Assessment of Poverty and Inequality in Kazakhstan: Current Situation and Prospects for Development

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Abstract

The development of strategies to reduce poverty and inequality is the main priority of sustainable development policy worldwide. Currently, the problem of economic inequality and poverty is one of the most acute problems in Kazakhstan. This is because the mass protest of the people in January 2022 made us realize that the poverty line in Kazakhstan is one of the lowest indicators in the world. The article analyzes the current state of socio–economic inequality and poverty, assesses the state of low-income large families in the Republic of Kazakhstan. During the analysis of the current state and assessment of poverty and inequality in the country, it was revealed that the scale of poverty in Kazakhstan varies regionally, which indicates mainly Despite the existing differences and income inequality between the regions, there is no centralized support program for large families in Kazakhstan. Since the current methods of social policy are ineffective in combating poverty, it is recommended that the government consider the mechanisms and tools of a strategy to overcome income inequality and poverty in the country by creating high-quality jobs in underdeveloped regions.

Keywords: poverty, inequality, income of the population, social policy, Gini coefficient.

JEL codes: I30, I38

1 Introduction

Reducing the level of poverty and inequality is one of the important tasks of the Kazakh society. The January (2022) events in Kazakhstan once again clearly demonstrated the problems of poverty and income inequality of people, which deepened during the Covid-19 period [1]. According to official data of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the middle class in Kazakhstan does not exceed 3%, which means that most of the population lives below the poverty line, or is somewhere nearby. The poverty rate in the country is 5.3%, 1 million 619 thousand. a person with a simultaneous increase in the depth and severity of poverty of 0.8 and 0.2%, respectively (Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022), according to the World Bank, the poverty level is much higher - 15.5%.

(World Bank, Kazakhstan overview, 2022). Also, the calculation of the incomes of Kazakhstanis by the median method showed that half of the population of Kazakhstan in 2022 has a monthly income of about 49.6 thousand tenge per month. There remains a significant differentiation of income in urban and rural areas. Thus, in urban areas, the share of the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum is 3.7%, in rural areas -7.6% [2;3].

According to the KPMG report, 55% of the national income, that is, more than half of the country's wealth, belongs to only 162 people. The annual income of 96.6% of the adult population (11,711,334 people) does not exceed $10,000 2.7% (326,322 people) earn from $10,000 to $100,000 0.35% (42,301 people) have an annual income from $100,000 to $1 million 0.05% (5,838 people) annually replenish their wealth in the amount of $ 1 to $ 50 million. And, most importantly, there is almost a statistical error, namely 0.001% (162 people) own about 55% of the total wealth. Of these, 112 people have from $50 million a year. up to $80 million 45 people — from $80 million to $800 million. Five people — from $2 to $3 billion [4]. Thus, there is a high level of income inequality of the population, an increased level of depth and severity of poverty.

The problem of poverty is not only sociological, but also psychological in nature, so-called habitual poverty arises in society, which leads to social poverty: depression, social isolation, discrimination and suicide, etc. It affects the development of the country as a whole, political, social and economic stability, the relevance of this problem is increasing dramatically every day.

In his Message to the people, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan KJ. Tokayev stressed the need to adapt the priorities of social policy in the "new situation", taking into account the challenges and accumulated problems. The new model of the country's development considers public trust in the state as the main issue of social policy and is based on fair distribution and creation of opportunities for the population. For the first time, on behalf of the President, a completely new document is being developed for Kazakhstan - the Social Code [1].

2 Literature Review

Back in 1873, the great English economist Alfred Marshall, in his report "The Future of the Working Classes", read at the Cambridge Reform Club, posed the following question: can everyone equally be rich, healthy and educated? In other words, can socio-economic equality be achieved in society? He said literally the following: "The question is not whether all people will eventually be equal–for they certainly will not be – but whether progress cannot continue steadily, even slowly, until everyone, at least by

occupation, becomes a gentleman. I think it is possible and that it will be so" [5].

For the first time, the relationship between inequality and economic development was investigated by the American Economist S. Kuznets, who showed that economic growth first leads to an increase in inequality, and then to its decrease [5].

