SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?
RETURN MIGRATION OR NATURALISATION: CASE STUDY OF TURKMEN STUDENTS IN ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract

This research investigates the decision-making processes of Turkmen students in Almaty, with a specific focus on whether they choose to remain in Kazakhstan or return to Turkmenistan. It delves into the intricate factors influencing their decisions, especially among those pursuing higher education in Almaty's universities. The study surveyed 44 respondents, comprising 33 females and 11 males, to explore the prevailing trends in decision-making within this demographic. Employing a range of computational methods, this research sheds light on the complex interplay of factors impacting the migration and naturalisation decisions of Turkmen students, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of return migration in the region. The most crucial finding of this research is that socio-cultural factors, particularly the sense of belongingness in the host country, play a paramount role in shaping the decisions of Turkmens. Contrary to common assumptions, economic and political factors appear to be less influential. This result challenges prevailing beliefs about Central Asian migration, where economic opportunities are often perceived as the primary motivator.

Keywords: Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmen migrants, return migration, naturalization, education decisions, cultural factors, migration patterns.

Остаться или уехать?
Обратная миграция или натурализация: кейс стади туркменских студентов в Алматы, Казахстан

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Аннотация

В статье исследуются процессы принятия решений туркменскими студентами в городе Алматы, с особым акцентом на то, решают ли они остаться в Казахстане или вернуться в Туркменистан. Рассматриваются сложные факторы, влияющие на их решения, особенно среди тех, кто получает высшее образование в университетах Алматы. В ходе исследования были опрошены 44 респондента, из них 33 женщины и 11 мужчин, чтобы изучить преобладающие тенденции в принятии решений в рамках этой демографической группы. Основываясь на ряде вычислительных методов, это исследование проливает свет на сложное взаимодействие факторов, влияющих на решения о миграции и натурализации туркменских студентов, предлагая ценную информацию о динамике обратной миграции в регионе. Наиболее важным выводом этого исследования является то, что социокультурные факторы, особенно чувство принадлежности к принимающей стране, играют первостепенную роль в формировании решений туркмен. Вопреки распространенным предположениям, экономические и политические факторы, по-видимому, оказывают меньшее влияние. Этот результат бросает вызов преобладающим представлениям о миграции из Центральной Азии, где экономические возможности часто воспринимаются как основной мотиватор.

Ключевые слова: Туркменистан, Казахстан, туркменские мигранты, возвратная миграция, натурализация, решения об образовании, культурные факторы, модели миграции

Қалу керек пе немесе кету керек пе?

Кері көші-қон немесе натурализация: Алматыдағы (Қазақстан) түрікмен студенттерінің мысалында зерттеу

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Аннотация

Бұл зерттеу Алматыдағы Түрікмен студенттерінің Қазақстанда қалу немесе Түрікменстанға оралуға шешім қабылдағанына ерекше назар аудара отырып, шешім қабылдау процестерін зерттейді. Онда олардың шешімдеріне әсер ететін күрделі факторлар, әсіресе, Алматы университеттерінде жоғары білім алатындар арасында қарастырылады. Зерттеу барысында 44 респондент, оның ішінде 33 әйел мен 11 ер адам осы демографиялық шешім қабылдаудағы басым тенденцияларды зерттеу үшін сауалнама жүргізді. Бірқатар есептеу әдістерін қолдана отырып, бұл зерттеу түрікмен студенттерінің көші-қон және натурализация шешімдеріне әсер ететін факторлардың күрделі өзара әрекеттесуіне жарық түсіріп, аймақтағы кері көші-қон динамикасы туралы құнды ақпарат ұсынады. Бұл зерттеудің ең маңызды қорытындысы - әлеуметтік-мәдени факторлар, әсіресе, қабылдаушы елге жату сезімі түрікмендердің шешімдерін қалыптастыруда маңызды рөл атқарады. Жалпы болжамдарға қарамастан, экономикалық және саяси факторлар аз әсер етеді. Бұл нәтиже экономикалық мүмкіндіктер, көбінесе, негізгі мотиватор ретінде қабылданатын Орталық Азиядан көші-қон туралы басым идеяларға қарсы тұрады.

