

**“Homeland integration: Assessing the experiences of repatriates (Qandas) in Kazakhstan and state policies associated with them”**

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## **ACRONYMS**

ISMU	Cariplo Foundation for Initiatives and Studies on Multi-ethnicity
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MISD	Ministry of Information and Social Development
MNE	Ministry of National Economy
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

## **ABSTRACT**

Kazakhstan began repatriation policies after independence as part of its national identity and demographic policy. The repatriation process consists of migration and integration. Integration, in turn, means sustainable mutual interaction between returnees and their homeland society. However, according to the Migration Policy Concept of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2017-2021 and previous studies, returnees experience certain difficulties in integrating into the local society. Although there have been no studies measuring the level of integration of returnees on the part of the state and in academia. Moreover, there has been no monitoring evaluation of the effectiveness of integration policies after the completion of Concept 2017-2021, where many measures were related to the integration of returnees. Thus, this study attempted to measure the integration index of returnees compared to the local population. It also attempted to identify existing barriers faced by returnees in the process of smooth integration and to assess the result of the Concept. The study showed that the integration index of returnees was significantly lower than that of locals. Gaps in repatriation policy institutions and lack of coordination between them, which reinforce these barriers and the primordial approach of integration policy were also identified.

## INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan has been facing integration issues of repatriates since its independence. In 2020 the term “oralman” was legally replaced by the term “qandas” by president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev (Tengrinews, 2020). The first idea of renaming occurred when the current president tweeted the meaning of the word “oralman” which is translated as “returnee,” and “qandas” with the translation “people of the same blood” (Umirbekov, 2019).

Oralmans has been returning to Kazakhstan since 1992. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of Kazakhstan (2021) 1,860,000 ethnic Kazakhs have moved to their historical homeland. Generally, home countries manage the process of ethnic return migration policy in two phases: immigration and integration (Bonnenfant, 2012). This study focuses on the second phase which is *integration policy*. The literature defines integration of returnees as sustained reciprocal interaction between newcomers and their host societies (Kuscu, 2009). Moreover, the policy of integration, measures taken by the state to ensure the process of returnees (qandas) entry into society as an equal representative (citizens) (Kryakvina, 2022). The main goal of integration policy is the merging process of repatriates into the home country’s cultural, social, and economic environment (Darieva 2005, Joppke 2005, Voutira 2006, Skrentyn et al. 2007). It includes welfare programs, language courses, vocational training or retraining, and settlement-housing programs (Bonnenfant, 2012). Kazakhstan has an integration framework defined in its Migration law, as well as other related decrees and regulations. This framework includes integration measures such as short-term assistance in the form of temporary adaptation centers and long-term assistance. This involves the provision of free medical services, the payment of allowances, the provision of employment assistance with vocational training, and assistance in learning Kazakh and Russian languages (UNDP 2006, p. 10, Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Population Migration 1997, amended in 2007).

The process of repatriation policy began with the First Law "On Immigration", adopted on June 26, 1992, by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan. According to this law, the republic set the maximum number (quota) of ethnic immigrants and the material and financial resources necessary for their reception, settlement, and adaptation (Sarbasov, 2020). Nevertheless, during the last decade the Kazakhstan government tends to focus on integrating obstacles of repatriates into the social, economic, and cultural environment (Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2017). The premise of the study is based on a statement by The Concept of the Migration Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2017-2021 which highlights the fact that

qandas are not still integrated into the local society. Therefore, the study focuses on the current integration issues and evaluation of recent Integration policies in Kazakhstan.

The purpose of this study is, first, to contribute to the field of repatriation studies. Second, it seeks to analyze the problems faced by the qandas in the integration process and to hear them personally. Third, it provides an assessment of current public policy toward the qandas. In particular, it provides insight into how renaming has affected local attitudes and, in general, how effective the reintegration component of the 2017-2021 migration program has been. And what more should have been added for further policies of qandas integration in Kazakhstan.

Our study will attempt to address the general question "What is the experience of integration and the main policy directions with regard to qandas in Kazakhstan?". Thus, to answer this general question, the study will attempt to answer the following specific research questions:

RQ1: To what extent are the qandas integrated into the local community (homeland)?

RQ2: What obstacles are the returnees facing now as citizens?

In order to answer the above questions, primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed using the necessary tools (Excel and Nvivo). The survey and interview based mixed methods research was conducted in two cities of regional significance Almaty and Astana. Thus, the results of this study provide an index of qandas integration, as well as an understanding of the experiences and problems of returnees (qandas) in integrating into society and state factors in the weak integration process, which remains a less studied area. Overall, this study consists of six chapters, an introduction, a literature review, a research methodology, a discussion of the results, a discussion of the key findings, and a conclusion with recommendations.

### **The terms and definitions**

The term "oralman" has been debatable in society since adopting. Officially "oralman" is defined as foreigners or stateless persons of Kazakh nationality who lived outside its borders at the time of the acquisition of the sovereignty of the Republic of Kazakhstan and arrived in Kazakhstan in places of permanent residence (Law on migration of the population, article 1, 1997). According to Orazgalyuly (2010) this term was used to describe persons who are returning to Kazakhstan under the Kazakh Return Migration Program within the established quotas. However he highlighted that many Kazakhs arrived without quotas and were also represented as oralmans in social discourse despite their inability to rely on the state.

Many scholars give a historical color for this term and define them as the ethnic Kazakhs who were descended from Kazakh families and fled the country in the early twentieth century (1930-1933) to avoid Soviet rulers' collectivisation and forced sedentarisation policies, as well as the large-scale hunger that resulted from both campaigns (Kuscu 2009, p. 36; Alff 2011, p. 2; Oka 2013, p. 4).

According to returnees, using the term *oralman* feels as humiliation and segregation (Azattyq, 2009). But officials agreed on the appropriateness of the adopted term (*oralman*), as they argue that the term is used to refer to repatriated Kazakhs to determine their legal status and eligibility for government assistance (Orazgalyuly, 2010). Nevertheless, such scholars as Bokayev and Oka mentioned the negative correlation of the term with local peoples' perception. Thus, the new law on migration was amended to replace the term “*oralman*” with “*qandas*” (meaning “blood relative”) in all legal documents (Kazpravda.kz, 2020). Many academic studies analyze the *qandas*'s and locals' attitudes toward the term “*oralman*”, but there is not enough knowledge about the new term “*qandas*”.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The repatriation of *qandas* has grown in importance in a scholarly debate over the last few decades. Most scholarly publications have concentrated on the socioeconomic position of repatriates (*qandas*) and local attitudes (positive/negative) toward them thus far.

Literature review will observe the existing studies regarding the repatriation policy of returnees. We have divided the literature review into five sub-parts. First, we examine the historical context of the repatriation process. Next, two sub-parts will review socio-cultural and economical-political obstacles of integration. Then the local community acceptance will be discussed. Lastly, the state's Repatriation Policy will be examined as a part National Identity policy.

### **1.1. Historical background of the repatriation process**

There were three periods in history that led to forming Kazakh diasporas in other host countries. Mendikulova (2004), local scholar with a focus on Kazakh diaspora claims the Kazakh diaspora in foreign countries arose from the movement of borders across people and the movement of people across borders. In other words, she explains that not all *qandas* actually migrated to other countries but the borders migrated over them (Mendikulova, 2004). The first period occurred in the late 1800s, when Russian colonial expansion drove Kazakh nomads from their natural pasture areas, forcing many of them to relocate to Xinxiang. In the second period (1920th) many Kazakhs ended up residing outside of the political entity known as "Kazakhstan" due to the determination of

borders during the formation of sovereign republics (Kuscu, 2009). Cummings et al. (1998) claims that the time of collectivization and forced sedentarization in the 1930s was the last stage in the establishment of the Kazakh diaspora. Famine killed about 40% of the Kazakh population at this time, and a third of the surviving population fled to other bordering countries. Today, China has the greatest Kazakh diaspora, while Uzbekistan and Russia have the second and third largest ethnic Kazakh communities (Cummings et al., 1998).

At the time of independence (1991), there were around 5 million ethnic Kazakhs living outside of Kazakhstan, spread over more than 40 countries (Bokayev, 2013). According to Brubaker (1994), former USSR union republics, including Kazakhstan, had a feeling of ethno-national right and ownership of national territory to varying degrees following the breakup of the USSR. Thus, Kazakhstan had two parallel tasks: the building of the nation and the state.

There are different discourses regarding the reasons for deep focus on the repatriation policy of Kazakhstan. According to Sancak and Fink (2005), increased immigration by ethnic Kazakhs to their homeland is seen as one of the ways to encourage direct population growth and, on the other hand, to increase the proportion of Kazakhs in the overall population.

Thus, Kazakhstan's repatriation policy can be divided into three periods. The first stage, from 1991 to 2000. It is the period of formation of the basis of the legal framework and institution. Repatriation policy was used as a tool for resolving the demographic situation and negative net migration rate in Kazakhstan (Sarbasov, 2020). In the next second stage, 2001-2011 there was maximum flow of qandas and a positive balance of migration. Repatriation policy as a solution to the problems of internal migration (outflow of the population from rural settlements) (Nurseitova, 2021). In the third stage (2012-2021) the Concept of migration policy 2017-2021 was adopted that highlighted the fact that returnees are not still integrated and should be focused on this aspect of policy. Although the country's leadership has done much to encourage the return of the qandas to their historic homeland, their sociocultural, economic, and political integration upon return remains a serious problem and a challenge that could become an obstacle to the full exercise of civil rights.

## **1.2. Socio-Cultural obstacles**

According to recent researchers the immigration policy that motivated the return of Kazakh ethnicities since the 1990s formed new socio-cultural groups in Kazakhstan (Baudiyarova et al., 2019). In other words, returnees have created new groups inside the society which complicated the integration and consolidation process. However, one of the main motives of repatriates (oralmans)

to immigrate to Kazakhstan is the desire to preserve the Kazakh identity, language, culture, and traditions (UNDP, 2006). Still, according to the results of research by Naumova (2017), the qandas are perceived as “outsiders” by local Kazakh citizens. The main argument for this situation that Naumova (2017) highlights is the inability to explain certain elements from the life of qandas with those models that are fixed in local traditional knowledge. Therefore, local citizens consider their traditions as alien (Naumova, 2017). Eventually, traditions and beliefs might be considered as obstacles to integration that lead to forming a new alien community inside the local community.

Additionally, existing linguistic differences can also become a serious obstacle on the path of qandas to integration into Kazakhstani society. One of the main problems faced by many ethnic Kazakhs, especially those coming from Western Mongolia, Western China, Northern Iran, and Afghanistan, was the language barrier: they suddenly found themselves in a Russified environment without having any Russian language skills (Valieva et al., 2019). According to survey results by Illimkhanova et al. (2014) the vast majority of repatriates in Almaty experience language problems. In response to a question about language proficiency, 100% of the survey participants reported that they could only speak Kazakh (Illimkhanova et al. 2014). Language adaptation is important in the socialization process, which is directly correlated to successful communication. According to scholars, it is a long and difficult process to acquire sociolinguistic abilities in another language, and involves understanding the social values that underlie the use of language in society (Rean et al., 2006). Thus, linguistic problems might be considered as one of the main barriers to integration. Therefore, by order of the Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of the RK (2013), the activities of centers for adaptation and integration of qandas were approved, where Kazakh and Russian languages were to be taught. However, there is a lack of research on the effects of these courses on qandas.

