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SETTLEMENT AND SOCIAL ADAPTATION OF KANDAS IN SOUTHERN KAZAKHSTAN: REGIONAL DYNAMICS AND THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION POLICY (2000–2023)

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Abstract. *Introduction.* Since gaining independence, the integration of kandas, ethnic Kazakh returnees, has become an important component of Kazakhstan's demographic and social policy, especially in the southern regions, which remain key destinations for ethnic migrants due to their demographic, economic, and cultural characteristics. Their inflow has reshaped settlement patterns, increased pressure on social infrastructure and labor markets, and encouraged adaptation strategies at institutional and community levels. *Goals and objectives.* This study examines the regional dynamics of settlement and social adaptation of kandas in southern Kazakhstan from 2000 to 2023, with a focus on the effectiveness of migration policy instruments. The research analyzes archival and statistical sources, spatial settlement patterns, access to housing and employment, the institutional and regulatory framework, and the main barriers to social adaptation. *Results.* The findings show that southern Kazakhstan has consistently served as one of the main reception zones for kandas. However, a considerable share of migration flows occurred outside established quota mechanisms, causing uneven resource distribution and growing pressure on housing, employment, and social services. Although legislative and institutional reforms from 2012 to 2023 improved certain aspects of migration governance, their effects remained uneven, and persistent integration challenges continued. *Conclusion.* Overall, the settlement and social adaptation of kandas in southern Kazakhstan are

complex, multi-layered, and shaped by historical and regional conditions. The findings suggest that migration policy effectiveness depends strongly on local socio-economic contexts, while archival evidence highlights the need to consider historical experience when developing more regionally differentiated and context-sensitive migration strategies.

Keywords: kandas, migration policy, social adaptation, southern Kazakhstan, regional dynamics, archival data

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ОҢТҮСТІК ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ ҚАНДАСТАРДЫҢ ҚОНЫСТАНУЫ МЕН ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК БЕЙІМДЕЛУІ: АЙМАҚТЫҚ ДИНАМИКАСЫ ЖӘНЕ КӨШІ-ҚОН САЯСАТЫНЫҢ ӘСЕРІ (2000–2023 ЖЖ.)

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Аңдатпа. *Kіріспе.* Қазақстан Республикасының тәуелсіздік кезеңінде қандастарды қоныстандыру және олардың әлеуметтік бейімделуі мемлекеттік демографиялық және әлеуметтік саясаттың маңызды бағыттарының біріне айналды. Бұл үдерістер әсіресе Оңтүстік Қазақстан өңірінде жоғары қарқынмен байқалып, аймақтың әлеуметтік-экономикалық дамуына көпқырлы әсер етті: халықтың аумақтық орналасуы өзгерді, әлеуметтік инфрақұрылымға жүктеме артты және еңбек нарығында жаңа бейімделу модельдері қалыптасты. Осы тұрғыдан алғанда, аталған үдерістерді аймақтық деңгейде талдау көші-қон саясатының іске асырылу ерекшеліктері мен нақты нәтижелерін бағалауға мүмкіндік береді. *Зерттеудің мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Зерттеудің мақсаты – 2000–2023 жылдар аралығында Оңтүстік Қазақстан өңірінде қандастарды қоныстандыру мен әлеуметтік бейімделу үдерістерінің аймақтық динамикасын кешенді талдау және көші-қон саясатының ықпалын бағалау. Осы мақсатта архивтік материалдар мен ресми статистикалық деректер талданып, қоныстану географиясы, тұрғын үймен қамтамасыз етілу деңгейі, жұмыспен қамту құрылымы, көші-қон саясатының институционалдық және нормативтік-құқықтық негіздері, сондай-ақ әлеуметтік бейімделу үдерісіндегі негізгі шектеулер мен тәуекелдер қарастырылды.

Нәтижелер. Зерттеу нәтижелері Оңтүстік Қазақстан өңірінің зерттелген кезең бойы қандастарды қабылдаудың негізгі орталықтарының бірі болғанын көрсетті. Сонымен бірге көші-қон ағындарының елеулі бөлігінің квоталық тетіктерден тыс жүзеге асуы ресурстардың аумақтық теңгерімсіз бөлінуіне, тұрғын үй, жұмыспен қамту және әлеуметтік инфрақұрылым салаларына қосымша жүктеме түсуіне әкелді. 2012–2023 жылдары жүргізілген заңнамалық және институционалдық өзгерістер көші-қон саясатын жетілдіруге бағытталғанымен, олардың нәтижелері өңірлік деңгейде біркелкі көрініс таппаған, ал әлеуметтік бейімделу саласында бірқатар жүйелі мәселелер сақталған. *Қорытынды.* Жалпы алғанда, қандастарды қоныстандыру және әлеуметтік бейімделу үдерістері күрделі, көпдеңгейлі әрі ұзақ мерзімді сипатқа ие. Зерттеу нәтижелері көші-қон саясатының тиімділігі аймақтардың әлеуметтік-экономикалық даму деңгейімен тығыз байланысты екенін көрсетеді. Сонымен қатар архивтік деректерді талдау көші-қон саясатын жетілдіруде тарихи тәжірибені және өңірлік ерекшеліктерді ескерудің маңыздылығын айқындайды.

Түйін сөздер: қандас, көші-қон саясаты, әлеуметтік бейімделу, Оңтүстік Қазақстан, аймақтық динамика, архивтік деректер

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РАССЕЛЕНИЕ И СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ АДАПТАЦИЯ КАНДАСОВ В ЮЖНОМ КАЗАХСТАНЕ: РЕГИОНАЛЬНАЯ ДИНАМИКА И ВЛИЯНИЕ МИГРАЦИОННОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ (2000–2023 ГГ.)

