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DEMOGRAPHIC DYNAMICS OF TAJIKISTAN: FERTILITY, MORTALITY, TRENDS AND FORECASTS (1990–2023)

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Abstract. *Introduction.* This study examines the demographic dynamics of Tajikistan between 1990 and 2023 within a broader historical and structural context. The country demonstrates sustained population growth alongside gradual aging, persistent fertility, improving life expectancy, and extensive labor migration. *Goals and objectives.* The article advances the project’s objectives by applying a comparable analytical framework to Tajikistan’s post-Soviet demographic transformation. It strengthens regional comparative analysis, refines understanding of fertility, mortality, migration, and aging patterns, and enhances demographic forecasting capacity. The study employs official statistical data of TajStat, Demographic Yearbook of TR, for 1990–2023, archival census materials from RSASPH, RSACH, SACH RT, SARF the 1920s–1930s, and secondary scholarly sources. Comparative demographic analysis, cohort-component interpretation, and structural trend evaluation are applied. *Results.* Findings indicate continued natural increase driven by relatively high fertility and demographic momentum; alongside gradual expansion of older cohorts due to improved survival. A persistent gender gap in life expectancy and migration-induced age-sex imbalances shape population structure. Archival evidence reveals long-standing mobility and ethnic consolidation processes. *Conclusion.* Tajikistan exhibits a hybrid demographic trajectory combining expansion, structural maturation, and sustained mobility. Aging progresses without demographic contraction,

distinguishing the country regionally. Future stability depends on fertility trends, migration regulation, healthcare modernization, and labor market adaptation. Historically informed analysis enhances forecasting reliability and policy relevance in managing demographic transformation.

Keywords: Tajikistan, fertility rates, mortality rates, demography, migration, socio-economic implications

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ТӘЖІКСТАННЫҢ ДЕМОГРАФИЯЛЫҚ ДИНАМИКАСЫ: ТУЫЛУ МЕН ӨЛІМ-ЖІТІМ КӨРСЕТКІШІ, ТЕНДЕНЦИЯЛАР ЖӘНЕ БОЛЖАМДАР (1990–2023)


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Аңдатпа. *Kipicne.* Мақала 1990–2023 жылдар аралығындағы Тәжікстанның демографиялық динамикасын кең тарихи және құрылымдық контекст аясында қарастырады. Елде халық санының тұрақты өсуі біртіндеп қартаю үдерісімен, сақталған жоғары туу деңгейімен, өмір сүру ұзақтығының артуымен және ауқымды еңбек көші-қонымен қатар жүруде. *Мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Мақала посткеңестік кезеңдегі Тәжікстанның демографиялық трансформациясына салыстырмалы талдау үлгісін қолдану арқылы жобаның мақсаттарын жүзеге асырады. Зерттеу өңіраралық салыстырмалы талдауды күшейтеді, туу, өлім-жітім, көші-қон және қартаю үдерістерін тереңірек түсіндіреді, сондай-ақ демографиялық болжау мүмкіндіктерін арттырады. *Материалдар мен әдістер.* Зерттеуде 1990–2023 жылдар аралығындағы TajStat ресми статистикалық деректері, ТР Демографиялық жылнамасы, 1920–1930 жылдардағы РМӘСТМ, РЖТММ, ЖТММТР, РФММ архивтік халық санағы материалдары және қосымша ғылыми әдебиеттер пайдаланылды. Салыстырмалы демографиялық талдау, когорталық-компоненттік интерпретация және құрылымдық трендтерді бағалау әдістері қолданылды. *Нәтижелер.* Зерттеу нәтижелері салыстырмалы

түрде жоғары туу деңгейі мен демографиялық инерцияның әсерінен табиғи өсімнің жалғасып отырғанын көрсетеді; сонымен қатар өмір сүру ұзақтығының артуы нәтижесінде егде жастағы топтардың біртіндеп ұлғаюы байқалады. Өмір сүру ұзақтығындағы тұрақты гендерлік айырмашылық және көші-қонға байланысты жас-жыныстық теңгерімсіздік халық құрылымына ықпал етеді. Архивтік деректер ұзақ мерзімді мобильділік пен этникалық шоғырлану үдерістерін айқындайды. *Қорытынды.* Тәжікстан демографиялық кеңеюді, құрылымдық жетілуді және тұрақты мобильділікті біріктіретін гибриді демографиялық траекторияны көрсетеді. Қартаю демографиялық қысқарусыз жүзеге асуда, бұл елді өңірлік деңгейде ерекшелейді. Болашақ тұрақтылық туу динамикасына, көші-қонды реттеуге, денсаулық сақтау жүйесін жаңғыртуға және еңбек нарығын бейімдеуге тәуелді. Тарихи тұрғыдан негізделген талдау демографиялық болжаудың сенімділігін және басқарушылық шешімдердің өзектілігін арттырады.

Түйін сөздер: Тәжікстан, туу көрсеткіштері, өлім-жітім көрсеткіштері, демография, миграция, әлеуметтік-экономикалық салдары

Алғыс. Мақала Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігі Ш.Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы Тарих және этнология институтының «Қазақстан Республикасының демографиялық дамуының қазіргі заманғы тенденциялары (1991–2021 жж.)» тақырыбындағы бағдарламалық-мақсатты қаржыландыру жобасын жүзеге асыру аясында орындалды (жеке тіркеу нөмірі: AP22785742).

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ДЕМОГРАФИЧЕСКАЯ ДИНАМИКА ТАДЖИКИСТАНА: РОЖДАЕМОСТЬ, СМЕРТНОСТЬ, ТЕНДЕНЦИИ И ПРОГНОЗЫ (1990–2023 ГГ.)


