Child Homelessness Among Kazakh Refugees in Tajikistan (1920s–1930s)

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ABSTRACT:
This article examines child homelessness among Kazakh refugees who migrated to Tajikistan during the socio-political crises of the 1920s–1930s. The study explores the causes, scale, and characteristics of homelessness as one of the most severe consequences of famine, forced migration, and social upheaval in the early Soviet period. The research is based on archival documents, statistical data, and other historical sources preserved in the archives and libraries of Tajikistan and several other countries. Comparative historical methods were employed to analyze the collected materials. The findings demonstrate that child homelessness among Kazakh refugees became a widespread social problem due to economic hardship, displacement, and the disintegration of family structures. Existing welfare institutions lacked sufficient resources and proved unable to meet growing needs, leaving many children without adequate care and protection. The situation began to improve only in the late 1930s, when state support mechanisms were strengthened and socio-economic conditions gradually stabilized.

Keywords: collectivization, migration–Kazakh refugees, Tajikistan, child homelessness

Introduction

The first three decades of the twentieth century represent a complex period in the history of the peoples of Central Asia, characterized by profound social, demographic, and political transformations. The establishment of Soviet power, the introduction of new administrative-territorial divisions, the radical transformation of traditional economic systems, and the forced collectivization campaign significantly affected the lives of many ethnic groups in the region. For Kazakh society in particular, which was largely based on nomadic and semi-nomadic economic practices, the consequences of these reforms were especially severe. The socio-economic policies implemented during the 1920s–1930s, including

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forced collectivization, confiscation of livestock and property, and political repression, destroyed the traditional structure of Kazakh society and triggered mass migration among the population.

During this period, famine and political pressure in the territory of Kazakhstan forced hundreds of thousands of people to abandon their historical homelands and migrate to neighboring regions and Soviet republics. While a portion of Kazakh refugees moved toward China, Afghanistan, and Iran, others resettled within the Soviet Union itself, including in the territories of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. These migration processes were not limited to demographic shifts alone; they also resulted in the disruption of social structures, the weakening of family relations, and the severe deterioration of the living conditions of the most vulnerable groups in society, particularly children.

Under conditions of mass migration, famine, and social crisis, child homelessness became one of the most widespread social phenomena. The collapse of many families, the death of parents, and the separation of children from their families for various reasons left thousands of children without care, making them one of the most vulnerable social groups in society. Although the issue of child homelessness received some attention within Soviet social policy, the scale and specific characteristics of this phenomenon among Kazakh refugees have not yet been sufficiently studied. In particular, child homelessness associated with the migration of Kazakhs to the territory of Tajikistan remains one of the topics that has not been systematically examined in historiography.

The social conditions of the Kazakh communities that migrated to Tajikistan, their adaptation to a new environment, and the humanitarian challenges that emerged during the migration process represent important yet insufficiently explored aspects of Central Asian history. From this perspective, studying the problem of child homelessness is important not only from the standpoint of demographic or social history but also for understanding the consequences of Soviet social policies. An examination of this issue makes it possible to identify the concrete impact of social crises that occurred under the conditions of a totalitarian system on individual human destinies.

In recent years, new sources preserved in the archival collections of Central Asian countries have begun to be introduced into scholarly circulation. Documents held in the state archives and libraries of the Republic of Tajikistan contain valuable information about the social conditions of Kazakh refugees, their settlement areas, and the spread of child homelessness. A scholarly analysis of these materials makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the history of the Kazakh diaspora, migration processes, and social transformations.

In this context, the present article examines the problem of child homelessness among Kazakhs who migrated to the territory of Tajikistan during the 1920s–1930s on the basis of historical sources. The study analyzes the causes of the emergence of this phenomenon, its social consequences, and its place in the lives of Kazakh refugees. In addition, based on documents and statistical materials preserved in the archives and libraries of Tajikistan, the article provides a comprehensive examination of the social conditions of the Kazakh community and the fate of children during the period under study.

Materials and methods

In order to comprehensively examine the problem of child homelessness among Kazakhs who migrated from the territory of Kazakhstan to Tajikistan during the 1920s–1930s, various types of historical sources and materials were employed in this study. The primary sources of the research consist of documentary materials preserved in the state archives and libraries of the Republic of Tajikistan. In particular, reports of administrative institutions from the Soviet period, official statistical data concerning the social conditions of the population, records of local administrative bodies, documentation from orphanages and social institutions, as well as various reports and reference materials related to migration processes were used as the main empirical basis of the study.

In addition, the research also examined scholarly works published on the socio-demographic

changes that took place in Central Asia during the first half of the twentieth century, as well as official Soviet publications and statistical compilations of that period. These materials make it possible to interpret the migration processes of Kazakh refugees, their social conditions, and the causes and consequences of the emergence of child homelessness within a broader historical context. The use of these sources made it possible to identify the dynamics of the historical processes related to the research topic, their social consequences, and their regional characteristics.

Several scientific methods were applied in the analysis of historical data. First, the historical-comparative method was used to examine migration processes of the 1920s–1930s and the social problems that emerged as a result of these processes in comparison with situations in other regions. This approach made it possible to analyze the conditions of Kazakh refugees in the territory of Tajikistan in comparison with similar phenomena observed in other parts of Central Asia.

