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FAMILY AND FERTILITY IN THE CONDITIONS OF MODERNIZATION OF KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract. *Introduction.* One of the main development trends in Kazakhstan after overcoming the crisis of the 1990s has been urbanization, which led to significant changes in reproductive behavior. Birth rates have fluctuated – from falling below the level of natural replacement to achieving levels of confidence, even surplus, extended reproduction, followed by a subsequent decline. *Goal of this article* is to analyze the dynamics of birth rates in Kazakhstan as a factor of the adaptation processes of family institutions to new conditions in the context of social modernization and urbanization. *Results.* The article explores the causes of these processes and their connection to the shift from traditional family structures to modernized ones. Birth rate is becoming an important indicator of the transformation of traditional family institutions, which were formed in rural environments, into urban family models characterized by different levels of fertility. The authors apply an interdisciplinary approach, analyzing changes in birthrate vectors and the transformation of family institutions as processes with both demographic and social characteristics. *Conclusion.* The decline in birth rates in Kazakhstan since 2021 is associated with changes in the age and gender structure of the population and the adaptation of families to new socio-economic conditions. In this context, a model of medium fertility is becoming dominant – one that ensures stable reproduction without a sharp increase in social burden. At the same time, various family types – ranging from large families to single-parent and low-fertility households – will continue to exist, reflecting Kazakhstan's sociocultural diversity and its transition toward an urbanized nation.

Keywords: Family, family institutions, fertility, urbanization, modernization of values, sex and age structure, ethnic settlement

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ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ ЖАҢҒЫРТУ ЖАҒДАЙЫНДАҒЫ ОТБАСЫ ЖӘНЕ ТУУ ДЕҢГЕЙІ

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Аңдатпа. *Kіріспе.* 1990-жылдардағы дағдарысты еңсергеннен кейінгі Қазақстан дамуының негізгі үрдістерінің бірі урбанизация болды. Бұл үрдіс репродуктивті мінез-құлықтың айтарлықтай өзгерістеріне алып келді: туу деңгейі табиғи өсімді қамтамасыз ете алмайтын деңгейден бастап, кеңейтілген ұрпақ алмасуды қамтамасыз ететін деңгейге дейін көтеріліп, кейін қайтадан төмендеді. *Мақала мақсаты* – Қазақстандағы туу динамикасын әлеуметтік жаңғыру және урбанизация жағдайындағы отбасылық институттардың жаңа жағдайларға бейімделу үдерісінің бір факторы ретінде талдау. Мақалада бұл үдерістердің себептері, дәстүрлі отбасылық үлгіден жаңғыртылған түрге ауысуымен байланысы көрсетілген. Туу деңгейі ауылдық өмір салтында қалыптасқан дәстүрлі отбасылық институттардың трансформациясының, олардың жаңа – қалалық сипаттағы, басқа бала санымен сипатталатын отбасы түріне ауысуының маңызды көрсеткішіне айналды. Авторлар пәнаралық тәсілді қолдана отырып, туу бағытының өзгерісін және отбасылық институттардың трансформациясын демографиялық және әлеуметтік сипаттамалары бар үдеріс ретінде қарастырады. *Қорытынды.* 2021 жылдан бастап Қазақстандағы туу деңгейінің төмендеуі халықтың жыныс-жас құрылымының өзгеруімен және отбасылардың жаңа әлеуметтік-экономикалық жағдайларға бейімделуімен байланысты. Бұл жағдайда басым модель ретінде орташа бала саны бар отбасылар қалыптасып, бұл тұрақты ұрпақ алмасуды қамтамасыз етеді және әлеуметтік жүктеменің күрт өсуіне жол бермейді. Сонымен қатар, қоғамның урбанизацияланған ұлтқа айналу үдерісін және социомәдени әртүрлілікті бейнелейтін көп

балалы, жалғызбасты және аз балалы отбасылардың әртүрлі түрлері қатар өмір сүруін жалғастырады.

Түйін сөздер: Отбасы, отбасылық институттар, туу, урбанизация, құндылықтарды жаңғырту, жыныстық-жас құрылымы, этникалық қоныстану, Қазақстан

Алғыс. Бұл мақала Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігінің Ғылым комитеті қаржыландырған «Қоғамдық қатынастар жүйесіндегі қазақстандық отбасы: жаңғырту жағдайындағы институтаралық өзара іс-қимылдың әлеуеті мен проблемалары» (AP26198919) гранттық жобасы аясында дайындалды.