Түйін сөздер: Түрікменстан, Қазақстан, түрікмен мигранттары, қайтымды көші-қон, натурализация, білім туралы шешімдер, мәдени факторлар, көші-қон үлгілері.

INTRODUCTION

International students represent a unique category of transnational migrants, willingly crossing borders in pursuit of educational opportunities abroad. Initially perceived as temporary residents in their host countries, these students often find themselves transitioning into more permanent roles as migrants or, in some cases, as labourers. This shift contributes to the formation of larger diasporic communities. As such, this research focuses on Turkmenistan, a landlocked nation, and its international students, particularly those now residing in Almaty, Kazakhstan. What distinguishes this study is its exploration of the critical decisions faced by these students. The volatile political and economic climate in Turkmenistan has given rise to a pivotal choice for many of them: to remain, integrate, and potentially naturalise in their host country or to return to their homeland.

Historically, Russia was the primary destination for Turkmen students, with a substantial population of 141,629 Turkmen students (Khashimov et al. 2022; Palwanova, 2022). However, recent years have witnessed a shift in this trend, with Kazakhstan emerging as an increasingly attractive alternative. Its geographic proximity, cultural affinities, and financial accessibility make Kazakhstan an appealing destination for Turkmen students. Furthermore, primary observations reveal that a significant concentration of these students are based in Almaty, where they are enrolled in prestigious institutions, such as Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, and KIMEP University. These students can further be categorised into three broad groups: those aspiring to return to Turkmenistan, those seeking integration and naturalisation in Kazakhstan, and those with ambitions of further migration, often toward Europe through study visas.

Due to an increasing diasporic influence of international students, this research seeks to address a fundamental question: What sociocultural factors drive the decision-making processes of Turkmen students influencing their choice to remain in Kazakhstan or return to Turkmenistan? In the course of this investigation, a secondary question emerged: To what extent do one's level of education, gender, age, marital status, and degree of integration in terms of language, culture, and religion impact this decision-making process? The initial hypotheses revolve around Turkmen students' social backgrounds, including education, gender, age, and marital status, as well as cultural factors like language, religion, and integration. The central assumption of this research posits that sociocultural factors have a more pronounced influence on Turkmen students'decisions in remaining in Kazakhstan, eclipsing economic considerations.

MATERIALS
Research Context

Citizens of Turkmenistan have been grappling with the economic and political challenges of their homeland for some time. Migration to neighbouring countries has offered an avenue for remittance and the possibility of permanent relocation. However, as the government's repressive policies tightened their grip, the options for travel dwindled, largely limited to obtaining study visas. This conundrum coincided with the global pandemic, which led to Turkmenistan closingits borders for nearly three years, making entry and exit exceptionally difficult.

During this period of isolation, a significant transformation occurred among Turkmen students studying abroad. Many of them navigated the intricate process of acquiring residency or citizenship in their host countries. This shift in status is an essential backdrop for this study, which explores the challenges and opportunities faced by these Turkmen students as they transition into roles as labour migrants, permanent residents, or citizens of Kazakhstan.

The central objective of this research is to unravel the factors that shape the decisions ofTurkmen students regarding the acquisition of work visas, residence permits, or citizenship in Kazakhstan. Understanding the dynamics of this decision-making process is pivotal in the context of Turkmenistan's evolving political landscape and its impact on the aspirations and futures of these students.

In the upcoming sections of this research, I will delve into an exploration of existing literature on general patterns of return migration and the naturalisation decisions of migrants. Subsequently, I will zoom in on the specific tendencies observed among Turkmen students in theirdecision-making processes.

To provide a comprehensive understanding, I rely on primary data gathered through surveys and employ computational methods to analyse this data, the details of which will be elucidated in thisresearch.