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Аннотация. *Введение.* В постсоветский период интеграция кандасов, этнических казахов-репатриантов, заняла устойчивое место в системе демографической и социальной политики Республики Казахстан. Наиболее активно эти процессы проявились в южных регионах страны, традиционно выступающих основными центрами приема этнических мигрантов. Увеличение численности кандасов сопровождалось изменением структуры расселения, ростом нагрузки на социальную инфраструктуру и трансформацией регионального рынка

труда, что обусловило формирование различных моделей социальной адаптации. В этой связи региональный анализ позволяет точнее оценить механизмы реализации миграционной политики и ее социально-экономические последствия. *Цель и задачи исследования.* Целью исследования является анализ региональной динамики расселения и социальной адаптации кандасов в Южном Казахстане в 2000–2023 гг., а также оценка результативности мер миграционной политики. Для этого были проанализированы архивные источники и официальная статистика, изучены особенности расселения, обеспеченность жильем и занятость, систематизированы институциональные и нормативно-правовые основы регулирования миграционных процессов, а также выявлены основные барьеры социальной адаптации. *Результаты.* Полученные результаты показывают, что Южный Казахстан на протяжении всего рассматриваемого периода сохранял статус одного из ведущих регионов приема кандасов. При этом значительная часть миграционных потоков проходила вне квотных механизмов, что усиливало неравномерное распределение ресурсов и нагрузку на жилищный фонд, рынок труда и социальную инфраструктуру. Несмотря на институциональные и законодательные изменения 2012–2023 гг., направленные на совершенствование миграционной политики, их эффект проявился неоднородно, а ряд проблем социальной адаптации сохраняется. *Заключение.* В целом процессы расселения и социальной адаптации кандасов имеют сложный, многоуровневый и длительный характер, формируясь под влиянием экономических, институциональных и территориальных факторов. Эффективность миграционной политики во многом определяется спецификой регионального развития и доступностью ресурсов, а анализ архивных материалов подтверждает необходимость учета исторического опыта и региональных особенностей при совершенствовании государственной политики в данной сфере.

Ключевые слова: кандас, миграционная политика, социальная адаптация, Южный Казахстан, региональная динамика, архивные данные

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Introduction

Following independence, Kazakhstan underwent profound transformations in its demographic configuration, social structure, and ethno-political landscape. Within this context, the repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs who had historically resided outside the country emerged as a strategically important direction of state policy. This initiative was not limited to symbolic nation-building objectives; it was also closely linked to demographic stabilization and the expansion of the national labor potential. As a result, the processes of settlement and social adaptation of kandas became embedded within a broader framework of demographic regulation and social policy. Existing empirical studies confirm that these processes have exerted a measurable influence on regional demographic dynamics, particularly in southern Kazakhstan (Kapbarova et al., 2024: 374).

The regional dimension of migration is critical for understanding its differentiated socio-economic outcomes, especially in the case of ethnic return migration. Regional dynamics refer to spatial and temporal variations in migration flows, settlement patterns, and adaptation outcomes across different territories. Southern Kazakhstan – currently represented by the Turkestan region and the city of Shymkent – has consistently functioned as one of the principal destinations for kandas. This pattern can be explained by a combination of factors, including geographical proximity to countries of origin, cultural and linguistic continuity, climatic conditions, and relatively developed elements of social infrastructure. Most kandas arriving in southern Kazakhstan originated from neighboring countries, particularly Uzbekistan, China, and Turkmenistan. At the same time, the concentration of migrants in specific territories generated asymmetric pressures on local systems, particularly in housing provision, employment absorption capacity, and the delivery of social services.

The institutionalization of migration policy evolved gradually. In the early 1990s, migration flows were largely spontaneous and weakly regulated. By contrast, the early 2000s marked a shift toward more structured governance, characterized by the introduction of quota mechanisms, the expansion of the legal and regulatory framework, and the implementation of targeted state and regional programs. Parallel to these developments, specialized institutional arrangements were established at the regional level to manage the integration of kandas. Collectively, these transformations signaled a transition from reactive to more systematized migration management.

The case of southern Kazakhstan provides a particularly informative empirical setting for examining how migration policy operates in practice. Archival evidence indicates that a substantial share of incoming kandas settled outside formal quota arrangements, which often resulted in mismatches between planned policy instruments and actual socio-economic conditions. In many instances, migrants faced constraints related to housing access and labor market integration, highlighting tensions between regulatory frameworks and lived realities.

While the existing body of literature tends to address ethnic migration primarily at the macro level, there remains a clear need for region-specific analyses that capture the complexity of implementation processes. Archival-based regional studies are especially valuable in this regard, as they allow for the reconstruction of policy practices and the identification of both their functional capacities and structural limitations. In this sense, the South Kazakhstan case offers an opportunity to conceptualize a regionally grounded model of ethnic migration management.

The purpose of this article is to examine the processes of settlement and social adaptation of kandas in southern Kazakhstan over the period 2000–2023, drawing on archival and statistical sources. The selected period (2000–2023) reflects the transition from spontaneous migration processes to institutionalized migration policy and its subsequent development. The study seeks to identify region-specific features of migration policy implementation and to assess its socio-economic implications. By doing so, it contributes both to a more nuanced historical understanding of ethnic return migration and to ongoing policy discussions aimed at improving migration governance.

