

During the past 10 years, the population of Central Asia has been increasing by an average of one million people annually. Despite the low living standards and high mortality rate in some countries, experts predict the further growth of the region's population.

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In total, the Central Asian population increased by 1.36 million in 2019. About half of this figure is the increase in the population of Uzbekistan. In total, over 10 years, the number of Uzbeks has increased by 7 million people: this is more than the entire population of Kyrgyzstan or Turkmenistan.

If the rates of the population growth are considered, then after 2011, Uzbekistan lost its positions and for the last eight years, the region's leader is Tajikistan. The number of its residents increases by an average of 2.4% annually.

Kazakhstan is the slowest growing country in the region. In 2019, the population growth rate was only 1.4%. On the other hand, Tajikistan is the leader in this term: the number of residents increases by an average of 2.4% annually and today exceeds 9.3 million people.

As for Kyrgyzstan, according to the [forecasts](#) of the National Institute for Strategic Studies of the Kyrgyz Republic and the United Nations Population Fund, the population will exceed 7 million by 2030, and by 2050, it will be 8.3 million. At the same time, the republic will remain the most sparsely populated state in Central Asia, and the difference in numbers with its closest neighbors will only increase.

Tajikistan

Sharofat Rahimova, 37, does not work and raises four children while her husband is in labor migration. She admits that it is not easy to give birth often, but she does it at the request of her husband. Despite the low socio-economic standard of living of the family, she is determined to have another child.

On average, there are up to four children per woman in Tajikistan; this is the highest

indicator in Central Asia.

In 2018, the World Bank connected unemployment, high migration and poverty to population growth. The organization's experts recommended the government to control the birth rate by preventing the early marriages and increasing the use of contraception. Rapid population growth, according to their forecasts, will increase social tensions and government spending by 10 times.

Demography expert **Abduaziz Kosimov** notes the increased burden on the state budget.



Abduaziz Kosimov. Photo from personal Facebook page

“Considering the current situation, when there is a large number of unemployed in the country, new jobs are not created, the share of unofficially employed is high, and the younger generation is leaving the country searching for work, government spending on the social sphere – social protection, healthcare, is increasing,” he says.

None of these groups pays taxes to the state budget. The state covers the costs by higher taxes for local businesses, but the budget deficit is still growing, the expert adds.

In 2019, the Tajik government decided to take control of the birth rate by launching the State Program of Reproductive Health for 2019-2022. According to the Head of the National Reproductive Health Center **Munira Ganizoda**, one of the main goals is to prevent unwanted pregnancies among women.

In addition, the program includes such directions as the sexual education and the improvement of women's health. Doctors note that the majority of Tajik women do not observe the medically necessary birth interval.

Some, like Sharofat, are not aware about the dangers of premature birth; do not know how to avoid pregnancy. According to her, she always gives birth at home and does not follow the doctors' recommendations.

The program provides for an increase in the contraception usage among the population, and as a result, the possible prevention of maternal mortality, says Ganizoda.

Tajikistan is not only the fastest growing country in Central Asia, but also its population is one of the longest living. In less than 10 years, the average life expectancy in the country has increased from 72.5 to 75 years.

According to 2019 statistics, men live on average 73.3 years, and women - 76.9 years.

The Ministry of Health of Tajikistan notes that the increase in longevity of the population is one of the indicators of the success of the National Health Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2010-2020.

However, the international experts warn that despite the current life expectancy, the sustainability of this achievement is not guaranteed.

Uzbekistan

In 2019, Uzbekistan set a record for the number of births: almost 815 thousand children were born. Over the past ten years, the population of the republic is growing by an average of 554 thousand people per year and it is expected that by 2040 the absolute population growth rate will exceed 9 million people.

The birth rate in the country is growing since 2004. Doctor of Economics, leading researcher at the Institute of Economics of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan **Lyudmila Maksakova** [states in her research](#) that the factor of delayed births in those families which, for economic reasons, could not afford to have a child in the 1990s, played a certain role in this.

“People feel confident for the future. All this together led to a new wave of birth rate growth in 2004-2008,” Maksakova believes.

This growth tendency continues to this day.

However, the group of international experts led by the Research Center at the Tashkent State University of Economics predicts that the birth rate in the country should soon slightly decline.

“The recent increase in the total birth rate can be considered only as a temporary trend, which is rather incompatible with the processes of modernization of society and their influence on reproductive behavior,” experts noted in the [forecast](#) of the demographic development of the republic until 2050.

At the same time, Uzbekistan is the region’s leader in terms of longevity. The average life expectancy here is 75.1 years. However, it is the only Central Asian state where the mortality rate also increased over the past ten years.