In addition, the historical-genetic method was applied to analyze the causes of the emergence of child homelessness and to trace its historical development step by step. This method allowed the study to identify the interconnection between Soviet social policies, forced collectivization, famine, and mass migration processes, as well as their impact on the lives and fate of children.

Furthermore, source criticism (source analysis) was widely used to systematize and analyze the collected data. This method made it possible to examine the content of archival documents, the circumstances of their creation, their authorship, and their historical value. In addition, comparative quantitative approaches were applied in the analysis of statistical data in order to identify the scale and dynamics of child homelessness during the period under study.

Thus, the combination of historical sources and the application of various scientific methods made it possible to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the problem of child homelessness among Kazakhs who migrated to the territory of Tajikistan during the 1920s–1930s. The introduction of archival materials into scholarly circulation provides new perspectives for examining the social conditions of Kazakh refugees and the fate of children during this historical period.

Discussion

The problem of child homelessness among Kazakh refugees in Tajikistan in the 1920s and 1930s has been explored by a number of domestic and international researchers. Modern historiography shows that during the Soviet period, the topic of child homelessness was virtually unexamined as an independent issue, as official sources sought to conceal the scale of the phenomenon. In the post-Soviet era, thanks to the opening of archives and the emergence of new publications, this topic has received systematic coverage. The problem of child homelessness in the context of famine and political repression has been studied by M.K. Kozybayev, Zh.B. Abylkhozhin, M.B. Tatimov (Abylkhozhin et al.1989) and others. The work of M.D. Baidavletova is devoted to domestic and foreign historiography on the history of Kazakh refugees during the famine of the early 1930s (Baidavletova 2025). The research of A.N. Nuraliyev (Nuraliev 2017) and O.I. Issenov and B.K. Kupenov's works are devoted to Kazakh refugees who migrated to the Republic of Tajikistan in the 1920s and 1930s and their adaptation (Issenov, Kupenov 2022).

Among Kazakh researchers, the works of R.K. Aidarbaeva and S.K. Ualieva occupy a special place (Aidarbayeva, Ualieva 2025). They analyze the fates of street Kazakh children forced to migrate due to famine and migrations, and also evaluate state support measures and their living conditions in Central Asia and Tajikistan. A.T. Kaipbaeva and A.M. Abikei, in their publications, examine the historiography of child homelessness, the stages and approaches of historians to studying this problem both in Kazakhstan and in neighboring republics (Kaipbayeva, Abikei 2024). O.Kh. Mukhatova examines issues of homelessness during the famine, analyzes social conditions and the response of government agencies, and conducts a historiographic analysis of scholarly approaches to the study of refugee

children (Mukhatova 2025). U. Ismagulov, Y. Konbay studies child homelessness in a regional context, including Western Kazakhstan, which helps understand the overall picture of child poverty and migration during this period (Ismagulov, Konbay 2025).

Foreign researchers such as Martha Brill Olcott (Olcott 2003), Robert Conquest (Conquest 1993), Sarah Cameron (Cameron 2018) and Robert Kindler (Kindler 2017) examine Kazakh refugee movements, their international dimensions, and humanitarian consequences, allowing the problem of homelessness to be placed within the broader context of migration. Overall, the historiography on this topic has evolved from almost complete neglect during the Soviet period to a comprehensive analysis in the post-Soviet era, incorporating quantitative data, social conditions, government support measures, and assessments of government efforts to accommodate and protect refugee children.

Results

During the 1920s–1930s, the population living in the territory of Kazakhstan was forced to migrate to neighboring countries, including Tajikistan, as a result of political repression, famine, and persecution caused by the misguided policies of forced collectivization. This period was characterized by complex socio-demographic transformations across the Central Asian region. In the tragic history of the Kazakh people and other ethnic groups of the USSR, who were compelled to move to other cities and neighboring republics in order to preserve their lives under the conditions of a totalitarian system, the issue of children who were left homeless as a consequence of these events occupies a significant place. Nevertheless, the problem of child homelessness resulting from these historical processes has still not received sufficient scholarly attention. Therefore, this article specifically examines the issue of child homelessness that emerged during these years of catastrophe as part of a broader effort to reconstruct the multifaceted history of the Kazakh people. For this purpose, documents and materials preserved in the archives and libraries of the Republic of Tajikistan are extensively used and analyzed from a scholarly perspective.

Kazakh refugees in Tajikistan themselves described the reasons for their resettlement to Central Asia in a letter to the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Kazakhstan on April 8, 1933, requesting funds for their return to their homeland. In their letter, they stated that they were residents of Aul No. 2 in the Kyzyl-Orda District, members of the Soviets collective farm, and were forced to resettle in Tajikistan in late 1932 in search of work to save their children from starvation. They claimed that they had managed to save their families from death, but that work was now resuming on their original collective farm, requiring them to return. The refugees emphasized that they lacked the means to return and therefore requested assistance by allocating funds for rail travel to Tortalai station on the Tashkent Railway. In total, as indicated in the statement, there were about 80 people, including families with women and children (KRSA. F. 33. Op. 1. D. 54. L. 22).

