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FEATURES OF ETHNO-DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENT OF EASTERN KAZAKHSTAN IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER REGIONS OF REPUBLIC

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Abstract. Introduction. This article examines the demographic development of East Kazakhstan region during Kazakhstan's independence period from an ethnic perspective. During the Soviet era, the proportion of Slavic ethnic groups, particularly Russians, predominated in the region, whilst Kazakhs mainly resided in rural areas. After 1991, geopolitical changes, migration waves, and repatriation had a significant impact on the region's ethno-demographic structure. Under these conditions, the Kazakh ethnos gradually became demographically dominant. Eastern Kazakhstan represents an important zone of interaction between ethnic changes, migration, and urbanisation, making it a distinct subject of scientific interest. Research objective. *Goals and objectives* are to analyse ethno-demographic changes in Eastern Kazakhstan compared to other regions during the inter-census period (1989–2021) and examine the causes and consequences of this transformation. The evolution of the ethnic structure of the population, urbanisation dynamics, and identification of migration movement patterns became the research objectives. Eastern Kazakhstan reflects nationwide processes: mono-ethnicisation, changes in age structure, and population reproduction. *Results.* The following demographic characteristics were identified: the proportion of Kazakhs in the population structure increased from 38 % to 63 %, whilst Russians and other Slavic ethnic groups decreased from 60.4 % to 29.6 %. The proportion of urban population increased substantially. The urbanisation process contributed to active adaptation, primarily of Kazakhs, to the urban environment. Migration movements of the 1990s–2000s had the greatest impact on ethnic composition. Despite

mono-ethnicisation trends, regional differences, historically established features, and sociocultural factors continue to play an important role. *Conclusions.* During the years of independence, the ethno-demographic situation in East Kazakhstan has changed significantly. Due to the regional geopolitical developments that occurred after 1991, a process of mass migration of ethnic Kazakhs back to their historical homeland began. This process was influenced by the settlement of newcomers in Zaisan, Ayagoz, Tarbagatai, Zharm, and Abai districts, as well as Semey. This led to an increase in the number of Kazakh people in these areas. The government's policies to address social issues, provide employment, and promote the use of the state language have led to fundamental changes in the cultural, linguistic, and social structures of the region, which are crucial for strengthening interethnic relations and national integrity.

Keywords: Ethno-demographic development, regional features, urbanisation, migration, ethnic composition, population census, Kazakh ethnos, social structure

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РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫНЫҢ БАСҚА ӨНІРЛЕРІМЕН САЛЫСТЫРҒАНДА ШЫҒЫС ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ ЭТНОДЕМОГРАФИЯЛЫҚ ДАМУ ЕРЕКШЕЛІКТЕРІ

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Аңдатпа. *Kipicne.* Осы мақалада этникалық аспектіде Қазақстанның тәуелсіздігі кезеңінде Шығыс Қазақстан облысының демографиялық дамуы жан-жақты зерттеледі. Кеңес заманында славян этностары, әсіресе орыстар өкілдерінің үлесі аймақта басым болды, ал қазақтар негізінен ауылдық жерлерде тұрды. 1991 жылдан кейін геосаяси өзгерістер, көші-қон толқындары, репатриация аймақтың этнодемографиялық құрылымына айтарлықтай әсер етті. Мұндай жағдайда қазақ этносы демографиялық тұрғыдан біртіндеп үстемдік ете бастады. Шығыс Қазақстан этникалық өзгерістердің, көші-қон мен урбанизацияның өзара

іс-қимылының маңызды аймағын білдіреді, бұл оны ғылыми қызығушылықтың жеке объектісіне айналдырады. *Зерттеудің мақсаты.* Бұл зерттеу санақаралық кезеңдегі (1989–2021 жж.) басқа өңірлермен салыстырғанда Шығыс Қазақстандағы этнодемографиялық өзгерістерді талдауға және осы трансформацияның себептері мен салдарын зерттеуге бағытталған. Халықтың этникалық құрылымының эволюциясы, урбанизация динамикасы және көші-қон қозғалысының ерекшеліктерін анықтау зерттеу міндеттеріне айналды. Шығыс Қазақстан жалпы қазақстандық процестерді көрсетеді: моноэтнизация, жас құрылымының өзгеруі және халықтың көбеюі. *Зерттеу нәтижелері.* Келесі демографиялық сипаттамалар анықталды: халық құрылымындағы қазақтардың үлес салмағы 38 %-дан 63 %-ға дейін өсті, ал орыс және басқа славян этностары 60,4 %-дан 29,6 %-ға дейін қысқарды. Қала тұрғындарының үлесі едәуір өсті. Урбанизация процесі, ең алдымен, қазақтардың қалалық ортаға белсенді бейімделуіне ықпал етті. Этникалық құрамға ең үлкен әсер 1990–2000 жылдардағы көші-қон қозғалыстары болды. Моноэтнизация тенденцияларына қарамастан, аймақтық айырмашылықтар, тарихи қалыптасқан ерекшеліктер мен әлеуметтік-мәдени факторлар маңызды рөл атқаруда. *Қорытындылар.* Тәуелсіздік жылдарында Шығыс Қазақстан облысындағы этнодемографиялық жағдай едәуір өзгерістер орын алды. 1991 жылдан кейінгі өңірлік геосаяси үдерістердің нәтижесінде этникалық қазақтардың тарихи отанына жаппай оралу үдерісі басталды. Қандастардың Зайсан, Аягөз, Тарбағатай, Жарма, Абай аудандарына және Семей қаласына қоныстануы қазақ этносының сандық өсіміне әсер етті. Әлеуметтік мәселелерді шешу, жұмыспен қамту және мемлекеттік тілді дамытуға бағытталған мемлекеттік саясаттың нәтижесінде этнос өкілдерінің мәдени, тілдік және әлеуметтік құрылымына түбегейлі өзгерістер еніп, бұл өзгерістер өңірдегі этносаралық қатынастарды нығайту мен ұлттық тұтастықты қалыптастыруда шешуші рөл атқарды.

Түйін сөздер: Этнодемографиялық даму, өңірлік ерекшеліктер, урбанизация, көші-қон, этникалық құрылым, халық санағы, Шығыс Қазақстан, қазақ этносы, әлеуметтік құрылым

Алғыс айту. Мақала Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігі Ғылым комитетінің қаржылық қолдауымен жүзеге асырылған «Тәуелсіз Қазақстанның шағын және моноқалаларының күнделікті өмірі (Шығыс өңірінің мысалында)» АР23488712 ГҚ жобасы аясында жазылды.


