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The purpose of the article is to study theoretical and practical issues of social inequality and develop recommendations for its reduction in Kazakhstan.

The hypothesis of the study is the assumption about the growing inequality of the population living in different regions of Kazakhstan.

The article summarizes the theoretical views of scientists on the problems of inequality, examines the dynamics of key indicators reflecting the standard of living of the population in the regions of Kazakhstan. The conclusion is made about the strengthening of social inequality of the population living in different regions of the country. Measures have been developed to reduce it.

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Research of Social Inequality of the Population in the Regions of Kazakhstan

Nailya K. Nurlanova [α], Farida G. Alzhanova [σ] & Nursaule Zh. Brimbetova [ρ]

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The methods of system research, generalizations, economic-statistical, index, scoring and ranking were used.

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I. Introduction

In the last decade of the XXI century, a deep technological and structural transformation is taking place in the world economy, in the process of which new high-tech industries and efficient jobs for highly qualified workers are emerging. This leads, on the one hand, to economic growth, on the other, to an increase in income inequality of various social groups of the population. Thus, the incomes of workers in highly paid sectors of the economy are growing, while those employed in traditional industries that preserve backward technologies are declining. Many researchers confirm the idea that economic growth not only contributes to poverty reduction, but is also accompanied by an increase in social inequality (Kanbur, 2000). This leads to the conclusion that the problems of inequality and economic growth are interrelated.

Indeed, in modern conditions, the development of the world economic system and individual national economies cannot be called sustainable when most of the world's wealth belongs to 1% of the population, the so-called "golden billion". Thus, according to the updated criteria of the World Bank (3.2 and 5.5 US dollars per day), almost half of the world's population lived below the poverty line in the world – 3.4 billion people (World Bank, 2023). At the same time, according to analysts, starting from 2020, in just one quarter of the global pandemic, the total wealth of the world's billionaires increased by 27.5%, amounting to 10.2 trillion US dollars.

Inertial development under this scenario leads to the fact that economic growth is limited by the exhaustion of natural resources, accompanied by an increase in the number of poor segments of the population, a decrease in demand for products. As a result, there is a deepening of differentiation of countries and regions, an increase in unemployment, poverty and poverty, marginalization and increased uncontrolled migration of the population.

The digital economy facilitates human access to social goods and services. If a society has an additional resource - access to infrastructure and communications, the Internet, it has increased opportunities to meet its needs (access to water, food, housing, energy resources, health services, education).

But along with positive trends, the expansion of digitalization in all sectors of the economy, the development of Big Data will eventually lead to the formation of a new oligarchic stratum of society (Harari, 2019, p.13] and to the new digital dictatorship, the so-called "network Netocracy" (Bard & Zoderkvist, 2004). Thanks to full access to information and manipulation of information, it acquires unlimited power in the management of society. At the same time, vulnerable social strata appear in society that do not possess digital skills and do not benefit from Internet resources. These strata of society are gradually becoming the poorest population. With the development of digital technologies, a significant part of the population of many countries will be forced out of the labor market, which will lead to an increase in unemployment, lower incomes, job cuts, and a decrease in the middle-class stratum.

In other words, despite digitalization and automation of processes in all spheres of the economy and human life, the problems of inequality are increasing in all countries. And everyone knows that an

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increase in the stratification of society can lead to serious social conflicts regarding the distribution of resources in the country and negatively affects economic, social and political stability.

Kazakhstan is no exception. In our country with a developing economy, large differences in spatial development and the predominance of extractive industries, the problems of social inequality are very acute. Under the influence of global challenges, income differentiation in Kazakhstan has increased significantly. According to experts, in 2021 in Kazakhstan, the number of rich people with a fortune of more than 30 million US dollars increased by 33%. At the same time, the share of poor households with incomes below the subsistence minimum increased to 5.2% compared to 4.3% in 2019, and in rural areas amounted to 6.3% (EEC, 2019).

Therefore, the problem of overcoming social inequality of the population is relevant in Kazakhstan.

The purpose of the article is to study theoretical and practical issues of social inequality and develop recommendations for its reduction in Kazakhstan.

An attempt is made on the basis of generalization of theoretical views of scientists on the problems of inequality and analysis of the dynamics of social indicators in the regions of Kazakhstan to confirm the hypothesis about the growing inequality of the population living in different regions of the country. It was made the conclusion about the need for constant monitoring of social indicators in the regions of the country, the development of a National Program to combat poverty in Kazakhstan in areas differentiated by region was proposed.

The methods of system research, generalizations, economic-statistical, index, scoring and ranking were used.

