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# Adaptation of Migrants Returning to Their Historical Homeland

## Abstract

The relevance of this research is determined by the fact that unsuccessful adaptation can lead to social isolation, unemployment, and other negative consequences, affecting the stability of society. This study aims to analyse the key factors and mechanisms that ensure successful sociocultural, economic, and psychological reintegration in the context of repatriates' adaptation processes. The total number of respondents was 273 Kazakh repatriates. The sociocultural adaptation of Kazakh repatriates in Kazakhstan shows several key trends. Mastery of the language of the historical homeland (Kazakh) ranges from medium to high. Attitudes towards traditions are diverse, with more than a third of respondents highlighting the positive influence of traditions on social interaction. While half of the repatriates actively participate in cultural and social activities, challenges arise in balancing traditional values with modern societal norms. As regards economic adaptation, most repatriates successfully secure employment within a short period and develop stable labour relations. The study emphasises the need for targeted support programmes, such as language courses, cultural orientation activities, and psychological counselling, to address the multifaceted challenges of adaptation.

## Keywords

repatriates, language skills, traditions, cultural values, labour integration, mental health

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# 1. Introduction

The relevance of research on the adaptation of repatriates returning to their historical homeland is determined by two main factors. Firstly, many repatriates face adaptation difficulties upon their return. These are related to linguistic differences between them and the natives, as well as differences in culture, traditions, and education. If repatriates do not speak the language of the country they are returning to, they may find it difficult to communicate with locals, find a job, or access education. Returning to a country where repatriates have not lived for many years may also cause culture shock. In addition, repatriates returning to the historical homeland may face employment problems. Furthermore, returning to the historical homeland may trigger psychological problems, including feelings of loss, frustration, and insecurity. Thus, the return to one's home country can be a dramatic experience, marked by the discrepancy between expectations and the real state of affairs. These problems trigger difficulties in adaptation, which in turn lead to negative consequences for repatriates. The adaptation of repatriates is crucial for their successful integration into society. If they fail to adapt, they may experience social isolation, unemployment, crime, and other problems. This can create additional social challenges for the country, potentially exacerbating already existing internal pockets of instability.

In the scientific discourse of Kazakhstan over the past three years, several studies have addressed repatriation, with a focus on issues related to migrants returning to Kazakhstan. Some studies also examine international experience. For instance, Davletbayeva et al. (2023) studied international practices of state support for the return of compatriots to their homeland. The main idea emerging from the study is that the impact of ethnic repatriation on the economy depends on several factors: state policies towards repatriates; individual characteristics of repatriates; and the socioeconomic situation in the country.

In the context of repatriation to Kazakhstan specifically, terminological, sociocultural, and economic aspects were considered. For instance, Bulbul (2023) explored the dynamics and reasons for changes in terminology used in scientific research over the past thirty years. He noted that different terms are used in the literature to describe the return of ethnic Kazakhs to Kazakhstan. When the emphasis is on the legal status of the repatriate, the most appropriate term is *oralman*. If the focus is on ethnic origin, the most appropriate term is ethnic return migration. When the focus is on the diaspora's connection with the historical homeland, the preferred term is diasporic return or diasporic migration to the homeland.

Yergenbolatkyzy (2022) and Askarov et al. (2024) considered topical issues related to the economic and social integration and socialisation of repatriates upon their return to Kazakhstan. These researchers conclude that the existing mechanisms of adaptation and integration of repatriates in Kazakhstan are ineffective. As a result, repatriates face difficulties in adjusting to a new environment, securing employment, and learning the local language and culture. Babazhanova et al. (2023) noted that repatriates who returned to Kazakhstan from other countries had a positive impact on the development of Kazakh culture. They brought with them new cultural traditions, and samples of art and literature, which enriched and diversified Kazakh culture.

Adaptation issues were also addressed by Tajibayeva and Kabakova (2023), who analysed the peculiarities of adaptation of repatriated students in the learning process, comparing Kazakhstani and foreign experience. The authors confirm that the motivation of repatriated students in higher education has several features that should be considered for successful adaptation and integration into the educational environment. In the first and second years of study, communicative, social and prestige-related motives dominate. In the third and fourth years of study, educational, cognitive, and professional motives begin to dominate. Among repatriating students with a low level of learning motivation, motives of failure avoidance and communicative motives tend to prevail (Spytska 2023b; Kaikenov et al. 2024). A separate case study is the research of Mukhatayeva and Marcos (2022), who analysed Kazakhstan's deradicalisation programme for persons returning from armed conflict zones. They identified several systemic problems that hinder rehabilitation and integration efforts: the lack of specialists capable of implementing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for persons returning from conflict zones; unresolved social and financial problems of repatriates; and social stigma, which creates an anti-terrorist bias against returnees.

Kazakh researchers addressed various aspects of repatriation. However, the available research base did not provide a comprehensive analysis of the sociocultural, economic, and psychological aspects of adaptation among migrants returning to their historical homeland. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the main factors and mechanisms for successful sociocultural, economic, and psychological reintegration as part of adaptation processes among migrants returning to their historical homeland. The study sets the following tasks:

1. To investigate the influence of sociocultural aspects such as language, customs, and values on the process of sociocultural adaptation of returned migrants.

2. To study the factors affecting labour market participation and the economic success of returned migrants.
3. To investigate the impact of mental health on the success of psychological reintegration of migrants returning to their historical homeland.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The interdisciplinary approach to studying the adaptation of repatriates returning to their historical homeland involved the integration of knowledge and methodologies from different scientific fields such as sociology, economics, and psychology. This approach centred on a fuller and deeper understanding of the multifaceted aspects of adaptation and the interrelationships between the different spheres of repatriates' lives. In terms of sociocultural adaptation, the interdisciplinary approach examined the impact of language, customs, and values on the processes of sociocultural integration. In economic terms, factors influencing employment and economic success were considered, providing a deeper understanding of the socioeconomic aspects of adaptation. Regarding mental health and psychological reintegration, the interdisciplinary approach included analyses of general psychological state, stress and anxiety levels, and sleep quality.