Дәйексөз үшін: Махметова Н.А., Аубакирова Ж.С., Марғұлан А.С. Республикасының басқа өңірлерімен салыстырғанда Шығыс қазақстанның этнодемографиялық даму ерекшеліктері // Asian Journal “Steppe Panorama”. 2025. Т. 12. № 4. 1130–1148 бб. (Ағылш.).

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ОСОБЕННОСТИ ЭТНОДЕМОГРАФИЧЕСКОГО РАЗВИТИЯ ВОСТОЧНОГО КАЗАХСТАНА В СРАВНЕНИИ С ДРУГИМИ РЕГИОНАМИ РЕСПУБЛИКИ


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Аннотация. *Введение.* В настоящей статье комплексно исследуется демографическое развитие Восточно-Казахстанской области в период независимости Казахстана в этническом аспекте. В советское время доля представителей славянских этносов, особенно русских, в регионе преобладала, тогда как казахи в основном проживали в сельской местности. После 1991 года геополитические изменения, миграционные волны, репатриация оказали существенное влияние на этнодемографическую структуру региона. В этих условиях казахский этнос стал постепенно доминировать в демографическом отношении. Восточный Казахстан представляет собой важную зону взаимодействия этнических изменений, миграции и урбанизации, что делает его отдельным объектом научного интереса. *Цель исследования.* Это исследование направлено на анализ этнодемографических изменений в Восточном Казахстане в сравнении с другими регионами в межпереписной период (1989–2021 гг.) и изучение причин и последствий этой трансформации. Эволюция этнической структуры населения, динамика урбанизации и выявление особенностей миграционного движения стали задачами исследования. Восточный Казахстан отражает общеказахстанские процессы: моноэтнизации, изменения возрастной структуры и воспроизводства населения. *Результаты.* Были выявлены следующие демографические характеристики: удельный вес казахов в структуре населения вырос с 38% до 63%, а русских и других славянских этносов сократился с 60,4 % до 29,6 %. Существенно выросла доля городского населения. Процесс урбанизации способствовал активной адаптации, прежде всего, казахов к городской среде. Наибольшее влияние на этнический состав оказали миграционные движения 1990–2000-х годов. Несмотря на тенденции моноэтнизации, региональные различия, исторически сложившиеся особенности и социокультурные факторы продолжают играть важную роль. *Заключение.* За годы независимости этно-демографическая ситуация в Восточно-Казахстанской области значительно изменилась. В результате региональных геополитических процессов, произошедших после 1991 года, начался процесс массового возвращения этнических казахов на историческую родину. Расселение кандасов в Зайсанском, Аягозском, Тарбагатайском, Жарминском, Абайском районах и г. Семей повлияло на количественное увеличение казахского этноса. В результате государственной политики по решению социальных вопросов, трудоустройства, развитие государственного языка произошли кардинальные изменения, повлиявшие на его культурную, языковую и социальную структуру, играющих решающую роль в процессе укрепления межэтнических отношений и национальной целостности региона. **Ключевые слова:** Этнодемографическое развитие, региональные особенности, урбанизация, миграция, этнический состав, перепись населения, казахский этнос, социальная структура **Благодарность.** Статья написана в рамках реализации грантового проекта AP23488712 «Повседневность малых и моногородов Независимого Казахстана (на примере Восточного региона)» при финансовой поддержке Комитета науки Министерства науки и высшего образования Республики Казахстан. **Для цитирования:** Махметова Н.А., Аубакирова Ж.С., Маргулан А.С. Особенности этнодемографического развития Восточного Казахстана в сравнении с другими регионами Республики // Asian Journal “Steppe Panorama”. 2025. Т. 12. № 4. С. 1130–1148. (На Англ.). DOI: 10.51943/2710-3994_2025_12_4_1130-1148

Introduction

The period following the Republic of Kazakhstan's independence opened the way for ethno-demographic processes in the country to develop with new content and in new directions. Whilst these changes encompassed all regions of the republic, their manifestation varied in each area. Among these, East Kazakhstan region stands out with its historical, geographical, and social peculiarities. During the Soviet period, this region was known for having a high proportion of Slavic ethnic groups – particularly Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and German peoples. The Kazakh ethnos was mainly located in rural areas and played an insignificant role in the social structure. During this period, most important positions in the social hierarchy belonged to representatives of non-titular ethnic groups.

The political and social changes that occurred during the years of independence, the change in direction of migration flows, the arrival of ethnic Kazakhs returning to their historical homeland, and the acceleration of urbanisation processes led to fundamental renewal of the ethno-demographic structure in Eastern Kazakhstan. These changes reshaped inter-ethnic balance in the region and caused the Kazakh ethnos to rise to a leading position in the demographic and social space.

This article analyses the ethno-demographic development of the Eastern Kazakhstan region based on historical statistical data, examining regional features, cause-and-effect relationships of demographic processes, and their social consequences. The findings of the study offer a chance to present solid scientific insights that can contribute to fostering inter-ethnic harmony and shaping regional strategies.

In the 1990s, mass migration of Kazakhs from villages to cities began. This flow differed from the dominant migration flow. Cultural attitudes were transported from one location, where people had previously lived according to their cultural norms, to another location. In the Soviet era, rural migrants were generally prepared to adjust to the city, to embrace its regulations, and to conform to the existing urban environment.