II. Literature Review on the Problem of Social Inequality and Inclusive Development

Many theorists, economists and analysts have been researching the phenomena of economic growth, social development and inequality for many years. The subject of the scientists' research was mainly factors of economic growth or recession, and unstable development (Kuznets, 1963; Lewis, 1954; Holmes, 1999; Fujita, Krugman, 1995). However, institutional and social causes of economic inequality in different territories of the country and different social strata of the population have been poorly investigated.

Later, more attention was paid to the problems of spatial inequality. Thus, the famous scientist Krugman associated economic development with the growth of urbanization and inequality in its early stages of development (Krugman, 1991). According to his theory, economic growth is promoted by structural changes in the urban economy, allowing it to take advantage of increased profits and the economy of urbanization. This theory was supported and developed by other scientists. In particular, Ross proved that urbanization accelerates the process of redistribution of labor from rural to urban areas (Ross, 2000). Behrens K. and Robert-Nicoud F. it was revealed that the growth of cities and a large concentration of the population are associated with growing inequality (Behrens & Robert-Nicoud, (2014). Scientists Baum-Snow N. and Pavan R. identified a positive relationship between the size of a city and wage inequality over the past decades and found that intra-group inequality in large cities is an important driving force of this relationship (Baum-Snow, 2012).

Of interest are empirical studies by a number of authors on spatial inequality on the example of the provinces of China. Thus, to assess territorial inequality, these authors analyzed the influence of independent variables measuring the level of globalization, decentralization and the location of production on gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (Tsui, 1993; Zhou & Qin, 2012). Other scientists who study the issues of concentration of factors of production and consumer market in the regions of developed countries also attach great importance to solving the problem of territorial inequality (Wei, Fang, 2006).

Thus, the geographical concentration of material, financial and human capital to a certain extent confirms the territorial inequality in the distribution of human benefits.

In the future, research papers began to trace the uneven distribution of income and poverty, excessive differentiation in access to health services, education (Granberg& Zaitseva, 2002; Grigoriev & Parshina, 2013; Andreeva et al., 2017). In the studies of Ukrainian authors, special attention is paid to social inequality, but the results obtained do not give a real idea of inequality in both income and property ownership (Feofanova& Feofanov, 2017).

Generalization of theoretical views on the problems of inequality allowed us to draw a number of conclusions.

Firstly, theoretical research and practice of world development indicate an increase in socio-economic inequality of countries, their individual territories, cities and villages.

Secondly, despite many studies, there is no consensus on the causes of regional inequality and living standards of different segments of the population. Nevertheless, many scientists argue that an increase in inequality can be both an engine of economic growth and have a negative impact on the sustainability of development.

Thirdly, increasing differences in the social development of countries and their individual territories, large discrepancies in the economic well-being and

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political interests of the population can contribute to the disruption of overall social stability and be a destabilizing factor

Fourth, one of the main problems of our time is the inequality of the population in various aspects: by the place of settlement on the territory of the country; by income level, distribution of national wealth; by the degree of accessibility to public goods and social services (health, education); by the provision of effective jobs, infrastructure, drinking water, etc.

Fifthly, the strengthening of social stratification leads to the radicalization of people's views and, accordingly, to an increase in social tension.

Thus, in many countries, there is a need to smooth out regional differences on the basis of a new, scientifically based development model.

In developing countries, such as Kazakhstan, the problems of regional inequality have not yet been adequately addressed. The key issues of regional inequality in the regions of Kazakhstan of various types – raw materials, industrial, agro-industrial, service - are poorly investigated.

The emergence of new conditions, factors and threats to stable socio-economic development makes it necessary to change approaches in Kazakhstan's economic policy to solve the problem of social inequality.

From our point of view, the conceptual model of Inclusive Growth meets the real conditions for maintaining social stability in society. It compares favorably with other theories, its implementation involves solving the problem of reducing inequality and rational distribution of resources and benefits.

The basis of the country's economic policy based on the principles of inclusive development should be not so much the increment of national wealth and its rational distribution, but comprehensive sustainable economic growth, ensuring an increase in income and quality of life for all categories of the population in all regions of the country, increasing their access to social benefits and the level of security. That is, if we switch to an inclusive development model, every person in society should be able to meet the needs of their life and human capital development: access to water, food, housing, energy resources, health services, education. An additional resource necessary for the life of people in modern society is access to infrastructure and communications, primarily broadband Internet.

The development of the economy, according to the inclusive development model, becomes possible with the expansion of the influence of informatization and digitalization of all processes and spheres of human activity, the formation of the network nature of the economy, the strengthening of the role of knowledge and innovation.

The main drivers of inclusive development from a regional perspective are schematically presented in Figure 1.