### **1.3. Economical-Political obstacles**

Economic-Political integration of returnees or the level of employment is a key indicator of their overall integration into the new community. Diener (2005) claims that unemployment issues of qandas occurred during the economic crisis in 1993 where the employment of returnees shifted to the second place. The migration of 500,000 people has put an economic strain on the government: however, a certain portion of qandas having been provided with the promised benefits (social pensions, child support, discounted healthcare, and discounted education) (Diener, 2005). Furthermore, there were inconsistently changing legal structures, local and nation-wide corruption, and the economic transition of Kazakhstan that led to the significant decrease in the support for

migrants. By the mid-1990s, the government had slowly recovered from the crisis; however, another state priority had been raised – shifting the capital from Almaty to Astana in 1996. At the same time, the unemployment rate among recently migrated qandas reached 70%, which was mostly associated with the reluctance of employers to employ qandas due to certain stereotypes, social stigma, and cultural differences between the local communities and qandas. Coupled with the lack of citizenship for many of those qandas, they ended up being unqualified for the benefits initially offered to them, and thus, became unemployed.

Cerny (2010) claims that a certain portion of returnees were not provided with everything they were initially entitled to (i.e. work and housing) under their labor contracts. The labor contract supposedly provided migrants with housing; preliminary funding for settling down, the ability to take loans for building houses, healthcare, job training, and provision of cattle (1 cow, 5-10 sheep) (Cerny, 2010). Nevertheless, he revealed that those migrants without any labor contract could not get the proper help from the local officials (Cerny, 2010). Family members who were not within the working-age also received support from the government in the form of pensions, stipends, discounted healthcare, and subsidies for child support and education (Cerny, 2010). However, the large influx of fellow ethnic Kazakhs put a strain on the government and its ability to comply with their promises to qandas. This was coupled with another problem the government was facing at the time – economic instability.

Thus, the concept of migration policy 2017-2021 to stimulate repatriation was tied to the State Program for the Development of Productive Employment and Mass Entrepreneurship for 2017-2021 "Enbek". According to the program, these qandas are provided with financial support in the form of subsidies and services for employment and professional development (Resolution of the Government of the RK, 2018). The term of the program will come to an end in 2021, which means the effectiveness of the governmental measures of integration can be evaluated and analyzed.

Lack of access to adequate housing is another crucial barrier for qandas in the integration process. Kuscu (2009) claims that qandas were faced with housing problems: since they did not have citizenship in Kazakhstan, they could not claim to participate in the privatization process, could not own property, or take loans to own property. Many returnees were housed into abandoned homes because of the repatriation of original homeowners (the Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, etc.), which also put a strain on them because those houses often required finances for restoration for proper living conditions (Kuscu, 2009). Likewise, she argues that settling in the abandoned houses

has brought qandas to regions and neighborhoods that are still predominantly inhabited by Russian speakers (Kuscu, 2009).

Moreover, according to Bokayev (2013), the problem of insufficient housing is especially obvious in areas with the largest population of qandas: Almaty city (about 80%), Astana city (about 60%), and Almaty oblast (about 45%). Kazakhstan's Karaganda and Kostanay areas attract a large number of qandas which are not included by the quota system, as well as secondary migrants.

Cerny (2010) also pointed out that apart from having problems with employment due to the lack of citizenship, qandas were also restricted in terms of election processes in the country: they were ineligible to vote or be elected to positions in civil service locally. Acquiring citizenship could only be possible when oralman could give up their previous citizenship officially, which was hard to actualize for the migrants already residing in Kazakhstan due to the lack of communication with the second party involved – the previous country's government.

#### **1.4. Local Community Acceptance**

According to the UNDP (2006), perception of qandas by the population of Kazakhstan is extremely controversial. On the one hand, local people respect qandas who want to return to their historical roots. On another hand, when it comes to distributing social benefits and targeted benefits the degree of mistrust is tremendous (UNDP, 2006). In the research done by "Center for Social Technologies" (CST) (UNDP, 2006), the majority of respondents with higher income were quite tolerant of qandas, while other people with less income expressed clearly the opposite opinion.

Oddly, repatriates, such as the repatriates from Mongolia, came to realize they were in a position of a diaspora upon their return to their ethnic homeland (Diener, 2005). Tsuda's (2003) views suggest this opinion, stating that repatriates acquire their own cultural characteristics after living and integrating with the society of their host countries, which makes them a minority in their ethnic homelands. This, coupled with the views of returnees about the purity of their Kazakh culture and traditions, makes it more difficult for the repatriates to integrate into the local community of Kazakhstan (Diener, 2005). The local community, on the other hand, meets these views with disdain, as the host Kazakhstani citizens view their national character as a result of the historic events that they have lived through (Diener, 2005). The findings of Bokayev's (2013) study reveal that a specific part of the public has a negative attitude about qandas based on vigilance for "strange" individuals, possible danger and fear of losing jobs, and reduced chances of acquiring homes in a tight real estate market.

Regarding the settlement of the repatriates, because of the distant locations qandas were assigned to by the state programs, and the benefits they were entitled to in those villages, local villagers also had negative feedback in this regard: rural Kazakhs were frustrated by the fact that the government supports those migrants, and not those who've lived in those regions there their whole lives (Diener, 2005). On the other hand, urban Kazakhstani people view the repatriates in a negative, "backward" way, due to the negative associations urban citizens have about the rural areas and the fact that most repatriates are particularly situated in rural areas (Diener, 2005). Those negative views were empowered even further by the events in Zhanaozen in 2011, after the violent clash between workers and the police in an oil field. In this incident, the repatriates from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were blamed for the provocation of the clash, thus being eliminated from the support system (Kaiser & Beimenbetov, 2020).

### **1.5. Repatriation policy within the framework of Ethnic National Identity Policy**

Kazakhstan as a New State after the Soviet system had to bring its own National Identity Policy. According to Burkhanov and Sharipova (2015) the state had to strengthen its legitimacy, both by satisfying a titular nation hungry for more radical change and by assuaging the fears of the large Slavic and other minority diasporas that had long resided in the republic. The authors (2015) argue that national identity politics in Kazakhstan is *ambiguous in nature*, with the government attempting to create a national identity that simultaneously includes and excludes different ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. This ambiguity has led to a lack of consensus among the population on what constitutes a citizen of Kazakhstan, with some people emphasizing ethnic identity while others emphasizing civic identity.

Kazakhstan's government officially expresses its commitment to a multi-ethnic strategy that attempts to create solidarity among the ethnic groups living in the country (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2015). On the other hand, the politics of national identity on an ethnic basis (primordial approach) also plays an important role in the growing process of Kazakhization. Some researchers explain this by the fact that the Nazarbayev regime generally preferred to prioritize policies aimed at strengthening the titular ethnic Kazakh identity (Burkhanov and Sharipova, 2015). One of the indicators is the creation immediately after the independence of an international non-governmental organization of national importance - the International Association of Kazakhs. Repatriation policy is also one of the main measures in ethnic national identity policy, which encourages the return of the titular nationality to its homeland.

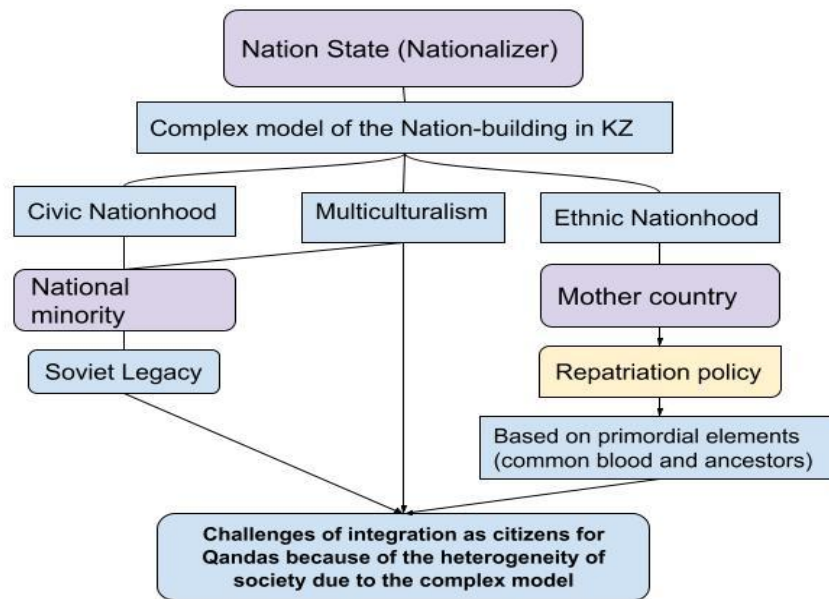
As a result, such complex (unclear) models of state national identity, reinforced in society, contradict each other and do not augur well for the nation's consolidation. As a consequence, such policies create a more heterogeneous society in which different groups hold different values (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2015). It may have led to low national integration within the Kazakhstani society, which created barriers to *integration for the qandas as well*. This heterogeneous environment leads to their social alienation from mainstream society and a tendency to live in their own isolated communities.

## 1.6. Theoretical Framework

In reviewing and exploring various approaches to the study of repatriation policy in Kazakhstan, we decided to go from the source of the problem to the problem itself. Rogers Brubaker's triadic model (Figure 1) which was adjusted to our context was chosen as the central framework in this study. Moreover, the arguments by Burkhanov and Sharipova (2015) mentioned before demonstrated that Kazakhstan's *complex (ambiguous) National Identity Policy* plays an important role here in our context as well.

Brubaker examines the emergence of *New States* after the collapse of the Soviet Union, emphasizing the importance of the role of state policy in shaping national and state identity. He argues that Soviet national identity politics has left its mark on contemporary national politics of New States (*Soviet Legacy*). The *institutionalized multinationalism* of which Brubaker wrote was a major feature and legacy of the Soviet system. He (1996) argued that the Soviet Union was a multinational state not only in terms of ethnic heterogeneity of population but, more importantly, institutionally (Brubaker, 1996). It established the modern concepts of citizenship and nationality as fundamental social categories.

Therefore he (1996) states that the nation must be viewed as an institutionalized form rather than a substance. It is produced by political fields of a certain type (Brubaker, 1996). Interethnic relations and nationalism, according to Brubaker, are characterized by a "*triadic model*": Nation-state (nationalizer) - National minority - Mother country (Homeland) (Figure 1) (Lupu, 2021). Thus, we adjusted this model to our context and applied it to our case of Kazakhstan (Figure 1). In this study, Kazakhstan is given the role of a Nationalizer with a titular ethnicity (Kazakhs), as well as a state where National minorities live, and a Mother country for ethnic Kazakhs abroad (*qandas*) (Figure 1). Kazakhstan, as a post-Soviet multiethnic state, had to appear in all three roles in its National Identity Politics.



**Figure 1. Theoretical framework**

Adjusted based on Brubaker’s triadic model of Nationalism (Lupu, 2021)

The Repatriation program is considered here as a part of this ethnic National Identity Policy (primordial). Primordialists take group identity for granted (Llobera, 1999). They state that attachments based on blood, race, and language are important features of our societies. In other words, the main requirements for participation in the Repatriation Program are based on common biological and linguistic elements. Whereas not only primordial elements but also historical puzzles played a significant role in the Nationalization of current Kazakhstan’s society. Brubaker argues that the ethnicity that is shared between the returnees and citizens of the titular nation is an “official ethnicity” rather than a sociologically “real” or “living” ethnicity (Kuscu, 2009). Thus, we can observe the repatriation policy in a primordial approach whereas Kazakhstan’s Nationhood (nation-building) strategies seems to be hybrid (ethnic, civic, multiculturalism) due to the past soviet experience.

In this regard, this study attempted to measure the current level of integration of locals and repatriates, as well as to assess repatriation policies and find out the main challenges that repatriates face in the integration process. Specifically, integration is examined at two stages (social acceptance (by locals) and state acceptance (citizenship)) using 4 variables (cultural (psychological), social, political, and economic). Social acceptance is the attitude by locals, and specifically the effect of renaming the term oralman to qandas to integration. Acceptance by the state in this study means gaining membership to fulfill civic rights and responsibilities in Kazakhstan upon return. That is,

not only integration as ethnic Kazakhs. But also as civilians. Since we argue that citizenship is not only about a sense of belonging, but also about living conditions.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### *Research design*

The research was conducted in Qualitatively driven mixed-method design (*QUAL-quan*). Chosen method has certain advantages which includes complementation, triangulation and elaboration. Interview results compliments survey data in terms of nuanced topics. Likewise, this method confirms findings and provides deeper analysis.

