WE, KAZAKHSTAN

Summary
Population Situation Analysis of the Republic of Kazakhstan
The purpose of the Population Situation Analysis of the Republic of Kazakhstan is to ensure the practical application of evidence-based statistics in the development of a national demographic policy framework.

Human capital is the most important form of capital in any society. Quantifying human capital and assessing its quality at both regional and national levels is a critical component of contemporary public administration. Generating numerical values for a national profile, including population size and its composition by age, gender, education, profession, economic activity, and other important characteristics, is a prerequisite for evidence-based public decisions, and plays a crucial role in monitoring progress towards internationally accepted Sustainable Development Goals. Kazakhstan’s priorities and objectives, as outlined in its “Kazakhstan 2050” long-term development strategy, fully comply with the goals and benchmarks of sustainable development.

Sustainable development can only be achieved by ensuring that all citizens are empowered to exercise their human rights, including their reproductive rights, to the fullest extent, and are provided with decent labor opportunities and possibilities for economic development.

Population dynamics have a significant impact on development processes and determine the possibility of achieving development goals.

Changes in age structure, fertility rates, disease incidence and mortality, population growth, urbanization, and internal migration are interlinked with income and inequality of opportunity in various regions of the country. In addition to national averages, subnational data plays a special role, as it reflects regional differences in economic opportunities and access to basic social and health services, including services for reproductive health.

As the potential for future development, young people drive technology innovations and social transformations. To do so, however, they also need to be provided with quality health care, education, and decent work opportunities.
The 2019 Human Development Report listed Kazakhstan among the countries with a very high Human Development Index (0.817), ranking 50th among 189 countries. Since independence from the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan’s southern and western regions demonstrated significant population growth and increased their share of the nation’s total. At the same time, areas located in the central, northern and eastern parts of the country saw a substantial decline in population size over the same period. Since 2008, the urban population has been growing steadily, driven by the country’s three largest cities — Nur-Sultan, Almaty, and Shymkent. The proportion of these residents in the nation’s total urban population increased from 19.5 to 36.8%. By the beginning of 2019, compared to early 1992, Kazakhstan’s urban population grew by 1,234,700 (13.6%), accounting for 58.2% of its total population. The rural population predominates the country’s southern regions, such as Turkestan (80%), Almaty (77.5%) and Zhambyl (60.3%) Oblasts.

### Nur-Sultan

Since 1992, Nur-Sultan’s population grew by 3.6 times, from 298,700 to 1,078,400 at the beginning of 2019. The percentage of residents of Nur-Sultan to Kazakhstan’s total population increased from 1.8% to 5.9%.

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<th>Population</th>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
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### Shymkent

Since 1992, Shymkent’s population increased by 2.5 times, from 400,500 to 1,009,100 at the beginning of 2019, and made up 5.5% of the country’s total population (up 2.4% from 1992).

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### Almaty

Almaty’s population grew by 63.5% since 1992. With 1,854,800 residents, Almaty remained the country’s most populated city at the beginning of 2019. Its share of the country’s total population increased from 6.9% in 1992 to 10.1% in 2019.

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### Population growth over the past five years would have been greater (by 260,000–270,000) if not for an increasing rate of migration loss (from 300 people in 2013 to 29,100 in 2018), which curbed it by 7.3% from 2014 to 2018, and 10.8% in 2018.
Kazakhstan’s population from 1991-2019 (at beginning of year)

Kazakhstan’s population growth components in 1999–2018

The greatest natural population increase occurred in the southern and western regions, as well as the cities of Nur-Sultan (23.7‰) and Shymkent (22.9‰). The leading regions were Mangistau (25.5‰) and Turkestan (22.3‰) Oblasts, where the natural growth increase significantly exceeded the national average.

In 2018, the lowest natural increase was recorded in North Kazakhstan (1.1‰) and Kostanai (3.2‰) Oblasts. In East Kazakhstan (5.5‰), Pavlodar (6.0‰), Akmola (6.8%) and Karaganda (7.0‰) Oblasts it was two times lower than Kazakhstan as a whole.

Kazakhstan’s overall fertility rates declined significantly in the 1990s, with the lowest recorded in 1999, when the number of births fell by 38.4% compared to 1991, and the crude birth rate by 32.1%.

In subsequent years, births grew almost every year, exceeding 400,000 in 2016 (up 84.2% compared to 1999). The total fertility rate peaked in 2014 (23.1‰). The rate decreased in subsequent years, with 2017-2018 seeing the lowest rate since 2008.

