

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL KAZAKHSTAN: SOCIO-ECONOMIC VECTORS

ҚАЗАҚСТАН АУЫЛЫНЫҢ ИНКЛЮЗИВТІ ҚАЛЫПТАСУЫ:
ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК-ЭКОНОМИКАЛЫҚ ВЕКТОРЛАРИНКЛЮЗИВНОЕ СТАНОВЛЕНИЕ КАЗАХСТАНСКОГО СЕЛА:
СОЦИАЛЬНО-ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИЕ ВЕКТОРЫСН. АКИМБЕКОВА^{1*}

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Abstract. The socio-economic aspects of the inclusive development of rural areas in the Republic of Kazakhstan are examined, aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for all categories of the rural population, including socially vulnerable groups, while reducing inequality and strengthening socio-cultural equity. *The objective* – is to analyze the social challenges of the republic's rural areas in the context of inclusive transformation and to identify the priorities for the sustainable modernization of rural regions. *Methods* – comparative and systems analysis, a review of scientific literature, and statistical data processing were employed to provide a comprehensive assessment of the socio-economic conditions of rural Kazakhstan. Within this framework, indicators of rural employment, income levels, accessibility of social infrastructure, education and healthcare, as well as existing state support mechanisms, were examined. *Results* – the principal factors constraining inclusive development were identified, including the insufficient level of social and engineering infrastructure, limited access to high-quality socially oriented services, and persistent disparities in the standard of living of rural residents. Particular attention was devoted to evaluating the effectiveness of current government programs aimed at strengthening rural regions. Based on the findings, recommendations were developed for improving public policy, focusing on the development of human capital, increasing access to social and economic opportunities, and supporting the labor force and entrepreneurship in rural areas. *Conclusions* – the implementation of effective measures will expand the scale of socio-economic inclusiveness in rural areas, improve the living conditions of the rural population, and create opportunities for balanced regional development. Inclusive development is presented as a mechanism performing an integrative function by ensuring the interconnection between economic efficiency, social equality, and territorial balance. The high significance of this issue for the country as a whole necessitates further scientific research and the development of practical recommendations.

Аңдатпа. Теңсіздіктің төмендеуімен және әлеуметтік-мәдени әділеттіліктің нығаюымен қатар жүретін әлеуметтік осал топтарды қоса алғанда, ауыл халқының барлық санаттары үшін тең мүмкіндіктерді қамтамасыз етуге бағытталған Қазақстан Республикасының ауылдық жерлерін инклюзивті дамытудың әлеуметтік-экономикалық аспектілері қаралды. *Мақсаты* - инклюзивті түрлендіру контекстінде республиканың ауылдық аумақтарының әлеуметтік проблемаларын талдау, ауылдық аудандарды жаңғыртудың орнықты динамикасының басымдықтарын анықтау. *Әдістері* – салыстырмалы және жүйелі талдау, ғылыми әдебиеттерді жалпылау, статистикалық деректерді өңдеу қазақстандық ауылдың әлеуметтік-экономикалық жай-күйін кешенді бағалау үшін қолданылды. Бұл тұрғыда ауыл тұрғындарының жұмыспен қамтылу көрсеткіштері, табыстары, әлеуметтік инфрақұрылымның, білім беру мен денсаулық сақтаудың қолжетімділігі, мемлекеттік қолдаудың қолданыстағы механизмдері қарастырылды. *Нәтижелер* - әлеуметтік және инженерлік кешендердің жеткіліксіз деңгейін, сапалы әлеуметтік бағдарланған қызметтерге қолжетімділіктің шектелуін және ауыл тұрғындарының әл-ауқат дәрежесінде сақталып отырған айырмашылықты ескере отырып, инклюзивті ілгерілеуді тежейтін негізгі факторлар белгіленді. Ауылдық өңірлерді нығайтуға бағытталған қолданыстағы мемлекеттік бағдарламалардың нәтижелілігін бағалауға ерекше назар аударылды. Зерттеу негізінде адами капиталдың өсуіне, әлеуметтік және экономикалық мүмкіндіктердің қолжетімділігін арттыруға, ауылдық жерлерде еңбек ресурстары мен кәсіпкерлікті қолдауға бағытталған мемлекеттік саясатты жетілдіру бағыттары ұсынылды. *Қорытындылар* - нәтижелі шараларды іске асыру ауылдық аумақтардың әлеуметтік-экономикалық инклюзивтілігінің ауқымын ұлғайтуға, ауыл халқының өмір сүру жағдайларын жақсартуға және өңірлік тепе-теңдік үшін мүмкіндіктер жасауға мүмкіндік береді. Сонымен қатар, инклюзивті даму экономикалық тиімділік, әлеуметтанулық теңдік және аумақтық тепе-теңдік арасындағы байланысты қамтамасыз ететін интеграциялық функцияны орындайтын механизм ретінде ұсынылған. Бұл аспектінің жалпы ел үшін жоғары маңыздылығы одан әрі ғылыми зерттеулер жүргізуді және практикалық ұсыныстарды әзірлеуді талап етеді.