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Аннотация. *Введение.* Настоящее исследование посвящено анализу демографической динамики Таджикистана в период 1990–2023 гг. в широком историческом и структурном контексте. В стране наблюдаются устойчивый рост численности населения, постепенное старение, сохраняющаяся относительно высокая рождаемость, увеличение продолжительности жизни и масштабная внешняя трудовая миграция. *Цель и задачи.* Статья

способствует реализации целей проекта посредством применения сопоставимой аналитической модели к постсоветской демографической трансформации Таджикистана. Исследование усиливает региональный сравнительный анализ, углубляет понимание процессов рождаемости, смертности, миграции и старения населения, а также расширяет возможности демографического прогнозирования. В работе использованы официальные статистические данные TajStat, материалы Демографического ежегодника Республики Таджикистан за 1990–2023 гг., архивные материалы переписей населения 1920–1930-х гг. из фондов РГАСИ, РГАНИ, ГАНИРТ, ГАРФ, а также вторичные научные источники. Применены методы сравнительного демографического анализа, когортно-компонентной интерпретации и оценки структурных тенденций. *Результаты.* Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о сохранении естественного прироста населения, обусловленного сравнительно высокой рождаемостью и демографической инерцией, а также о постепенном увеличении численности старших возрастных групп вследствие повышения выживаемости. Устойчивый гендерный разрыв в продолжительности жизни и миграционно обусловленные возрастно-половые диспропорции оказывают значительное влияние на структуру населения. Архивные материалы подтверждают длительные процессы мобильности и этнической консолидации. *Заключение.* Таджикистан характеризуется гибридной демографической траекторией, сочетающей количественный рост, структурное созревание и устойчивую мобильность населения. Старение происходит без демографической депопуляции, что отличает страну в региональном контексте. Перспективная устойчивость зависит от динамики рождаемости, регулирования миграции, модернизации системы здравоохранения и адаптации рынка труда. Исторически обоснованный анализ повышает надежность демографического прогнозирования и прикладную значимость управленческих решений в условиях демографической трансформации.

Ключевые слова: Таджикистан, рождаемость, смертность, демография, миграция, социально-экономические последствия

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Introduction

The article “Demographic Dynamics of Tajikistan: Fertility, Mortality, Trends and Forecasts (1990–2023)” is conceptually and methodologically aligned with the project “Contemporary Demographic Trends in the Republic of Kazakhstan (1991–2021)” (AP22785742) through its shared focus on post-Soviet demographic transformation in Central Asia.

Both studies examine fertility, mortality, migration, and age-structural change within the context of socioeconomic transition following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. While the project concentrates on Kazakhstan, the article extends the analytical framework to Tajikistan, enabling comparative regional interpretation of demographic trajectories, including population growth patterns, aging processes, and migration dynamics.

The Tajikistan case contributes a complementary view by illustrating a model of demographic expansion combined with gradual structural maturation, in contrast to Kazakhstan’s distinct demographic pathway. This comparative dimension enhances the broader scientific objectives of the project by situating Kazakhstan’s demographic evolution within a wider Central Asian context and strengthening cross-national analytical generalization.

The relevance of this article lies in the need to provide a comprehensive and historically grounded assessment of Tajikistan’s demographic transformation in the post-Soviet period. Between

1990 and 2023, the country has experienced sustained natural population growth driven by relatively high fertility, gradual improvements in life expectancy with a persistent gender gap, and expanding older age cohorts. This simultaneous coexistence of demographic expansion and incipient aging constitutes a distinctive regional pattern requiring systematic analysis. In addition, periodic mortality fluctuations linked to economic vulnerability and infrastructural constraints—particularly in mountainous regions highlight the sensitivity of demographic processes to structural conditions.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Central Asian states have experienced profound demographic transformations shaped by socioeconomic restructuring, institutional change, and evolving migration systems. Within this regional context, Tajikistan presents a particularly distinctive trajectory. Between 1990 and 2023, the country has combined sustained natural population growth with gradual structural aging, persistent fertility, increasing life expectancy, and large-scale external labor migration. This configuration challenges linear interpretations of demographic transition and requires an integrated analytical approach that accounts for historical continuity and contemporary structural change.

Unlike several post-Soviet states characterized by depopulation and accelerated aging driven by fertility decline, Tajikistan has maintained relatively high birth rates supported by demographic momentum embedded in its youthful age structure. At the same time, survival probabilities have improved, contributing to the gradual expansion of older age cohorts and the feminization of aging, reflected in a stable gender gap in life expectancy. Periodic fluctuations in mortality indicators further reveal the sensitivity of demographic processes to economic conditions, healthcare accessibility, environmental vulnerability, and infrastructural constraints, particularly in mountainous regions where geographic isolation shapes patterns of settlement and service provision.

Migration constitutes a structurally decisive component of Tajikistan’s demographic system. Large-scale external labor migration influences household welfare, domestic economic circulation, age-sex composition, and labor force sustainability. Remittance inflows affect consumption patterns and macroeconomic stability, while the outflow of working-age individuals generates demographic and social imbalances. Importantly, contemporary migration processes are not historically unprecedented. Archival census materials from the 1920s–1930s demonstrate that administratively regulated population mobility, ethnic reclassification, and territorial redistribution were already integral to regional demographic development.

The country’s extreme mountainous geography encompassing the overwhelming majority of its territory has further reinforced spatial demographic differentiation, concentrating populations in valleys and limiting infrastructural integration. These structural conditions continue to shape regional disparities in mortality, migration intensity, and socioeconomic opportunity. Against this background, the present study seeks to provide a comprehensive and historically grounded analysis of Tajikistan’s demographic dynamics from 1990 to 2023. By integrating official statistical data, archival census evidence, and structural demographic interpretation, the research aims to elucidate the interaction between fertility, mortality, migration, and age-structural change, and to assess their implications for long-term demographic forecasting and policy planning.

