

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION DURING INDEPENDENCE

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### *Introduction*

The Central Asian states are currently attracting the keen attention of the world community due to the geopolitical significance of their location next to China, Pakistan, India, Iran, and Afghanistan, as well as to economic factors (natural and human resources and transit potential for transcontinental trade). The countries of the region, which enjoys considerable natural and human

resources, are vastly different from each other in terms of territorial dimensions, population size, economic potential, mineral reserves, and state of the social, environmental, and managerial spheres.

This article takes a look at how human resources are faring in the Central Asian region after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the newly independent states.

### **Demographic Development of the Central Asian Region in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Periods: General and Specific**

Demographic processes reflect the deep-seated changes occurring in a country's economic and sociopolitical life. During Soviet times, the population in the Central Asian countries underwent significant growth and life expectancy increased; more than 34 million people, or 11% of the population of the Soviet Union (1991), lived in the Central Asian republics. What is more, considerable success was achieved in public health, education, and raising the standard of living.

The Central Asian republics were characterized by high average annual population growth rates—2.75% compared to 0.90% for the Soviet Union as a whole (in some other regions, in the Baltic states and the NonBlack Soil Zone, for example, this index was even lower). The region's urban population grew rapidly, whereby there was a simultaneous increase in the number of rural residents, which was the main characteristic of the Central Asian urbanization phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

A real picture of the sociodemographic situation in the region's countries that developed during the years of independence can be gained by studying the results of the censuses carried out approximately every 10 years on the U.N.'s recommendations. Population censuses provide a wealth of information about the country's socioeconomic development, but they do not show the short- and mid-term changes that occur at the national and regional level.

Nevertheless, on the whole, the data gleaned from censuses can be an efficient tool for making decisions aimed at improving the sociodemographic situation.

The first population census during the years of independence in Central Asia was carried out in 1995 in Turkmenistan, where a population of 4,481,000 people was recorded. In 1999, the first national censuses were carried out in Kazakhstan (14,953,126 people) and Kyrgyzstan (4,851,000 people), and in 2000 in Tajikistan (6,127,005 people). As for Uzbekistan, no population census has been conducted there since Soviet times (1989—19,905,000 people).

After independence, the growth rates in the Central Asian population compared to previous years significantly dropped (between 1990 and 2004), for the following three reasons.

1. Out-migration occurred, especially in the early years after independence.
2. Each country's birth rate has fallen by at least 25% since 1992. There has been a significant decline in the number of children under five. For example, in Tajikistan in 1990, this group was 18% of the population, but it was only 13.5% in 1998.
3. With the steady dissolution of national health coverage and a significant decrease in expenditures on social infrastructure, all countries in Central Asia have experienced a sharp decrease in life expectancy at birth since 1990.<sup>2</sup>

This comes at a time when the Central Asian nations are still very young despite declining birth rates: the share of people under age 17 ranges from 32% of the total population in Kazakhstan to almost 48% in Tajikistan.<sup>3</sup>

According to the 2005 Human Development Report, Central Asia—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—is home to almost 60 million people.<sup>4</sup>

Hereafter we will rely on the data presented in the UNFPA (U.N. Fund for Population Activities) State of World Population 2010 Report.

## Tajikistan

In 2010, the total population in Tajikistan amounted to 7.1 million people, the projected population by 2050 was estimated at 11.1 million people, the average population growth rate (2005-2010) was 1.6%, and the percentage of the urban population (2010) was 26%.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: A. Saliev, *Problemy rasseleniia i urbanizatsii v respublikakh Sredney Azii*, FAN, Tashkent, 1991, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Central Asia Human Development Report. Bringing Down Barriers: Regional Cooperation for Human Development and Human Security*, UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS, Bratislava, 2005, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>4</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. IV.

<sup>5</sup> See: *State of World Population 2010, From Conflict and Crisis to Renewal: Generations of Change*, Published by UNFPA, New York, p. 104.

