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PEOPLE BETWEEN COUNTRIES: WHERE KAZAKHSTAN'S MIGRANTS WERE BORN AND WHERE PEOPLE BORN IN KAZAKHSTAN LIVE, 1990-2024

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Abstract: This paper uses the United Nations International Migrant Stock, which counts people by country of birth, to describe how Kazakhstan's migration ties changed between 1990 and 2024, and checks every result against the previous edition of the same data. In the 2024 edition, people born in Russia made up 62.5% of the 3.29 million foreign-born residents of Kazakhstan in 1990 and 26.4% of 2.09 million in 2024, while people born in Uzbekistan grew from 164,039 to 744,161 and have outnumbered those born in Russia since 2015. Among people born in Kazakhstan who live abroad, Russia's share fell from 73.9% to 47.2%, and Germany has been the second country of residence in every year from 2000, with 896,268 people in 2024. The 2020 edition gives a very different picture of who lives in Kazakhstan: in it, people born in Russia still made up 66.3% of the foreign-born in 2020, and the share born in the four other Central Asian countries rose only from 3.9% to 8.6%. Russia's falling share and Germany's second place from 2000 among people born in Kazakhstan hold in both editions, but the size of the fall, the comparison with the other Central Asian countries and the shift in the origins of Kazakhstan's foreign-born residents depend on the edition. The author's expectation that Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan would be the second country of residence is not supported. Her explanation, given after a hint about the resettlement of the Volga Germans in 1941, that Germans forcibly resettled to Kazakhstan later returned to their ethnic homeland, is consistent in size with German statistics on resettlers.

Keywords: international migration; migrant stock; Kazakhstan; Russia; Germany; Uzbekistan; Central Asia; data revision.

1. Introduction

When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, millions of people found that the place where they lived and the place where they were born were now in different countries. Since then Kazakhstan has seen large departures of ethnic Germans, Russians and other European groups, and new arrivals, many of them from other Central Asian countries [1, pp. 160, 164]. This paper asks whether these movements turned Kazakhstan's migration ties away from Russia, both for the people who live in Kazakhstan and for the people born in Kazakhstan who live abroad.

The United Nations Population Division publishes estimates of the international migrant stock, the number of people living in a country other than the one where they were born, for pairs of countries from 1990 to 2024 [2]. These estimates make it possible to look at both sides of Kazakhstan's migration with one source: who lives in Kazakhstan but was born elsewhere, and where people born in Kazakhstan live today.

Research questions. (1) How did the countries of birth of people living in Kazakhstan change between 1990 and 2024, and did Central Asia replace Russia as the main origin? (2) Where do people born in Kazakhstan who live abroad live, and how did Russia's share among them change, compared with people born in the four other Central Asian countries? (3) Do these answers stay the same in the previous edition of the data (2020)?

2. Hypothesis

When the author chose this topic, she had already been told that in 2024 more people born in Uzbekistan than in Russia lived in Kazakhstan (744,000 against 552,000, against 164,000 and about 2 million in 1990), and on 26 October her mentor added that Russia was the first country where people born in Kazakhstan live. She was asked why people born in Uzbekistan had become so many more, and which country is second after Russia, before she saw any figures on where people born in Kazakhstan live. Her first answer (27 October 2026) was: "Possibly because of the current political situation in Russia??". After the task was explained more simply, with work, study and family given as examples of possible reasons, she wrote (28 October 2026): "I think it is mainly because of the high standard of living in Kazakhstan compared with Uzbekistan; this factor compels many to move to our country later" and, for the second country: "I think Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan, since both countries are connected with our history, we have a lot in common and the states border each other" (translated from Russian). The first answer explains a change she already knew about; the second is a prediction.

3. Literature review

Özden and colleagues built global matrices of bilateral migrant stocks by country of birth for 1960-2000 by combining more than one thousand census and population register records [3]; the UN series used here continues this kind of data to 2024. The end of the Soviet Union was followed by what Brubaker called migrations of "ethnic unmixing": he compared the post-Soviet movement of ethnic Russians to Russia with the movements of other once-dominant minorities after the collapse of earlier empires [4], and wrote that ethnicity can act both as a push factor at the point of origin and as a pull factor at the point of destination [5]. For Kazakhstan, Amrin, Kaliyeva and Alzhanova describe the "mass migration of ethnic Germans and Russians and other European ethnic groups" that began in the late 1980s and early 1990s [1, p. 160].