Numerous scholarly works have been published on the subject of demographic shifts in Kazakhstan during the latter half of the XXth century. However, there is a dearth of scholarly inquiry into the East Kazakhstan region. Alekseenko N.V. has provided a comprehensive account of East Kazakhstan's history through the lens of documents and materials in their work titled "History of East Kazakhstan in Documents and Materials" (Alekseenko, 2007). Additionally, Alekseenko A.N. has offered a detailed examination of the ethnic composition of the East Kazakhstan region in their textbook titled "Peoples of East Kazakhstan". (Alekseenko, 1994)

In science, the regional features of demographic development in Kazakhstan are considered as "ethno-demographic regions" and divided into regions, as they are formed under the influence of high ethnic differentiation (Aubakirova, 2010: 27). Ethno-demographic regions are territories that differ from others by their demographic development features, population reproduction regimes, and have interconnection and integrity of their constituent elements (ethnic composition, population size, natural growth, settlement type, etc.). At the same time, considering this integrity as an objective condition and natural result of the demographic development of ethnic groups in this territory over a long historical period, one can conclude that the regional features of demographic development in Kazakhstan were formed under the influence of clear ethnic differentiation (Aubakirova, 2010: 31). This potential accumulation was formed over a long historical period as a result of the patterns of natural population movement, as well as under the influence of state policy – regulation of certain demographic processes (for example, population settlement, its size, migration flows, etc.). Gradually, Kazakhstan's ethnic composition is changing, moving towards a mono-ethnic direction, with Kazakhs becoming the majority of the population. Kazakhstan's unified demographic system is being formed, which Kazakhs are defining for the first time in new history. However, the mono-ethnic composition of the population does not lead to homogeneity of demographic processes; regional specificity remains clear, based on previously formed different types of reproduction that arose under the influence of the entire complex of socio-economic, socio-cultural, and historical features of Kazakhstan's regions.

The Kazakh demographic system can be considered in two periods: the nomadic period and the USSR period. That is, it was characterised by ethnic, distinct socio-cultural and socio-economic isolation in which traditional birth coefficients were maintained. The demographic indicators of Kazakhs particularly demonstrated these features. They did not reflect urban lifestyle, industrial employment structure, etc. Kazakhs entered the sovereign period on this basis. They became the majority of the population, including in cities. The political factor that inevitably occurs during the formation of a sovereign state and the construction of a sovereign state system becomes a determinant. In the 2000s, demographic development was proceeding based on the Kazakh ethnos. In the 1990s, there was a "preparation" period for creating a new ethno-demographic situation (approaching mono-ethnicism). The ethnic environment of political and economic institutions was formed. Social structures were established where Kazakhs occupied key positions. They became a demographic majority both in the Republic of Kazakhstan generally and in cities. Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century (1999 census), the foundation of the Kazakh demographic system was established.

At the end of the XXth century, amid political upheavals, the Soviet "Europeanised" demographic system was destroyed, and the foundation of a sovereign system based on the socio-cultural and socio-economic advantages of the Kazakh ethnos was laid. The results of the 1999 population census provided new data about the demographic changes that had formed in the republic. In 1999, the population decreased by 9.2 %. During the comparison of statistical data, we observed ethnic differentiations. Precisely during this period, the number of Kazakhs exceeded fifty percent of the population for the first time (53.4 %), comprising an equal half. Meanwhile, the numbers of other ethnic groups decreased: the Russian ethnos by 27.6 %, Ukrainians by 42.8%, and Germans by 2.7 times. Although the Kazakh population increased, this did not significantly affect the number of people. Consequently, the overall population declined. Consequently, the overall population declined. (Aubakirova et al., 2023: 20).

Materials and Methods

During the research, official data from the Statistics Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan, results of population censuses (1989, 1999, 2009, 2021), ethno-demographic literature, and scientific articles were used. The research was conducted using qualitative and quantitative approaches, identifying demographic indicators and regional characteristics of each ethnos.

The timeframes for the research were categorized into three distinct historical phases:

1. End of the Soviet period (1989).
2. First decade of independence (1991–2000).
3. Period of economic stabilisation and active execution of the national strategy (after 2000).

Materials were examined structurally and dynamically. The extent of urbanisation, migration patterns, and demographic trends were contrasted at the regional scale.

The research employed comparative-historical approach, statistical techniques, content and cartographic analyses.

Ethnic characteristics mainly determine significant territorial differences in demographic processes, age-gender structure and family size, population movement, and forms of economic activity and settlement. An ethnos is usually considered a historically formed stable community of individuals with a common language, common characteristics of culture, psyche, and self-identification, standing under its own name and established (in ethnonym). Additionally, the composition of the population influences the political and economic trends occurring in the state. The population develops as a result of the long historical process of mixed ethnic group representatives.

In the first decades after Kazakhstan gained independence, significant changes occurred in the country's socio-economic structure. One of these was urbanization – the movement of population to cities and active development of urban lifestyle. This trend not only changed the settlement structure of the population but also significantly affected the economy, infrastructure, culture, and state governance system. Although the process of urbanization in Kazakhstan started during

the Soviet era, it took a new turn after 1991. During 1999–2009, economic crises, migration processes, and changes in city statuses influenced the pace of urbanisation.

Discussion

Scientific research dedicated to Kazakhstan's ethno-demographic development encompasses a wide range of issues and is being conducted across various theoretical and methodological directions. The first systematic studies in this field began at the end of the Soviet period and, after independence, developed within new methodological paradigms closely linked to national policy, migration, and changes in ethnic structure. (Aubakirova et al., 2024: 203–214)

The theoretical foundation of the research drew upon the works of domestic scholars such as A. Alekseenko and M. Tatimov. Aubakirova Zh.S. first introduced the concept of "ethno-demographic regions" and analysed demographic characteristics at the regional level. This concept enables comprehensive assessment of ethnic composition, migration patterns, natural growth, and socio-cultural factors in each region. Particular attention was given to Kazakhstan's eastern region. (Alekseenko, Aubakirova, 2020: 16; Tatimov, 1975: 21)

Among foreign researchers, the works of specialists in demography and urbanisation such as Rowland D.T. and Dave B. provided a foundation for broader consideration of the characteristics of urbanisation and ethnic migration in Kazakhstan. According to their assessments, migration is important not only economically but also as an indicator of social identity and cultural integration. They examine inter-ethnic relations, state language policy, and national identity issues in Kazakhstan, analysing the characteristics of nation-building processes in the post-Soviet space. They link the Kazakh ethnos becoming the demographic core of the state with institutional changes (Rowland, 2003: 432; Dave, 2007: 16–17).

Similarly, A. Uskelenova and N. Nikiforova in their works offer a comprehensive approach by applying SWOT analysis methodology to ethno-demographic transformation whilst analysing the development characteristics and historical preconditions of Kazakhstan's regions. The research content is aimed at proving the impact of migration and urbanisation at the regional level on ethnic structure (Uskelenova, Nikiforova, 2024: 11).

