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CONTENTS

PEDAGOGY

Abylkassymova A., Yeskhozhayeva S., Zhumabay N. Developing students' mathematical literacy through contextual problems based on stem education.....	16
Adaskanova Zh.K., Moldasan K.Sh., Tsay Y. Professional-research thinking of the future educational psychologist: concept and structure.....	41
Aliyeva Zh.Zh., Baikenzheyeva A.T., Arystanova S.D. Developing entrepreneurial skills in biology majors within the framework of the minor supplementary educational program.....	55
Akhmetova D.M., Oryngaliyeva Sh.O., Kundakova A. Methodological foundations for the use of regional oral history materials in school practice when teaching the topic of women on the home front.....	72
Baishuakova A.D., Aldabergenova M.K., Zhadrayeva G.A. Epistolary sources as a means of developing historical thinking in future history teachers.....	90
Boztayeva S.Zh., Amrenova G.R., Jumabayeva S.T. Features of the development of coordination abilities of university students.....	104
Darkulova K.N., Turgynbayeva Zh.M., Kuttybayeva Zh.F. The influence of modern digital technologies on the formation of academic writing competencies among students.....	117
Dzhumanova L.S., Kaskataeva Zh.A., Turbaeva S.M. Problems of using artificial intelligence in education.....	133
Yermekbayeva A., Suleimenova K., Shormakova A.B. The role of assessment criteria in improving academic writing in higher education.....	151
Zhanys A.B. Digital variative mathematics education for agricultural engineers.....	166
Zhussupbekova B.A., Kulanbayeva G.K. Historical and psychological portrait of Mustafa Chokay.....	183
Kegenbekov J.K., Urazakynov D.K. The relevance of career guidance training in biophysics at medical universities.....	199
Kemelbekova Zh.S., Kopzhasarova Zh.B. Generative artificial intelligence tools in education: PRISMA 2020-based analysis and improvement model.....	218

Kurymbayeva S.K., Baizhumanova N.S., Bakina Y.A. Higher education instructors competencies in using AI in the inclusive education process.....	237
Massalimova B.K., Shintemirova M.T., Nurkenova A.D. Using STEM technologies to develop students' research skills.....	259
Orazaliyeva R., Ametkhan Zh. Folk pedagogy as a source of development of the ethno-artistic potential of students of creative specialties of the university of Kazakhstan.....	285
Pilten P., Pilten G., Kuralbayeva A. Pedagogical approaches to values education among primary school teachers.....	301
Sugirbekova A., Nametkulova F., Tasbolat E. Methodology for preparing future physics teachers to organize students' research activities.....	320
Tankibayeva A.A., Turalbayeva A.T., Baimukhanbetov B.M. Formation of professional competencies of future primary school teachers on the basis of micro-learning.....	340
Shyndaliev N.T., Serikkazy A.S., Nurbekova G.F. Enhancing students' professional competencies in big data processing through artificial intelligence: results of a pedagogical experiment.....	364

ECONOMICS

Aitkazina M., Karshalova A., Biken V. Analysis of green lending programs of second-tier banks and development institutions in the Republic of Kazakhstan.....	380
Aitmanbetova R., Bukharbaeva A. Improving accounting and audit systems through digitalization in Kazakhstan's agricultural sector: a current approach.....	403
Altai M.T., Mustafayeva B.U., Kulbaeva M.A. Development of the tourism industry as a factor of economic growth in the Turkestan Region: institutional and legal aspect.....	423
Assanova Zh., Mahfudz A.A., Turysbekova R. Environmental audit as an accounting and analytical tool for ensuring sustainable development in the Republic of Kazakhstan.....	438
Ashirbayeva S.B., Yessirkepova A.M., Alzhanova A.A. Methodological approaches to assessing the economic efficiency of forestry in the context of climate change.....	465
Yeltay B.B., Azatbek T.A. Evaluating the effectiveness of state regulation and institutional environment formation in the non-ferrous metallurgy sector.....	486

Zhaukhanova A.K., Muslimkyzy L.

The impact of investment processes on the development of the labor market of the Republic of Kazakhstan.....510

Kaliyeva S., Umurzakova B.

Human capital management in project-based banks of the Republic of Kazakhstan.....529

Kamardinov Y., Moldashbayeva L., Satymbekova K.

Digital transformation of accounting of transport and logistics services based on AI and Big Data.....544

Karanova Zh.Y., Kazhmuratova A.K., Chakeyeva K.S.

China–Kazakhstan transport corridor: digitalization and efficiency in the context of growing freight flows.....564

Kozhakhmetova K., Rakhmatullayeva D.Zh., Ruziev K.

Multicriteria analysis in ESG-oriented portfolio optimization.....587

Madysheva M.Zh., Mazbayeva K.O.

Cost audit in a commercial healthcare company: assessment of efficiency and transparency.....609

Mamutova K.K., Pashenova L.M., Aitymbetova A.N.

Digitalization of tax administration in Kazakhstan: modern technologies and development directions.....627

Narimanov R.N., Niyetalina G.K., Tayauova G.Zh.

Comparison of quiet luxury and logo branding in the context of consumer status signaling in Kazakhstan.....640

Nizamdinova A., Hao Zhen, Dzhakisheva U.

Improving the mechanisms of strategic management accounting in renewable energy enterprises.....657

Nurlybek Zh.A., Nurgaliyev K.M., Tynyshbayeva A.A.

Investment screening as a state governance mechanism of foreign capital access: the Australian experience.....675

Pakhuasheva D.S., Ermekbayeva D.D., Duiskanova R.Zh.

Strategic management of sustainable development of hotel chains in Kazakhstan.....698

Primzharova K., Bissenbayeva S., Zhumaxanova K.M.

Social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan: stages of formation and mechanisms of development.....726

Tulaganov A.B., Nurmagambetova A.I., Bigozhin R.M.

Contribution of higher education system to implementation of sustainable development goals in Kazakhstan.....750

Tuleeva A., Karabaeva Sh., Yessentayeva A.

Digital IT marketing as a tool for enhancing the competitiveness of agro-industrial enterprises.....765

МАЗМҰНЫ

ПЕДАГОГИКА

Әбілқасымова А.Е., Есхожаева С.М., Жұмабай Н.

