

MIGRATION POLICY OF KAZAKHSTAN AND LEGAL SUPPORT FOR THE ADAPTATION OF REPATRIATES

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Abstract. This article examines migration policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the legal framework for the adaptation of ethnic Kazakh returnees (kandas). The study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of legal regulation and institutional integration mechanisms by analysing the gap between formal guarantees and their practical implementation. The research methodology combines legal analysis of national legislation, qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with returnees, and secondary analysis of academic and policy literature. The findings demonstrate that while Kazakhstan's legal model formally provides extended social guarantees and simplified naturalisation procedures for returnees, a significant discrepancy persists between normative provisions and administrative practice. Key barriers include bureaucratic procedures for citizenship acquisition, institutional fragmentation among state agencies, document legalisation requirements, limited awareness of support measures, and insufficient effectiveness of adaptation centres. The study concludes that improving interagency coordination, enhancing information accessibility, and developing a comprehensive institutional integration model are essential for increasing policy effectiveness. The results may inform migration policy reforms and legislative development in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: *migration policy, ethnic return migration, kandas, citizenship, integration, legal regulation, Kazakhstan.*

ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ
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Аңдатпа. Мақала Қазақстан Республикасының көші-қон саясаты мен этникалық қазақтардың (қандастардың) бейімделуін құқықтық қамтамасыз ету мәселелерін талдауға арналған. Зерттеудің мақсаты – репатрианттарды интеграциялау саласындағы нормативтік реттеу мен институционалдық тетіктердің тиімділігін құқықтық кепілдіктер мен олардың іс жүзінде жүзеге асырылуы арасындағы сәйкестік тұрғысынан бағалау. Зерттеу әдістемесі нормативтік-құқықтық актілерді талдауды, қандастармен жүргізілген тереңдетілген сұхбаттарды сапалық талдауды және ғылыми жарияланымдарды екінші деңгейлі талдауды қамтиды. Зерттеу нәтижелері Қазақстандағы репатриацияны құқықтық қамтамасыз ету моделі формалды түрде кеңейтілген әлеуметтік кепілдіктер мен азаматтық алудың жеңілдетілген рәсімдерін көздейтінін, алайда тәжірибеде нормативтік модель мен әкімшілік іске асыру арасында айтарлықтай алшақтық бар екенін көрсетті. Азаматтық алу рәсімдерінің күрделілігі, ведомстволық өкілеттіктердің бөлшектенуі, құжаттарды заңдастыру мәселелері, қолдау шаралары туралы ақпараттың жеткіліксіздігі және бейімдеу орталықтарының тиімділігінің төмендігі негізгі кедергілер ретінде анықталды. Зерттеу нәтижелері көші-қон саясатын жетілдіруде қолданылуы мүмкін.

Түйін сөздер: көші-қон саясаты, қандастар, репатриация, азаматтық, бейімделу, құқықтық реттеу, Қазақстан.

МИГРАЦИОННАЯ ПОЛИТИКА КАЗАХСТАНА И ПРАВОВОЕ ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИЕ АДАПТАЦИИ РЕПАТРИАНТОВ

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена анализу миграционной политики Республики Казахстан и правовых механизмов адаптации этнических казахов (кандасов). Целью исследования является оценка эффективности нормативного регулирования и институциональных инструментов интеграции репатриантов с точки зрения соответствия между юридическими гарантиями и их практической реализацией. Методология исследования основана на комплексном подходе, включающем анализ нормативно-правовой базы, качественный анализ глубинных интервью с кандасами, а также вторичный анализ научных и экспертных публикаций. В работе показано, что казахстанская модель правового обеспечения репатриации формально предусматривает расширенные социальные гарантии и упрощённые процедуры натурализации, однако на практике наблюдается устойчивый разрыв между

нормативной конструкцией и административной реализацией. Выявлены ключевые барьеры адаптации, включая бюрократические процедуры получения гражданства, институциональную фрагментацию компетенций государственных органов, проблемы легализации документов, низкую информированность о мерах поддержки и ограниченную эффективность центров адаптации. Сделан вывод о необходимости совершенствования межведомственной координации, повышения информационной доступности услуг и формирования комплексной институциональной модели интеграции репатриантов. Результаты исследования могут быть использованы при разработке государственной миграционной политики и совершенствовании законодательства Республики Казахстан.