The main reason for the decline in the crude fertility rate in recent years is the decrease in the number and share of women of active reproductive age, as those who are currently entering this age were born in the 1990s, when birth rates were also low.

In 2017, 87.0% of newborn children in Kazakhstan were born to formally married couples. The proportion of those born out of registered marriage is decreasing every year—from 24.4% in 2005 to 13% in 2017.

The total fertility rate (TFR)—the average number of births per woman over her entire life at current age-specific fertility rates—provides a more accurate assessment of the dynamics and regional differences in fertility rates. The highest TFR is observed in Turkestan Oblast (4.07). The TFR of North Kazakhstan Oblast (2.01) is twice as low, and at the lowest in Kostanai Oblast (1.77) and the city of Almaty (1.76), which is almost twice as low as the TFR of the city of Shymkent. The TFR in rural areas is significantly higher than in urban areas (3.09 and 2.68 in 2018, respectively).

Kazakhstan’s regions by total fertility rate

Mean age at childbearing in Kazakhstan, 2000–2018

Mean age at childbearing in Kazakhstan, 2000–2018

1 Calculated using data from the Statistics Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
Kazakhstan has achieved undeniable success in ensuring safe maternity. To maintain this trend and prevent maternal mortality, the government must enhance the quality of perinatal care and develop tools to conduct confidential audits of maternal mortality and morbidity indicators, which can aid robust policy decisions.

According to MICS 2015, almost all pregnant women received prenatal care: 99.3% of women aged between 15 and 49 with a live birth in the last two years were attended to by a skilled health professional at least once, and 95.3% at least four times. Almost all deliveries (99.4%) in the recent two years were carried out in the presence of skilled health personnel and in a medical institution (99.3%).

At the same time, knowledge about reproductive health and contemporary methods of contraception has remained stable, or even declined.

A basic reproductive right is the right to receive family planning services, namely the free choice of efficient methods of contraception. According to the 2015 MICS, 55.7% of women between 15 and 49 used contraception at the time of the survey, while 9.8% of women aged 15–49 wanted to plan childbirth, but were not using contraception. One indicator of improved efficacy of family planning services is a reduction in the number of induced abortions. Over twenty years—from 1995 to 2015—the total abortion rate in Kazakhstan dropped sixfold, to 0.3 in 2015 (compared to 0.57 in Russia and 0.43 in the U.S.).

In Kazakhstan, the adolescent birth rate remains high.

In 2017, the adolescent birth rate for girls aged 15–19 was 24.93 per 1,000 (34.72 per 1,000 in 2014).

The crude mortality rate in Kazakhstan has been declining steadily since 2006. In 2014, it fell below 8 per 1,000 for the first time since independence, and in 2018 reached 7.

Regional differences in the crude mortality rate are largely due to varying gender and age distributions, which vary significantly in Kazakhstan’s regions and cities. Direct standardization for the general mortality rate reveals a twofold difference between the crude mortality rate among men (10.8 per 1,000) and women (5.9 per 1,000).

Infant mortality in Kazakhstan has declined substantially in the last decade, amounting to 7.9 deaths under one year of age per 1,000 live births in 2017, and 8.0 in 2018. The continuous decrease in infant mortality stopped in 2008, due to the transition to a new criteria for live births recommended by the WHO.

Over the last 20 years, the most noticeable decrease in maternal mortality occurred from 2010 to 2012, when the number of deaths among pregnant women, women in labor, and postpartum women dropped 2.7 times, from 36.8 per 100,000 live births in 2009, to 13.5 in 2012. The main causes of maternal mortality were obstetric hemorrhage, eclampsia, septic infections, and abortion-related complications.

Over the last decade, mortality rates in Kazakhstan fell among all age groups, and among men and women. Causes of death have changed substantially over the last decade. In 2008, more than half of deaths (50.3%) in Kazakhstan were caused by circulatory system diseases.

Their prevalence declined to 23.4% in 2018, but still remain the most significant causes of death, followed by respiratory diseases (12.89%), and malignant neoplasms (cancer) (12%).

An analysis of life expectancy by age and causes of death has shown that there is still considerable room for improvement in the reduction of mortality caused by diseases such as acute myocardial infarction, stroke and cerebrovascular diseases, malignant neoplasms, and accidents (unintentional injuries).

