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## **CONTEMPORARY ETHNODEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENT TRENDS IN THE KOSTANAY REGION**

**Annotation.** The article presents a comprehensive analysis of the current ethnodemographic development trends in the Kostanay region. The basic problem of the study lies in identifying the impact of changes in the ethnic composition and migration processes on the socio-economic balance of the region. The relevance of the topic is determined by the growing ethnodemographic transformations in Kazakhstan, the restructuring of the labor force, and the need to enhance regional demographic and migration policies.

The research employs statistical analysis, comparative-geographical methods, and demographic modeling. The key hypothesis states that the direction and intensity of ethnodemographic change directly influence regional social stability and economic capacity.

The results show a steady increase in the share of the Kazakh ethnic group, while Slavic-origin populations have declined due to migration outflows. Intensifying urbanization and youth migration are reshaping the demographic structure of the region.

The findings can be applied in developing regional ethnodemographic policies, improving migration management strategies, and adapting social development programs to the specific characteristics of the Kostanay region.

**Keywords:** ethnodemography, migration, population structure, urbanization, ethnic composition, Kostanay region, demographic policy.

### *Introduction*

In contemporary socio-economic discourse, the population is increasingly conceptualized as a key strategic and developmental resource, a shift that has led to a significant intensification of interdisciplinary research interest in demographic dynamics and long-term population trends. Demographic indicators are now recognized not merely as statistical descriptors of natural and migratory movement but as critical determinants of labor force capacity, human capital formation, and the structural stability of regional development. Consequently, demographic policy has emerged as a priority area at both national and regional levels, with targeted programs aimed at stabilizing population structures and mitigating negative demographic tendencies. The efficiency of such interventions, however, is largely predicated on the systematic monitoring of demographic indicators and the comprehensive evaluation of the outcomes of policy measures implemented across different administrative levels.

Within this national context, the Kostanay region is distinguished by a *persistently adverse* demographic profile. Comparative assessments against national averages reveal several critical trends: a sustained decline in the overall population, birth rates that remain insufficient to ensure natural generational replacement, and a comparatively slower reduction



in mortality levels. Collectively, these processes indicate demographic imbalance, which poses potential constraints for the region's socio-economic resilience and developmental prospects over the medium and long term.

**Purpose of the Study:** To develop a structured analytical assessment of the contemporary ethnodemographic situation in the Kostanay region.

**Research Objectives:**

- To characterize the physical and geographical foundation of the region as a determinant of settlement patterns;
- To analyze the quantitative and qualitative demographic transformations currently observed in the region's population;
- To identify and interpret the principal factors influencing ongoing demographic shifts within the Kostanay region.

*Materials and Methods of Research*

The Kostanay region is situated in the northern sector of the Republic of Kazakhstan, occupying the interfluvial territory of the Tobyl and Torgai river basins. Geopolitically, the region has a transboundary position: to the north and northwest it adjoins the Kurgan, Chelyabinsk, and Orenburg oblasts of the Russian Federation, whereas to the southeast and southwest it borders the administrative regions of North Kazakhstan, Akmola, Karaganda, and Aktobe within Kazakhstan. This spatial configuration places the territory at the intersection of internal regional connections and cross-border socio-economic interactions, which historically shaped migration flows, settlement patterns, and the ethnodemographic structure of the population.

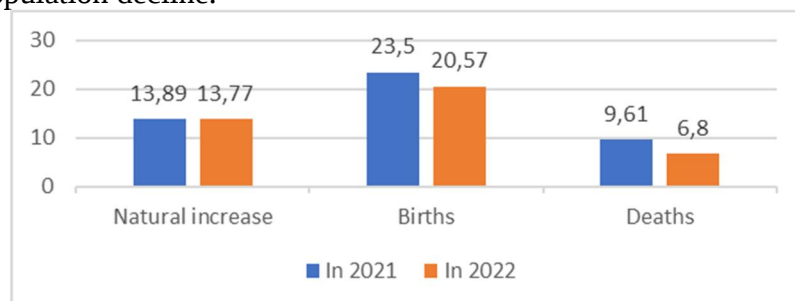
The administrative entity of the region was formally established on July 29, 1936, based on the former Kostanay and Torgai gubernias. Its total area amounts to 196.0 thousand km<sup>2</sup>, with the city of Kostanay serving as the administrative center. The region comprises 16 rural districts, 5 cities, 8 urban-type settlements, and 690 rural administrative units. The population stands at approximately 900.3 thousand people, of whom 53.7% reside in urban localities (483.5 thousand) and 46.3% in rural areas (416.8 thousand). The average population density is 4.6 persons per square kilometer. The territory is predominantly characterized by level steppe relief. The region's subsoil is noted for its considerable mineral wealth, including large reserves of magnetite and oolitic iron ores, bauxite, gold, nickel, asbestos, and brown coal, as well as raw materials vital for construction, such as cement-grade limestone, dolomite, refractory and brick clays, glass sands, granite, diorite, and sandstone [1].

Due to its significant latitudinal span (approximately 740 km), the region encompasses several distinct physical and geographical zones: the western part lies within the Pre-Ural Upland (250–400 m), the northern part corresponds to the southern margin of the West Siberian Plain (150–200 m), the southern portion is situated on the Torgai Plateau (250–300 m), while the southeastern extremity includes the western segment of the Saryarka highlands (450–500 m). The predominantly flat terrain has historically facilitated agricultural development, transportation, and the establishment of settlements.

The research employed a combination of historical, comparative-geographical, ethnodemographic, and statistical methods. According to 2023 demographic data, the total population of the Kostanay region declined by 0.41%. For comparison, as of January 1, 2023, the population of Kazakhstan reached 19,776,807 people, marking an annual increase of 1.35%. The demographic decline in the region is primarily driven by the persistent excess of mortality over birth rates (the coefficient of natural decrease was –1.14‰ in 2022), while migration flows are insufficient to compensate for this natural loss. In 2021, the number of



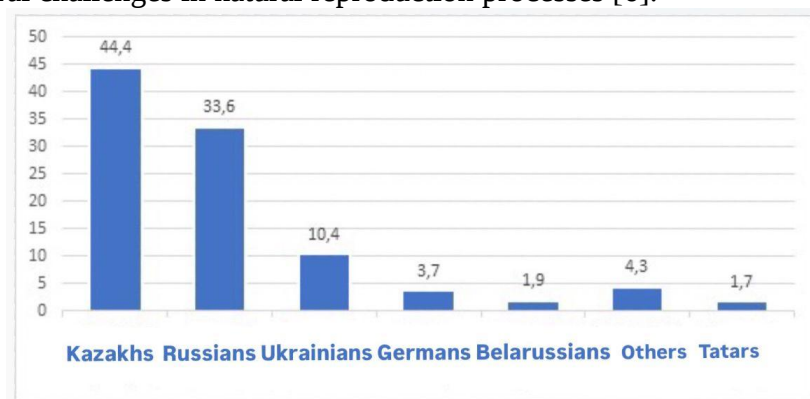
births declined by 4.44% (492 cases), and mortality increased by 14.7% (1562 cases), resulting in 11,174 births compared to 12,158 deaths (Fig. 1), which confirms the sustained trend of natural population decline.