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СЕМЬЯ И РОЖДАЕМОСТЬ В УСЛОВИЯХ МОДЕРНИЗАЦИИ КАЗАХСТАНА

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Аннотация. Введение. Основным трендом развития Казахстана после преодоления кризиса 1990-х годов стала урбанизация, следствием чего стали значительные изменения в репродуктивном поведении, рождаемость колебалась от падения ниже уровня естественного воспроизводства, до значений уверенного, «с запасом», воспроизводства расширенного и последующего снижения. *Цель статьи* – проанализировать динамику рождаемости в Казахстане как фактора адаптационных процессов семейных институтов к новым условиям в контексте социальной модернизации и урбанизации. В статье показаны причины этих процессов, связь с переходом от традиционных форм семьи к модернизированным. Рождаемость становится важным индикатором трансформации традиционных семейных институтов, сформировавшихся в условиях сельского уклада, их превращения в городскую семью с другими показателями детности. Авторы используют междисциплинарный подход и анализируют изменения векторов рождаемости и трансформацию семейных институтов как процессы, обладающие в равной степени демографическими и социальными характеристиками. **Выводы.** Снижение рождаемости в Казахстане с 2021 года связано с изменением половозрастной структуры населения и адаптацией семей к новым социально-экономическим условиям, где доминирующей моделью становится среднететность, обеспечивающая устойчивое воспроизводство без резкого роста нагрузки. При этом сохраняются различные типы семей – от многодетных до монородительских и малодетных, отражающих социокультурное разнообразие и переход общества к уровню городской нации.

Ключевые слова: Семья, семейные институты, рождаемость, урбанизация, модернизация ценностей, половозрастная структура, этническое расселение, Казахстан
Благодарность. Статья написана в рамках реализации грантового проекта «Казахстанская семья в системе общественных отношений: потенциал и проблемы межинституционального взаимодействия в условиях модернизации» (AP26198919) финансируемого Комитетом науки Министерства науки и высшего образования Республики Казахстан.

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Introduction

In the course of historical development, fertility has acquired the distinct features of a social phenomenon while retaining its biological foundation. The first social institution – the family – emerged precisely to ensure the conditions necessary for childbirth, the safe upbringing of children, and their effective socialization.

In the early stages of human development, the family was the sole form of social organization, performing all essential functions – social-reproductive, economic, political, cultural, and normative. Children have always been, and remain, the semantic core of the family. Consequently, fertility processes, their dynamics, and effectiveness are closely linked to the state and forms of family institutions.

Over time, particularly in urban contexts, more specialized institutions emerged, gradually assuming many of the functions previously carried out by the family. Nevertheless, the family has not lost its central, society-forming role. Having undergone all stages of societal evolution, family institutions have persisted – albeit continuously transformed – demonstrating a remarkable capacity for adaptation. No other social institution in human history exhibits such a diversity of forms, structures, and organizational models as the family.

The profound socio-political, economic, and civilizational transformations that have marked the past decades in Kazakhstan could not help but influence fertility dynamics. These shifts have objectively led to structural changes within the Kazakhstani family. The factors that have shaped the current state of family institutions can be viewed, in part, as negative – particularly during periods that triggered elements of degradation in social reproduction, such as the systemic crisis of the 1990s. It was during this time that spontaneous mass urbanization of Kazakhs began – a de facto exodus to the cities. On the other hand, urbanization became a prerequisite for and a principal driver of modernization in the country.

Significant changes occurred in fertility patterns; in the early stages, the reproductive system found itself in an unstable, volatile state. This situation necessitated the adaptation of family institutions to new social and economic realities. The complex and often contradictory challenges faced by Kazakhstani families have had a direct impact on fertility dynamics – an impact well documented in statistical data.

Fertility indicators are studied and analyzed across various disciplines; however, when examined in isolation from a broader social context, such analysis can lead to incomplete understanding and flawed forecasts. Without establishing a connection between fertility trends and the formation of new family types, it is hardly possible to predict future trajectories of social development as a whole.

The aim of this article is to analyze fertility dynamics in Kazakhstan as a factor in the adaptation of family institutions to new conditions within the context of social modernization and urbanization.

To explore fertility dynamics as a predictor of family institutional transformation, the authors have employed interdisciplinary approaches. Examining fertility through the lens of both demographic and social meaning has, for the first time, made it possible to investigate reproductive processes in close interrelation with the adaptive transformations of family institutions in the context of Kazakhstan’s urbanization and modernization.

Materials and Methods

This review aims to provide a brief overview of the sources used by the authors. The materials are grouped according to formal and thematic criteria.