STEM білім беру негізінде контекстік есептер арқылы оқушылардың математикалық сауаттылығын дамыту.....16

Адасканова Ж.К., Молдасан К.Ш., Цай Е.

Болашақ педагог-психологтың кәсіби-зерттеушілік ойлауы: ұғымы және құрылымы.....41

Әлиева Ж.Ж., Байкенжеева А.Т., Арыстанова С.Д.

Міног қосымша білім беру бағдарламасы аясында биология мамандығы студенттерінің кәсіпкерлік дағдыларын дамыту.....55

Ахметова Д.М., Орынғалиева Ш.О., Құндақова А.

Тылдағы әйелдер тақырыбын оқытуда өңірлік ауызша тарих материалдарын мектеп практикасында қолданудың әдістемелік негіздері.....72

Байшуакова А.Д., Алдабергенова М.К., Жадраева Г.А.

Эпистолярлық деректер болашақ тарих мұғалімдерінің тарихи ойлауын дамытудың құралы ретінде.....90

Бозтаева С.Ж., Амренова Г.Р., Джұмабаева С.Т.

Университет студенттерінің үйлестіру қабілеттерін дамыту ерекшеліктері.....104

Даркулова К.Н., Тургынбаева Ж.М., Куттыбаева Ж.Ф.

Заманауи цифрлық технологиялардың студенттердің академиялық жазу құзыреттілігін қалыптастыруға әсері.....117

Жұманова Л.С., Қасқатаева Ж.А., Турбаева С.М.

Білім беру саласында жасанды интеллектті пайдалану проблемалары.....133

Ермекбаева А., Сулейменова Қ., Шормақова А.Б.

Жоғары оқу орнында болашақ филологтардың академиялық жазылымын дамытудағы критерийлік бағалау рөлі.....151

Жаныс А.Б.

Агроинженерлерге математиканы цифрлық вариативті оқыту.....166

Жусупбекова Б.А., Куланбаева Г.К.

Мұстафа Шоқайдың тарихи-психологиялық портреті.....183

Кегенбеков Ж.К., Уразақынов Д.К.

Медициналық жоғары оқу орындарында биофизика курсын кәсіби бағдарлы оқытудың өзектілігі.....199

Кемельбекова Ж.С., Копжасарова Ж.Б.

Білім берудегі генеративті жасанды интеллект құралдары: PRIMSA 2020 негізіндегі талдау және жетілдіру моделі.....218

Құрымбаева С.Қ., Байжұманова Н.С., Бакина Ю.А.

ЖОО оқытушыларының инклюзивті білім беру процесіндегі ЖИ қолдану құзіреттері.....237

Масалимова Б.К., Шинтемирова М.Т., Нүркенова А.Д.

Оқушылардың зерттеу дағдыларын дамыту үшін STEM технологияларын қолдану.....259

Оразалиева Р., Аметхан Ж.

Халықтық педагогика Қазақстанның жоғары оқу орындарындағы шығармашылық мамандықтары студенттерінің этномәдени әлеуетін дамыту көзі ретінде.....285

Пилтен П., Пилтен Г., Құралбаева А.

Бастауыш сынып мұғалімдерінің құндылықтарға негізделген білім берудегі педагогикалық тәсілдері.....301

Сугирбекова А., Наметкулова Ф., Тасболат Е.

Болашақ физика мұғалімдерін оқушылардың зерттеу әрекетін ұйымдастыруға даярлау әдістемесі.....320

Танкибаева А.А., Туралбаева А.Т., Баймуханбетов Б.М.

Микрооқыту негізінде болашақ бастауыш сынып мұғалімдерінің кәсіби құзыреттілігін қалыптастыру.....340

Шындалиев Н.Т., Серікқазы Ә.С., Нурбекова Г.Ф.

Жасанды интеллект арқылы студенттердің үлкен деректерді өңдеудегі кәсіби құзыреттілігін арттыру: педагогикалық эксперимент нәтижелері.....364

ЭКОНОМИКА**Айтқазина М., Каршалова А., Бикен В.**

Қазақстан Республикасындағы екінші деңгейдегі банктер мен даму институттарын «жасыл» несиелеу бағдарламаларын талдау.....380

Айтманбетова Р., Бұхарбаева А.

Қазақстанның ауыл шаруашылығы секторындағы бухгалтерлік есепті цифрландыру жағдайында бухгалтерлік есеп және аудит жүйесін жетілдіру.....403

Алтай М.Т., Мустафаева Б.У., Құлбаева М.А.

Түркістан облысының экономикалық өсу факторы ретінде туристік саланы дамыту: институционалдық-құқықтық аспект.....423

Асанова Ж., Махфудз А.А., Турысбекова Р.

Қазақстан Республикасында орнықты дамуды қамтамасыз етудің есепке алу-талдау құралы ретінде экологиялық аудит.....438

Аширбаева С.Б., Есиркепова А.М., Альжанова А.А.

Климаттық өзгерістер жағдайында орман шаруашылығының экономикалық тиімділігін бағалаудың әдістемелік тәсілдері.....465

Елтай Б.Б., Азатбек Т.А.

Түсті металлургия саласын мемлекеттік реттеудің және институционалдық ортаны қалыптастырудың тиімділігін бағалау.....486

Жауханова А.К., Муслимқызы Л.

Қазақстан Республикасының еңбек нарығының дамуына инвестициялық үдерістердің әсері.....510

Қалиева С., Умурзакова Б.

Қазақстан Республикасының жобалық басқару моделін қолданатын банктеріндегі адам капиталын басқару.....529

Камардинов Е., Молдашбаева Л., Сатымбекова К.

AI және Big Data негізінде көлік-логистикалық қызметтердің бухгалтерлік есебін цифрлық трансформациялау.....544

Каранова Ж.У., Қажымұратова А.К., Чакеева К.С.

Қытай–Қазақстан көлік дәлізі: жүк ағындарының өсуі жағдайында цифрландыру және тиімділік.....564

Кожаметова К., Рахматуллаева Д.Ж., Рузиев К.