Materials and Methods

Archival sources were drawn from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RSASPH. F.17. Inv. 59, 112. C. 436, 405, 678. P. 85, 90, 94, 182), which contain administrative and statistical records relevant to early Soviet nationality policy, census organization, and demographic classification practices. These documents provide insight into the institutional formation of ethnic categories and population accounting mechanisms. Additional materials were obtained from the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RSACH. F. 5. Inv. 90. C. 103. P. 26) (original document), offering evidence on policy decisions influencing demographic regulation.

Primary regional evidence derives from the State Archive of Contemporary History of the Republic of Tajikistan (SACHRT. F. 3. Inv. 18. C. 19. P. 5–7, 9, 10, 11–12, 14; original documents). These records document inter-republican migration flows, resettlement policies, administrative correspondence, and logistical arrangements of population transfers in the late 1920s–1930s.

Contemporary demographic analysis is based on official statistical publications of the Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, including Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Tajikistan (2016, 2018, 2024 editions) and TajStat, Volume III (2023), which provides detailed data on national composition, language proficiency, and citizenship. Sectoral statistical compilations, such as the 2014 education statistical bulletin, were used to contextualize human capital development. The theoretical and analytical framework incorporates key scholarly works addressing demographic processes, migration, aging, and historical state formation in Central Asia, including studies by Gafurov (1989), Masov (1991), Kuznetsova (2006), Islamov (2021, 2023), Islamov and Babayev (2020), Islamov and Khaydarov (2011), Sattarova (2004), Ulmasova (2023), Toshimuhanmadofu (2005).

The study applies a multidisciplinary demographic methodology combining quantitative statistical analysis with historical-institutional interpretation. Comparative demographic analysis is employed to assess fertility, mortality, life expectancy, migration, and age-structural change during 1990–2023. Cohort-component interpretation is utilized to assess demographic momentum, generational replacement, and aging dynamics, allowing for evaluation of dependency ratios and future structural transformation. Structural trend analysis is conducted to examine the interaction between demographic processes and socioeconomic factors. Historical-archival analysis is integrated to contextualize contemporary demographic patterns within longer-term processes of ethnic consolidation.

Discussion

Statistical compilations published in 2016, 2018, and 2024 by the national statistical authorities demonstrate that Tajikistan has maintained sustained population growth over more than three decades. This continuity confirms that demographic momentum remains a decisive structural factor. Unlike trajectories observed in several neighboring states, Tajikistan’s population increase has persisted despite economic vulnerability and large-scale external mobility. Such resilience supports the argument that fertility norms remain deeply embedded within social and cultural frameworks. The historical research provided by B.G. Gafurov (1989) and R. Masov (1991) helps contextualize contemporary demographic patterns within longer processes of ethnocultural consolidation and territorial differentiation. The formation of modern national identity and administrative boundaries during the Soviet period influenced settlement structures and interethnic proportions that continue to shape demographic distribution. Kuznetsova (2006) emphasizes that post-Soviet state-building processes in Central Asia were accompanied by demographic reconfiguration, including shifts in ethnic composition and migration orientation. These historical legacies are essential for understanding current structural imbalances and regional disparities. Life expectancy improvements and the gradual increase in older age groups correspond with the demographic-economic interpretations advanced by Islamov and Khaydarov (2011). Their analysis of population aging in Tajikistan highlights the emerging tension between expanding elderly cohorts and limited institutional capacity for social protection. Although Tajikistan remains demographically young, the incremental growth of older groups signals the onset of structural aging. This process occurs without overall population decline, thereby creating a dual demographic burden: the need to support both youthful and aging segments simultaneously.

Migration constitutes a central dimension of this structural transformation. Islamov and Babayev (2020) demonstrate that external labor mobility has become a systemic component of Tajikistan’s socioeconomic model under globalization. Remittance inflows significantly influence household consumption, poverty reduction, and macroeconomic stability. Ulmasova (2023) further underscores the developmental role of diasporic networks in sustaining domestic economic circulation. However, large-scale outflows of working-age individuals also generate demographic distortions, including gender asymmetry and altered reproductive behavior. These dynamics complicate long-term projections of labor supply and dependency ratios.

The relationship between human capital and demographic change, examined by Islamov (2021), adds another dimension to the discussion. Educational statistics (SSSORT, 2014) indicate

expanding enrollment and institutional coverage, suggesting gradual modernization of the knowledge base. Yet migration-driven brain circulation and regional inequality in educational access continue to influence labor market outcomes. Demographic growth alone does not automatically translate into productive capacity; its developmental impact depends on investment in health, education, and institutional efficiency.

Dates presented in TajStat, Volume III (2023), reveal ongoing consolidation of national identity alongside shifts in minority representation and language proficiency. These patterns reflect both historical classification processes and contemporary mobility trends. The consolidation of titular identity has occurred in parallel with external migration and selective outflows of certain ethnic groups, contributing to changes in national composition. Nevertheless, Conflict-related displacement, mortality shocks (Toshimuhanmadofu, 2005), and delayed socioeconomic recovery affected fertility behavior and migration orientation. Demographic policy considerations outlined by Sattarova (2004) emphasize the necessity of aligning reproductive health, social protection, and migration governance strategies with structural realities.

Results

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan has experienced substantial demographic expansion. Between 1991 and 2015, the country’s population increased by 55.6 %, underscoring the intensity of post-Soviet growth processes. This expansion, however, was markedly uneven across regions. According to Islamov, population growth reached 27.1 % in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, 35.0 % in Dushanbe, 50.3 % in Sughd Region, 66.0 % in the Districts of Republican Subordination, and 63.6 % in Khatlon Region. Such territorial differentiation highlights the role of region-specific socioeconomic conditions, migration patterns, and structural demographic factors in shaping national population dynamics (Islamov, 2023: 15).

Despite these spatial differences, from 1998 to the present (approximately eighteen consecutive years), Tajikistan has maintained a stable annual population growth rate of 2.0-2.3%, which can be considered a distinctive feature of the country’s demographic trajectory under new post-transitional conditions (Islamov, 2023: 15). This sustained natural increase contrasts sharply with the demographic stagnation or decline observed in several other post-Soviet states.