Аннотация. Рассмотрены социально-экономические аспекты инклюзивного развития сельской местности Республики Казахстан, направленные на обеспечение равных возможностей для всех категорий сельского населения, включая социально уязвимые группы, сопровождающееся снижением неравенства и укреплением социокультурной справедливости. *Цель* – проанализировать социальные проблемы сельских территорий республики в контексте инклюзивной трансформации, выявление приоритетов устойчивой динамики модернизации сельских районов. *Методы* – сравнительного и системного анализа, обобщения научной литературы, обработка статистических данных применялись для комплексной оценки социально-экономического состояния казахстанского села. В этом контексте рассматривались показатели занятости сельчан, доходов, доступности социальной инфраструктуры, образования и здравоохранения, действующие механизмы государственной поддержки. *Результаты* - обозначены основные факторы, сдерживающие инклюзивное продвижение, с учетом недостаточного уровня социального и инженерного комплексов, ограниченного доступа к качественным социально ориентированным услугам и сохраняющегося различия в степени благосостояния сельских жителей. Особое внимание уделено оценке результативности действующих государственных программ, нацеленных на укрепление сельских регионов. На основе исследования предложены направления совершенствования государственной политики, ориентированные на рост человеческого капитала, повышение доступности социальных и экономических возможностей, поддержку трудовых ресурсов и предпринимательства в сельской местности. *Выводы* - реализация результативных мер позволит увеличить масштабы социо-экономической инклюзивности сельских территорий, улучшить условия жизни сельского населения и создать возможности для региональной сбалансированности. При этом инклюзивное развитие представлено как механизм, выполняющий интеграционную функцию, обеспечивающую взаимосвязь экономической эффективности, социологического равенства и территориального равновесия. Высокая значимость данного аспекта для страны в целом требует проведения дальнейших научных исследований и разработки практических рекомендаций.

Keywords: rural areas, rural population, employment, income level, social inequality, inclusive development, social policy, government programs.

Түйінді сөздер: ауылдық аумақтар, ауыл халқы, жұмыспен қамту, табыс деңгейі, әлеуметтік теңсіздік, инклюзивті даму, әлеуметтік саясат, мемлекеттік бағдарламалар.

Ключевые слова: сельские территории, сельское население, занятость, уровень доходов, социальное неравенство, инклюзивное развитие, социальная политика, государственные программы.

Introduction

In the context of intensifying global challenges and increasing social polarization, inclusive development has become one of the key priorities of contemporary socio-economic policy. This concept emerged as a response to growing social inequality, which often accompanies economic growth in different countries and regions. In this regard, inclusive development is viewed not only as a social objective, but also as a necessary condition for sustainable and balanced economic progress.

Unlike the traditional approach, under which development is assessed mainly through indicators such as gross domestic product or labor productivity, the inclusive model emphasizes the fair distribution of the benefits of economic growth among all segments of the population. Particular attention is paid to socially vulnerable and territorially isolated groups, including the rural population, whose access to economic and social opportunities often remains limited compared with urban residents.