Within the framework of general scientific theoretical methods, the system analysis method was used to review the phenomenon as a system consisting of interrelated elements. This allowed for a comprehensive coverage of the complexity of the adaptation process, emphasising not only individual aspects but also their interactions. This method was used to highlight the importance of an integrated view of the repatriation process for a thorough understanding of its dynamics. To present a holistic picture of repatriation in Kazakhstan, a synthesis method was employed, which involved integrating research information from each level of adaptation. The synthesis method was used to analyse the adaptation of repatriates in Kazakhstan by integrating data on sociocultural, economic, and psychological aspects, enabling the formation of a multidisciplinary understanding of the repatriation process. This approach facilitated an in-depth analysis of the interrelationships and mutual influences between different spheres of repatriates' lives, revealing a complex network of factors affecting their adaptation.

The empirical basis of the study is sociological research conducted through a questionnaire survey. The study involved a total of 273 respondents. The snowball method was used to form the sample. This

method starts with an initial respondent who meets the research criteria. This respondent is then invited to participate in the study and asked to refer acquaintances, friends, or relatives with similar experiences of return migration. This selection strategy allowed for a wider and more diverse set of respondents. To enhance data reliability, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of respondents prior to the main data collection phase. This ensured the clarity and relevance of the questions, as well as their alignment with the research objectives. Based on feedback from the pilot test, adjustments were made to improve question precision and reduce ambiguities. Reliability and validity of the survey data were assessed using statistical measures. The internal consistency of the survey was evaluated, and steps were taken to ensure that key sections met acceptable reliability standards. Additionally, face validity was established by consulting experts in sociology and psychology, who reviewed the questionnaire items for relevance and comprehensiveness. These measures strengthened confidence in the study's findings and enhanced the scientific rigor of the methodology.

As mentioned above, the interviewees were invited to distribute the questionnaire to their acquaintances, friends, or relatives with repatriation experience (Appendix A). The questionnaire was administered offline between January and April 2023. It was observed that the majority of respondents possessed higher education degrees and were employed. These characteristics might influence the interpretation of the study results and should be considered when analysing the data. The gender and age structure of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Distribution of gender and age of respondents (N = 273)**

Age categories	Male	Female
18–25	14	20
26–30	29	30
31–40	38	47
41–50	30	32
51–60	9	12
61+	4	8
Total	124	149

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The study data were analysed using IBM SPSS software. Univariate distributions were obtained to identify the frequency and main trends in the adaptation of migrants returning to their historical homeland, focus-

ing on economic, cultural, and psychological challenges. Additionally, bivariate analyses, such as cross-tabulations and chi-square tests, were conducted to explore relationships between demographic variables (e.g., age, gender) and adaptation outcomes. This approach provided a clearer understanding of the key factors influencing the adaptation process while maintaining analytical precision.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1 Sociocultural Adaptation of Repatriates**

In general, sociocultural adaptation includes assimilation and acceptance of new customs, traditions, language, and other aspects of culture, as well as changes in social behaviour and interaction with the surrounding society. Ager and Strang (2010) developed a conceptual model of sociocultural adaptation that includes the following main components: acquiring knowledge and understanding of the host society's culture, developing skills of communication and interaction with its members, adopting new social roles and identity, and forming social ties in the host society. Berry (1997) considered sociocultural adaptation as a process in which individuals adapt to a new culture while maintaining their cultural identity. The author distinguishes four models of sociocultural adaptation: integration – individuals retain their cultural identity and simultaneously integrate into the host society; assimilation – individuals fully accept the culture of the host society and lose their cultural identity; segregation – individuals remain isolated from the culture of the host society and retain their cultural identity; and marginalisation – individuals cannot integrate into the host society and cannot retain their cultural identity.

Ward et al. (2001) considered sociocultural adaptation as a process that includes the following stages: culture shock – individuals experience difficulties in adapting to the new culture; orientation – individuals begin to learn the new culture and try to adapt to it; stabilisation – individuals adapt to the new culture and begin to feel comfortable in it; individualisation – individuals integrate elements of the new culture into their own. The context of sociocultural adaptation can be applied to repatriates – people returning to their home country after a long stay abroad. Repatriation is also a form of migration, and the process of adaptation to one's native culture may involve several aspects similar to those described above. First and foremost, repatriates may need to update their knowledge of their home culture, considering the changes

that occurred during their absence. This may include learning new sociocultural features and refreshing their knowledge of traditions and changes in social life. Linguistic challenges are also an important aspect of repatriation.

The study conducted among Kazakh repatriates provides valuable data on language skills and their impact on daily life. Overall, the Kazakh-Russian language situation among repatriates appears to be quite diverse. Approximately 40.3% of the study participants rated their proficiency in Kazakh as average, suggesting some insecurity or insufficient practice in using their native language. It is important to note that only 14.3% of respondents are confident in their good command of the Kazakh language, which may reflect their level of linguistic self-identification. On the other hand, regarding the Russian language, more than half of the respondents (54.3%) reported fluent speaking, indicating that Russian is also widely used and may assist with adaptation in the new country of residence. It is important to note that approximately 23.4% of respondents rated their Russian language skills at an intermediate level, which may reflect the diversity of language competence levels. Interestingly, despite the differences in language skills, the majority of repatriates (68.2%) do not report facing difficulties due to language barriers. This may indicate that many of them have successfully adapted to the language environment of their new place of residence. Regarding the impact of language skills on daily and professional life, 46.2% of respondents believe that language skills have a neutral impact. Nevertheless, about one-third of the respondents (34.1%) noted a positive impact of language on everyday and work-related aspects, which may indicate the importance of language as a factor of successful social integration and professional adaptation.