Previous research

Return Migration and Motivations

Return migration, defined as the movement of emigrants back to their home country, can be permanent or temporary (Gmelch, 1980). Despite its significance, return migration is often overlooked in policymaking discussions about migration, although a substantial body of literature exists on this topic. The intentions to return migrants can evolve over time, subject to various behavioural differences (Dustmann et al., 1996). For instance, temporary migrants often return before retirement age, primarily motivated by concerns about their home country's economic development. In contrast, permanent migrants are less constrained by economic factors, and there are distinctions in the consumption and savings behaviour of these two groups.

Temporary migrants often send remittances home and even invest in properties in their home country (Erdal, 2011, 2013). Whether migrants return or remain in their host country, building homes in their country of origin serves both symbolic and practical purposes, fostering a sense of belonging and offering comfort and income resources that facilitate reintegration.

International Students' Return and Stay Decisions

Studies on international students and their decisions to return or stay reveal several patterns. For

instance, research on Chinese undergraduate students in Canada shows that their decisions to remain are influenced by demographic characteristics of the host province, pre-migration behaviour, experiences in Canada, parental expectations, and their own aspirations (Lu, Zong & Schissel, 2009). Social and emotional adaptation are also important predictors of their decision to stay. A study of foreign students in the Netherlands, focusing on employment and marriage, reveals that having a job in the Netherlands is not necessarily a predictor of staying for students from developed countries, while the opposite is true for students from developing countries (Bijwaard & Wang, 2016). Marital status does not significantly affect the decision to stay, as foreign students often have the flexibility to stay in the host country, return to their home country, or move to their spouse's home country.

Naturalisation and Its Impact

In terms of naturalisation, research by Carling and Petersen (2014) categorises migrants' decisions based on their attachment to the destination or home country, which is linked to their level of integration and transnationalism. Acquiring citizenship has become more common for migrant families as it offers several advantages, including better access to social, economic, legal, and political benefits. Naturalised migrants often experience a positive impact on the labour market, as citizenship removes restrictions from certain occupations. A cross-national study of 13 Western European countries found a positive relationship between naturalisation and employment probabilities for both men and women (Hoxhaj, Vink, & Breuer, 2020). The social aspect of acquiring citizenship is also noteworthy, with the characteristics of individuals who acquire citizenship positively correlated with their country of origin, destination country, and the integration process of the receiving community (Peters, Vink, & Schmeets, 2016). Moreover, young age at migration and having a native or naturalised partner are associated with an increased likelihood of naturalisation.

Challenges and Opportunities in Naturalization

Despite its attractiveness, limited research has been conducted on students' decisions to naturalise in their host countries. In the Australian context, the country's migration policy, which often recruits graduating international students, has led many to consider studying in Australia as a pathway to residency. The decisions of these students to seek only residency or citizenship vary, with those aiming for citizenship showing a stronger sense of belonging and cultural integration (Robertson, 2008). While naturalisation offers opportunities, it also presents challenges. Changes in nationality laws, such as the revised Dutch Nationality Act of 2003, have imposed more restrictive regulations on migrants, particularly those from developing and politically unstable countries (Carling and Petersen, 2014). In the UK, language proficiency and fees can pose challenges, with limited English language skills reducing the chances of acquiring citizenship and higher citizenship fees acting as a barrier (Fernandez-Reino & Sumption, 2022). Similar fee increases have been observed in the US, but they have not significantly deterred citizenship applications (Passel, 2007).

Motivations and Challenges for Turkmen Migrants

As for Turkmen migrants, their motivations are influenced by social, economic, and political factors (Palwanova, 2022). Opportunities for higher income and better job conditions often attract migrants, while the high unemployment rate in Turkmenistan acts as a push factor, particularly toward destinations like Turkey. While economic factors are well-documented, limited information and migrants' reluctance to speak out have hindered a deeper understanding of the role of political factors. Environmental factors have also played a role in recent migration trends (Palwanova, 2022).