Family structure, intra-family processes and communication, gender aspects of family transformation, reproductive strategies, as well as the principles and forms of family policy implementation in different countries, have become the subject of extensive research in many societies experiencing profound changes in the nature of the “eternal” institutions of family and reproduction.

Notable contributions in English-language literature include the works of M. Baran, E. Evan, J. Jones (Baran, et al., 2013), A. Sorrenti, M. Joan, M. Leon, E. Pavolini (Sorrenti, et al., 2019), S. Demuth, S. Brown (Demuth, et al., 2004), C. Saraceno (Saraceno, 2023), P. McCarthy, J. Edwards (McCarthy, et al., 2018), and Y. Gippenreiter (Gippenreiter, 2021). This international research has contributed to the development of an interdisciplinary and comparative understanding of the transformation of the family as an institution that performs both socio-cultural and demographic functions. It has helped to identify universal and unique trends in the changes of family structures, reproductive behavior, and gender roles across diverse socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, this body of work has served as both a methodological and empirical foundation for the development of effective family policy models, tailored to the realities of post-industrial society and oriented toward sustainable socio-demographic development.

Various aspects of the transformation of the Kazakhstani family, the evolution of its social functions and value orientations, as well as its interaction with external socializing environments – including institutional mechanisms of the state – are thoroughly addressed in the works of domestic researchers. Of particular interest are studies by A.B. Kalysh (Kalysh, 2013), Kh.A. Argyimbaev (Argyimbaev, 1996), Zh. S. Aubakirova (Aubakirova, 2014), Z.Kh. Valitova (Valitova, 2005), A.B. Yessimova (Yessimova, 2010), Zh.Zh. Zhanazarova (Zhanazarova, 2003), B. Rakisheva (Rakisheva, 2019), T.V. Klimova (Klimova, 2006), N.U. Shedenova (Shedenova, 2018), G.G. Solovyova, E.E. Burova (Solovyova, et al., 2013), Z. Arystamkulova (Arystamkulova, 2014), M. Kabakova (Kabakova, 2013), among others. These authors have made theoretical and empirical contributions to the analysis of family structures and their transformations under conditions of social change.

Special attention in scholarly literature is devoted to the modernization of reproductive behavior within a socio-cultural framework. This topic has been consistently developed in the works of Zh.S. Aubakirova, E.O. Stolyarova, G.A. Sarsembayeva, N.L. Krasnobayeva, and A.N. Alekseenko (Aubakirova, et al., 2023), who have contributed significantly to understanding the dynamics of fertility in the context of shifting values and gender transformations.

A substantial informational and analytical foundation for studying the current state and evolution of the family institution in Kazakhstan is provided by the national thematic reports *Kazakhstan Families* for the years 2019, 2020, 2022, and 2024 (Kazakhstan Families, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2024). These comprehensive overviews cover a broad range of family-related issues in the country and allow for the tracking of key trends and trajectories of transformation amid socio-economic and cultural shifts.

The development of family and demographic policy in sovereign Kazakhstan is reflected in a number of legislative acts (Decree, 2016; 2022; Code, 2011). The empirical basis of this study also includes data from the All-Union Population Census of 1989, the national censuses of 1999, 2009, and 2021, as well as current statistical reports (Statistical Yearbook, 1991; 2022; Summary Results, 2022).

Discussion

The earliest academic studies that documented changes in fertility patterns and the shift from traditional family structures to urban (modernized) families can be traced back to the mid-20th century (Frank, 1944; Irene, et al., 1944). It was during this period that scholarly discourse around what came to be known as the “demographic transition” began to take shape. These global

transformations in fertility and the adaptation of family institutions to new living conditions have been closely linked to modernization processes, primarily urbanization.

Within this context, a body of research has emerged that identifies distinct stages of the demographic transition, including the so-called “first”, “second”, and “third” demographic transitions. In the 1970s, families, whether small or large, began to draw the attention of Soviet scholars. Some even attempted to examine these patterns through the lens of ethnodemographic analysis, including V. A. Belova (Belova, 1988) and G. A. Bondarskaya (Bondarskaya, 1999). The renowned Russian demographer A. G. Vishnevsky dedicated his seminal work *The Demographic Revolution* to this subject (Vishnevsky, 2005).

A more recent scholarly trend involves examining the meanings and connotations associated with the concepts of family and fertility as they arise and evolve within the informational and media space. In this regard, Sarah Perry’s article “*The History of Fertility Transitions and the New Memplex*” is noteworthy. It analyzes how new images and understandings of fertility and childbearing – as intrinsic attributes of the family – become embedded in public consciousness (Sarah, 2014).