The implementation of this model will require increasing the role of state and local authorities in stimulating the creation of effective jobs and income growth of the population, more even participation in economic processes. Thus, inclusive development will contribute to the achievement of social justice.

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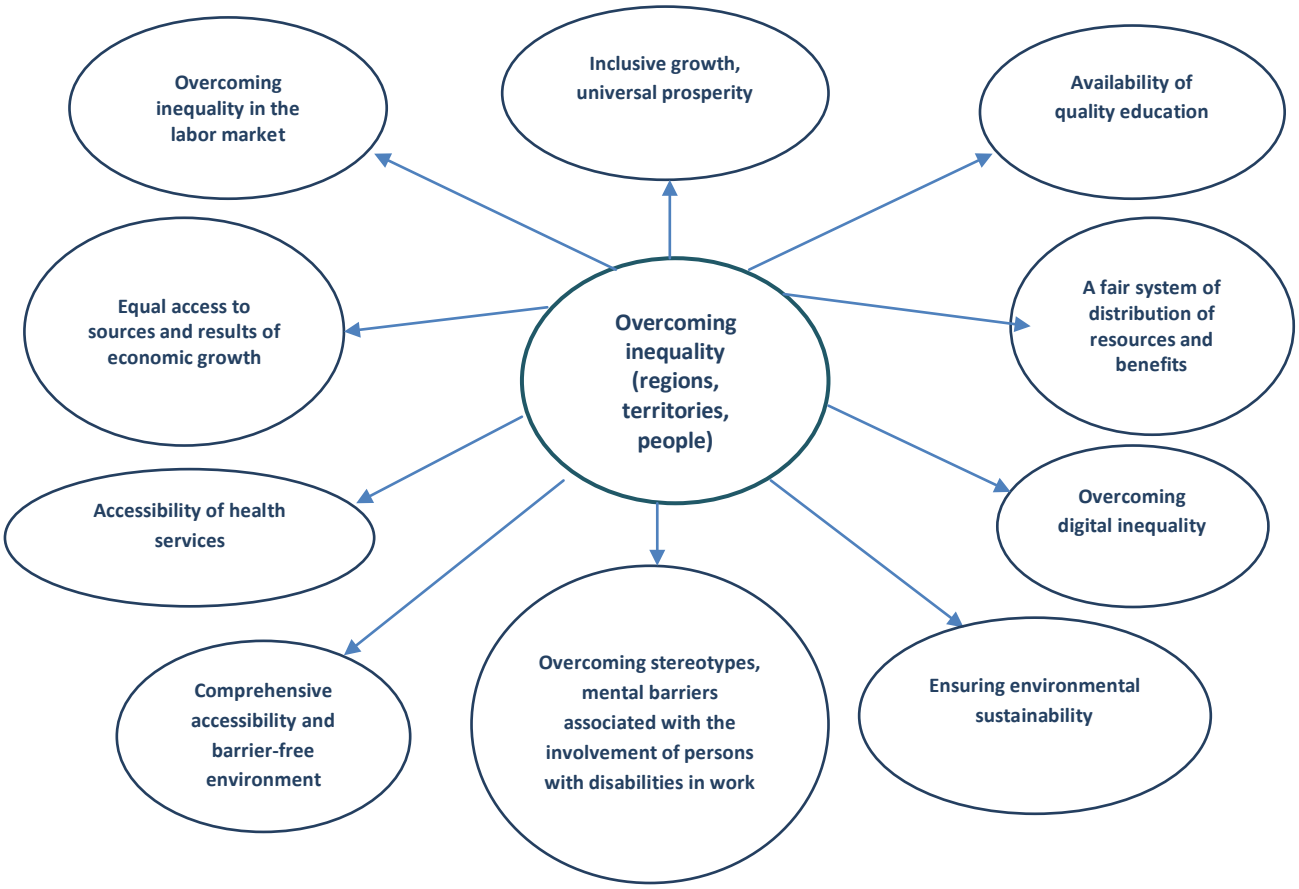


Fig. 1: The main drivers of inclusive regional development

III. Resources and Methods

The social inequality of the population in the regions was measured by methods and indicators that allow assessing the level of poverty, the income gap between rural and urban residents, differences in the provision of doctors, housing, the number of vulnerable people with disabilities by regions of the country and different layers of society.