Materials and methods

The empirical foundation of this research is formed by a corpus of official documents reflecting migration processes in southern Kazakhstan, preserved in central and regional archival repositories of the Republic of Kazakhstan. TRSA stands for the Turkestan Regional State Archive. In this study, social adaptation is understood as the process of integration of kandas into the host society, including access to employment, housing, education, and social services. The primary sources include reports of migration authorities, internal correspondence, analytical notes, and administrative records produced by regional and district executive bodies. These documents focus on key aspects of migration governance, including admission procedures, resettlement practices, and the social adaptation of kandas. Resettlement refers to the process of distribution and relocation of kandas across specific regions, including their placement in urban and rural areas. Particular attention was given to materials from the Turkestan Regional State Archive (TRSA), specifically Fund 1454 (Inventory 1, Cases 143, 145, 180; Inventory 24, Case 198), which provide detailed insights into the institutional mechanisms and organizational practices underlying migration policy implementation at the regional level. These sources make it possible to reconstruct both the formal regulatory framework and its practical implementation.

To complement the qualitative evidence, the study also draws on annual statistical reports for the South Kazakhstan region covering the period 2009–2011 (TRSA. F. 161. Inv. 3. P. 525). These reports contain systematized information on the number of kandas, their participation in the labor market, applications to employment services, as well as their involvement in public works and vocational training programs. The integration of statistical data enabled a more grounded assessment of the socio-economic dimensions of adaptation and allowed for cross-verification of archival findings.

The theoretical framework of the study is based on both domestic and international scholarship on migration. Migration is conceptualized not only as a spatial relocation of population groups, but also as a multidimensional process affecting demographic structures, social institutions, and policy

configurations (Brook, 1974; Tatimov, 1989). Tatimov (1989) is used as a theoretical framework for understanding the social determinants of demographic and migration processes. In line with approaches developed in the literature on forced and ethnic migration, particular emphasis is placed on the interdependence between adaptation processes, legal status, and economic integration (Tishkov, 1997). Research focused on Kazakhstan highlights the role of employment, social inclusion, and cultural identity in shaping the integration trajectories of kandas (Galimova, 2008). At the same time, studies within the broader migration theory tradition address issues of labor participation, economic activity, and the social positioning of migrants (Migration of Population, 2001).

Contemporary migration studies emphasize the role of integration and adaptation frameworks, viewing migration as a long-term process shaped by both structural and individual factors (Castles et al., 2014; Massey et al., 1993). In this context, the adaptation of kandas can be understood through the interaction between state policies, labor market conditions, and access to social infrastructure. These approaches are also reflected in acculturation theory, which highlights the importance of social and cultural integration in migrant adaptation (Berry, 1997), as well as in broader migration-development perspectives (de Haas, 2010).

Additional analytical depth is provided by works examining the historical formation of the Kazakh diaspora and its socio-cultural characteristics (Mendikulova, 1997; Syroezhkin, 1994; Svanberg, 2005; Seidin, 2005). These contributions are particularly important for understanding migration motivations, behavioral strategies, and long-term adaptation patterns, thereby linking contemporary processes with their historical roots. Media and expert materials further supplement the analysis by shedding light on practical aspects of migration policy implementation, including access to citizenship, registration procedures, and social guarantees (Toiken, 2016; Changes in migration legislation in Kazakhstan, 2013).

Methodologically, the study combines several complementary approaches. The historical-genetic method is employed to trace the evolution of migration policy and the development of resettlement and adaptation mechanisms over time. The historical-comparative approach allows for situating regional processes within the broader national context and, where relevant, in comparison with similar dynamics in other post-Soviet states. Source criticism and document analysis are applied to evaluate the informational value, internal consistency, and analytical potential of archival materials.

In addition, statistical analysis is used to systematize and compare quantitative indicators, identify trends, and assess the direction of socio-economic changes associated with migration processes. The combined use of qualitative (archival) and quantitative (statistical) data ensures a more comprehensive interpretation of the phenomena under study, allowing them to be examined as a complex, multi-layered socio-historical process rather than a set of isolated indicators. The study is based on archival and statistical data; sociological surveys were not included due to the limitations of available sources.

The results of the analysis are presented in tabular and graphical formats, which facilitate the identification of structural patterns and enhance the interpretability of migration dynamics at the regional level.

Discussion

The issues of resettlement and social adaptation of kandas occupy a significant place in contemporary migration studies and have been extensively addressed in both domestic and international scholarship. A comparative engagement with this body of literature allows for a more grounded interpretation of the empirical findings derived from archival and statistical sources. In particular, studies on migration processes in Central Asia emphasize the long-term and structurally embedded nature of ethnic repatriation, which is typically accompanied by prolonged socio-economic adjustment (Sadovskaya, 2020). The evidence obtained in this study confirms that, in the case of southern Kazakhstan, migration should be understood not merely as a demographic shift, but as a complex historical process shaped by the interaction of social, economic, and political factors.

Within the broader theoretical tradition, migration is conceptualized as a phenomenon that not only involves spatial mobility but also contributes to the reconfiguration of social structures (Brook, 1974; Tatimov, 1989). The empirical results support this perspective, demonstrating that the influx of kandas influenced settlement patterns, labor market segmentation, and the distribution of social resources at the regional level. At the same time, the adaptation of kandas was closely linked to issues of social and ethnic integration within Kazakhstani society. Existing research highlights that successful adaptation depends on a combination of legal status, access to employment, and availability of social infrastructure (Galimova, 2008). The findings of this study extend this argument by showing that adaptation processes were not confined to immediate needs such as housing, but evolved as long-term and multi-dimensional trajectories.