The survey results show diversity concerning the observance of traditions and customs among Kazakh repatriates. Half of the survey participants (52.8%) express their devotion to traditions and customs when returning to their native country. This may indicate a strong desire to preserve their cultural and historical identity in the new environment – an important element of cultural heritage preservation. At the same time, about half of the respondents (48.7%) claim that traditions have a neutral influence on their relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. This may indicate that for some repatriates, traditions do not play a key role in their daily life and interactions. Notably, over a third of the respondents (37%) reported that traditions have a positive influence on social interaction. This may reflect the power of cultural practices in strengthening community and forming positive relationships in soci-

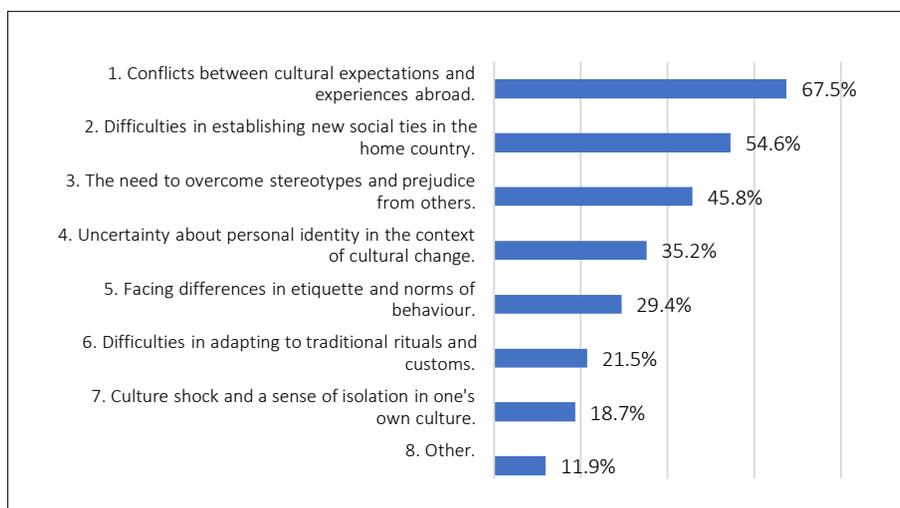
ety. The results of the survey on participation in the cultural and public life of their native country reveal diversity in the level of involvement among respondents. Almost two-fifths of survey participants (39.2%) actively participate in the cultural and public life of their home country, showing a high level of interest in activities, traditions, and events that shape the cultural environment. In contrast, approximately half of the respondents (48%) rarely or never participate in such events. This difference may be due to various factors such as geographical distance, time constraints, or changing personal interests.

The survey results on the importance of preserving the cultural values of the country of departure when returning to the historical homeland emphasise the notable diversity in opinions and attitudes among the respondents. It is assumed that such diversity may be caused by individual experience, the degree of adaptation, as well as the impact of historical and sociocultural factors. Approximately one-third of respondents (31.1%) have a neutral attitude towards the importance of preserving cultural values. This may indicate that for this group, return to the historical homeland is not necessarily accompanied by an active desire to preserve traditions. However, one-fifth of respondents (20.5%) generally consider it important to preserve the culture of the country where they resided before returning to their historical homeland. This may indicate a strong connection and respect for the cultural heritage of their previous place of residence. On the other hand, over a third of respondents (37.3%) do not consider this aspect important. This may be due to various factors, including changes in priorities, successful adaptation to the new environment and culture, or lack of emotional attachment to the previous place of residence.

The survey results regarding the level of public support in the process of adaptation in the home country show that respondents express a variety of opinions on this issue. Almost half of the survey participants (46.9%) generally assess the level of support in society as high. This result indicates that a significant proportion of respondents feel supported by society during the adaptation period, which may have a positive impact on their integration and comfort. About a quarter of the respondents (23.8%) indicated that community support was medium. This may indicate that for this group of respondents, the impact of community support was not overly pronounced, but it was not absent either. Only 16.1% of respondents indicated that community support was low. This proportion may represent those who felt less supported or faced difficulties in the adjustment process, which is important for understanding the challenges faced by some repatriates.

The analysis of the results of the survey on cultural and customary problems when returning to the home country reveals several key issues faced by repatriates (Chart 1). A significant proportion of respondents experience difficulties due to conflicts between cultural expectations and their experiences abroad. This may indicate difficulties in adapting their previous cultural experiences to the new conditions in their home country. It is also noted that many repatriates find it difficult to establish new social ties in their home country. This may be due to changes in the social environment as well as the redefinition of social roles after return. The need to overcome stereotypes and prejudices from others is also highlighted as an important aspect. This can hinder the process of social integration and interaction within society.

**Chart 1: Main cultural and customary problems of repatriates upon return to their home country**



Source: Compiled by the authors.

Thus, the study highlights the complex nature of the adaptation of Kazakh repatriates, including language, observance of traditions and customs, active participation in cultural and social life, as well as the importance of support from society. Successful adaptation is shaped by the interplay of these factors, highlighting the need for targeted programmes and support for repatriates in their integration process. The findings point to the heterogeneity of sociocultural adaptation among Kazakh repatriates, which emphasises the importance of an individualised approach in providing support and developing adaptation strategies. Particular attention should be devoted to linguistic aspects and the

preservation of cultural traditions. However, in addition to sociocultural factors of adaptation, economic factors also play an important role in the integration of repatriates.