P. Tridico in his work considers an interesting idea of classifying types of economic inequality into intra- and inter-country, and also gives the author's view on the cyclical development of these processes. For intra-country inequality, the key driver of change is changes in the labor market, the creation of new professions and types of employment, technological changes that allow some people to earn more than others, which leads to the polarization of income and wealth within one country [6]. This idea is well described with. Rosen in the theory of superstars, and also fits perfectly into the concept of economic globalization and technological progress, as a result of which, for example, bloggers can earn fabulous incomes by selling intellectual products to a global audience [7].

Poverty reduction is increasingly becoming a major topic for researchers in various social sciences, from economics and finance to management and entrepreneurship [9, 10). This is due to the seriousness of the problem of extreme poverty and the clearly ambiguous results of measures to combat poverty. These measures include foreign aid programs, microfinance and property rights promotion, as well as initiatives at the bottom of the pyramid, these initiatives have not had much impact on extreme poverty and may have actually created some additional problems.

However, in recent years, researchers have begun to study economic growth and its relationship to poverty reduction through entrepreneurship and the development of new technologies and new methods (Ahlstrom 2014, 2015; Bloom et al. 2013; Bloom, Draca, and Van Reenen 2016; McCloskey 2017). This, in turn, has given rise to new approaches (and ways of considering) poverty reduction that challenge the existing theory of poverty research, traditionally focused more on financial aid and other basic poverty reduction measures (Easterly 2002; Sachs 2003; Whitacre, Meadowcroft, and Gallardo 2019). Studies ranging from trade policy and globalization (Pearce 2005; Bergh, Mirkina, and Nilsson 2016; Bhagwati and Srinivasan 2002; Dollar and Kraay 2004) to legal and institutional reform (Rodrik, Subramanian, and Trebbi 2004) to leadership are making significant progress in understanding many key factors in combating extreme poverty and stimulating economic growth.

Kazakh researchers managed to substantiate the general patterns of the formation of economic stratification and income inequality [11]. When assessing the relationship between inequality and economic growth, it turned

out that economic growth and openness to trade contribute to reducing inequality in the distribution of income and the level of absolute poverty, while the growth of foreign direct investment, on the contrary, leads to their growth [12].

3 Methodology

Various types and methods of systematic, comparative, functional, economic–statistical and structural analysis, synthesis were used as the methodological basis of the study.

Currently, one of the main problems in the country is the problem of poverty, which is increasingly developing into a problem of poverty. The number of people who find themselves below the poverty line is steadily growing, and there is a consistent increase in the stratification of the population by income and material security, which is spontaneous, since until recently the impact on it from the state was hardly noticeable.

4 Results and Discussion

According to the calculated data of the Bureau of National Economy, the share of the population of Kazakhstan with incomes below the subsistence minimum in 2021 amounted to 5.3% or 1 million 619 thousand people. The World Bank has set the international poverty line at $1.90 per day. In Russia, the share of the population with such low incomes is practically absent, amounting to less than 0.1%. Turkey ranked 21st out of 156 countries in the World Poverty Index (World Misery Index) for 2021. According to the index compiled by economist Steve H. Hanke from Johns Hopkins University, Turkey also ranks first among European countries in terms of poverty. According to the statistics of the countries that published data for 2021, the poverty level is below 5% only in Kazakhstan and Belarus. Moreover, in Kazakhstan this indicator was 5.3%, in Belarus – 5.2%. However, in a European country, about 451 thousand people are below the subsistence level, and in Kazakhstan – 858.5 thousand [2].