The main potential drivers for increasing life expectancy are associated with the reduction in premature male mortality. Most pressing are the causes of death that demonstrate the greatest gap between “years of potential life lost” for men and women, such as external causes of death (accidents, including road accidents, homicides, and suicides).
Marriages and divorces, 2000–2018

Marriage trends, in particular first childbirths, are known to affect fertility rates, as well as family and household composition and structure. In Kazakhstan, the number of marriages is declining, while the rate of divorce is growing. Between 2013 and 2018, the number of marriages dropped countrywide by 18%, though saw a 28% drop in East Kazakhstan Oblast. The number of divorces between 2000–2018 almost doubled. Divorces became more frequent in all regions of the country—from an increase of 1.3 times in East Kazakhstan Oblast, to 2.8 times in Almaty Oblast. Divorces are most frequent in the northern and eastern regions and the cities of Nur-Sultan and Almaty, where divorce rates are higher than the country’s average. Fewer people divorce in the southern and western regions of the country. If in 2000, divorces accounted for 30% of marriages, in 2018 the ratio increased to 40%. Should this divorce-to-marriage ratio persist, in the future more than one third of marriages will dissolve. This can adversely affect the number of second and subsequent births.

The number of divorces between 2000–2018

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Sociological studies of the sexual and reproductive health of people with various forms of disability in Kazakhstan have shown that these people experience disadvantages in family planning. Women and men with disabilities face problems in obtaining reproductive health services. Most people with disabilities lack access to quality medical information about their sexual and reproductive health, family planning, and birth control methods.

The largest numbers of households, according to the 2009 census, were recorded in Turkestan (490,700), East Kazakhstan (446,600), the city of Almaty (438,200), Karaganda Oblast (437,800), and Almaty Oblast (432,200). The composition of households has changed: the number of those without children grew from 29.2% to 36.2%, while households with children declined by 7%.

An analysis of household composition by region shows that a nuclear household (i.e., a family consisting of a parent/parents and children, or just spouses) remains the predominant type of households in all regions (accounting for 51–59%). The exceptions are the cities of Nur-Sultan and Almaty, where these households comprise 42–43% of the total. The largest shares of extended households are recorded in Turkestan (38.12%), Kyzylorda (37%), Almaty (36.9%), Mangistau and Atyrau (36.53%), and Zhambyl (35.2%) Oblasts. With an increase in the urban population, the share of households consisting of single persons or persons who are not connected by family ties can be expected to remain high. The increase in urban housing in multi-family apartment buildings will contribute to household nuclearization, as young families will have more opportunities to establish their own domiciles.

SPECIAL NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

There are 674,200 persons with disabilities (3.7% of total population) officially registered in Kazakhstan. Of these, 44% are women. 88.5% of people with disabilities are over 16 years of age. In the last five years, the number of disabled persons in Kazakhstan increased by 7.5%. In some regions, disability rates exceed the national average. The regions with the highest disability rates are Karaganda (4.7%), Turkestan (4.15%), and East Kazakhstan (4.1%) Oblasts.

Analyzing the dynamics and structure of households and the families that comprise them can elucidate both reproductive trends and the relationships between demographic changes and socioeconomic development.

A comparison of the censuses of 1999 and 2009 shows that the number of households grew by 231,500, from 4.16 million to 4.39 million (5.6%), though the number of urban households grew by a mere 1.2%, and rural households by 13.4%.

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The quality of a person’s life is inextricably linked to their fundamental rights, such as their right to health and education, their freedom of choice and non-discrimination, their reproductive rights, and their right to productive employment. People can achieve the best quality of life when they can exercise these rights.

In recent years, Kazakhstan has seen a steady increase in per capita nominal monetary income. From 2013 to 2017 it increased by 47.1%, almost 1.5 times. The highest nominal incomes were recorded in Atyrau Oblast, with the lowest in Turkestan Oblast. However, changes in real earnings in Kazakhstan differ from those in nominal earnings due to inflation, which devalues nominal income.

Real earnings have been growing at a much slower rate in all regions, as well as in Kazakhstan as a whole. Between 2013 and 2017, they increased by only 5.2%, while nominal earnings soared by 47.1%. Only three regions saw a steady yearly rise in real earnings: Akmola Oblast (10.8% growth over this period), Kostanai Oblast (16.5%, the highest among all regions), and North Kazakhstan Oblast (8.7%). These are the regions where nominal earnings also demonstrated the highest growth. Over the same period, real earnings declined in Turkestan (by 10.5%), Mangistau (5.2%), and Kyzylorda (4.3%) Oblasts.

The poverty level (the share of the population with incomes below subsistence) decreased insignificantly in recent years (from 2.9% in 2013 to 2.6% in 2017). To analyze regional poverty patterns, the proportion of the poor in a region is compared to the national proportion, and the proportion of the region’s population compared to the country’s total population. If this ratio exceeds 1, the region is considered relatively poor compared to the national average.