The German part of this movement has a specific history. On 28 August 1941 the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued the decree "On the resettlement of the Germans living in the Volga regions", and the people's commissar of internal affairs proposed to move 479,841 people to the north-eastern regions of the Kazakh SSR and to four regions of Siberia [6]. Between 1990 and 1999 Germany admitted about 1.63 million ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union [7]. According to the German Federal Agency for Civic Education, citing the Federal Office of Administration, since 1992 more resettlers have come from Kazakhstan than from any other country, 935,000 people, and in the 2020 microcensus 673,000 people living in Germany reported that they had come from Kazakhstan as resettlers [8].

Migration into Kazakhstan changed in the same years. From 1991 to 2017, more than one million ethnic Kazakhs returned from abroad with the status of repatriates (oralman); the main countries they came from were China, Uzbekistan and Mongolia [1, p. 160]. Since the early 2000s Kazakhstan has also become a destination for labour migrants from Central Asia, which the same authors link to its rising standard of living [1, p. 164].

These studies describe flows of people in particular periods. This paper looks at both sides of Kazakhstan's migration in one series, compares Kazakhstan with the four other Central Asian countries, and checks how much the results depend on the edition of the data.

4. Data and methods

Data. The data are the United Nations International Migrant Stock 2024, table "Destination and origin" (Table 1, both sexes, numbers on 1 July of 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020 and 2024) [2], and the same table of the International Migrant Stock 2020 (1990-2020) [9]. Both files were downloaded from the website of the UN Population Division on 11 November 2026; the 2024 file is identical to a copy downloaded on 24 October 2026.

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What is counted. A migrant here is a person who lives in one country and was born in another. The UN uses the country of birth whenever it is available and the country of citizenship only when it is not [10]. For Kazakhstan, Russia, Germany and Türkiye, the 2024 data are marked as based on the foreign-born population plus refugees reported by UNHCR; for Ukraine and Belarus, on the foreign-born population only [2]. The data say nothing about ethnicity or citizenship: a person born in Kazakhstan who lives in Germany is counted whether or not he or she is ethnically German. The 1990 table lists today's countries, so people who moved between Soviet republics before 1991, for example from Russia to Kazakhstan in the 1960s, are counted as international migrants.

Measures. On the immigrant side: the number of people living in Kazakhstan by country of birth and the share of each country in all foreign-born residents. On the emigrant side: the number of people born in Kazakhstan by country of residence, the share of Russia, and the share living outside the 15 former Soviet republics. Not every country of residence reports every country of birth: in the 2024 edition, for example, Germany reports Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine but not the other Central Asian countries. To compare Kazakhstan with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Russia's share was therefore computed only over the countries of residence that report all five countries of birth (25 in the 2024 edition, 40 in the 2020 edition).

Edition check. The UN fully reassessed the 2024 estimates for 60 countries and areas, Kazakhstan, Russia, Germany, Türkiye and the Republic of Korea among them, and extrapolated the 2020 estimates for the rest [10]. All measures were therefore computed again on the 2020 edition for the years both editions cover (1990-2020). All numbers in this paper were computed by an analysis script from the two downloaded tables; the analysis is descriptive and does not test causes.

5. Results

5.1 Who lives in Kazakhstan

In the 2024 edition, 3,289,058 people living in Kazakhstan in 1990 had been born in another country, 19.2% of the population; in 2024 there were 2,089,797, or 10.1% [2, 10]. The number fell to 1,733,374 in 2000 and has grown slowly since. The composition changed much more than the total (Table 1, Figure 1). People born in Russia fell from 2,056,693 to 552,258, from 62.5% to 26.4% of all foreign-born residents. People born in Uzbekistan grew 4.5 times, from 164,039 to 744,161 (35.6%). The two numbers were almost equal in 2015 (616,254 born in Uzbekistan, 612,650 in Russia), and since then Uzbekistan has been the first country of birth of migrants in Kazakhstan.

The other Central Asian countries, China and Mongolia also grew: people born in Turkmenistan 3.9 times, in China 3.0 times, in Mongolia 1.7 times, in Tajikistan 1.3 times and in Kyrgyzstan 1.1 times. Together the four other Central Asian countries accounted for 9.2% of foreign-born residents in 1990 and 47.3% in 2024. People born in Ukraine and Belarus, the other large origins of 1990, fell by two thirds or more.