A. Ualtayeva and her research team, who studied Eastern Kazakhstan, analyse the urbanisation process and development dynamics of small cities, connecting them with historical migration processes. They examine the interrelationship and adaptation process between urbanisation and ethno-demographic structure within an ethnological context (Ualtayeva, et al., 2024: 96–110; Ualtayeva, 2006: 352–353).

Within the historiographical framework, N. Abdinassir, S. Kovalskaya, A.S. Adilbayeva, and A.B. Bakytzhanova deserve particular attention. They characterise domestic and foreign historiography of studying Kazakhstan's population ethnic structure by dividing it into three periods – imperial, Soviet, and independence – conducting comparative analysis. This research enables understanding of methodological aspects of ethno-demographic development evolution (Abdinassir, Kovalskaya, 2025: 9–10; Adilbayeva, 2023: 25–26; Adilbayeva, Bakytzhanova, 2024: 27).

In joint work by A. Saparbekova and Czech researchers, migration movements of the late XIXth and early XXth centuries are considered as factors influencing ethnic structure changes. They substantiate historical data with quantitative indicators, identifying historical patterns of demographic trends (Saparbekova et al., 2014).

In recent years, particular attention has been paid to the interrelationship between ethno-demographic processes and urbanisation. G. Dauletova and colleagues in their research analyse rural and urban population ratios, examining ethnic composition changes in new phases of urbanisation. They link urbanisation's new character with ethno-social adaptation processes (Dauletova et al., 2025: 72–73).

Additionally, G. Ilyassova, T. Sadykov, I. Zherebtsov, and G. Dinmukhammed extensively analyze the evolution of Kazakhstan's ethnic demographics in their research. Their research scientifically explains the impact of state policy in regulating inter-ethnic relations, as well

as post-Soviet migration flows on ethno-demographic structure. Researchers, whilst analysing historical statistical materials, clearly demonstrate the interdependence between demographic processes and national policy (Ilyassova et al., 2023: 132–139; Dinmuhammed, 2022: 225–227)

Among researchers studying the demographic situation, ethnic composition, urban and rural population, and ethno-demographic processes of the Eastern Kazakhstan region, we note the papers of G. Pankovskaya, T. Kamaldzhanova, R. Akhmetova and Sh. Shyngysbaeva, A. Saipov, Zh. Alkanova (Pankovskaya, 2008: 129; Kamaldzhanova, Akhmetova, 2024: 89–99; Shyngysbaeva, Saipov, 2022: 4–13; Alkanova, 2024: 76–85).

The publications mentioned above provide additional information on the ethno-demographic development of Kazakhstan and aim to provide a comprehensive study of the regional characteristics. As this historiographical review demonstrates, the study of ethno-demographic processes is an important scientific direction in determining national integrity, social stability, and future strategies.

In 1999, approximately 56 % of Kazakhstan's population lived in rural areas and 44 % in cities. In 2009, this indicator remained practically unchanged. In 2021, the urban population share reached 59.1 %, demonstrating a revival of the urbanisation process.

Table 1. Urban and rural population numbers by region (1999–2021) (National composition, 2021: 7–10)

Regions	1999		2009		2021	
	city	village	city	village	city	village
Republic of Kazakhstan	56,0	44,0	56,1	43,9	61,2	38,8
Akmola	45,5	54,5	47,0	55,7	53,0	44,3
Aktobe	56,2	43,8	66,9	74,1	33,1	25,9
Almaty	29,8	70,2	24,6	25,4	75,4	74,6
Atyrau	58,2	41,8	52,0	55,1	48,0	44,9
West Kazakhstan	40,8	59,2	46,0	55,7	54,0	44,3
Zhambyl	46,2	53,8	40,7	43,0	59,3	57,0
Karaganda	82,2	17,8	77,5	80,6	22,5	19,4
Kostanay	54,2	45,8	52,2	61,2	47,8	38,8
Kyzylorda	60,5	39,5	41,9	46,8	58,1	53,2
Mangystau	78,4	21,6	50,9	45,3	49,1	54,7
Pavlodar	63,4	36,6	68,0	70,5	32,0	29,5
North Kazakhstan	37,8	62,2	40,0	48,0	60,0	52,0
Turkistan	40,0	60,0	21,3	24,3	78,7	75,7
East Kazakhstan	58,8	41,2	57,4	63,1	42,6	36,9

The ratio of urban and rural population is one of the important indicators characterising a state's demographic, social, and economic development level. The level of urbanisation determines the structure in the labour market, migration flows, infrastructure policy, and regional development characteristics. The table above shows the demographic structure of Kazakhstan's regions, particularly the proportion of urban and rural population, based on census data from 1999, 2009, and 2021.

The 1999 census was a time when the consequences of the post-Soviet transitional period were still clearly felt. In Soviet industrialised regions (Karaganda, Pavlodar, Mangystau), the proportion of urban population was high because coal, oil, metallurgy, and chemical industries had developed in these regions. For example: In Karaganda region, the proportion of urban population was 82.2 %, which is explained by the development of coal production during the Soviet period and the abundance of mono-cities such as Zhezkazgan, Temirtau, and Saran. In Mangystau region – 78.4 %, where the formation of Caspian oil and gas complexes that began in the 1960s played a decisive role (Tatimov, 1975. 32).

Conversely, in agriculturally oriented regions, rural population predominated. For example: Almaty region – rural population 70.2 %; Zhambyl region – 53.8 %. This was connected with the preservation of the Soviet system's collective farm structure oriented towards agriculture, slow urban development, and insufficient infrastructure.

In the 2010s, economic growth began in Kazakhstan. New industrial programmes and state projects such as “Ak Bulak” and “Road Map” gave new impetus to the urbanisation process. (Resolution, 2011; Resolution, 2015) The urbanisation process in Kazakhstan over the past 20 years proceeded at different rates and for different reasons:

- In industrial regions (Karaganda, Pavlodar), former Soviet cities went through a period of decline.
- In southern regions (Turkistan, Almaty), new administrative decisions and investments caused sharp growth in the urban proportion.
- In northern regions, urban population is increasing through migration and state programmes.

These changes directly affect social policy, transport infrastructure, education, and the labour market. Therefore, urbanisation must be considered not merely as a quantitative indicator but as a complex historical-social phenomenon (Dave, 2007: 18–20).