Ключевые слова: миграционная политика, кандасы, репатриация, гражданство, адаптация мигрантов, правовое регулирование, Казахстан.

Introduction

The return of ethnic Kazakhs to their historical homeland remains one of the strategically significant directions of the migration policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Since the early years of independence, repatriation policy has been closely linked to the tasks of demographic development, consolidation of national identity, preservation of ties with the Kazakh diaspora abroad, and strengthening of social cohesion. In this context, the legal and institutional support for the adaptation of ethnic Kazakh returnees, officially referred to as kandases, has acquired particular importance.

The relevance of this study is determined by the fact that, despite the existence of a developed regulatory framework and state support mechanisms, the practical integration of kandases continues to face a number of unresolved problems. These include difficulties in obtaining citizenship, bureaucratic procedures for document recognition and legalization, limited awareness of support measures, uneven access to adaptation and integration centers, and insufficient coordination among state bodies. As a result, the formal legal guarantees provided by migration and social legislation do not always correspond to the real experience of repatriates.

In recent years, the issue has become even more significant due to the transformation of Kazakhstan's migration legislation, the introduction of new administrative and digital procedures, and the growing need to improve the effectiveness of state support for socially vulnerable groups of migrants. The adoption of the Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2023, the modernization of migration services, and the expansion of digital application mechanisms have created new opportunities for integration. At the same time, these reforms require critical assessment from the perspective of their practical accessibility and legal effectiveness.

The problem under consideration is not limited to migration policy alone. It also concerns broader issues of citizenship, social inclusion, administrative justice, access to public services, and the relationship between law and practice. For this reason, the adaptation of kandases should be examined not only as a socio-cultural process but also as a legal and institutional process shaped by the quality of state regulation, administrative procedures, and interagency coordination.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a legal and interdisciplinary analysis

of the adaptation mechanisms of ethnic Kazakhs (kandas) in the Republic of Kazakhstan, with a focus on the regulatory framework, institutional instruments, and the correspondence between legal guarantees and their implementation in practice. The study aims to identify gaps in legal regulation, assess the effectiveness of current legislative approaches, and determine directions for improving legal and institutional support for repatriates.

Within the framework of this objective, the following research questions are formulated:

1. To what extent does the current regulatory and legal framework of the Republic of Kazakhstan ensure effective adaptation and integration of kandas?
2. What institutional and administrative barriers arise in the implementation of legal mechanisms for naturalization and social support of repatriates in practice?
3. To what extent do existing state support mechanisms, including adaptation centers and digital services, correspond to the needs of kandas and ensure accessibility of services?
4. What directions for improving legal regulation and institutional coordination could enhance the effectiveness of migration policy regarding repatriates?

Literature Review

The study of ethnic return migration and the adaptation of repatriates is based on several interrelated theoretical approaches, including theories of acculturation, migrant integration, transnationalism, citizenship, and nation-building. One of the key conceptual foundations is the acculturation framework proposed by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits [1]. This approach explains cultural changes that occur as a result of continuous contact between different cultural groups. Later, Berry developed this framework by identifying several strategies of migrant adaptation, including integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization [2]. His concept of acculturative stress is also important for understanding the psychological and social difficulties experienced by migrants during adaptation [3].

In the context of ethnic repatriation, the acculturation approach is particularly relevant because common ethnic origin does not automatically ensure successful integration into the receiving society. Although kandas return to their historical homeland, they may face cultural distance, linguistic barriers, differences in social norms, and difficulties in interaction with state institutions. Therefore, adaptation should be considered not only as a cultural process, but also as a broader social and institutional process.

The integration framework developed by Ager and Strang is also significant for this study. According to this approach, successful integration depends on several interconnected domains, including employment, housing, education, health, social connections, language and cultural knowledge, safety, stability, rights, and citizenship [4]. This model is useful for analysing the adaptation of kandas because it allows integration to be assessed not only through cultural belonging, but also through access to rights, services, and institutional support.