Figs 1. General coefficients of natural movement in Kazakhstan. Source: compiled by the author

According to recent demographic observations, the ethnic structure of the population in the Kostanay region is characterized by a multiethnic composition. As of May 4, 2023, the proportion of Kazakhs accounted for 44.4% of the total population, Russians constituted 33.6%, Ukrainians represented 10.4%, Germans amounted to 3.7%, while Tatars and Belarusians comprised 1.7% and 1.9%, respectively; other ethnic groups collectively accounted for the remaining 4.3% (Fig. 2). This ethnic diversity has historically been shaped by migration flows, state demographic policies, and socio-economic transformations within the region.

At the national scale, Kazakhstan demonstrates a generally stable trend of natural population increase, with an average coefficient of 23.5‰. The highest birth rates are characteristic of the southern and western regions of the country: Mangystau region records 28.53 births per 1,000 population, Turkistan region shows 27.67, and the city of Shymkent maintains a corresponding level of 27.13 per 1,000 population. In contrast, the Kostanay region exhibits a considerably lower indicator — 12.97 births per 1,000 inhabitants — reflecting a demographic situation that is less favorable compared to national dynamics and indicating structural challenges in natural reproduction processes [6].



Figs 2. Ethnic composition of Kostanay region. Source: compiled by the author

As of February 1, 2024, the demographic size of the Kostanay region was assessed at 829.5 thousand inhabitants. Within this total, the majority of the population — 517.9 thousand individuals (62.4%) — resides in urban settlements, whereas 311.6 thousand people (37.6%) live in rural areas. Such a ratio demonstrates the sustained predominance of urbanization processes in the region and confirms the structural shift toward city-centered patterns of residence.



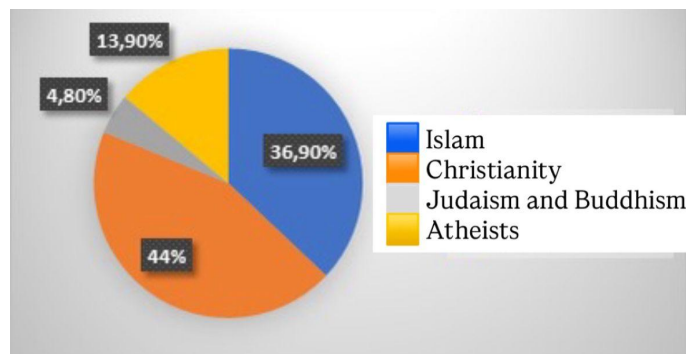
In January 2024, the natural population increase amounted to 47 persons. This indicator exceeds the value recorded during the same month of the previous year, when the natural growth reached only 20 persons. Although the absolute scale of the increase remains modest, the observed upward trend may be interpreted as an early signal of gradual demographic stabilization. At the same time, the region continues to lag behind the national average in terms of natural reproduction parameters, suggesting the persistence of long-term demographic challenges.

The urban population numbered 510,586 people, while the rural population reached 323,057 people. Compared to the previous census data, the share of the urban population increased by 9%, reaching 61.2%, whereas the share of the rural population decreased from 47.8% to 38.8%.

Compared to the previous census, the number of men decreased by 15,343 people or 3.7%, and the number of women decreased by 36,584 people or 7.8%. The ratio of men to women developed with a predominance of women, who accounted for 51.7%, compared to men at 48.3% (431,368 and 402,275 people, respectively).

In the total population, 830,923 people (99.7% of the region's population) were citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2,617 people (0.3%) were citizens of other countries, and 103 were stateless persons [7].

Islam was professed by 308,024 people or 36.9% of the total population, Christianity by 366,880 people (44%), Judaism by 508 people, Buddhism by 349 people, and other religions by 1,475 people. A total of 4.8% (40,343 people) identified themselves as non-believers, while 13.9% (116,064 people) declined to indicate their religious affiliation (Figs 3).



Figs 3. Religious composition of Kostanay region. Source: compiled by the author

In January 2024, 854 children were born in the Kostanay region, which represents an increase of 0.8% in comparison with the corresponding month of 2023. During the same period, 807 deaths were registered, marking a 2.4% decrease relative to January 2023. Thus, although the difference between birth and mortality levels remains narrow, the dynamics indicate a slight improvement in natural population change.

The region, however, continues to experience a negative migration balance. In January 2024, the migration loss reached –558 persons, which is significantly higher than the figure recorded in January 2023 (–276 persons). Within this indicator, external migration accounted for –66 individuals (compared to +11 in the previous year), while internal migration contributed –492 individuals (against –287 in 2023). These data reflect the sustained predominance of population outflow over inflow, particularly in internal migration processes, which continue to exert downward pressure on the regional population size.

Regarding mortality structure, the leading causes of death were diseases of the circulatory system (24.9%), respiratory illnesses (10.2%), malignant neoplasms (9.6%), and



external causes such as accidents, poisoning, and injuries (9.4%), followed by diseases of the digestive system (9.0%) [8]. This distribution corresponds to general national patterns, where chronic non-communicable diseases retain a dominant share.

Age-specific mortality indicators show that the number of deaths among children under one year reached 1,365 cases, with the infant mortality rate recorded at 5.35 per 1,000 live births. In 2022, deaths among children under five years of age totaled 3,689 cases, corresponding to an under-five mortality rate of 8.69 per 1,000 live births. These figures highlight persistent issues in maternal and child health and underscore the need for enhanced preventive and perinatal healthcare measures.