The literature on forced and ethnic migration frequently underscores the role of institutional capacity in shaping integration outcomes (Tishkov, 1997). In this regard, the South Kazakhstan case illustrates that the effectiveness of migration policy measures is strongly mediated by the administrative and organizational capabilities of regional governance structures. Archival evidence reveals that limitations in social infrastructure, alongside bureaucratic complexities, acted as significant constraints on the adaptation process. This observation aligns with broader post-Soviet experiences, where formal policy frameworks often diverged from their practical implementation at the regional level.

From the perspective of labor migration theory, the degree of economic integration is largely determined by the correspondence between migrants' skills and labor market demand (Migration of Population, 2001). The results of this study indicate that a considerable share of kandas were employed in low-skilled or temporary occupations, which contributed to their unstable socio-economic positioning and limited upward mobility. Similar patterns have been noted in earlier studies (Abdrakhmanova, 2018), suggesting a structural underutilization of human capital among ethnic returnees.

The legal dimension of migration also plays a crucial role in shaping adaptation trajectories. Academic and expert discussions consistently identify access to citizenship, registration procedures, and eligibility for social guarantees as key determinants of successful integration (Toiken, 2016). Although legislative reforms in Kazakhstan have sought to address these issues, the findings indicate that their implementation has produced uneven outcomes across different stages and regions. This confirms earlier observations that regulatory improvements do not automatically translate into effective social integration (Changes in migration legislation in Kazakhstan, 2013).

Insights from diaspora studies further contribute to understanding the heterogeneity of adaptation patterns among kandas. Research on the historical formation and socio-economic characteristics of the Kazakh diaspora demonstrates that prior experiences in countries such as China and Turkey have shaped migration motivations, behavioral strategies, and expectations (Mendikulova, 1997; Syroezhkin, 1994; Svanberg, 2005). These factors help explain the diversity of adaptation trajectories observed in the empirical data. At the same time, studies focusing on state policy toward the diaspora emphasize that the stimulation of ethnic migration has been closely linked to broader demographic and political objectives (Seidin, 2005). However, the results of this research suggest that such policy measures, while facilitating return migration, are insufficient on their own to ensure successful social adaptation, which requires sustained and coordinated interventions.

Overall, the comparison of empirical findings with the existing literature indicates that the processes of resettlement and social adaptation of kandas in southern Kazakhstan developed in line with broader migration dynamics characteristic of the post-Soviet space, while also reflecting distinct regional specificities. This underscores the importance of moving beyond macro-level generalizations and highlights the analytical value of regionally grounded studies. Such an approach enables a more nuanced assessment of migration policy and its outcomes within a historically informed framework.

Results

The systematization of empirical materials was carried out through the integration of archival and statistical data, presented in tabular and graphical formats. Such an approach made it possible to

identify the structural characteristics and key trajectories of the resettlement and social adaptation of kandas in southern Kazakhstan. The results demonstrate that, over the period 2000–2023, these processes developed as complex and multi-layered phenomena, shaped not only by demographic policy priorities but also by a combination of socio-economic and institutional factors.

Archival evidence indicates that southern Kazakhstan consistently occupied a leading position among the regions receiving kandas. This observation corresponds with existing research emphasizing the role of southern territories as zones of demographic concentration and growth (Kapessova, 2021). At the same time, migration authority reports show a pronounced spatial clustering of kandas, particularly in the city of Shymkent and in densely populated rural settlements (TRSA. F. 1454. Inv. 1. P. 143). Such concentration patterns intensified the pressure on local social infrastructure and complicated the provision of housing, employment opportunities, and public services. In the broader theoretical context, this type of spatial imbalance is often associated with increasing regional disparities in migration outcomes (Brook, 1974; Tatimov, 1989).

From the mid-2000s onward, migration management in the region began to acquire more structured institutional features. The establishment of the Council for Kandas Affairs under the regional akimat marked a transition toward more coordinated governance mechanisms (TRSA. F. 1454. Inv. 1. P. 143). The activities of this body were aimed at synchronizing the process of resettlement of kandas, expanding social support measures, and facilitating the adaptation of kandas, thereby reflecting an attempt to move from fragmented interventions to more systematic policy implementation.

Quantitative indicators further illustrate the scale and dynamics of migration flows. According to the report of the Commission on Human Rights under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, between 1991 and 2011, approximately 221. 3 thousand families (or 860. 4 thousand individuals) of ethnic Kazakhs returned to Kazakhstan, with a significant proportion represented by working-age individuals and youth (Kapbarova, 2024). The peak of migration activity at the national level occurred during 2002–2008, a trend that was even more pronounced in southern Kazakhstan, where a substantial share of kandas settled in already densely populated areas (TRSA. F. 1454. Inv. 1. P. 143).

More detailed archival data for the region confirm this pattern. Between 1992 and August 1, 2008, a total of 45, 452 families (154, 853 individuals) arrived in South Kazakhstan. Of these, only 14, 533 families (32. 0%) were resettled within the framework of the official migration quota, while the majority – 30, 919 families (68. 0%) – moved outside quota mechanisms. This imbalance highlights a significant discrepancy between planned policy instruments and actual migration practices. The predominance of extra-quota migration increased the administrative and financial burden on regional authorities, while simultaneously limiting the effectiveness of centralized regulatory measures.