Another important theoretical perspective is transnationalism, which considers migrants as participants in several social, cultural, and legal spaces at the same time [5]. Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt further emphasize that migrants may maintain stable cross-border ties while simultaneously participating in the life of the receiving society [6]. This approach is especially relevant to the study of kandas, many

of whom continue to maintain family, economic, and symbolic ties with their countries of previous residence. Finke's study of Mongolian Kazakhs shows that return migration to Kazakhstan did not eliminate transnational connections; rather, difficulties of integration contributed to the preservation of frequent visits, kinship ties, and nostalgia for familiar social environments [7].

International scholarship also examines ethnic return migration through the concepts of citizenship, nation-building, and state identity. Brubaker's work on citizenship and nationhood provides a theoretical basis for understanding ethnically oriented migration policies [8]. Laruelle analyses Kazakhstan as a migration crossroads and considers repatriation as part of the state's demographic and identity-building strategy [9]. Oka examines the changing priorities and dilemmas of Kazakhstan's ethnic return migration policy [10]. Bonnenfant studies Kazakhstan's policy toward ethnic return migration through the discourse of homeland construction [11], while Diener analyses settlement planning and the "oralman dilemma," emphasizing the social and regional tensions that may arise when integration mechanisms are insufficient [12]. Brereton also interprets ethnic return migration in Kazakhstan as part of the politics of belonging and cultural policy [13].

Domestic and regional studies have made an important contribution to the analysis of kandas adaptation. Kurganskaya and co-authors examine problems of repatriate integration in Kazakhstan from a sociological perspective, identifying employment, education, language adaptation, and access to social infrastructure as key challenges [14]. Negizbayeva and Lamazhaa analyse the transformation of the legal and media discourse surrounding the status of kandases and draw attention to the gap between symbolic recognition and institutional implementation [15]. Abdrakhmanova and Shoibekova study the linguistic representation of ethnocultural identity among repatriates, showing that language remains one of the central elements of adaptation and self-identification [16].

Recent Kazakhstani studies further expand this research field. Nguyen, Shakeyeva, and Bastaubayeva analyse the integration of kandases into Kazakhstani society based on field research conducted in the Almaty, East Kazakhstan, and North Kazakhstan regions. Their study identifies several persistent barriers, including difficulties in obtaining information, language problems, employment issues, housing, education, healthcare, and weak interaction with responsible local authorities [17]. Aitymbetov and Shakeyeva also study kandas integration on the basis of documentary analysis, media and social network content analysis, and narrative-biographical interviews. Their findings show that despite state support measures, compact settlement, weak civic identity, limited institutional support, and the insufficient practical application of migration legislation continue to complicate the integration process [18].

Saiyn, Zhiyembayeva, and Zhumay focus on the cultural and linguistic adaptation of repatriates from Iran and Uzbekistan. Their study highlights language difficulties, differences in cultural norms, social isolation, stereotypes, and the lack of institutional support as factors influencing the adaptation process [19]. Konysbayev examines the assimilation and socio-economic adaptation of kandases in the Mangystau region, paying particular attention to employment, housing conditions, uneven resettlement, and the need to improve educational programs, small and medium-sized business support, and regional infrastructure [20]. These studies demonstrate that the problems of kandas adaptation are not uniform across

Kazakhstan, but differ depending on region, country of origin, socio-economic status, language background, and access to state institutions.

At the same time, the existing literature mainly focuses on the sociological, cultural, demographic, and identity-related dimensions of repatriation. Less attention has been paid to the legal and institutional mechanisms that determine the practical implementation of state guarantees. In particular, there remains a need to analyse how the formal legal status of kandases is translated into administrative practice, how citizenship and permanent residence procedures operate in reality, how adaptation and integration centres function, and how interagency coordination affects access to rights and services. Therefore, the present study contributes to the existing literature by combining legal analysis with empirical data from in-depth interviews and by assessing the gap between the normative model of Kazakhstan's migration policy and the actual experience of repatriates.

Research Methods

This study employs a methodology that combines legal, sociological, and analytical approaches. The objective is to identify the specific features of legal regulation governing the adaptation processes of ethnic Kazakhs (kandases) in the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as to assess the effectiveness of existing mechanisms within migration policy.