Inclusive development is a systemic and multi-level approach aimed at ensuring sustainable economic growth accessible to all categories of the population, promoting social justice through the reduction of barriers and structural inequality, and expanding equal access to basic public goods. These include education, healthcare, transport and digital infrastructure, employment opportunities, and financial resources. An important element of the inclusive model is also the active participation of the local population in making and implementing decisions affecting the socio-economic development of territories.

The inclusive approach is of particular importance for rural areas, where problems of infrastructural, social, and economic underdevelopment have traditionally persisted. Rural areas play a significant role in the national economy, since a substantial share of the population lives there (36.4%), natural resources are concentrated there, and agricultural production is carried out there, thereby shaping the country's food security and export potential. At the same time, the standard of living of the rural population remains lower than that of urban residents. This gap continues to affect the overall pace and quality of regional development.

Limited access to quality educational and medical services, employment opportunities, and entrepreneurship contributes to migration processes and persistent socio-economic dis-

parities. Under these conditions, the inclusive development of rural areas in the Republic of Kazakhstan implies the creation of conditions in which rural residents not only obtain equal access to social and economic opportunities, but also become active participants in sustainable regional development. This requires the improvement of public policy and a more targeted approach to reducing regional imbalances and improving the quality of life of the rural population.

Literature review

Various instruments for stimulating rural development are used in many countries. For example, in India and Kenya, cooperative associations enable small farmers to share agricultural machinery, gain access to financing, and enter sales markets. In Bangladesh, the Grameen Bank microfinance model contributed to the development of women's entrepreneurship in rural areas and improved living standards: over a period of 3–5 years, household incomes increased on average by 20–25% (Ferdousi F., Mahmud P....) [1].

In European countries, agritourism plays an important role in rural development (Tedioli F.; Zanetti B., Verrascina M., Licciardo F. et al....) [2,3]. In Italy and Spain, this sector contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage and the attraction of investment to rural regions. In Slovenia, "green village" projects are being implemented with a focus on sustainable tourism development, support for local production, and the creation of new jobs. As a result, the pace of rural urbanization has slowed, and the rural population has been retained more effectively.

In a number of developed countries, such as Estonia, Finland, and South Korea, digital inclusion strategies are being actively implemented. These include e-government, online access to education and telemedicine, as well as the use of digital technologies in agriculture (Social Entrepreneurship Network ...) [4]. The digitalization of rural areas has contributed to a 15–18% increase in small business activity and to higher investment per rural resident. China also demonstrates significant experience in this field, where public investment in roads, water supply systems, and digital networks has been accompanied by the development of rural industrial clusters, making it possible to integrate rural regions into the national economy and reduce territorial inequality (OECD. *Rural Well-being* ...) [5]. In Latin American countries such as Brazil and Colombia, social enterprises involving local populations in the pro-

cessing of agricultural products and the development of regional brands have become widespread (Gómez J.C., Andrade R.F.) [6]. This contributes to increased employment and stronger social cohesion within rural communities.

Thus, international experience shows that sustainable and inclusive development of rural areas is ensured through a combination of measures, including infrastructure development, cooperation, agritourism, digitalization, support for entrepreneurship, and the active participation of local communities in socio-economic development processes (Joint project of the ...) [7].

Within the global sustainable development agenda, this issue is directly related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 "No Poverty," SDG 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth," SDG 10 "Reduced Inequalities," and SDG 11 "Sustainable Cities and Communities" (United Nations...; FAO. UNECACC-AA...) [8,9]. In domestic academic research, primary attention is given to assessing the inclusive development of regions as a whole, whereas the issue of evaluating the level of inclusive development specifically in rural areas remains insufficiently studied.

Materials and methods

The study employed methods of comparative and systems analysis, synthesis of academic literature, and analysis of statistical data characterizing the socio-economic condition of rural regions.

The informational and empirical basis of the study consisted of official data from the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The use of statistical materials made it possible to conduct a comparative assessment of the socio-economic living conditions of the rural population and to identify the main development trends in rural regions.

The analysis covered indicators such as rural employment, income levels, access to social infrastructure, and the existing mechanisms of state support for rural development.