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Table 1. People living in Kazakhstan by country of birth, 2024 edition [2]

Country of birth	1990	2000	2010	2024	Share 2024, %
Uzbekistan	164,039	439,439	550,703	744,161	35.6
Russia	2,056,693	732,103	651,023	552,258	26.4
China	66,383	103,283	136,201	196,398	9.4
Turkmenistan	29,949	100,768	107,312	117,117	5.6
Kyrgyzstan	88,352	64,408	77,837	100,242	4.8
Mongolia	45,599	54,312	62,564	75,801	3.6
Ukraine	231,701	95,692	86,297	74,585	3.6
Tajikistan	21,385	23,886	22,204	27,922	1.3
All countries	3,289,058	1,733,374	1,856,870	2,089,797	100

The eight largest countries of birth in 2024. Shares are of all foreign-born residents, including people whose country of birth is not given ("Others": 329,223 in 1990, 13,148 in 2000, 62,719 in 2010, 104,104 in 2024). Without them, Russia's share in 1990 is 69.5%.

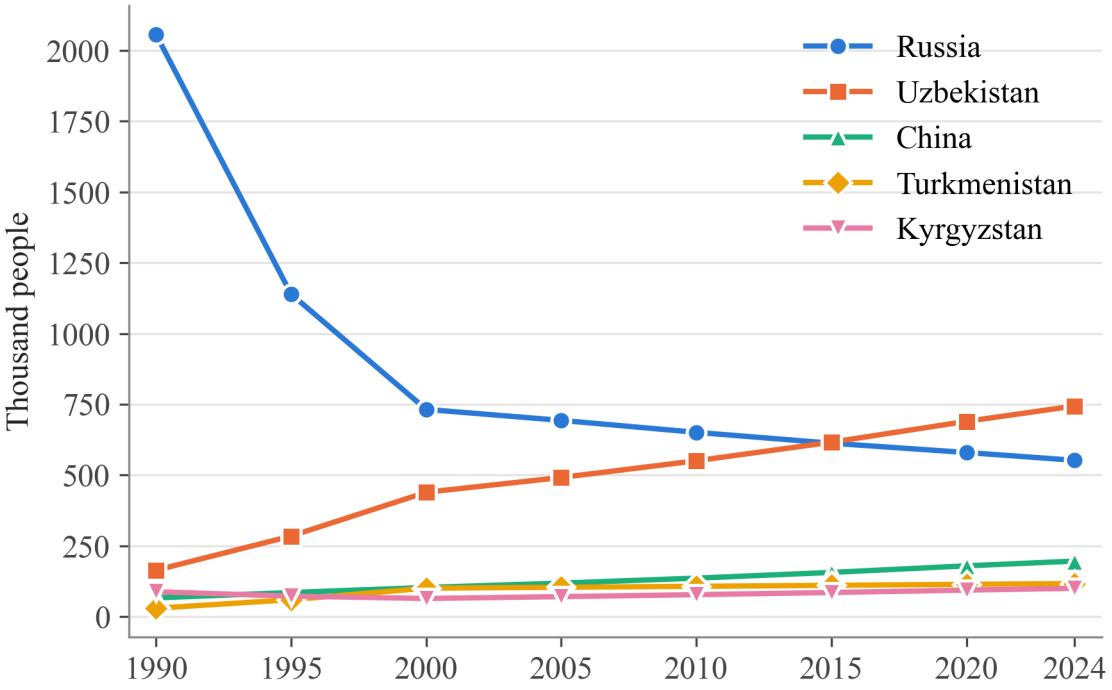


Figure 1. People living in Kazakhstan born in Russia, Uzbekistan, China, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, thousands, 2024 edition [2]

5.2 Where people born in Kazakhstan live

In the countries that report them, people born in Kazakhstan and living abroad numbered 3,178,221 in 1990, peaked at 3,753,542 in 2010 and were 2,796,572 in 2024 (Table 2, Figure 2). Russia remained the first country throughout, but the number living there fell from a peak of 2,571,681 in 2000 to 1,321,004 in 2024, and Russia's share fell from 73.9% to 47.2%. Germany was third in 1990, with 215,522, after Russia and Ukraine, and has been second in every year from 2000. In 2024 it had 896,268 people born in Kazakhstan, 32.0% of all counted abroad. In this series Germany grew most between 2000 and 2010, by 459,637 people, although German statistics show most resettlers arriving in the 1990s (see Section 6).