Fertility remains one of the key indicators of the condition and sustainability of family institutions. Special attention is given to the relationship between family, marriage, and fertility in countries where issues of population reproduction are particularly acute and where depopulation has become a pressing reality (Gurko, 2008; Rostovskaya, et al., 2023).

Research on the transformation of reproductive and marital practices under modernization often draws on the findings of Ronald Inglehart (Inglehart, et al., 2005). This approach makes it possible to analyze the complex interrelations between fertility rates, marriage patterns, and shifting family roles on one hand, and generational changes – including transformations in the age and gender structure of society – on the other.

The authors argue that these processes reflect a dynamic exchange between the external and internal social environments in which family institutions operate. They also reveal the interplay between latent demographic processes and shifts in value orientations occurring under conditions of urbanization, radical changes in the socio-economic landscape, and evolving goals and strategies for personal and familial self-realization.

Results

Family and fertility are closely interconnected and mutually dependent phenomena of a complex biosocial nature. At the same time, they are continuously influenced by a range of external factors, both demographic and social. This influence is not uniform – at different historical stages, certain factors may play a dominant role, only to be replaced over time by others. Retrospective studies make it possible to identify such stages and to apply this knowledge in constructing probabilistic scenarios for the development of family institutions and fertility dynamics.

Throughout the entire period of Kazakhstan's independence, fertility has undergone significant changes. At the starting point in 1990, the situation appeared relatively favorable – the total fertility rate (TFR) stood at 2.79. However, by the turn of the century (1999–2003), the TFR declined below the replacement level, reaching a low of 1.80. The situation began to improve by the end of the first five-year period of the 21st century: already in 2004, demographic statistics recorded a TFR of 2.21.

Following this, a steady increase in fertility was observed, culminating in a peak TFR of 3.32 in 2021. However, within just three years, the rate dropped again to 2.80.

Effectively, this marks a return to the initial level – 2.79 in 1990 and 2.80 in 2024. Between these two points, significant fluctuations were recorded, ranging from a pattern of below-replacement fertility (TFR of 1.80) to one of above-replacement fertility (TFR of 3.32).

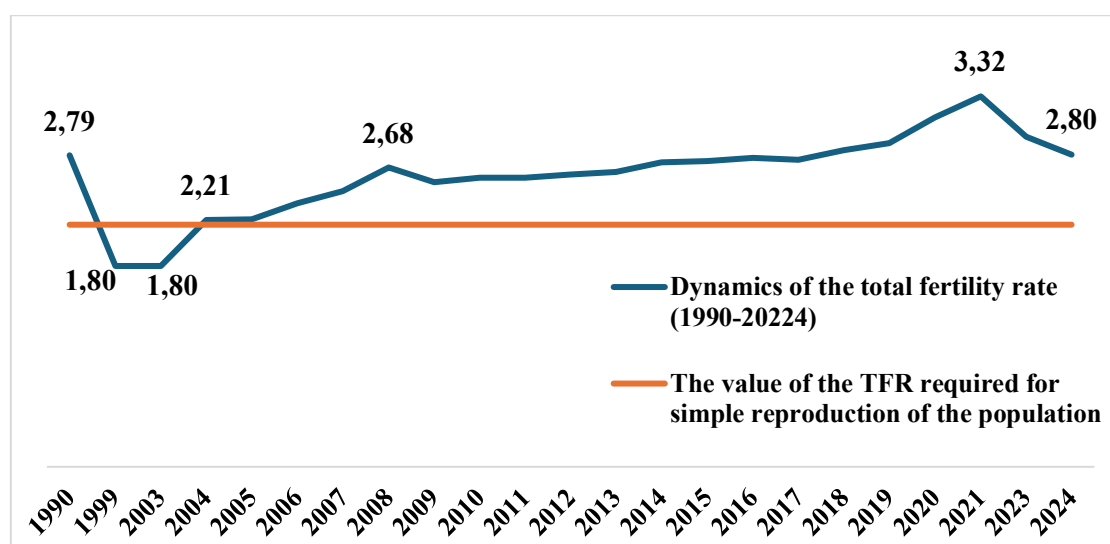


Figure 1 – Dynamics of total fertility rate in Kazakhstan (1990–2024) Calculated by: Demographic yearbook of Kazakhstan. Art. Sat Ed. Zh. A. Kulekeeva. Almaty, 1998. Pp. 103., Demographic Yearbook of Kazakhstan. Statistical compilation. Astana, 2024. Pp. 148–150