### 3.2 Economic Adaptation of Repatriates

The involvement of repatriates in the economic life of their native country largely depends on the success of their labour integration. Labour integration is a complex process that includes not only the search for employment but also adaptation to new labour market conditions and learning new professional skills. Zhapakov et al. (2020) analysed the historical aspects of the formation of the Kazakh diaspora and irredenta abroad and provided information about the return of *oralmans* (Kazakh for repatriates) to their homeland. In addition, they examined the problems faced by *oralmans* upon their return home. The main problem was unemployment. This makes the labour integration of repatriates particularly relevant. However, at the same time, European experience shows that migration has a positive impact on labour markets and sustainable economic development. It can increase employment rates, decrease unemployment, raise labour productivity, reduce poverty, and improve education and living standards (Noja et al. 2018). These findings suggest that migration (or repatriation) can be an important factor in promoting sustainable economic development.

According to the results of the author's survey, more than one-third of the respondents, namely 36.6%, stated that the process of finding a job upon returning home took them from one to three months. This indicates that a significant proportion of repatriates find employment relatively quickly. However, about one-fifth of respondents (20.6%) reported that it took them three to six months to find a job, while less than one-fifth (13.2%) reported that their job search was longer than six months. These figures indicate that some repatriates find it difficult to integrate into the labour market of their home country after a long absence. Only 12.5% of respondents reported that they were able to find a job in less than a month. While some find employment quickly, most repatriates take longer to do so.

From the respondents' answers to the question about the job search methods they considered effective, online search platforms proved to be the most common. More than a third of the survey participants, 38.6%, said that accessing job vacancies through online platforms was their main tool. This indicates widespread use and popularity of online job search resources among repatriates. The second most effec-

tive method was personal connections and recommendations. About a quarter of respondents, 24.5%, reported that professional connections and recommendations from acquaintances were important to them. A small percentage (12.8%) claimed to have received a job offer from previous employers. Therefore, maintaining contacts with previous jobs can be useful and may even lead to re-employment. The results of the survey on the economic stability of repatriates show that almost half of the respondents (47.3%) had never changed jobs since returning, indicating that a significant proportion of repatriates achieved stability in their professional lives, preferring long-term employment relationships. About a quarter of respondents (23.4%) stated that they had changed jobs once or twice. Less than one-fifth (16.1%) said they had changed jobs three to five times. Only 7.7% of respondents said they had changed jobs more than five times. However, it is important to consider that the survey did not explicitly include a parameter related to the duration of respondents' stay in Kazakhstan prior to assessing their employment stability. Adaptation is a dynamic process that evolves over time, and the relationship between employment changes and the duration of stay could provide valuable insights into the stages of economic adjustment. Future studies should incorporate temporal parameters to better assess how employment patterns develop during the adaptation process.

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The second important component besides labour integration is economic well-being. Survey results regarding satisfaction with salary levels show that there is a significant polarisation of opinions on this issue. Approximately one-third of respondents (30%) expressed satisfaction with their salary level, which may indicate that for this group of repatriates, economic well-being is satisfactory. At the same time, another third of respondents (33.4%) are generally dissatisfied with their salaries. Almost a quarter (23.8%) have a neutral opinion thereon. Respondents were also asked to assess their overall economic success in the home country. Here again, opinions were divided. One-third of the respondents (33.3%) rated their economic success as average. This may indicate that there is a certain stability and satisfactory level of economic activity for this group of repatriates. Almost a quarter of respondents (23.8%) assessed their success as satisfactory, while 28.3% consider themselves economically unsuccessful. Thus, the results of the survey on the assessment of economic success emphasise that repatriates have different views on their situation and there are both positive and negative perceptions of their economic success in the home country.

Two additional questions addressed career prospects. A majority of respondents, 41.1%, expressed a neutral attitude towards the impact

of their international experience on their careers in their home country. This may indicate that for this group of repatriates, international experience does not have a clear positive or negative impact on their career development. However, 27.8% of the respondents confirmed that their international experience had a positive impact on their careers in the home country. This may indicate that for a certain part of repatriates, international experience is seen as valuable and relevant in their home labour market. Thus, the results indicate that there is no consensus among repatriates regarding the impact of international experience on their careers in their home country, and this is an issue that may elicit a variety of personal and professional evaluations. The results of the assessment of career prospects among respondents revealed a diversity of perceptions of future professional development. Almost a third of the survey participants (30.2%) rated their career prospects in the home country as high, which may indicate an optimistic view of the future and confidence in favourable conditions for professional development. An average rating of career prospects in the home country was given by 35.8% of respondents, while 25.8% of respondents assessed their career prospects as low.

In the context of career development, a multiple-choice question was posed to identify the main difficulties repatriates face in achieving success in a new workplace after return (Chart 2).

**Chart 2: The main problems of repatriates in the professional sphere upon return to their native country**



Source: Compiled by the authors.

The most frequently cited issue is the lack of recognition of international experience and qualifications. This result indicates the high importance of perceiving their international experience and qualifications in the context of their home country. It is possible that repatriates feel a lack of recognition of their international experience, which may affect their professional confidence. The second most common issue is the lack of support from management and limited career development opportunities. The third issue relates to unsatisfactory working conditions, which may relate to the physical working environment, poor organisation of the work process, and social aspects of working life.

Overall, the analysis shows that repatriates usually integrate into their home labour market successfully, finding a job within a short period. However, there is noticeable diversity in their perceptions of satisfaction with salary levels and career prospects. The effectiveness of job search depends on the use of online platforms and personal connections. It is also important to note that overcoming difficulties, such as the lack of recognition of international experience and working conditions, remains a challenge for repatriates. Thus, successful integration requires not only professional skills but also careful attention to aspects of social and professional adaptation in the home country. In addition to the sociocultural and economic adaptation, the psychological aspect is also important, as it represents the most profound dimension of the repatriates' adaptation process.