Outside the former Soviet Union, the next countries with data in 2024 were Türkiye (84,823, up from 4,996 in 1990), the Republic of Korea (30,061, from 275), Greece (29,238), Israel (17,166) and Canada (15,397). The share of people born in Kazakhstan counted outside the 15 former Soviet republics rose from 7.8% to 39.8%, and 80.6% of them live in Germany. Fifteen countries that reported people born in Kazakhstan in the 2020 edition give no figure in the 2024 edition, among them the United States (36,353 people in 2020), the United Kingdom and Switzerland; together they held 56,967 people in 2020, all outside the former Soviet Union; all 15 were among the countries

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reassessed for 2024 [10], so the 2024 shares outside it are somewhat too low and Germany's share of them somewhat too high. Among countries with data, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, which the author expected to be second, were 11th and 12th in 2024, with 13,013 and 12,333 people born in Kazakhstan, against 30,344 and 38,405 in 1990; their estimates were not reassessed for 2024 [10].

Table 2. People born in Kazakhstan by country of residence, 2024 edition [2]

Country of residence	1990	2000	2010	2024	Share 2024, %
Russia	2,349,697	2,571,681	2,480,017	1,321,004	47.2
Germany	215,522	348,925	808,562	896,268	32.0
Ukraine	330,947	254,065	221,504	228,982	8.2
Türkiye	4,996	4,996	14,790	84,823	3.0
Belarus	81,148	72,587	70,573	68,126	2.4
Republic of Korea	275	2,203	3,246	30,061	1.1
All reporting countries	3,178,221	3,407,178	3,753,542	2,796,572	100

The six largest countries of residence in 2024. The total covers only the countries that report people born in Kazakhstan in this edition; the United States and 14 other countries are missing.

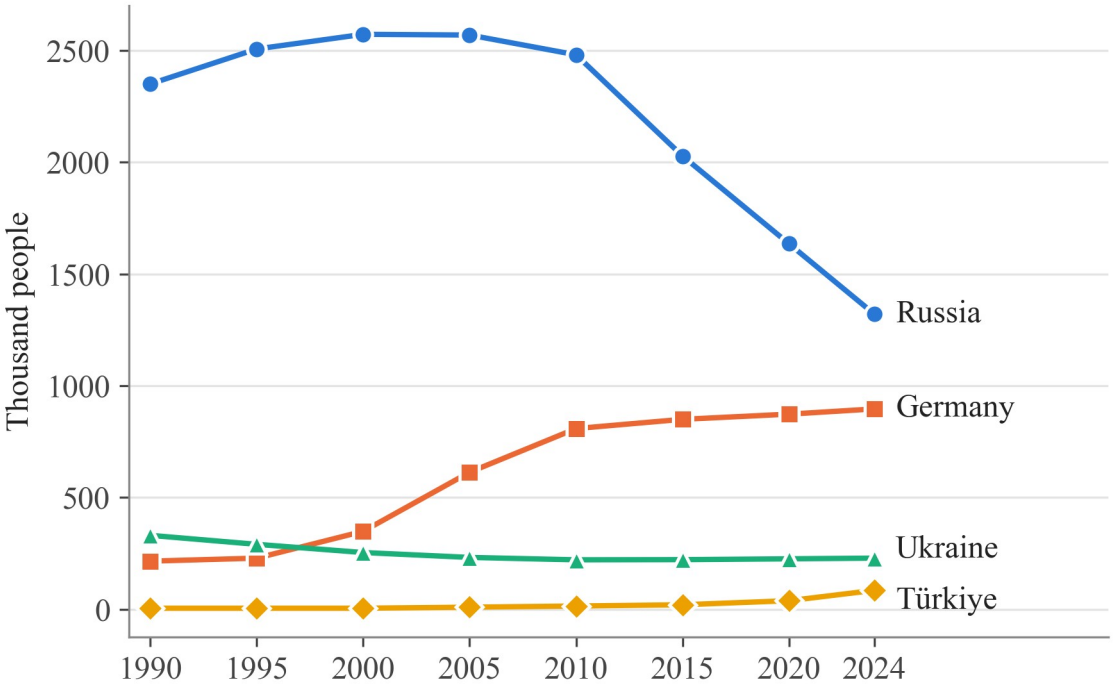


Figure 2. People born in Kazakhstan living in Russia, Germany, Ukraine and Türkiye, thousands, 2024 edition [2]