ESG-бағдарланған портфельді оңтайландырудағы көп критериялды талдау.....587

Мадышева М.Ж., Мазбаева К.О.

Коммерциялық денсаулық сақтау кәсіпорнындағы шығындар аудиті: тиімділік пен ашықтықты бағалау.....609

Мамутова Қ.Қ., Пашенова Л.М., Айтымбетова А.Н.

Қазақстандағы салық әкімшілендіруді цифрландыру: заманауи технологиялар және даму бағыттары.....627

Нариманов Р.Н., Ниеталина Г.К., Таяуова Г.Ж.

Қазақстандағы тұтынушылардың статус дабылы контекстінде quiet luxury және logo branding салыстырмалы талдау.....640

Низамдинова А., Хао Чжэнь, Джакишева У.

Жаңартылатын энергия кәсіпорындарында стратегиялық басқарушылық есеп механизмдерін жетілдіру.....657

Нұрлыбек Ж.А., Нұрғалиев Қ.М., Тынышбаева А.А.

Шетел капиталына қолжетімділікті реттеудің мемлекеттік басқару механизмі
ретіндегі инвестициялық скрининг: Австралия тәжірибесі.....675

Пахуашева Д.С., Ермекбаева Д.Д., Дүйскенова Р.Ж.

Қазақстанның қонақ үй желілерінің тұрақты дамуын стратегиялық басқару.....698

Примжарова Қ., Бисенбаева С., Жұмаксанова К.М.

Қазақстан Республикасындағы әлеуметтік кәсіпкерлік: қалыптасу кезеңдері
және даму тетіктері.....726

Тулағанов А.Б., Нұрмағамбетова А.И., Бигожин Р.М.

Қазақстандағы жоғары білім беру жүйесінің орнықты даму мақсаттарын
жүзеге асыруға үлесі.....750

Тулеева А., Карабаева Ш., Есентаева А.

Агроөнеркәсіптік кәсіпорындардың бәсекеге қабілеттілігін арттыру құралы
ретіндегі цифрлық IT-маркетинг.....765

СОДЕРЖАНИЕ

ПЕДАГОГИКА

Абылкасымова А.Е., Есхожаева С.М., Жумабай Н.

Развитие математической грамотности учащихся посредством контекстных задач в рамках STEM-образования.....16

Адасканова Ж.К., Молдасан К.Ш., Цай Е.

Профессионально-исследовательское мышление будущего педагога-психолога: понятие и структура.....41

Алиева Ж.Ж., Байкенжеева А.Т., Арыстанова С.Д.

Развитие предпринимательских навыков у студентов специальности «Биология» в рамках дополнительной образовательной программы Minor.....55

Ахметова Д.М., Орынғалиева Ш.О., Кундакова А.

Методические основы использования материалов региональной устной истории в школьной практике при изучении темы женщин тыла.....72

Байшуакова А., Алдабергенова М., Жадраева Г.

Эпистолярные источники как средство развития исторического мышления будущих учителей истории.....90

Бозтаева С.Ж., Амренова Г.Р., Джумабаева С.Т.

Особенности развития координационных способностей студентов вузов.....104

Даркулова К.Н., Тургынбаева Ж.М., Куттыбаева Ж.Ф.

Влияние современных цифровых технологий на формирование компетенций академического письма у студентов.....117

Джуманова Л.С., Каскатаева Ж.А., Турбаева С.М.

Проблемы использования искусственного интеллекта в сфере образования.....133

Ермекбаева А., Сулейменова К., Шормакова А.

Роль критериального оценивания в развитии академического письма будущих филологов в вузе.....151

Жаныс А.

Цифровое вариативное обучение математике агроинженеров.....166

Жусупбекова Б.А., Куланбаева Г.К.

Историко-психологический портрет Мустафы Шокая.....183

Кегенбеков Ж.К., Уразакынов Д.К.

Актуальность профориентационного обучения курсу биофизики в медицинских вузах.....199

Кемельбекова Ж.С., Копжасарова Ж.Б.

Генеративные инструменты искусственного интеллекта в образовании: анализ по PRISMA 2020 и модель совершенствования.....218

Курымбаева С.К., Байжуманова Н.С., Бакина Ю.А.

Компетенции преподавателей вузов по использованию ИИ в процессе инклюзивного образования.....237

Масалимова Б.К., Шинтемирова М.Т., Нуркенова А.Д.

Использование STEM-технологий для развития исследовательских навыков учащихся.....259

Оразалиева Р., Аметхан Ж.

Народная педагогика как источник развития этнохудожественного потенциала студентов творческих специальностей вуза Казахстана.....285

Пилтен П., Пилтен Г., Куралбаева А.

Педагогические подходы к ценностно-ориентированному образованию у учителей начальных классов.....301

Сугирбекова А., Наметкулова Ф., Тасболат Е.

Методика подготовки будущих учителей физики к организации исследовательской деятельности.....320

Танкибаева А.А., Туралбаева А.Т., Баймуханбетов Б.М.

Формирование профессиональной компетентности будущих учителей начальных классов на основе микрообучения.....340

Шындалиев Н.Т., Серикказы А.С., Нурбекова Г.Ф.

Повышение профессиональной компетентности студентов в обработке больших данных с использованием искусственного интеллекта: результаты педагогического эксперимента.....364

ЭКОНОМИКА**Айтказина М., Каршалова А., Бикен В.**

Анализ программ зеленого кредитования банков второго уровня и институтов развития в Республике Казахстан.....380

Айтманбетова Р., Бухарбаева А.

Совершенствование системы учета и аудита в условиях цифровизации бухгалтерского учета аграрного сектора Казахстана.....403

Алтай М.Т., Мустафаева Б.У., Кулбаева М.А.

Развитие туристской отрасли как фактор экономического роста Туркестанской области: институционально-правовой аспект.....423

Асанова Ж., Махфудз А.А., Турысбекова Р.

Экологический аудит как учетно-аналитический инструмент обеспечения устойчивого развития в Республике Казахстан.....438

Аширбаева С.Б., Есиркепова А.М., Альжанова А.А.

Методические подходы к оценке экономической эффективности функционирования лесного хозяйства в условиях климатических изменений.....465

Елтай Б.Б., Азатбек Т.А.