Thus, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can bring detailed coverage of the research problem including the extent (quantitative) and nature (qualitative) of a problem and how they are interrelated. The data was collected in a sequential explanatory design by using mixed research: quantitative (surveys), then qualitative (interviews).

Multidimensional Measure of Immigrant Integration by Harder et al. (2018) and the ISMU Foundation's four integration criteria (cultural integration, social integration, economic integration, and political integration) methodologies were used to develop the questionnaire and interview questions (Caselli, 2015).

### *Data collection*

Data collection methods include surveys and interviews. A total of 331 samples (168 qandas and 163 locals) were distributed through Qualtrics. In the end, the results of the survey with complete answers collected among the locals - 103, among qandas - 92. For qualitative results, 11 interviews were conducted (6 in Almaty, 5 in Astana) with qandas.

Snowball sampling was used as a technique of data collection (respondents recruit other participants for study). In addition, social networks were used to disseminate information about the interview. According to Otandastar Qory (2022, between 1991 and 2022 the following number of qandas returned from Uzbekistan (50%), China (32%), Turkmenistan (7%), Mongolia (5%), Russia (2%), and other countries. Returnees from Turkmenistan are mainly located in western part of Kazakhstan, specifically, Zhanaozen. Therefore, surveys and interviews were conducted mainly among qandas from three host countries: Uzbekistan, China, and Mongolia. The result of this division provided us information about the integration disposition based on which country they returned from. In addition, by year of repatriation, the sample is divided into 4 time ranges: 1990 - 2000, 2000 - 2010, 2010 - 2015, 2015 - 2022. It gave us information about the required period of

integration, and the effectiveness of recent integration policy by the government (The concept of migration 2017-2021, renaming “qandas”).

Qandas as a group are composed of different individuals representing different life experiences. This point requires *in-depth qualitative analysis*. That is why in-depth interviews were conducted with different representatives of qandas. Fourteen in-depth interviews in *Kazakh language (translated into english)* were conducted from cities such as Astana, Almaty, Pavlodar, Atyrau and Shymkent. But mostly the number of interviews in Almaty and Astana (6 and 5 interviews each). From Pavlodar, Atyrau and Shymkent one interview each. Therefore, it was decided to consider and analyze only Astana and Almaty. In addition, 3 interviews were conducted with experts (qandas at the same time) working in the field of repatriation policy or dealing with this topic. Among them was one interview with an employee of the Otandastar Qory Foundation (Expert 1). The second interview was with a representative of a branch of the World Association of Kazakhs (Expert 2). And the last one was an interview with a representative of IzProject (Expert 3), a social project organized to empower young returnees to integrate smoothly into society.

#### *Data analysis*

The survey was conducted and analyzed using comparative design. After obtaining the survey results, two indices (locals and qandas) were compared to answer our first research question: To what extent are qandas integrated into the local community? Then interviews were conducted to identify the cause and specific barriers that prevent them from integrating into society. Thus, we answered our next research question: What are the obstacles returnees facing now (after renaming)?

Index of integration was calculated from means of the results of the questionnaire (cultural, social, political, and economic challenges/variables). Those variables are divided into several indicators (Table 1). For instance, an indicator of knowledge of local languages (Kazakh and Russian) will consist of questions related to understanding, speaking, reading, writing, language of the media and so on. Each sub-index has between at least three to five indicators (Table 1). These indicators are then broken down into four sub-indices (cultural, social, political integration, and economic integration). Each sub-indices' value was standardized on a scale (0 to 1) using the formula:  $(x - \text{minimum value}) / (\text{maximum value} - \text{minimum value})$  using excel. 4 sub-indexes were aggregated into the total integration index in the end.

For instance, the question: How often do you feel isolated from Kazakhstani society? Respondents choose a number (x) from 1 to 5 scale (1 - always, 2 - often, 3 - sometimes, 4 - rarely, 5 - never).

Table 1. Indicators supplemented with variables (adjusted using Harder et al. (2018) and Caselli (2015) methods)

<b>Index/ Variable</b>	<b>Cultural and Psychological integration</b>	<b>Social integration</b>	<b>Political integration</b>	<b>Economic integration</b>
<b>Indicators</b>	<p>Sense of belonging to Kazakhstan</p> <p>Knowledge of local languages (kz, rus, eng)</p> <p>Common values and traditions</p> <p>Use of local media sources</p>	<p>Relationship with the locals</p> <p>The participation in the local group activities</p> <p>Using the language of Host country</p> <p>Intends to remain in Kazakhstan</p> <p>Problems with receiving government services</p>	<p>Participatory level as a citizen</p> <p>Interest in Kazakhstan's current affairs</p> <p>Basic knowledge of public policy and current events</p> <p>Political activism</p>	<p>Level of satisfaction with economic situation</p> <p>Housing situation</p> <p>Employment situation</p> <p>Possession of a bank account</p>

The hypotheses of the research will be as followings:

H1: Cultural integration of qandas has a significantly lower index than Local residents

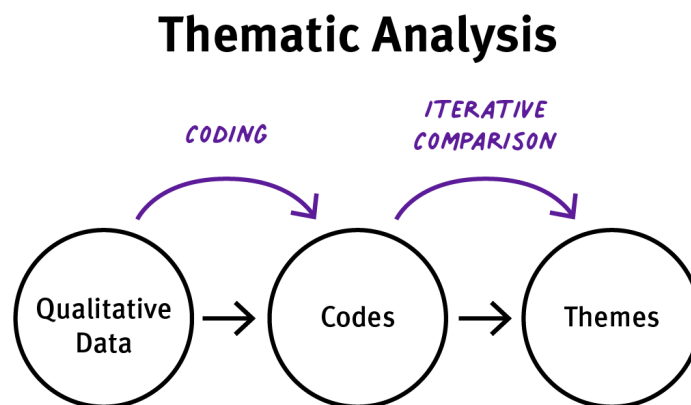
H2: Social integration of qandas has a significantly lower index than Local residents

H3: Political integration of qandas has a significantly lower index than Local residents

H4: Economical integration of qandas has a significantly lower index than Local residents

After obtaining the index of both groups the results were analyzed using T-test to test the hypotheses. The t-test is a statistical test used to compare two groups' averages. It is often used in hypothesis testing to determine if the two groups are different (Bevans, 2022). In our case returnees and Locals.

The Qualitative part of the research (interviews) was analyzed through Method of Thematic Analysis using *Software Program Nvivo*. It compiles topics according to the categories that were most frequently mentioned by the interviewees. An inductive approach was implemented during the process of determining the themes. Coding was done using the Nvivo program, compiling topics according to the categories that were most frequently mentioned by the interviewees (Figure 2). An inductive approach was implemented during the process of determining the themes.



*Figure 2. Thematic Analysis*  
Rosala M. (2022)

<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/thematic-analysis/>

### 3. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This part of the study presents the results of surveys and analysis of in-depth interviews that answer the questions posed in this study. Two research questions are addressed in this chapter. First (1) To what extent are qandas integrated into the local community (hometown)? Second (2) What obstacles do qandas face as citizens?

#### 3.1. Quantitative Survey results

In the questionnaire, respondents chose a number (x) on a scale of 1 to 5 (Appendix 1). Then the value of each indicator was calculated using Excel on a scale from 0 to 1. Thus, the results of the questionnaire of local and qandas were calculated separately and their index of integration into society was revealed. 1 - maximum integration score (successfully integrated), 0 - minimum (insufficiently/not integrated). Table 2 demonstrates the results of the integration indices for the two groups.

Table 2. Total Index of integration of qandas and local residents of Kazakhstan

	Local	Qandas
Cultural Integration	0.70	0.42
Social Integration	0.47	0.41
Political Integration	0.56	0.47
Economic Integration	0.45	0.38
Total Integration	0.54	0.42

In order to evaluate and find out whether there is a significant difference between the averages of the two groups, the following tables (3-6) present the results of the T-test for each sub-indices.

Table 3. Statistical analysis of cultural integration index

	<i>Qandas</i>	<i>Local</i>
Mean	0.538232	0.698393
Variance	0.037715	0.043072
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.435896	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	17	
t Stat	-3.18035	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.002737	
t Critical one-tail	1.739607	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.005474	
t Critical two-tail	2.109816	

Based on the provided data and statistical analysis, we can conclude that hypothesis 1 is supported by the data.

The calculated t-statistic (-3.180) is larger than the critical t-value for both one-tailed (1.740) and two-tailed (2.110) tests with a significance level of 0.05, indicating that the difference in means between Cultural integration of qandas and Local residents is statistically significant.

Moreover, the p-value for both one-tailed (0.003) and two-tailed (0.005) tests is less than the significance level of 0.05, which also suggests strong evidence for H1.

Therefore, we can accept hypothesis 1 and conclude that the mean index for cultural integration among qandas is significantly lower than that of local residents.

Table 4. Statistical analysis of social integration index

	<i>Qandas</i>	<i>Local</i>
Mean	0.419355	0.486534
Variance	0.025739	0.028472
Observations	16	16
Pearson Correlation	0.8796	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	15	
t Stat	-3.31075	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.002376	
t Critical one-tail	1.75305	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.004753	
t Critical two-tail	2.13145	

By looking at other tables 4-6, we can conclude that H2, H3, and H4 are supported by the data.

The calculated t-statistic (-3.311) is larger than the critical t-value for both one-tailed (1.753) and two-tailed (2.131) tests with a significance level of 0.05, indicating that the difference in means between social integration of qandas and local residents is statistically significant (Table 4).

Table 5. Statistical analysis of political integration index

	<i>Qandas</i>	<i>Local</i>
Mean	0.465054	0.558824
Variance	0.019551	0.020526
Observations	10	10
Pearson Correlation	0.889257	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	

df	9	
t Stat	-4.44569	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000805	
t Critical one-tail	1.833113	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00161	
t Critical two-tail	2.262157	

The hypothesis being tested is that the mean score on the political integration variable is significantly lower for qandas than for local residents (Table 5).

The t-test results indicate that the difference in means between the two groups is statistically significant. The t-statistic is -4.44569, which is outside the range of values expected under the null hypothesis (no difference in means). The p-value for a one-tailed test is 0.000805092, meaning that if the null hypothesis were true, the probability of observing a difference in means this large or larger is less than 0.1%. The t-critical value for a one-tailed test at a significance level of 0.05 and 9 degrees of freedom is 1.833112933, while the t-critical value for a two-tailed test is 2.262157163.

*Table 6. Statistical analysis of economic integration index*

	Qandas	Local
Mean	0.376045	0.452206
Variance	0.011619	0.014488
Observations	9	9
Pearson Correlation	0.904332	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	8	
t Stat	-4.44628	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.001075	
t Critical one-tail	1.859548	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00215	

t Critical two-tail	2.306004
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According to the Table 6, the calculated t-statistic (-4.446) is larger than the critical t-value for both one-tailed (1.860) and two-tailed (2.306) tests with a significance level of 0.05, indicating that the difference in means between economical integration of qandas and local residents is statistically significant.

Therefore, we can accept the H4 that there is no significant difference between the economical integration of qandas and local residents, and conclude that the mean index for economic integration among qandas is significantly lower than that of local residents.

### 3.2. Interview results

The main purpose in conducting interviews is to reveal the reason and specific obstacles/challenges that complicate integrating into society. Thus, we tried to answer our second research question: What are the obstacles returnees facing now (after renaming)?