5.3 Comparison with the other Central Asian countries

Over all countries of residence with data, Russia's share among people born in Kazakhstan fell by 26.7 percentage points between 1990 and 2024. A fair comparison with the other Central Asian countries needs the same countries of residence for all five, and these do not include Germany in the 2024 edition (Table 3). On that basis, in the 2024 edition Russia's share fell by 8.4 points for people born in Kazakhstan, about as much as for Kyrgyzstan (8.5), less than for Uzbekistan (14.2) and Turkmenistan (28.6), and not at all for Tajikistan. In the 2020 edition, where Germany is among the common countries, it fell most for Kazakhstan (20.8 points in 1990-2020) and rose for Turkmenistan; over the same years, 1990-2020, the 2024 edition gives a fall of only 2.5 points for Kazakhstan (from 82.6% to 80.0%), so most of the difference comes from the choice of countries and the edition, not from the period. Whether Kazakhstan moved away from Russia faster than the other four Central Asian countries therefore cannot be answered from these data.

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Table 3. Russia's share among people born in each Central Asian country who live abroad, in the countries of residence that report all five, % [2, 9]

Country of birth	1990	2024	Change	1990	2020	Change
Kazakhstan	82.6	74.2	−8.4	82.5	61.7	−20.8
Uzbekistan	78.9	64.7	−14.2	78.1	72.2	−5.9
Kyrgyzstan	87.9	79.5	−8.5	88.2	78.9	−9.3
Tajikistan	88.8	88.8	0.0	88.6	84.8	−3.8
Turkmenistan	64.5	36.0	−28.6	65.3	78.6	+13.3

First three columns: 2024 edition, 1990-2024, 25 countries of residence (Germany not among them; they hold 1,781,073, or 63.7%, of the people born in Kazakhstan counted abroad in 2024). Last three: 2020 edition, 1990-2020, 40 countries (Germany among them). Changes in percentage points.

5.4 The edition check

The two editions agree on the emigrant side in direction but not in level. In both, Germany is the second country of residence of people born in Kazakhstan in every year from 2000, and Russia's share falls: from 79.1% in 1990 to 60.9% in 2020 in the 2020 edition, and from 73.9% to 54.0% over the same years in the 2024 edition. The size of the change differs: for 2020 the old edition counts 2,558,907 people born in Kazakhstan in Russia and 1,128,201 in Germany, the new one 1,635,008 and 872,932. So the fall in the number living in Russia after 2010 appears only in the 2024 edition. For 1990 the old edition counts only 10,199 people born in Kazakhstan in Germany, against 215,522 in the new one, so Germany's place in 1990 also depends on the edition.

On the immigrant side the two editions disagree (Figure 3). They differ already in 1990: 3,619,200 foreign-born residents in the old edition and 3,289,058 in the new one, with 5,606 against 88,352 born in Kyrgyzstan and 338 against 29,949 born in Turkmenistan. For 2020 the old edition counts 3,732,073, of whom 2,476,018 were born in Russia and 296,511 in Uzbekistan; the new one counts 1,990,268, of whom 579,845 were born in Russia and 689,957 in Uzbekistan. In the old edition the share of people born in Russia stays near two thirds in every year (68.4% in 1990, 66.3% in 2020), people born in Uzbekistan never outnumber them, and the four other Central Asian countries make up only 3.9% of foreign-born residents in 1990 and 8.6% in 2020. The shares of the largest origins in that edition are the same to one decimal place in 2010, 2015 and 2020 (Russia 66.3%, Ukraine 9.5%, Uzbekistan 7.9%), which suggests that after 2010 it kept the composition fixed and changed only the total. The UN documentation says that Kazakhstan's series was fully reassessed for 2024 but does not say which new source was used [10].