In compliance with the decree of Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon *On the Population Census*, between 21 and 30 September, 2010, a population and housing stock census was carried out in the country. According to the preliminary data of the republic's Statistics Agency, Tajikistan's population (as of 21 September, 2010) amounted to 7,565,000 people. So compared to the data of the 2000 census (i.e. over a span of ten years), the size of the republic's population increased by 1,438,000 people, or by 23%.<sup>6</sup>

In June 2010, the Tajikistan parliament adopted the Law on Reproductive Health, which envisaged carrying out several birth control measures. During discussion of the law, President Emomali Rakhmon noted in particular that Tajikistan's population is growing in conjunction with a catastrophic drop in GDP (whereby a higher natural increase in childbirth is noted among the less wealthy rural population). According to Emomali Rakhmon's forecast, by 2020, the population of Tajikistan could reach 8 million people. This means that the 10 hundred square meters of irrigated land enjoyed by each resident of the country today will decrease to 8 hundred square meters, which is not enough. Moreover, taking into account Tajikistan's geographic characteristics, there is no way to increase planting acreages.<sup>7</sup>

## Uzbekistan

In 2010, the total population in Uzbekistan amounted to 27.8 million people, the projected population by 2050 was estimated at 36.4 million people, the average population growth rate (2005-2010) was 1.1%, and the percentage of the urban population (2010) was 36%.<sup>8</sup> However, it should be noted that no population census has been carried out in the republic since 1998. The total size of Uzbekistan's population can only be judged from estimates based on vital statistics records or statistical surveys carried out on the basis of a representative selection of the population. According to the current records, as of 1 April, 2011, the size of Uzbekistan's permanent population amounted to 28.54 million people; this is reported by the republic's State Statistics Board.<sup>9</sup>

Uzbekistan, like other Central Asian states, is characterized by a relatively young population, in the structure of which there is a high share of able-bodied people. According to one of the forecasts, the increase in population from 24.6 million (at the beginning of 2000) to 45.0 million (2050) will put an extra burden on the vital support system, primarily due to drinking water and food shortages; the number of people per 1 hectare of cultivated land will increase, which in 1999 amounted to six people.<sup>10</sup>

At present, articles on compulsory sterilization of women in Uzbekistan aimed at reducing the birthrate are appearing.<sup>11</sup> According to the official data, in the past 10-15 years, the republic's government has been exerting efforts to form a healthy gene pool (by encouraging mothers to space their

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<sup>6</sup> See: "Naselenie Tadjikistana za 10 let vyroslo na 23%," available at [[http://www.dp.ru/a/2011/05/24/Naselenie\\_Tadjikistana\\_za/](http://www.dp.ru/a/2011/05/24/Naselenie_Tadjikistana_za/)], 19 November, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> See: I. Adyasov, "Osnovnye ugrozy dlia ekonomiki Tadjikistana v 2011 godu," available at [[www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1364453.html](http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1364453.html)], 19 November, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> See: *State of World Population...* p. 104.

<sup>9</sup> "Chislennost' postoiannogo naselenia Uzbekistana—28,54 milliona chelovek," available at [<http://www.uzdaily.uz/articles-id-6652.htm>], 19 November, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> See: R. Murtazina, "Demographic Processes and the Health of Uzbekistan's Population," *Uzbek Humanitarian Journal. Public Opinion. Human Rights*, No. 1, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> See: "Uzbekistan: Zhenshchin sterilizuiut. Khirurgicheskie instrumenty—net," 20 September, 2010, Prepared by Maria Yanovskaia, available at [<http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=6740>], 19 November, 2011.

children) and conducting a policy aimed at orienting the family toward bringing up healthy, educated citizens rather than having more children.

The Uzbekistan government organized national campaigns such as “Healthy Generation Year,” “Year of Mother and Child,” and “Health Year.” The international nongovernmental charity fund Soglom avlod uchun was created by a presidential decree of 23 April, 1993, the main objective of which is to ensure the health of the future generation, provide an efficient maternity and child welfare service, and create favorable conditions for the physical, intellectual, and moral development of children.