### 3.3 Psychological Adaptation of Repatriates

Psychological adaptation refers to an individual's adaptation to new conditions and requirements of the environment at the psychological level. This process involves changes in the emotional sphere, cognitive functions, as well as in the mental state of a person. Ukrainian researchers distinguish four types of psychological adaptation: normal adaptation – successful coping with typical problems without violating personality structure or social norms. It can be protective (using defence mechanisms) and unprotective (without them). Problems are solved by social-psychological mechanisms; mixed type – a combination of protective and unprotective mechanisms in a situation of partial frustration, where the individual may display defensive aggression; deviant adaptation – satisfaction of individual needs within a group, but with deviation from the expectations of other participants, which may manifest itself in non-conformism, innovation, or conflict with group norms (Spytska 2023a); and pathological adaptation – the use of pathological mechanisms or

behaviours, leading to the formation of pathological character complexes beyond normal behaviour (Overchuk & Shindirovskaya 2021). Acculturation theory suggests four psychological strategies available to immigrants: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation (Scottham & Dias 2010). According to K. J. Aroian (1990), psychological adaptation requires resolving a dual task: overcoming grief over losses and shocks related to leaving the country and mastering the resettlement conditions related to novelty and language.

While these frameworks provide valuable insights, understanding the specific coping strategies employed by repatriates is essential for addressing psychological adaptation. Repatriates manage stress and anxiety through methods such as seeking social support from family and community networks, engaging in cultural or religious practices, and participating in social or professional activities (Sakhiyeva et al. 2015; Duanaeva et al. 2023). Emotional challenges, including isolation and cultural dissonance, are often addressed through self-help techniques like journaling, mindfulness, or familiar hobbies. Some repatriates, however, may require targeted psychological interventions, such as counselling or support groups. Personalised recommendations are crucial for supporting repatriates in overcoming psychological barriers. Tailored programs focusing on emotional resilience training, mental health resources, and peer networks can ease the adaptation process (Ronzhes 2023; Lewinski 2016). These strategies should account for unique stressors, such as language barriers, generational expectations, and varying levels of cultural familiarity, to create more effective and responsive support systems.

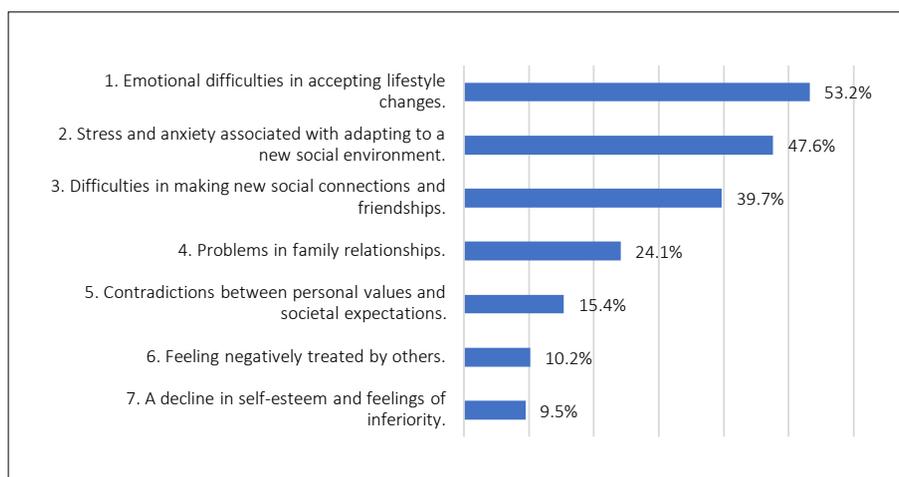
In the context of repatriates' psychological adaptation, several key aspects determine their overall psychological well-being. Upon return, the respondents present different variants of well-being. A significant portion of them, namely 29.6%, report a neutral state, which may indicate the absence of pronounced emotional reactions. At the same time, 30.9% experience positive emotions, which may indicate joy or satisfaction with the return, while 29.6% of respondents report negative emotions, which may indicate stress or even depression. One important factor is the level of stress and anxiety, which can have a significant impact on the adaptation process. The survey results indicate a diversity of emotional reactions among repatriates upon their return home. Almost half of the respondents, namely 49.8%, reported experiencing almost no emotional stress, which may indicate a relatively smooth and positive transition to the new environment. However, almost a third of the respondents (31.9%) reported frequent or constant emotional

stress. While the majority (53.6%) expressed feelings of anxiety, for some (22.8%), this emotion was absent, which may indicate an easier adaptation or availability of resources for emotional support. It is also noteworthy that for 13.3% of repatriates, the level of anxiety decreased, which may indicate a gradual adaptation and adjustment to the new environment.

Sleep problems are another important indicator (often latent) of the quality of mental health. Sleep disturbances can indicate emotional or adaptation difficulties. The majority of respondents (57.6%) reported occasional or infrequent sleep problems. This may be due to recurrent stressful situations, adaptive challenges, or other factors affecting emotional well-being. It is important to note that 20.8% of the study participants experience sleep problems regularly. Another important indicator of mental stability is the need for psychological assistance. This may also be related to stigmatisation and prejudice, which ultimately create barriers to seeking psychological help. Thus, this indicator can only partially clarify the problem of psychological adjustment of repatriates. Only 24.1% of participants express a clear need for such assistance, which may reflect both individual requests for support and willingness to seek professional help. At the same time, more than half of the respondents (56.9%) do not feel the need for psychological assistance.

The survey also revealed the main thematic constructs of psychological problems in the process of adaptation in the home country (Chart 3). This question was multivariate.

**Chart 3: The main problems of repatriates in the personal-psychological sphere**



Source: Compiled by the authors.