Urban and rural population growth rates further illustrate structural differentiation. Urban population growth ranged from 1.3% to 2.1 %, whereas rural growth was significantly higher, ranging from 3.3 % to 2.4 %. Particularly notable were Khatlon Region (3.4–2.5 %) and the cities of the Districts of Republican Subordination (3.3–2.6 %), where growth rates exceeded national urban averages (Islamov, 2023: 16). The higher growth rates among rural populations reflect Tajikistan’s predominantly agrarian settlement structure and sustained high fertility in rural areas.

Although the share of the urban population declined during 1992-1995 largely due to the civil war, economic disruption, and migration flows it began to increase rapidly thereafter. This dynamic demonstrates the combined impact of internal displacement, post-conflict stabilization, and gradual urban recovery. Islamov (2023) emphasizes that the overall demographic trajectory unfolded under conditions of a favorable age-sex structure. Specifically, the presence of a relatively large cohort in reproductive ages contributed to sustained natural increase and reinforced demographic momentum.

Mortality dynamics provide further insight into Tajikistan’s demographic transition. According to the (Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2024: 174, 176, 178, 180, 182, 184, 186, 192), mortality in the 70–74 age group evolved as follows: 1991: 6,264 deaths 1995: 6,264 deaths 1998: 5,634 deaths 2000: 6,118 deaths 2005: 6,236 deaths 2010: 6,685 deaths 2015: 6,981 deaths 2020: 6,596 deaths 2023: 7,570 deaths. These data reveal several important patterns. First, mortality levels in the early 1990s remained relatively stable despite profound political and economic upheaval. The decline observed in the late 1990s (5,634 deaths) may reflect data fluctuations or short-term structural effects following the civil conflict. Subsequently, a steady upward trend becomes evident, particularly after 2005, culminating in 7,570 deaths in 2023.

This increase is not necessarily indicative of deteriorating health conditions; rather, it likely reflects demographic aging namely, the expansion of older cohorts due to prior high fertility. As

larger birth cohorts enter advanced ages, the absolute number of deaths increases even if age-specific mortality rates remain stable or decline. The temporary decline in 2020 (6,596 deaths) requires cautious interpretation and may relate to reporting distortions or cohort effects. Overall, the trend demonstrates the gradual aging of Tajikistan’s population alongside continued overall population growth.

Population census data further reveal structural changes in educational attainment following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As (Islamov, 2021: 27) notes, there was an increase in the proportion of the population with higher education, specialized secondary education, and incomplete secondary education. At the same time, the share of individuals with general secondary and incomplete secondary education declined.

However, Islamov (2021) warns of a potentially adverse long-term effect: a reduction in the population with complete general secondary and incomplete secondary education may eventually lead to a decline in the number of individuals attaining higher education. Particularly concerning is the increase in the proportion of the population with incomplete secondary education by 13.7 percentage points in 2010 compared with 1989. This structural imbalance suggests emerging vulnerabilities in human capital formation. Educational structure is closely linked to fertility, mortality, and migration. Higher educational attainment especially among women is typically associated with declining fertility and improved health outcomes. Conversely, growth in incomplete secondary education may correlate with higher fertility persistence, lower labor productivity, and increased labor migration. Therefore, the educational transformation observed during the post-Soviet period may influence Tajikistan’s long-term demographic transition trajectory.

Synthesizing the findings of Islamov (2021; 2023) and the Official Demographic Statistics RT (2024), Tajikistan’s demographic dynamics since 1990 can be characterized by interconnected features: a) Sustained high natural population growth supported by a favorable age structure and high rural fertility; b) regional differentiation in demographic expansion, with particularly rapid growth in Khatlon and the Districts of Republican Subordination; c) Gradual aging reflected in rising mortality numbers in older age groups; d) Structural shifts in educational attainment with potentially significant implications for future demographic and socioeconomic development.

Thus, Tajikistan represents a case of continued demographic expansion in the post-Soviet space, yet with emerging structural challenges. The persistence of high fertility combined with gradual population aging and educational imbalances suggests that future demographic forecasts must account not only for quantitative growth but also for qualitative changes in human capital and age composition.

The demographic trajectory of Tajikistan during the post-Soviet period cannot be properly understood without considering the profound socioeconomic crisis of the 1990s and its institutional consequences. As Kuznetsova notes, “during 1991–1998 the Government of Tajikistan demonstrated an inability to provide the population with adequate social services. Public expenditure on education declined dramatically from 11% to 2% of GDP, while health care spending fell from 6% to 1% of GDP. In international development rankings, Tajikistan dropped to 108th place out of 174 countries” (Kuznetsova, 2006: 133).

These fiscal contractions coincided with the civil war (1992–1997), systemic economic collapse, and institutional fragmentation. The reduction in public investment in human capital sectors education and health occurred precisely during a period of high demographic pressure, characterized by a young age structure and sustained natural increase (Islamov, 2023: 16–17). Thus, Tajikistan experienced a paradoxical demographic situation: rapid population growth alongside shrinking social infrastructure capacity.

Despite this crisis, long-term educational infrastructure data reveal adaptive expansion over time. According to official statistical data “Statisticheskiy Sbornik Sfery Obrazovaniya Respubliki Tadjikistan” changes in the number of general education institutions and students in the Republic of Tajikistan during 1991–2019 demonstrate the following: 1991–1992: 3,229 institutions with 1,325,400 students. 1995–1996: 3,460 institutions with 1,322,800 students. 2005–2006: 3,804 institutions with 1,682,020 students. 2009–2010: 3,773 institutions with 1,694,245 students.

2010–2011: 3,747 institutions with 1,694,696 students. 2013–2014: 3,836 institutions with 1,717,063 students. 2018–2019: 3,878 institutions with 1,970,925 students (SSSORT, 2014: 43).