The most severe situation is in Turkistan, where the proportion of people in poverty is almost twice as high (19%) than the ratio of the regional population to the country’s total. This region is home to 31% of all people in the country living in poverty. Zhambyl, Mangistau, and North Kazakhstan Oblasts may be considered relatively poor regions, as the share of people in poverty in these regions is 1.3 times higher than their share of the country’s total population.

Poverty in rural areas is 2.7 times higher than in urban areas. The main causes of poverty are unemployment, unproductive labor, and lower wages of the rural population, whose income is just a half the national average. At the same time, 40% of those employed in agriculture are self-employed, with earnings insufficient to maintain a decent standard of living. In 2017, the country had 2.1 million self-employed people (24.5% of the employed population). In southern regions, up to 80% of the working population are self-employed.

National policies should aim to solve the issues of productive employment and unemployment among women and young people—especially in rural areas—and enhance social protection of the most vulnerable groups.

Proportion of population having incomes below subsistence level (urban vs rural population), %

According to surveys of people with disabilities, 49.4% experience various types of violence in their families, regardless of gender and age. The situation is compounded by low legal awareness. The lack of information in forms accessible to the disabled makes it more difficult for them to obtain protective services against violence. Individuals with sensory impairments and intellectual disabilities often face communication barriers and have difficulty or cannot report violence, or receive crisis protection and intervention. Physical barriers, such as the lack of accessible transport or infrastructure, limit access of people with disabilities to protective and gender-based violence services.

Child and forced marriages, which are detrimental to the well-being of girls, are practices found in Kazakhstan in some ethnic patriarchal communities, especially in rural areas. This is due to low awareness among adolescent girls of their rights, shortcomings in legislation against bride kidnapping, as well as the practice of religious registration of marriages with girls under legal age, which is not legally binding and fails to protect the rights of married girls.

Over the past five years in Kazakhstan, around 1,200 girls under the age of 18 married each year. In 2017, the share of marriages with minor girls was 0.71%. This figure is significantly higher for adolescents aged 15–19, comprising 10.8% of all marriages registered in Kazakhstan.

Child and forced marriages violate girls’ rights to education and their reproductive rights, increasing the risk of diseases and maternal mortality. Married girls are vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence. If they get pregnant, they often face problems in childbearing, as their bodies are physiologically not ready to give birth. Preventing and combating violence in Kazakhstani society are among the most important priorities of state policy and the international obligations adopted by Kazakhstan. To prevent early/child and forced marriages, the government should strengthen relevant legislation to eradicate these practices and those that infringe upon the rights and interests of individuals in matters of marriage and family relationships.
KAZAKHSTAN’S POPULATION PROSPECTS TO 2050

A key task of population studies is to make population projections. The estimates of the future population size, age, and gender composition and demographic changes should inform plans and strategies for the socioeconomic development of the country, its regions, and its economic sectors.

Three projections were made for Kazakhstan. The “middle” variant describes the most probable changes in population size and structure until 2050, while the “low” and “high” ones set the limits for possible changes in the size and composition of the population.

According to all three forecasts, Kazakhstan’s population will grow. Demographic growth will be sustained throughout the projection period, but the rate of growth varies from the low to high variant. That said, the three variants of our projections fall within the boundaries of the medium and high variants disseminated by the United Nations Population Division.

Migration scenarios
The main assumption in generating international migration scenarios was that, due to the peculiarities of the country’s economic and demographic development, the outflow of people from Kazakhstan will gradually decrease over time.

The key factors behind this trend will be:

1 — the country’s continued economic development, accompanied by a high demand for labor;
2 — the gradual cessation of significant ethnic out-migration; and
3 — the rapid growth of the population in the countries south of Kazakhstan: Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan.

The current age and gender composition of the population, reflecting both demographic and socioeconomic history, determines to a significant extent future demographic trends, which creates opportunities and constraints for economic and social development. At the beginning of 2019, women comprised 51.5% of Kazakhstan’s total population, and men 48.5%.

2019 (beginning)

51.5% female 48.5% male

The population of working age accounted for 59.1% of the total. The share of those under the working age has been growing since 2010, reaching 29.9% by 2019. The decline in the proportion of the population older than working age by the beginning of 2019 is associated with an increase in the retirement age for women.

Working-age population
2010 (beginning) 2019 (beginning)
59.1% 64.2%

The share of the working-age population is higher among the urban population than in rural areas (60.2% and 57.6%, respectively, at the beginning of 2019).