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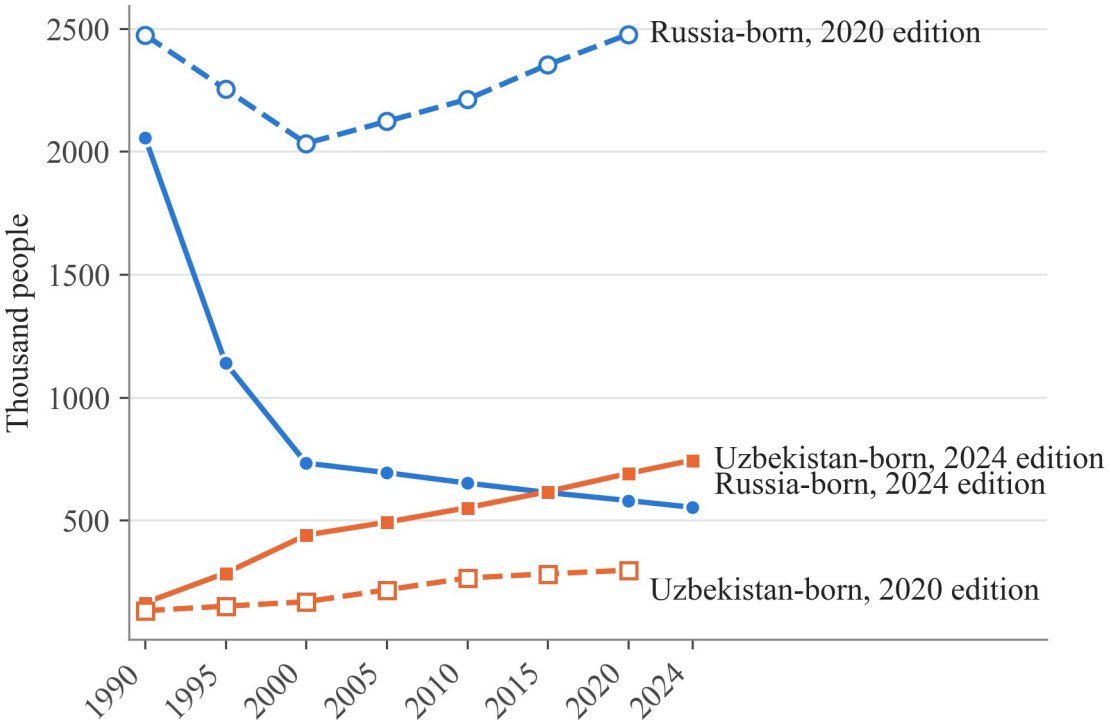


Figure 3. People living in Kazakhstan born in Russia and in Uzbekistan, thousands, in the 2024 edition (solid) and the 2020 edition (dashed) [2, 9]

6. Discussion

The first part of the author's hypothesis, that people move from Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan because of the higher standard of living, is consistent with the literature on labour migration into Kazakhstan since the early 2000s [1, p. 164], but these data cannot test it: they count people by country of birth and do not record why they moved, and estimates built on censuses may miss short-term labour migrants. They also include ethnic Kazakhs born in Uzbekistan, China and Mongolia who returned as repatriates [1, p. 160], and these countries are among those whose numbers grew. Her first answer, the political situation in Russia, does not fit the timing of the change: most of the fall in the number of people born in Russia came before 2000 (from 2,056,693 to 732,103).

The second part of her hypothesis is not supported: among countries with data, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are 11th and 12th, with 12,000-13,000 people born in Kazakhstan each, fewer than in 1990. Replying to the figures on 31 October, she wrote that her guesses had been right about Russia, South Korea and Kyrgyzstan/Uzbekistan, and that she thought "it is all connected with the level of development of the countries and with foreign policy". She linked the fall in the number of people born in Kazakhstan living in Russia to the situation in Russia, and the growth in the Republic of Korea to Korea's higher GDP and level of development (translated from Russian). The guess about Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan as the second country did not match, and she had not made a guess about Korea before. The number in Korea did grow (275 people in 1990, 4,109 in 2015, 30,061 in 2024), mostly between 2015 and 2020, but whether income differences explain it cannot be tested here; the fall in the number living in Russia appears only in the 2024 edition (Section 5.4).