According to the results of the study, a positive aspect was noted: in recent years, the infant mortality rate has decreased. While in 2021 it decreased by 6%, in 2022 it fell by 5.4%. A decline in mortality among children under one year of age was also observed (6.4% in 2022). However, this decrease is not particularly significant compared to the national data: per 1,000 live births, the rate in Kazakhstan decreased from 6.9% in 2021 to 6.3% in 2022, and in Kostanay region from 6.1% in 2021 to 5.8% in 2022.

The leading cause of mortality among children under one year of age continues to be complications arising during the perinatal period. In the previous year, this category accounted for approximately 63% of all infant deaths. The persistence of such trends is largely attributed to the insufficient availability of highly specialized neonatal and obstetric care in a number of maternity facilities across the region. As a result, women with high-risk pregnancies or complicated labor often had to seek medical assistance in specialized healthcare institutions located in the city of Kostanay, which indicates structural disparities in access to perinatal medical services [9].

With regard to the overall mortality structure of the population, diseases of the circulatory system remain the predominant cause, accounting for nearly 45% of all registered deaths. Meanwhile, mortality associated with infectious and parasitic diseases has shown a decrease of approximately 5%. In contrast, deaths resulting from malignant neoplasms increased by 4%, from diseases of the digestive system by 7%, and from respiratory system disorders by 11%. Mortality linked to diseases of the nervous system demonstrated the most notable growth, rising by approximately 40%. These shifts underscore the growing burden of chronic non-communicable diseases and the need for improved disease prevention and long-term management strategies.

The observed mortality structure in the Kostanay region largely corresponds to the national pattern. Across Kazakhstan, diseases of the circulatory system remain the primary cause of death and account for 49% of total mortality, although a slight decline of 0.7% has been recorded at the national level. This alignment suggests that the region reflects broader demographic and epidemiological trends characteristic of the country as a whole.

Neoplasms ranked second at 17% (with a 1.8% increase in mortality), and deaths from other causes ranked third at 8% (a 5% decrease). Growth was also observed in mortality from certain infectious and parasitic diseases (by 8%), diseases of the digestive system (by 7%), and diseases of the respiratory system (by 3%) [10].

Thus, in Kostanay region, as in Kazakhstan overall, a trend is observed toward increased mortality from neoplasms, diseases of the digestive and respiratory systems, and a decrease in mortality from circulatory system diseases.

In 2021, 5,371 marriages were officially registered in the Kostanay region, which exceeds the 2020 figure (4,749 marriages) by 622 cases, or approximately 13%. This number represents 3.8% of all marriages recorded throughout Kazakhstan during the same year. In



contrast, the number of registered divorces reached 2,410 cases, which is 251 (9.4%) fewer than in 2020, when 2,661 divorces were documented. The share of divorces from the total across the country amounted to about 5%.

When calculated relative to the population size, the regional marriage rate in 2021 stood at 6.24 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants, which placed the Kostanay region at the lowest position nationally according to this indicator. For comparison, the average marriage rate across Kazakhstan was 7.38 per 1,000 inhabitants.

In terms of divorce indicators, the Kostanay region ranked sixth in the republic, with 2.8 divorces per 1,000 people, while the national average was slightly lower—2.54 divorces per 1,000 inhabitants [5]. These data suggest that, despite the overall increase in the number of marriages in the region, the level of marital instability remains relatively high. The demographic situation demonstrates the coexistence of two opposing tendencies: a gradual rise in family formation alongside a persistently significant share of family dissolution.

The majority of marriages were contracted between persons aged 20–34 years — 70%. Marriages are also registered among individuals of retirement age. In 2021, 310 men over 60 years old entered into marriage unions. Typically, women over 50 years of age become their spouses. However, marriages with significant age differences are also recorded: three older grooms chose young brides aged 25 to 34 years [11].

As of 2021, most marriages were first unions (approximately 70%). At the same time, every third marriage was a union between a man and/or a woman who had previously been married. A considerable proportion of men and women marry between the ages of 25 and 29 (in this age group, more than 56% of all grooms and 58% of all brides marry).

#### *Research results*

Analysis of the collected data indicates that one of the key determinants contributing to the population decline in the northern regions of Kazakhstan, including the Kostanay region, is the sustained migration outflow of residents of Slavic origin, primarily ethnic Russians, to the Russian Federation. This process is largely associated with the implementation of Russia's state program titled "*State Support for the Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad*", which facilitates relocation by offering financial, organizational, and legal assistance to those who identify themselves as ethnic or cultural compatriots of the Russian state.

The existence of such a program has strengthened the mechanism of return migration, thereby increasing the scale of outflow from Kazakhstan's northern territories, where Slavic ethnic groups historically constituted a significant share of the population. As a result, migration acts as one of the primary drivers reshaping the ethnodemographic structure of the region.

Compatriots who have been socialized within the cultural traditions of the Russian language environment and who possess a sufficient level of linguistic competence typically demonstrate comparatively high adaptability when relocating. Their cultural proximity and shared symbolic identity allow them to integrate more readily into the socio-cultural and communicative structures of Russian society, reducing the costs of socialization and accelerating inclusion into local professional and community networks.

In this regard, the state resettlement program performs not only a demographic function but also a socioeconomic one. It is intended to support the internal development priorities of the Russian Federation. At the present stage, these priorities include the need to reverse depopulation trends, compensate for population losses in several strategically significant regions, and address the reduction of the working-age population — a problem that



has direct implications for national economic sustainability and labor market capacity [12]. Thus, the program contributes to mitigating the effects of population decline and supports the long-term objectives of regional development and demographic security [13].

The implementation of this program has had a direct and measurable impact on the ethnodemographic dynamics of the northern regions of Kazakhstan, including the Kostanay region. Historically, these territories were characterized by a significant share of the Russian-speaking population, formed during the Soviet period as a result of industrial development, agricultural colonization, and the settlement of labor resources. With the activation of the resettlement program, many individuals identifying as ethnic Russians, as well as representatives of other Slavic groups and Russian-speaking communities, received institutional and financial support for relocation, which intensified outmigration processes [14].

This outflow has contributed to a noticeable shift in the ethnic composition of the region, leading to a decrease in the proportion of Russian and other Slavic-origin residents and a corresponding increase in the share of the Kazakh population. At the same time, the migration of predominantly working-age individuals and specialists has influenced the labor market structure. The departure of qualified technical and industrial personnel has posed challenges for enterprises operating in manufacturing, agriculture, and social infrastructure sectors, which rely on stable human resources.