A key component of the research is the analysis of the regulatory and legal framework. The study examines the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Law "On Population Migration," the Law "On Citizenship," the Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2023), and subordinate legal acts regulating the status, adaptation, integration, naturalization, employment, and social support of repatriates. The legal analysis was conducted in order to identify the formal rights granted to kandases, compare their legal status with that of citizens and other categories of foreigners, and assess the extent to which the existing legal framework provides effective guarantees for their adaptation.

The empirical part of the study is based on qualitative data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20 kandases who had personal experience of migration to Kazakhstan and encountered difficulties related to naturalization, document processing, access to social services, employment, housing, or interaction with state institutions. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling, as the study focused on individuals whose migration experience made it possible to assess the practical implementation of legal and institutional adaptation mechanisms.

The sample mainly included kandases who had arrived in Kazakhstan from China, while several respondents had migrated from Uzbekistan and Mongolia. The respondents represented different gender and age groups, although the purpose of the study was not to achieve statistical representativeness, but to identify recurring legal, administrative, and institutional barriers in the adaptation process. In terms of occupation, most respondents were self-employed, while some were engaged in other forms of economic activity or were temporarily outside formal employment. This composition of the sample made it possible to examine adaptation not only from the perspective of formal legal status, but also through the everyday socio-economic experience of repatriates.

The interview guide included several thematic blocks: reasons for returning

to Kazakhstan; procedures for obtaining kandas status, permanent residence, and citizenship; difficulties in document recognition and legalization; access to employment, education, healthcare, housing, and social support; awareness of adaptation and integration centers; experience of interaction with local executive bodies and migration authorities; and respondents' assessment of the effectiveness of existing state support measures. The interviews made it possible to trace the real trajectories of legal interaction between returnees and state institutions and to identify institutional barriers that are not always visible through formal legal analysis alone.

The collected interview materials were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The responses were grouped according to key problem areas, including citizenship acquisition, administrative procedures, interagency coordination, document legalization, access to public services, employment, housing, and information support. This approach allowed the study to compare formal legal guarantees with the practical experience of kandas and to reveal the gap between the normative model of migration policy and its implementation.

The research also uses secondary analysis of academic and expert publications addressing migration policy, repatriation, social integration, transnational ties, and the legal status of ethnic migrants. This provides contextualization of the topic within both domestic and international scholarly discourse and allows the empirical findings to be compared with the conclusions of previous studies.

The combination of legal analysis, qualitative interviews, and secondary analysis ensures a comprehensive examination of the topic and makes it possible to provide a well-grounded assessment of both the normative and practical dimensions of the adaptation process of kandas in the Republic of Kazakhstan

Research Results

Regulatory and Legal Model of Repatriate Adaptation in the Republic of Kazakhstan

The legal regime governing the adaptation of kandas in Kazakhstan is structured as a “bridge” from the status of a foreigner to the status of a citizen. On the one hand, the Constitution establishes the principle of equality and extends basic rights to foreigners and stateless persons, unless otherwise provided by the Constitution and laws [21]. This constitutional logic is also reflected in the draft Constitution of 2026, which reaffirms guarantees of non-discrimination and preserves the differentiation between general human rights and social rights linked to citizenship [22]. On the other hand, specific provisions of migration and social legislation grant kandas a set of “quasi-citizenship” guarantees, including education, social protection, employment assistance, and access to adaptation services even prior to naturalization [23], [24].

The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan enshrines the fundamental principles of non-discrimination and grants foreigners and stateless persons rights and freedoms on an equal basis with citizens, except in cases established by law [21]. In this context, kandas status performs the function of a transitional legal mechanism: it does not immediately equate a repatriate with a citizen, but it provides access to a number of social and institutional guarantees before the completion of naturalization procedures [23], [24].

The key regulatory pillars are the Law “On Population Migration”, which regulates procedures for kandas status, regional quotas, support packages, adaptation

and integration centers [23], and the Social Code, which includes kandas in employment promotion and labor mobility instruments [24]. The expansion of procedural accessibility was ensured by the 2020 amendments, which established the possibility of simultaneous application for permanent residence and citizenship under a simplified procedure [25].