Since the end of the 1990s, international organizations have been helping to promote extensive educational activity in the country aimed at family planning, encouraging maternal health, and preventing early marriages and too frequent pregnancies.

According to Uzbek researchers, the steady high birthrate in the country was not underpinned by corresponding economic growth, which had a negative effect on the standard of living of large families. Demographic growth was surging ahead of economic development, particularly in the 1970s-1980s. This was when the economy underwent increasing stagnation, while noneconomic forms of coercion did not yield the desirable result. The problematical demographic situation also caused relative overpopulation of the oases; rural migration rates were extremely low.<sup>12</sup>

Concern about the high population growth rates in Uzbekistan was also expressed in the 1999 Human Development Report. It noted that “although it has notably decreased in recent years, at the present growth rate some 48 million people will be living in the republic by 2040, twice the current total. By the end of the next century the total population will reach 100 million. The country’s land and water resources cannot stand such increased demographic pressures without a loss in the living standards of its people.”<sup>13</sup>

## Kyrgyzstan

In 2009, the second population and housing stock census was carried out in the Kyrgyz Republic. On 24 March, 2009, the size of the republic’s de facto population amounted to 5,107,640 people, while the permanent population was 5,362,793 (1,827,136 of whom were urban residents and 3,535,657 rural).

One of the most significant changes in the composition of the population was the increase in number of “temporarily absent” people. According to the official data, their number currently amounts to 330,000, which is 6 times higher than in 1999.

According to the National Statistics Board of Kyrgyzstan, between 1999 and 2009, the average annual increase in population amounted to 1.1% (whereby the rural population is growing 0.3% faster than the urban). Among the regions, the maximum permanent population growth was noted in the Osh Region, where the number of residents has increased by 161,000 in the past ten years and today amounts to almost 1 million people (not counting the city of Osh).<sup>14</sup>

According to the UNFPA, in 2010, the total size of Kyrgyzstan’s population amounted to 5.6 million people, the projected population by 2050 was estimated at 6.9 million people, the average

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<sup>12</sup> See: M. Tokhtakhodzhaeva, *Utomlennye proshlym. Reislamizatsiia obshchestva i polozheniie zhenshchin v Uzbekistane*, Tashkent, 2001, p. 217.

<sup>13</sup> *Human Development Report. Uzbekistan 1999*, Uzbekistan, Tashkent, 2000, p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> See: A. Zhetigenova, A. Bolotbekova, “Natsstatkom opublikoval detali perepisi naseleniia,” available at [<http://kloop.kg/blog/2010/03/03/nacstatkom-opublikoval-detali-perepisi-naseleniya>], 19 November, 2011.

population growth rate (2005-2010) was 1.2%, and the percentage of the urban population (2010) was 35%.<sup>15</sup>

By the beginning of the 21st century, the aggregate birth rate in Kyrgyzstan dropped to 2.4 births per woman of the nominal generation, whereby to 1.7 in the cities and to 2.9 in rural areas. Beginning in 1994, the birth rate in cities was lower than the level necessary to maintain reproduction of the population. According to U.N. forecasts (average estimates), by around 2015, the aggregate birth rate in Kyrgyzstan could drop to a level that does not maintain reproduction of the population.<sup>16</sup>

The overall demographic situation in the country is characterized by the fact that more than half of Kyrgyzstan's population is younger than 25, while around 32% of the population is between the ages of 15 and 25.<sup>17</sup> In so doing, the southern regions of the country ensure around 62% of the population growth, whereas it is shrinking in the northern parts of the country. At the beginning of 2005, the country's population growth amounted to 27.5%.<sup>18</sup>