The object of the study were the regions of Kazakhstan.

a) Indicators of social inequality

The selected indicators characterizing regional differences in the levels of social development are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Indicators of social development of the regions of Kazakhstan

No.	Indicator	The content of the indicator, units of measurement
1	Average per capita nominal monetary income	US dollar
2	Poverty level	The proportion of the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum, %
3	Median income of the population	US dollar per month
4	Funds ratio	The ratio of 10 percent of the most and 10 percent of the least affluent population, times
5	Disability	The number of persons with disabilities per 1000 people of the population, people
6	Availability of doctors	Number of doctors per 1000 population, people
7	Availability of Housing	Sq. m for 1 person

b) Research methods and algorithm

All values of the indicators were normalized on a scale from 1 (lowest score) to 9 (highest score) according to formulas 1 (for indicators whose higher value is a positive phenomenon) and 2 (for indicators whose higher value is a negative phenomenon).

$$X\ \text{scaled} = 8 * \frac{X_n - X_{min}}{X_{max} - X_{min}} + 1 \quad (1)$$

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$$X\ scaled = -8 * \frac{X_n - X_{min}}{X_{max} - X_{min}} + 9\ , \quad (2)$$

where X_n – the value of the current indicator;
X_{max} - the maximum value of the indicator;
X_{mix} - the minimum value of the indicator.

Calculations of the indices and their scoring allow ranking the regions of Kazakhstan according to the level of social inequality of the population.

One of the important issues that need to be addressed to reduce differences in the social development of regions is gender equality. Therefore, for a more complete assessment of the level of social inequality, the dynamics of wage differences between men and women in the regions of Kazakhstan is analyzed.

The critical point in social inequality is the poverty of rural residents, whose number in Kazakhstan reaches 42%. Therefore, the authors focus on the analysis of dynamics and regional differences in household incomes of the city and village.

The analysis of the totality of these indicators allows the authors to assess the level of social justice in the regions of Kazakhstan.

c) Sources

The information base of the study was made up of foreign and domestic literary sources, regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan, official statistical data: Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, demographic statistics data: Standard of living statistics (https://stat.gov.kz/official/industry/64/statistic/7), Social security statistics (https://stat.gov.kz/official/industry/66/statistic/8); Health statistics (https://stat.gov.kz/official/industry/63/statistic/8); Statistics of the housing stock of the Republic of Kazakhstan (https://stat.gov.kz/edition/publication/collection). Data from the National Bank, the Ministry of Finance, and the Unified Accumulative Pension Fund of the Republic of Kazakhstan were also used for calculations.

IV. Analysis of the Dynamics of Social Indicators in the Regions of Kazakhstan

The object of the study to assess the differences in the levels and dynamics of social indicators were the regions of Kazakhstan - 14 regions and 3 cities of republican significance. The results of calculations of indicators of social development of the regions of Kazakhstan in 2021 are presented in Table 2.

Based on the indicators of social development using the index method according to formulas (1) and (2), the authors carried out their point normalization and ranking of the regions of Kazakhstan. The ranking of regions made it possible to identify those in which the highest level of social inequality of the population is observed, requiring radical measures to reduce it. The results of the assessment of the level of social development and the rating of the regions are presented in Table 3.

The analysis of social indicators clearly demonstrated the continuing inequality of the regions of Kazakhstan.

A clear picture of the social inequality of the population in the regions of Kazakhstan is provided by the analysis of household incomes used for consumption in the context of urban and rural areas. The bottom line is that the higher the rate of use of income for consumption, the lower the ability of households to receive educational, medical and other services, the smaller the share of income used for the expansion or development of the economy. Calculations of real household incomes used for consumption in urban and rural areas by regions of the country, on average per capita and their comparative dynamics for 2016-2021. presented in table 4.

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Table 2: Indicators of social development of the regions of Kazakhstan, 2021

No.	Regions and Cities	Average per capita nominal monetary income of the population, US dollar	The proportion of the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum (poverty level), %	Median income of the population, US dollar[4] per month	The ratio of funds (the ratio of 10 percent of the most and 10 percent of the least well-off population), times	The number of persons with disabilities per 1000 people of the population, people	Availability of housing, sq. m for 1 person	Availability of doctors, per 1000 people of the population, people
1	Akmola	283	5,9	135	5,94	40	23,6	2,6
2	Aktobe	266	3,5	119	5,22	31	23	4,5
3	Almaty	226	4	135	5,38	32	21	2,5
4	Atyrau	583	3	116	3,78	35	24,2	3,1
5	West Kazakhstan	297	3,9	118	4,48	36	22,5	3,3
6	Zhambyl	209	5,8	105	3,86	40	18	3,0
7	Karaganda	326	3	169	6,9	49	23,5	4,7
8	Kostanay	283	3,5	143	5,06	33	22,5	2,9
9	Kyzylorda	214	5,8	113	4,23	38	20,9	3,5
10	Mangystau	363	5,7	115	3,28	39	27,3	3,4
11	Pavlodar	320	3,9	146	6,51	37	22,6	4,0
12	NorthKazakhstan	272	6,7	157	6,67	49	22,2	3,1
13	Turkestan	160	12,2	97	3,42	47	19,1	2,9
14	East Kazakhstan	310	6,5	174	6,78	40	21,2	4,4
15	Astana city	450	1,5	158	4,73	22	30,6	7,6
16	Almaty city	416	4,9	173	7,45	26	29	6,9
17	Shymkent city	189	5	98	3,22	33	25,8	4,5
The gap between the maximum and minimum values of indicators		3,6	8,1	1,8	2,3	2,3	1,7	3,1