These figures indicate several important structural tendencies: First, during the most acute phase of political instability (early mid 1990s), the number of institutions continued to increase moderately (from 3,229 to 3,460), although the number of students slightly declined (from 1,325,400 to 1,322,800). This stagnation likely reflects war-related displacement, migration, and temporary disruption of schooling. Second, from the mid-2000s onward, a pronounced expansion in student enrollment is observable. Between 2005–2006 and 2018–2019, the number of students increased from 1,682,020 to 1,970,925, representing substantial demographic pressure on the education system. This expansion corresponds directly to the earlier high fertility rates of the 1990s and early 2000s, demonstrating demographic momentum. Even where the number of institutions fluctuated slightly (e.g., 3,773 in 2009–2010 and 3,747 in 2010–2011), student numbers continued to rise, implying increasing class sizes and strain on infrastructure.

When integrated with Islamov’s (2021) findings regarding educational attainment structure, a complex picture emerges. Although the number of students expanded significantly, the quality and continuity of educational attainment remain uneven. The earlier reduction in state expenditure on education (Kuznetsova, 2006: 134) may have contributed to the growth of incomplete secondary education observed in later census data. Thus, quantitative expansion of educational infrastructure does not automatically translate into qualitative human capital improvement. Urban-rural dynamics further illuminate Tajikistan’s demographic transformation. In 1989, the share of the urban population constituted 32.6%. Subsequently, until 2016, it remained at approximately 26%. This decline reflects large-scale demographic restructuring following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Islamov explains that beginning in 1970, economic motives initiated the out-migration of the non-indigenous population from Tajikistan, most of whom resided in urban areas. From 1985 onward, the processes of perestroika and democratization intensified this trend. During 1990–1993, large-scale emigration involved not only non-indigenous but also indigenous populations, primarily as refugees during the civil war. From 1995–1997 onward, migration beyond national borders was driven predominantly by economic motives a pattern that continues to the present day. Labor migration, especially toward the Russian Federation and other countries, became a structural component of Tajikistan’s demographic model. Between 1989 and 2000, the absolute number of urban residents declined. Only after 2001 did the urban population surpass its 1989 level. In contrast, between 1991 and 2016, the rural population increased by 2,606,500 persons. This growth resulted primarily from natural population increase and partially from reverse migration (Islamov 2023: 17, 18).

These dynamics are highly significant for understanding fertility patterns. Rural areas in Tajikistan traditionally exhibit higher fertility rates than urban centers. Therefore, the expansion of the rural population base reinforced national fertility levels and sustained annual growth rates of 2.0–2.3 % (Islamov, 2023: 19). The persistence of a predominantly rural demographic structure helps explain why Tajikistan avoided the sharp fertility collapse observed in other post-Soviet states. At the same time, prolonged labor migration introduces additional demographic complexities: a) It reduces the working-age male population domestically; b) It affects household fertility decisions; c) It generates remittance-dependent economic structures; d) It reshapes age-sex composition at the regional level; Thus, migration serves both as a demographic safety valve (absorbing labor surplus) and as a structural modifier of fertility and family behavior.

When analyzing the findings of Kuznetsova (2006), SSSORT (2014), and Islamov (2023), several interrelated conclusions emerge. The 1990s socioeconomic collapse significantly weakened institutional capacity in education and healthcare, yet demographic growth remained strong due to structural momentum. Educational infrastructure expanded quantitatively in response to high fertility, but fiscal contraction may have affected quality and attainment structure. Urban decline in the 1990s was driven primarily by migration (ethnic and economic), not by demographic stagnation. Rural population growth by 2,606,500 persons between 1991 and 2016 played a decisive role in sustaining high national fertility. Migration since the mid-1990s has become a permanent structural component of Tajikistan’s demographic system.

Therefore, Tajikistan’s demographic dynamics from 1990 to 2023 are characterized by the coexistence of: High natural population increase; rural demographic predominance; structural labor migration; expanding but strained educational infrastructure; gradual aging alongside continued growth. These trends suggest that while total population growth will likely continue in the medium term due to demographic momentum, future dynamics will increasingly depend on: Urbanization patterns, educational quality and human capital formation, migration flows and remittance dependence, changes in fertility behavior among younger cohorts. In sum, Tajikistan represents a distinctive post-Soviet demographic model: one of sustained population expansion under conditions of institutional fragility, migration intensity, and rural demographic dominance.

A comparative analysis of population dynamics for the periods 1990–2008 and 2000–2008 demonstrates that the population aged 65 years and older increased at a faster rate than the total population. This tendency signals the onset of population aging in Tajikistan (Islamov and Khaydarov, 2011: 19).

This finding is particularly significant in light of the country’s sustained natural population growth and relatively young age structure during the early post-Soviet decades. The accelerated growth of the elderly cohort indicates that demographic aging is emerging not as a consequence of low fertility—common in many European and post-Soviet contexts—but rather as a structural outcome of improved survival and demographic momentum. Thus, Tajikistan is entering a phase of dual demographic pressure: continued population expansion combined with a gradually increasing elderly population share.

Life expectancy trends further illustrate this transition. According to the Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Tajikistan (Demograficheskiy Yezhegodnik RT, 2018: 124), life expectancy at birth in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO), disaggregated by sex, demonstrates the following pattern: 2010: males 68.7 years; females 74.6 years; 2011 males 69.6 years; females 74.7 years; 2012 males 70.5 years; females 75.3 years; 2013: males 71.1 years; females 76.0 years; 2014 males 72.7 years; females 78.4 years; 2016 males 71.6 years; females 77.3 years; 2017: males 72.2 years; females 78.1 years; 2018 males 73.0 years; females 76.9 years.

These figures demonstrate a general upward trajectory in life expectancy for both sexes, albeit with some fluctuations. The overall improvement suggests gradual advances in health conditions, survival rates, and possibly access to medical services, even in geographically remote mountainous regions.