On March 2, 1933, Kulumbetov, a representative of the Kazkrai Committee and deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of Kazakhstan, spoke at a meeting of the Executive Commission of the Central Asian Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), where he presented a report on Kazakh refugees in Central Asia. Following the decision of the Central Asian Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of February 15, 1933, it was proposed that the Central Committees of the national communist parties and the regional committees of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) provide practical assistance to representatives of Kazakhstan in organizing the voluntary return of cotton pickers and other Kazakhs with draft animals and the ability to travel by their own transport. It was also instructed to conduct extensive outreach to them, avoiding any administrative pressure. It was decided to determine the exact number of returning Kazakh households in order to establish, on this basis, the total volume and procedure for providing them with food aid during their resettlement from

Tajikistan and Karakalpakstan to Kazakhstan. Furthermore, the Central Committees of the national communist parties and the regional committees of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) were required to provide accommodation for all unaccompanied Kazakh children located within their territories (including on roads and at railway stations), with the condition that these temporarily housed children would be transferred to Kazakhstan starting May 1 (CSA SPH KR. F. 10. Op. 1. D. 493. L. 20–21).

On March 9, 1933, T. Ryskulov, Deputy Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR, analyzed the reasons for the migration of the Kazakh population from Kazakhstan in a report addressed to I.V. Stalin, noting that, according to the latest approximate information from the field, there were a significant number of migrants in neighboring regions at that time: approximately 100,000 in Kyrgyzstan, 20,000 in Karakalpakstan, and approximately 30,000 in Central Asia. He emphasized that the nomads had also settled in more remote areas, including Kalmykia, Tajikistan, the Northern Territory, and other territories, while part of the population, led by rich (bay) nobles, had migrated to Western China. The note also noted that mass migrations had led to a sharp increase in homelessness: many households en route abandoned their children at railway stations, in cities, and in regional centers (Famine in the Kazakh Steppe 1991: 167).

The movement of refugees across Central Asia, including Tajikistan, took place through Kyrgyzstan, where the highest concentration of refugees was observed. According to Resolution No. 132 of the Council of People's Commissars of the Kirghiz ASSR dated March 17, 1933, "On Kazakh Nomads Residing in Kirghizia," to facilitate their resettlement, the People's Commissariat of Labor was instructed to prioritize recruiting Kazakh refugees when recruiting labor for construction work (in irrigation, road construction, and for industrial and business enterprises). Directors of state farm trusts and industrial enterprises were instructed not to allow the dismissal of Kazakh workers employed in their systems, with the exception of those considered kulak elements. When launching seasonal summer work, they were also to prioritize recruiting labor from among Kazakhs. Furthermore, the People's Commissariat of Labor was recommended to prioritize recruitment among Kazakh refugees when recruiting workers for Central Asian projects for the Vakhsh Irrigation System in Tajikistan, which had been declared an all-Union construction project. The Children's Commission of the Central Executive Committee and the Kirghiz Red Cross and Crescent Society were tasked with developing measures to establish children's colonies for Kazakh children, determining the locations, the size of the contingents, and the necessary material resources, and then submitting these proposals to the RSFSR Council of People's Commissars' Commission for the Settlement of Kazakh Refugees (CSA KR. F. 23. Op. 1. D. 720. L. 98).

A telegram from I.A. Tolstopiatov, head of Vakhshstroy, sent on May 19, 1933, to Semerekov, representative of the People's Commissariat of Labor of the Kirghiz ASSR at Vakhshstroy (with a copy to Yu. Abdrakhmanov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Republic), expressed dissatisfaction with the unsatisfactory recruitment of Kazakh refugees. It was reported that of the 313 Kazakh workers recruited, accompanied by 870 dependents, the majority were unfit for excavation work due to physical exhaustion. This, in the author's opinion, indicated an unacceptable approach to recruitment, disregard for his instructions, and a lack of understanding of the actual conditions at Vakhshstroi (CSA KR. F. 23. Op. 1. D. 720. L. 58–58 rev.).

The political and economic conditions in Tajikistan also affected the Kazakhs who migrated to this region. In an attempt to preserve their families and livestock, Kazakhs who fled their homeland and sought refuge in Tajik lands found that educated and socially active individuals among them also became victims of the state's punitive system. This situation demonstrates that Soviet political repression was not geographically limited to a single region but instead possessed a systemic character that extended across the entire Soviet space. According to data from the State Committee for National Security of the Republic

of Tajikistan, archival materials preserved in file No. C03305 of the Information Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan indicate that Abdali Babaev (born in 1900 in village No. 7 of the Kyzylorda region of the Kazakh SSR; sentenced on 6 December 1937 by the "Troika" of the State Security Directorate of the NKVD of the Tajik SSR to eight years of imprisonment; died on 5 May 1944 in the Angara labor camp) and Kalymbet Babaev (born in 1895 in village No. 49 of the Kyzylorda region of the Kazakh SSR; sentenced to death on 11 September 1937 by the "Troika" of the State Security Directorate of the NKVD of the Tajik SSR under Articles 62 and 58 of the Criminal Code of the Tajik SSR, with the sentence carried out on 15 September 1937) were unjustly persecuted and punished (Nuraliev 2017: 29).

