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Research Article

**INDIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND: PROSPECTS FOR
KAZAKHSTAN**

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ABSTRACT

The article explores India's involvement with Kazakhstan in the fields of higher education and tourism, two sectors with significant potential to strengthen bilateral relations. The article begins by describing the prospects of the Indian market and its demographic dividend as key considerations when evaluating future engagement. It then examines the growing demand among Indian youth for medical education and emerging travel destinations, highlighting Kazakhstan's potential to position itself as an attractive option. Furthermore, the article evaluates Kazakhstan's ability to meet these growing demands. The findings are then summarized to provide an overall assessment, as well as recommendations for enhancing Indian-Kazakhstan ties through the expansion of opportunities for students and tourists.

Keywords: India, Kazakhstan, Demographic dividend, Tourism, Education.

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INTRODUCTION

India is officially the most populous country in the world, with a population of over 1,441 billion people. According to the 2024 State of the World's Population Report by the United Nations Population Fund, India's population is expected to continue growing for several decades, peaking in the early 2060s at approximately 1,7 billion people, and then declining by 12%. India is expected to remain the most populous country in the world throughout the century (UN, 2024).

Compared to other countries with a large population, India has one principal advantage 47% of its population, or 650 million people, are under 25 years of age. Currently, one in every five people under 25 worldwide resides in India, and by 2030, one in every five working-age individuals will be from India. The average age of Indians is about 28 years, and only 10% of Indians are over 60 years old (BBC, 2022; Bloomberg, 2024).

India's youthful population is a demographic dividend if properly harnessed. It can be the country's driving force for accelerating economic growth, improving socio-economic indicators, and thereby enhancing India's regional and global ambitions. With proper planning, India can emerge as a global economic leader, boasting the largest skilled workforce and a hub for global development.

India's demographic dividend is not only a factor in its internal development but also an important aspect of its foreign policy. India has a gigantic workforce, human capital and consumer market. In implementing foreign policy, India's demographic challenges are a significant factor determining the vector of cooperation for both India and partner countries. For India, it is essential to maximise its economic potential, and for partner countries, it is important to leverage India's demographic scale.

Kazakhstan, being a strategic partner and India's largest trade and investment partner in Central Asia, is keen to realize the full potential of bilateral cooperation. However, on a global scale, relations with Kazakhstan remain peripheral to India's geopolitical agenda due to modest indicators of trade and economic cooperation, as well as resulting obstacles (Muratbekova & Khitakhunov, 2024).

The article aims to examine India's interest in higher education and tourism in Kazakhstan as two key sectors through which the widening of existing ties between India and Kazakhstan can be projected. To this end, the article describes the prospects of the Indian market, highlighting its demographic dividends as a significant consideration while evaluating future engagement. The article begins by outlining the demographic profile of India and the opportunities and challenges facing the Indian government. It then examines how Kazakhstan capitalizes on India's demand for medical education and its interest in exploring new tourist destinations. Further, the article examines Kazakhstan's capacity to respond to the growing demand. The findings are then summed up to provide an overall assessment as well as recommendations for enhancing Indian-Kazakhstan ties through the widening of student and tourist' attraction.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The impact of population size on a country's economic growth has been debated for decades. Economists examining this approach have been divided into three

major groups: “Pessimistic” theorists, following Malthusian theory, believe that population growth limits economic growth; “Optimistic” theorists tend to believe that population growth promotes economic development; and “Neutralist” theorists believe that population growth has no significant impact on a country’s economic growth (Bloom et al., 2003).

However, these discussions focus on the size and growth of the population, ignoring its age structure as a critical variable. If relying on the age structure, then there is a possibility of increasing the potential for economic growth due to an increase in the share of the working-age population. Economists refer to this phenomenon as a demographic dividend — during the period when the share of the working-age population in the country exceeds the share of dependents, there is a high probability of accelerating economic growth (Williamson, 2013; Gribble & Bremner, 2012).

Proponents of the liberal approach to international relations also emphasize the economic and social interdependence of states, believing that population issues are on par with traditional security and development issues. In this regard, followers of economic interdependence believe that a country’s demographic advantage can stimulate economic growth, leading to increased trade and investment opportunities between states (Copeland, 2015; Keohane & Nye, 2001). Theorists of institutional liberalism believe that demographic characteristics can serve as the basis for the development of institutional mechanisms in interstate relations, contributing to reduced uncertainty and economic growth (Keohane, 2012). Taking into account examples where changes in population proportions led to the development of interstate relations, especially in Asian and African countries, this article selects the demographic condition of a country as the primary variable for analysing its potential for interaction.