Strategic policy documents also play an important role in shaping the legal and institutional framework for the adaptation of repatriates. The Concept of Migration Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2017–2021 systematized state approaches to external, internal, and ethnic migration, including the return of ethnic Kazakhs, regional settlement, and the need to link migration flows with labor market needs [26]. The Concept for 2023–2027 further strengthened the focus on the integration of kandas, labor mobility, reduction of regional demographic imbalances, and institutional support for adaptation [27]. The current Concept of Migration Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030 reflects a more comprehensive approach by identifying ethnic migration as a separate policy area, emphasizing regional settlement programs, digital migration services, interagency coordination, and the need to assess the labor, educational, and language potential of ethnic migrants [28]. Thus, the evolution of Kazakhstan's migration policy concepts demonstrates a gradual transition from a predominantly demographic and resettlement-oriented approach toward a model of institutional and socio-economic integration of repatriates.

However, empirical studies in recent years indicate a persistent “norm–practice” gap: integration is complicated by delays and administrative bottlenecks, a lack of preliminary information about the sociolinguistic and institutional environment, quota selectivity, limited awareness and utilization of adaptation and integration centers, as well as problems related to qualification recognition and employment [17], [18], [19], [20].

The special status of “kandas” is defined in the Law “On Population Migration” as the status of an ethnic Kazakh and (or) members of his/her family of Kazakh nationality who previously did not hold citizenship of the Republic of Kazakhstan and who obtained the relevant status in accordance with the procedure established by the authorized migration authority [23]. The law simultaneously introduces infrastructure-related concepts: the kandas adaptation and integration center, the regional admission quota, and an information database on kandas and the support measures provided.

Within the current regulatory framework, the assignment of kandas status and access to support measures are regulated through interaction with local executive bodies and specially established commissions. The legislation differentiates guarantees into universal ones, available to all kandas, and extended ones, applicable to those included in the regional quota. Basic measures include the right to adaptation services, education, medical care, and employment assistance on an equal basis with citizens, while quota mechanisms provide for priority employment, access to financial instruments, and benefits for obtaining land plots. At the same time, a number of conditional return obligations are established, including reimbursement of costs in cases of loss of eligibility or relocation outside the designated region. The legislator emphasizes a balance between support and responsibility, forming a contractual model of adaptation tied to compliance with territorial and legal criteria.

The adaptation infrastructure is legally established through temporary accommodation centers and adaptation and integration centers: initial settlement

prior to the assignment of status is possible in temporary accommodation centers; the procedure and duration of residence and service provision are determined by the authorized body at the level of subordinate regulation [29]. The duration of the status makes the system “accelerating”: the status terminates upon acquisition of citizenship, in cases of problems with permanent residence authorization, or after one year from the date of obtaining status (which increases the cost of any bureaucratic delays); extension is permitted once and for a limited period (under the law - no more than six months) for the purposes of simplified citizenship acquisition [30].

The institution of kandas naturalization in Kazakh law has undergone significant evolution as a result of the 2020 reform aimed at reducing institutional barriers to citizenship acquisition. The construction of a simplified (registration-based) citizenship procedure for kandas is normatively positioned as a process not dependent on the duration of residence in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan, provided that the requirements of lawful permanent residence are met. Thus, the legislator effectively implements a model of priority ethnic repatriation in which the criterion of origin acquires greater legal significance compared to traditional naturalization requirements, such as a lengthy residence qualification period. Similar models of ethnically oriented migration policy are characteristic of nation-building states and post-socialist countries, where repatriation is viewed as an instrument of demographic and political consolidation [8], [9], [10].

A significant procedural innovation of the reform was the establishment of the right of kandas to simultaneously submit documents for permanent residence authorization and for admission to citizenship under a simplified procedure. This substantially reduces the administrative burden on applicants and has legal significance as well, since it lowers the transaction costs of administrative interaction, eliminates the problem of sequential queues, and minimizes the risks of loss of legal status due to expiration of consideration periods or lack of coordination between agencies, which in academic literature is often considered an important element of institutional efficiency in migration administration [31].