Several analytical observations can be drawn: First, the consistent gender gap in life expectancy favoring women by approximately 5–7 years corresponds to global demographic patterns but may also reflect gendered differences in occupational risks, migration-related mortality exposure, and health behaviors. Second, the steady increase in male life expectancy from 68.7 years (2010) to 73.0 years (2018) indicates measurable improvement in survival probabilities, which contributes directly to the expansion of older age cohorts identified by Islamov and Khaydarov (2011). Female life expectancy, although fluctuating in later years, remains substantially higher, reinforcing the feminization of aging. Third, the observed volatility in certain years suggests sensitivity to economic conditions, healthcare accessibility, and possibly environmental factors. In mountainous regions such as GBAO, infrastructural limitations can intensify the demographic impact of external shocks.

The qualitative characteristics of mortality in Tajikistan must also be understood within a broader theoretical framework. Islamov characterizes traditional mortality patterns as being predominantly determined by exogenous environmental factors. In such systems, the majority of deaths are caused by external conditions largely independent of age, serving as the primary source of early and premature mortality. The dominance of exogenously determined mortality reflects limited capacity to control adverse environmental conditions under circumstances of underdeveloped productive forces, widespread poverty, and severe social exploitation (Islamov, 2021: 38).

This conceptualization is crucial for interpreting Tajikistan’s demographic trajectory. During the early post-Soviet crisis period, reduced public expenditure on healthcare and social services likely reinforced vulnerability to exogenous mortality factors. However, the subsequent improvement in life expectancy particularly in the 2010s suggests a gradual shift away from strictly exogenous mortality

dominance toward a more transitional mortality regime. In demographic transition theory, such a shift implies declining early-age mortality, increasing survival into older age groups, rising importance of endogenous (age-related and chronic) causes of death. The coexistence of improving life expectancy with growing elderly cohorts confirms that Tajikistan is advancing through an intermediate stage of demographic transition, while still retaining structural features of a developing demographic regime.

An additional dimension of demographic restructuring is reflected in the legislative definition of working-age boundaries. According to the Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Tajikistan (*Demograficheskiy Yezhegodnik RT*, 2016: 4) in 2000–2002, working age was defined as 15–59 years for men and 15–54 years for women. The population younger than working age was 0–14 years. The population older than working age was defined as 60 years and older for men and 55 years and older for women. In 2003, working age was redefined as 15–60 years for men and 15–55 years for women. Older than working age became 61+ for men and 56+ for women. In 2004, working age was further extended to 15–61 years for men and 15–56 years for women. The threshold for older-than-working age shifted to 62+ for men and 57+ for women. These incremental adjustments demonstrate institutional recognition of increasing life expectancy and improved survival. Extending working-age boundaries effectively reduces the statistical dependency ratio and partially offsets the economic implications of population aging.

The contemporary socio-economic situation of Tajikistan cannot be adequately understood without reference to external labor migration, which has become a structural component of national development. As Islamov and Babayev emphasize, “labor migration abroad constitutes a decisive factor influencing the livelihood of the majority of families in the Republic of Tajikistan. Migration, as a socio-demographic determinant of sustainable economic development, has acquired particular significance under modern conditions and requires continuous scientific analysis to ensure effective state regulation and management of migration flows” (Islamov and Babayev, 2020: 11–12).

This interpretation aligns with Sattarova’s economic assessment “that income generated abroad through labor migration contributes directly to increased monetary circulation within the country. Remittance inflows stimulate the expansion of imports and, through these channels, affect the production of gross domestic product. Thus, migration operates simultaneously as a demographic regulator and as a macroeconomic stabilizer. In the context of sustained population growth and limited domestic labor absorption capacity, migration mitigates unemployment pressures while injecting financial resources into the national economy” (Sattarova, 2004: 23).

However, the long-term demographic implications of migration are complex. Ulmasova analyzing successive stages of mass emigration of Tajik citizens concludes “that since the early 2000s, large-scale external labor migration has become firmly established. Hundreds of thousands of individuals have migrated abroad in search of employment and material security for their families. Importantly, after extended periods of labor activity in host countries, a portion of migrants integrates into receiving societies and does not return permanently to Tajikistan. This trend introduces structural demographic consequences: potential reduction of the economically active population, shifts in age-sex composition, selective loss of working-age cohorts, and long-term effects on fertility behavior” (Ulmasova, 2023: 89).

The demographic selectivity of migration is further reflected in changes in ethnic composition. According to TajStat, “the number of ethnic Kazakhs residing in Tajikistan declined from 936 persons in 2000 to 595 in 2010 and further to 125 in 2020. In proportional terms, their share decreased from 63.6 per mille in 2000 to 21.0 per mille in 2010. These figures illustrate not merely statistical fluctuation but a broader process of ethnic restructuring influenced by migration, assimilation, and possibly return migration to historical homelands. Such demographic contraction among smaller ethnic groups contributes to increasing national homogenization and may affect linguistic diversity and cultural plurality” (TajStat, Vol. III. 2023: 5, 6).

The impact of migration and socio-economic restructuring is also observable in the scientific and academic sphere. According to data cited by in 1985 the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR “employed 1,514 scientific researchers, including 85 Doctors of Sciences and 656 Candidates of Sciences. By the end of December 2015, the total number of scientific staff had decreased to 1,061

persons, including 129 Doctors of Sciences and 270 Candidates of Sciences. While the number of senior doctoral-level scholars increased, the overall reduction in research personnel and the significant decline in Candidates of Sciences indicate contraction in the mid-level scientific workforce. This structural shift may reflect migration of qualified specialists, aging of academic cadres, and limited institutional renewal during periods of economic strain. In demographic-economic terms, this represents a potential “brain drain” effect intertwined with broader migration processes” (Islamov and Babayev, 2020: 88).