It is possible to conditionally distinguish three distinct periods in Kazakhstan's fertility dynamics, each characterized by a different trajectory. The first period was marked by a decline in the total fertility rate (TFR) to 1.80 by the late 1990s and early 2000s. The second period, from 2004 to 2021, saw a steady increase in fertility, with the TFR peaking at 3.32. Finally, the third period, beginning in 2022, has been characterized by a decline in fertility, with the TFR dropping to 2.80 by 2024. It is too early to determine whether this third phase has ended, as further statistical updates are required. More important, however, is to understand which factors influenced these trends, the social and economic contexts in which they occurred, and how they relate to the condition and transformation of family institutions.

At the beginning of the 1990s, two predominant family types could be identified in Kazakhstan: rural and urban. These types had clearly defined ethnic distinctions. In cities, where the population was primarily of Russian-Slavic origin, the nuclear (two-generation) family structure prevailed, typically associated with low fertility (1–2 children). In contrast, extended multigenerational families, oriented toward high fertility, were still common in rural areas, where the majority of ethnic Kazakhs lived. These differences in urban and rural lifestyles led to divergent fertility models: high fertility among rural ethnic groups and low fertility among groups that had undergone earlier stages of urbanization.

Thus, fertility models and family types (rural vs. urban) were closely interlinked and emerged as the result of demographic evolutions and social transformations, each with different origins and mechanisms of influence on Kazakhstani families.

The distinction between demographic and social factors is somewhat artificial, as in reality, they are deeply intertwined. Nonetheless, for the purposes of analysis, we may provisionally assume that demographic processes can be measured through objective quantitative indicators and identified using statistical data. These include the age-sex composition of the population, ethnic structure, patterns of settlement, and others. Social processes, by contrast, are more complex – they often involve qualitative shifts that are difficult to measure directly, with statistics providing only indirect indications. Nevertheless, these transformations are no less real and have an equally significant impact on both fertility trends and the forms and functions of family institutions.

In the context of this study, urbanization is considered the key social factor. However, urbanization is not treated here as merely the migration of rural populations to urban centers. Rather, it is understood as a deep transformation of the socio-economic order, lifestyle, value systems, and the gradual replacement of traditional daily practices with modernized ones.

The processes that defined the first two fertility periods are relatively well studied. Overall, the picture looks as follows: the large birth cohorts of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s – especially in

rural Kazakh families – still retained high reproductive intentions. However, the crisis of the 1990s undermined confidence in the future and forced many to postpone childbearing and suspend their reproductive aspirations until more favorable conditions emerged.

By the mid-2000s, both objectively and in public perception, conditions began to improve. As a result, the entire reproductive potential – both current and previously postponed – began to be realized during this time. A significant rise in both absolute and relative fertility indicators followed. Let us briefly outline the ethnodemographic factors behind this trend.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Kazakhstan underwent a substantial shift in its ethnic composition. From that point forward, fertility dynamics became primarily driven by ethnic Kazakhs, who largely maintained traditional reproductive norms. This shift in ethnic structure is therefore the first major factor that must be considered when analyzing fertility trends (see Table 1).

The second key factor is the transformation of the age-sex structure of the population, in which Kazakhs also began to dominate. In the most reproductively active and demographically promising age groups, Kazakhs came to hold a clear demographic advantage. For instance, in 2021, ethnic Kazakhs represented 74.0 % of the population aged 15–19 (Russians – 12.5 %, other ethnicities – 13.5 %) and 73.5 % of those aged 20–24 (Russians – 12.5 %, others – 14.0 %) (National Composition, 2023: 31–37). The ethnic composition of the population stabilized, and demographic processes became predominantly autochthonous. By 2010, Kazakhs accounted for over 70 % of all births and more than 90 % of natural population growth in Kazakhstan (Demographic Yearbook, 2012: 116).