The application of the systems approach ensured the comprehensiveness of the study and made it possible to consider the inclusive development of rural areas as a set of interrelated economic and social factors. This, in turn, made it possible to identify key directions for improving the effectiveness of public policy in the field of rural development, including strengthening labor potential and supporting employment and rural entrepreneurship.

The results of the study also made it possible to outline promising directions for further research into the formation of social standards of living within the framework of state regulation of the inclusive development of rural areas.

Results

Under the current conditions of Kazakhstan's socio-economic development, the problem of inequality between urban and rural areas remains one of the most acute. Despite certain achievements in infrastructure development and improvements in the standard of living of the rural population, a significant gap persists in access to social services, quality education and healthcare, as well as in employment and income levels. This circumstance hinders balanced territorial development and reduces the effectiveness of the implementation of national economic growth strategies.

An analysis of policy documents and a review of academic literature show that, in the Kazakhstani context, the concept of inclusive education remains limited to a narrow group of children with health-related conditions, on whom the main support measures are concentrated. In rural areas, the problems of insufficient early screening, delayed identification of children's special educational needs, low detection rates of children with special educational needs, and the lack of modern corrective support for children of early and preschool age remain relevant. These factors contribute to an increase in the number of persons with special educational needs, including children with disabilities, by the time they enter school.

Currently, more than 725 thousand persons with disabilities live in the country, accounting for about 3.5% of the total population. Nearly one-third of them experience mobility difficulties, including 15% of children (On Approval of the Concept...) [10]. Existing disparities in access to education and social services limit the possibilities for balanced territorial development and the implementation of the principles of inclusive economic growth. Strengthening support measures aimed at the early identification and assistance of children with special educational needs, especially in rural areas, is a key condition for overcoming these challenges and ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens.

The uneven development of urban and rural areas is determined by a combination of economic, infrastructural, and demographic factors. A key role is played by differences in economic opportunities, the level of development of transport and digital infrastructure, and access to modern technologies and services.

Rural areas are characterized by a limited number of jobs, a high dependence of employment on seasonal and natural-climatic conditions, and comparatively low income levels. An additional factor is the migration of young people and the working-age population to cities, which intensifies demographic imbalances, contributes to population ageing, and reduces the economic potential of rural areas.

The specific features of the inclusive development of rural areas in Kazakhstan are determined by a set of interrelated structural factors that directly influence the socio-economic dynamics of the regions.

First, the spatial fragmentation of rural settlements significantly limits the population's access to basic services and resources. Low population density and considerable distances between settlements hinder the effective development of social and engineering infrastructure. The economic impracticality of constructing and maintaining infrastructure facilities in remote areas, including transport networks, healthcare institutions, educational organizations, and service centers, directly reduces opportunities for employment, education, and medical care.

As a result, a vicious circle is formed: limited access to services reinforces territorial isolation, reduces business activity, and diminishes the potential of the local economy. In practice, this is reflected, in particular, in the decline in the number of small rural settlements with populations of 200–500 people, whose number has decreased by 597 over the past ten years.

Second, climatic and seasonal risks create additional pressure on the sustainability of the rural economy. A significant share of the rural population (11% or 983 thousand people) is employed in the agricultural sector, which is highly dependent on natural and climatic conditions. Seasonal production patterns, droughts, extreme weather events, and instability in agricultural markets lead to income volatility and increase the social vulnerability of rural households. The irregular nature of employment limits opportunities for long-term financial planning, reduces savings and investment activity, and, in turn, slows down the processes of sustainable territorial development and reduces economic self-sufficiency.

Third, economic vulnerability and insufficient diversification of the local economy persist. In many rural regions, there is a narrow tax base, a low level of investment, and a limited number of economic growth points. Despite the growth of employment in the service sector at the national level, from 63% to 70%, rural areas

remain insufficiently integrated into production and supply chains. The infrastructure for the procurement, storage, processing, and marketing of agricultural products, including fruit and vegetables, potatoes, meat, and dairy products, remains underdeveloped. The network of agricultural support services, including agrochemical supply, repair and technical maintenance, logistics, and freight transportation, is only partially functioning. The insufficient development of logistics hubs and digital infrastructure reduces the involvement of rural entrepreneurs in national production networks, limits innovation activity, and hinders the formation of an integrated economic environment.