The social conditions of Kazakhs who migrated to the territory of Tajikistan significantly affected not only their material well-being but also the structure of their families. In particular, the consequences of political and economic crises and migration processes directly influenced the social conditions of children. Various political, economic, and social factors contributed to the emergence of homeless children among Kazakhs in Tajikistan. One of the main causes was the forced collectivization of agriculture in the early 1930s, the persecution of wealthy peasants, and the mass famine of 1932–1933.

One of the most significant manifestations of social crises during the Soviet period was the problem of child homelessness. Social upheavals that occurred during the first half of the twentieth century – such as political repression, forced collectivization, and mass famine – had a direct impact on the most vulnerable groups in society, particularly on children. Under such historical circumstances, many families collapsed, leaving children without parental care and forcing them into conditions of homelessness or orphanhood. This phenomenon was observed not only in the territory of Kazakhstan but also widely across regions of Central Asia that experienced migration flows of Kazakh populations.

Although the Soviet state implemented certain social policies aimed at addressing the issue of homeless children, their scope and effectiveness were not always sufficient. In particular, during periods marked by intensified political repression and socio-economic crises, the problem of child homelessness became even more acute. Therefore, examining the issue of child homelessness in Soviet society during the 1920s–1930s makes it possible to better understand the characteristics of social policy during that period as well as the concrete humanitarian consequences of crises that emerged under the conditions of a totalitarian system.

In the early years of Soviet rule, insufficient attention was paid to addressing the problem of child homelessness (Kaipbayeva, Belyalova 2025: 809). According to N. K. Krupskaya, by the early 1930s there were more than two million homeless children and adolescents in the USSR. Although this figure was lower than that recorded in 1922, it nevertheless remained a serious problem for both the state and society (Savelyev 2015: 115).

There were specific reasons why Soviet authorities did not devote sufficient attention to homeless and orphaned children. First of all, the categories of "homeless children" and "orphaned children" were themselves largely a product of the political and social policies implemented by the Soviet state. The forced separation of children from parents labeled as "enemies of the people" was one of the practices of Soviet repression (Mussabalinova 2023: 174). During the "Great Terror" of 1937–1938, thousands of children whose parents had been arrested as "enemies of the people" were left without parental care, as not only fathers but often mothers were imprisoned. Many of these children were subsequently placed in orphanages. Relatives and friends of the arrested individuals who wished to take the children into their families were not always able to prevent their placement in orphanages. According to Circular No. 4 of the NKVD of the USSR dated 7 January 1938, entitled "On the Procedure for Placing Children of Repressed Parents under Guardianship of Relatives," potential guardians were subject to background checks conducted by regional and provincial NKVD administrations to

determine whether any "compromising information" existed about them. NKVD authorities were also instructed to monitor the emotional state, behavior, and social contacts of the children of those who had been arrested. For relatives who remained free or for parents who were later released from prison, locating a child who had been sent to an orphanage was often difficult, as children's surnames were frequently recorded incorrectly or deliberately altered (F.E. Dzerzhinsky 2007: 872).

In some orphanages, the children of those labeled as "enemies of the people" were subjected to regular physical abuse, humiliation, and inadequate feeding, often accompanied by the repeated use of proverbs such as "the apple does not fall far from the tree." They were also forced to listen to constant propaganda emphasizing their supposed social inferiority. Educational practices in these institutions often displayed indifference toward homeless children and were aimed at making them forget their allegedly "traitorous" parents (Stolee 1988: 64–67).

In the early years of Soviet rule, the new type of educational institutions consisted of communal schools intended to accommodate all homeless and neglected children, as well as the children of workers and poor peasants in need of state financial support (Antonello 2020: 497–499). In 1918–1919, such schools operated in Khujand, Kostakoz, Ura-Tyube, and several other towns. The first boarding schools in Eastern Bukhara were established with the assistance of Red Army units. Thus, boarding schools were organized in Kulyab and Garcha, while in Khorog and Murghab they were established with the support of border guards.

Homelessness and neglect among children in the USSR constituted a social phenomenon generated by social catastrophes within the Soviet state (Stevens 1982: 242–247). From the very establishment of the USSR, measures were undertaken to eliminate child homelessness, including the creation of a state system of social and legal protection and assistance, the establishment of specialized bodies and institutions for combating and preventing disease, the organization of commissions for juvenile affairs, and the creation of a system of social supervision over children. Reception centers, orphanages, and communes were established. Thus, concrete steps began to be implemented to address the problem of homeless children (Krivonosov 2003: 92–98).

If in 1919 orphanages housed 125,000 children, in 1921–1922 this number rose to 540,000. Various forms of work with neglected children began to be applied, including patronage, adoption, guardianship, and custodianship. Komsomol members searched for young people and adolescents "on the streets" and took them under care. Special quotas (7 %) were introduced at enterprises to provide adolescents with vocational training and employment.