Table 1 –Number and ethnic composition of the population of Kazakhstan according to censuses of 1989, 1999, 2009 and 2021, thousand people

Ethnic Groups	1989	1999	2009	2021	2021 к 1989 (%)
Total population	16464,5	14953,1	16009,6	19186,0	116,5
Kazakhs	6534,6	7985,0	10096,8	13497,9	206,6
Russians	6227,5	4509,6	3793,8	2981,9	47,9
Ukrainians	956,2	547,1	333,0	387,3	40,5
Germans	957,5	353,4	178,4	226,1	23,6
Uzbeks	332,0	370,7	457,0	614,0	184,9
Other ethnic groups	1456,7	1187,3	1150,9	1478,8	101,5

Source: *Statistical Compendium on Selected Indicators from the All-Union Population Censuses of 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979, and 1989*. Alma-Ata, 1991. pp. 7–9; *Ethnic Composition of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Volume 4, Part 1: Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan by Ethnicity, Sex, and Age (Results of the 1999 Population Census in the Republic of Kazakhstan)*. Statistical Compendium, edited by A. Smailov. Almaty, 2000. pp. 6–237; *Ethnic Composition, Religious Affiliation, and Language Proficiency in the Republic of Kazakhstan*. Astana, 2023. pp. 4–7.

The focus of the study then expanded to include not only the dynamics of the ethnic composition and age-sex structure but also changes in the ethnic character of settlement patterns – specifically, internal migration processes characteristic of the period of accelerated urbanization.

The active urbanization of ethnic Kazakhs, who maintained traditional family structures and a pronatalist orientation, led to a shift in the urban–rural birth ratio. The reproductive potential increasingly shifted towards urban areas. The gap between urban and rural birth rates steadily widened in favor of urban regions. From 2000 to 2010, the urban birth rate exceeded the rural rate by a factor of 1.1; however, from 2010 to 2021, this difference grew to 7.9 times. In 2021, 58.9 % of all births in Kazakhstan occurred in urban areas.

In absolute terms, the number of births in 2021 reached the highest level in Kazakhstan's demographic history. Demographic factors such as the age-sex structure, ethnic replacement, and the “postponed births” effect contributed positively to the overall birth dynamics. Initially, active urbanization did not lead to a decline in fertility. On the contrary, rural families brought traditional reproductive models with them into urban settings. Over the 15-year period of nearly uninterrupted growth in fertility rates, it appeared that this upward trend would continue. The high level of ethnic identity among Kazakhs, and their perception of family traditions as a core value, contributed to the belief that urban Kazakh families (who constitute the majority) would preserve reproductive behaviors formed in earlier historical periods.

Against this backdrop, a new and unexpected trend emerged: from 2021 to 2024, the number of births began to decline rapidly both in urban areas (by 16.6 %) and in rural areas (by 18.3 %). Likewise, general fertility rates also dropped significantly during this period – by 22.7 %. Notably, the decline in urban areas was steeper than in rural ones – 25.4 % and 18.0 %, respectively (see Table 2).

Table 2 – Total fertility rates in Kazakhstan, per 1000 people

Years	Total Population	Including	
		Urban	Rural
2010	22,53	21,73	23,57
2015	22,72	22,71	22,57
2021	23,47	23,24	23,80
2022	20,57	19,97	21,55
2023	19,52	18,69	20,89
2024	18,15	17,34	19,52

Source: *Demographic Yearbook of Kazakhstan. Statistical Collection. Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Committee on Statistics. Chief Editor: N.S. Aidapkelov. Astana, 2017. pp. 5; Demographic Yearbook of Kazakhstan. Statistical Collection. Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Astana, 2024. p. 5.*

A multifaceted analysis once again reveals that this phenomenon does not stem from a single cause, but rather from a complex interplay of various processes.

At the surface level, the decline in fertility rates is commonly explained by the sociocultural transformation of Kazakhstani society in the context of urbanization. Despite the resilience of traditions, the urban environment is objectively ill-suited for large families. Restructuring urban space to meet the needs of such families is not only a lengthy and costly process but, in essence, an impractical one. After all, the choice to live in cities is neither accidental nor a passing trend – it reflects a universal, global trajectory of development. Consequently, families are compelled to adapt to new living conditions.

There is a pressing need to break the entrenched dichotomy that defines a “real Kazakh family” as necessarily large, with many children being perceived as essential for preserving cultural identity and national traditions. The realities of the Second Demographic Transition must be acknowledged – a process which, across all sociocultural settings, inevitably leads to a decline in fertility. In this context, family institutions adjust to new, urban “rules of the game.”

The shift toward new fertility models does not imply a rejection of historical or cultural roots. On the contrary, by maintaining the ability to adapt and evolve, Kazakhstani society gains new avenues for development and opens fresh opportunities for the future.