Dynamics of Urban Population Share in Kazakhstan Regions (1999–2021)

Қазақстан облыстарындағы қала халқының үлесі динамикасы (1999–2021)

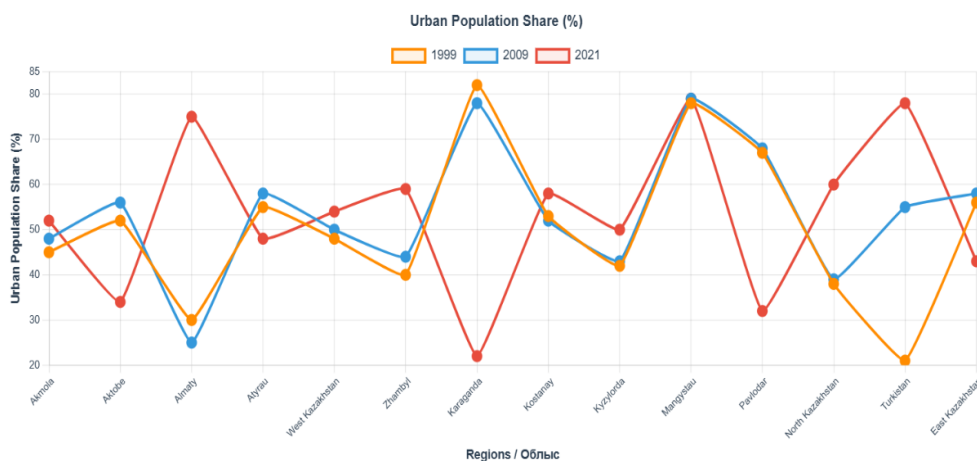


Figure 2 – Dynamics of urban population share in Kazakhstan regions (1999–2021)
(National composition, 2021: 12–16)

Figure 1 depicts the dynamics of change in the urban population share across Kazakhstan's 14 regions in 1999, 2009, and 2021. As evident from the graph, the level of urbanisation across the republic has developed at different rates over the past two decades. This is related to each region's socio-economic situation, historical development characteristics, and the direction of state policy.

Overall, the presented data demonstrates that urbanisation trends in Kazakhstan have not proceeded uniformly, with each region having its own development trajectory characteristics. The main factors affecting urbanisation levels include changes in administrative status, migration dynamics, regional policy direction, and concentration of infrastructure and employment opportunities.

Regions with high urbanisation momentum:

Almaty region: Whilst the urban population share was 29.8 % in 1999, it reached 75.4 % in 2021. This indicator shows intensive urbanisation in the region, expansion of the Almaty agglomeration, as well as an increase in the number of settlements that gained city status.

Turkistan region: Sharp increase from 21.3 % in 2009 to 78.7 % in 2021. Such significant growth is related to Turkistan city gaining regional centre status in 2018 and infrastructure investments directed towards it.

North Kazakhstan region: The urbanisation indicator grew from 37.8 % in 1999 to 60 % in 2021. This change may be the result of state programmes (such as “Serpin”) aimed at attracting labour resources from southern regions.

Regions with reverse trends or instability:

Karaganda region: A sharp decrease from a high urbanisation indicator of 82.2% in 1999 to 22.5% in 2021 was recorded. This data may be related to statistical inconsistencies or administrative-territorial changes, as such a sudden change cannot be explained by natural demographic factors.

Pavlodar and Aktobe regions: The urban population share somewhat decreased from 1999 to 2021. This can be linked to reduced economic activity in mono-cities (e.g., Ekibastuz, Khromtau) as well as external migration processes.

Regions with observed urban-rural population balance:

Akmola, Kostanay, and West Kazakhstan regions have urban and rural population ratios positioned around 50 %. These regions show balanced development of urbanisation and rural life. Such structure can be considered as a manifestation of socio-economic stability and infrastructural balance.

Between 1999–2021, the urbanisation process in Kazakhstan proceeded at different rates, with regional differences clearly observed. Whilst urbanisation accelerated rapidly in some regions (Almaty, Pavlodar, NKR), in others the rural population share increased (Aktobe, Atyrau, EKR). These differences are related not only to economic factors but also to historical, ethnic, and migration characteristics.

The demographic potential accumulated by Kazakhs in the 1950s-80s became the foundation for the successful functioning of the sovereign demographic system (Table 2).

Table 2. Population size and composition of Kazakhstan according to population censuses of 1989, 1999, 2009, 2021 (thousands of people) (Note – Compiled based on literature (Statisticheskii sbornik, 1991: 70), (National composition, 2021: 22–25))

Ethnic Groups	1989		1999		2009		2021	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total population	16464,5	100	14953,1	100	16009,6	100	19196.0	100
Kazakhs	6534,6	39,7	7985,0	53,4	10096,8	63,1	13497.9	70,3
Russians	6227,5	37,8	4509,6	30,2	3793,8	23,7	2981.9	15,5
Uzbeks	332,0	2,0	370,6	2,5	456,9	2,9	614,0	3,2
Ukrainians	875,7	5,4	547,1	3,7	333,0	2,1	387,3	2,0
Other ethnic groups	2512,7	15,2	1540,8	10,3	1329,1	8,3	1714,9	8,9

During the final years of the Soviet period, ethno-demographic trends during the years of independence led to significant changes in the national composition of the population. Whilst the proportion of the Kazakh people increased from 39.7 % to 68.4 %, the proportion of ethnic groups such as Russians, Ukrainians, and Germans sharply decreased. These processes occurred under the influence of factors such as migration, repatriation, natural growth, and assimilation.

Research results show that ethno-demographic changes in Eastern Kazakhstan have gradually moved towards mono-ethnicisation. Although this process proceeded more slowly compared to other regions of Kazakhstan, it took on a stable character despite regional historical characteristics and demographic inertia. Regional differences, migration policy, social infrastructure, and economic development levels directly influenced ethnic structure. Additionally, the adaptation of ethnic Kazakhs to urbanisation and the increase in their proportion in urban society is also affecting the spread of state language and culture. The results obtained during the research can serve as an important foundation for forming demographic, linguistic, and cultural policies at republican and regional levels and ensuring inter-ethnic stability.

Results

In the 1990s, mass migration of rural Kazakhs to cities began. This migration took on a different character from previous Soviet urbanization – Kazakhs began not only adapting to the urban environment but also creating new social space based on their own culture. The proportion of the Kazakh ethnos grew from 39.7 % in 1989 to 70.3 % in 2021. This trend was influenced by migration, the arrival of ethnic repatriates, natural growth, and ethnic assimilation.