More than 540,000 children passed through the 200 reception and distribution centers established in 1921, each of which was designed to accommodate between 50 and 100 children at a time in its first year of operation (Voitkevich, 2012: 12). Nevertheless, according to some sources, due to financial shortages and staff reductions, only 350,000 street children came to the attention of the relevant committees between 1922 and 1923.

According to A. N. Krivonosov, "Homeless children were taken from the streets to reception centers and from there transferred to orphanages. This method quickly filled orphanages for which the state had no funds to provide adequate support" (Krivonosov 2003: 92–99).

After the establishment of the Tajik ASSR in October 1924, public education developed considerably. Already in the 1930–1931 academic year, the republic had 15 orphanages serving 850 children. As of 1 April 1937, according to data from the People's Commissariat of Education of the Tajik SSR, there were 33 orphanages and 5 preschool orphanages in the republic. Their ethnic composition was diverse: of the 307 preschool children, 185 were Uzbeks, 29 Russians, 71 Kazakhs, 11 Kyrgyz, and 8 others (Obidov 1968: 105).

In 1924, V.I. Lenin established a special fund to assist children, and as a result, by 1926 the

voluntary society "Friend of Children," which organized shelters, workshops, summer camps, and playgrounds for homeless children, began its activities (Voitkevich 2012: 13). A new Soviet school for the re-education of "difficult" adolescents also began to develop, an initiative associated with N. K. Krupskaya and A. S. Makarenko (Krivonosov 2003: 92–99).

At the First Moscow Conference on Combating Child Homelessness held in March 1924, N. K. Krupskaya declared that eliminating homelessness was not an act of charity but the task of a healthy society (Krivonosov 2003: 93). In November 1924, at the Fourth Congress of the Heads of Provincial Administrations for Combating Child Homelessness, A. V. Lunacharsky emphasized the social danger of homelessness, stating:

"The issue is not that we should merely sympathize with the suffering of homeless children; the issue is that we risk raising from these children people alien to society, adherents of an antisocial way of life. Through these children, we are creating a camp of enemies that will replenish the army of crime... Six million unschooled children are a terrible danger to the country and the revolution. Help organize work with street children" (Voitkevich 2012: 13).

Resolutions and concrete measures adopted at the center concerning social programs for homeless children eventually also reached the peripheral regions of the Soviet Union. In this context, one important component of the work of the internal affairs bodies in Northern Tajikistan was the struggle against child homelessness. Owing to the death of parents, severe material hardship, and a number of other reasons, children and adolescents left on the streets often entered criminal circles and became involved in offenses ranging from theft to serious murder. Such children and adolescents became accustomed to antisocial behavior and lagged behind their peers in development.

The task of the authorities in Northern Tajikistan was to identify such children and adolescents and transfer them to the Commissions for Children's Affairs, which then sent street children to orphanages and labor collectives, where their accommodation, schooling, and vocational education were organized.

Militia officers solved and prevented crimes related to theft in children's institutions and also identified homeless children left without parents who committed minor offenses in markets and railway stations. In 1925, special units for work with children were established within the NKVD of the Tajik ASSR; these later evolved into divisions for juveniles operating under the militia system today.

Most homeless children were boys: in Tajikistan in 1925–1926, girls accounted for no more than 17–18% of homeless children. In 1925, the country had 200,000 homeless children, of whom 90,000 were in urgent need of assistance (Voitkevich 2012: 14). The militia, the criminal investigation department, and the state political administration were responsible for registering homeless children (Krivonosov 2003: 94).

However, the main part of this work was carried out by local bodies of public education. In order to prevent homelessness, local education authorities in 1926 established bodies for the social and legal protection of minors, which included a guardianship office, a children's address bureau, a legal consultation department, and a commission for juvenile affairs. Compared with 1920, the number of such committees had increased eightfold by 1925. The Central Commission for Juvenile Affairs acted as the governing body (Voitkevich 20121: 15).

A Children's Social Inspection also operated, conducting raids on neglected children, checking the conditions in shelters where children were kept, and monitoring places where large numbers of those under care gathered (Savelev 2015: 116).

In 1925, the Soviet government allocated 50 million rubles to combat child homelessness. The "Friend of Children" societies in 17 districts began using their clubs, canteens, teahouses, and shelters to care for homeless children.

The institution of patronage was created, through which children were placed with working families for upbringing. This became an important stage in the adaptation of graduates of colonies and

orphanages to life outside institutional care (Krivonosov 2003: 35).

In work with difficult adolescents, measures such as one-time educational intervention (conversation, warning), placement or return to the family, supervision of the child's behavior, or placement in closed educational institutions were organized (Krivonosov 2003: 36). Commissions for juvenile affairs were special bodies that considered cases of offenses committed by minors (F.E. Dzerzhinsky 2007: 872). Closed institutions worked with difficult adolescents under a strict pedagogical regime and were required to provide them with both the school curriculum and vocational training.

Jobs were created in cities, while labor colonies were established in rural areas. The latter had both educational and corrective functions. In the early 1920s, OGPU labor communes developed at the initiative of Felix Dzerzhinsky.