## Turkmenistan

The demographic data for Turkmenistan are rather contradictory; this is because the country supplies the U.N. and corresponding CIS committees with limited statistics. According to the 1995 census, the size of the country's population amounted to around 4.5 million people. However, attempts to carry out a selected population census in 2004 were not crowned with success. According to the researchers who carried out extrapolation of the 1995 census data, keeping in mind the country's official population growth rates, Turkmenistan's population as of the beginning of 2005 amounted to approximately 6 million people.<sup>19</sup>

According to the UNFPA, in 2010, the total size of Turkmenistan's population amounted to 5.2 million people, the projected population by 2050 was estimated at 6.8 million people, the average population growth rate (2005-2010) was 1.3%, and the percentage of the urban population (2010) was 50%.<sup>20</sup>

According to the Turkmenistan State Statistics Board, as of 1 January, 2011, the share of women in the country's population structure amounted to 50.2%, whereby it was essentially the same among the urban and the rural population.

Turkmenistan is a country with an average urbanization level; the share of urban population in the republic amounts to 50.6% (2010).<sup>21</sup>

The U.N. News Center reports that Turkmenistan is the first CIS country to carry out a trial electronic population census (a full electronic population census of Turkmenistan will be carried out in

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<sup>15</sup> See: *State of World Population...* p. 102.

<sup>16</sup> See: M. Denisenko, "Demograficheskiy perekhod v Kyrgyzstane. Rozhdaemost bistro snizhaetsia," available at [<http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2005/0191/tema01.php>], 19 November, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> See: *Human Development Report 2009/2010. Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth-Successful Country*, UNDP, Bishkek, 2010, 102 pp.

<sup>18</sup> See: *Strategicheskaya matritsa Kyrgyzstana: retrospektiva, sovremennost i stsenarii budushchego razvitiia*, ed. by A. Bayshushakov, Institute of Economic Strategy, Moscow, 2007, p. 213.

<sup>19</sup> See: S. Kamenev, "Demografia," available at [<http://encyclopaedia.big.ru/enc/country/TURKMENISTAN.html>], 19 November, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> See: *State of World Population...* p. 104.

<sup>21</sup> See: "Turkmenistan v tsifrakh," available at [<http://www.stat.gov.tm/ru/content/info/turkmenistan>], 19 November, 2011.

December 2012). According to the results of the trial census, most of the respondents are people with higher education and the students of national and foreign higher education institutions. In addition to the state language, most young people also have command of two or three foreign languages; more than half of the respondents have access to the Internet.<sup>22</sup>

## Kazakhstan

When it acquired its independence, the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan also encountered several socioeconomic and psychological problems. According to the data of the 1999 population census, 14,953,126 people lived in Kazakhstan. However, according to the 1989 census, the country's population amounted to 16,199,154 people. So during the time that ensued between these censuses, Kazakhstan's population dropped by 1,246,028 people, or by 7.7%.<sup>23</sup>

According to the results of the 2009 census, the size of Kazakhstan's population amounted to 16,009,600 people. Compared to the 1999 census, the size of the republic's population increased by 1,028,300 people (that is, during the time between the censuses, there was a 6.9% increase). The size of the urban population amounted to 8,662,400 people and the rural to 7,347,200 people. In so doing, the urban population grew by 206,600 people (or by 2.4%) and the rural by 821,700 people (or by 12.6%). The share of urban population in the country amounted to 54.1%, and the rural to 45.9%, while in 1999, these figures amounted to 56.4% and 43.6%, respectively.<sup>24</sup>

According to the UNFPA, in 2010, the total size of Kazakhstan's population amounted to 15.8 million people, the projected population by 2050 was estimated at 17.8 million people, the average population growth rate (2005-2010) was 0.7%, and the percentage of the urban population (2010) was 59%.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

If we proceed from the data presented by the UNFPA, the population of Central Asia in 2010 amounted to 61.5 million people, of which Uzbekistan accounts for 45%, Kazakhstan for 26%, Tajikistan for 12%, Kyrgyzstan for 9%, and Turkmenistan for 8%. The lowest level of average population growth between 2005 and 2010 is seen in Kazakhstan; it amounts to 0.7%. It is followed by Uzbekistan—1.1%, Kyrgyzstan—1.2%, and Turkmenistan—1.3%, while Tajikistan has the highest index—1.6%. The highest birth rate among all the Central Asian countries is seen in civil-war-torn and economically beleaguered Tajikistan, while Kazakhstan has the lowest birth rate (0.7%).