In the initial phase, the interviews were structured according to the principle of free narrative. Participants talked about their immigration experiences and personal integration experiences. They then focused on the challenges they faced in the integration and adaptation process. This helped to identify thematic issues, after which the narrative was continued with semi-structured interviews.

#### *Participants (interviewees)*

Participant	Age	Gender	Marital status	Host country	Time since return to homeland	Region of residence
Expert 1	26	Male	Married	Uzbekistan	2004	Astana
Expert 2	59	Female	Married	China	2011	Astana
Expert 3	26	Female	Single	China	2012	Astana
Participant 1	23	Female	Single	China	2010	Almaty
Participant 2	53	Female	Married	China	2000	Almaty
Participant 3	20	Female	Single	Mongolia	2017	Pavlodar
Participant 4	50	Female	Married	China	2016	Almaty
Participant 5	19	Female	Single	China	2015	Almaty

Participant	Age	Gender	Marital status	Host country	Time since return to homeland	Region of residence
Participant 6	19	Female	Single	China	2019	Astana
Participant 7	22	Male	Single	China	2017	Atyrau
Participant 8	23	Female	Single	China	2018	Astana
Participant 9	19	Female	Single	Mongolia	2022	Almaty
Participant 10	32	Female	Married	Uzbekistan	2008	Shymkent
Participant 11	20	Male	Single	Mongolia	2019	Almaty

Table 7. Demographic characteristics of the participants

The collected data were analyzed with Method of Thematic Analysis using Software Program *Nvivo*, a program for qualitative and mixed-method research. This method (thematic analysis) is used for qualitative data in order to identify, analyze, and report on recurring patterns among the indicated opinions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Consequently, these categories were divided into themes as challenges in integration processes (Figure 3).

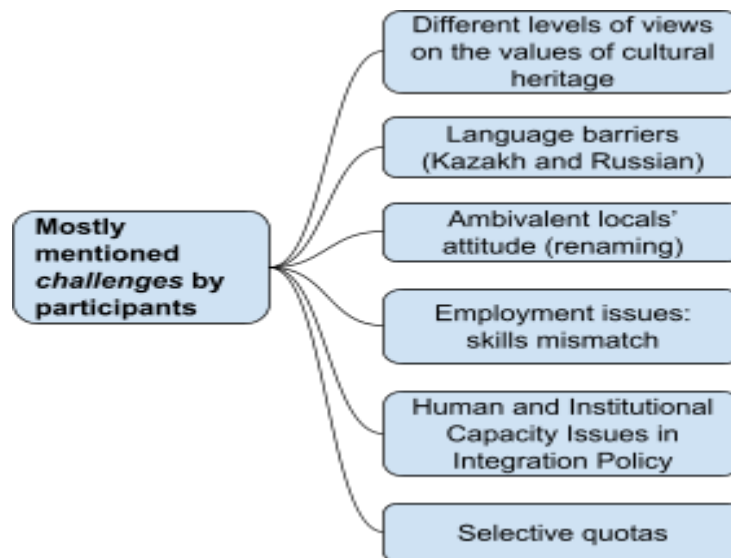


Figure 3. Interview results (Thematic framework)  
Obstacles qandas facing in integration process (from their experiences)

### **3.2.1 Different levels of views on the values of cultural heritage**

In terms of cultural integration, the interviews revealed certain differences in people's attitudes toward particular holidays and the conduct of rituals in them. Specifically, it was mentioned by interviewees several times the differences between how they celebrated Nauryz in the host countries. As they stated, Nauryz is celebrated en masse by the efforts and enthusiasm of people, which means that it has become a crucial element for qandas in the host countries in terms of social consolidation among ethnic Kazakhs. Whereas several interviewees (qandas from China) noted interesting opinions about the participation of the State in enhancing ethnic identity elements. Comments included:

“... Nauryz is a big holiday for us. We go to each other's houses a lot. But here (Kazakhstan), as I noticed, the government organizes a lot of concerts and festivals. The main focus was on the relationship of relatives and friends in China, but not on the festival and concerts”.

“...during Nauryz we used to go to each other's houses. Whereas in Kazakhstan it is more or less celebrated at the country level”.

One expert who is a head of the filial of World Association of Kazakhs (qandas) stated:

“... cultural differences also play a crucial role in integration with locals. Moving to Kazakhstan, they (qandas) want to keep such traditions and behavior that are very valuable to them. But the locals may not share such feelings (*may not care*), so they will gather around the qandas by themselves, without the locals. This might also become an obstacle to integration”.

Thus, the conclusion regarding cultural integration issues can be seen as a refusal by Qandas to accept changed historical cultural and ethnic patterns among current local Kazakhs. This can lead to the isolation of the Qandas as a minority group in terms of different levels of views on the values of cultural heritage.

### **3.2.2. Language barriers**

Language-related challenges were the most frequently mentioned. As it was analyzed based on the interviewees' answers, insufficient knowledge of the language can be a major obstacle to the full exercise of their rights as citizens of Kazakhstan. They feel obstacles due to the language barrier to education, employment, obtaining public services, health care, and other rights of citizens. This experience will be presented by the languages themselves (Kazakh and Russian), by the aspects of difficulty, and by the countries they came from.

### *Kazakh language*

The common issue for qandas from *China* was revealed that they can only speak and understand in Kazakh. The interviewees from China mentioned that they use the old alphabet which was created by Akhmet Baitursynov in 1910th before the USSR. Comments included:

“Kazakhs from China write in “Tote zhazu”. And for those who returned from China, they should learn cyrillic alphabet again.”

“... writing was the main problem because we knew only Chinese characters and it was difficult for me to learn Cyrillic”.

“... in terms of Kazakh it is very difficult for me to write. Moreover, I read very slowly”.

Therefore, the main barrier for Kazakhs from China was illiteracy in both languages in Kazakhstan. There were Kazakh schools in China. However, as they mentioned, there is a perception that Chinese schools provide a better education, and this has led to Kazakhs studying in Chinese schools.

“My parents wanted to send me to a Kazakh school, but friends of my parents said it was better to send me to a Chinese school, the level of education is better there. So they gave me to chinese school”.

Moreover, due to recent Chinese policies, all Kazakh schools in China have been closed since 2018. Even recently, there are cases where they cannot understand and speak Kazakh:

“The last Kazakh school closed in 2018. All Kazakh kids study at school in Chinese now. From kindergarten. Now they have become more Chinese. Current qandas might not even know kazakh”.

Thus, the new generation repatriating from China might face even more barriers. This requires more attention to the linguistic aspects of integration policy, especially for Kazakhs from China.

From the results of interviews it was revealed that qandas from *Uzbekistan* have similar challenges even if both countries had a common Soviet history. They can be divided into two categories: the older generation, which knows the Cyrillic alphabet, and the younger generation, born in independent times, which can only read and write in the Latin alphabet. It also might complicate the integration for students.

“In Uzbekistan there are people who still know and use cyrillic, but they are mostly elderly generation. The youngsters do not know cyrillic and use latin”.

A comment by qandas from Uzbekistan says the solution here could be a faster transition to the Latin alphabet in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhs from Mongolia mentioned the difficulties in learning the Kazakh language in schools as well.

“I studied in Mongolian school but there was a mixed language. Certain courses were in Kazakh, but the books were in Mongolian language only”.

During interviews, several people said it was easier for young people to integrate through schools and universities. However, many qandas who moved to Kazakhstan during their school years noted that the language barrier caused them stress, and they even had to change subjects on the Unified National Test (UNT). Comments included:

“... in 11th grade I wanted to take English and World History for UNT. But it was very difficult to understand all world history in Kazakh. So I decided to take physics and math”.

### *Russian language*

From participants' comments regarding the Russian language, we can conclude that most places related to civilian life are still in Russian. This may violate the rights of citizens who cannot exercise their rights because of the language barrier. The impact of not knowing Russian on employment opportunities was mentioned most often. We can conclude that adults with diplomas may not find jobs, and there are young people who are motivated to go to another country in search of work if they cannot learn Russian. Comments included:

“...pairs of qandas who were excellent experts in the agro-industrial sector. They worked very well in China. But when they came here, the companies turned them down, citing the fact that the language of work was Russian. There are a lot of cases like this one”.

“...after graduation I think that Russian language is required in order to find a good job in Kazakhstan. But if I fail to find a job, I plan to move to another country”.

“...I might consider working at a Chinese company in Kazakhstan”.

Another language factor in the job search was the lack of job advertisements in the Kazakh language. The comment by the expert:

“...if you look at the job market of kz there are more than 90% of job announcements in russian. But in Kazakh there are very few, you can google and check”.

In addition, in the first days of the repatriation there were difficulties in simple everyday life caused by the Russian language. In particular, they mentioned obstacles in buying even goods in markets, etc.

“...just buying groceries was problematic. All the names were mostly in Russian. We bought it by pointing with our hands”.

“...in Almaty without knowing Russian it is hard to live. Therefore I had to speak in Russian”.

Interviewees stated that when receiving public and medical services, specialists mostly used the Russian language. This made their work with documentation, clinics, etc. more difficult. Comments include:

“...my son is a person with special needs, he needed constant monitoring, and we went to many doctors. And it was necessary for me to understand what the doctor was saying. And doctors usually spoke Russian”.

“People use Russian in important places like the Population Service Center and the Migration Department, it complicates my documentation process”.

Thus, language was found to be a major concern among those interviewed. The above experience may demonstrate the need for language support services for current and future qandas. Otherwise, it will be a barrier to the full enjoyment of citizens' rights.

### **3.2.3. Ambivalent locals' attitude**

The ambivalent attitude of the local Kazakhstani population toward repatriates is a well-known discourse in society and at the state level. This was also addressed in the "Literature Review" part. The renaming of the term from "oralman" to "qandas" should have put a good vibe on integration. However, according to qandas, it did not change attitudes. The presence of a “qandas” identity still includes many disadvantages in society. Therefore, many respondents noted that after obtaining citizenship, even in qandas status, they try to hide the fact that they came from other countries and are qandas. Because they know that there are stereotypes and bad attitudes from a certain part of the population. Comments include:

“... there were moments when certain reflexes appeared and locals said “oralman”. It felt more negative and aggressive”.

“... even my classmates, with whom I studied for 11 years, did not know that I was repatriated from Uzbekistan. I just didn't talk about it”.

“... I will not say this information. Since there are a lot of stereotypes, especially if you are qandas from China”.

As it was mentioned there was a renaming of the term to “qandas”. However, in relation to the role of renaming the terms there are many different positions by qandas. But most of the respondents mentioned that it is not helpful. They said it was a good policy for them (qandas) to feel better about themselves instead of using oralman. But they felt it was not enough and had not yet succeeded in changing the attitudes of the locals. There was also mention of the need for time. In

addition, there were opinions not to use any terms, it was suggested to just say "ethnic Kazakhs from abroad". Comments include:

“... still there are certain people who do not know or do not want the word qandas in daily life rather use oralman”.

“... I do not think that it changed the attitude of locals. Changing the name does not change anything. I think instead of qandas/oralman I think it is better to say ethnic Kazakhs from abroad”.

Several interviewees mentioned bullying in schools based on their experiences as qandas. They described some incidents that had a psychological impact on them. Because there is a tendency for children to move to Kazakhstan before their parents, they experience loneliness and isolation at an earlier age. Comments include:

“... they perceived me as Chinese and asked if I ate snakes, people or dogs. I was without my parents at the time. After school I cried and called my parents saying I wanted to go back and study further at a Chinese school”.

“... in my class there were other Oralman guys also. Classmates did not want to share something or communicate with them. That's why I tried to help them. They could use the word "Oralman" as a nickname. They could separate from the group, etc”.

“... I heard that one qandas school student made suicide. Tengrinews published about it. But they did not write that he is qandas”.