Note: calculated according to the following sources of statistical information: Standard of living statistics (https://stat.gov.kz/ official/ industry/64/statistic/7), Social security statistics (https://stat.gov.kz/official/industry/66/statistic/8); Health statistics (https://stat.gov. kz/official/industry/63/statistic/8); Statistics of the housing stock of the Republic of Kazakhstan (https://stat.gov.kz/edition/publica tion/collection).

Table 3: Indices of social development and ranking of regions of Kazakhstan, 2021

No.	Regions and cities	Index	Rating
1	Akmola	3,54	14
2	Aktobe	4,49	7
3	Almaty	3,44	15
4	Atyrau	5,21	3
5	West Kazakhstan	4,14	11
6	Zhambyl	3,10	16
7	Karaganda	5,12	4
8	Kostanay	4,16	10
9	Kyzylorda	3,62	13
10	Mangystau	4,86	5
11	Pavlodar	4,39	9
12	North Kazakhstan	3,63	12
13	Turkestan	2,37	17
14	East Kazakhstan	4,47	8
15	Astana city	7,99	1
16	Almaty city	6,53	2
17	Shymkent city	4,58	6

Note: Calculated according to the indicators of Table 1.

[4] Tenge is the national currency of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

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Table 4: Real household incomes for consumption in urban and rural areas by region, on average per capita

Regions and cities	Household income used for consumption in urban and rural areas, US dollars								The growth rate of household income used for consumption, 2020 to 2016, in %		The growth rate of household income used for consumption, 2021 to 2016, in %	
	2016		2018		2020		2021					
	City	Village	City	Village	City	Village	City	Village	City	Village	City	Village
Akmola	130	113	158	133	170	145	175	155	154,7	150,9	164,3	166,8
Aktobe	121	109	128	106	141	115	154	120	112,5	124,6	155,3	133,9
Almaty	137	147	161	145	181	154	181	160	156,2	123,5	161,5	132,5
Atyrau	128	100	139	107	132	120	142	121	121,2	141,9	135,1	148,2
West Kazakhstan	129	97	140	106	141	114	152	125	104,8	139,7	144,0	157,4
Zhambyl	97	78	115	94	127	107	137	118	154,2	160,9	171,6	184,2
Karaganda	154	121	176	140	188	157	210	171	143,6	153,0	166,3	171,5
Kostanay	121	107	133	113	152	129	175	155	147,9	141,5	195,4	175,9
Kyzylorda	92	88	119	100	122	111	130	128	155,4	148,9	172,9	176,7
Mangystau	126	108	136	112	133	120	137	124	124,2	130,7	132,0	140,7
Pavlodar	121	119	146	138	164	148	190	164	159,2	147,5	190,5	168,9
North Kazakhstan	142	123	185	138	184	152	207	169	126,2	146,6	177,3	167,8
Turkestan[2]	85	77	90	85	98	94	122	104	135,7	144,5	174,2	166,4
East Kazakhstan	158	110	182	134	188	135	200	156	140,5	145,0	154,7	172,8
Astana city	151		166		163		191		126,9		153,5	
Almaty city	183		205		206		218		132,8		145,2	
Shymkent city[2]	112		127		110		112		115,2		121,8	
Republic of Kazakhstan	139	107	158	116	162	126	176	136	137,9	138,9	155,1	156,0
max	183	147	205	145	206	157	218	171				
min	85	77	90	85	98	94	112	104				
Max/min (gap)	2,1	1,9	2,3	1,7	2,1	1,7	1,9	1,6				

Note:

1. Calculated according to the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan. URL: http: www.stat.gov.kz
2. Calculated in US dollars at the current exchange rate of tenge in the corresponding year.
3. Until 2018 there was a South Kazakhstan region, from which the city of Shymkent and the Turkestan region were separated.

In general, judging by the above indicators, there is a positive trend in the growth of household incomes used for consumption in the regions of Kazakhstan. However, income growth is offset by an increase in inflation in the consumer market, which reinforces the trend of increasing poverty of the population. In addition, there are still large differences in household incomes used for consumption, both by regions of the country and by cities and villages, which indicates the continuing social inequality of the population.