From a demographic perspective, the program has reinforced the effects of natural population decline already observed in the region. Migration losses have exceeded natural population growth rates, contributing to the overall reduction of population size and accelerating processes of demographic aging. Consequently, the Kostanay region has faced the dual challenge of both quantitative (reduction in total population) and qualitative (change in professional and age composition) transformation of its demographic profile [15].

Participants of the State Program are provided with a range of social guarantees and support measures. Each compatriot who is officially accepted into the Program receives a participant certificate, issued in accordance with the standardized form approved by the Government of the Russian Federation. This document is used uniformly throughout the entire territory of the Russian Federation and is classified as a strict-accountability record [16].

The certificate serves as legal confirmation of the rights and obligations of the Program participant, as well as those of the accompanying family members included in the certificate. Moreover, it formalizes the commitments undertaken by the Russian Federation to provide state support and guarantees, the scope of which varies depending on the settlement region and the level of regional participation in the Program.

The validity of the participant certificate is limited to a period of five years from the date of issuance. Upon expiration, the individual concerned forfeits the legal status of a Program participant, and the family members listed in the certificate simultaneously lose their associated status [13].

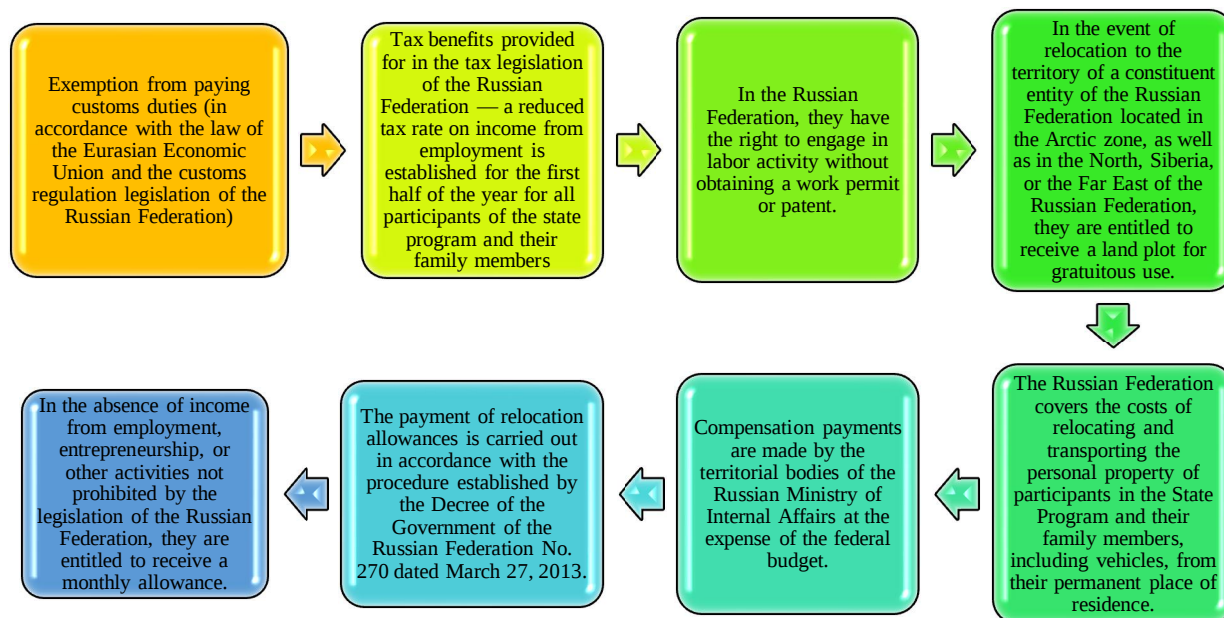
The Program grants the participant and accompanying family members the right to move to the Russian Federation for permanent residence (Fig. 4). In addition, they receive the following benefits:

- exemption from customs duties on personal property transported during relocation, in accordance with the legislation of the Eurasian Economic Union and the customs regulation framework of the Russian Federation.

The conditions for exemption from customs duties for individuals importing goods and vehicles for personal use into the Russian Federation are defined in Chapter 37 of the



Customs Code of the Eurasian Economic Union and in paragraph 6 of Appendix No. 3 to Decision No. 107 of the Council of the Eurasian Economic Commission dated December 20, 2017, “On Certain Issues Related to the Eurasian Economic Commission Council Regarding Goods for Personal Use” [14].



Figs 4. The State Program of the Russian Federation “Assistance to the Voluntary Resettlement to the Russian Federation of Compatriots Living Abroad as an Organizational and Legal Mechanism.” [14]. Source: Compiled by the author

**According to the tax legislation of the Russian Federation**, all participants of the State Program and their family members are granted tax benefits – a reduced tax rate is established for income from employment activities received during the first six months.

A foreign citizen (or a stateless person) who is a participant in the State Program, as well as his or her family members migrating together with him or her, are entitled:

- to carry out labor activities in the Russian Federation without obtaining a work permit or patent. At the same time, the employer is also exempt from the requirement to have permission to attract and employ foreign workers;

- to obtain a temporary residence permit (without being subject to the quota approved by the Government of the Russian Federation and without submitting a certificate confirming knowledge of the Russian language, fundamentals of law, and the history of Russia), as well as to acquire a place of residence and citizenship of the Russian Federation under the legislation of the Russian Federation on citizenship [14];

- in case of resettlement to the territory of a constituent entity of the Russian Federation located in the Arctic zone, in the North, Siberia, or the Far East – to receive a land plot for gratuitous use.

Depending on the selected settlement area, participants are entitled to receive state guarantees and social support, including:

- ✓ compensation from the federal budget for relocation to their future place of residence.

The Russian Federation reimburses the participants of the State Program and their family members for expenses related to the transportation and transfer of personal property, including vehicles, from their permanent place of residence (for citizens of the Russian Federation) or



according to the registration of residence of resettlers. Compensation payments are made in accordance with the procedure established by the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 150 of March 10, 2007.

The territorial bodies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia make compensation payments at the expense of federal budget funds;

- reimbursement of expenses related to the payment of state duties for notarization of the accuracy of translations of personal documents required for processing resettlers' legal status in the territory of the Russian Federation and/or authenticity of the translator's signature.