Some administrative, psychological, and social support for qandas was not considered by the school for a healthy adjustment. Many in the interviews suggested that such measures should be considered as part of an integration policy. The following comments demonstrate the need for systemic adaptation and integration support measures for young qandas in schools.

“... I only now realize that I needed a psychologist at the time”.

“There wasn't much help from school. I asked my classmates to help me with my homework for a chocolate bar, etc”.

“In China at school we wore sports uniforms. But here in schools we were required to wear a skirt. It was very uncomfortable for me to go to school in a skirt”.

### **3.2.4. Employment issues: skills mismatch**

According to the results of the answers to the interview questions, the following 3 ways of labor activity among returnees can be distinguished. The first one is doing livestock farming or cleaning stuff which does not require language skills. The second, who graduated from university in

Kazakhstan and works in local organizations. Their integration is quite successful. And the third one who runs a small business due to skills mismatch.

For instance, the following interviewee comments address the issue of unemployment due to skills mismatch.

“...worked in the civil service in China. It was difficult to find a job. First of all, diplomas don't count here, and there were also difficulties in terms, in language. Mother worked in the demographic policy department. So they could not work in the civil service here. So they started working in sales...”.

“...my brother studied architecture at a university in Mongolia. But his diploma is not recognized here. And he works in business now”.

“...more than 20 years worked in public administration and was a certified specialist. I could not find a job, even if I wanted to, because of the difficulties with the Russian language”.

For example, a well-known trend among qandas in terms of employment is to engage in entrepreneurship and sales. Moreover, they usually move to Kazakhstan with the money from the sale of houses. And for the first few months they try to adapt and deal with the paperwork with that money. However, there is a procedure by which they will be provided with jobs through special programs (Enbek). Interviews revealed the low level of awareness of qandas about these employment programs and the dysfunctional state of this procedure. Comments included:

“It was written in the law that qandas will be assisted with employment. But the reality is not like that. They stay without jobs before receiving citizenship”.

“I recently graduated with a master's degree and personally used Enbek.kz myself to look for teaching jobs. But many don't check the applications. In Almaty public schools principals always want bribes from you. And it is not profitable for them to put it in Enbek”.

### **3.2.5. Human and Institutional Capacity Issues in Integration Policy**

#### *Unknown and unclaimed Adaptation and Integration centers*

The Adaptation and Integration Centers were created as institutions to help qandas integrate better and more seamlessly into society. They provide a range of services for returnees (educational, legal, social, and counseling) with a place to stay temporarily in order to integrate into society. These centers can be seen as the main institution in qandas integration policy. However, according to those interviewed, they have not heard of them. And even if they had, they noted that there were only three centers (Shymkent, Karagandy, Turkestan) in Kazakhstan. Moreover, they were located in regions with low demand. In other words, they were located in regions where fewer "qandas" came. Comments include:

“...we did not hear about such centers. There was not any information by the department of migration. If I knew about them I think I would go. It would be great to come and receive certain consultations and support”.

“I had never heard about centers of adaptation”.

“I think there is room for improvement in terms of sharing information. Because I did not know about these adaptation centers before working in IZproject”.

Since such centers might register qandas as temporary residents which is an important step in the processes of citizenship application. The limited number of such centers results in qandas being unable to find places to register, leading to problems with visas and deportation. One of the expert stated it as below:

“...if the people could not find the place to register within 3 months they should extend their visas. If the visa expires they will be deported based on the law. Therefore there should be such centers in each region of Kazakhstan”.

#### *Otandastar Foundation and the lack of institutions working with integration*

Regarding the work of the Otandastar Foundation, opinions were divided. Many responded that they knew only this foundation, which works and supports the qandas in integration processes. However, local qandas activists, who are also involved in integration issues, noted the foundation's functional and informational shortcomings.

“...they could have done more. They need some promotion I guess. Most workers are locals. And I think they don't know the real issues of qandas”.

“... they are not so open for collaboration with other organizations. I came to them with propositions. They have a department called “Zhas Kazakh” which works with young people. They are more open but there was no follow up”.

In addition, from 2022 100% of the right to own and use the state block of shares of the non-profit joint-stock company "Otandastar Foundation" is transferred to the MFA from the MISD of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The purpose of the fund is to provide services for the adaptation and integration of compatriots in foreign countries and ethnic Kazakhs arriving in Kazakhstan. Although during the meeting with the representatives of the fund it was said that in foreign countries they work more with Kazakhs (about 70%). This means that the foundation is working towards more support for ethnic Kazakhs abroad, as the budget is allocated by the MFA.

“...there are no institutions which directly work with integration. There is only Otandastar Qory, but there are not enough resources. It is under the Ministry of Foreign affairs. And all the projects financed by the Government”.

“...Otandastar Qory mostly worked with the ethnic Kazakhs abroad. Because they are under the Ministry of Foreign affairs. They do not have functions to work on integration issues”.

“About Otandastar Qory, I would say that they work with ethnic Kazakhs abroad mostly”.

Thus, there is a need for a special institution that will work directly with the integration policy. The absence of such a systematic approach may be the cause of the current problems and may lead to new problems in the future.

### **3.2.6. Selective quotas**

During the interviews, opinions were expressed about the impact of the policy of allocating quotas to selective regions on the creation of an isolated group of qandas. Because there are observations that the qandas are sort of incorporated into the group of qandas in the area in which they come. Thus, this policy can worsen such a trend and make it difficult to integrate into the local community. Comments include:

“... I think it is important not to separate (isolate) qandas”

“...qandas from China always stick together and do not interact with locals”.

Consequently, according to participants such policies vice versa might negatively affect and can lead to creation of isolated social groups (qandas).

Another issue that has been raised about quotas is to give the right of choice and not to use them as a subject for the Kazakhization of the northern regions. Comments include:

“...the main idea of this policy is actually to make the northern society more kazakh. And it is right. However, why should the victims (instruments) of this process be qandas?”

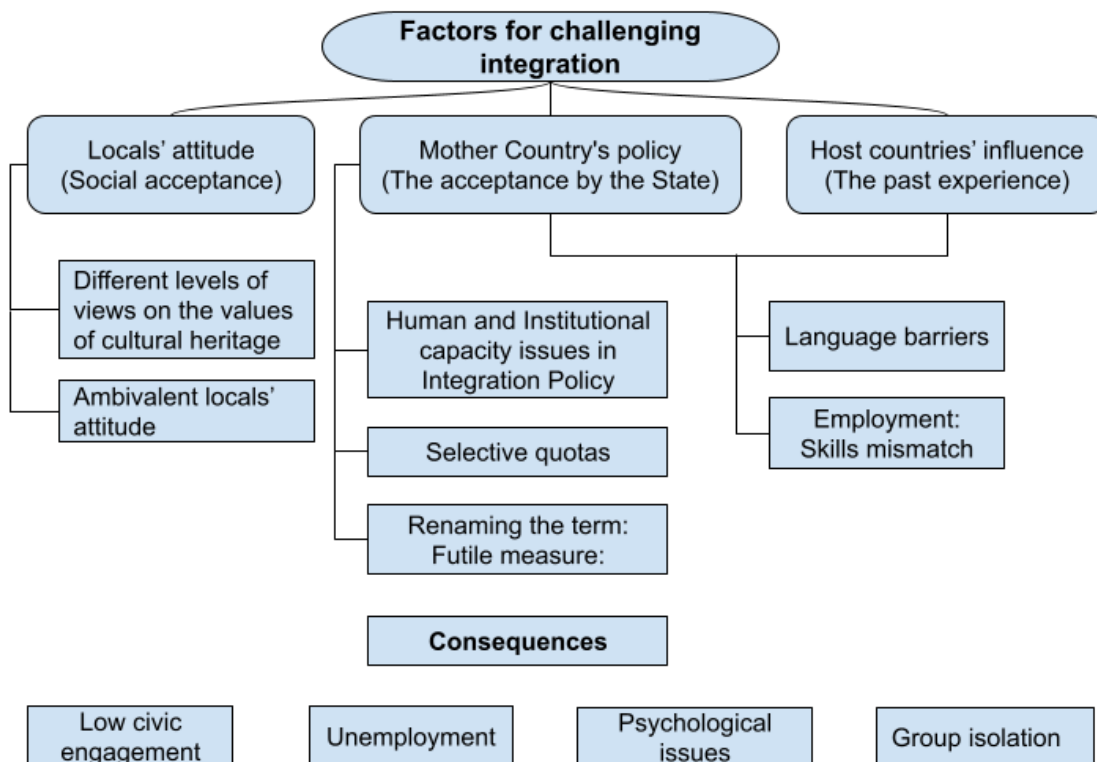
“...it would be better not to choose the region by the government and give a right to choose”.

Thus, there is a debate among the qandas about the effectiveness of this policy. Distributing quotas only in northern regions may negatively affect the level of integration of qandas as citizens and create conditions of isolation for them. Moreover, there was an opinion that such isolative measures might violate their rights of movement.

#### 4. DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to measure the current degree of integration and explore the integration experience of the qandas as new citizens, also evaluate the Public Policy associated with it. The main focus of the research was to understand the types of challenges qandas faced with and what Policy measures are ineffective in their adaptation and integration process.

The results of the quantitative part of the study provide data and the t-test results which highlight that the difference between the overall index of integration of qandas and locals is significant. Consequently, the in-depth interviews revealed several sides of problems in the integration process. It was also important to understand the causal relationships. The Model of relations among challenges and consequences made via Nvivo were introduced in Figure 4. Thus, these challenges identified by the interviewees and their consequences were presented below in the format of an Interpretive Thematic Analysis by subtopic.



**Figure 4. Thematic Framework**

Findings about the specific challenges and the consequences

Overall, the findings are in well agreement with previous studies and empirical research that identified socio-cultural and economic-political barriers as the most significant integration problems

(Baudiyarova et al, 2019; Naumova, 2017; Narozhnaya, 2017; Illimkhanova et al, 2014; Rean et al, 2006; Diener, 2005; Kuscu, 2009; Bokayev, 2013). Although each study participant's integration experience was a unique case, some common challenges were identified. The study attempted to identify and demonstrate the specific institutional and social barriers that returnees face.

The first variable, cultural integration, showed the largest difference between the indices of locals and returnees ( $0.69 > 0.41$ ) among the other variables. Many participants noted the importance of cultural heritage to them. Because it was the main reason for repatriation to the homeland. This was also mentioned in the results of previous studies (UNDP, 2016; Baudiyarova et al., 2019). The findings and opinions that repatriates create new sociocultural groups in society and make integration and consolidation difficult are consistent with Baudiyarova et al. (2019). However, general opinions about the reason for this cultural isolation the study showed that there are different levels of views on the values of cultural heritage. For example, Nauryz is one of the cultural heritage mentioned several times. They stated that Nauryz used to be celebrated en masse through the efforts and enthusiasm of people, which means that it has become a crucial element for qandas in the host countries in terms of social consolidation among ethnic Kazakhs. Whereas here the state plays a major role in its celebration and in reinforcing elements of ethnic identity. This might suggest that ethnic Kazakhs as minorities in the host countries have tried to crystallize their identity (difference) from others. Moving to Kazakhstan, they want to preserve such traditions and behavior that are very valuable to them. But the locals may not share such feelings, so they will gather around the qandas themselves, without the locals. Thus, different levels of views on cultural heritage values may be one of the obstacles that alienate qandas from locals.

There was a question in the survey “How often do you feel isolated from Kazakhstani society?”. Following figures (Figures 5, 6) demonstrate the answers in percentages for locals and qandas.