The transformation of Kazakhstan’s age structure in the years to come will contribute to a decrease in the overall fertility rate, an increase in the overall mortality rate, and a reduction in natural population growth.

WE ESTIMATE KAZAKHSTAN’S POPULATION TO GROW BY 23% OVER APPROXIMATELY TWO GENERATIONS, OR A LITTLE MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY, AS A RESULT OF MOMENTUM OR REPLACEMENT-LEVEL FERTILITY.

Population in the 15–19 and 20–24 age cohorts, according to the middle projection, Kazakhstan, 2019–2050 (in thousands)

While the number of women aged 20–39 will drop by 200,000 from 2019 and 2029, in subsequent years it will increase by more than 900,000 in the period under consideration. Such an increase in the number of potential mothers will partially offset the negative impact of a decrease in the total fertility rate on total births.

The number of children under 15 years of age is determined by changes in fertility rates and the size of the reproductive cohort of women. After an increase in the children’s cohort, which will continue until 2024–2025, it will shrink, as the number of potential mothers will also go down. A new increase in the child population will begin after 2035.

Kazakhstan is a young country, not only in terms of a high proportion of children, but also of young people aged 15–24. In 2018, this age cohort accounted for 12.8% of the total population, and 20% of the population aged 15–64.

Changes in the size of the youth population will directly impact the development of a vocational education system, the state of the labor market, the burden on social services, the speed of societal innovation, as well as fertility, marriage, and migration trends. In the next five years, the number of people aged 15–19 is projected to soar in Kazakhstan, as a result of an increase in births from 2000 to 2010. By 2035, this group will grow by 17 times. This will entail a steady increase in the number of young people aged 20–24 at almost the same rate, with a time lag of five years from 2022 till 2040. Over the next 15 years, the share of young people aged 15–24 among the population aged 15–64 will increase from 20% to 27%.

The country is approaching a new stage of its age-structure development. The structure of dependency rates will change noticeably, with old-age dependency rising from 20.8% in 2019 to 37.8% in 2050, and the child dependency ratio falling from 79.2% to 62.2%.

This structural transformation will undoubtedly affect the nation’s socioeconomic development and should be taken into account in development plans.

The most recent period of a potentially positive demographic dividend was observed in the 1990s and 2000s. To create conditions for realizing the demographic dividend in the future, policies should be aimed at:

1) minimizing unemployment;
2) increasing the involvement of women and youth in the labor market;
3) improving the return on investment in human capital (education and health care); and
4) promoting effective migration policy.

However, ageing may be conducive to a second demographic dividend. But it will not appear automatically without effective public policy. This involves the creation of reliable and credible financial institutions that will ensure the accumulation of assets.
**Objective:** To support the expanded reproduction of the population, further reduce mortality and increase life expectancy, and reduce depopulation due to migration.

**Key activities and tasks:**
1. **Supporting fertility and families with children.**
   - Strengthening the family.
     - Support the birth rate at a level that will ensure natural population increase.
     - Extend economic support to families with children in order to reduce poverty.
     - Improve opportunities to combine employment and parenting.
     - Strengthen the institute of the family and promote family values.
     - Improve living conditions for families with children.
     - Support young families.
     - Improve the nation’s reproductive health.

2. **Reducing mortality and raising life expectancy.**
   - Reduce the main causes of mortality.
   - Reduce maternal and infant mortality and improve the health of children and adolescents.
   - Decrease the incidence of socially significant diseases and create conditions to motivate healthy lifestyle changes.

3. **Regulating and optimizing migration.**
   - Improve Kazakhstan’s attractiveness for the categories of migrants that promote economic growth and further societal and demographic development.
   - Reduce the outflow of young people from the eastern and northern regions of Kazakhstan.
   - Regulate the stay of temporary migrant workers in Kazakhstan.
   - Promote adaptation and integration of migrants.
   - Optimize internal migration.

**Recommendations:**
To comprehensively address demographic factors, trends, and prospects for population replacement in the management of Kazakhstan’s economic and social spheres, we recommend:
- The creation of a population development program for Kazakhstan for 2020–2030, with support from UNFPA Kazakhstan, in order to maintain population replacement, further reduce mortality, ensure an increase in life expectancy, and prevent depopulation due to migration;
- The preparation of an analytical and monitoring report entitled Kazakhstan’s Population Development: Trends, Prospects, Consequences, and Actions;
- The establishment of a Kazakhstan governmental expert group to monitor the population situation and develop and implement demographic policy measures; and
- Ensure professional development of managers dealing with the issues of population development at national, regional, and district levels.