At the top of the list are emotional difficulties associated with accepting lifestyle changes. This may include a sense of loss of familiar environment, lifestyle, and cultural patterns. The process of accepting change can be emotionally challenging and takes time to adjust to the new reality. In second place are stress and anxiety related to adapting to a new social environment. Moving to another country or area is often accompanied by cultural differences, language barriers, and changes in social dynamics (Leleka & Moskalenko 2023; Pochwatko & Naydonova 2023). These factors can cause stress and anxiety in repatriates, complicating the integration process. The third place was occupied by difficulties in establishing new social ties and friendships. This reflects the social aspects of adaptation, where repatriates may struggle to find community, understand local customs, and make new friends. Social isolation or feelings of rejection can affect overall psychological well-being.

In general, the process of psychological adaptation of repatriates is a complex journey marked by emotional and social difficulties. The sense of loss of a familiar environment, stress, and anxiety are the most common emotional challenges faced by repatriates. Social aspects are also important aspects of adaptation, including difficulties in establishing new social ties and friendships. The low need for psychological help may indicate existing stigmas, which emphasises the importance of creating a supportive environment that encourages awareness and the use of professional help services. Access to emotional support, including social resources and culturally sensitive psychological support, is essential for the successful adaptation of repatriates.

## 4. Discussion

The study of sociocultural, economic, and psychological adaptation of repatriates in Kazakhstan provides a comprehensive overview of the situation, identifying both successful and problematic aspects. The study highlights successful aspects of adaptation, such as economic well-being and active participation in cultural life. However, the problems identified, such as conflicts in cultural expectations and difficulties in establishing social ties, emphasise the need for targeted support to help repatriates better adapt to their new environment.

The study by Malaysian scientists Aljofan and Anees (2022), conducted in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, examined the influence of work roles on the job adaptation of repatriated students. A work role is defined as a set of expectations associated with a particular job (Alishli et al. 2024). It includes factors such as duties, authority, responsibil-

ity, interaction with others, and expectations of the organisation. Their study found that repatriates' work roles are positively correlated with their job adjustment, except for role freedom, defined as the extent to which an individual has control over their job. The results of the study showed that repatriates who have more control over their jobs have better job adjustment. The study also showed that career ambition and career expectations have a positive effect on repatriates' workplace adjustment. The Malaysian researchers' study used an empirical methodology similar to that of the present study, with both utilising online surveys. However, key differences should also be noted. First of all, unlike the present study, which comprehensively examines three types of adaptation (sociocultural, economic, and psychological), the Malaysian study focuses on the economic level of adaptation. In addition, the Malaysian study focuses on finding correlative relationships between the indicators. The present study, on the other hand, did not use bivariate analysis, which may indicate a methodological limitation.

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Fischer and Schwarzkopf (2023) studied factors influencing the process of reintegration of repatriates returning from Asia, with special attention to social support and the role of the community. The main focus is on examining the influence of the community on the reintegration process of repatriates upon their return to Germany. The article identifies a variety of factors that influence this process and considers the impact of social support and the role of the community in successful return. The results of the study highlight the variables that influence the reintegration process of repatriates returning from Asia. These variables have both positive and negative effects on successful reintegration into society after a certain period spent abroad. Particular attention is given to identifying the role of social networks in the home country, as the lack of social support negatively affects the reintegration process. This causes repatriates to prefer to stay in known repatriate communities where they can get the necessary support. The German study relied on a qualitative methodology and focused more on social adaptation, while the present study addressed adaptation levels in greater depth.

A Korean study by Ha and He (2022) addressed the adjustment stress experienced by Third Culture Kids (TCKs) in early adulthood upon their return to Korea. The ABC-X family stress model was used to analyse the effects of various variables on the level of return adjustment stress. The main findings of the study emphasise that Korean TCKs experience moderate levels of return-related stress, along with significant changes in cultural identity. Among survival resources, high levels of self-efficacy and social support are highlighted, while adaptability and family cohe-

sion are rated at a medium level. Additionally, variables found to significantly influence Korean TCKs' stress upon return include self-efficacy, social support, and cultural identity change. Greater stress is observed for those with low levels of self-efficacy, weak social support, and significant changes in cultural identity. Like the present study, the Korean study used a quantitative methodology, namely a questionnaire survey. However, its scope was limited to a narrow age group, whereas the present study considered almost all age categories.

Geeraert et al. (2022) examined the gap between expectations and experiences among individuals returning home after studying abroad, focusing on its impact on well-being. Their findings reveal that negative mismatches – when expectations were not met—were associated with lower levels of well-being, while positive mismatches, where adaptation exceeded expectations, improved well-being. This demonstrates the significant role of expectation management in the adaptation process. Although both studies employed quantitative methodologies, the UK study primarily focused on a younger, predominantly female sample, whereas the present study provides a more balanced gender representation and broader age range, offering a more comprehensive perspective on adaptation dynamics.

The study of Chinese scientists Shen et al. (2022) emphasises the importance of considering the happiness of urban youth in the context of the Healthy China 2030 plan. Based on extensive social research on social practices in China, the paper applies hierarchical linear regression models and structural equation models to identify factors affecting the happiness level of urban youth returning to China. The findings indicate that the happiness of urban young repatriates is not only influenced by their sociodemographic characteristics such as age and education but to a large extent by their professional development, institutional factors (particularly the employment and entrepreneurship policy system), and social factors (physical environment and urban-rural relations), which are different from those affecting ordinary citizens. Additional research demonstrates that professional development indirectly affects the happiness levels of urban young repatriates through relationship adjustment, collective adjustment, and material adjustment. Institutional factors also have an indirect impact through relationship adaptation and material adaptation, while social factors have an indirect impact through relationship adaptation, collective adaptation, and material adaptation. Unlike the present study, the Chinese study focused on the level of happiness of repatriates. Nevertheless, this issue is closely related to the psychological aspect explored in the current study. Another important

difference is that the Chinese study focused on young people, while the present study considered all age groups.