Table 1. Key indicators of uneven income distribution in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2018-2022

	The proportion of the population with incomes below: in %		The depth of poverty %	The severity of poverty %	Gini coefficient for 20 % of population groups
	subsistence minimum values	the cost of the food basket			

2018	3,7	0,1	0,5	0,1	0,280
2019	3,8	0,1	0,6	0,1	0,277
2020	4,6	0,1	0,7	0,2	0,275
2021	5,2	0,1	0,8	0,2	0,285
2022	5,3	0,1	0,8	0,2	0,290
Note: compiled on the basis of [2]					

Analyzing Table 1, we can say that regions in Kazakhstan have been developing disproportionately for many years due to the uneven distribution of income: the share of the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum in 2022 increased to 5.3% with a simultaneous increase in the depth and severity of poverty (0.8 and 0.2%, respectively). The share of the population with incomes below the cost of the food basket is stable (0.1%), so this group of people has income only for survival. The depth of poverty shows the average deviation of the level of income (consumption) of people who are below the subsistence minimum from the subsistence minimum. The severity of poverty shows inequality among the poor – the degree of dispersion of the incomes of the poor from their average value.

From the theory of distribution of the total amount of monetary income among the population, it is expressed in terms of the share of total monetary income, which falls on each of the 20 and 10% groups of the population as the average per capita monetary income increases. For example, the Gini coefficient for 20% of population groups, which is an indicator of the degree of stratification of society in the ratio of the richest 20% to the poorest 20%, in Kazakhstan tended to decrease from 0.275 in 2020 to 0.290 in 2022 (Table 2).

Table 2. The share of income of the population by 10 percent (decile) groups and the Gini coefficient

10-% of the population group	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
1 decile	4,15	4,07	4,06	4,09	4,15
2 decile	5,35	5,23	5,26	5,27	5,27
3 decile	6,21	6,10	6,13	6,07	6,05
4 decile	7,05	6,92	6,89	6,86	6,81
5 decile	7,97	7,82	7,74	7,73	7,67
6 decile	9,02	8,89	8,79	8,78	8,71
7 decile	10,29	10,21	10,09	10,09	10,05
8 decile	11,99	11,98	11,89	11,86	11,90
9 decile	14,65	14,79	14,83	14,83	14,78

10 decile	23,32	23,99	24,32	24,42	24,61
Gini Coefficient	0,278	0,287	0,289	0,290	0,291
Note: compiled on the basis of [2]					

To measure income inequality, the statistical method of dividing the population into equal shares — deciles and quintels (1/10 and 1/5 of the studied population) is widely used. The measurement includes a comparison of incomes in the upper, middle and lower groups. The distribution of income by deciles, quintels reflects the degree of income differentiation and levels of concentration of purchasing power of the population. Consequently, according to calculations, in Kazakhstan, low-income groups (poor) are located on 1 decile, and the highest-income groups (rich) are located on 10 deciles.

Analyzing Table 2, we can see that the share of income of the population in 1 decile is 5 times lower than in 10 decile, this once again proves a large imbalance in the distribution of income in the country. Also, the Gini coefficient for 10 percent (decile) groups in 2022 increased to 0.291, which indicates a slight increase in income differentiation of the population. In 2020, compared to 2016, the share of income from the 1st decile group did not change, 4,5,6,8 decreased, and the share of income from the 9th and 10th decile groups increased by 0.1 and 0.94 percentage points, respectively (Table 2).

In 2021, the Gini coefficient in Kazakhstan was 28.8%, which is the average value for developing countries. For comparison, highly developed countries with strong economies have significantly higher indicators, so the US Gini coefficient for 2021 is 41.5%, in Germany — 31.9, in China — 38.5, in Russia it has increased to 37.5%. While developing economies have an average Gini coefficient of about 27% (Finland — 27.4, Norway — 27.0, Denmark — 28.7), the highest stratification rate in the world is observed in the least developed countries of the African continent: in Namibia — 59.1, in Suriname — 57.9, in Zambia — 57.1, and in South Africa, it reached 63% in 2021 [3].