India’s population is currently in a position to benefit from its demographic dividend. The size of India’s young workforce has enormous potential not only for domestic development but also for influencing global mechanisms. The young generation of Indians contributes to global development through their large market for both skilled and unskilled labour, their potential to export education, and their ability to create new development paths that take into account the changing interests and needs of the younger generation.

Hence, the article argues that India’s capabilities as a global leader in sending foreign students and the largest outbound tourism market thanks to its demographic dividend, allow us to project these two areas as potential areas for expanding bilateral cooperation with Kazakhstan. To examine the quantitative validity of the argument, the article uses statistical data from the Agency of Statistics of Kazakhstan. The article also employs the data from a comparative perspective, enabling the formulation of conclusions and suggestions. Altogether, qualitative methods such as comparative analysis are used in combination with quantitative elements.

PECULIARITIES OF THE INDIAN POPULATION

India is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and is the world’s fourth-largest economy by nominal GDP. The country aims to become one of the world’s top three economies by its centenary of independence in 2047 (The World Bank, 2024). By 2030, India aims to become an upper-middle-income

country, meaning it will have over 75 million upper-middle-class individuals and approximately 25 million affluent individuals. Collectively, India's middle class is expected to comprise approximately 56% of the population by 2030 (Price, 2023). This means that in the long term, India's population will remain not only one of the youngest in the world but also one of the richest.

However, such a large population brings with it not only opportunities but also challenges. For example, there is a giant gap between the rich and the poor in the country. According to an Oxfam report, the wealthiest 10% of India's population own about 72% of the total wealth, while the top 5% of the wealthiest people on the list own almost 62% of the country's total wealth. Overall, about 30% of India's population owns more than 90% of the country's total wealth, while the poorest portion of the population owns less than 3% of the wealth (Oxfam India, 2023).

This gap not only highlights the diversity of supply and demand in the Indian market but also the resulting opportunities presented by the country's complex demographics. In particular, the field of education in India is marked by numerous barriers and complexities associated with the differentiation of the educational system based on class, language, ethnicity, gender, geography, and other factors. In addition, there are barriers to accessing English-medium education, higher education, and advanced training courses due to overburdened infrastructure (Oxfam India, 2023).

There is also a pressing need to increase the number of jobs continually. While more than 10 million young Indians enter the job market each year, this figure is expected to increase by 2030, with 16,5 million new jobs created annually (Economic Times, 2024). Overall, the Indian government needs to create more than 90 million new jobs by 2030 to accommodate the 60 million new workers (McKinsey Global Institute, 2020).

India's massive demographic challenges create fierce competition in both education and employment, prompting many to migrate in search of more favourable conditions. Therefore, the Indian diaspora is considered one of the largest in the world, with over 18 million people living abroad. According to surveys, three out of four Indians with middle – and high-income levels attempt to move abroad (United Nations, 2020).

Taking into account the above-mentioned macroeconomic indicators of India's demographic situation, the article further discusses migration for higher education and outbound tourism as potential areas for the development of bilateral cooperation with Kazakhstan.

PROSPECTS FOR ENHANCEMENT OF BILATERAL COOPERATION

Higher education

India is the world leader in the number of international students, with over 1,3 million Indian students pursuing higher education abroad in 2024 (Times of India, 2025). Indian students constitute the largest group of international students at many of the world's leading institutions. In terms of the number of international students, India is the most popular destination for higher education, alongside the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

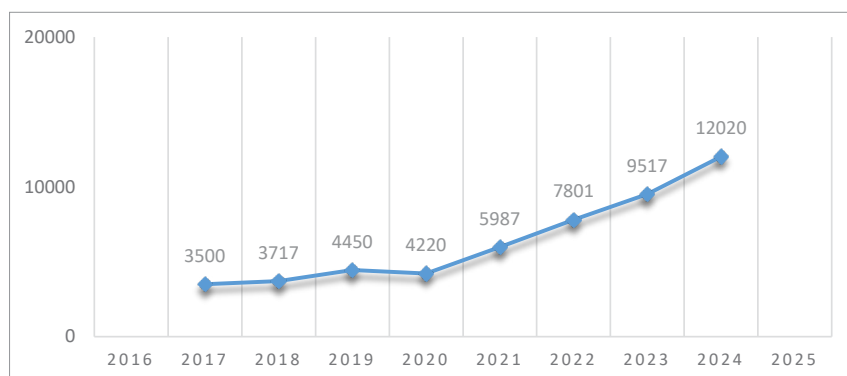
Given the social structure of India's population, interest in higher education among Indian students is growing not only among popular destinations in developed countries but also in developing countries. In particular, there has been a noticeable increase in demand for education in Central Asian countries recently. The flow of international students to countries in the region has increased, especially after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, which has made it one of the most popular destinations in the post-Soviet space. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan lead the region in attracting students from India, with Kyrgyzstan becoming the ninth most popular destination for Indian students worldwide in 2023 (Muratbekova, 2024a).