Payment of relocation allowances is carried out in accordance with the procedure established by the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 270 of March 27, 2013;

- receipt of a monthly allowance in the absence of income from labor, entrepreneurial, or other activities not prohibited by the legislation of the Russian Federation.

The rules for payments to participants of the State Program and their family members in the absence of such income are established by the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 8 of January 15, 2007;

- payment of a housing subsidy from the federal budget – a social payment provided to the participant of the State Program and his or her family members for the purchase or construction of housing, the right to which is confirmed by a housing certificate [15].

The Russian Federation's initiative "Gathering Compatriots" has often been criticized for the dismissive attitude of local Russian officials toward migrants and the imperfection of the corresponding state program. Nevertheless, Russian-speaking residents of Kazakhstan have been actively responding to the call of their historical homeland. One may debate the reasons that force them to pack up and leave – they may seem rooted in extreme disillusionment or in "imperial" snobbery, and thus appear unconvincing... Yet, in any case, it is difficult to describe such a massive outflow of Russian-speaking people from Kazakhstan merely as a "natural process" resulting from purely economic factors.

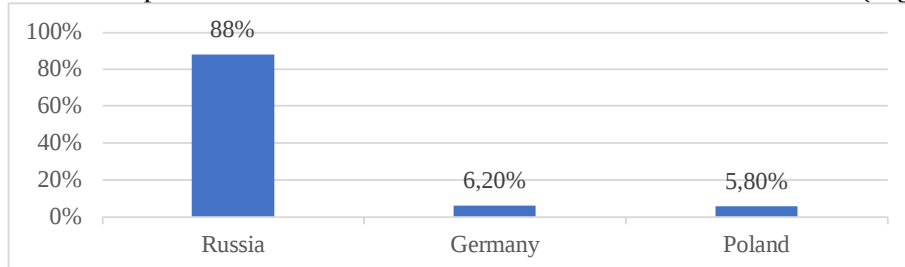
Russia's motivation for attracting its compatriots is clear – it seeks to address problems related to natural population decline, low birth rates, and a shortage of labor force. Why, however, Kazakhstan has become the main "donor" of human capital for its northern neighbor remains an ambiguous question. Various experts consistently assert that Russian-speaking people leave Kazakhstan either in search of higher earnings, more attractive social guarantees, or to satisfy their "imperial ambitions" [16].

In 2016, a total of 23.5 thousand Russians officially relocated to Russia for permanent residence (PR); in 2017 – 26 thousand; in 2018 – nearly 30 thousand. The current year may even prove "record-breaking" – in the first half alone, about 19 thousand individuals renounced their Kazakhstani citizenship in favor of a Russian passport. Although domestic media often describe the "Compatriots" program, designed to facilitate voluntary resettlement to the Russian Federation, as fictitious and purely populist, and tell stories of those who failed to adapt to life in Russia and returned to Kazakhstan, the above-mentioned trend is quite revealing. Indeed, cases of families returning to Kazakhstan after relocation do occur, but these examples (despite the difficulties of obtaining Russian citizenship and settling permanently for citizens from former Soviet republics) cannot be considered systemic indicators.

The main direction of emigration for permanent residence from Kazakhstan remains Russia, which in 2019 received nearly 40 thousand people, or 88% of all emigrants. The second most popular destination is Germany (2,805 people or 6.2%), followed by Poland (550



people). However, these figures do not take into account the ethnic characteristics of migrants. It should also be noted that many individuals leaving Kazakhstan for permanent residence do not formalize their departure and therefore are not reflected in these statistics (Figs 5).



Figs 5. Main Direction of Migration from Kazakhstan for Permanent Residence. Source: Compiled by the author

According to the available research data, during the previous year and the first quarter of the current year, more than 45,000 individuals left Kazakhstan for permanent residence in the Russian Federation. The overwhelming majority of these migrants were ethnic Russians originating predominantly from the northern and central regions of Kazakhstan.

As noted by the analytical resource *Ranking.kz*, between January and December 2019, the overall migration outflow from Kazakhstan amounted to 45.2 thousand people, which is 8% higher compared to the previous year. Among those who left, ethnic Russians represented the largest group (32.8 thousand), followed by ethnic Germans (3.2 thousand) and Ukrainians (approximately 3 thousand). The primary destination for emigrants remained the Russian Federation, which received 39.8 thousand individuals. The highest levels of outmigration were recorded in East Kazakhstan (7.1 thousand people), Karaganda (5.8 thousand), and Kostanay (5.7 thousand) regions.

Additionally, data published by the analytical portal *Finprom.kz* indicate that in January–March 2020, 7.3 thousand people emigrated from Kazakhstan, which is 12% fewer than in the same period of the previous year. The authors of the report associate this temporary decline with the restrictive measures implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is also emphasized that during the first quarter of the year, the majority of emigrants were individuals of working age (from 16 years until retirement age), totaling approximately 5.4 thousand persons, or nearly 73% of the total number of migrants. The Russian Federation continued to dominate as the primary destination country, accounting for 87% of all registered departures.

Among the key motivating factors for relocation to the Russian Federation are the perceived availability of higher-quality education in Russian universities and broader employment opportunities, particularly in industrial and service sectors.

In terms of regional distribution, the largest number of emigrants came from East Kazakhstan region (1.2 thousand people), followed by Kostanay region (917 people), Pavlodar region (857), and Karaganda and North Kazakhstan regions — 830 and 728 people respectively [17].

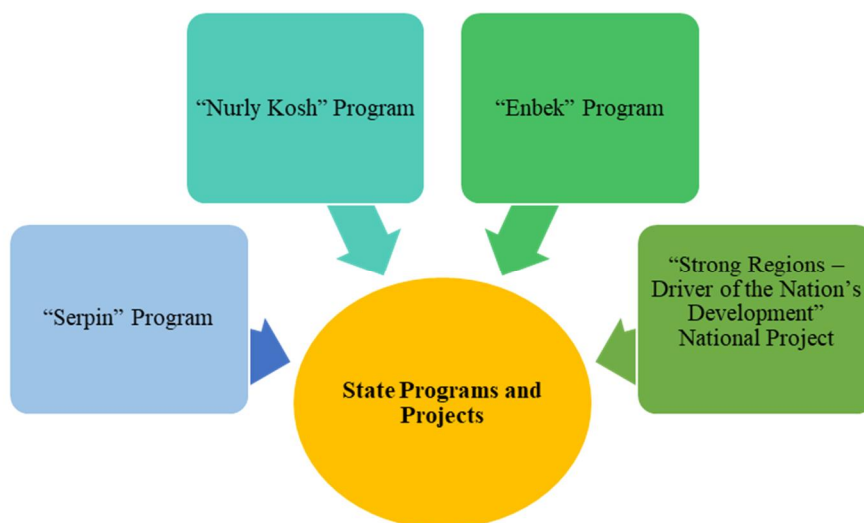
According to the statistical reports of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, over 161 thousand individuals obtained Russian citizenship during the first quarter of 2020. This value demonstrates a pronounced increase — approximately 2.5 times higher than the figure recorded for the same period in the previous year. Researchers associate this surge primarily with the legislative changes that came into force in 2020, which simplified the procedure for acquiring citizenship for certain categories of foreign nationals, including compatriots residing in