As of 2022, wages in Kazakhstan, with the existing regional income discrepancy, are on average 269,149 tenge per month. The highest rates are observed in Almaty (159.4 thousand tenge), Atyrau region (171.2) and Nur-Sultan (241.6), and the lowest is in the densely populated Turkestan region (102.8 thousand tenge) (Figure 1).
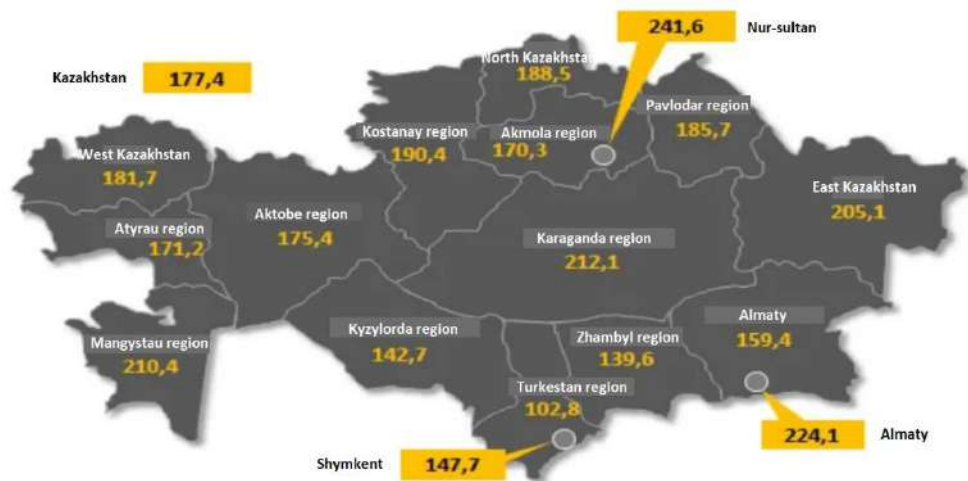
Figure 1. Monetary incomes of the population of the Republic of
Kazakhstan by region, 1st quarter 2020 (thousand tenge)
Note: compiled on the basis of [2]

Analyzing Figure 2, we can say that Astana and Almaty, as well as the industrially developed Karaganda region and the oil-producing Mangystau region, stand out with the highest per capita incomes. The minimum income is received by residents of mainly southern agricultural regions. Incomes of the population increased in almost all regions compared to the 1st quarter of 2019, with the exception of Almaty and Turkestan region, which may be due to a faster rate of population growth in these regions with a relatively low rate of income growth. According to the analysis, the largest share of income from hired work is received in the western regions, namely in the Mangistau and Atyrau regions, in the Turkestan region – from self-employment or entrepreneurship, and in the North Kazakhstan region – from social transfers. At the same time, it should be noted that in the Turkestan region, income from self-employment and entrepreneurship account for 30.4% of all income in the region. This may be a consequence of the fact that in the Turkestan region the largest number of self–employed is 361.5 thousand. a person according to the 1st quarter of 2020. There are arguments that there is a large share of the shadow economy of the self-employed in this area.
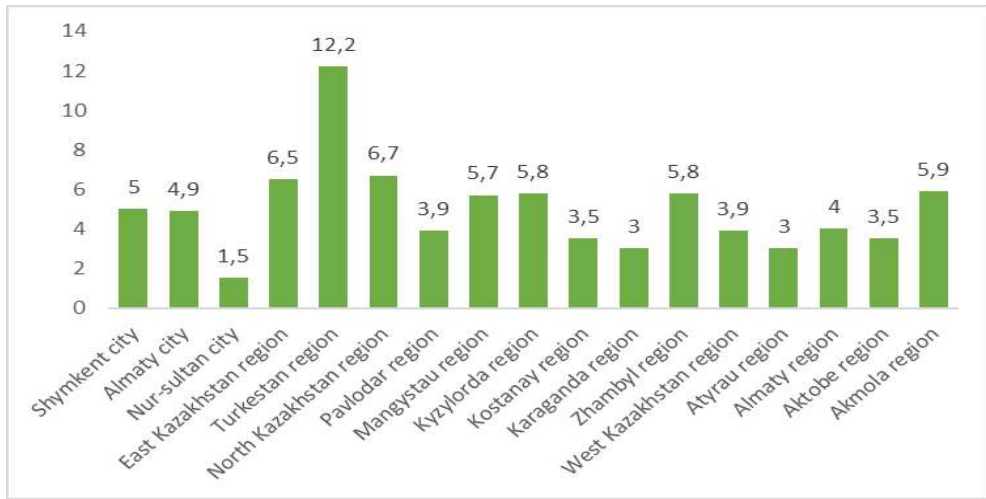
Figure 2. Poverty level in Kazakhstan by region, 2020
Note: compiled on the basis of [2]

Figure 3 shows that the scale of poverty in Kazakhstan varies regionally, which indicates mainly the existing income inequality between regions.