From 1999–2021, the level of urbanisation increased across the republic. In regions such as Turkistan, Almaty, and North Kazakhstan, the proportion of urban population increased significantly. However, reverse trends or statistical inconsistencies were observed in Pavlodar and Karaganda regions.

Regional analysis showed that there is an interrelationship between ethnic structure and urbanisation. In western and southern regions, the proportion of the Kazakh ethnos predominates, whilst in the north and east this indicator increased later. In EKR and Abay regions, the proportion of Kazakhs was 38–40 % in 1989, reaching 62–63 % in 2021.

Kazakhstan's population ethnic structure underwent complex changes from the second half of the XXth century, forming its contemporary national-demographic profile. The collapse of the Soviet Union and Kazakhstan's independence directly affected ethnic composition. Analysis of these historical-social changes based on census data from 1989, 1999, 2009, and 2019 is important.

The research was conducted based on official statistical data – results of population censuses in Kazakhstan in 1989, 1999, 2009, and 2019. The proportion and absolute numbers of each ethnos within the general population were compared dynamically.

Whilst Kazakhstan's population was 16.5 million people in 1989, this indicator exceeded 18.4 million in 2019. Over 30 years, the population increased by approximately 1.9 million people. However, this growth did not affect all ethnic groups equally.

Kazakhs comprised 39.7 % of the population in 1989, whilst this indicator reached 68.4% in 2019. In absolute terms, they increased from 6.5 million to 12.6 million. This growth is explained by the following factors:

1. Natural growth – the birth rate of the Kazakh people was higher than all other ethnic groups.
2. Arrival of compatriots – during the years of independence, more than 1 million ethnic Kazakhs (from China, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Russia, and other countries) returned to the country.

In the period from 1991 to 2001, about 370,000 emigrated to the country. During this period, the vast majority of those who arrived were rural professions from Mongolia and Uzbekistan. In 2002–2011, this figure was increased by another 400 thousand people. During this period, the scale of repatriation expanded, and repatriates also began to arrive from China, Iran, Afghanistan and Russia. (Resolution, 2008) In the years 2012 to 2021, the pace of migration slowed down somewhat, with approximately 280,000 ethnic Kazakhs immigrating to the country during this decade. During this time, the admission quotas were determined at the regional level. In the period from 2022 to 2023, the migration of Kazakhs decreased, but on average, 18,000 to 20,000 people returned on a permanent basis each year. In general, by the end of 2023, more than 1,900,000 native residents had visited Kazakhstan. (National composition, 2021) As for their regional distribution, most incomer are located in the Turkestan (22–25 %) and Almaty (15–18 %) regions, as well as the Zhambyl region (10–12 %). A significant portion is also allocated to areas with high labor demand, such as Mangistau and Atyrau. (National composition, 2021)

Despite the fact that the East Kazakhstan region, including the Abai region, which was later formed, welcomed a substantial number of settlers, this number was lower than the national average. In general, the proportion of ethnic Kazakhs who relocated to the eastern regions is estimated to be between 3 % and 4 %, which amounts to approximately 35,000 to 45,000 individuals. The majority of these individuals settled in rural areas, such as Zaisan, Tarbagatai, Ayagoz, Zharma, and Abai districts. These were regions where the population had declined, leaving behind vacant homes. Additionally, a portion of the Kandases relocated to Semipalatinsk and Ust-Kamenogorsk, where they were registered in the private sector.

1. Strengthening of national identity and increase in the proportion of Kazakhs living in cities.
2. The number of Russians was 6.2 million (37.8%) in 1989, whilst this indicator was 3.47 million (18.9%) in 2019. That is, the proportional indicator decreased by nearly half. This decrease is mainly connected with migration processes.
4. Between 1990–2000, a wave of mass resettlement to Russia occurred.
5. Linguistic and cultural factors, as well as difficulties in economic adaptation, also contributed to increased migration.

The proportion of Ukrainians decreased from 5.8% to 1.5%, whilst Germans decreased from 5.8 % to 1.0 %. The main reason was the resettlement of these ethnic groups to their historical homelands (Germany, Ukraine). Most Germans left the country in the 1990s under Germany's repatriation programme. The proportion of the Uzbek people increased, with most Uzbeks concentrated in southern regions. This is territorially influenced. The increase in proportion is explained by migration and employment in Kazakhstan's labour market. The "other ethnic groups" category includes Uyghurs, Tatars, Koreans, and Caucasian peoples. Their proportion was 10.9 % in 1989 and 10.2 % in 2019. Relative stability of this group is observed (Abdakimov, 2009: 62).

Between 1989–2021, Kazakhstan's population ethnic structure underwent fundamental change. Whilst the proportion of the Kazakh people nearly doubled, the proportion of Slavic and German ethnic groups significantly decreased. This trend is the result of complex factors such as migration, natural growth, arrival of compatriots, peoples returning to their historical homeland, and strengthening of national identity. Although Kazakhstan's current ethnic structure is based on a stable multi-ethnic society model, Kazakh national predominance has been established.

According to statistical data, fundamental changes in Kazakhstan's ethnic composition are observed at the end of the XXth century and beginning of the XXIst century. The dynamics of the state's population are determined by Kazakhs. From 1989–2021, Kazakhstan's population increased by 14.2 %. As a result, in 2021 the proportion of Kazakhs in the population composition was 70.3 % (Table 2).

The formation of the sovereign demographic system went through several stages. The ethno-demographic changes took place in Kazakhstan during the 1990s (1989–1999) were the outcome of intricate and conflicting processes during the period of transition. Within the framework of political, social, economic, and cultural upheavals, the Soviet "Slavic" demographic system was destroyed, and the foundation of a sovereign system based on the socio-cultural and socio-economic advantages of the Kazakh ethnos was being laid. These phenomena had a negative impact on demographic processes, and Kazakhstan's population began to decrease. At the same time, the proportion of the Kazakh ethnos in the republic's population composition was 53.4% (Table 2). A trend of Kazakhs' leading role in the republic's demographic development was determined (Aubakirova, 2020: 46–48).