Swiss scientists Heinzmann et al. (2023) conducted a comparative analysis of two mobile students forced to end their stay abroad early during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and to return home after seven and eleven weeks, respectively. The interview data were subjected to qualitative content analysis to reveal how the pandemic outbreak affected the lives and experiences of both students. The results of the analysis suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic was a stressful event for both students, impacting their social contacts and readaptation process in their home environment. However, the experiences of these students differed significantly, which may be due to differences in their prior social contacts, goals related to being abroad, and the adopted strategies to adapt to the new environment. The Swiss study is similar to the present study in that it also examined stress levels among repatriates. However, its methodology differed significantly, as it employed a qualitative approach based on just two interviewees. The author believes that this is an extremely small sample, even for qualitative research.

Overall, the analysed studies indicate that the adaptation of repatriates is a complex process that can be conditioned by various factors, both individual and external. The most important factors influencing the adaptation of repatriates include the alignment or misalignment between repatriates' expectations and experiences; the presence or absence of social support (from family, friends, colleagues); the difference between home and host cultures; and successful professional development.

To address these challenges and enhance the adaptation process, specific policy measures can be proposed, such as language courses tailored to the needs of repatriates with intermediate proficiency levels, which would significantly improve their ability to integrate into local communities and workplaces. Additionally, cultural orientation programmes could facilitate smoother social adaptation by familiarising repatriates with contemporary traditions and societal norms in Kazakhstan. Implementing career counselling services and initiatives to recognise international qualifications would help overcome professional barriers, such as limited career opportunities and the undervaluation of overseas experience. Lastly, accessible psychological support programmes, including counselling services and peer support groups, could alleviate the emotional challenges repatriates face, such as stress, anxiety, and social isolation. By adopting these targeted strategies, the

adaptation process can be significantly improved, ensuring a smoother reintegration of repatriates into their historical homeland.

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## 5. Conclusions

The analysis of the sociocultural adaptation of Kazakh repatriates revealed several trends. The level of proficiency in the Kazakh language varies from average to high. Attitude towards traditions and customs among the repatriates are diverse, with over a third of them emphasising the positive impact of traditions on social interaction. Regarding participation in cultural and social life of their native country, half of the repatriates reported being actively involved. Opinions on the importance of preserving the cultural values of the country upon return also vary. Analyses of problems experienced upon return revealed conflicts between cultural expectations and experiences, difficulties in establishing new social ties, and the need to overcome stereotypes and prejudices.

In terms of economic adaptation, labour integration of repatriates in Kazakhstan is generally successful. Most repatriates find employment within a relatively short period and have stable labour relations. The economic well-being of repatriates is also generally satisfactory. About half of the repatriates are satisfied with their salary level and a third consider themselves economically successful. However, there are certain problems that may hinder the successful labour integration of repatriates, such as insufficient recognition of repatriates' international experience and qualifications, insufficient support from management, lack of career opportunities, and dissatisfaction with working conditions.

The psychological adaptation of repatriates is a complex process that can be accompanied by various emotional and psychological difficulties. Stress and anxiety levels among repatriates are relatively high. Sleep problems are also common. The need for psychological help among repatriates is relatively low, which may be due to various factors including stigmatisation and prejudice. The main psychological problems faced by repatriates are emotional difficulties related to accepting lifestyle changes, stress and anxiety related to adapting to a new social environment, and difficulties in establishing new social ties and friendships.

Prospects for further research should focus on the study of state support for the adaptation of repatriates. In this context, both legal frameworks and social policies that support the integration of repatriates in Kazakhstan are important.

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## Appendix A

### Survey

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Dear respondent!

We invite you to take part in the survey regarding the adaptation of migrants returning to their historical homeland. We guarantee full confidentiality of your answers, which will be used only in conjunction with the answers of other respondents. Please choose one answer option, unless otherwise indicated.

#### **1. How fluent are you in Kazakh language?**

1. Fluent
2. Intermediate
3. Pre-intermediate
4. Beginner
5. Hardly speak Kazakh
6. Hard to answer

#### **2. How fluent are you in the Russian language?**

1. Fluent
2. Intermediate
3. Pre-intermediate
4. Beginner
5. Hardly speak Russian
6. Hard to answer

#### **3. Have you encountered difficulties due to language barrier?**

1. Yes
2. No
3. Hard to answer

#### **4. How do your language skills affect your daily communication and working life in your home country?**

1. Very positively
2. Positively
3. No effect
4. Negatively
5. Very negatively
6. Hard to answer

**5. To what extent do you adhere to the traditions and customs of your culture when you return to your home country?**

1. To as much as possible
2. To some extent
3. Barely adhere
4. Don't adhere
5. Hard to answer

**6. How do customs affect your relationships with family, friends or colleagues?**

1. Positively
2. No effect
3. Negatively
4. Hard to answer

**7. How actively do you participate in the cultural and social life of your home country after your return?**

1. Full active participation
2. Participation in some events
3. Rarely participate in events
4. No participation
5. Hard to answer

**8. How important is it to you to preserve the cultural values of the country you lived in upon returning to your historical homeland?**

1. Highly important
2. Important
3. No difference to me
4. Somewhat unimportant
5. Not important
6. Hard to answer

**9. How do you assess the level of support from the community in the process of your adaptation in your home country?**

1. Very high
2. High
3. Average
4. Low
5. Very low
6. Hard to answer

**10. What specific cultural and customary challenges do you experience upon return? (no more than three options can be selected)**

1. Difficulties in adapting to traditional rituals and customs
2. Conflicts between cultural expectations and experiences abroad
3. Difficulties in establishing new social ties in the home country
4. Facing differences in etiquette and norms of behaviour
5. The need to overcome stereotypes and prejudice from others
6. Culture shock and a sense of isolation in one's own culture
7. Uncertainty about personal identity in the context of cultural change
8. Other (state your answer): \_\_\_\_\_