Analysis of the level of gender equality is of great importance from the perspective of overcoming poverty and social modernization of society. Gender equality implies equal access of people to the sphere of employment and social services, regardless of gender and age, as well as their place of residence. To a large extent, women suffer from inequality, which is manifested in the following:

- women receive less pay;
- have less control over resources;
- have fewer opportunities to get an education due to employment in the household;
- have less access to high-paying jobs in the public and commercial sectors of the economy;
- as a rule, they have less representation in the government;
- have a large work load associated with both work in the sectors of the economy, as well as with the birth and upbringing of children, employment in the household.

Women from socially vulnerable categories of the population who face the problem of finding stable employment are experiencing particular difficulties. Unemployment and the associated decline in the standard of living of the population increase the risk of an increase in various forms of violence against women.

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At the same time, the creation of equal opportunities for women ensures their active participation in the political, economic and social life of the country.

The study of the level of gender equality in the regions of Kazakhstan was conducted by comparing the differences in the provision of men and women with jobs and decent pay for their work. For these purposes, the ratio of the average monthly nominal salary per employee among men and women for 2016 and 2021 is calculated (Table 5).

Table 5: The ratio of the average monthly nominal salary of one female and male employee

Regions and cities	2016			2021		
	Average monthly nominal salary, US dollars		The ratio of women's and men's salaries, %	Average monthly nominal salary, US dollars		The ratio of women's and men's salaries, %
	Men	Women		Men	Women	
Republic of Kazakhstan	514	361	70,2	652	510	78,3
Akmola	344	271	78,7	491	449	91,5
Aktobe	397	299	75,4	559	445	79,6
Almaty	349	299	85,6	471	488	103,5
Atyrau	1 050	539	51,3	1 144	628	54,9
West Kazakhstan	572	329	57,4	592	464	78,3
Zhambyl	310	265	85,2	453	454	100,2
Karaganda	440	301	68,4	642	464	72,2
Kostanay	353	283	80,1	492	443	90,0
Kyzylorda	407	308	75,6	518	470	90,6
Mangystau	1 006	464	46,1	1 005	563	56
Pavlodar	427	311	72,8	568	448	78,8
North Kazakhstan	314	268	85,4	435	434	99,8
Turkestan[2]	345	279	80,8	466	443	95,2
East Kazakhstan	403	311	77,2	566	470	82,9
Astana city	685	544	79,4	888	711	80,1
Almaty city	548	463	84,4	756	622	82,3
Shymkent city[2]	-	-	-	461	438	94,9

Note:

1. Calculated according to the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan. URL: http: www.stat.gov.kz
2. Calculated in US dollars at the current exchange rate of tenge in the corresponding year.
3. Until 2018. there was a South Kazakhstan region, from which the city of Shymkent and the Turkestan region were separated

These data show that in Kazakhstan there is a gender asymmetry in the amount of wages, which is largely due to the fact that women make up the majority in the public sector, where wages are relatively low.

V. Results and Discussion

a) The level of poverty in the regions of Kazakhstan

An assessment of regional differences in social indicators showed that the largest gap was in the level of poverty (the proportion of the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum). Thus, the gap between the maximum indicator in the Turkestan region and the minimum in Astana reached 8.1 times. At the same time, the gap in per capita nominal monetary incomes of the population is much smaller – 3.6 times. This is due to the fact that there are more numerous households in the Turkestan region.

The agro-industrial regions (Akmola, Almaty, Kostanay, Turkestan regions) have the lowest provision of doctors for the population. In terms of housing security, the best situation is observed in the cities of republican significance (Almaty, Astana and Shymkent) and in the oil-producing Atyrau region. At the same time, the largest number of people with disabilities is observed in industrial regions (Karaganda and North Kazakhstan regions).

The five leaders in social well-being included two megacities (Astana and Almaty), two oil-producing regions (Atyrau and Mangystau regions) and the industrial Karaganda region. But intraregional problems are also observed in the leading regions. For example, Atyrau region is the leader in terms of average wages. Only 3% of the population of this region have incomes below the subsistence minimum, the coefficient of funds is 3.78. In the Mangystau region, the coefficient of funds

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is also one of the best in the country - 3.28. At the same time, the median income in these oil–producing regions is one of the lowest, and the gap between the median and average per capita income in Atyrau region is 5 times, and in Mangystau - 3 times, which is the highest among the regions. This indicates a large gap in income and standard of living among the population employed in the core industry (oil production), and among people employed in other sectors of the economy of these areas.