Оценка эффективности государственного регулирования и формирования институциональной среды в сфере цветной металлургии.....486

Жауханова А.К., Муслимкызы Л.

Влияние инвестиционных процессов на развитие рынка труда Республики Казахстан.....510

Калиева С., Умурзакова Б.

Управление человеческим капиталом в банках Республики Казахстан с проектной моделью управления.....529

Камардинов Е., Молдашбаева Л., Сатымбекова К.

Цифровая трансформация бухгалтерского учета транспортно-логистических услуг на основе AI и Big Data.....544

Каранова Ж.У., Кажмуратова А.К., Чакеева К.С.

Транспортный коридор Китай–Казахстан: цифровизация и эффективность в условиях роста грузопотоков.....654

Кожакметова К., Рахматуллаева Д.Ж., Рузиев К.

Многокритериальный анализ в ESG-ориентированной портфельной оптимизации.....587

Мадышева М.Ж., Мазбаева К.О.

Аудит расходов в коммерческом предприятии здравоохранения: оценка эффективности и прозрачности.....609

Мамутова К.К., Пашенова Л.М., Айтымбетова А.Н.

Цифровизация налогового администрирования в Казахстане: современные технологии и направления развития.....627

Нариманов Р.Н., Ниеталина Г.К., Таяуова Г.Ж.

Сравнение quiet luxury и logo branding в контексте статусной сигнализации потребителей в Казахстане.....640

Низамдинова А., Хао Чжэнь, Джакишева У.

Совершенствование механизмов стратегического управленческого учета в предприятиях возобновляемой энергетики.....657

Нурлыбек Ж.А., Нурғалиев К.М., Тынышбаева А.А.

Инвестиционный скрининг как механизм государственного управления
доступом иностранного капитала: опыт Австралии.....675

Пахуашева Д.С., Ермекбаева Д.Д., Дуйскенова Р.Ж.

Стратегическое управление устойчивым развитием гостиничных сетей
Казахстана.....698

Примжарова К., Бисенбаева С., Жумаханова К.М.

Социальное предпринимательство в Республике Казахстан: этапы становления
и механизмы развития.....726

Тулаганов А.Б., Нурмагамбетова А.И., Бигожин Р.М.

Вклад системы высшего образования в реализацию целей устойчивого развития
в Казахстане.....750

Тулеева А., Карабаева Ш., Есентаева А.

Цифровой IT-маркетинг как инструмент повышения конкурентоспособности
предприятий агропромышленного комплекса.....765

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SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN: STAGES OF FORMATION AND MECHANISMS OF DEVELOPMENT

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Annotation. The article examines the development of social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan for the period 2010–2025. *The relevance of the study* is due to the increasing role of socially oriented business in solving the problems of employment, social inclusion, accessibility of services, regional development and sustainable growth. *The purpose of the article* is to identify the stages of the formation of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan, assess its institutional dynamics and identify key factors, constraints and development prospects. *The methodological basis of the study* was made up of normative-institutional, retrospective, comparative-structural, typological methods and elements of descriptive statistics. The information base includes regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan, data from the Ministry of National Economy, the Bureau of National Statistics, as well as international approaches from the OECD, the European Commission, and scientific papers on social entrepreneurship. *The results of the study showed* that in

2010–2020 social entrepreneurship developed primarily as a set of local initiatives, NGO projects and socially oriented business practices without an independent legal status. After 2021, the stage of institutionalization of the sector began, associated with the legislative consolidation of social entrepreneurship and the formation of a register of subjects. In 2024–2025, the number of social entrepreneurship entities increased from 835 to 1,672, which indicates the rapid growth of the officially recognized sector. At the same time, its share in the total structure of SMEs remains less than 0.1%, which indicates an early stage of institutional maturity. *The practical significance of the study* lies in substantiating the need to move from formal accounting of subjects to the development of a full-fledged support ecosystem, including financing, training, social procurement, regional programs and social impact assessment.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, Kazakhstan, small and medium-sized businesses, social economy, inclusive development, social innovation, sustainable development, social impact

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ҚАЗАҚСТАН РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫНДАҒЫ ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК КӘСІПкерлік: Қалыптасу кезеңдері және даму тетіктері

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Аннотация. Мақалада 2010–2025 жылдар аралығындағы Қазақстан Республикасындағы әлеуметтік кәсіпкерліктің дамуы қарастырылады. *Зерттеудің өзектілігі* жұмыспен қамту, әлеуметтік инклюзия, қызметтердің қолжетімділігі, өңірлік даму және тұрақты өсу мәселелерін шешудегі әлеуметтік бағдарланған бизнестің рөлінің артуымен айқындалады. *Мақаланың мақсаты* - Қазақстандағы әлеуметтік кәсіпкерліктің қалыптасу кезеңдерін анықтау, оның институционалдық динамикасын бағалау және дамудың негізгі факторларын, шектеулері мен перспективаларын айқындау. *Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізін* нормативтік-институционалдық, ретроспективті, салыстырмалы-құрылымдық және типологиялық әдістер, сондай-ақ сипаттамалық статистика элементтері құрайды. Ақпараттық база ретінде Қазақстан Республикасының нормативтік-құқықтық актілері, Ұлттық экономика министрлігінің және Ұлттық статистика бюросының деректері, сондай-ақ OECD, European Commission халықаралық тәсілдері мен әлеуметтік кәсіпкерлік жөніндегі ғылыми еңбектер пайдаланылды. *Зерттеу нәтижелері* 2010–2020 жылдары әлеуметтік кәсіпкерлік негізінен жергілікті бастамалар, ҮЕҰ жобалары және дербес құқықтық мәртебесі жоқ әлеуметтік бағдарланған бизнес-тәжірибелер жиынтығы ретінде дамығанын көрсетті. 2021 жылдан кейін әлеуметтік кәсіпкерлікті заңнамалық бекіту және субъектілер тізілімін қалыптастырумен байланысты секторды институттандыру кезеңі басталды. 2024–2025 жылдары әлеуметтік кәсіпкерлік субъектілерінің саны 835-тен 1 672-ге дейін өсті, бұл ресми танылған сектордың қарқынды дамуын көрсетеді. Сонымен бірге оның ШОБ-тың жалпы құрылымындағы үлесі 0,1%-дан төмен болып отыр, бұл институционалдық жетілудің ерте кезеңін сипаттайды. *Зерттеудің практикалық маңыздылығы* субъектілерді формалды есепке алудан қаржыландыруды, оқытуды, әлеуметтік сатып алуларды, өңірлік бағдарламаларды және әлеуметтік әсерді бағалауды қамтитын толыққанды қолдау экожүйесін дамытуға көшу қажеттілігін негіздеумен айқындалады.