the CIS countries. The introduced administrative facilitations significantly reduced both the duration and complexity of application processing, thereby stimulating a higher inflow of applicants [18].

One of the main priorities during the third decade of Kazakhstan's independence has been the strengthening of the process of "Kazakhization" in the northern regions. Naturally, this issue also includes Kostanay region within the framework of our research. It is particularly concerning that the share of Kazakhs in Kostanay region still does not exceed 50% [19].

Nevertheless, significant work has been carried out in this direction. The following initiatives and state programs demonstrate the ongoing efforts by the government to improve the ethnic and demographic situation in the region. The programs and projects presented below have had a tangible impact on the transformation of the ethnodemographic composition of Kostanay region [19].



Figs 6. State programs and projects influencing the demographic development of Kostanay Region. Source: Compiled by the author

Since the launch of the "Enbek" ("Employment") program, from 2016 to 2020, 617 people have migrated to the Kostanay region from the Turkestan region — including 319 men and 298 women. The relocation primarily aims to fill labor market needs in the region. At job fairs held in densely populated southern regions, potential migrants are offered employment in high-demand occupations in Kostanay.

Upon arrival, migrants are placed in job openings provided by the Employment Center. If the proposed job does not suit them, they may look for work independently. Migrants have found employment in various fields such as teaching, medicine, mechanics, cooking, and management.

Of the 617 migrants who arrived in Kostanay region, 292 were of working age, and among them, 243 people (83.2%) were successfully employed.

When any citizen applies to the Employment Center, specialists provide consultation services on program opportunities, including free vocational training and, if desired, obtaining a second profession in demand on the labor market. Most migrants are employed shortly after their arrival.

The regional demand for labor reaches up to 6,000 job openings annually [19].

Currently, the most in-demand skilled occupations in the region include mechanics, heavy truck drivers, construction workers, electricians, and cooks. There is also a consistent need for doctors, teachers, and technical specialists.



To support agricultural development, various microcredit programs are available with preferential interest rates, and within the framework of the “*Enbek*” Program, both grant funding and microcredit loans are provided.

State grants are offered on a non-repayable basis to participants who are starting or planning to start a small business.

Government grants for new business ideas are provided up to 100 monthly calculation indices (MCI) (approximately 252,200 KZT), while young people, large or low-income families, and able-bodied persons with disabilities may receive grants up to 200 MCI (about 505,000 KZT).

Housing is purchased at market prices. Program participants receive financial assistance to cover rental and utility costs.

In 2023, the Kostanay region received 960 kandas (ethnic Kazakhs returning from abroad) and internal migrants from the country’s densely populated southern regions. These families participate in the national project “Strong Regions — the Driver of Country Development.” Under this program, relocated individuals receive financial support, employment, and housing.

According to the ministry, in 2023 there was also a significant increase in arrivals of ethnic Kazakhs from neighboring regions of Russia — 40 people arrived in the first months of the year. New arrivals may choose to settle in any of the 20 districts or cities of the region. The list of sought-after professions includes welders, mechanics, doctors, teachers, and veterinarians [18].

**“Serpín-2050” – “Mangilik El Zhastary – Industriyaga” State Program.** The “Serpín-2050” program, also known as “Mangilik El Youth for Industry”, has been operating since 2014.

Its goal is to train and employ youth from the densely populated southern regions of Kazakhstan in northern, western, and eastern regions, where there is a shortage of skilled personnel. Initially, the program focused on pedagogical specialties, later expanding to include technical and agricultural fields.

Students who are admitted to universities under the “Serpín” grant program are provided with dormitory accommodation, and upon graduation, the university assists in job placement.

Under this project, youth from southern Kazakhstan can receive free education in universities and vocational colleges of Akmola, Aktobe, Atyrau, West Kazakhstan, North Kazakhstan, East Kazakhstan, Pavlodar, Kostanay, and Karaganda regions — where there is demand for industrial labor — and gain permanent employment opportunities.

In 2014, the *Kostanay State Pedagogical Institute* was designated as one of the higher education institutions implementing the “Serpín-2050” program. The institute provided dormitories for “Serpín” students and contributed to the realization of this state initiative of national importance.

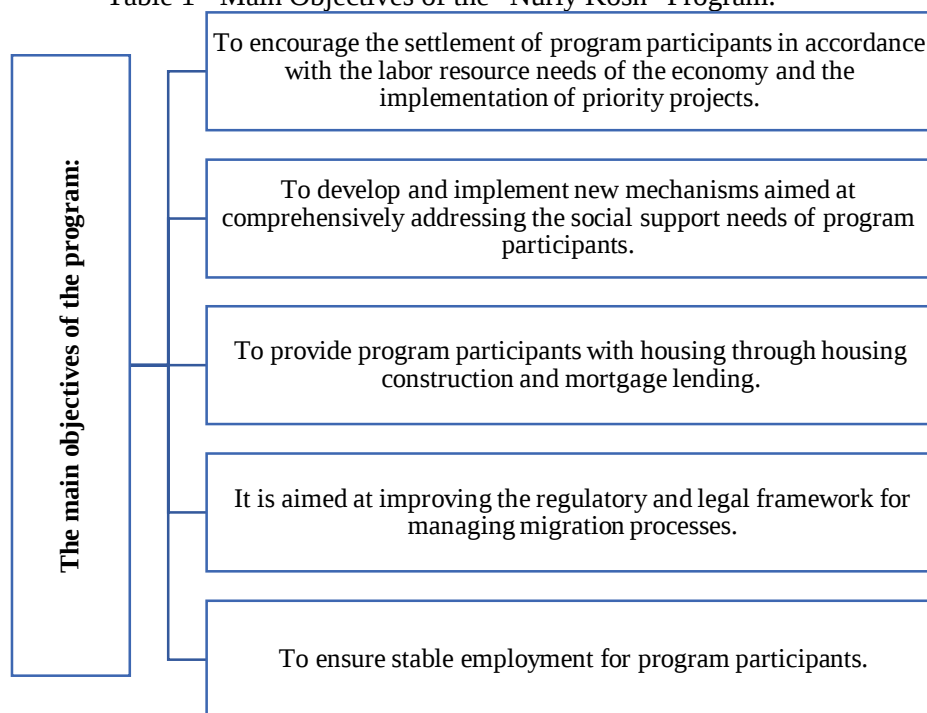
Although the program initially gained momentum in Kostanay region, in recent years it has stagnated and is on the verge of discontinuation. Under the program, regional colleges enrolled 100 students in 2014 and 150 in 2015, but afterward, the number of participants declined sharply. By 2021, no new students were admitted under the program. The main problem lies in the failure to provide employment for graduates and their difficulty in finding jobs independently [20].