Turkestan region has one of the lowest coefficients of funds, but at the same time the lowest level of per capita and median income, the highest proportion of the population with an income below the subsistence minimum, a large proportion of the population with disabilities. It can be said that relative "equality in poverty" persists in the region. Given that the Turkestan region is the most densely populated region of Kazakhstan, the high level of the poor population in this region has a great impact on the severity of the poverty problem in the whole country. Of the 1 million poor population in Kazakhstan as a whole, 25% of its population falls on the Turkestan region. The paradox is that the demographic potential of this region is one of the largest in the country, but its economic potential remains low. The region is an outsider in most economic indicators, it has the lowest indicators of gross domestic product per capita, investment, budget security, housing, higher education, and the highest proportion of the population with vulnerable, unstable employment (46%).

b) Differences in household income per capita used for consumption in urban and rural regions of Kazakhstan

A comparative analysis of household incomes per capita used for consumption in urban and rural areas of the regions of Kazakhstan allowed us to conclude that higher household incomes on average per capita per month were in Almaty (218 US dollars) and urban areas of industrial regions: East Kazakhstan (200 US dollars), Karaganda (210 US dollars) and North Kazakhstan (207 US dollars). In rural areas of these regions, incomes were lower: in Almaty (155 US dollars), Karaganda (171 US dollars) and North Kazakhstan regions (169 US dollars). The worst situation for this indicator in urban areas was in Shymkent (112 US dollars), Turkestan (122 US dollars), Kyzylorda (130 US dollars) and Zhambyl (137 US dollars) regions. To some extent, such low per capita incomes are explained by the large number of people in the households of these regions. In rural areas low incomes were in Turkestan (104 US dollars), Zhambyl (118 US dollars) regions, as well as in raw material producing regions: Aktobe (120 US dollars), Atyrau (121 US dollars), West Kazakhstan (125 US dollars), Kyzylorda (128 US dollars), Mangystau (124 US dollars) regions[5].

The gap we calculated between the maximum and minimum indicators of household income per capita used for consumption indicates inequality in the levels of social development across the country's regions, which in 2018-2020 tended to increase and only slightly decreased in 2021 (1.9). In particular, a large gap is observed between the indicators of Almaty, the cities of East Kazakhstan, Karaganda regions and Turkestan region.

In rural areas, the regional gap is slightly lower (1.6), which is explained by equally low incomes in rural areas of all regions. A paradox can be noted – in the regions of the oil-producing regions (Atyrau and Mangystau regions), which are among the five leaders in social well-being, critically low household incomes per capita used for consumption have developed in rural areas.

The analysis showed that the growth of household incomes used for consumption was not accompanied by a corresponding increase in savings. These trends are typical for Aktobe (city and village), Almaty (village), Atyrau (city), West Kazakhstan (city and village), Mangystau (city and village), North Kazakhstan (city) and Turkestan (city) regions. In three cities of republican significance, the growth of consumption expenditures is estimated as moderate, which indicates the continuing opportunities for progressive social development of households.

In general, it can be concluded that household incomes used for consumption are significantly lower in rural areas than in the city.

c) The level of gender equality

A comparative analysis of the average monthly nominal wages of men and women in Kazakhstan showed that a lower wage for women compared to the national average in 2016 was observed in Zhambyl (265 US dollars), North Kazakhstan (268 tenge), Akmola (271 US dollars) regions and Turkestan (279 US dollars). In 2021, the situation in the amount of wages has changed significantly for the better, especially among women. Despite the persistence of gender inequality in society, the economic aspect of this phenomenon tends to equalize. Thus, in the Almaty region, women's wages were 2.1% higher than men's wages. In Turkestan, Zhambyl regions and Shymkent, women receive salaries almost on a par with men. However, in most regions, gender wage inequality persists, and in oil and gas producing regions, men's salaries are almost 1.5-2 times higher.

[5] Bureau of National Statistics (2021) *Regions of Kazakhstan* (2021). In Ed. ShaimardanovZh. N, Astana, 451.

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This means that despite the increase in women's wages over the past 6 years in 10 regions, gender inequality remains significant, which reduces the opportunities for inclusive social development.

There are many reasons for the persistence of gender inequality. First of all, women's labor, as a rule, is involved in lower-paid sectors of the economy, which is why women in our country as a whole have lower wages. Women in Kazakhstan have to combine work with household management, with the birth and upbringing of children, so it is more difficult for them to compete with men for effective jobs. Women are still insufficiently involved in Government, political and public structures.

Thus, the main reasons hindering the achievement of gender equality in Kazakh society are as follows:

- unbalanced remuneration of men and women;
- lack of specialized knowledge and skills among women entrepreneurs;
- weak activity of women in the economic sphere.

The difference in the levels of economic activity of men and women is primarily shown by the unemployment rate. The share of unemployed women in 2021 was 53.3%, with the highest rate observed in Almaty (57.7%), Karaganda (58.9%) and Mangystau regions (64.9%). Therefore, despite the higher proportion of women in the total population of the country (51.48%), their contribution to the formation of gross domestic product (GDP) remains quite low compared to the contribution of men.