Turkmen Students in Kazakhstan

In terms of Turkmen students in Kazakhstan, previous literature suggests that due to its geographic and cultural proximity, Kazakhstan has remained a favourite destination for the last five years, accumulating around 3,000 Turkmen labour immigrants, 3,500 Turkmenistani students, and 518 refugees in

the country (Vatican News, 2020). Most immigrants live in the regions of Mangystau, Karaganda, Kostanay, and Almaty, as well as in the cities of Almaty and Astana (JJ TV Kazakhstan, 2021). Furthermore, for the first quarter of 2022, the number of incoming Turkmens has increased six-fold, thus placing Kazakhstan as close as Russia in terms of migration destination (Kursiv Media, 2022). However, in the legal framework, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan do not have bilateral agreements on labour migration, unlike Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan or Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Therefore, it makes the issue of migration and remittances arduous for the Turkmen migrants. It is also observed that Kazakhstan is initially selected as a study destination due to the affordable prices leading to extended stay through work or spousal visas. Furthermore, due to possible and accessible governmental services, Kazakhstan has remained an ideal place for Turkmen migrants (JJ TV Kazakhstan, 2021).

Challenges in Acquiring Kazakh Citizenship

Acquisition of citizenship of Kazakhstan by Turkmens is challenging as Turkmenistan is not a part of the simplified registration procedure. Citizenship of Kazakhstan can be acquired by individuals permanently residing on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan for at least five years (1); individuals married to a citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan (residing for at least three years) (2); citizens of the former union republics who arrived for permanent residence in the Republic of Kazakhstan (3); and Kandasdar (Kandas) permanently residing in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan on legal grounds, regardless of the length of residence (4) (Electronic Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). This law limits the opportunities of Turkmen citizens who wish to acquire Kazakh citizenship since they do not fall into the category of fast-track citizenship or simplified registration procedure. Consequently, out of 22,000 foreigners who received Kazakh citizenship in 2022, 17,676 were Kandas, 1,287 were from Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, hence received citizenship via a simplified registration procedure. Approximately 1,777 were women married to Kazakh citizens, hence received citizenship according to the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (Ualikhanova, 2023). It remains unclear whether Turkmens are part of the last category, necessitating a need for better policy categorization from the side of Kazakhstan. In general, naturalisation has become ubiquitous due to modern political, legal, and territorial divisions, as well as specific historical and cultural aspects of the applicants. Turkmens in Kazakhstan indeed practice naturalisation, yet due to certain limitations, the number of Turkmen acquiring Kazakh citizenship is lower than that of other nationals.

Analogous Study

An analogous study conducted by Hofmann (2017) focused on Turkmen students. The study found that return can be voluntary or involuntary, influenced by family requests or the expiration of international passports. The intentions of male and female Turkmen students to return from studying abroad differ, with a higher percentage of men returning shortly after graduation, motivated by family and career opportunities. Female students tend to create new ties and families in the host countries, resulting in a lower tendency to return. Marital status is also significant, with the majority of male and female returners being married. Education does not necessarily serve as a stepping stone for permanent stay, as for education migrants with intentions to remain educated abroad, education abroad is not a significant pull factor. Factors such as family ties and integration at home significantly influence return migration. Gender differences are evident, with men more inclined to return due to masculine associations of patriotism, while women may fear discrimination due to ongoing policies affecting women's rights.

Gaps and opportunities

In conclusion, Hofmann's study, albeit exploratory and small in scale, highlights the essential factors influencing the decisions of Turkmen students to return or stay, which will be further explored in the current study. Simultaneously, previous research on return migration, naturalisation, and the decisions of international students, including Turkmen students, has provided valuable insights into the factors influencing these processes. Studies have explored the motivations behind return migration, the impact of naturalisation on migrants, and the decisions of international students to return or stay in their

host countries. The research has highlighted various factors, including demographic characteristics, family ties, integration, and gender differences that influence these decisions. However, despite the existing body of literature, several gaps remain. There is a limited understanding of the specific decision-making processes of Turkmen students in Kazakhstan, a group facing unique challenges due to the political and economic instabilities in Turkmenistan. The existing research often focuses on broader trends or other migrant groups, making it crucial to delve deeper into the experiences of Turkmen students.