Table 3. Household food consumption by regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, %, on average per capita per quarter, tenge

	Consumer spending — total			including food products		
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020
The Republic Of Kazakhstan	152 378	165 084	178 565	76 867	88 228	100 864
Akmola	147 909	155 355	183 687	74 526	84 344	101 873
Aktobe	120 036	142 143	159 837	61 338	74 753	95 457
Almaty	155 212	171 815	188 277	83 679	98 855	113 120
Atyrau	128 402	137 941	147 168	75 973	81 753	96 095
West Kazakhstan	120 340	136 946	148 692	63 913	79 382	90 261
Zhambyl	114 586	130 624	148 443	65 911	72 674	90 134
Karaganda	170 951	184 020	209 010	82 200	95 154	113 710
Kostanay	121 721	141 780	169 370	56 137	68 349	84 456
Kyzylorda	114 310	121 647	136 259	61 744	69 178	81 571
Mangystau	148 201	154 412	163 215	80 272	87 281	94 486
Pavlodar	153 450	169 911	194 147	81 289	94 636	115 332
North Kazakhstan	149 997	163 251	187 885	71 351	81 353	97 965
Turkestan	95 512	108 923	125 543	56 298	67 641	78 973

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East Kazakhstan	163 009	179 225	194 454	88 081	98 133	112 540
Nur-Sultan City	173 159	189 615	200 180	76 128	88 534	102 070
Almaty city	270 912	278 438	262 434	114 589	138 034	137 289
Shymkent city	145 771	135 686	137 550	75 291	63 668	66 564
Note: compiled on the basis of [2]						

Table 3 shows that the lowest consumption of food by households are Turkestan, Kyzylorda, Zhambyl regions. The highest rate is observed in Almaty, Astana, Akmola, Karaganda regions.

According to the UN classification by the share of expenditures on food and income of the population, Kazakhstan falls into the group with a lower-than-average standard of living (40-50%): more than half of the population cannot afford to buy even a basic grocery basket painlessly.

Such an imbalance is associated with overpopulation in 32% (in Turkestan, Zhambyl, Kyzylorda regions), this of course shows high labor resources, but despite these advantages, these regions occupy leading positions in terms of unemployment in the country. This means that the majority of the population does not work, this also proves low monetary incomes (102.8 thousand tenge) than other regions, compared to the Mangystau region, it is two times lower (210.4 thousand tenge).

Table 4 – Comparative table of the number of recipients of social assistance from the state and the average monthly amount of assigned assistance in 2020 and 2021

Name of regions	Number of recipients of social assistance from the state		Growth rate for the period from 2020 to 2021	Average monthly amount of assigned social assistance, tenge		Growth rate for the period from 2020 to 2021
	2020 year	2021 year		2020 year	2021 year	
Republic of Kazakhstan	571584	2177176	3,8%	4834	12188	2.5%
Akmola	12 371	43 607	3,5%	2 702,9	11 525,0	4,3%
Aktobe	20 082	92 214	4,6 %	2 981,7	11 999,0	4%
Almaty	58 768	274 378	4,7%	3 622,8	12 152,0	3,35%
Atyrau	10 949	39 856	3,6%	3 933,6	11 067,0	2,8%
West Kazakhstan	16 815	58 605	3,5%	3 585,1	11 582,0	3,2%