However, beyond sociocultural aspects, there are also demographic factors that significantly influence fertility trends in both urban and rural areas. These factors are independent of individual family choices. By the mid-2020s, the reproductive activity of the large cohort of women aged 30–39 – born in the mid-1980s to early 1990s – is gradually declining (1.485 million in 2024). Responsibility for sustaining fertility increasingly shifts to the 20–29 age group, born in the mid-1990s to early 2000s. However, this younger generation is substantially smaller than the previous one – by 21.4 %, or 317.1 thousand individuals. This demographic shift is one of the primary reasons for the recent decline in the total fertility rate and the overall number of births.

The actual trends in fertility growth or decline – independent of changes in the age structure – are best illustrated by age-specific fertility rates (ASFR), which reflect the intensity of the fertility process within specific age groups of women of reproductive age (15–49 years). The data in Tables 3 and 4, even over a short time frame, demonstrate contrasting dynamics in ASFR trends.

Table 3 – Age fertility rates of urban and rural population of Kazakhstan in 2010-2021, per 1000 people

Age of Women	2010			2021			2021 vs. 2010 (%)		
	Total Population	Including		Total Population	Including		Total Population	Including	
		Urban	Rural		Urban	Rural		Urban	Rural
15-49	79,88	72,51	89,95	97,97	92,52	107,00	122,6	127,6	118,9
15-19	28,31	25,80	31,08	23,74	19,74	28,21	83,8	76,5	90,8
20-24	146,69	122,98	122,98	180,47	165,40	202,43	123,0	134,4	110,8
25-29	155,63	144,21	144,21	201,49	190,49	221,15	129,5	132,1	128,6
30-34	111,39	102,16	102,16	142,64	127,01	177,57	128,0	124,3	142,9
35-39	62,51	56,67	70,66	90,37	85,49	99,04	144,6	150,8	140,2
40-44	16,14	14,29	18,67	24,52	23,45	26,29	151,9	164,1	140,8
45-49	0,76	0,70	0,85	1,35	1,57	0,99	177,6	224,2	116,5
CKP	2,61	2,33	3,00	3,32	3,07	3,75	127,2	131,8	125,0

Source: Demographic Yearbook of Kazakhstan. Statistical Compendium. Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Committee on Statistics. Chief Editor: N.S. Aidapkelov. Astana, 2017. pp. 140–145; Demographic Yearbook of Kazakhstan. Statistical Compendium. Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Astana, 2024. pp. 148–150.

Table 3 presents age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) of Kazakhstani women in 2010 and 2021. The overall trend reveals a marked increase in age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) across most age groups, with the notable exception of the youngest cohort (15–19 years), which experienced a decline. Moreover, the growth rate tends to rise progressively with each older age group. In urban areas, this trend is generally more pronounced, with few exceptions. As a result, the total fertility rate (TFR) in 2021 increased by 27.2 % compared to 2010 (by 31.8 % in urban areas and 25.0 % in rural areas).

As previously noted, after 2021 both the number of births and overall fertility rates began to decline. Between 2021 and 2024, there was a sharp drop in fertility rates, particularly among younger women. In the 15–19 age group, the ASFR decreased by 34.1 %, and in the 20–24 group – by 25.1 %. The decline was much more pronounced in urban areas than in rural ones, despite the fact that just recently the trend in ASFR evolution had been the opposite. Among urban women aged 15–19, the ASFR dropped by 38.2 % (compared to 19.0 % in rural areas); among urban women aged 20–24, it fell by 33.6 % (compared to 9.0 % in rural areas).

With each older age group, the pace of decline slows (except for the oldest group), yet the most significant structural shifts occurred precisely in the older reproductive age groups. A comparison of the ASFRs for 2010–2021 and 2021–2024 in the most active reproductive age range (25–39 years) clearly illustrates this transformation.

As a result, the total fertility rate between 2021 and 2024 decreased by 15.7 % overall (by 19.2 % in urban areas and by 8.3 % in rural areas) (see Table 4).

Table 4 – Age fertility rates of urban and rural population of Kazakhstan in 2021-2024, per 1000 people

Age of Women	2021			2024			2021 vs. 2010 (%)		
	Total Population	Including		Total Population	Including		Total Population	Including	
		Urban	Rural		Urban	Rural		Urban	Rural
15-49	97,97	92,52	107,00	77,77	71,10	90,44	79,4	76,8	84,5
15-19	23,74	19,74	28,21	15,64	12,20	20,43	65,9	61,8	81,0
20-24	180,47	165,40	202,43	135,10	109,82	184,28	74,9	66,4	91,0
25-29	201,49	190,49	221,15	170,63	154,60	204,27	84,7	81,1	92,4
30-34	142,64	127,01	177,57	131,55	120,56	155,66	92,2	94,9	87,7
35-39	90,37	85,49	99,04	80,79	74,13	95,09	89,4	86,7	96,0
40-44	24,52	23,45	26,29	24,18	22,63	27,19	98,6	96,5	103,4
45-49	1,35	1,57	0,99	1,81	1,98	1,48	134,1	126,1	149,5
CKP	3,32	3,07	3,75	2,80	2,48	3,44	84,3	80,8	91,7

Source: Demographic Yearbook of Kazakhstan. Statistical Compendium. 2024. pp. 148–150; Fertility Rates by Age Groups, 2024. Series 18. Demographic Statistics / Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan. March 18, 2025.