Overall, Ukraine was the leader in the post-Soviet space among Indian students before the war, with approximately 20,000 students studying there. Russia and Kyrgyzstan rank second in popularity among Indian students, with 20,000 and 17,500 medical students studying there, respectively. Globally, Russia, the Philippines, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and China are currently the most popular destinations for Indian medical students (Muratbekova, 2024a).

It is worth noting that Indian students in the region almost always choose medical specialities. This trend is attributed to the challenges of obtaining a medical education in India. In India, to enrol in a medical university, it is necessary to pass the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET), based on the results of which applicants are admitted to medical specialities. However, passing the test does not guarantee admission to the university, even for fee-paying programs, due to insufficient academic infrastructure. For instance, in 2023, 106,333 seats were available in 695 Indian medical colleges: 43,915 seats in private colleges and 48,012 in government medical colleges. However, that year, 1,145,976 applicants successfully passed the NEET exam, meaning that only 10% of those who qualified for medical education were admitted to Indian universities (Muratbekova, 2024a). Unsurprisingly, all other applicants were forced to search for opportunities to study in other countries, depending on their budget. The situation with enrollment in Indian medical institutions remains the same every year due to a lack of sufficient spots and high demand for medical education. The shortage has led to a large number of Indian students seeking medical education opportunities abroad.

Under these circumstances, Kazakhstan, like other countries, is striving to attract more Indian students. Notably, since 2023, Indian students have become the largest group of international students in the country, surpassing those from Uzbekistan. Previously, the number of students did not exceed 5,000. Following the closure of the Ukrainian education market, the influx of students from India has been steadily increasing, reaching 12,000 students in the 2024-2025 academic year.

Figure 1
Number of Indian students in Kazakhstan



Source: Stat.gov.kz; ENIC (2023)

The vast majority of these students—11,997 out of 12,020 in 2024—are studying at medical universities. Kazakhstan has 11 medical universities that offer courses in English and comply with the recommendations of the National Medical Commission of India and are recognised by the World Federation for Medical Education. The cost of education in Kazakhstan is far lower than that of medical colleges in the USA, Europe, and popular Asian nations. In comparison to the USA, it is even thirteen times lower (KazPravda, 2025).

Kazakhstan's education, thanks to its fairly internationalised higher education system, proven international recognition in well-known rankings, and various international accreditations, along with comparatively low costs, has every chance to provide alternatives to India's demand for medical education. Given the demographic situation in India, the number of Indians seeking medical education is expected to increase year after year. However, there are doubts that the Indian government will be able to create sufficient infrastructure for all in such a short period. Accordingly, interest in Kazakhstan education will only grow.

Outbound tourism

The steady growth of the Indian economy has contributed to the improvement of the living standards and socio-economic conditions of its population. The significant improvement in the well-being of the population has increased demand for tourism, sparked increased interest in travel, and expanded the possibilities for choice. The growth in income among different population categories has shifted demand toward more affordable destinations. As a result, the range of tourist offers and vacation options has expanded.

According to a FICCI report, outbound tourism in India is growing at an unprecedented rate. The Indian outbound tourism market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 11% by 2032. Outbound tourism is expected to triple by 2034, driven by the growing middle class in India. Furthermore, outbound spending by Indian tourists is projected to increase from US\$18,82 billion in 2024 to US\$55,39 billion by 2034 (FICCI, 2024). A McKinsey analysis also shows growing interest in travel among Indians and rising spending. By 2030, India is expected to become the world's fourth-largest travel market, largely due to the growth of its middle class. However, Indian tourists are already among the highest spenders

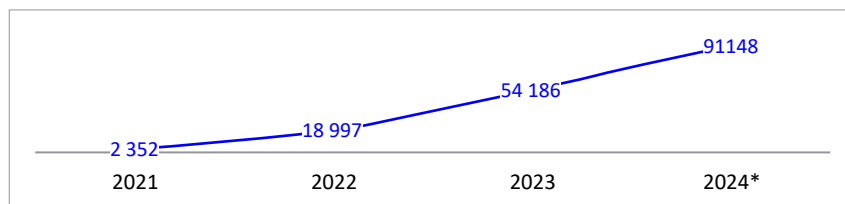
globally (Muratbekova, 2024b). These increases are taking place despite India's weak passport, which ranks only 84th (out of 199 countries) with 58 visa-free countries in the Global Passport Power Rank 2024.