The adoption of the Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2023 strengthened the institutional integration of kandas into the system of social and labor guarantees by establishing them as an independent subject of state employment and labor mobility policy. Of fundamental importance is the provision granting kandas the right to register as job seekers on an equal basis with citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan and permanently residing foreigners or stateless persons. It should be noted that when hiring a foreign worker, an employer is required to obtain a special permit from the local executive authority, whereas when hiring a kandas, such a permit is not required. This legislative decision indicates a transition from predominantly migration regulation toward a model of socio-economic integration, in which kandas status is considered not only a migration-law category but also an element of the state employment system. Contemporary studies of repatriate adaptation confirm that access to the labor market and social institutions is a key factor for successful integration and for reducing socio-economic risks [4], [32].

Additional confirmation of the comprehensive nature of regulation is the inclusion of kandas in voluntary resettlement mechanisms aimed at increasing labor mobility, where they act as an independent group of recipients of state support measures linked to regional quotas for settlers and kandas. Thus, legal regulation

combines migration policy with regional development and demographic balancing of territories, which corresponds to trends in the strategic management of migration in states with territorial population imbalances [33].

In recent years, an important direction of modernization of legal regulation has been associated with the digitalization of migration procedures and the implementation of the “one-stop shop” principle. Subordinate regulatory acts and official explanations establish the expansion of application submission channels through electronic services, including public service portals, mobile applications, foreign institutions, and the state corporation. From a legal perspective, digitalization has a dual effect. On the one hand, the standardization of procedures contributes to increased transparency of administrative decisions, reduction of corruption risks, and shortening of application processing times. On the other hand, the transfer of procedures into the digital environment increases the requirements for interagency coordination, legal certainty of decision-making algorithms, and mechanisms for protecting applicants from automated refusals. Researchers consider the digital transformation of public administration as a factor that changes not only administrative processes but also the architecture of legal guarantees governing interaction between the state and the individual [34]. In this context, the digitalization of migration administration becomes not only an instrument of service-oriented modernization of the state but also a factor in the transformation of administrative and legal mechanisms for protecting the rights of *kandases*.

Gap Between the Normative Model and Practice: Assessing the Effectiveness of Adaptation Mechanisms

Despite the consistent improvement of Kazakhstan’s migration policy regulatory framework, empirical data indicate the existence of a persistent gap between the declared model of simplified naturalization for *kandases* and the actual practice of its implementation. Interviews with repatriates show that key problems arise not so much at the level of formal legal norms as in the sphere of administrative procedures, interagency coordination, and law enforcement, which is typical for migration regimes of transitional states.

Similar conclusions are reflected in studies of *kandas* integration policy, which emphasize that the implementation of state migration policy is accompanied by systemic institutional barriers, including insufficient interagency coordination, weak informational support, and limited effectiveness of local executive bodies [35].

One of the most significant factors complicating the acquisition of citizenship remains the requirement to renounce previous citizenship due to the prohibition of dual citizenship in Kazakhstan. Formally, this requirement complies with constitutional provisions and citizenship legislation; however, in practice, the procedure for renouncing foreign citizenship often proves lengthy, bureaucratically complex, and dependent on the decisions of authorities of another state. Interviews confirm that many repatriates are forced to postpone naturalization for years. In some cases, individuals live in Kazakhstan for more than five to ten years while retaining their previous citizenship, which is linked not only to administrative difficulties but also to socio-economic considerations. For example, one informant noted that renouncing foreign citizenship would lead to a substantial loss of

pension rights accumulated in the country of previous residence. Such situations demonstrate that naturalization mechanisms insufficiently account for transnational social guarantees and economic consequences for migrants, which corresponds with findings in research on transnational social protection [36].

A serious barrier in recent years has been the problem of document legalization related to apostille requirements following the accession of several states to the 1961 Hague Convention. This problem is particularly acute for repatriates from China, where obtaining an apostille may require personal travel to the region of origin. Interviews indicate the presence of objective risks for applicants who fear the inability to leave the country again or administrative restrictions imposed by local authorities. As a result, a formally neutral international legal procedure transforms into a significant migration barrier that effectively blocks access to citizenship for certain categories of kandases. Moreover, in some cases, the absence of primary documents due to the specifics of registration systems in countries of origin leads to the inability to meet the requirements of Kazakh authorities, demonstrating insufficient adaptation of procedures to the real migration trajectories of repatriates.