Түйін сөздер: әлеуметтік кәсіпкерлік, Қазақстан, шағын және орта бизнес, әлеуметтік экономика, инклюзивті даму, әлеуметтік инновациялар, тұрақты даму, әлеуметтік әсер

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СОЦИАЛЬНОЕ ПРЕДПРИНИМАТЕЛЬСТВО В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ КАЗАХСТАН: ЭТАПЫ СТАНОВЛЕНИЯ И МЕХАНИЗМЫ РАЗВИТИЯ

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается развитие социального предпринимательства в Республике Казахстан за период 2010–2025 гг. *Актуальность исследования* обусловлена возрастающей ролью социально ориентированного бизнеса в решении проблем занятости, социальной инклюзии, доступности услуг, регионального развития и устойчивого роста. *Цель статьи* заключается в выявлении этапов становления социального предпринимательства в Казахстане, оценке его институциональной динамики и определении ключевых факторов, ограничений и перспектив развития. *Методологическую основу исследования* составили нормативно-институциональный, ретроспективный, сравнительно-структурный, типологический методы и элементы описательной статистики. Информационной базой послужили нормативно-правовые акты Республики Казахстан, данные Министерства национальной экономики, Бюро национальной статистики, а также международные подходы OECD, European Commission и научные труды по социальному предпринимательству. *Результаты исследования показали*, что в 2010–2020 гг. социальное предпринимательство развивалось преимущественно как совокупность локальных инициатив, проектов НПО и социально ориентированных бизнес-практик без самостоятельного правового статуса. После 2021 г. начался этап институционализации сектора, связанный с законодательным закреплением социального предпринимательства и формированием реестра субъектов. В 2024–2025 гг. количество субъектов социального предпринимательства

увеличилось с 835 до 1 672, что свидетельствует о быстром росте официально признанного сектора. Вместе с тем его доля в общей структуре МСП остаётся менее 0,1%, что указывает на раннюю стадию институциональной зрелости. *Практическая значимость исследования* заключается в обосновании необходимости перехода от формального учёта субъектов к развитию полноценной экосистемы поддержки, включающей финансирование, обучение, социальные закупки, региональные программы и оценку социального воздействия.

Ключевые слова: социальное предпринимательство, Казахстан, малый и средний бизнес, социальная экономика, инклюзивное развитие, социальные инновации, устойчивое развитие, социальный эффект

Introduction. In modern conditions, social entrepreneurship is becoming increasingly important as a tool for solving socially significant problems, developing human capital, supporting vulnerable groups of the population and forming a more inclusive model of economic growth. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, which is primarily focused on making a profit, social entrepreneurship combines economic sustainability with a social mission. Its peculiarity lies in the fact that entrepreneurial activity is used not only as a source of income, but also as a mechanism for creating social value, expanding access to social services, employing citizens from vulnerable categories, supporting local communities and introducing social innovations (Dees, 1998; Mair, Martí, 2006).

In international practice, social entrepreneurship is considered as an important element of the social economy and sustainable development. It helps to mitigate social inequality, increase employment, develop local initiatives, involve the civil sector in solving public problems, and strengthen partnerships between government, business, and non-profit organizations. According to the approaches of the OECD and the European Commission, the development of social enterprises requires not only entrepreneurial initiative, but also a supportive institutional environment, including legal recognition, financial support, market access, advisory support, and social impact assessment mechanisms (OECD, European Commission, 2013).

The topic of social entrepreneurship is of particular relevance for the Republic of Kazakhstan. The country faces the challenges of diversifying the economy, improving the quality of employment, developing regions, supporting socially vulnerable groups and expanding access to social services. In these circumstances, social entrepreneurship can become an important addition to government social policy, as it combines market mechanisms with socially useful goals. This tool is especially important for rural areas, small towns, and regions where the need for affordable educational, social, rehabilitation, environmental, and service initiatives remains high.

The development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan in 2010-2025 has a pronounced stage character. In 2010-2015, socially oriented entrepreneurial initiatives existed mainly outside the special legal framework. They manifested

themselves through the activities of non-governmental organizations, charitable foundations, local business projects, inclusive workshops, educational and public initiatives. However, during this period, there was no unified legislative definition, an official register of social entrepreneurship entities, and systematic statistical data. As a result, social entrepreneurship actually developed, but was not fully reflected in government statistics and the system of entrepreneurial policy.

In 2016-2020. Expert and public attention to social entrepreneurship as a promising area of socio-economic development has increased. During this period, social entrepreneurship was increasingly seen as a tool to support employment, inclusion, social adaptation, community development, and social innovation. However, the lack of a special legal status continued to limit the development of the sector, as social entrepreneurs lacked clearly defined recognition criteria, special support measures, and an official monitoring system.

The stage after 2021, when the regulatory consolidation of social entrepreneurship began in Kazakhstan, was of fundamental importance. The business legislation introduced provisions defining social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship entities, and the formation of a registry mechanism began. This made it possible to move from disparate social business practices to the official recognition of the sector and the creation of conditions for its state accounting. In 2024-2025. There was a particularly noticeable increase: the number of social entrepreneurship entities increased from 835 to 1,672, which indicates the expansion of the formally recognized sector and the increased interest of entrepreneurs in obtaining the appropriate status (Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025).

At the same time, social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is still at an early stage of institutional maturity. Despite the increase in the number of registered entities, their share in the overall structure of small and medium-sized enterprises remains insignificant. With more than 2.1 million operating SMEs, officially registered social entrepreneurs account for less than 0.1% of their total number (Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2026; Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025). This shows that the sector has significant potential for expansion, but needs further development of financing mechanisms, training, acceleration, social ordering, regional support and public impact assessment.