The rise in travel is also driven by the mindset of Gen Z and millennials, who view travel as an integral part of their established lifestyle. Younger travellers are shifting the landscape and purpose of travel, with popular itineraries being reconsidered in favour of more authentic, unconventional options with a variety of holiday formats. Also, the availability of more budget-friendly options is expanding the range and scope of travel. In India, Gen Z and millennials are driving the growth of tourism, forming an important consumer group and providing key demand for the changing needs of tourism.

In light of this, Kazakhstan and Almaty in particular are emerging as promising tourism destinations. After the Indian tourism sector recovered from COVID-19 restrictions, interest in travelling to Kazakhstan increased significantly, reaching over 90,000 Indian tourists in 2024. Authorities in Kazakhstan link this trend to the implementation of the 14-day visa-free period in 2022. Figure 2 illustrates how the numbers are continuously increasing, and the demand is anticipated to rise.

Figure 2

Number of inbound visitors served by accommodation by nationality—India



Source: Stat.gov.kz

The data for 2024 covers January to September due to the unavailability of later figures, while the data for 2021–2023 spans January to December.

Kazakh authorities, recognising the potential of the Indian market, are expanding the country's visibility in India. In 2024, Kazakh Tourism opened its first international tourism office in Delhi. It organises large-scale promotions for the Indian market by participating in Indian travel fairs, working with Indian travel agencies, and starting digital marketing efforts tailored to Indian audiences to promote Kazakhstan as a destination for Indian tourists. The company's main focus is on the Indian FIT (fully independent travellers) and MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) segments (D&B Bureau, 2024).

These measures, along with its proximity, direct three-hour flights, and a 14-day visa-free regime, have contributed to Almaty's growing popularity as a new tourist destination for travellers from India. It is also evident from the search results on well-known platforms, such as MakeMyTrip, Agoda, and Booking.com. Remarkably, the MakeMyTrip platform showed a record growth of 527% in search queries for the city of Almaty in 2024. Also, Almaty was among the most popular foreign holiday destinations for Indian travellers in 2024 (Muratbekova, 2024b). Thus, Almaty's potential as a new destination for Indian travellers is promising.

KAZAKHSTAN'S RESPONSE TO INDIA'S DEMAND

The analysis of India's demographic development demonstrates that India's youth can serve as a driving force in widening bilateral cooperation. Sectors such as education and tourism that are driven and sustained by youth can contribute to becoming the cornerstone of the future partnership. Expanding interest among youth can foster scalable, significant collaborations that tackle shared development objectives.

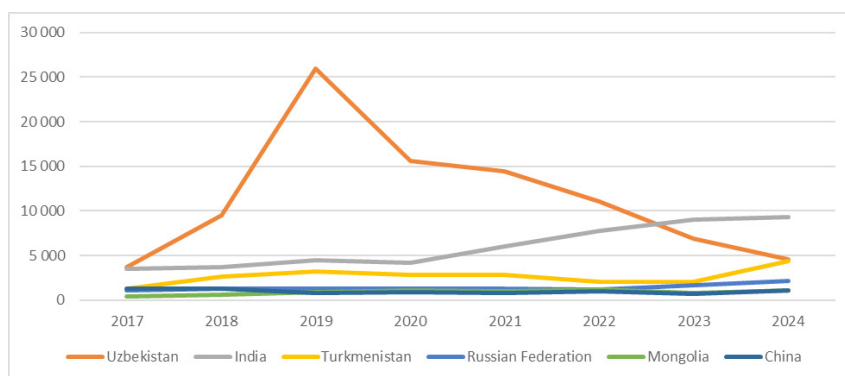
India's engagement with Kazakhstan remains limited, especially in expanding trade potential, due to the lack of direct land connections and transport barriers caused by India's foreign policy toward the connecting states. The bilateral trade figures between India and Kazakhstan are negligible considering the potential of both parties (Muratbekova & Khitakhunov, 2024).