Interviews also reveal a high level of administrative uncertainty associated with frequent legislative and procedural changes. Since the adoption of the Law “On Citizenship of the Republic of Kazakhstan,” numerous amendments have been introduced affecting the conditions and procedures for admission to citizenship, including simplified procedures. The frequency of amendments creates a situation of normative instability in which applicants face changing requirements, deadlines, and document lists [37]. In the perception of repatriates, this is expressed as a sense of increasing procedural complexity and unpredictability of outcomes, which reduces trust in state institutions. Similar problems of normative instability and institutional fragmentation are also noted in academic studies of Kazakhstan’s migration policy [11], [12].

An additional institutional problem remains the fragmentation of competencies among different state bodies. The naturalization process falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, while integration measures are implemented by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and local executive authorities. The absence of clear delineation of powers and a unified coordination center leads to duplication of procedures and administrative delays. Secondary studies confirm that the distribution of functions among several agencies is one of the key factors reducing the effectiveness of integration policy, as it creates confusion for applicants and increases the transaction costs of interaction with the state [35].

Although legislation provides for the implementation of the “one-stop shop” principle and the possibility of simultaneous submission of documents for permanent residence and citizenship, interviews confirm that these mechanisms have been implemented only partially and do not always ensure the expected reduction in processing times and bureaucratic burden.

An additional factor reinforcing institutional barriers to adaptation is the low level of awareness among repatriates regarding existing state support mechanisms, including kandas adaptation and integration centers. The interviews conducted show that a significant proportion of respondents either were unaware of the existence of such centers or had very limited understanding of their functions and procedures for accessing them. Even where general awareness existed, interaction

with these institutions was perceived as complex and insufficiently transparent, which reduced motivation to use the services offered. As a result, many repatriates prefer to resolve administrative issues independently or through informal channels - relatives, acquaintances, or intermediaries.

The obtained data are consistent with the results of secondary studies, according to which insufficient systematic informational support is one of the key problems of Kazakhstan's integration policy. It is noted that repatriates often lack information about their rights, benefits, and institutional support opportunities, and also experience difficulties in understanding the sequence of administrative procedures, which directly affects the effectiveness of migration legislation implementation [35].

Moreover, limited awareness is reinforced by institutional fragmentation of the migration management system, in which responsibility for different stages of naturalization and integration is distributed among multiple agencies and levels of authority.

The low level of awareness of adaptation centers also has structural causes. First, the territorial distribution of such institutions does not always correspond to the actual geography of repatriate settlement, which limits the physical accessibility of services. Second, state information channels are insufficiently adapted to the characteristics of the target group, including language barriers, differences in levels of legal literacy, and the specifics of migration experience. As a result, even formally existing support mechanisms remain underutilized. Such a situation corresponds to the conclusions of research on migrant social protection, according to which informational asymmetry between the state and service recipients significantly reduces the effectiveness of formal institutions and contributes to the development of informal mediation practices [38].

New legislative requirements in recent years, including mandatory testing of knowledge of the state language, history, and the Constitution, also have an ambiguous impact on the effectiveness of naturalization. On the one hand, they correspond to international practice of integration requirements. On the other hand, in the absence of sufficient preparation infrastructure and consideration of the age and educational characteristics of repatriates, these measures may constitute an additional barrier, especially for older individuals. Moreover, studies of ethnic repatriate integration show that even with cultural proximity between migrants and the host population, the adaptation process may be accompanied by marginalization and socio-economic difficulties when institutional support is insufficient [39].

Taken together, the interviews make it possible to conclude that the key problem of Kazakhstan's migration policy regarding *kandases* lies not so much in the absence of normative adaptation mechanisms as in the limited effectiveness of their practical implementation. The gap between the legal model and administrative practice is caused by institutional fragmentation, normative instability, transnational legal barriers, and insufficient adaptation of procedures to the real socio-economic conditions of repatriates. In this regard, the conclusion that strengthening interagency coordination and creating a unified institutional center for managing repatriation, naturalization, and integration processes is necessary appears justified.

Discussion

The results of the study correlate with the conclusions of previous domestic research analyzing the problems of repatriate adaptation in Kazakhstan, which have been examined primarily within sociological and cultural contexts. Earlier studies noted difficulties related to employment, language adaptation, social inclusion, and the perception of repatriates within the host society. At the same time, existing research has focused to a lesser extent on the legal mechanisms of integration and the institutional implementation of migration policy, considering adaptation mainly as a social process.