**11. How long did it take you to find a job upon return?**

1. Less than a month
2. 1–3 months
3. 3–6 months
4. More than 6 months
5. Hard to answer

**12. What job search methods have been most effective for you?**

1. Search platforms on the Internet
2. Personal connections and references
3. Invitations from former employers
4. Participation in professional events
5. Other (state your answer): \_\_\_\_\_

**13. How many times have you changed jobs since your return?**

1. Not a single time
2. 1–2 times
3. 3–5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Hard to answer

**14. Do you feel satisfied with your salary level?**

1. More than satisfied
2. Mostly satisfied
3. Yes
4. Not really
5. Very dissatisfied
6. Hard to answer

**15. How would you rate your current economic success in your home country?**

1. Highly successful
2. Successful
3. Average success
4. Unsatisfactory
5. Not successful
6. Hard to answer

**16. How does international experience affect your career and job opportunities in your home country?**

1. Positively.
2. No difference to me.
3. Negatively.
4. Hard to answer.

**17. How do you assess your career prospects in your home country?**

1. Very high
2. High
3. Average
4. Low
5. Very low
6. Hard to answer

**18. Which of the factors listed above do you think represent the main challenges to succeeding in a new job upon return? (no more than three options can be selected)**

1. Language barriers and communication difficulties
2. Insufficient recognition of international experience and qualifications
3. Conflicts with co-workers and cultural differences in the work environment
4. Limited access to professional networks and connections
5. Unsatisfactory working conditions
6. Lack of support from management and lack of career development
7. Difficulties in balancing personal and professional life
8. Incompatibility of corporate culture with personal values
9. Other (state your answer): \_\_\_\_\_

**19. How would you rate your overall psychological state upon return?**

1. Very positive
2. Positive

3. Indifferent
4. Negative
5. Very negative
6. Hard to answer

**20. How often do you experience emotional stress related to the process of adaptation in your historical homeland?**

1. Rarely
2. Sometimes
3. Often
4. Very often
5. Constantly
6. Hard to answer

**21. Compared to your time abroad, have you noticed an increase in your anxiety levels since returning?**

1. Yes, significantly
2. Yes, although insignificantly
3. No changes
4. No, anxiety level has decreased
5. Hard to answer

**22. How often do you experience sleep problems upon return?**

1. Rarely
2. Sometimes
3. Often
4. Almost constantly
5. Constantly
6. Hard to answer

**23. Are you seeking professional help or support to maintain your mental health?**

1. Yes, regularl
2. Yes, sometimes
3. No
4. Hard to answer

**24. Which of the following psychological problems do you consider to be the main ones in the process of adaptation in your home country? (no more than three options can be selected)**

1. Difficulties in making new social connections and friendships

2. Emotional difficulties in accepting lifestyle changes
3. Stress and anxiety associated with adapting to a new social environment
4. Problems in family relationships
5. A decline in self-esteem and feelings of inferiority
6. Contradictions between personal values and societal expectation
7. Feeling negatively treated by others
8. Other (state your answer): \_\_\_\_\_

**25. Please indicate your gender:**

1. Male
2. Female

**26. Please indicate your age: \_\_\_\_\_**

**27. Please indicate your education:**

1. Primary education (less than 9 grades).
2. Basic secondary education (full 9 grades).
3. Complete secondary (or vocational) education (11 grades).
4. Undergraduate higher education (technical school, universities of I, II accreditation levels).
5. Incomplete higher education.
6. Full higher education (universities of III, IV accreditation levels).

## **Prilagajanje izseljencev povratnikov na življenje v domovini**

### **Izvelek**

Ob povratku v svojo izvorno domovino se izseljenci pogosto srečujejo z različnimi izzivi, tako ekonomskimi v smislu omejenih možnosti zaposlitve kot kulturnimi v prilagajanju lokalnim tradicijam in psihološkimi, kot sta stres in družbena izključenost. Raziskovalni pomen študije izhaja iz dejstva, da lahko neuspešna prilagoditev povzroči socialno izolacijo, brezposelnost in druge negativne posledice, kar vpliva na stabilnost celotne družbe. Namen članka je analizirati ključne dejavnike in mehanizme, ki zagotavljajo uspešno družbeno-kulturno, ekonomsko in psihološko reintegracijo povratnikov. Raziskava, v kateri je sodelovalo 273 kazahstanskih izseljencev, je na področju družbeno-kulturnega prilagajanja pokazala več ključnih dejavnikov. Raven znanja (kazahstanskega) jezika se giblje od srednje do visoke. Različen je tudi odnos povratnikov do tradicional-

nih navad in običajev, pri čemer več kot tretjina anketirancev poudarja pozitiven vpliv tradicije na družbene interakcije. Polovica povratnikov se aktivno udeležuje kulturnih in družbenih dejavnosti, vendar usklajevanje tradicionalnih vrednot s sodobnimi družbenimi normami predstavlja svojevrsten izziv. Kar zadeva ekonomsko prilagajanje, si večina povratnikov relativno hitro zagotovi zaposlitev in razvije stabilna delovna razmerja, ostajajo pa ovire, kot so nepriznavanje mednarodnih delovnih izkušenj in omejene možnosti za poklicno napredovanje. Na psihološkem področju uspešno prilagoditev zavirajo čustvene stiske, povezane s spremembami življenjskega sloga, občutek osamljenosti in težave pri vzpostavljanju trdnih družbenih vezi. Članek poudarja potrebo po ciljno usmerjenih podpornih programih, kot so jezikovni tečaji, kulturna orientacija in psihološko svetovanje, ki bi zajeli različne izzive prilagajanja izseljencev povratnikov na novo družbo.

### **Ključne besede**

izseljenci povratniki, znanje jezika, tradicije, kulturne vrednote, delovna integracija, duševno zdravje