**“Nurly Kosh” Program.**



The “*Nurly Kosh*” (“*Bright Migration*”) state program, initiated by First President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2008, was designed to facilitate the large-scale repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs from abroad. It aimed to revitalize depopulated villages, repopulate rural schools, and reinvigorate agriculture by resettling returning compatriots in underpopulated areas.

Table 1 - Main Objectives of the “*Nurly Kosh*” Program.



Its main goal was to resettle ethnic Kazakhs from abroad, as well as former citizens of Kazakhstan who came for employment, and residents of unfavorable regions, by providing them with housing, infrastructure, and integration support.

In essence, the “*Nurly Kosh*” program sought to reconnect the interrupted thread of migration, revive the halted repatriation process, and restore demographic balance in sparsely populated rural areas (see *Table 1*). [21]

According to the Territorial Development Strategy of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2015, the Northern, Southern, and Central territorial development axes were to become the main macro-regions for resettlement of the program participants [20].

However, instead of moving migrants to rural areas, the returnees were settled near cities and regional centers that were already densely populated and faced high unemployment. Moreover, the houses built for them were of poor quality, cold in winter, and jobs were scarce, which led to hardship among the migrants. Later, they dispersed in search of better living conditions. This mistake caused the failure of the “*Nurly Kosh*” program, which stopped after a few years without achieving its original goals.

#### **Proposal for improving the demographic situation of Kostanay Region:**

In 2019, an additional project to the “*Nurly Kosh*” state program was proposed. It was called “*A New Model for Settling Returnees and Internal Migrants in Rural Areas*”, or briefly, the “*Aul-Ana*” Project.

According to this project, a sheep farm settlement is designed for 2.8–3.2 thousand sheep (four flocks). It operates as a communal farm (cooperative). Four shepherds and four assistant shepherds take care of the flocks. These eight families share collective responsibility for the livestock throughout the year. In summer, four shepherds go to the



pasture while the others stay in the winter quarters to harvest fodder, cut hay, and grow vegetables. The following year, they switch roles to prevent fatigue. One of the key advantages is that shepherds are never isolated, as they live and work in a close-knit community.

The second advantage lies in the design of a universal housing complex for eight families. It resembles an urban two-story building with eight apartments, heated from a single boiler, so each family does not have to manage individual stoves. The complex is built in the shape of the letter “H,” with four apartments on each side and shared social spaces in the center — a club room with a small library, a children’s playroom, and a primary school classroom. If one of the residents is a teacher, they can educate the children themselves [21].

These eight families would form a small autonomous village. Two of the four flocks would be breeding ewes, while the other two would be fattened for meat to generate income. Each year, at least 700–800 sheep would be sold, and the number of livestock and income would continue to grow. Wool processing — such as weaving carpets, clothes, and felt products for yurts — would also provide additional profit. Gardening would ensure food security and supply vegetables and potatoes to nearby villages. In addition to sheep farming, a similar model could be applied to a cattle farm raising dairy cows and young bulls.

According to the proposal, funding was requested to establish two such model villages in the Kayyndy and Kyzylzhuldiz settlements of the Arkalyk district (formerly large state farms) — one for sheep and one for cattle farming. Each small village would consist of 8 families, totaling 16 families. With proper state and governmental support, these villages could revive — livestock numbers and population would grow, new jobs would be created, and rural life would flourish again. Eventually, the project could become a model for rural revitalization across the country [21].

Unfortunately, this proposal was not supported by the regional administration and was left unimplemented. We believe that if such projects were revived and returnees were resettled in these villages, it would have a positive impact on the region’s ethnodemographic transformation.

If we consider separating the Torgai Region from the Kostanay Region — Torgai existed from 1970–1988 and again from 1990–1997, with Arkalyk as its administrative center. Honored Worker of Kazakhstan, writer and journalist Kösemali Sattibaiuly, noted that Arkalyk was one of the 47 cities built under Dinmukhamed Kunaev. Torgai Region was created under his leadership. However, as part of the 1997 administrative-territorial reform, five of the 19 existing regions were abolished, leaving only 14. These were Torgai, Kokshetau, Zhezkazgan, Semey, and Taldykorgan. Recently, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev restored three of them under new names — Ulytau, Abai, and Zhetysu Regions.

It is believed that the closure of Torgai Region was partly due to the depletion of rich bauxite deposits near Arkalyk, which were essential for aluminum production. In 1989, before independence, residents of Torgai protested Soviet rule demanding the restoration of their region — archival photos of these rallies still exist. Responding to public demand, the government restored Torgai Region in 1990, but it was again dissolved eight years later.

Would restoring Torgai Region today cause outmigration from Kostanay? Political scientist Zein Sabyrkulov argues that not only economic but also demographic factors influenced the decision. As of 2024, Kostanay Region’s population stands at 829.3 thousand, with a density of only 4.4 people per square kilometer. By contrast, Almaty Region has 2.1 million, and Karaganda and East Kazakhstan each have about 1.4 million residents. If Kostanay were split, each new region would have only around 400 thousand people — too small for administrative viability.