Overall, the empirical findings suggest that the resettlement of kandas in southern Kazakhstan was characterized by a combination of institutional efforts and spontaneous migration dynamics. This duality shaped both the opportunities and constraints of the adaptation process, reinforcing the importance of region-specific approaches to migration policy implementation.

Table 1 – Overall Indicators of Kandas Migration to South Kazakhstan (1992–2008)

Indicator	Number	Share (%)
Total number of families	45, 452	100
Arrived within migration quota	14, 533	32. 0
Arrived outside migration quota	30, 919	68. 0

(TRSA. F. 1454. Inv. 1. P. 143).

Table 1 shows that the majority of kandas settled outside the official quota system. Out of 45, 452 families, 30, 919 (68. 0%) arrived independently, without state-supported resettlement mechanisms. This indicates a gap between migration policy planning and actual migration flows. The high share of non-quota arrivals created additional pressure on housing, employment, and social services, particularly in urban areas. It also complicated the coordination of migration processes at the regional level.

Archival materials from the Maktaaral district (TRSA. F. 1454. Inv. 18. P. 144) provide detailed evidence of local migration processes. Between 1991 and the mid-2000s, a total of 37, 023 individuals (11, 007 families) settled in the district. Of these, only 2, 844 families were resettled within the quota framework, while the overwhelming majority – 8, 163 families – arrived outside it. This distribution clearly indicates that migration at the district level developed largely in a spontaneous manner, with limited alignment to centrally planned mechanisms.

The consequences of this imbalance are reflected in the organization of accommodation and social support. For instance, Hostel No. 3 of the Maktaaral agribusiness complex was temporarily repurposed to house kandas who arrived outside the quota system. Over time, this temporary solution evolved into a more permanent arrangement, with maintenance and repair costs being covered by the district budget. However, archival records indicate that approximately 400 families in the district continued to experience housing shortages. This suggests that the process of resettlement of kandas across the region remained incomplete and extended over a prolonged period, reflecting the cumulative effects of institutional constraints and resource limitations.

Overall, the case of Maktaaral district illustrates how the mismatch between planned migration instruments and actual settlement patterns translated into persistent socio-economic challenges at the local level. It also highlights the importance of considering sub-regional variations when assessing the effectiveness of migration policy.

Table 2 – Characteristics of Kandas Settlement in the Maktaaral District (1991–2008)

Indicator	Number of Families	Notes
Total number of resettled families	11, 007	1991–mid-2000s
Arrived within migration quota	2, 844	State migration quota
Arrived outside migration quota	8, 163	Independent migration
Families in need of housing	about 400	2008

Note: Compiled on the basis of archival materials (TRSA. F. 1454. Inv. 3. P. 144).

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that the resettlement of kandas in the Maktaaral district evolved as a prolonged and structurally complex process. The arrival of 11, 007 families between 1991 and the mid-2000s confirms the district's role as one of the key receiving areas for ethnic migration. At the same time, the relatively low proportion of families resettled within the official quota framework (2, 844 families) reveals a substantial divergence between formally planned migration instruments and the actual dynamics of population inflows. The predominance of extra-quota migration (8, 163 families) not only altered the scale of settlement processes but also significantly complicated the provision of housing and social support at the local level.

A closer examination of the data suggests that housing constraints constituted one of the most critical bottlenecks in the adaptation process. Archival evidence indicates that by 2008 approximately 400 families in the district remained in need of permanent housing, pointing to the incomplete character of resettlement. Temporary solutions, such as the use of dormitories and inadequately adapted residential facilities were widely employed to accommodate kandas arriving outside quota mechanisms. While these measures mitigated immediate social risks, they did not create the conditions necessary for sustainable long-term integration.

The intensification of migration flows was accompanied by a growing burden on local public finances and social infrastructure. Increased demand for educational, healthcare, and utility services required additional budgetary resources, which were often constrained at the district level. This imbalance between rising social needs and limited fiscal capacity underscores the dependence of migration policy outcomes on local institutional and economic conditions, rather than solely on central regulatory frameworks.

Employment dynamics further illustrate the challenges of social adaptation. According to archival data (TRSA. F. 161. Inv. 3. P. 525), in 2011 a total of 66 kandas applied to employment services, of whom only 30 were successfully placed in jobs. This low placement rate reflects limited absorption capacity of the local labor market and indicates structural barriers to economic integration.

In this context, the mismatch between migrants' skills and available employment opportunities likely contributed to their concentration in unstable or low-skilled occupations.

When considered in conjunction with settlement patterns, these indicators reveal the cumulative nature of adaptation constraints. Persistent housing shortages, reliance on temporary accommodation, and insufficient access to stable employment collectively weakened the socio-economic stability of kandas. The interdependence of these factors prolonged the adaptation process and slowed the transition toward full participation in local economic and social systems.

Overall, the evidence derived from Table 2 suggests that the Maktaaral district represents a micro-level case illustrating the structural limitations of migration policy implementation. The dominance of extra-quota migration, combined with unresolved housing issues and constrained labor market integration, points to the need for more coordinated, resource-sensitive, and long-term policy approaches at the sub-regional level.

Table 3 – Employment Indicators of Kandas in South Kazakhstan (2011)

Indicator	Total	Rural Areas	Urban Areas
Applicants to employment services	66	25	41
Employed persons	30	11	19
Participants in public works	8	7	1
Participants in vocational training	11	3	8

Note: Compiled on the basis of archival materials (TRSA. F. 161. Inv. 3. P. 525).