As a result, this research aims to bridge these gaps in the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the decision-making processes of Turkmen students residing in Kazakhstan. It will explore the multifaceted factors that influence their choices, with a focus on socio-cultural aspects, including education, gender, age, marital status, and the degree of integration. By conducting this research, I seek to shed light on the nuanced decision-making of Turkmen students and offer valuable insights into their motivations to stay in Kazakhstan or return to Turkmenistan. Despite having a small number of participants, this study will contribute to a better understanding of the migration dynamics of Turkmen students in Kazakhstan and, more broadly, the challenges and opportunities they face in their host country.

METHODS
Data Collection

Overview

Data collection for this research involved a combination of methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the study's subject matter. The primary research method utilised for this study was quantitative data analysis, although it is worth noting that preliminary qualitative work was conducted to form the survey. This process consisted of conducting interviews and subsequently administering online questionnaires. It is important to highlight that the research encompassed two data collection phases, one focusing on the population of Turkmens who had arrived in Kazakhstan and the other specifically targeting Turkmen students studying in Almaty.

Preliminary Qualitative Work

The initial phase of data collection commenced with ten pilot interviews designed to identify patterns and insights that would form the development of the subsequent quantitative survey. These interviews employed a mix of structured and unstructured formats, incorporating both close-ended and open-ended questions. The interviewees were diverse, including six students, three workers, and one individual who had already acquired Kazakh citizenship.

Survey Questionnaires

After the interview phase, online questionnaires were developed and distributed to a wider pool of participants to rigorously test various hypotheses. These questionnaires were made available in both Russian and Turkmen languages via Google Forms. It is vital to emphasise that the questionnaires did not collect any sensitive personal information, such as names or addresses. Furthermore, they were designed to be user-friendly, with no financial costs or registration requirements for completion. The advantages of this approach are evident, as online surveys are convenient, cost-effective, and easily translatable into quantitative data.

Sampling and Participant Selection

The study's sample primarily consisted of two distinct groups: Turkmens who had arrived in Kazakhstan under various visas for reasons, such as study or work, and Turkmens who were specifically enrolled as students in Almaty. The rationale for this two-phase sampling approach is rooted in a multistage or clustering sampling technique. This choice was made to respect the privacy of participants and categorise them without revealing personal details. The sampling method employed in both phases of the study was random sampling to ensure an equal probability of participation among all eligible individuals. This strategy aimed to mitigate potential bias, with convenience sampling deliberately avoided due to the researcher's prior

knowledge of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. The target sample size for the study was optimally set between 30 and 100 participants in Almaty, and ultimately, data was collected from 44 individuals.

Addressing Validity and Reliability

Given the potential challenges stemming from participants' reluctance to share information due to safety concerns and low interest, coupled with the researcher's familiarity with the case study, additional measures were implemented to ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative data collection and interpretation. These measures include member checking, presenting rich descriptions to provide context, presenting discrepant information to challenge the main research findings, peer debriefing to engage fellow researchers for review, and an external auditor, unfamiliar with the research. Spending an extended period in the field to gain an in-depth understanding and minimise bias further enhances the study's credibility and reliability.

Data Collection Subsections

Data collection was organised into three distinct sections.

Section 1 focused on the primary outcome, which was either returning to Turkmenistan or remaining in Kazakhstan within five years. Of the participants, 27 expressed their intention to stay in Kazakhstan, while 17 intended to return to Turkmenistan.