Her first answer on Germany (2 November) was that Germany is second "because of the large difference in the figures over these years". After her mentor's hint, given three times between 2 and 7 November, that the Volga Germans had been resettled to Kazakhstan in 1941, she wrote (7 November 2026): "Because of certain circumstances the Germans were forcibly resettled to the territory of Kazakhstan, and later they decided to return to their ethnic homeland; that is why the number of people born here and now living there is so large" (translated from Russian). The data are consistent with this conclusion in size: the German figures on resettlers from Kazakhstan, 935,000 arrivals since 1992 and 673,000 resettlers living in Germany in 2020 [8], are of the same

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order as the UN's 872,932 people born in Kazakhstan living in Germany in 2020. The two counts are not the same thing: the German figures count resettlers and their family members by the country they came from, not by country of birth, and leave out people born in Kazakhstan who came in other ways. The timing differs: of the 2,029,176 resettlers who arrived in Germany in 1990-1999, 1,630,107 came from the former Soviet Union [8], while in the UN series the number born in Kazakhstan grew most in 2000-2010; this may reflect how the estimates were built rather than when people moved, and it was not examined further. The data cannot show what share of people born in Kazakhstan in Germany are ethnic Germans.

The answer to the first research question depends on the edition. In the 2024 edition Central Asia replaced Russia as the main origin of migrants in Kazakhstan; in the 2020 edition it did not. The 2024 edition is the more recent reassessment, which is why it is used for the main results here, but this paper cannot show which edition is closer to the truth. For the second question, Russia's falling share and Germany's second place hold in both editions; the size of the fall and the comparison with the other Central Asian countries do not.

Limitations. The migrant stock counts people by country of birth only, so 1990 includes people who moved within the Soviet Union, and it does not show ethnicity, citizenship or the reasons for moving. The numbers are estimates, partly interpolated between censuses and, for countries that were not reassessed, extrapolated from the 2020 edition; for Kazakhstan, the source of the 2024 reassessment is not named in the documentation and was not checked against Kazakhstan's 2021 census. Fifteen countries of residence, including the United States, give no figure for people born in Kazakhstan in the 2024 edition. The German resettler figures were taken from a summary by a federal agency, not from the original statistics.

7. Conclusion

In the latest UN data, the people who live in Kazakhstan but were born elsewhere have changed from a population mostly born in Russia (62.5% in 1990) to one in which almost half (47.3% in 2024) were born in the four other Central Asian countries, with Uzbekistan the first country of birth since 2015. People born in Kazakhstan who live abroad still live mostly in Russia, but less so (from 73.9% to 47.2% of those counted), and Germany, home to about 900,000 of them, is clearly second. The author explains Germany's place by the forced resettlement of Germans to Kazakhstan and their later return to their ethnic homeland, and the German statistics on resettlers are of the same size. Russia's falling share and Germany's second place from 2000 hold in the previous edition of the data; the size of the fall, the comparison with the other Central Asian countries and the shift in the origins of Kazakhstan's foreign-born residents do not, so these should be treated as findings of the 2024 reassessment until they can be checked against Kazakhstan's own census data, if the 2021 census publishes the population by country of birth.

Author contributions and use of AI tools

The author chose this topic on 24 October 2026, as "the most relevant" (translated from Russian), from five directions that her mentor offered on 23 October; his message already contained the main figures on the people born in Uzbekistan and in Russia for 1990 and 2024. She wrote the answers quoted in Section 2 (27 and 28 October 2026) before she saw the figures on where people born in Kazakhstan live, compared them with these figures on 31 October, and wrote the explanation quoted in Section 6 (7 November 2026) after her mentor's hint about 1941. Her mentor, Myrzabek Kurakbay, with a generative AI assistant (Claude, Anthropic), prepared the five directions and the questions put to her, set the three research questions and the method, chose the literature, downloaded the data, wrote the analysis code, made the figures and tables, and wrote the text, including its interpretation; he also translated her words from Russian with the same assistant. The author did not do the calculations. All numbers come from the analysis script or from the cited sources, and no number, quotation or reference was produced by a language model without being checked against the data or the source. The author read and approved the final text.

Data availability

All data are public [2, 9]. The analysis script (Python), the downloaded tables and the results files are available from the author's mentor on request.

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Conflicts of interest

The author's mentor is employed by an admissions consultancy that the author's family pays for her mentoring, and this paper was written as part of that mentoring. No other funding was received.

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