Partially, this is explained by the high infant mortality rate. In 2018, UNICEF stated that 57% of deaths of children under five occur in the first 28 days of their life.

The main causes of adult mortality in Uzbekistan are diseases of the circulatory system and respiratory system.

Researchers predict that the mortality rate of the population will gradually decrease. This will lead to an increase in the life expectancy of women and men, as well as the population increase.

According to experts, by the end of 2050, the population of Uzbekistan will reach 45 million people. In October 2019, this figure was 33.72 million.

Kyrgyzstan

An average of 158.8 thousand people are born in Kyrgyzstan with six million population every year. At the same time, there is no state policy on demography in the country: the government does not take any measures to control or stimulate the birth rate.

The one-time allowance “[Balaga Suyunchu](#)”, which is provided since 2018, is only 4 thousand soms (\$51.6) for each child. This is below the poverty limit.

The parents of triplets are the only exception. Since December 2019, when three or more children are born at the same time, the state pays 50 thousand soms (\$645) for each child.

Experts claim that in the near future, the population of Kyrgyzstan will grow, although it will not reach the neighbors’ level.

At the same time, the country ranks last among the Central Asian states in terms of life

expectancy. On average, it is 71.3 years. For men - 67.4 years, for women - 75.6 years.

According to the World Health Organization, the difference between the life expectancy of men and women should not exceed five years. It should be noted that this indicator does not comply with WHO standard in any Central Asian country.

The biggest gap is in Kazakhstan - 9 years, in Kyrgyzstan - 8.2 years, in Tajikistan - 7 years, in Uzbekistan - 6.6 years.

The main cause of death in Kyrgyzstan remains the so-called non-infectious diseases of the cardiovascular system (more than 50% of cases annually), cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes.

The Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan focuses on the prevention of diseases, the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, and the popularization of physical culture. However, the medical expert **Aybar Sultangaziev** is sure that these measures help better in developed countries with strong economies.

“In the developing or poor countries, just like ours, the main strategy is always simply to save lives. People go to hospitals and medical institutions in general, most often when they are already crawling,” Sultangaziev says.

According to him, given the current state of the healthcare system, the question is not about increasing life expectancy, but about saving lives and their quality.

Nevertheless, the mortality from the main cause, diseases of the cardiovascular system, is insignificantly decreasing.

“This is not due to the improvement of healthcare, but in spite of it. The quality of people’s life improved, people receive better nutrition, this is the first thing. Second, private clinics and medical centers appeared, and people are going there. With cardiovascular diseases, the main thing is to take drugs on time. We now have those drugs that allow us to maintain health in the best possible condition,” explains Sultangaziev.



Aybar Sultangaziev Photo from personal Facebook page

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan, despite its large territory, remains one of the most sparsely populated countries. The republic ranks 9th in terms of territory, but the population density, according to the [United Nations Population Fund](#), in 2019 was only 6.8 people per square kilometer. According to the Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at the beginning of this year, there were 18.6 million Kazakhs in the country.

Despite the slow growth rates, experts from the Economic Research Institute note a favorable birth rate.

Demographers believe that positive dynamics is connected with economic growth, improved welfare of the population, a favorable age structure and the implementation of delayed births.



Batzhan Akmoldina Photo from personal Facebook page

According to the economist **Batzhan Akmoldina**, Director of the Center for Social and Demographic Development Research at the Economic Research Institute, the policy of supporting the birth rate in Kazakhstan is implemented through the payment of benefits from the state budget.

There is an allowance for caring for a child under 1 year old, 15.3-23.6 thousand tenge (\$37-57) for the stay-at-home mothers. Working mothers who made social contributions can apply for benefits of 40% of the average monthly income for the last two years and maternity benefits.

“There are also one-time allowances for childbirth, [...] there is support for large families through benefits to families with many children and mothers with many children,” adds Akmoldina.

The amount of the one-time childbirth allowance in the republic is 100.7 thousand tenge (\$243); with the birth of the fourth child, it increases to 167 thousand tenge (\$403).

However, with the mortality rate of an average of 135.7 thousand people per year, the population of Kazakhstan increases on average by only 254 thousand people annually. Even

despite the fact that life expectancy in the republic since 2010 has increased by 4.7 years, up to 73.2 years.

According to experts from the Economic Research Institute, in 2008, not only the general mortality rate began to decline, but the absolute indicator also significantly decreased. In 2018, the number of deaths decreased by 30.1% compared to 2007.

Researchers connect this with the economic growth, as a result of which infant and maternal mortality significantly decreased, and life expectancy increased.

Batzhan Akmoldina notes that there is no control over the life expectancy and health in Kazakhstan. However, the measures are being taken to reduce the rates of maternal and infant mortality that affect life expectancy.



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