This process gained even greater momentum in the first decade of the 21st century (1999–2009). In 2009, the proportion of the ethnos in the population composition increased to 63.1 % (Table 2). The rapid growth in the Kazakh population became the defining factor in the republic's population growth from 1999–2009, whilst the rate of reduction of Kazakhstan's other ethnic groups, primarily Russians, substantially reduced. As a result, in 2009 Kazakhstan's population almost returned to its 1989 level, but its ethnic composition fundamentally changed. The majority determining the demographic situation in the first decade of the 21st century were Kazakhs. During that period, the Slavic ethnic group decreased by nearly half, and its proportion in the population composition significantly decreased.

Thus, the demographic influence of Slavic ethnic groups, which had affected Kazakhstan's population dynamics for more than a century, was minimal by 2009. From this moment, the demographic behaviour of Kazakhs decisively determines demographic trends in the country. The republic's population growth momentum is steadily increasing. The following factors are the reasons for "demographic acceleration" occurring within the framework of socio-economic stabilisation:

1. The scale of social initiatives aimed at assisting families with multiple children, including financial assistance upon the birth of a child, is gradually expanding;

2. A prosperous demographic situation persists, with a significant part of the population in the reproductive age range;

3. Declining emigration barely determines the essence of demographic processes anymore. At the same time, the state's immigration policy is beginning to yield demographic results. Traditional reproductive attitudes and large families are common among ethnic compatriots;

4. Changes in the ethnic composition of the population. Kazakhs are becoming the dominant ethnos. Quantitative changes in ethnic composition have moved to a new quality;

5. The demographic situation in the state is determined by representatives of the Kazakh ethnos who maintain high reproductive attitudes (Aubakirova et al., 2023: 146–149).

Further growth of Kazakhstan's population was observed on the established ethnic basis. The growth rate from 2009–2021 was 14.2%, which is 2.1 times higher than the growth rate of the previous decade (1999–2009). Compared to the 1999–2009 period, the growth dynamics of the Kazakh population somewhat decreased due to reduced migration flow (from 26.4% to 24.7%), but much less than steel (1.9 times) and the rate of decrease in the Russian population. The demographic evolution of other Slavic groups has little impact on the general situation due to their small numbers (Table 2).

Demographic processes, which have been developing on an external basis for many decades, are increasingly determined by internal factors. The main patterns of demographic development are located within the country and focused on the cultural and social characteristics of the Kazakh ethnos. For the first time in new history, the republic's demographic system began operating on a sovereign basis.

Current statistics on Kazakhstan's population size and ethnic composition from 2021 data were statistical confirmation of sovereign evolutions. Kazakhs determine the republic's ethnic composition both in cities and rural areas. In 2021, in all regions of Kazakhstan (except North Kazakhstan and Kostanay regions), they constitute the majority of the population. In this regard, in Atyrau, Mangystau, and Kyzylorda regions, the proportion of Kazakhs exceeds 90%. Aktobe region is also close to this indicator. Currently, the Kazakh people, who have preserved traditional values, are a powerful demographic resource of the state in many regions.

Kazakhstan's population ethnic structure is an important indicator of the country's demographic stability and national identity. In the second half of the XXth century, as a result of Soviet migration policy and industrialisation, the Kazakh people became an ethnic minority in many regions. After Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991, policies aimed at restoring national identity and demographic balance began to be implemented. These processes were observed at different rates at the regional level.

However, as a result of migration, demographic, and national policies implemented during the years of independence, the ethnic structure of the republic's population acquired new content. This process proceeded at different rates in each region and depended on regional characteristics. In individual regions, the proportion of Kazakhs increased by more than double, whilst the Russian ethnos decreased significantly. For example, in northern regions – previously ethnically Russian-speaking and industrial areas – ethno-demographic balance completely changed, with Kazakhs becoming the dominant ethnos (Tatimov, 1975: 72–75).

In southern regions – Turkistan, Zhambyl, and Almaty – whilst Kazakhs comprised 53–67 % of the population in 1989, this indicator increased to 70–80 % in 2021. This growth is explained by natural demographic rates as well as high ethnic homogeneity in southern regions. The proportion of the Russian ethnos correspondingly decreased from 20–30 % to 9–17 %. In these regions, the resettlement of part of the Russian population to their historical homeland and the assimilation process resulting from frequent mixed marriages among youth also played an important role.

The northern region – North Kazakhstan, Akmola, Kostanay, and Pavlodar – was characterised by Russian dominance in ethnic composition in 1989: Russians comprised 46–55 %, whilst Kazakhs were only at the 25–36 % level. However, by 2021, Kazakhs in these regions increased to 51–65 %, becoming the dominant ethnos. The largest growth was recorded in North Kazakhstan region – Kazakhs rose from 25 % to 65 %, whilst Russians decreased from 55 % to 30 %. This change

was achieved through state programmes to attract youth from southern regions (“Serpín”), internal migration processes, and natural growth. Additionally, large-scale migration waves (especially in 1990–2000) were directed towards the Russian Federation.

In Central Kazakhstan – Karaganda and the newly established Ulytau regions – the proportion of Kazakhs was around 30–35 % in 1989. These regions traditionally belong to industrialised areas where the proportion of Russian and Ukrainian ethnic groups was previously high. In 2021, the proportion of Kazakhs increased to 59–66 %, whilst the proportion of Russians decreased to 31–27 %. Demographic changes here are also related to migration, changes in ethnic balance during urbanisation, and natural growth.

Eastern Kazakhstan – East Kazakhstan and Abay regions – were regions where the proportion of the Russian ethnos was high even during the Soviet period. In 1989, Russians comprised 44–45 % of the population in these regions, whilst Kazakhs were only 38–40 %. However, by 2021, the proportion of Kazakhs reached 62–63 %, becoming the dominant ethnos. Here too, Russian-directed migration as well as the arrival of repatriates played a major role.

In western regions – Atyrau, Mangystau, West Kazakhstan, and Aktope – the proportion of the Kazakh people was relatively high even during the Soviet period. In Atyrau and Mangystau regions, the proportion of Kazakhs was 47–51 % in 1989, increasing to 92 % and 78 % respectively in 2021. Whilst natural growth was very high in these regions, the Russian ethnos decreased rapidly: in Atyrau from 31 % to 5 %, in Mangystau from 30 % to 14 %. Similar trends were observed in West Kazakhstan and Aktope: Kazakhs increased from 44–29 % to 79–71 %, whilst Russians decreased from 38–52 % to 14–25 % respectively. This shows that in western regions, the development of the energy sector and the influence of internal migration and urbanisation factors were significant.