Zhambyl	74 517	193 968	2,6%	2 847,2	12 613,0	4,4%
Karaganda	10 967	61 644	5,6%	3 606,8	12 349,0	3,42%
Kostanay	14 256	49 491	3,5%	3 291,2	10 873,0	3,3%
Kyzylorda	39 409	154 103	3,9%	3 833,3	13 756,0	3,6%
Mangystau	9 761	54 045	5,5%	4 076,7	12 583,0	3,1%
Turkestan	195 620	624 305	31,8%	7 419,9	11 714,0	1,6%
Pavlodar	6 977	44 017	6,3%	3 316,0	11 483,0	3,5%
North Kazakhstan	8 723	24 698	2,8%	3 013,6	10 916,0	3,6%
East Kazakhstan	31 601	98 290	3,1%	3 974,4	11 929,0	3%
Nursultan	4 601	41 988	9,12%	3 310,3	12 830,0	3,9%
Almaty	2 781	63 163	22,71%	4 333,2	12 535,0	2,9%
Shymkent	53 386	258 804	4,9%	3 941,5	12 968,0	3,3%
Note: compiled on the basis of [2]						

An analysis of the data in Table 3 shows a tendency to increase the average monthly amount of assistance from the state to the poor. The country's growth rate was 3.8%. Turkestan became the leader in the growth rate of this indicator among the regions – the number of recipients increased to 624,305 people in 2021 (see Table 3). In this region, the share of the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum is higher compared to other regions. This is due to the large accumulation of the population in this region.

According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, as of May 1, 2021, there are 454.4 thousand large families in the country, including more than 2 million children.

According to statistics of the Bureau of National Statistics, Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the share of the poor population living in families of five or more people is 89.6%. For comparison, the share of the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum in families consisting of three people is only 3.6%.

According to UNICEF research, 90% of poor families in the country have many children. In other words, statistics show that the probability of being in the poverty zone is higher among large families. Accordingly, the risk of child poverty is higher among such families.

According to the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in

comparison with 2011, the distribution of per capita income of households with four or more children became more uniform by the end of 2020, but still the level of per capita income remains low.
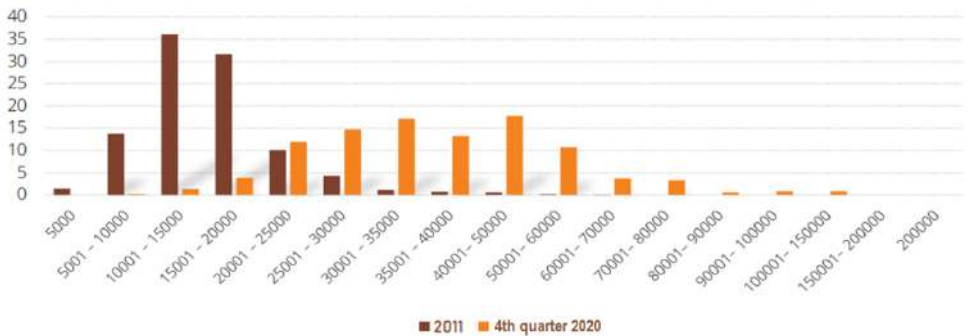

Figure 3. Distribution of households with 4 or more children by the size of the per capita monetary income, %
Note: compiled on the basis of [2]

If we consider the number of large families receiving financial support from the state, then according to the data provided by JSC "Center for Human Resources Development", their number has increased markedly over the past three years. If in 2018 there were 228,014 families of recipients of state benefits and targeted social assistance (TSA) with four or more children under the age of twenty-three, then their number doubled across the country in 2020. The largest increase in recipients over the past three years was observed in Atyrau region (+145.45%), the cities of Almaty (+131.34%) and Nur-Sultan (+131.21%). At the same time, the majority of recipients in the republic (about 60%) live in rural areas.

The largest number of recipients over the past year lives in the Turkestan region – 109,593 families, the smallest number – in the North Kazakhstan region (4,017 families), which is explained by the general distribution of large families across the country.

The main reasons for the surge in the number of recipients of state benefits and TSA among large families with children under twenty-three years old were the simplification of obtaining TSA from 2020 and an increase in the birth rate (206,046 last year against 194,272 in 2019). Simplification of the procedures for obtaining TSA, on the one hand, allowed in a more convenient form and in a short time to issue an application, but, on the other hand, led to the fact that people who do not need help from the state received it.

