparities between Kazakhstan’s regions are not transitory but systemic. They underscore the urgency of adopting regionally differentiated policies aimed at demographic revitalization in the north, including incentives for youth retention, fertility stimulation, internal migration support, and expanded social infrastructure. Simultaneously, the demographic potential of the south must be strategically leveraged through investment in education, healthcare, and employment to sustain its positive trajectory. A balanced and proactive national demographic policy will be essential to ensure equitable regional development and long-term socio-economic sustainability for Kazakhstan as a whole.

The primary objective of demographic policy is to address and reverse negative trends in demographic processes, prevent depopulation, and ensure both quantitative and qualitative population growth in alignment with the country’s long-term development strategy. In the implementation of demographic policy, state institutions are tasked with several key responsibilities: improving public health, with particular emphasis on reproductive health; reducing mortality rates and consequently increasing life expectancy; stabilizing the birth rate and subsequently raising it to a level sufficient to ensure full generational replacement and the establishment of an expanded population reproduction regime. Additional priorities include enhancing family living conditions, strengthening family and marital relations, managing migration flows, fostering greater societal and individual responsibility for population health, and mitigating the adverse effects of environmental disasters.

The measures undertaken by Kazakhstan following the attainment of independence reflect a comprehensive approach to addressing demographic challenges. These measures include the repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs (Oralmans), material support for families and children, internal migration policies, social reforms, and infrastructure development. Despite notable achievements –

such as population growth from 14.9 million in 1999 to 20.1 million in 2023 – significant regional disparities persist. These imbalances necessitate the adaptation of demographic strategies with a particular focus on supporting northern and depopulating regions.

ABBREVIATIONS

NKSA – North Kazakhstan State Archive

TRSA – Turkestan Regional State Archive

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