Geographical conditions further contextualize these demographic dynamics. The Republic of Tajikistan occupies a mountainous zone in southeastern Central Asia. As noted by Mekhron Toshimuhammad “approximately 93 percent of the country’s territory consists of mountainous terrain, primarily within the Pamir, Tien Shan, Hindu Kush, Kunlun, and Himalayan mountain systems, with elevations ranging from 300 to 7,495 meters above sea level. The average life expectancy of citizens is 67 years, and population density stands at 45 persons per square kilometer. Ethnically, Tajiks comprise slightly less than 80 percent of the population, Uzbeks account for 15.3 percent, Russians and Kyrgyz each represent 1.1 percent, and Tatars and Turkmen each constitute 0.3 percent. Religiously, more than 95 percent of the population adheres to Islam, predominantly Sunni Islam; however, with rare exceptions, inhabitants of the mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Region (Pamir Mountains) are Ismailis, a branch of Shiite Islam” (Toshimuhammad, 2005: 25).

This extreme mountainous geography has profoundly influenced settlement patterns, economic development, and population distribution. Historical processes concentrated Tajik communities in valleys and isolated highland regions, reinforcing demographic fragmentation and regional disparities. Geographic isolation has shaped migration strategies, limited infrastructural connectivity, and contributed to uneven access to healthcare, education, and labor markets. Consequently, demographic phenomena such as life expectancy variations, fertility persistence in rural highland areas, and migration selectivity must be interpreted within this environmental framework.

When integrated into the broader national demographic model, external labor migration emerges as both a stabilizing and destabilizing force. On the one hand, remittances sustain household consumption, stimulate economic circulation, and alleviate labor market pressure amid continuing natural population growth. On the other hand, prolonged external migration may accelerate demographic aging by selectively removing working-age individuals, reduce reproductive potential domestically, and contribute to skilled labor depletion.

Tajikistan’s demographic dynamics between 1990 and 2023 are shaped by the interaction of sustained population growth, gradual aging, geographic constraints, ethnic restructuring, and institutional adaptation. Migration functions as a central mediating mechanism within this system linking demographic expansion, economic survival strategies, and structural transformation. For future demographic forecasts, the scale, duration, and selectivity of migration flows will remain critical determinants of population structure, labor supply, human capital development, and long-term socioeconomic sustainability.

The archival record entitled “List of Nationalities for the Processing of Materials of the All-Union Population Census of 1926” enumerated 188 nationalities, entry number 189 was designated as “other nationalities,” while entry number 190 referred to “nationalities not precisely indicated,” into which unspecified groups were. This classification scheme reveals early methodological ambiguities in Soviet ethnodemographic accounting: “The existence of residual and undefined categories indicates that ethnic identification was not yet stabilized, and that statistical instruments were still adapting to the ethnolinguistic complexity of Central Asia. Particular difficulties were noted in determining the national affiliation of the peoples and tribes of the Pamir region. The 1926 census recorded only the Yaghnobis, numbering 1,829 persons. In the linguistic classification table, the Yazgulyam language was reported with 1,924 speakers and the Shugnan-Rushan language with 15 speakers (SACHRT. F. 3316. In. 28. C. 865. P.28,29). However, the specialist on Pamir nationalities A. M. Dyakov identified eight distinct groups and estimated their populations as follows: Shugnans 12,000; Rushans 5,400; Bartangs and Oroshors 2,700; Wakhans 4,000; Ishkashimis between 500 and

600; Yazgulyams 2,000; and Yaghnobis 2,000 persons. Dyakov further emphasized that all these groups, with the exception of the Yaghnobis, identified themselves as Tajiks and referred to their language as Tajik” (SACHRT. F. 3316. In. 28. C. 865. P. 29).

This interpretation is further supported by Rakhim Masov, who characterizes the Soviet delimitation of Central Asia as a process of “crude partition,” emphasizing that political expediency often outweighed ethnographic and historical considerations (Masov, 1991:9). According to Masov, the fragmentation of Tajik settlement areas was not accidental but reflected the strategic priorities of Soviet governance, contributing to long-term demographic imbalance and territorial grievances.

Archival materials from the period 1927–1933 further document significant population movements between Kazakhstan and Tajikistan: A substantial number of households from districts of Kazakhstan resettled into the Kurgan-Tyube, Aral, and other districts of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic. At the same time, petitions from individuals located within the Tajik SSR indicate forced or involuntary relocation to the Kazakh Republic, with some reporting that they had already sold part of their property in local markets in anticipation of transfer (SACHRT. F. 3. Inv. 18. C. 19. P. 5, 7).

By 1934, “the economic organization of formerly nomadic households settling in the South Kazakhstan region encompassed a total contingent of 20,000 households” (SACHRT. F. 3. Inv. 18. C. 19. P. 10). Resolution No. 65 of the Presidium of the South Kazakhstan Regional Executive Committee, “adopted in the city of Chimkent on 22 April 1934, addressed the petition of representatives of 234 nomadic households from the Turkestan, Karasai, and other districts who had migrated in 1931–1933 and were at that time residing in the Tajik SSR, expressing their desire to return with property and livestock to their districts in the southern region” (SACHRT. F. 3. Inv. 18. C. 19. P. 11–12).

The same archival file records an influx of 1,900 Kazakh nomadic households demanding immediate transfer to the Aral Sea region of Kazakhstan: “The logistical organization of this relocation involved the transfer of households together with 202 camels, 31 horses, 45 cows, 25 donkeys, and approximately 160 head of small livestock from the Kurgan-Tyube and Aral districts of the Tajik SSR to the southern region, under the authority of Inspector Nurtumov Ali of the Regional Executive Committee” (SACHRT. F. 3. Inv. 18. C. 19. P. 11–12).

These materials are demographically significant for several reasons. First, they demonstrate that inter-republican mobility and administratively regulated population transfers were embedded features of regional demographic development long before the contemporary era of labor migration. Second, they reveal how state-directed settlement policies reshaped ethnic and territorial distributions, contributing to the formation of demographic patterns that persisted into the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Third, they underscore the structural interdependence of Tajikistan and neighboring territories within a broader Central Asian demographic system.