In Kazakhstan, the situation is gradually improving due to the State importance of gender equality issues. According to the UNDP, Kazakhstan fulfills its obligations on gender equality, encourages measures that open up more opportunities for women to participate in decision-making, be more competitive in the labor market, occupy leadership positions in business and unite against gender-based violence. Thanks to these measures, Kazakhstan has risen by 15 positions in the field of gender development and ranked 65th out of 146 countries in the ranking of the Global Gender Gap Index in 2022. Including in the field of education, the country rose from 63rd place in 2020 to 27th in 2022, in health and survival - from 74 to 44, in women's participation in economic activity - from 37th place in 2022 to 29 in the same period. However, in the field of women's political empowerment, Kazakhstan ranked 103rd in 2022 against 93rd in 2017 (UNDP, 2023).

The process of ensuring gender equality is still one of the rather complex phenomena. Therefore, ensuring gender equality, including in the context of the regions of Kazakhstan, implies further improvement of the institutional framework in order to strengthen state guarantees for the provision of equal opportunities for men and women in the exercise of their rights.

VI. Conclusion

The conducted research allows the authors to draw the following conclusions and suggestions.

a) Reduction of social inequality in Kazakhstan requires constant monitoring of social and economic levels in the regions. We propose a methodological approach that can become a reliable tool for public authorities when developing regional programs and making managerial decisions on the development of the country's regions. It allows you to get a general picture of the social differences between regions in general and on individual grounds. The indicators complement each other, allowing not to smooth out the picture, but to identify individual contradictions within and between regions. In Kazakhstan, it is necessary to improve the institutional foundations of macroeconomic and regional policy in the direction of taking regulatory measures for a more equitable distribution of resources between territories and layers of society, strengthening social support measures for the population in various aspects: to ensure access to public goods and social services, to provide effective jobs, infrastructure.

b) Today, significant risks for the implementation of the principles of inclusive regional development in Kazakhstan are the imperfection of the institutional framework. For example, in the National Project "Strong regions - the driver of the country's development", only 3 out of 20 indicators are focused on socio-economic development. At the same time, this document does not provide indicators for increasing the income of the population, providing high-quality medical, educational and other public services. In other words, it can be stated that this program document of Kazakhstan on the development of regions has a low level of inclusiveness and does not yet meet the goals of reducing social inequality in the regions. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a National Program to combat poverty throughout Kazakhstan with measures and mechanisms differentiated by region.

c) In order to fully solve the problems of poverty in rural areas, it is recommended, along with strengthening the stimulation of agricultural production, to actively introduce a mechanism of local self-government.

d) It is possible to overcome large regional differences in the levels of socio-economic development, reduce the poverty of the population and ensure the transition of the regions of Kazakhstan to an inclusive development model by using the existing potential in the following areas:

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- In Akmola, North Kazakhstan, East Kazakhstan and Turkestan regions, where the situation in terms of poverty is the most difficult, it is necessary to radically revise the strategies of socio-economic development. They require defining the parameters of state financial support, developing individual plans for the development of urban and rural territories and border areas.
- In urban and rural settlements of Atyrau, West Kazakhstan, Zhambyl, Kostanay, Kyzylorda and Pavlodar regions (regions of moderate severity in terms of poverty), it is necessary to ensure employment by creating new jobs through the diversification of the local real sector, the creation of new industries, as well as increasing investment in healthcare, which will ensure an increase in the quality of life of all population.
- Youth unemployment is a critical risk of increasing poverty in Almaty, Karaganda, Mangystau regions, the cities of Almaty and Shymkent. In Almaty, the problem of employment of the population of Almaty can be solved through the formation of the Almaty agglomeration, which provides for the construction, together with the Singapore Company, of four structurally united satellite cities G4-City along the Almaty-Kapshagai highway, as well as as a result of the administrative division of the Almaty region and the separation of the Zhetysu region from its composition with the center in Taldykorgan.
- In Shymkent, where there is a high population density and a large proportion of the poor, a more complete and effective use of local resources is a priority.
- In the Mangystau region, the growth of unemployment is associated with unfavorable climatic conditions and low social attractiveness of the village. Here, poverty reduction in rural areas is possible through the creation of new oil refineries, small and medium-sized businesses, and the development of camel breeding.
- In the Karaganda region, poverty reduction should be associated with the technological modernization of city-forming enterprises, economic diversification, the development of the digital services sector, the activation of small and medium-sized businesses, which will eventually contribute to the creation of new jobs and income growth of the population.

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