The data presented in Table 3 demonstrate that the integration of kandas into the labor market in southern Kazakhstan was characterized by both structural complexity and spatial unevenness. The overall level of labor market integration remained limited: in 2011, only 30 out of 66 applicants to employment services were successfully placed in jobs. This outcome points to a clear mismatch between the human capital of incoming migrants and the actual demand conditions of the regional labor market.

A territorial disaggregation of the data reveals pronounced differences between rural and urban contexts. In rural areas, employment opportunities were largely constrained by the scarcity of permanent jobs, which resulted in the widespread involvement of kandas in public works programs. Of the eight individuals engaged in such activities, seven were rural residents, reflecting the seasonal and unstable nature of rural labor markets. While public works provided short-term income support, they did not contribute to sustainable employment trajectories or long-term socio-economic stability.

In contrast, urban areas offered relatively broader employment opportunities, as evidenced by the fact that 19 out of 30 employed kandas were city residents. This pattern can be attributed to the more diversified structure of urban economies, where employment is concentrated in sectors such as services, trade, and construction. However, even within urban settings, most kandas were employed in low-skilled or temporary positions, indicating an incomplete utilization of their professional capacities and limited upward mobility.

An additional constraint is reflected in the relatively low participation in vocational training and retraining programs. Only 11 individuals were involved in such initiatives, suggesting that institutional mechanisms supporting labor market adaptation remained underdeveloped. The particularly low participation rates in rural areas can be explained by limited access to training infrastructure and information, whereas the comparatively higher engagement in urban areas is associated with the greater availability of educational and retraining services.

Taken together, these findings indicate that employment outcomes for kandas were strongly conditioned by the structural characteristics of regional labor markets. The shortage of stable jobs in rural areas, combined with competitive pressures and skill mismatches in urban environments, significantly slowed the process of socio-economic integration. This underscores the need for more targeted and coordinated policy measures aimed at enhancing professional adaptation, expanding access to vocational training, and aligning migrants' skills with labor market demand.

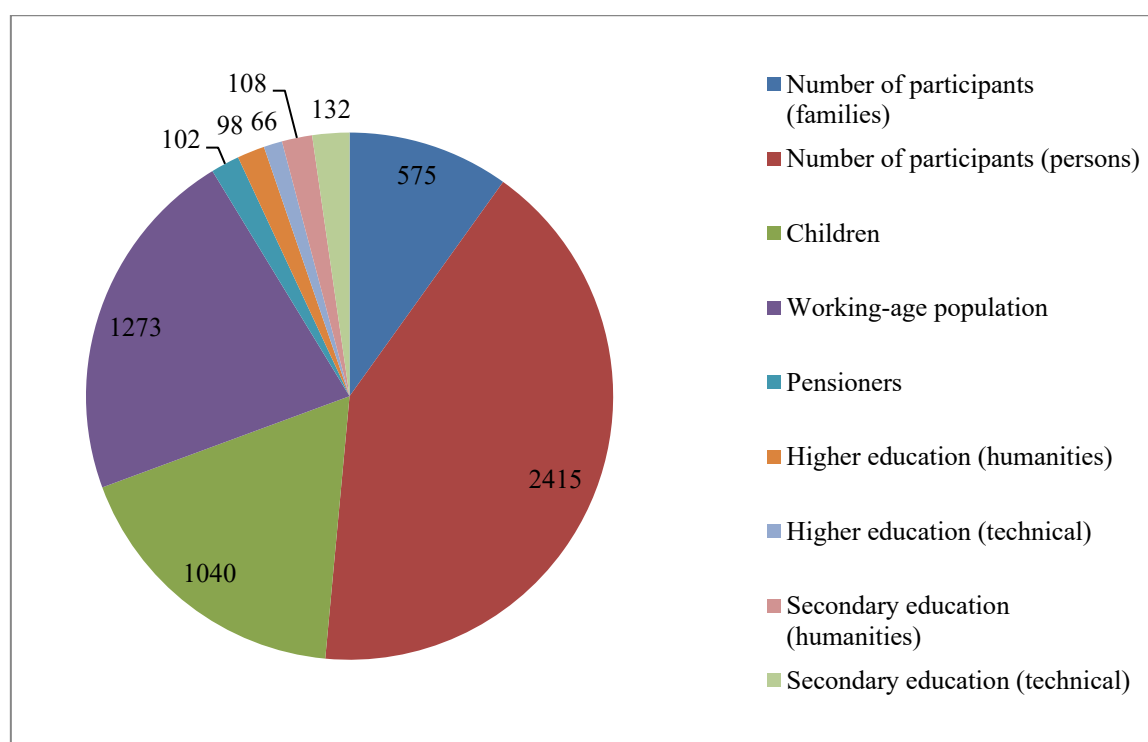


Figure 1 – Social Composition of Participants in the "Asar" Pilot Project of the "Nurly Kosh" Program in South Kazakhstan (2009)

Note: Compiled on the basis of archival materials (TRSA. F. 1454. Inv. 24. P. 198).

The graphical representation of employment structures indicates that the proportion of kandas engaged in stable, long-term employment remains limited. The relatively high shares of public works participation and involvement in vocational training programs suggest that economic integration has not yet reached a sustainable stage. These patterns confirm the view that labor market integration of migrants is typically gradual and prolonged, reflecting both structural constraints and institutional limitations (Migration of Population, 2001).

A synthesis of archival and statistical evidence demonstrates that the resettlement and social adaptation of kandas in southern Kazakhstan developed under the simultaneous influence of formal policy measures and spontaneous migration dynamics. This duality reveals a persistent gap between planned regulatory mechanisms and actual settlement practices. The comparative analysis further highlights that many of the challenges observed at the regional level are rooted in institutional constraints and uneven resource distribution.