According to the authors, Kazakhstan is undergoing a rapid generational shift in reproductive cohorts, characterized by significantly different attitudes toward fertility. The generation now exiting reproductive age developed its childbearing attitudes under the influence of ethno-political, socio-economic, and sociocultural contexts of previous decades. In parallel with the growth of the urban Kazakh population, new perspectives on family, the number of children, and related values are emerging. As a result, reproductive choices are increasingly based not on the number of children, but on the quality of conditions in which children are raised and socialized.

These changes indicate that the family's primary function – raising the next generation – not only remains central but is gaining renewed significance. This suggests the continued development and evolution of family institutions. The results of a three-year sociological study “Regional peculiarities of reproductive behavior of urban Kazakh women” can serve as confirmation of this thesis. The study involved 1,050 young Kazakh women, university students, who were asked to choose the most attractive scenario for the near future (3–5 years). Of the six proposed scenarios, three contained reproductive activity, and three did not involve motherhood. At the same time, each scenario contained a certain set of social characteristics (marriage, continuing education, professional career, etc. Over the course of three years, the total choice of reproductively active scenarios increased: from 29.1 % in 2021 to 49.6 % in 2023. It is significant that the main increase was provided by the option “Specialist, working, married, 1–2 children”. It is this model of childhood that is most characteristic of a modernized urban society – it allows for the realization of both reproductive and socio-economic needs, not only to provide children financially, but also to give them a role model of a modern mother.

Thus, family structures and reproductive behavior (fertility) are influenced by factors of various origins – both demographic and socio-economic. First and foremost, there is a transformation in the worldview of young women, who represent the country's main reproductive potential. The desire for professional and economic self-fulfillment, which enhances individual status, is now combined with the need to maintain a new level of financial stability within the family. Rising expectations and needs – particularly regarding the upbringing and education of children – demand more than one working adult per household. Maintaining traditional gender roles, where the man is the sole breadwinner and the woman is responsible for childcare and domestic life, is no longer viable for the majority of Kazakh families.

The growing number of educated, highly qualified women in Kazakhstan suggests that families will increasingly prioritize the quality of childrearing and educational conditions. This forms the social background against which family institutions currently operate and transform.

Conclusions

The decline in fertility observed since 2021 should not be interpreted as moral decay or a breakdown of family values, as it is often portrayed in the media. On the one hand, it is a natural consequence of shifts in the age-sex structure of the population; on the other, it reflects the adaptation of family institutions to new realities and is a response to drastic changes in everyday socio-economic practices. In these new conditions, high fertility can no longer remain the dominant model of family life.

Under the most optimistic scenario – assuming continued social stability, sustainable economic development, and a favorable geopolitical and economic environment – the Kazakh family will likely adopt new forms, where the dominant model becomes moderate fertility. This model would support replacement-level reproduction without triggering a demographic “explosion”, which, despite its potential benefits, would also entail increased demographic burden and risks to sustainable development.

It is reasonable to assume that high fertility will persist as a localized model among specific population groups: those for whom traditional or religious values outweigh social or economic difficulties, as well as the wealthiest and the poorest families. For the former, large families are a cultural or religious choice; for the latter, children may be viewed as a source of state support.

Some families will likely adopt a low-fertility model. Others may opt out of childbearing altogether, unable to envision providing the necessary conditions for children's upbringing and socialization. Single-parent families are already emerging as a distinct type of household in Kazakhstan.

Marriage and family institutions, as well as reproductive behavior, reflect the broader socio-economic and cultural state of society. Kazakh society has entered a new stage of development – the level of an urban nation. Urban lifestyles necessitate the search for new forms of family functioning. As has happened throughout history, the family adapts, seeking the most effective ways to fulfill its core functions – childbearing and socialization.

The previously dominant dichotomy between two family types – rural (large families) and urban (small families), characteristic of Kazakhstan in the mid-20th century – has been replaced by a more complex typology, which now requires careful study and analysis.

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