The scientific relevance of the study is determined by the fact that social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan has not yet been sufficiently studied as an independent institution of socio-economic development. Existing research most often examines certain aspects of this topic: legal regulation, social innovation, support for vulnerable groups, the role of NGOs, or international experience. However, a comprehensive analysis is required to link the development of social entrepreneurship with the dynamics of small and medium-sized businesses, institutional changes, regional conditions and sustainable development objectives over a long period from 2010 to 2025.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the formation and development of social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2010-2025, to identify its institutional stages, dynamics, growth factors, limitations and prospects for further development.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks were identified: to reveal theoretical approaches to understanding social entrepreneurship; to analyze the institutional stages of its development in Kazakhstan in 2010-2025; to assess the dynamics of officially registered social entrepreneurship entities; to determine the relationship of social entrepreneurship with the development of small and medium-sized businesses; to identify key models of social enterprises; to substantiate the main barriers and prospects for the development of this sectors in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The object of the research is social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan as an emerging institution of a socially oriented economy. The subject of the study is the institutional, statistical, regional and organizational features of the development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan in 2010-2025.

The methodological basis of the study was made up of normative and institutional analysis, a retrospective approach, comparative structural analysis, typologization and elements of descriptive statistics. The information base includes regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan, data from the Ministry of National Economy, the Bureau of National Statistics, materials from the register of social entrepreneurship entities, as well as scientific papers and international analytical documents on social entrepreneurship and social economics (Dees, 1998; OECD, European Commission, 2013; The Entrepreneurial Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015).

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the fact that the development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is considered not only as a legal or social category, but also as part of an entrepreneurial ecosystem related to the dynamics of SMEs, regional development, social policy and sustainable growth objectives. Special attention is paid to the transition from the informal social initiatives of 2010-2020 to the officially recognized sector after 2021, as well as to the analysis of quantitative growth in 2024-2025.

The practical significance of the research lies in the possibility of using its results in the development of state support measures for social entrepreneurship, regional development programs, social ordering mechanisms, acceleration programs and social impact assessment methods. The findings can be useful for government agencies, development institutions, NGOs, entrepreneurs, researchers, and educational organizations involved in social economics, sustainable development, and inclusive entrepreneurship.

Literary review. In the scientific literature, social entrepreneurship is considered as a special form of entrepreneurial activity in which economic stability is combined with solving socially significant problems. Unlike traditional businesses, which focus primarily on making a profit, social entrepreneurship involves creating

social value, supporting vulnerable groups, developing local communities, and implementing innovative solutions in the social sphere. One of the most well-known conceptual definitions belongs to J. G. Dees, who viewed the social entrepreneur as an agent of change using entrepreneurial tools to achieve a social mission (Dees, 1998). This approach was further developed in the works of Mair and Martí, where social entrepreneurship is defined as the process of innovative use of resources to stimulate social change and meet social needs (Mair and Martí, 2006).

In the international research tradition, social entrepreneurship has been formed at the intersection of several theoretical areas: the theory of entrepreneurship, the concept of social economics, institutional theory, the theory of social innovation and sustainable development. Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern emphasize that social and commercial entrepreneurship have a common entrepreneurial nature, but differ in their objective function: for commercial entrepreneurship, the main result is economic profit, while for social entrepreneurship it is a social mission and social impact (Austin et al., 2006). This approach is important for analyzing Kazakhstan, since social enterprises here develop mainly among small and medium-sized businesses, but their activities cannot be assessed solely through profitability and output indicators.

Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, and Shulman made a significant contribution to the development of the theory of social entrepreneurship by proposing a typology of social entrepreneurs based on motives, mechanisms for finding opportunities, and ethical challenges. The authors show that social entrepreneurship is associated not only with the creation of organizations, but also with the search for new ways to solve social problems, including employment, social integration and access to basic services (Zahra et al., 2009). This logic is especially significant for Kazakhstan, as social entrepreneurship is increasingly seen as a tool for involving socially vulnerable groups in economic activity, as well as as a mechanism to support inclusive development.

The European School of Social Entrepreneurship focuses on the relationship of social enterprises with the social economy, cooperatives, associations, foundations and organizations acting in the public interest. Defourny and Nyssens note that in Europe, a social enterprise is usually viewed as an organization combining entrepreneurial activity, a social goal, and a special management system focused on stakeholder participation (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010). In the documents of the OECD and the European Commission, a social enterprise is defined as a private activity in the public interest, organized on an entrepreneurial basis, but with the main goal not to maximize profits, but to achieve economic and social goals (OECD, European Commission, 2013).

Special importance in foreign literature is given to the institutional conditions for the development of social entrepreneurship. The OECD and the European Commission emphasize that the sustainable development of social enterprises requires an enabling legal, regulatory, and financial environment, including clear definitions, tax incentives, market access, advisory support, and social impact

measurement mechanisms (OECD, European Commission, 2013). In this context, social entrepreneurship cannot develop solely through the initiative of individual entrepreneurs.; It requires an ecosystem approach that includes government agencies, businesses, educational organizations, NGOs, foundations, and local communities.

An important area of research is the measurement of the social effect. Unlike commercial enterprises, where effectiveness can be expressed through profit, profitability, revenue and productivity, the activities of social enterprises require additional assessment of the social impact. The OECD and the European Commission point out that the measurement of social impact should be proportional: it should not create an excessive administrative burden for small organizations, but should allow assessing the real contribution of social enterprises to solving social problems (OECD, European Commission, 2015). This is especially important for Kazakhstan, since formal inclusion in the register of social entrepreneurship entities does not in itself show the depth and quality of the social effect.

The Kazakh research literature on social entrepreneurship began to be actively formed in the second half of the 2010s. In the works of Alzhanova and Saurbayeva, social entrepreneurship is considered as a new model of sustainable social change based on a combination of social mission, innovation, financial sustainability and scalability (Alzhanova and Saurbayeva, 2018). The authors emphasize that not only individual entrepreneurial initiatives are important for the development of the sector, but also the formation of an ecosystem of support, including educational centers, acceleration programs, and partnerships with government and public institutions.