There, repeat offenders acquired trades and were trained in labor organized along collective production lines. Communist ideology promoted propaganda among homeless children, asserting that "the main thing in educating street children and adolescents is a new attitude toward the human being, new care for them, and new attention to them; by shedding the disgraceful label of a 'third-rate' group, you will attain the status of a коммунар, lead others like yourself along the same path, fight for the country, and understand well what you are fighting for—you will earn the title of a Dzerzhinsky communard."

From 1928 onward, the state set itself the task of eliminating child homelessness within a short period. An emergency plan was developed to eliminate street homelessness, and the number of orphanages and reception centers increased. Children were placed with peasant families, artisans, and collective and state farms on the grounds that, for each child, an additional plot of land exempt from one-time taxation for three years would be granted, the child would have access to free schooling, and a one-time allowance would be provided. This emergency elimination plan consisted of simultaneously "removing" vagrant children and adolescents from their places of residence and placing them in orphanages, children's homes, and shelters (F.E. Dzerzhinsky 2007: 872).

In the circular of the People's Commissariat of Education dated 19 March 1928, the work of eliminating street homelessness was equated with a "combat task." The nature of the actions resembled, in effect, a major military operation: forces and resources were carefully planned, the main directions of work were defined, strict secrecy of the operation was ensured, coordination of joint actions was agreed upon, and careful reconnaissance was carried out. The mass roundup of homeless children from the streets began simultaneously throughout the country on the night of 12–13 April 1928 and involved OGPU officers, militia and criminal investigation personnel, inspectors dealing with vagrant children, and Komsomol workers (Krivonosov 2003: 39).

Children without shelter were placed in orphanages. Adoption and patronage remained only auxiliary methods in combating neglect and orphanhood. The figure published in 1926—19,000 orphaned children placed in patronage families—amounted to approximately 14% of all orphans at that time (Krivonosov 2003: 41).

On 1 October 1932, the People's Commissariat of Railways of the USSR instructed militarized railway security units to detain homeless children found along railway lines, carry out sanitary treatment, and provide them with food and cultural activities.

Special patrols and operational groups were deployed to search for children, including at unguarded railway stations. The militarized security units also included educators who carried out their work either in railway carriages or in reception centers (Deryabin 1981: 54) (Table 1).

Table 1. Data on orphanages in Tajikistan (SART. F. 360. Op. 16. D. 269. L. 36)

№	Name	Number	Number of orphanages	Total	Number of children	Number of teachers
1	Ura-Tyube	24	2	26	932	27
2	Penjikent	5	1	6	200	5
3	Gorno-Badakhshan	6	2	8	150	7
4	Korgan-Tyube	3	1	4	112	4
5	Garm	4	1	5	170	6
6	Kulyab	5	1	6	205	8
7	Gissar	12	3	15	541	18
8	Total	59	11	70	2330	75

It was only on 2 November 1933 that a special directive was issued concerning the placement of orphaned children of wealthy peasants (kulaks) imprisoned in the Gulag in designated settlements (Issenov, Kupenov 2022: 98). The directive stated that in a number of special settlements there were significant numbers of children of various ages – orphans, homeless children, and sick children. These children, having no parents and consequently no permanent shelter, often lived in conditions of semi-starvation and were exposed to various illnesses that frequently led to death. As a rule, these children were not engaged in any form of labor, not even light work, which contributed to the development of poverty and parasitic tendencies among them. The directive emphasized that such conditions could not be allowed to continue in the future (Franko 2016: 123–124).

On 31 May 1935, the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) issued the decree "On the Elimination of Child Homelessness and Neglect," which proclaimed the task of raising children while simultaneously setting objectives for eliminating mass homelessness and intensifying the punishment of children and the struggle against juvenile delinquency. The decree stated that, given the considerable number of children's institutions and the improved material conditions of workers, the continuing presence of street children reflected deficiencies in preventive work. It also emphasized the public role in child upbringing, defined a system of measures to prevent neglect and homelessness, developed measures to combat violations of minors' rights, and increased parental responsibility for child-rearing. The decree acknowledged that homelessness had not yet been fully eliminated but still existed, explaining this not by deep-rooted social causes, but by the poor work of local Soviet and party organs and the insufficient organized participation of Soviet society in combating it (Krivonosov 2003: 92–98). Thus, it took approximately fifteen years for the Soviet Union to eliminate mass child homelessness.

Naturally, decrees and decisions adopted at the center, though delayed, also reached peripheral regions. In Tajikistan, too, under the influence of Soviet power, an active struggle against child homelessness was carried out and a certain amount of work was accomplished. Nevertheless, the fact that this work assumed a campaign-like character and was conducted without any solid preparation indicates that it failed to produce substantial results. Archival data show that the orphanages created in haste did not meet the required standards and were

unable to respond adequately to the needs of homeless children.

For example, on 1 April 1936, 53 children were being raised in the Khorog orphanage. In this institution, the buildings were dirty and unwhitewashed, the floors were unwashed, the ceilings were dirty, and the stoves were unusable. There was no electric lighting. The children were not provided with bedding, and there were no bedside tables. Objects and pieces of bread lay under the mattresses. Linen was insufficient, and washing was poor and irregular. There were lice among the children. Educational work was poorly organized. The existing workshop was unsuitable for conducting lessons. The children were not accustomed to labor processes (SART. F. 360. Op. 16. D. 269. L. 36).