The evolution of the regulatory framework played a significant role in shaping these processes. Beginning in the early 2000s, Kazakhstan gradually strengthened its legal and institutional approach to migration governance. The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Population Migration" (1997, revised in 2011) established the legal status of kandas and introduced mechanisms for their resettlement, social support, and inclusion. Within this framework, quota systems, social benefits, and adaptation programs were formalized at the national level.

Following the 2011 legislative revisions, migration policy expanded in scope, with increased responsibilities assigned to regional executive authorities. Archival and official data indicate that during this period, resettlement and adaptation measures in southern Kazakhstan were increasingly implemented through region-specific programs and administrative plans. This shift contributed to the institutionalization of migration management at sub-national levels and improved coordination mechanisms.

Between 2012 and 2016, migration policy became more strongly oriented toward socio-economic integration. Employment support, vocational training, and retraining programs were emphasized as key instruments of adaptation. However, both statistical evidence and prior research suggest that these measures did not fully resolve the issue of stable employment. In rural areas in

particular, limited labor market diversification constrained opportunities, resulting in the continued prevalence of temporary and low-skilled employment. This indicates the persistence of structural barriers that had emerged in earlier stages of migration policy development (Tatimov, 1989; Migration of Population, 2001).

A further institutional shift occurred after 2017, when amendments to migration legislation simplified administrative procedures related to the legal status and integration of ethnic migrants. The introduction of the term "kandas" in place of "oralman" signaled a broader transformation in state discourse, reflecting a more integrative approach that emphasized not only demographic objectives but also socio-cultural inclusion. This change also reflected a shift toward a more inclusive and integrative migration policy focused on long-term social adaptation.

In the period from 2018 to 2023, elements of digitalization were incorporated into migration governance. Administrative processes, such as registration, documentation, and access to social benefits, were increasingly transferred to electronic platforms. While these measures improved procedural efficiency and reduced administrative barriers, they did not fully address the underlying socio-economic challenges at the regional level. A significant proportion of kandas continued to experience difficulties related to housing provision, stable employment, and access to essential services.

The long-term effects of earlier settlement patterns remain evident. Archival and recent official data consistently show a high concentration of kandas in densely populated areas of southern Kazakhstan. This spatial concentration continues to generate sustained pressure on regional labor markets and social infrastructure, reinforcing the cumulative nature of adaptation challenges.

Overall, the findings for the period 2000–2023 indicate that, despite repeated regulatory and institutional reforms, the resettlement and adaptation of kandas in southern Kazakhstan remain constrained by persistent structural factors. While legislative changes have strengthened the formal framework of migration policy, issues related to housing, employment, and social integration have acquired a long-term character, underscoring the need for more regionally differentiated and resource-sensitive policy approaches.

Table 4 – Main Stages of Kandas Adaptation Policy in South Kazakhstan (Turkestan Region) (2012–2023)

Period	Legislative Changes	Main Directions	Regional Characteristics
2012–2014	Implementation of the 2011 edition of the Law on Population Migration	Improvement of quota mechanisms, employment measures	Continued concentration of kandas in rural districts
2015–2017	Elements of decentralization of migration policy	Social adaptation and vocational training	Employment remained unstable, temporary work predominated
2018–2019	Replacement of the term "oralman" with "kandas"	Simplification of legal status procedures	Acceleration of documentation procedures
2020–2021	Digitalization and online registration systems	Optimization of administrative procedures	The pandemic slowed adaptation processes
2022–2023	Regional migration regulation mechanisms	Priority given to social integration	Problems of previously settled families remained relevant

Note: Compiled on the basis of legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan, archival materials (TRSA. F. 1454. Inv. 1. P. 143) and scholarly literature.

The data presented in Table 4 indicate that between 2012 and 2023 migration policy in Kazakhstan underwent several distinct stages of institutional and regulatory transformation. Although legislative reforms were aimed at simplifying procedures related to the legal status of kandas (previously referred to as "oralman"), their impact on social adaptation at the regional level remained uneven. In particular, structural challenges, such as access to adequate housing and stable employment for previously resettled families, continued to persist over the long term. This suggests

that the effectiveness of migration policy is not determined solely by regulatory improvements but is strongly conditioned by regional socio-economic capacities. Contemporary research similarly emphasizes that the outcomes of migrants' economic integration are closely linked to labor market stability and absorptive capacity (World Bank, 2023).

One of the key findings of the study is the pronounced territorial unevenness of the process of resettlement of kandas. Archival evidence demonstrates that migration policy implementation in southern Kazakhstan varied significantly between urban and rural contexts. These differences were primarily shaped by disparities in economic development, labor market structure, and infrastructure availability (TRSA. F. 1454. Inv. 1. P. 143). As a result, the same policy instruments produced differentiated outcomes across sub-regional units.

The spatial distribution of kandas further reinforces this pattern. A significant proportion of migrants concentrated in densely populated areas, particularly in the city of Shymkent and its surrounding zones. This trend can be explained by urbanization factors, including greater availability of employment opportunities, as well as access to educational and healthcare services. However, such concentration simultaneously intensified pressure on urban infrastructure, exacerbating existing challenges related to housing shortages, unemployment, and social integration.