Before the legislative consolidation of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan, one of the key problems was the lack of a special legal status and official statistics. This made it difficult to assess the scale of the sector and its contribution to employment, social integration, and regional development. Studies published before 2021 often emphasized that social enterprises in Kazakhstan actually exist, but do not have full-fledged legal and statistical recognition. In particular, the analytical papers noted that the lack of open data, the lack of a unified classification and a weak institutional framework limited the possibilities of a comprehensive assessment of the development of the sector (Academy of Entrepreneurship Journal, 2021).

The legal formalization of social entrepreneurship in 2021 became a turning point. The concepts of “social entrepreneurship” and “social entrepreneurship entity”, as well as registration and state support mechanisms, were introduced into the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Karagussov notes that these changes were the first important step towards creating a legal and organizational framework for social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan, but further development requires a deeper study of organizational and legal forms, social financing and institutional recognition of the social economy as an independent sector (Karagussov, 2023).

According to the legal approach established in Kazakhstan, social entrepreneurship is associated with the participation of business in solving

social problems of citizens and society. At the same time, the subjects of social entrepreneurship can be individual entrepreneurs and legal entities included in the relevant register. This approach makes the registry a key tool for formalizing the sector. However, it also creates a methodological limitation: social initiatives that actually have a public orientation, but are not included in the register, may remain outside the official statistical accounting. Therefore, when analyzing the dynamics of 2010-2025, it is important to distinguish between the actual existence of social business practices and their official recognition by the state.

From 2024-2025, Kazakhstan has seen a marked acceleration in the institutional growth of the sector. According to the Ministry of National Economy, the number of social entrepreneurship entities increased from 835 in 2024 to 1,672 in the fourth quarter of 2025. This means an almost twofold increase in one year and indicates an increase in the recognition of the status of a social entrepreneur, an expansion of the practice of inclusion in the register and an increased role of local executive bodies in the selection of subjects. The register is formed on the basis of information from local executive bodies after consideration of the materials by special commissions, and the Ministry of National Economy updates it quarterly (Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025).

In the Kazakh context, social entrepreneurship is closely linked to the development of small and medium-sized businesses. This is due to the fact that most social enterprises, by their organizational nature, are small legal entities, individual entrepreneurs, public foundations or local initiatives working in the fields of services, education, employment, rehabilitation, ecology and territorial development. Therefore, it is advisable to consider social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan not as a separate sphere from business, but as a socially oriented segment of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. This approach is consistent with the international logic that social enterprises should combine market sustainability and a public mission (OECD, European Commission, 2013; Mair, Martí, 2006).

An important feature of Kazakhstan is the regional heterogeneity of conditions for the development of social entrepreneurship. Large cities, primarily Almaty, Astana and Shymkent, have more developed entrepreneurial, educational and digital infrastructure, which creates better conditions for the emergence of social enterprises. At the same time, the social significance of such initiatives is particularly high in rural areas, small towns, and regions with limited access to social services. This creates a contradiction between the concentration of resources in large cities and the need for social innovation in the periphery. Consequently, a regional policy to support social entrepreneurship should take into account not only the number of actors, but also territorial differences in access to finance, markets, training, and infrastructure.

Thus, an analysis of the literature shows that social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is developing in line with international theoretical approaches, but it has its own institutional specifics. International literature emphasizes social mission, innovation, financial sustainability, stakeholder engagement, and social

impact measurement. Kazakhstan's practice, in turn, demonstrates the transition from informal social initiatives to legal recognition, registry accounting and the gradual formation of state support. The main scientific conclusion is that social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan should be considered as an emerging institution of inclusive development, the potential of which depends on the quality of the legal environment, the availability of social financing, regional infrastructure, intersectoral partnership and the ability of the state to assess not only the number of registered entities, but also the real social impact of their activities.

Materials and methods. The methodological basis of the research is based on the specifics of social entrepreneurship as a hybrid institution combining the features of entrepreneurial activity, social policy, civic initiative and local development. Unlike traditional business, social entrepreneurship is focused not only on generating income, but also on achieving socially significant effects: creating jobs for vulnerable groups, expanding access to social services, supporting inclusive education, developing local communities, and solving environmental problems (Dees, 1998; OECD, 2013).

The study covers the period 2010-2025. This time interval was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, it allows us to trace the development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan before its official legislative formalization. Secondly, the period after 2021 provides an opportunity to assess the initial results of the institutionalization of the sector, including the formation of a register of social entrepreneurship entities and an increase in the number of officially registered participants. It is important to take into account that before the regulatory consolidation of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan, there was no unified state statistics on this sector, therefore, for 2010-2020, mainly qualitative institutional analysis was used, and for 2021-2025, a combination of regulatory, statistical and comparative analysis.

The information base of the study was made up of regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan, official statistical data, materials from government agencies, as well as international analytical approaches to the study of social entrepreneurship. The main regulatory source is the Entrepreneurial Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which sets out the legal foundations of entrepreneurial activity and provisions related to social entrepreneurship (Entrepreneurial Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015). To analyze the current state of the sector, data from the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the number of social entrepreneurship entities were used, according to which, by the end of the fourth quarter of 2025, their number reached 1,672, whereas in 2024 it was 835 (Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025). Data on the general business environment are taken from the materials of the Bureau of National Statistics: as of October 1, 2025, 2,176.4 thousand small and medium-sized enterprises operated in Kazakhstan, the number of employees in SMEs amounted to 4,522.4 thousand. production in January–September 2025 reached 73,180.1 billion tenge (Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2026).

The research methodology included several interrelated stages. At the first stage, a regulatory and institutional analysis was conducted aimed at identifying changes in the legal status of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. This method allowed us to determine that until 2021, social entrepreneurship developed mainly outside the special legal framework, and after legislative consolidation it began to form as a separate category of entrepreneurial activity. Special attention was paid to the rules for maintaining the register of social entrepreneurship entities, since it was the registry mechanism that became a tool for official recognition of the sector and its administrative monitoring (Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023; Entrepreneurial Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015).