Section 2 centred on predictive factors. The questions in this section were divided into two types: factual and perception-based. Factual questions addressed the respondents' employment status (e.g., "Do you have a job in Kazakhstan?") and housing conditions (e.g., "Do you live in a dormitory in Kazakhstan?"). The majority of participants did not have a job (29), while those who were employed worked either full-time or part-time, either officially or unofficially. Turkmens residing in a dormitory corresponded to unemployment counts of 29, leading to the prediction that those participants with any type of employment lived outside of their university dormitories (Figures 7 and 8). Perception questions in this section revolved around expected financial satisfaction and the sense of belongingness or integration in Kazakhstan (e.g., "How financially satisfied will you be in Kazakhstan?" and "How integrated do you feel in Kazakhstan?"). Most participants (39) expressed some degree of satisfaction with their financial opportunities in Kazakhstan, and 42 participants felt socio-culturally integrated, expressing a sense of belongingness in Kazakhstan

Section 3 focused on demographic characteristics. Of the 44 respondents, 11 were male, and 33 were female. The age range of participants spanned from 18, being the youngest, to 33, the oldest. The majority of respondents fell within the age category of 20-25, with one participant aged 18, two aged 19, three aged over 25, and four aged older than 30 years. Additionally, 27 respondents either grew up in or were from urban areas in Turkmenistan, with 17 participants originating from rural areas.

RESULTS

Data Analysis

Overview

Data was collected through Google Forms, and the analysis process was divided into three steps: The first step was Data Wrangling and Preparation. In the first step, the collected data was prepared for further analysis. This included initial data cleaning and analysis to determine which variables to use and which ones to exclude. For instance, only 44 responses were considered for analysis out of the initial 46. This step involved sorting, filtering, and cleaning the dataset to ensure its readiness for the subsequent analyses. The second step is Univariate and Multivariate Analysis. This step involved univariate and multivariate analyses, including logistic regression. Univariate analysis examined the individual variables in isolation, while multivariate analysis considered the relationships between multiple variables. Logistic regression was used to explore these relationships further. This step allowed for a deeper understanding of the data and the identification of potential predictive factors. The final step is Bivariate Analysis for Interaction Effects. In the third step, bivariate analysis was conducted to determine interaction effects between variables. This

analysis aimed to uncover how variables interacted with each other and whether combined effects influenced the outcomes. By examining these interactions, the study gained insights into the complexity of factors influencing the decision-making process of Turkmens in Kazakhstan.

The data analysis was carried out using Jupyter Notebook and R Studio under the guidance and supervision of the Dr. Jacob Reidhead. These analytical steps were crucial in uncovering the relationships and patterns within the dataset, leading to the findings and conclusions of the study.

Demographic Factors

The study aimed to investigate the factors influencing the decision to return to Turkmenistan within five years. Initially, hypotheses suggested that gender and age would play significant roles in these decisions, with an assumption that females were more likely to stay in Kazakhstan, and younger individuals would be more integrated and, thus, more likely to stay. However, analysis revealed that neither gender nor age significantly impacted the outcome (Table 1).

In contrast, the factor of urbanisation was found to be highly correlated with a participant's decision not to return to Turkmenistan. Urbanisation, reflecting where a participant grew up in Turkmenistan (urban or rural areas), was unexpectedly significant. That is, 59.26% of participants from urban areas in Turkmenistan were more likely to remain in Kazakhstan. It appears that the level of urbanisation in Turkmenistan significantly influences the perceptions and attitudes of Turkmens regarding their future plans. In comparison, gender and age factors showed insignificance (0.72 and 0.09, respectively) when tested to predict the outcome (Table 1).

Economic Factors

The study also tested the outcome against economic factors. While several economic, financial, and educational factors were considered, the analysis revealed that some variables were highly correlated, leading to insignificant or insufficient results. Therefore, for the economic section, two variables were used - actual economic status and participants' attitudes toward their economic prospects.