Another factor is ethnic composition. On maps from the 1980s–1990s, Torgai Region was a landlocked area, while Kostanay bordered Russia and had a high concentration of ethnic Russians. During the early years of independence, there were concerns about territorial integrity, prompting the 1997 merger of Torgai into Kostanay to strengthen the region's Kazakh demographic balance. Many ethnic Kazakhs from the former Torgai area moved to Kostanay, accelerating the process of “Kazakhization.” This trend continues today [19].

If Torgai Region were reestablished, it could attract Kazakhs back from Kostanay. Local residents understandably face difficulties — Arkalyk is about 500 km from Kostanay, making travel to the regional center hard even in summer. However, this should be addressed through infrastructure improvements: increasing train frequency, subsidizing travel costs, building modern highways, and fully digitizing government services to reduce the need for physical travel. Instead of creating a new region, the government should adopt a special development program for the Torgai area.

Referring to the Government Decree of April 10, 1997, “*On Additional Measures to Improve the Socio-Economic Situation of Torgai Region*,” the plan included construction of large wind power plants near Arkalyk, opening of a fish-canning plant in Torgai settlement, processing of salt, fish, alcohol, and liquid glass, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises, including agricultural machinery production. Implementing similar measures today, combined with resettlement programs, could help mitigate demographic challenges [21].

### Conclusion

The demographic situation in Kostanay Region remains characterized by a persistent and structurally embedded imbalance. The stable predominance of the mortality rate over the birth rate confirms the presence of a natural population decline, which is indicative of a long-term demographic downturn. The region demonstrates one of the lowest relative fertility levels in Kazakhstan, which signifies insufficient reproduction of the population and the gradual aging of demographic structures. The near equivalence between the number of registered marriages and divorces further reflects the fragility of family institutions and contributes to the erosion of demographic stability, reducing the potential for sustainable population renewal.

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated, multidimensional demographic policy that integrates socio-economic, cultural, and institutional mechanisms. Priority measures should include strengthening targeted support for young and reproductive-age families, expanding regional housing and employment programs, and improving access to quality social and medical services. Additionally, it is essential to develop regional programs aimed at improving family well-being, fostering family-oriented values, and reducing the socio-economic risks associated with childbearing and childrearing.

These measures must be implemented not only at the national level but also through locally adapted initiatives that take into account the specific socio-economic and ethnodemographic characteristics of Kostanay Region. Only a systematic and sustained approach can reverse existing negative trends, ensure the stabilization of natural population growth, and form the basis for the region's long-term demographic and socio-economic resilience.

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**Н.Н.Тажимаева, Н.Д.Шакирова**  
**КОСТАНАЙ ОБЛЫСЫНЫҢ ҚАЗІРГІ ЭТНОДЕМОГРАФИЯЛЫҚ ДАМУ**  
**ТЕНДЕНЦИЯСЫ**

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада Қостанай облысының қазіргі этнодемографиялық дамуының негізгі үрдістері мен аймақтық ерекшеліктері ғылыми тұрғыда кешенді түрде талданады. Зерттеудің басты мақсаты – өңірдегі этностық құрам динамикасының және көші-қон үдерістерінің әлеуметтік-экономикалық даму көрсеткіштеріне әсер ету деңгейін айқындау. Аталған мәселе Қазақстан қоғамындағы этнодемографиялық қайта құрулардың белсенді жүруімен, тұрғындардың қоныс аудару бағыттарының өзгеруімен, сондай-ақ ел ішінде урбандалу үдерісінің күшеюімен тікелей байланысты. Сондықтан зерттеу тақырыбының өзектілігі өңірлік демографиялық қауіпсіздікті қамтамасыз ету, еңбек ресурстарының тепе-теңдігін сақтау және этносаралық келісімді қолдау міндеттерімен шартталады.

Зерттеу барысында ресми статистикалық мәліметтерге талдау, салыстырмалы-географиялық әдіс, демографиялық көрсеткіштерді модельдеу тәсілдері қолданылды. Ғылыми гипотеза этнодемографиялық өзгерістер қарқыны мен бағыты аймақтың әлеуметтік тұрақтылығына, экономикалық әлеуетіне және көші-қон саясатының тиімділігіне тікелей ықпал етеді деген тұжырымға негізделеді.

Зерттеу нәтижелері қазақ этносының үлесі жыл сайын артып келе жатқанын, ал славян тектес халықтардың саны керісінше сыртқы және ішкі көші-қон себептерімен азайып отырғанын көрсетті. Сонымен қатар, жастардың қалаға қоныстану үрдісінің күшеюі урбандалу деңгейін арттырып, демографиялық құрылымды жаңартуда шешуші рөл атқаруда.

Алынған нәтижелер өңірлік этнодемографиялық саясатты жетілдіруде және әлеуметтік даму бағдарламаларын оңтайландыруда қолдануға мүмкіндік береді.

**Кілт сөздер:** этнодемография, көші-қон, халық құрылымы, урбандалу, этностық құрам, Қостанай облысы, демографиялық саясат.

**Н.Н.Тажимаева, Н.Д.Шакирова**  
**СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ЭТНОДЕМОГРАФИЧЕСКИЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ РАЗВИТИЯ**  
**КОСТАНАЙСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ**

**Аннотация.** В статье проводится комплексный научный анализ основных тенденций и региональных особенностей современного этнодемографического развития Костанайской области. Цель исследования заключается в определении степени влияния динамики этнического состава и миграционных процессов на социально-экономические показатели развития региона. Актуальность темы обусловлена активизацией этнодемографических преобразований в казахстанском обществе, изменением направлений миграции населения и усилением процессов урбанизации. В связи с этим исследование рассматривается в контексте обеспечения региональной демографической безопасности, сохранения баланса трудовых ресурсов и поддержания межэтнического согласия.

В ходе исследования применены методы анализа официальных статистических данных, сравнительно-географический подход и демографическое моделирование. Основная гипотеза опирается на положение о том, что направление и интенсивность этнодемографических изменений напрямую влияют на социальную устойчивость региона и его экономический потенциал, а также на эффективность миграционной политики.

Результаты исследования показали устойчивый рост численности казахского этноса и сокращение доли славянского населения под воздействием внутренних и внешних миграционных потоков. Усиление урбанизации и рост миграции среди молодежи способствуют обновлению демографической структуры региона. Полученные выводы могут быть использованы при совершенствовании региональной этнодемографической политики и оптимизации программ социально-экономического развития.

**Ключевые слова:** этнодемография, миграция, структура населения, урбанизация, этнический состав, Костанайская область, демографическая политика.