Given India's demographic profile, economic prospects, and external policy strategies, the author suggests that attracting Indian students for education and welcoming Indian tourists represents an untapped opportunity to strengthen bilateral engagement and expand bilateral ties. It would also contribute to raising awareness among nations. For this purpose, institutionally, the parties already cooperate through the India-Kazakhstan Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC). The sides are organising joint working groups and joint events to popularise and advance bilateral mechanisms. They are also working on enlarging business ties by conducting events for the business community, such as the India-Central Asia Business Council and Kazakhstan-India Business Council meetings.

Nevertheless, diplomatic initiatives alone are insufficient to foster bilateral interaction. Kazakhstan, transitioning toward a more internationalised model, has its own difficulties in attracting foreigners.

In higher education, while implementing internationalisation strategies since 2010, Kazakhstan has prioritised sending its students abroad rather than providing conditions for attracting inbound students. As a result, Kazakhstan universities traditionally had a modest share of international students. Specifically, to date, more than 31,500 international students are enrolled in Kazakhstan universities, marking the biggest figure to date (Tengri News, 2025).

Among them, more than 12,000 are from India, 4,600 are from Uzbekistan, and 4,400 are from Turkmenistan. As seen in Figure 3, the number of students from the Asian countries gradually exceeded the number of students from the neighbouring Russian-speaking countries. As a result, in 2024, the number of students from Asia surpassed the number of students from CIS nations for the first time, indicating a shift in the traditional dominance of CIS students (Inbusiness.kz, 2025).

Figure 3*Dynamics of Top 5 Countries of Origin for International Students*

Source: Stat.gov.kz

Overall, in the 2024-2025 academic year, 624,500 students studied at Kazakhstan universities, meaning that the share of international students constitutes approximately 5% of the total student population. This percentage reflects a small share of international students, especially taking into account the numbers. At the same time, an increase in international enrolment represents a positive shift and a growing trend in Kazakhstan's higher education system, as more international students choose to study there.

To respond to growing demand for foreign education, Kazakh universities need to foster their internationalisation efforts and adapt more programs for international students. While Kazakhstan universities are already listed in the global university rankings, such as QS and THE, the course content and availability of programs in English need further advancement. However, the Ministry of Higher Education has already announced its intention to accommodate about 150,000 students by 2028-2029, so more opportunities to attract international students, specifically from India, can be expected (Kapital, 2025).

If the plans for preparing sufficient infrastructure and education programs to increase the share of international students are successfully realised, Indian students would be among the priority target audiences. Recent statistics indicates a consistent increase in Indian students' interest in Kazakhstani education, highlighting a proven and enduring pattern. As was mentioned, for Indian students, the affordable tuition fees and living conditions, along with the ease of travelling, are among the major reasons for choosing Kazakhstani education.

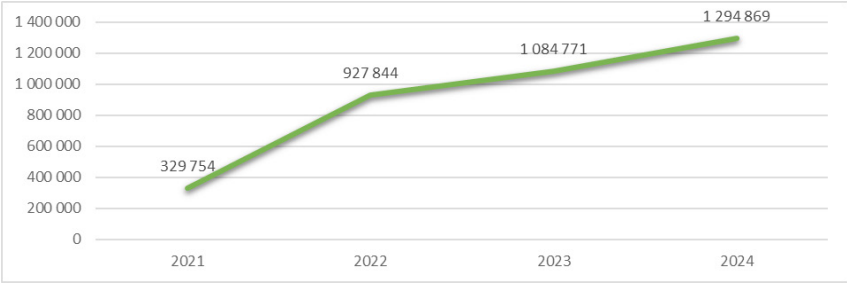
The potential of the Indian market also serves as a driving force, among other factors, for transforming universities in Kazakhstan. Therefore, when contemplating expansions to attract more international students, it's valuable to consider the demands of Indian students, particularly in the field of medicine. In this regard, Kazakhstan's Ministry of Education is following a timely path to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the burgeoning Indian market for international students, which will hopefully lead to enhancing bilateral ties between the nations.

In the long run, with the demographic dividend of India, such an outcome could have a sustained effect not only on the education sphere but, in general, on

the enhancement of Indo-Kazakhstan ties. Education has a lasting impact on bilateral ties since the experience of living abroad fosters a durable network of relationships, built through interpersonal connections, alumni networks, and engagement with local communities. These activities will result in increased interpersonal interactions and enhanced connections, fostering mutual awareness on both sides.