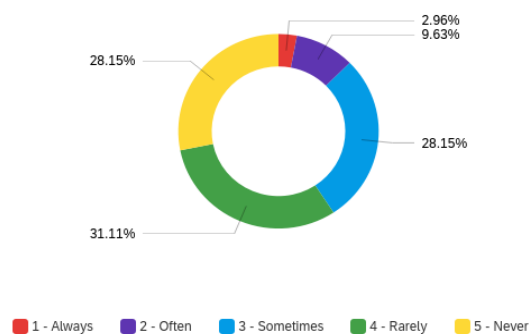


Figure 5. A sense of isolation among the locals

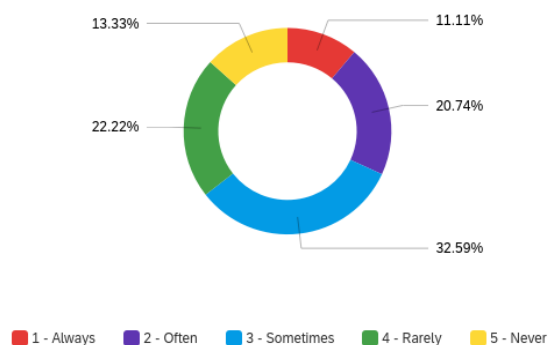


Figure 6. A sense of isolation among the returnees

The results show that 11.11% of respondents in the repatriate group feel isolated all the time, and 20.74% feel isolated often. For such a sense of isolation and slow integration influence another factor as locals' *ambivalent attitude*. In other words, social acceptance plays a role as well. The controversial attitude among society toward returnees is well-known discourse. This was also addressed in the findings by UNDP (2006) and Bokayev (2013). Therefore our study also tried to find out whether qandas felt a change in attitudes toward them after the renaming of the term "Oralman" to "Qandas". Many participants noted the correctness of the president's actions. After all, the fact that they were called oralmans was insulting to them. However, it turned out that all of the participants felt that only changing the attitude by renaming the term was ineffective. Interviewees claimed that there are minorities who use the term "qandas". Even the repatriates themselves still use "oralman." Thus, it was clear from the participants' responses that renaming the term did not affect local attitudes.

Another issue that was mentioned several times was the problem of integrating young returnees in school. Since respondents included those who moved to Kazakhstan at school age, they shared their experiences. Many respondents noted that their classmates supported them during their adaptation period, which helped them integrate without problems. However, some participants noted unpleasant attitudes from classmates and school administrators. One participant recounted an incident when classmates bullied her and other returnees in class. Therefore, she decided not to say that she was a repatriate when she transferred to another school. Another participant mentioned that she needed psychological support during her studies because she was alone away from her family. Because there is a tendency for children to move to Kazakhstan alone without their parents or with one parent due to financial risk. Young returnees who moved alone usually live with relatives and try to adapt and integrate through schools or universities. Thus, educational institutions can be a potential place of integration for young returnees. Many respondents recommended the inclusion of integration measures in the school functions for young qandas (psychological support, social

adaptation, additional language courses, etc.). The results of the interviews showed the need for such support in school in terms of curriculum and sociocultural adaptation.

Another obstacle to smooth integration is problems with the institutional and human capacity of state repatriation organizations. First of all, participants most often mentioned weak information exchange in such state measures. Awareness of the existence of main integration institutions such as adaptation and integration centers was mentioned only by experts during the interviews. Participants stated a lack of promotion of such integration measures and centers among returnees. This finding is in line with the results of Kryakvina's (2022) study. Also the low awareness of them can be explained by the limited number of centers and their location. As the centers operate only in 3 regions of the country (Shymkent, Karaganda, Turkestan). One of the experts noted that they are not in demand, because according to statistics few qandas move there. This means that such centers are not in demand due to lack of awareness and location. While the centers were supposed to provide many useful services: providing information and reference services, translation services, employment assistance, training, legal assistance, training in the Kazakh and Russian languages. Experts argued that such centers exist also to register returnees as temporary residents, which is an important step in the citizenship application process. The limited number of such centers results in returnees being unable to find places to register, leading to problems with visas and deportation.

Another important point about the institution of integration is the function of Otandastar Qory. Several experts mentioned in interviews that the foundation works under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Representatives of the organization have stated that they are fully funded by the MFA, and this is likely the reason why they dedicate their efforts to those abroad.

Several respondents expressed concern about the qualifications of the specialists working in the migration departments. Thus, ignorance of the exact steps and changed laws leads to difficulties in the process of obtaining citizenship and postponing documents. And this, accordingly, affects employment and receiving certain services and benefits as a full citizen in the future. It can be noted here that the migration departments operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. Whereas the integration process and the measures taken by the state to ensure the integration of returnees are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. Thus, we can observe a division of functions between executive agencies: repatriation is one, and integration is another. Similar conclusions were noted in the results of Kryakvina (2022).

One of the important elements of returnees economic integration is the process of their employment, as identified in previous studies (Kuscu, 2009; Diener, 2005; Cerny, 2010). This point

is very important and affects the rest of integration, both sociocultural and political. One of the experts noted that some unemployed *qandas* cannot find money even for the documentation procedure. Therefore, they refuse to obtain citizenship and simply survive by doing some kind of work or providing services. She claims that there are people who have not received citizenship for 20-30 years. However, the law stipulates that returnees will be assisted in finding employment through the *Enbek.kz program*. Interviews revealed a low level of awareness of these employment programs among participants. Only 3 interviewees were aware of this opportunity. According to one of those participants, there is a tendency when employers simply do not post open vacancies on the website (*Enbek.kz*). In addition, the results of the interviews revealed a trend of *skill mismatch*. For example, the skills of former civil servants in host countries become irrelevant to local realities (different laws, policies, attitudes, etc.) after repatriation. As a consequence, one participant shared, a sense of worthlessness to society affected her self-esteem. She held a high position in the local government (in host country), but when she moved here she felt illiterate and backward in society because she couldn't even write or read in the local language and get a job. Thus, the trend of skill mismatch, especially among former civil servants, is identified in the study as one of the barriers to the economic integration of returnees as well. In addition, the lack of language skills makes it even more difficult to find work in another field, as discussed below.

Challenges related to language have been mentioned most frequently by scholars studying this topic. Our study may once again mention this serious problem. Because, according to the participants, this problem still exists for current returnees. It can be noted here that now, due to the fact that the number of returnees is more than before, they can communicate with each other and create their own community. In this regard it was mentioned that they use the language of host countries which is comfortable for them. Thus, based on Brubaker's model, there is the influence of host country politics as well in the integration process. For instance, according to several participants, all Kazakh schools in China have been closed since 2015. And there will be a new wave of young returnees from China who do not understand or speak Kazakh at all. Whereas Kazakhstan's authorities have developed amendments to the legislation, providing for the possibility of denying citizenship to those who do not speak Kazakh in 2022. However, according to the deputies, ethnic Kazakhs will be exempt from the initiated requirement (Torebayeva, 2022). Thus, deputies may believe that repatriates should a priori know the Kazakh language because they are Kazakhs (primordialist approach of repatriation policy). But in fact, as indicated above, host country policies play a role in changing the situation. Majority of returnees are struggling regarding language issues. Thus, this suggests the need to develop new measures to explore the linguistic elements of integration. Thus the language barrier for current repatriates, as mentioned before, is a

major obstacle to the full exercise of their rights as citizens of Kazakhstan (education, employment, receiving public services, medical care and other rights of citizens).

In addition to the aforementioned factors, the study argues based on participants' responses, that government-imposed quotas for certain regions are a misguided measure that isolates qandas. The mood of the repatriation policy, which actively encouraged ethnic Kazakhs to return to their historic homeland, changed somewhat in 2005 after Nazarbayev's speech. He stated that resettlers should think about how they could help Kazakhstan, not what Kazakhstan owed them (Bonnenfant, 2012). Quotas were suspended for 2012-2016 (Sarbasov and Zhalsylykov, 2020). This was followed by a drastic restriction on the freedom of movement of resettlers in the form of the allocation of priority regions for settlement, where the issuance of social support is maintained and employment assistance is offered through state programs. Thus, quotas are now only allocated to those returnees who have resettled in five regions (Akmola, Pavlodar, North Kazakhstan, East Kazakhstan, and Kostanay). Thus, several participants and experts shared their concerns that the policy restricted their rights of movement. Moreover, there were allegations that they were being used to Kazakhize (казахизация) the Northern regions. One participant said that, on the contrary, they might become Russian-speaking. Or they could become more isolated from society by creating and joining a returnees group because it is difficult for them to integrate.

The aforementioned factors as barriers to integration as a citizen can affect the nature of civic engagement. As interviewees noted, most returnees are not interested in or involved in political activities. Their experiences as minority groups in host countries play a significant role here. This might create Parochial or Subject political culture within ethnic Kazakhs in the host countries. Second, after moving to Kazakhstan, they may think that because of the attitude of the locals they will remain a new minority as "qandas" and there is no point in participating in political life. Third, illiteracy in Kazakhstani law and politics and their agenda. In order to participate in political life, one must put a lot of effort into self-education. Finally, one of the main reasons could be the language factor. Thus, the challenges discussed in this chapter as a consequence may lead to qandas inactive civic participation.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The premise of the study is based on the assertions of the state document and academic literature, which emphasize the fact that qandas have not yet been integrated into local society. The study argues that the process of integration of such a large group of immigrants - qandas (repatriates) as citizens (membership) has not received proper attention from the state. The purpose of this study was to examine the integration index of ethnic Kazakhs who have returned to Kazakhstan from different countries, namely China, Mongolia, and Uzbekistan, and the integration barriers they often face. The data was collected using a mixed method (survey and interview). The findings from the analysis showed that there is a difference in the integration index between returnees and locals, and qandas still faced difficulties in integrating into society as new members (citizens). In particular, the integration part of the repatriation policy is of paramount importance as part of strengthening ethnic national identity politics using a primordial approach. In particular, as the results showed, the system of integration of returnees is divided between ministries and organizations, which results in poorly systematized work. In addition, the state as the historical homeland does not pay due attention to the policy of the host countries towards returnees and, accordingly, the same policy is applied to repatriates from different countries. Finally, as the results of the study showed, returnees did not feel the impact on local attitudes after the renaming of the term, which points to the need to develop measures for its acceptance by the local community.

Thus, qandas still face difficulties in obtaining information about their rights and responsibilities, language barriers, isolation as a new sociocultural group, ambiguous attitudes of the local population, and problems of skills mismatch in employment. Thus, the study concludes that despite the existence of current integration policies, additional measures and changes in the status quo are needed.

Based on the above-mentioned conclusions, the following recommendations were formed for the current policy of integration of returnees:

1. Implement a three-pronged repatriation policy model. It should include *outreach to the local population* (Special measures should be taken to raise awareness and positive attitudes toward qandas), *acceptance of returnees as citizens* (accept repatriates, not as a group of Kazakhs whose aim is to introduce Kazakhness (ethnic identity), but to support integration as equal citizens), and *consideration of the impact of host country policies* on returnees (recognize that the host country's

policies have a huge impact on qandas, and try to take a different approach to returnees from different countries).

2. Two phases of Repatriation policy (immigration and integration) should be merged and coordinated. Specifically, those institutions, the Migration departments (working under the MIA), MNE which coordinate the integration measures, and Otandastar Foundation under the MFA which aims to support foreign and returned ethnic Kazakhs. Since the majority of returnees repatriated without quotas might have gone through only the first phase (immigration).
3. It is recommended to reconsider the decision transferring the Otandastar Foundation from the MISD to the MFA. This could affect the organization's focus on ethnic Kazakhs abroad, rather than on returnees in Kazakhstan.
4. Establish a process of providing integration and awareness-raising services through systematic financial support for the work of NGOs from the state budget. And oblige local authorities to cooperate with NGO representatives to organize the process of integration of returnees.
5. Adaptation and Integration centers should be set up in each region, or at least on a statistical basis in places where returnees mainly arrive.
6. The functioning of the employment program Enbek, aimed at providing returnees with jobs, should be strictly regulated to avoid corruption in the recruitment process. Moreover, special measures should be established when all job announcements must be translated into Kazakh.
7. Educational institutions can be a potential place of integration for young returnees. Since there is a trend of young returnees moving alone and living with relatives and trying to adapt and integrate through schools or universities. It is recommended that the functions of the school include integration measures for the healthy adaptation of young repatriates (psychological support, social adaptation, additional language courses).