Let's analyze the distribution of households within the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum. In this category, the most negative results are shown by households consisting of 5 or more persons. If in the 4th

quarter of 2018 86.1% of the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum were families of 5 or more persons, by the end of 2020 their share increased to 89.6%. For comparison, during the same period, families consisting of 3 persons accounted for 3.3% and 3.6% of the total population living with incomes below the subsistence minimum, respectively.
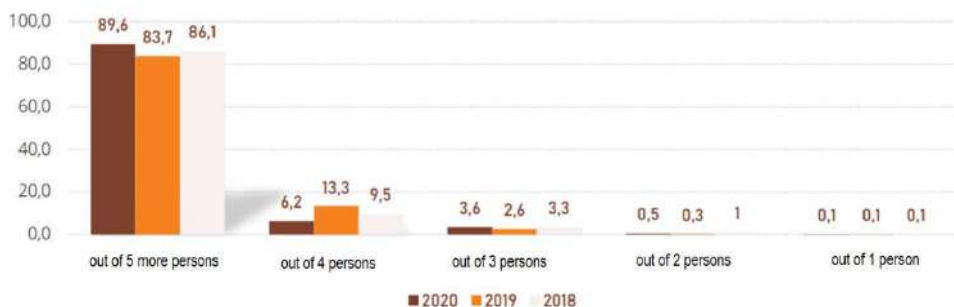

Figure 4. The share of the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum, depending on the size of the household for the 4th quarter of 2018-2020, %

Note: compiled on the basis of [2]

Despite the positive changes in state policy towards large families in terms of the adoption of legislative acts (this includes an increase in the amount of benefits, and simplification of receiving targeted social assistance), especially in the last 2 years against the background of negative information reasons, there are still maneuvers for further improvements. Lack of work and limited opportunities for the development of children in rural areas force some families to move to large cities in search of a better life. At the same time, they often cannot afford normal living conditions, posing a threat to the lives of children. Large families have the right to queue for housing at the local executive body, but the speed of construction in the regions and, accordingly, the progress of the queue leaves much to be desired. And some move in the hope of receiving greater material benefits in the form of assistance from the state, popularizing dependent sentiments. The low income level of large families can give rise to another problem – child poverty. Therefore, there is a need for well-developed mechanisms to support large families, taking into account the rational burden on the budget.

The Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan implements many state programs aimed at improving social well-being. However, despite the existence of a wide class of social assistance programs, information asymmetry leads to the fact that largest families simply do not have detailed information about existing programs, benefits, and support. The reason for this is, among other things, the large number of support programs that often duplicate each other. In order to raise awareness about the rights and

opportunities of large families, explanatory work and the creation of a "roadmap for large families" are required.

Thus, there is no centralized support program for large families in Kazakhstan, which should regulate measures suitable for this targeted social group.

5 Conclusion

The conducted research allowed us to draw the following theoretical conclusions and recommendations.

In 2021, the share of the population of Kazakhstan with incomes below the subsistence minimum, according to the Bureau of National Economy, amounted to 5.3% or 1 million 619 thousand people, while according to the World Bank, this figure is much more, 15.5%.

The scale of poverty in Kazakhstan varies regionally, which indicates mainly the existing differences between regions and income inequality. At the same time, there is a gap in the level of wages for similar types of work. It is noteworthy that high economic indicators do not always have a positive impact on the situation of the poor. In addition, there is a noticeable difference in the monetary income of the population of different regions.

Based on the above, we can conclude that the current economic growth of 3-4% does not increase the welfare of the majority of the population and is distributed extremely unevenly. A solution to this problem may be, in addition to the implementation of state programs ("State Program for the Development of Regions for 2020 2025"), the creation of new institutional structures whose powers will include control over the distribution of benefits. In international practice, such a method of resolving inequality issues has been successful in Switzerland. Institutional transformation can be the key to solving the problem of uneven intra-country socio-economic development of the regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The state plays a major role in raising the incomes of the population by supporting businesses and providing social guarantees, including social assistance, to the poorest citizens of the country. But since these methods are ineffective in combating poverty, it is recommended that the government consider the mechanisms and tools of a strategy to overcome income inequality and poverty in the country by creating high-quality jobs in underdeveloped regions.

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