In the Shybyrgan orphanage, as of 15 April of the same year, 14 children were being cared for by four staff members. The rooms and floors were dirty, and the premises were dilapidated and damp. Instruction was poorly organized. The children were often left unsupervised for several days. They were unable to wash for days at a time. There was no sanitary or medical supervision. No doctor visited the institution. There was no isolation room. No pedagogical work was conducted, and the children were left to themselves. There was no Pioneer work and no head supervisor (SART. F. 360. Op. 16. D. 269. L. 37).

In the Garm orphanage, as of 10 March 1936, there were 67 children – 60 boys and 7 girls. The room was designed for only 31 beds. There were 40 mattresses and 55 blankets. Some children slept two to a bed, while the others slept on the floor. The premises had not been heated for three days (SART. F. 360. Op. 16. D. 269. L. 38).

There was no boiled drinking water, and the children drank from irrigation ditches. Their clothes were dirty, and some went barefoot. Their food consisted of tea with bread in the morning and soup for lunch. At night the children were left on their own. Some wet their beds because they were afraid to go outside and because the weather was cold. The children were dirty. There was no entertainment or useful activity of any kind. There was no Pioneer work. Instead of the allocated 3 rubles per day for food, only 2 rubles were provided (SART. F. 360. Op. 16. D. 269. L. 39).

As of 10 May 1936, the Istara orphanage housed 50 children. The orphanage in Isfara had no clear direction, and work processes were not organized. There was no Pioneer work. The children included both school-age and preschool-age children. There were overgrown children and children who still had parents. The children belonged to various ethnic groups. Russian children attended an Uzbek school, and some had completely forgotten their native language. There was no sanitary or medical supervision. There was no mass work, no games, and no entertainment. Work had not yet begun. There was no workshop. Food was insufficient. In the morning and evening the children were given tea with bread; in the afternoon, soup. No second or third courses were provided, and meat was not served even on major holidays. There was no boiled water. The children's hair was not cut. This situation had been reported to the People's Commissariat of Education many times (SART. F. 360. Op. 16. D. 269. L. 40).

The condition of the Korgan-Tyube orphanage, where Kazakh children were being raised, was even more severe than in the others. The orphanage housed 68 children, including 58 schoolchildren and 10 preschool-age children. There were also older children. Some former residents of the orphanage who worked at enterprises still lived there. There was no labor education. Recently, seven children had run away. There were no preschool-age children. The institution included children of various ethnicities: Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs. The teachers did not know the Tajik language, while some children did not know Russian at all. Communication took place through child interpreters. No doctor had been appointed. There was no medical care. There was no isolation room. There was a sewing workshop for girls, but not everyone worked there. The carpentry workshop was not functioning because there was no instructor. The land had not yet been cultivated. The children were not taught

labor skills. There was no boiled water in the institution. The staff had no special training. Of all the children in the orphanage, only 25 were healthy; the others suffered from malaria (11), tuberculosis (8), syphilis (3), and other illnesses. Some school-age children did not attend school. The children's institutions in the district were in an unsanitary condition. The premises were unfit for habitation. Plaster was falling off, the ceiling was collapsing, the windows were broken, and the floor was made of clay. The beds were arranged so tightly that there was no free space between them for movement. There was no place for lessons. The children did their homework kneeling beside their beds. The kitchen was dirty, and the ceiling was collapsing. The children were left to themselves. There was no entertainment and no games. There was no isolation room. The children themselves were in an unsanitary condition. The state of the beds and bedding was deplorable. The children had no personal towels, toothbrushes, or even soap. They drank water from irrigation channels. Their level of education was extremely low. There was no Pioneer work (SART. F. 360. Op. 16. D. 269. L. 42).

Cases in which orphanage residents in Tajikistan were assigned for education in Uzbek, Russian, and Tajik, regardless of their ethnic background, were quite frequent. For example, archival documents contain an instruction sent by Ibragimov, Head of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Tajik SSR, to the director of the Leninabad orphanage, ordering that German, Russian, Ukrainian, and Mordvin children be assigned to Russian schools, while Tatar and Kazakh children were to be placed in schools providing instruction in Uzbek (SART. F. 360. Op. 16. D. 13. L. 26–32).

The results of the study demonstrate that in the Soviet Union during the 1920s–1930s, the consequences of misguided policies and the negative socio-economic and social policies of authoritarian rule also affected children. Political repression, famine, and coercive collectivization did not spare ordinary people, including Kazakhs living in Tajikistan. During these political upheavals, Kazakhs who migrated beyond their homeland to neighboring regions, including Tajikistan, also experienced the consequences of Soviet policy. Archival evidence indicates that the problem of child homelessness, which constitutes the core subject of this article, also affected Kazakhs residing in Tajikistan.

The study further shows that the phenomenon of orphaned and homeless children, which had been alien to traditional Kazakh society, became clearly manifest under Soviet rule as a result of Soviet repression and social catastrophe. At the same time, the Soviet government fought child homelessness not on the basis of genuine compassion for these children, but rather in order to prevent the emergence of a cruel generation of children who might oppose Soviet power.