In the sphere of tourism, Kazakhstan is emerging as a tourism destination, transforming and advancing its global image. In 2024, the country achieved the highest influx of over 11,5 million tourists (PrimeMinister.kz, 2024). The overall trend of incoming tourism indicates stable and positive enhancements in the tourism sector's dynamics (Figure 4).

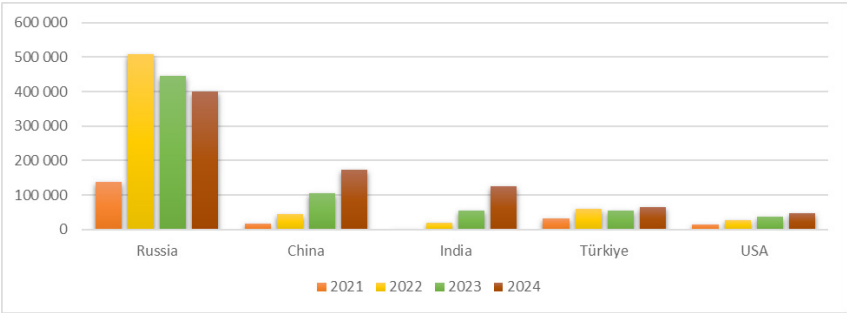
Figure 4
Total number of foreign visitors served by accommodation



Source: Stat.gov.kz

Within the country, Almaty attracted the highest number of international tourists, totalling 1,7 million visitors, reflecting a 14% rise (PrimeMinister.kz, 2024). Based on tourists' nationalities, Russian visitors show the highest interest, followed by tourists from China and India, with Türkiye and the USA completing the top five. Thus, India already shows a significant presence in Kazakhstan's tourism market.

Figure 5
The top five countries by the number of tourists, based on accommodation



Source: Stat.gov.kz

However, addressing internal infrastructure and service challenges is necessary to draw in more tourists. Despite significant infrastructure advancements, transit, lodging, and amenities still require improvement, particularly in terms of intra-city connectivity. The service and mindset for accommodating foreign

tourists also necessitate greater modification and adaptation from local residents due to their inexperience in drawing a substantial influx of visitors.

At the same time, the government's policy of strengthening the tourism sector, coupled with promotion campaigns, easing visa policies, and intensifying flights, resulted in a significant boost to the industry. The influx of Indian tourists demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach and suggests room for further improvement. An expanding appeal to Kazakhstan among Indians will increase awareness of the country and contribute to broader economic engagement between countries. It may influence the attraction of entrepreneurs and investors, thereby resulting in expanded trade and investment opportunities. Accordingly, tourism development is seen as one of the key promising areas for expanding and strengthening bilateral cooperation.

CONCLUSION

India is one of the fastest-growing and developing economies in the world. The country's young population allows the Indian government to give every reason to expand the country's global and regional ambitions. The article aims to highlight the potential of the Indian market, which, thanks to the country's demographic dividend, is expected to continue growing and strengthening in the future. The article, also focusing on some demographic characteristics of the Indian population, showed the potential challenges of India's scale, which the Kazakhstan authorities can leverage.

The Indian higher education and tourism market has tremendous potential for further growth. Its scope and forecasts for the future show how rising trends are positively intensifying. Therefore, Kazakhstan needs to consider those factors while maintaining bilateral relations and strengthening higher education and tourism spheres in the agenda of diplomatic relations.

To achieve this, it is necessary to promote both the domestic and foreign agendas of the country. Within Kazakhstan, given the possibilities of internationalisation of the Kazakh product, it is necessary to create the appropriate infrastructure, taking into account global and regional trends. This includes strengthening the focus of universities on attracting foreign students, creating conditions for their education, and amplifying the promotion of Kazakhstani education. In the field of tourism, it is also necessary to create conditions for different budgets of travelers, including those who are considering educational migration to Kazakhstan.

At the level of bilateral relations, Kazakhstan should intensify efforts to increase recognition of the country and attract Indian citizens to work, study and travel to Kazakhstan. Given the modest volume of bilateral trade and economic relations, the development of emerging promising areas of cooperation contributes to the strengthening and development of productive interaction, as well as the expansion of the cooperation portfolio, which in turn will lead to sustainable, multifaceted, and mutually beneficial cooperation.

Ethical Commission Approval

This study did not require approval from an ethics committee as it did not involve human participants, animals, or sensitive personal data. All data used in this research were obtained from publicly available sources.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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