On the whole, there are several factors that explain the drop in birth rate seen over the past 20 years in Central Asia. In the first years of the reforms, the standard of living of a significant part of the population dropped, which had a negative effect on family wellbeing and plans to have children.

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<sup>22</sup> See: "V Turkmenistane proveli probnuiu e-perepis naseleniia," available at [<http://www.ict.kg/v-turkmenistane-proveli-probnu>], 19 November, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> See: *Itogi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda v Respublike Kazakhstan. Chislennost i razmeshchenie naseleniia v RK*, ed. by A. Smailov, Vol. 1, Almaty, 2000, 100 pp.

<sup>24</sup> See: "Itogi natsionalnoi perepisi naseleniia 2009 goda," available at [[www.stat.kz](http://www.stat.kz)], 19 November, 2011.

<sup>25</sup> See: *State of World Population*... p. 102.

The increase in labor migration led objectively to a decrease in the number of marriages and undermining of the customary family way of life (due to the long absence of one of the parents). It should also be noted that according to expert evaluations, in recent years labor migration from Central Asia is assuming female features, since women are being increasingly drawn into it.

Moreover, the increase in birth regulation, family planning, and the growing availability of contraception have had a certain influence on the demographic situation in the region.

As for public and international family planning organizations in Central Asia, their activity is aimed at creating the necessary conditions for preserving and improving the population's reproductive health.

At present, trends are appearing in the demographic behavior of the region's population toward small families; according to researchers, economic and social factors are the main reasons for this. However, the drop in birth rate depends not only on socioeconomic (although they play a significant role in certain cases), but also on mental and psychological factors.

For example, in the villages of the southern and western regions of Kazakhstan, where the indigenous population, which adheres to traditional values (including family), predominates, there are more large families than in the industrially developed northern and eastern areas. According to national statistics, in the Mangistau and South Kazakhstan regions, where Kazakhs primarily reside, the aggregate birth rate is more than twice as high as the corresponding index for the Kostanai and North Kazakhstan regions, where the share of European population is high.

So it can be noted that in the Central Asian region, there is trend toward a drop in the birth rate, which is differentiated in terms of country, region, city, village, as well as ethnic and social groups of women. A direct correlation can be seen: the higher the education level of women and the greater urbanization, the lower the birth rate. However, the birth rate index among women of the local ethnicities is largely determined by cultural, national, and religious traditions.

Some countries of the region are carrying out state measures aimed at stimulating the birth rate (for example, in Kazakhstan), while in others they are aimed at restraining it (Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). On the whole, raising the standard of living seems to be extremely problematic for most CA countries, which essentially have a very young population, approximately half of which has not reached able-bodied age. This is because the economically active part of the population is responsible for the upkeep of too many dependants.

At the current stage, it seems important to carry out a deeper analysis of the possible consequences of the demographic and migration processes in Central Asia and their influence on the sociopolitical situation in the region. It should be noted that demographic policy, which is usually based on a variety of different measures (economic, administrative-legal, educational, and propagandistic), could encounter factors that cannot easily be manipulated.

On the whole, as we see it, the demographic situation cannot be changed by either programmed precepts or short-term measures, however, nor should we disparage the importance of socioeconomic measures in stimulating the birth rate.

We can only talk about long-term actions, the results of which will be seen in tens of years. In particular, attention should be primarily focused on cultivating and promulgating family values and on enforcing a corresponding image of the family as the main social state institution in public conscience.