The scholarly work of Professor B. Grande, published in 1935 in the journal *Revolution and Nationality* (Issue No. 4), was devoted to refining the list of peoples of the USSR. His “Materials for the Clarification of the List of the Peoples of the USSR” were based on the All-Union Census of 1926, particularly Volume XVII of the Central Statistical Administration edition (Section I: “Nationality, Native Language, Age, Literacy”) and the “Brief Summaries” of that census (Issue IV, Moscow, 1926) (SARF. F. 3316. Inv. 28. C. 865. P. 29). The forthcoming All-Union Census of 1936 prompted the task of compiling a preliminary and precise list of peoples and languages in the USSR in order to clarify which of the recorded designations genuinely denoted distinct peoples or languages. Despite the passage of more than nine years since the 1926 census, no more accurate published list of the peoples and languages of the USSR had yet been produced (SARF. F. 3316. Inv. 28. C. 865. P.29).

The list used in the 1926 census included a number of designations that referred not to distinct nationalities but to tribes, subdivisions of nationalities, or even territorial and local names (GARF. F. 3316. Inv. 28. C. 865. P. 29). This methodological ambiguity is crucial for contemporary demographic analysis. It highlights that ethnic statistics, often treated as objective demographic indicators, are historically contingent constructs shaped by administrative priorities and epistemological frameworks.

In the context of the broader study of Tajikistan’s demographic dynamics from 1990 to 2023, these archival sources serve major analytical functions. First, they provide a *longue duree* perspective on ethnic structuring and territorial redistribution, enabling scholars to trace the historical origins of present-day ethnic composition and regional demographic imbalances. Second, they illuminate the continuity between early twentieth-century administratively managed mobility and modern labor migration, suggesting that population mobility has long been a structural component of the region’s demographic regime. Third, they allow for critical reflection on the reliability and comparability of historical and contemporary census data, particularly with regard to ethnicity and language. Thus, the integration of these archival materials transforms the analysis from a purely post-Soviet demographic study into a historically grounded examination of demographic transition, ethnic consolidation, and migration-driven structural change. By situating contemporary fertility, mortality, and migration trends within their deeper historical context, the research acquires greater explanatory power and enhances the robustness of long-term demographic forecasting for Tajikistan. These documents allow for the reconstruction of the historical foundations of ethnic classification, migration regulation, and territorial population redistribution, thereby contextualizing contemporary demographic processes within a broader structural continuum.

Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis of demographic processes in Tajikistan from 1990 to 2023 demonstrates that the country’s population development cannot be interpreted through a single linear model of demographic transition. Rather, Tajikistan exhibits a complex and hybrid demographic configuration shaped by the interaction of sustained fertility, gradually improving survival rates, large-scale labor migration, historical patterns of ethnic consolidation, and structurally constrained geographic conditions. The persistence of relatively high fertility, even amid socioeconomic transformation, has ensured continued natural population growth and the preservation of a comparatively young age structure. At the same time, progressive improvements in life expectancy accompanied by a consistent gender gap favoring women have initiated a gradual expansion of older cohorts. This simultaneous presence of demographic momentum and incipient aging distinguishes Tajikistan from many post-Soviet states characterized by depopulation and accelerated age structure contraction. In Tajikistan, aging unfolds not as a consequence of demographic decline, but alongside ongoing quantitative population expansion.

Mortality trends reveal incremental improvements in survival probabilities, although periodic volatility underscores the sensitivity of demographic indicators to economic fluctuations, healthcare accessibility, environmental vulnerability, and infrastructural limitations—particularly in mountainous regions. The country’s extreme topography, with the overwhelming majority of territory located in high-altitude zones, continues to influence settlement concentration, regional disparities in access to services, and the spatial distribution of demographic risk.

Migration emerges as a structurally decisive factor within Tajikistan’s demographic system. Contemporary external labor migration functions not only as a socioeconomic survival strategy for households but also as a macroeconomic stabilizer influencing domestic consumption, import dynamics, and overall economic circulation. However, the sustained outflow of working-age individuals contributes to distortions in age-sex composition, affects reproductive behavior, and complicates long-term labor force sustainability. Importantly, archival evidence demonstrates that large-scale and administratively regulated population mobility has deep historical roots in the region. Early twentieth-century census classification challenges, ethnic categorization ambiguities, and inter-republican resettlement policies reveal that demographic structuring in Tajikistan has long been shaped by state intervention, migration flows, and processes of ethnocultural consolidation. Contemporary demographic patterns thus reflect both post-Soviet transformation and earlier institutional legacies.

Tajikistan is likely to experience continued population growth in the medium term due to demographic momentum embedded in its youthful cohorts. However, the share of elderly individuals will progressively increase as survival improves and larger generations advance into older ages. The

future trajectory of dependency ratios will depend critically on three interrelated variables: fertility stabilization patterns, the scale and direction of migration flows, and the effectiveness of healthcare modernization. Labor market sustainability will remain closely tied to the regulation of migration processes and the productive integration of expanding working-age cohorts.

Tajikistan’s demographic dynamics between 1990 and 2023 reflect the coexistence of expansion, structural maturation, and mobility. The country is transitioning from a predominantly high-fertility and externally influenced mortality regime toward a more differentiated demographic structure characterized by overlapping stages of transition. Understanding this hybrid configuration grounded in historical continuity and contemporary transformation is essential for constructing reliable demographic forecasts and for designing policies that ensure long-term socioeconomic resilience.

Sources

RSASPH — Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History
RSACH — Russian State Archive of Contemporary History
SACHRT — State Archive of Contemporary History of the Republic of Tajikistan

Источники

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РГАНИ — Российский государственный архив новейшей истории.
ГАВИРТ — Государственный архив новейшей истории Республики Таджикистан

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