Thus, over the past thirty years, the demographic and ethnic predominance of the Kazakh people has been established in all regions of Kazakhstan. These trends were greatly influenced by migration, the policy of accepting repatriates, natural growth, urbanisation, and state national policy. The number and proportion of the Russian ethnos decreased in all regions, with the return of Slavs to their historical homelands and their slow demographic activity in Kazakhstan being one of the main reasons. These ethno-demographic changes formed the basis for the homogenisation of Kazakhstan's contemporary national structure and the strengthening of the role of the state-forming nation – the Kazakh people.

Table 3. Population size and ethnic composition of Kazakhstan according to current statistical data for 2021 (thousands of people) (National composition, 2021: 12–16)

Regions	Total population		Kazakhs		Russians		Uzbeks		Ukrainians		Other ethnic groups	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Republic of Kazakhstan	19196.0	100	13497.9	70,3	2981.9	15,53	614.0	3,2	387.3	2, 2	1714.8	8,9
Akmola	783.0	100	385.0	49,1	210.8	26,92	1.5	0,1	0.6	0,7	185.2	23,6
Aktobe	906.2	100	770.6	85,0	67.5	7,4	1.3	0,1	3.3	0,6	63.6	7,02
Almaty	2146.6	100	1577.3	73,4	229.2	10,6	5.8	0,2	10.9	0,5	323.3	15,6
Atyrau	681.6	100	625.9	91,8	30.1	4,4	0.9	0,1	1.7	0,2	23.1	3,3
West Kazakhstan	675.7	100	592.1	87,6	109.2	16,1	0,5	0,02	13.5	1,9	23.3	3,2
Zhambyl	1199.3	100	891.3	74,3	88.0	7,3	29.0	2,4	9.8	0,8	181.2	15,1
Karaganda	1348.5	100	751.9	55,7	391.7	29,0	3.3	0,2	52.9	3,9	148.7	11,0

Kostanay	833.6	100	368.3	44,1	280.6	33,6	1.3	0,1	87.9	10,5	95.6	11,4
Kyzylorda	814.9	100	782.8	96,0	12.3	1,5	2.1	0,2	0.9	0,1	16.8	2,7
Mangystau	735.0	100	670.5	91,2	32.0	4,3	2.1	0,2	3.2	0,4	27.2	3,7
Pavlodar	756.8	100	432.3	57,1	223.7	29,5	1.3	0,1	8.7	1,1	90.7	11,9
North Kazakhstan	540.8	100	203.2	37,5	240.6	44,4	0.6	0,1	30.0	5,5	66.5	12,2
Turkistan	2054.0	100	1551.6	75,5	27.9	1,3	0.4	0,2	3.4	0,1	470.7	22,9
East Kazakhstan	1341.3	100	842.4	62,8	431.0	32,1	1.5	0,1	9.4	0,7	57.0	4,2
Astana city	1234.0	100	1004.8	81,4	118.4	9,5	7.1	0,8	20.7	1,6	83.0	6,7
Almaty city	2030.3	100	1286.2	63,3	415.7	20,4	11.4	0,6	21.0	1,4	295.9	14,5
Shymkent city	19196.0	100	13497.9	70,3	2981.9	15,53	614.0	3,2	387.3	2, 2	1714.8	8,9

The 2021 ethnic structure indicators show a significant increase in the proportion of the Kazakh ethnos in Kazakhstan and the ongoing process of ethnic homogenisation. This trend was formed as a result of the restoration of historical justice as well as natural demographic growth and ethnic migration. Ethnic diversity has been preserved at the regional level. In northern and central regions, the proportion of Slavic ethnic groups is still high, based on historical reasons. In southern and western regions, the historical predominance of the Kazakh people is clearly visible. Changes in ethnic structure have a direct impact on state policy, linguistic environment, education system, cultural integration, and inter-ethnic accord.

Ethnic differences between urban and rural residents are also significant. Whilst most of the Kazakh people live in rural areas, the number of Kazakhs living in cities has sharply increased as a result of the urbanisation process. Although Russian, German, and Ukrainian ethnic groups historically comprised the majority of the urban population, this situation is changing as a result of migration.

Today, the Kazakh ethnos is becoming the dominant ethnos in all regions of the country. This trend is particularly evident in metropolises such as Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent. As a result of internal migration, a large part of the Kazakh people has been directed from the south and west towards the north and centre. In these regions, the proportion of Kazakhs increased by 10–15% over the past decade (Dave, 2007: 18–19).

The ethno-demographic situation in Eastern Kazakhstan has undergone fundamental change since the 1990s. Whilst the Russian ethnos was the main ethnic group of the region at the end of the Soviet period, according to the results of the 2021 census, the proportion of the Kazakh ethnos reached 63%, gaining demographic predominance. The proportion of Russians and other Slavic ethnic groups correspondingly decreased to 32 %. These changes were influenced by return to historical homeland, migration waves, natural growth, and internal migration processes. The activity of Kazakhs in the urban environment increased, which is directly related to urbanisation. The cities of Semey and Oskemen are the main centres of demographic restructuring.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Kazakhstan's ethnic structure is gradually becoming a society dominated by the Kazakh ethnos. This trend requires maintaining inter-ethnic harmony and social integration along with demographic stability.

The ethno-demographic development of East Kazakhstan region entered a historically new phase during the years of independence. The Kazakh ethnos becoming the dominant ethnos in the regional demographic structure led to changes in ethnic identity and social structure. These changes are closely related to factors such as urbanisation, migration, and natural growth. At the same time, the influence of the historically established multi-ethnic environment is still felt. In the coming years, the social, cultural, and economic consequences of these changes will determine the main directions of regional policy and demographic planning. Therefore, the research results can serve as a valuable scientific-practical foundation for developing demographic strategies, ensuring social stability, and predicting future migration processes.

Despite the numerous demographic catastrophes that befell the East Kazakhstan region in the previous century, in the new century, these shocks gradually began to subside. In the years since independence, the ethnodemographic development of the East Kazakhstan region has entered a new phase in history. Initially, the region was divided into two administrative units: East Kazakhstan and Semipalatinsk. However, in 2022, a new region, Abai, was established, aiming to bridge the gap between densely populated and sparsely populated areas. While Kazakhs constitute the majority of the region's population, the local government in the region continues to uphold a policy of interethnic unity and harmony.

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