### **5.1. Limitations**

The study has limitations which need to be taken into consideration for further relevant research on the topic. The limitation of the research is that the survey was confined to only respondents from Almaty and Astana. Other regions and small villages were out of focus in the process of conducting research which is not enough to come to a general conclusion. Apart from quantitative methods, an interview was also conducted in only 5 cities with the highest number of interviews in Almaty and

Astana. Since there was only one interview in each of the other cities, their results were not analyzed. This research work focused mainly on migrated qandas from Mongolia, China and Uzbekistan. Despite the fact that an interview with a worker of "Otandastar Foundation" was conducted, this organization was not fully accessible to receive complete information. Finally, the concept of integration into the local society was studied in comparison to the local population due to the lack of indicators defining the integrated qandas.

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## APPENDIX A

### Survey results

*Table 1. Integration of local citizens in terms of age*

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-50	50-60	Total integration
Cultural Integration	0.69	0.69	0.71	0.72	0.72	0.71
Social Integration	0.50	0.41	0.48	0.52	0.28	0.44
Political Integration	0.50	0.52	0.63	0.59	0.50	0.55
Economic Integration	0.55	0.31	0.52	0.43	0.27	0.42
Total integration	0.56	0.48	0.59	0.56	0.44	0.53

*Table 2. Integration of qandas in terms of age*

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-50	50-60	Total Integration
Cultural Integration	0.56	0.43	0.45	0.74	0.47	0.53
Social Integration	0.44	0.35	0.35	0.45	0.46	0.41
Political Integration	0.44	0.53	0.53	0.41	0.64	0.51
Economic Integration	0.44	0.35	0.35	0.45	0.46	0.41
Total Integration	0.47	0.42	0.42	0.51	0.51	0.46

*Table 3. Integration of local citizens in terms of gender*

	Male	Female
Cultural Integration	0.69	0.70
Social Integration	0.45	0.48
Political Integration	0.59	0.54
Economic Integration	0.49	0.43

*Table 4. Integration of qandas in terms of gender*

	Male	Female
Cultural Integration	0.53	0.54
Social Integration	0.46	0.39
Political Integration	0.49	0.45
Economic Integration	0.42	0.34

Table 5. Integration of qandas in terms of education

	High school diploma	Undergraduate degree	Postgraduate degree	Other	Total integration
Cultural Integration	0.49	0.55	0.54	0.57	0.54
Social Integration	0.37	0.43	0.45	0.46	0.43
Political Integration	0.33	0.52	0.44	0.44	0.43
Economic Integration	0.34	0.37	0.31	0.44	0.36
Total integration	0.38	0.47	0.43	0.48	0.44

Table 6. Integration of local citizens in terms of education

	High school diploma	Undergraduate degree	Postgraduate degree	Other	Total integration
Cultural Integration	0.68	0.71	0.69	0.71	0.70
Social Integration	0.51	0.50	0.45	0.34	0.45
Political Integration	0.59	0.54	0.61	0.50	0.56
Economic Integration	0.43	0.43	0.52	0.31	0.42
Total integration	0.55	0.54	0.57	0.46	0.53

Table 7. Integration of qandas in terms of countries returned from

	Uzbekistan	China	Mongolia	Others
Cultural Integration	0.58	0.51	0.49	0.58
Social Integration	0.42	0.46	0.38	0.47

Political Integration	0.52	0.37	0.34	0.43
Economic Integration	0.40	0.56	0.35	0.41
Total Integration	0.48	0.48	0.39	0.47

*Table 8. Integration of qandas in terms of time of repatriation*

	1990-1995	1995-2000	2000-2005	2005-2010	2010-2015	2015-2022
Cultural Integration	0.40	0.50	0.65	0.61	0.61	0.52
Social Integration	0.36	0.50	0.41	0.45	0.49	0.41
Political Integration	0.28	0.59	0.61	0.68	0.53	0.43
Economic Integration	0.28	0.39	0.38	0.31	0.33	0.39
Total Integration	0.33	0.50	0.51	0.51	0.49	0.44

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Survey questions**

#### Introduction.

Dear participant, we invite you to take part in a study on "Homeland integration: Assessing the experiences of repatriates (Qandas) in Kazakhstan and state policies associated with them". The study is conducted by master's students of the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Public Policy. Integration - the process by which repatriates become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups.

#### Procedures.

The purpose of this research is to reveal reliable information about how the rebranding has affected current integration policies, and local attitudes, and, in general, how effective the reintegration component of the 2017-2021 migration program has been. If you agree to take part in this research project, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire, which will take about 10 minutes to complete. All information you provide will be anonymous, so we would appreciate your honesty in answering each question in this survey. There are no right or wrong answers here; our goal is to get a more accurate picture of your opinion of Kazakhstan's state integration policy.

#### Risks.

There are only minimal risks associated with this study. Possible risks may include feelings of discomfort related to memories of negative life events (possible barriers to integration into society, attitudes of local residents, etc.). We remind you that your answers will remain anonymous, and you can withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

#### Benefits.

Expected benefits of this study include a better understanding of the potential phase of economic, political, social and cultural integration of qandas. The gained information will be useful in evaluating current policies and will be used in order to develop recommendations for more effective integration policies in Kazakhstan.

#### Compensation.

No tangible compensation will be given.

#### Confidentiality & Privacy.

The survey will not collect information that may reveal your identity, including your first name, last name, or IP address. Any data collected in this survey will be securely stored in accordance with Nazarbayev University's Research Data Management Policy. This data will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. Summarized anonymous results of this survey may be presented at a conference or published.

#### Voluntary Nature of the Study.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and if consent to participate has been given, it can be withdrawn at any time without prejudice to the case.

### Points of Contact.

It is understood that if you have questions or comments about this project, you should contact the principal investigator Sezim Aubakirova at @sezim.aubakirova@nu.edu.kz. Any other questions or concerns can be directed to the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee, resethics@nu.edu.kz.

### Statement of Consent.

By clicking “I agree” below you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, have read and understood this consent form and agree to participate in this research study.

- I Agree
- I Disagree

- *1.1 Cultural and psychological integration*

1. How connected do you feel with Kazakhstan?

- 1 - I do not feel a connection at all
- 2 - I feel a weak connection
- 3 - I feel a moderately close connection
- 4 - I feel a very close connection
- 5 - I feel an extremely close connection

2. Thinking about your future, where do you want to live?

- 1 - I definitely want to move to another country
- 2 - I probably want to move to another country
- 3 - I am unsure if I want to remain in Kazakhstan or if I want to move to another country
- 4 - I probably want to live in Kazakhstan for the rest of my life
- 5 - I definitely want to live in Kazakhstan for the rest of my life

3. How often do you feel isolated from Kazakhstani society?

- 1 - Always
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Sometimes
- 4 - Rarely
- 5 - Never

4. Communicating in Kazakh/Russian has many components, like reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills.

Please evaluate your own skills in Kazakh. How well can you do the following when reading, speaking, writing, or listening to Kazakh? Please mark one answer for each row.

“I can read in Kazakh and understand the main points in simple newspaper articles on familiar subjects”

- 1 - Not well at all
- 2 - Not well
- 3 - Moderately well
- 4 - Well
- 5 - Very well

5. In a conversation, I can speak in Kazakh about familiar topics and express personal opinions

- 1 - Not well at all
- 2 - Not well
- 3 - Moderately well
- 4 - Well
- 5 - Very well

6. I can write letters in Kazakh about my experiences, feelings, and about events

- 1 - Not well at all
- 2 - Not well
- 3 - Moderately well
- 4 - Well
- 5 - Very well

7. I can listen to in Kazakh and understand the main points in radio or TV programs about familiar subjects

- 1 - Not well at all
- 2 - Not well
- 3 - Moderately well
- 4 - Well
- 5 - Very well

8. Please evaluate your own skills in Russian. How well can you do the following when reading, speaking, writing, or listening to Russian? Please mark one answer for each row.

“I can read in Russian and understand the main points in simple newspaper articles on familiar subjects”

- 1 - Not well at all
- 2 - Not well
- 3 - Moderately well
- 4 - Well
- 5 - Very well

9. In a conversation, I can speak in Russian about familiar topics and express personal opinions

- 1 - Not well at all
- 2 - Not well
- 3 - Moderately well
- 4 - Well

5 - Very well

10. I can write letters in Russian about my experiences, feelings, and about events

1 - Not well at all

2 - Not well

3 - Moderately well

4 - Well

5 - Very well

11. I can listen to in Russian and understand the main points in radio or TV programs about familiar subjects

1 - Not well at all

2 - Not well

3 - Moderately well

4 - Well

5 - Very well

12. To what extent do you speak English?

1 - Not at all

2 - Little

3 - Somewhat

4 - To a large extent

5 - To a great extent

13. To what extent do you think you follow local Kazakh (Kazakhstani) traditions?

1 - Not at all

2 - Little

3 - Somewhat

4 - To a large extent

5 - To a great extent

14. To what extent do you celebrate national holidays? (e.g. Nauryz, New Year, Victory Day)

1 - Not at all

2 - Little

3 - Somewhat

4 - To a large extent

5 - To a great extent

15. To what extent do you watch local channels and movies on TV?

1 - Not at all

2 - Little

3 - Somewhat

4 - To a large extent

5 - To a great extent

16. To what extent do you listen to local Radio channels?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

17. To what extent do you follow Kazakhstani Media representatives?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

18. To what extent do you go to the local concerts of Kazakhstani celebrities?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

● *Social integration*

19. To what extent do you have a strong relationship with local people?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

20. To what extent do you feel supported by local people?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

21. To what extent do you interact with local people from your neighbourhood?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

22. In the last 12 months, how often did you eat dinner/ lunch with local Kazakhstanis who are not part of your family?

- 1 - Never
- 2 - Once a year
- 3 - Once a month
- 4 - Once a week
- 5 - Almost every day

23. People sometimes participate in different kinds of groups or associations. For each group listed below, how often do you participate in a group activity?

A group related to your job, like a union, business, or professional organization?