Another finding of the research is that some Kazakh children were officially recorded as Uzbek, Tajik, or Russian. A promising direction for future research is therefore to trace the descendants of these children and restore their connection to their historical roots.

Conclusion

The study conducted demonstrates that the Soviet socio-economic transformations and mechanisms of totalitarian governance in the 1920s–1930s had a profound and long-term impact on the socio-demographic development of the Kazakh people, the structure of the family, and the fate of children. Forced collectivization, confiscation, famine, political repression, and forced migration processes destroyed the traditional social system of Kazakh society and led to the mass homelessness of its most vulnerable segment — children. From this perspective, child homelessness should be understood not only as a consequence of humanitarian crisis, but also as a concrete historical manifestation of Soviet social-engineering policies.

The findings of the study make it clear that the emergence of child homelessness among Kazakhs who migrated to the territory of Tajikistan was not accidental and was not the result of isolated household-level factors. Rather, it was directly connected with the systematic

political, social, and repressive measures of Soviet rule. A comparative analysis of archival documents and scholarly literature has shown that the loss of parents, the collapse of families, social vulnerability under conditions of famine and displacement, as well as the isolation of children of those labeled "enemies of the people," became the main preconditions for homelessness among Kazakh refugees. This demonstrates the need to examine child homelessness in the Soviet period not only from a social perspective, but also from political-legal and institutional perspectives.

The analysis based on materials from the state archives and libraries of the Republic of Tajikistan has shown that orphanages and boarding institutions in peripheral regions were in an extremely difficult material, sanitary, medical, and pedagogical condition. The study established that overcrowding, the lack of heating and lighting, shortages of bedding, clothing, clean drinking water, medical assistance, and professionally trained personnel were systemic features of children's institutions. These findings clearly demonstrate that the social protection measures adopted by the central authorities were not fully or effectively implemented in peripheral republics and that a substantial gap existed between official decrees and lived reality.

At the same time, the results of the study indicate that Kazakh children in Tajikistan were exposed not only to social vulnerability but also to the risk of linguistic and ethnocultural disintegration. Archival evidence confirms that Kazakh children were placed in Uzbek-, Tajik-, or Russian-language institutions without regard for their ethnic origin or linguistic identity. Such practices broaden the scope of the problem of child homelessness and make it possible to view it as a complex phenomenon closely linked to issues of ethnic identity, cultural adaptation, and historical memory. In this regard, the issue under consideration contributes not only to the study of the social history of Kazakh refugees, but also to an understanding of the everyday consequences of Soviet nationality policy in Central Asia.

One of the important conclusions of the study is that the Soviet government's struggle against child homelessness was based primarily not on humanitarian principles, but on the goals of social control and the preservation of political stability. The perception of homeless and neglected children as a potential source of danger led to the formation of mechanisms aimed at regulating them through reception and distribution centers, orphanages, labor communes, and closed institutions. Thus, although Soviet social policy toward children outwardly appeared to contain elements of protection, in reality these measures largely functioned as components of a disciplinary and institutional system of control.

The scholarly novelty of this study lies in its treatment of child homelessness among Kazakhs who migrated to the territory of Tajikistan as a distinct object of research. Although previous scholarship has addressed the history of Kazakh refugees, famine, and migration processes in broad terms, the impact of these processes on the fate of children — especially Kazakh children in Tajikistan — has not previously been systematically analyzed on the basis of a specific documentary foundation. In this respect, the introduction into scholarly circulation of documents preserved in the archives and libraries of Tajikistan not only expands the source base of the topic, but also makes it possible to reinterpret previously understudied aspects of Kazakh history.

The theoretical significance of the study lies in its examination of child homelessness in relation to Soviet modernization, forced migration, social catastrophe, and processes of ethnic adaptation. Its practical significance lies in the possibility of using the findings for the study of the history of Kazakh migration in the twentieth century, the formation of the Kazakh diaspora, the consequences of Soviet social policy, and humanitarian crises in Central Asia. In addition, the conclusions obtained may serve as a methodological basis for research aimed at reconstructing historical memory, systematizing archival documents, and tracing

intergenerational continuity among Kazakh refugees.

Future research should expand the corpus of archival materials relating to Kazakh children in Tajikistan and examine in greater detail their subsequent life trajectories, transformations of ethnic identity, adaptation to linguistic environments, and intergenerational continuity. In particular, tracing the later fate of Kazakh children who were registered in documents as Uzbek, Tajik, or Russian may become a new and important direction in the study of the Kazakh diaspora, migration anthropology, and historical demography. Thus, the problem of child homelessness among Kazakhs who migrated to Tajikistan should be recognized as an important scholarly issue that deepens our understanding of the historical experience of the Kazakh people in the twentieth century and requires further interdisciplinary development.

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Sources

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CSA SPH KR – Central State Archive of Socio-Political History of the Kyrgyz Republic

KRSA – Kyzylorda Regional State Archive

SART — State Archive of the Republic of Tajikistan

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