In rural areas, the dynamics of adaptation followed a different trajectory. Archival materials indicate that although some kandas were directed to agriculturally developed districts, including Maktaaral, Saryagash, and Shardara, a mismatch often emerged between their professional backgrounds and the specific demands of local labor markets (TRSA. F. 1454. Inv. 18. P. 144). While many migrants were able to engage in agricultural activities, the absence of stable income sources limited their long-term socio-economic security and weakened their social positioning.

Housing provision emerged as one of the most persistent and unresolved challenges. While families resettled within quota frameworks received partial state support, the majority of kandas who arrived outside these mechanisms were compelled to rely on their own resources. Archival records document the widespread use of temporary accommodation, such as dormitories and rental housing, which, although mitigating immediate needs, did not constitute sustainable solutions and ultimately slowed the adaptation process.

Another important dimension of adaptation concerns integration into the educational system. Although children of kandas were generally enrolled in general education schools, they often faced difficulties related to language differences and curriculum alignment. These barriers had a direct impact on educational outcomes and highlighted the need for more targeted pedagogical adaptation mechanisms.

Labor market integration remained one of the weakest components of regional migration policy. Data for 2011 indicate that only about half of the kandas who applied to employment services were successfully employed (TRSA. F. 161. Inv. 3. P. 525). This reflects both limited labor market capacity and a structural mismatch between migrants' qualifications and available employment opportunities.

Following 2012, migration policy increasingly emphasized social adaptation. Legislative reforms focused on simplifying legal procedures and improving access to documentation and social benefits. However, a comparison of archival and subsequent official data reveals that implementation outcomes varied considerably across regions. In some areas, adaptation programs were actively developed and operationalized, whereas in others they remained largely formal or under-implemented.

The replacement of the term "oralman" with "kandas" after 2017 marked a shift in the conceptual framing of migration policy, signaling a move toward a more integrative approach that emphasized not only demographic objectives but also socio-cultural inclusion. Nevertheless, the persistence of adaptation challenges at the regional level indicates that the practical effects of this discursive shift were limited.

The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021) introduced additional constraints, further complicating the socio-economic position of kandas. The reduction of temporary employment opportunities, disruptions to small businesses, and decreased access to social services significantly slowed adaptation processes. This period underscored the vulnerability of migrant populations to external

shocks and highlighted the dependence of migration outcomes on broader macroeconomic conditions.

In 2022–2023, migration policy began to incorporate a stronger regional focus, with increasing attention to the unresolved social issues faced by previously resettled families. Comparative analysis of archival and recent statistical data suggests that housing provision, stable employment, and access to social infrastructure remain central challenges.

Overall, the findings confirm that the processes of resettlement and social adaptation of kandas in southern Kazakhstan are inherently multi-level and long-term. The effectiveness of migration policy at the regional level is shaped by the interaction of socio-economic conditions, institutional capacity, and the degree of coordination between national and local governance structures.

Conclusion

The analysis of the period 2000–2023 demonstrates that the resettlement and social adaptation of kandas in southern Kazakhstan (currently the Turkestan region and the city of Shymkent) evolved as a phased, multi-dimensional, and institutionally conditioned process. The findings confirm that ethnic migration policy in Kazakhstan cannot be interpreted solely within the framework of demographic objectives; rather, it is deeply embedded in broader socio-economic and institutional contexts that shape its outcomes at the regional level.

Archival evidence indicates that southern Kazakhstan consistently functioned as one of the principal reception areas for kandas. At the same time, the predominance of migration flows occurring outside formal quota mechanisms revealed a persistent discrepancy between policy design and actual migration dynamics. This imbalance generated long-term pressures on housing provision, employment systems, and social infrastructure, thereby influencing the trajectory of adaptation processes.

The study shows that the institutional framework governing migration gradually strengthened from the mid-2000s onward. The establishment of coordination bodies, such as the Council for Kandas Affairs under regional authorities, along with the development of quota systems and legislative reforms, contributed to a more structured approach to migration management. However, these measures did not fully eliminate the underlying constraints of social adaptation, particularly at the local level, where resource limitations and administrative capacity played a decisive role.

Labor market integration emerged as one of the most critical challenges. The observed disparities between rural and urban areas, combined with the prevalence of unstable and low-skilled employment, indicate that the economic incorporation of kandas remained incomplete. These conditions not only slowed the formation of long-term social stability but also limited the effective utilization of migrants' human capital.

The period from 2012 to 2023 was characterized by significant policy transformations, including the redefinition of the conceptual framework of migration (through the adoption of the term "kandas"), the expansion of digital administrative procedures, and the simplification of legal status acquisition. Despite these advancements, key structural issues, most notably housing shortages and limited access to stable employment, persisted, underscoring the dependence of migration policy effectiveness on regional socio-economic conditions.

Overall, the findings highlight the dual nature of migration processes in southern Kazakhstan, shaped by the interaction between formal policy instruments and spontaneous migration flows. This duality explains the uneven outcomes of adaptation and points to the necessity of more flexible and regionally differentiated policy approaches.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in the introduction of previously underutilized archival materials into academic discourse, which enables a more detailed reconstruction of migration processes at the regional level. Furthermore, the identification of spatial and institutional patterns of kandas resettlement and adaptation provides a basis for refining theoretical approaches to ethnic migration in post-Soviet contexts. From a practical perspective, the results emphasize the importance of integrating historical experience, strengthening regional governance capacities, and aligning policy instruments with local socio-economic conditions in order to enhance the effectiveness of migration

management. The novelty of the study lies in the introduction of archival materials into scientific circulation and the identification of regional patterns of kandas settlement and social adaptation.

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