- 1 - Do not belong nor participate
- 2 - Belong but do not actively participate
- 3 - Participate at least once per year
- 4 - Participate at least once per month
- 5 - Participate at least once per week

24. A group related to your religious beliefs, like a church, mosque, synagogue, or other religious organisation?

- 1 - Do not belong nor participate
- 2 - Belong but do not actively participate
- 3 - Participate at least once per year
- 4 - Participate at least once per month
- 5 - Participate at least once per week

25. A group related to your hobbies, like a sports, leisure, or cultural group?

- 1 - Do not belong nor participate
- 2 - Belong but do not actively participate
- 3 - Participate at least once per year
- 4 - Participate at least once per month
- 5 - Participate at least once per week

26. A group related to a social or political cause, such as a voluntary organization or political party?

- 1 - Do not belong nor participate
- 2 - Belong but do not actively participate
- 3 - Participate at least once per year
- 4 - Participate at least once per month
- 5 - Participate at least once per week

27. Another voluntary organization?

- 1 - Do not belong nor participate

- 2 - Belong but do not actively participate
- 3 - Participate at least once per year
- 4 - Participate at least once per month
- 5 - Participate at least once per week

28. If you think about members of the groups you are participating in, how many of them are local Kazakhstanis?

- 1 - Do not belong nor participate
- 2 - None of them
- 3 - About half of them
- 4 - Most of them
- 5 - All of them

29. To what extent do you speak the language of the country you returned from?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

30. To what extent do you feel that your children will stay in Kazakhstan?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

31. To what extent do you feel sensitive about the status of qandas?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

32. In this country, how difficult or easy would it be for you to see a doctor?

- 1 - Very difficult
- 2 - Somewhat difficult
- 3 - Neither difficult, nor easy
- 4 - Somewhat easy
- 5 - Very easy

33. In this country, how difficult or easy would it be for you to search for a job (find proper listings)?

- 1 - Very difficult

- 2 - Somewhat difficult
- 3 - Neither difficult, nor easy
- 4 - Somewhat easy
- 5 - Very easy

34. In this country, how difficult or easy would it be for you to get help with legal problems?

- 1 - Very difficult
- 2 - Somewhat difficult
- 3 - Neither difficult, nor easy
- 4 - Somewhat easy
- 5 - Very easy

- *Political integration*

35. To what extent do you feel yourself as a politically active citizen?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

36. To what extent do you go to the elections?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

37. How well do you understand the important political issues facing Kazakhstan?

- 1 - Not well at all
- 2 - Not well
- 3 - Moderately well
- 4 - Well
- 5 - Very well

38. In the last 12 months, how often did you typically discuss major political issues facing Kazakhstan with others?

- 1 - Never
- 2 - Once a year
- 3 - Once a month
- 4 - Once a week
- 5 - Almost every day

39. Now we would like to ask you some questions about public policy and current events.

Please answer these questions from memory, without looking up the answers or asking another person. Not many people can answer every question correctly, and we would be very grateful if you would answer the questions to the best of your ability.

In politics, people often talk about the form of the government. Can you please tell us if the following sentence is true or not?

The Republic of Kazakhstan is a unitary state with a presidential form of government.

- True
- False
- Do not know

40. Which party in Kazakhstan offered to nominate Tokayev as a presidential candidate in the November 2022 elections?

- Ak Jol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan
- People's Party of Kazakhstan
- Other
- Do not know

41. The former name of the party "Amanat"?

- People's Party of Kazakhstan
- Nur Otan
- Other
- Don't know

42. What do we need to access the Egov.kz portal?

- Electronic digital signature
- Email
- Other
- Don't know

43. To what extent do you feel supported by the government?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

44. There are different ways of trying to improve things in Kazakhstan or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? Have you...

	Yes	No
tried to convince somebody to change their political opinion?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
tried to influence others on how to vote?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
made a political statement in a public setting or online regarding politics in Kazakhstan?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
engaged in public or online discussions regarding politics in Kazakhstan?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
contacted a politician, or a government official?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
worked in a political party or action group?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
engaged in public or online discussions regarding politics in Kazakhstan?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
contacted a politician, or a government official?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
worked in a political party or action group?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
worn or displayed a political badge, sticker, or sign?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
signed a petition?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
taken part in a lawful public demonstration?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
boycotted certain products?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
collected signatures for a petition?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- *Economic integration*

45. How satisfied are you with your current employment situation? It might be either in paid work, in school, unemployed, permanently sick or disabled, retired, in the military, in community service, doing unpaid housework, looking after children or other persons, or another status.

- 1 - Very dissatisfied
- 2 - Somewhat dissatisfied
- 3 - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- 4 - Somewhat satisfied
- 5 - Very satisfied

46. To what extent do you feel supported by the government in terms of housing?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

47. To what extent do you feel supported by the government in terms of employment?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

48. To what extent are you satisfied with your monthly profit?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

49. To what extent can ignorance of local languages (Kazakh/Russian) become an obstacle in the employment process?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

50. To what extent does your professional skill set match with the local company's required skills?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

51. To what extent do you feel comfortable doing business?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

52. To what extent do you measure your contribution to the local economic development?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

53. To what extent do you use banks of the country you returned from?

- 1 - Not at all
- 2 - Little
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - To a large extent
- 5 - To a great extent

Demographic information:			
1	What is your current civil status?	Multiple choice Allow one answer	Qandas/ Citizen of Kazakhstan/ Other _____
2	Please select your age group	Multiple choice Allow one answer	18-24/25-34/35-44/45-50/50-60/ over 60 years old
3	Please select your gender identity	Multiple choice Allow one answer	Male/Female/Other/Rather not to say
4	Please select your marital status	Multiple choice Allow one answer	Single/Married/Divorced/Widowed/ Other
5	Please select your household size	Multiple choice Allow one answer	1-3 persons /4-6 persons/7 and more
6	What is your highest level of education	Multiple choice Allow one answer	High school diploma/Undergraduate degree/Postgraduate degree/Other _____
7	Please select your current employment status	Multiple choice Allow one answer	Employed/Self-employed/ Unemployed/ Student/Retired/Other _____
8	Please select your household monthly income	Multiple choice Allow one answer	Below 100 000 Tenge/100 000 – 200 000 Tenge/200 001 – 300 000 Tenge/300 001 – 400 000 Tenge/More than 400 000 Tenge

9	In which country were you born and raised before returning to Kazakhstan?	Multiple choice Allow one answer	Uzbekistan/ China/ Mongolia/ Russia/ Kyrgyzstan/ Turkmenistan/ Other _____
10	When did you return?	Multiple choice Allow one answer	1990-1995 1995-2000 2000-2005 2005-2010 2010-2015 2015-2022

## APPENDIX C

### A. Introductory Section

First of all, thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this study. Before we proceed could you please read and sign the informed consent form? We inform you that this interview is confidential and voluntary. If you do not want to answer certain questions or would like to stop the interview at any time, you can do so without any consequences. Do you have any questions before we start?

*All questions concern the Repatriation policy in Kazakhstan. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the design and implementation of the policy as well as to reveal the current obstacles in the process of integration.*

### B. Participant information

Date:	
Place:	
Time:	
Participant's ID code	
Organization's ID code	
Language:	
Duration of the interview:	
Occupation:	
Education (expert knowledge):	
How long have you been living in Kazakhstan (years/months)?	
Which country did you return from?	
What is your citizenship status?	

### C. Main Section

#	Main thematic question	Questions
<b>1. Cultural integration</b>		
1.1.	Traditions and celebrations	What are the traditions that you and your family follow? What kind of traditions or celebrations do you maintain for your ancestors? What traditions or customs have you made an effort to preserve? Are there traditions that you have given up or changed? What difficulties have you encountered because of differences in tradition or customs?
1.2.	Lifestyle	What changes in lifestyle did you make once you moved to Kazakhstan? What was your first impression when you first came? How did your current lifestyle differ from your early experience?
1.3.	Hopes and feelings	Who greeted you when you first arrived in Kazakhstan? What was the difference between feeling for the homeland before and after arrival?

		What were your hopes when you first arrived? Have those hopes been realized?
<b>2. Social integration:</b>		
2.1.	Language	What languages do you speak? Do you speak a different language in different settings, such as home, school, or work? What kind of difficulties did you face in terms of language?
2.2.	Relationship with people	How is your relationship with your neighbors? Where are the majority of your friends from? What challenges did you face in the process of building relations with people around? Where do you make friends besides work or study?
2.3.	Family	Which family members came along or stayed behind? What was most difficult for your family about leaving? How do you think your family has changed by moving back to Kazakhstan? What was the attitude of local people towards you and your family as newcomers? (welcoming/unwelcoming)
2.4.	Education	Where did you get your education? What kind of schools did you attend? What level of education did you have? What were some memories and/or memorable events you had in school/university? (due to the qandas status) How did the teachers treat you? The other students?
<b>3. Political integration</b>		
3.1.	Location	In what city and state did you first settle in? What kind of issue did you face there? Why do you live where you live now? How do you feel about the place of life chosen by the government?
3.2.	Rebranding	What is your attitude towards the term “oralman”? What is your attitude towards the new term “qandas”? How did new changes affect you? How did new changes affect the local people’s attitude towards you?
3.3.	Repatriation Policy	What kind of programs in terms of repatriation do you know? How do you evaluate the work of the “qandas Adaptation and Integration Centers”? How do you evaluate repatriation policy in terms of language? What would you recommend to change/ develop in repatriation policy?
3.4.	Active citizenship	What kind of political parties are you aware of? What do you think are some of the most important political issues the government of Kazakhstan should pay attention to? How do you get news and info (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, internet)? What do you usually do as an active citizen?

<b>4. Economic integration</b>		
4.1.	Finance	<p>How were your finances when you first arrived?</p> <p>Did you receive financial support from an organization, individuals, or family? If yes, what kind of?</p> <p>How do you evaluate your financial conditions now?</p> <p>What is your level of satisfaction with your wage?</p> <p>Do you financially support your relatives that stayed in the country you returned from?</p>
4.2.	Employment	<p>How did you make a living after resettlement?</p> <p>Who helped you to find these opportunities?</p> <p>What differences in job opportunities do you see in Kazakhstan versus the country you have arrived from?</p> <p>How do you evaluate governmental employment programs such as “Enbek kz”?</p> <p>What kind of issues did you face in terms of skills in the process of applying for a job?</p>
4.3.	Housing	<p>How did you find housing?</p> <p>Who helped you to find it?</p> <p>What kind of housing programs do you know?</p> <p>Has the government provided housing for you or any of your relatives? What was the program?</p>

## APPENDIX D

### Oral Informed Consent Form (will be sent by email before focus-group)

**Introduction.** Dear XXX, we invite you to take part in a study on "Homeland integration: Assessing the experiences of repatriates (Qandas) in Kazakhstan and state policies associated with them". The study is conducted by master's students of the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Public Policy.

Integration - the process by which repatriates become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups.

The following document is written to familiarize you with the purposes of the study, the procedures, your rights as a participant, and the potential risks and benefits associated with this study.

**Procedures.** The purpose of this study is to identify visible and invisible barriers to the integration of qandas into society. If you agree to participate in this research project, you will be asked to participate in a focus group with a member of the research team. The focus group questions will address topics related to your personal experience as “qandas” and the barriers you have encountered to integration, and will take up to 60 minutes to complete.

If you agree, the focus group will be audio-recorded. This question will be asked again at the end of the document if you agree to participate as a focus group member. The recorded information will be confidential and no one other than the research team will have access to the digital information. The recordings will be stored on a personal electronic device.

**Risks.** There are only minimal risks associated with this study. Possible risks may include feelings of discomfort related to memories of negative life events (possible barriers to integration into society, attitudes of local residents, etc.). We remind you that your answers will remain confidential, and you do not need to answer questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. You can withdraw from the study any time without any consequences.

**Benefits.** The expected benefits of this study include a better understanding of the potential stage of economic, political, social, and cultural integration of qandas. The information obtained will be useful in evaluating current policies and will be used to develop recommendations for more effective integration policies in Kazakhstan.

**Compensation.** No tangible compensation will be given.

**Confidentiality & Privacy.** Any information obtained in the course of this study will be kept as confidential as possible. Any information related to your identity will not be published or shared outside of the research team. Any data from this study that is shared or published will be the aggregate data of all participants, not individuals.

**The voluntary nature of the research.** Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and if consent to participate has been given, it can be withdrawn at any time without prejudice. If you decide to stop participating in the study, you will be asked how you would like us to dispose of the data collected up to that point. This may include returning the data, destroying it, or using it for research.

**Points of Contact.** It is understood that if you have questions or comments about this project, you should **contact the principal investigator at \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_**. Any other questions or concerns can be directed to the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee, [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz).

**Oral Consent Questions.** (The person will be asked before the start of the focus-group)

- Do you have any questions or would you like to know any additional details related to the research process or to the Oral Consent Form sent to you earlier by email?
- Do you agree to participate in this study by being aware that you can withdraw at any point with no consequences to you?
- Do you agree that your answers with a focus group will be recorded by an audio-recorder?