The results showed that having a job in Kazakhstan (official or unofficial, full or part-time) was less likely to lead to a return to Turkmenistan. However, this factor was insignificant due to the missing p-value. In contrast, a person's perception and future outlook on their financial satisfaction were significant factors. A positive financial outlook or satisfaction in Kazakhstan made individuals less likely to return (-0.82*) (Table 2).

Socio-Cultural Factors

The decision to remain in Kazakhstan or return to Turkmenistan was also tested against socio-cultural factors. While several variables related to socio-cultural factors were considered, only one factual variable on accommodation and one perception variable on integration were used.

Living in student housing was a factual variable, but it was not highly essential, with only a small difference observed. However, the analysis predicted that living in a dormitory made it more likely for individuals to return to Turkmenistan. That is, those living in dormitories had a greater likelihood of returning due to the lack of a safety net in Kazakhstan, supporting the idea that the ability to purchase or rent an apartment in the host country influenced longer stays (Table3).

The socio-cultural factor of feeling integrated in Kazakhstan had a high influence on the decision not to return to Turkmenistan, with a significant correlation (-3.94**). This supported the initial argument that socio-cultural factors played a crucial role, possibly even outweighing economic and political factors in the decision-making process of Turkmens in Kazakhstan (Table 3).

Intersectionality

Bivariate analysis was used to explore the possible intersectionality between factors of integration and age (1), integration and gender (2). The analysis did not show a significant correlation, suggesting that assumptions derived from Hofmann's studies were not applicable to the case of Turkmens in Kazakhstan.

Age did not appear to affect the feeling of belonging among Turkmens living in Kazakhstan, and similar patterns were observed for both male and female Turkmens regarding their experiences of integration (Table 4).

In summary, data analysis yielded intriguing findings. Assumed important factors, such as age and gender, proved insignificant in the case of Turkmens in Kazakhstan regarding their decisions to remain or return. Socio-cultural factors emerged as critical, while economic and political factors exhibited no significance and were thus excluded from the analysis. Lastly, previously neglected factors of urbanisation resulted to be the most influential factor affecting participants' decisions.

DISCUSSION

The discussion section presents the key findings from the regression analysis and offers three main takeaways based on the results. These findings provide valuable insights into the decision-making processes of Turkmens in Kazakhstan.

Gender and Age

The initial hypothesis suggested that gender and age might play a significant role in the decision of Turkmens to stay in Kazakhstan or return to their home country. However, the regression analysis revealed that neither gender nor age, whether analysed independently or in combination with other factors, proved to be significant. Although there is a negative correlation, it does not carry statistical significance. This result challenges the assumption that gender and age are decisive factors in this context.

Urbanisation

A surprising finding emerged during the analysis, highlighting the significance of the factor of urbanisation. The researcher had not initially considered urbanisation as a key variable, but it turned out to be the only variable consistently significant throughout the analysis. The p-values for urbanisation remained consistently low, indicating its importance in influencing the decision of Turkmens. As shown in various models, urbanisation remained statistically significant with values of -1.48, -1.95, -4.21, and -12.77 in Models 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. This finding underscores the critical role of urban background in the decision-making process of Turkmens.

Socio-Cultural Factors

The final takeaway aligns with the primary argument of the study, asserting the significance of socio-cultural factors in shaping the decisions of Turkmens in Kazakhstan. The analysis confirmed this hypothesis by showing that socio-cultural factors, including accommodation and integration, are as important or even more important than economic and political factors. While political factors were found to be statistically insignificant and were therefore removed from the analysis, economic factors remained important. However, when economic factors were compared and combined with socio-cultural factors, the latter proved to be more influential, with a p-value of -7.56* as indicated in Table 4. This result supports the idea that socio-cultural aspects, such as the sense of belonging and accommodation, are key drivers in the decision-making process of Turkmens.