Another significant problem is demographic outflow and population ageing. Over the past ten years, the share of young people aged 15–34 has decreased from 30% to 27%, while their number declined from 2.3 million in 2016 to 1.9 million in 2026. At the same time, the share of the population aged over 64 increased from 7% to 10%. Similar imbalances in age structure are observed in almost all regions of the country. Such disproportions hinder the formation of balanced territorial development and limit the potential for inclusive economic growth.

Additionally, it is necessary to take into account the gender aspect of inclusive development. In rural areas, women more often face limited access to employment, entrepreneurship, and education, despite their significant role in ensuring household sustainability and the development of the local economy. Insufficient support for women's employment and entrepreneurship reduces the overall development potential of rural areas.

The migration of young people to cities in search of education and broader employment opportunities leads to the depopulation of rural areas, a decline in labor potential, and gradual degradation, especially in remote and border settlements. The main migration exchange takes place within the country. Thus, in 2025, the number of internal migrants amounted to 129.4 thousand people, which is 14% higher than in the previous year. Limited employment opportunities in rural areas stimulate the development of labor migration. In 2025, about 500 thousand people participated in labor migration: 27% commuted daily to regional centers for work, 30% worked in other regions of the country, and 43% carried out labor activities within their own region. These trends intensify the demographic imbalance between urban and rural areas, weaken the human capital of the countryside, and reduce the potential for its sustainable socio-economic development.

ploma to the Village», which facilitates the attraction of young specialists by providing social benefits and financial support on the condition of mandatory employment in the region.

Special attention in public policy is paid to the formation of an inclusive social environment. In Kazakhstan, the principle of non-discrimination on the grounds of disability is enshrined at the legislative level. A substantial contribution to the development of inclusive practices is made by the Foundation «Samruk-Kazyna Trust», which implements rehabilitation and social integration programs, as well as educational and sports initiatives, including in rural areas (Samruk-Kazyna Trust....) [15].

With the adoption of the Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2023, a stage of systemic transformation of social policy began. This regulatory act is aimed at ensuring equal access of citizens to social support measures regardless of their place of residence, including rural regions (Social Code....) [16]. An additional direction of state social policy is support for the family, motherhood, and childhood. Programs are being implemented to increase the level of social protection of the population, including the provision of benefits, privileges, and guaranteed childcare leave with job retention. In particular, the program «National Fund for Children» provides for the formation of targeted savings for citizens under the age of 18, while the programs Analar Saulygy and Ansa-gan Sabi are aimed at protecting women's health and supporting reproductive health.

It should be noted that more than 50% of the state budget is allocated to the social sphere, while the annual volume of investment in human capital development reaches one trillion tenge.

Thus, the public policy being implemented indicates the formation of a comprehensive approach to rural development, covering both economic and social aspects and aimed at reducing interterritorial disparities. At the same time, a number of systemic constraints continue to hinder the implementation of the principles of inclusive development. These include an insufficient volume of long-term financing and investment, since some projects remain pilot initiatives with limited coverage, a shortage of qualified personnel, including in education, healthcare, and social work, limited access to digital technologies, and a low level of digital literacy in certain regions. Infrastructure constraints caused by climatic and geographical conditions and the seasonal nature of economic activity also remain a significant factor (table).

Note: compiled by the authors on the basis of a sociological study

4. Priority support for socially and economically vulnerable territories based on targeted financing and instruments of spatial (territorial) planning.

5. The development of human capital through increased investment in education, healthcare, vocational training, and the formation of digital competencies. Expanded access to financial resources and the stimulation of rural entrepreneurship, including the development of microfinance mechanisms, guarantee funds, and support for agricultural start-ups.

The implementation of these directions will make it possible to increase the level of inclusiveness of the socio-economic development of rural areas, strengthen their economic potential, and ensure the sustainable and balanced development of the country in the long term.

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