The principal distinction of the present study lies in its political and legal approach to analyzing kandas adaptation, based on a comparison between the normative model of state policy and its actual implementation in practice. The use of empirical data from in-depth interviews made it possible to identify institutional barriers that are not always reflected in regulatory documents, including administrative delays, complexities of naturalization procedures, problems of interagency coordination, and low awareness among repatriates regarding state support mechanisms. Thus, adaptation is viewed not only as a socio-cultural process but also as the result of the functioning of the state's legal and administrative institutions.

The findings confirm that the mere existence of normative guarantees does not in itself ensure effective integration of repatriates. A key factor is the quality of law enforcement and the institutional coherence of state bodies. The identified gap between the normative framework and administrative practice indicates the need to reconsider migration policy implementation mechanisms from the perspective of institutional effectiveness.

From a scientific standpoint, the study expands the understanding of repatriate adaptation by demonstrating that even when migrants share ethnic affiliation with the host society, integration requires stable legal mechanisms and coordination among state institutions. The practical significance of the results lies in identifying specific problem areas within migration policy, the resolution of which could enhance the effectiveness of state support for kandas.

Conclusion

The conducted study has shown that the Republic of Kazakhstan has developed a relatively comprehensive legal framework for the adaptation and integration of ethnic Kazakhs (kandas). In response to the first research question, it can be concluded that the current regulatory model formally provides important adaptation mechanisms, including the legal status of kandas, simplified naturalization procedures, social guarantees, access to employment assistance, adaptation and integration services, and participation in regional resettlement mechanisms. These instruments demonstrate that Kazakhstan's migration policy has gradually moved from a predominantly demographic and repatriation-oriented approach toward a broader model of institutional and socio-economic integration.

At the same time, the analysis demonstrates that the existence of legal guarantees does not automatically ensure their effective implementation. In response to the second research question, the study identified several institutional and administrative barriers that limit the practical effectiveness of the existing legal framework. These include bureaucratic delays in naturalization procedures, difficulties related to

renouncing previous citizenship, document legalization and apostille requirements, frequent changes in administrative procedures, insufficient coordination between state bodies, and fragmentation of institutional responsibilities. As a result, the simplified legal model of naturalization does not always correspond to the actual experience of repatriates.

With regard to the third research question, the study found that existing state support mechanisms, including adaptation and integration centers and digital services, only partially meet the needs of kandases. Although legislation provides for institutional support and the expansion of digital application channels, interviews show that many repatriates remain poorly informed about available services, do not fully understand the sequence of administrative procedures, or prefer to rely on informal support networks. The limited accessibility and insufficient visibility of adaptation centers reduce their practical effectiveness. Digitalization, while improving procedural accessibility, also requires stronger interagency coordination and clearer legal safeguards for applicants.

In response to the fourth research question, the study substantiates several directions for improving legal regulation and institutional coordination. First, it is necessary to strengthen interagency cooperation between migration authorities, local executive bodies, employment services, and institutions responsible for social support. Second, the state should improve information support for kandases before and after their arrival in Kazakhstan, including clear multilingual guidance on legal procedures, rights, benefits, and available services. Third, adaptation and integration centers should be made more accessible and functionally stronger, with their activities linked to employment, education, housing, healthcare, and legal assistance. Fourth, digital migration services should be developed not only as technical tools but also as mechanisms for ensuring transparency, predictability, and protection of applicants' rights.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the political and legal analysis of kandas adaptation through the comparison of the normative model of migration policy with its practical implementation. The use of empirical data from in-depth interviews made it possible to identify institutional factors that are not always visible in formal legal analysis, including administrative uncertainty, informational asymmetry, and the gap between legal guarantees and actual access to services.

The practical significance of the study consists in substantiating the need to move from a fragmented model of support toward a comprehensive institutional system for the integration of repatriates. Such a model should combine legal regulation, social support, labor market integration, digital services, and regional development priorities. Strengthening coordination, improving information accessibility, and adapting procedures to the real socio-economic conditions of kandases are essential for increasing the effectiveness of Kazakhstan's migration policy and ensuring the successful integration of repatriates into society.

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