In summary, the regression analysis provides critical insights into the decision-making factors for Turkmens in Kazakhstan. While gender and age appear to have minimal impact, urbanisation emerges as a significant factor, and socio-cultural aspects are the most influential in determining whether Turkmens choose to stay in Kazakhstan or return to Turkmenistan. These findings challenge some initial assumptions while confirming others, ultimately shedding light on the nuanced dynamics of this specific migrant group.

CONCLUSION

This research sought to understand the critical factors influencing the decisions of Turkmens in

Kazakhstan regarding whether to remain in their host country or return to Turkmenistan. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, the study revealed significant findings that shedlight on the decision-making process of this specific migrant group.

The most crucial finding of this research is that socio-cultural factors, particularly the sense of belongingness in the host country, play a paramount role in shaping the decisions of Turkmens. Contrary to common assumptions, economic and political factors appear to be less influential. This result challenges prevailing beliefs about Central Asian migration, where economic opportunities are often perceived as the primary motivator.

This study has academic and practical implications. Firstly, it contributes to the existing literature on the bilateral relations between Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, offering a nuanced perspective on migration dynamics between these two countries. Secondly, it challenges the widespread notion that economic factors are the sole driving force behind migration, highlighting the importance of socio-cultural aspects. Lastly, it aligns with the proposed theoretical framework of the Meta-theory of migration, emphasising the multifaceted and interconnected nature of migration decisions.

Further research in this field could expand the scope by including a more diverse range of participants with various visas and statuses in Kazakhstan, providing a broader perspective on migration dynamics. This could help uncover more intricate factors affecting the decision-making processes of migrants.

As for recommendations, the study encountered challenges due to the lack of official and reliable migration data provided by the governments of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The author suggests the establishment of a bilateral migration database that is open and accessible to researchers. Such a database would not only facilitate collaboration between the two nations at the national level but also enable more robust and reliable academic studies in the field of Central Asian migration.

In conclusion, this research has illuminated the importance of socio-cultural factors in the migration decisions of Turkmens in Kazakhstan. By challenging conventional wisdom, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of migration, underscoring the need for comprehensive data and more open bilateral cooperation in the region.

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Tables

Table 1. Demographic factors tested against the outcome

Constant	-2.53
	(-0.86)
Male	0.72
	(1.19)
Age	0.09
	(0.73)
Urban	-1.48**
	(-2.61**)
N	44
AIC	55.26
p-value: *** < .001; ** < .01; * < .05; . < .10	

Table 2. Economic factors tested against the outcome

Constant	-0.15
	(-0.04)

Has a job	-1.04
	(-1.18)
Financially satisfied	-0.82*
	(-2.26*)
N	44
AIC	51.20
p-value: *** < .001; ** < .01; * < .05; . < .10	

Table 3. Socio-cultural factors tested against the outcome

Constant	9.33 .
	(1.71 .)
Lives in the dorm	0.34
	0.24
Socially integrated	-3.94**
	(-2.65**)
N	44
AIC	33.29
p-value: *** < .001; ** < .01; * < .05; . < .10	

Table 4. *Logical regression analysis*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	-2.53	-0.15	9.33 .	27.1
	(-0.86)	(-0.04)	(1.71 .)	(1.95)
Male	0.72	0.72	0.32	1.66
	(1.19)	(1.04)	(0.27)	(0.92)
Age	0.09	0.12	0.21	0.48
	(0.73)	(0.81)	(1.2)	(1.38)
Urban	-1.48**	-1.95**	-4.21*	-12.77 *
	(-2.61**)	(-2.62**)	(-2.47*)	(-1.98*)
Has a job		-1.04		-5.24
		(-1.18)		(-1.42)

Financially satisfied		-0.82*		2.94
		(-2.26*)		(-1.59)
Lives in the dorm			0.34	-0.76
			0.24	(-0.31)
Socially integrated			-3.94**	-7.56*
			(-2.65**)	(-2.17*)
N	44	44	44	44
AIC	55.26	51.20	33.29	30.39
p-value: *** < .001; ** < .01; * < .05; . < .10				

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