At the second stage, a retrospective analysis for 2010-2025 was applied. It allowed us to identify four stages of the development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan: the pre-institutional stage of 2010-2015; the stage of public and expert recognition in 2016-2020; the stage of legal institutionalization in 2021-2023; the stage of quantitative growth and administrative registration in 2024-2025. This staging is used in the research results to explain why the quantitative dynamics of the sector has been particularly noticeable only in recent years, whereas in the earlier period social entrepreneurship existed mainly in the form of individual social business practices, NGO initiatives, charitable projects and local entrepreneurial solutions.

At the third stage, the descriptive statistics method was used. It was used to analyze the dynamics of officially registered social entrepreneurship entities, as well as to compare this sector with the general structure of small and medium-sized enterprises. Absolute indicators, growth rates and the relative share of social entrepreneurs in the total number of operating SMEs were calculated. For example, a comparison of 1,672 social entrepreneurship entities with 2,176.4 thousand. The study of existing SME entities showed that the formally registered social entrepreneurship sector still accounts for less than 0.1% of the total number of existing SME entities. This calculation allowed us to conclude that the institutional development of the sector is at an early stage, while there is high growth dynamics in 2024-2025.

At the fourth stage, a comparative structural analysis was applied, aimed at identifying regional and sectoral prerequisites for the development of social entrepreneurship. The indicators of SMEs in the regions of Kazakhstan, including the number of operating entities, the number of employees and output, were used as a base. Special attention was paid to the cities of Almaty, Astana and Shymkent, as they have the most developed business infrastructure, high concentration of human capital, access to educational and digital resources, as well as high demand for social services. This approach allowed us to substantiate the conclusion that social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan has a pronounced dependence on the level of regional entrepreneurial development and the quality of the institutional environment.

At the fifth stage, a typological method was used to identify the main models

of social entrepreneurship typical of Kazakhstan: inclusive employment, social services, territorial development, environmental entrepreneurship, as well as creative and educational initiatives. The classification was based on the target group, the nature of the social effect, the type of service provided, and the relationship to local development. This method was necessary because social entrepreneurship does not form a homogeneous sector: it can manifest itself in education, healthcare, handicrafts, processing, care services, rural initiatives and employment projects for vulnerable groups.

The study also applied a comparative approach with international concepts of social entrepreneurship. The theoretical interpretation uses the approaches of J. G. Dees, OECD and the European Commission, where social entrepreneurship is considered as an activity combining entrepreneurial sustainability, social mission and the creation of a measurable social effect (Dees, 1998; OECD, 2013; European Commission, 2025). This allowed us to consider the Kazakh experience not in isolation, but in the context of broader international practice, where social enterprises act as a tool for inclusive growth, employment and sustainable development.

The following analytical indicators were used to assess the dynamics:

Indicator	Purpose in the study
Number of subjects of social entrepreneurship	Assessment of the scale of an officially recognized sector
The growth rate of the number of social entrepreneurship entities	Determining the intensity of institutional expansion
Number of operating SME entities	Characteristics of the general business base
The share of social entrepreneurs in the total number of SMEs	Assessment of the relative scale of the sector
Number of employees in SMEs	Indirect assessment of employment and social integration potential
SME output	Characteristics of the economic base for the development of social entrepreneurship
Regional concentration of SMEs	Defining the territorial prerequisites for the development of social enterprises

The following formula was used to calculate the relative share of social entrepreneurship entities in the SME sector:

$$Dsp = Ssp / SME \times 100,$$

where Dsp is the share of social entrepreneurship entities in the total number of operating SMEs; Ssp is the number of social entrepreneurship entities; SME is the number of operating small and medium-sized businesses.

Based on the available data, the calculation takes the following form:

$$Dsp = 1\,672 / 2\,176\,400 \times 100 = 0,077\%.$$

The obtained indicator indicates that social entrepreneurship still occupies a small share in the overall structure of entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. However, its importance cannot be assessed solely through a quantitative scale, since social enterprises create not only an economic, but also a social effect. In this regard, when interpreting the results, not only the number of subjects was taken into account, but also institutional changes, the social orientation of activities, the availability of government support and the potential to influence the employment of vulnerable groups of the population.

The limitation of the study is the incomplete comparability of data for the entire period 2010-2025. This is due to the fact that official statistics on subjects of social entrepreneurship began to be formed after the normative consolidation of this institution. Therefore, the indicators for 2010-2020 cannot be presented as a full-fledged statistical series. In this part of the study, qualitative methods, institutional reconstruction and analysis of the prerequisites for the development of the sector were used. For 2024-2025. Official quantitative data were used, which allowed for a more accurate assessment of the current state of social entrepreneurship.

Thus, the chosen methodology combines regulatory, retrospective, statistical, comparative-structural and typological approaches. This combination of methods allows not only to describe the quantitative dynamics of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan, but also to explain its institutional nature, regional differences and the relationship with the development of small and medium-sized businesses.

Results. The analysis showed that the development of social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2010-2025 was uneven and can be divided into several institutional stages. Until 2021, social entrepreneurship actually developed as a set of individual socially significant business initiatives, projects of non-governmental organizations, charitable foundations, inclusive workshops, educational and service initiatives, but did not have an independent legal status. Starting in 2021. The stage of regulatory institutionalization began, when provisions on social entrepreneurship were introduced into business legislation, and later a register of social entrepreneurship entities was formed. It was this period that became a turning point for the transformation of social entrepreneurship from a fragmented practice into an independent sector of entrepreneurial activity (Entrepreneurial Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015; Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025).

Table 1 — Stages of social entrepreneurship development in Kazakhstan in 2010-2025

Период	Stage Characteristics	Main Features
2010–2015	The pre-institutional stage	Social initiatives developed mainly through NGOs, charitable organizations, local projects and individual business initiatives. There was no single definition, registry, or special support measures.
2016–2020	The stage of public and expert recognition	Social entrepreneurship has been discussed as a tool for solving social problems, employment of vulnerable groups and the development of local communities. However, the sector remained poorly formalized.
2021–2023	The stage of legal institutionalization	The concept of social entrepreneurship was consolidated in the legislation, categories of subjects were defined, and the formation of a registry approach was initiated.
2024–2025	The stage of quantitative growth and administrative registration	There is a rapid increase in the number of registered social entrepreneurship entities and an expansion of regional coverage. According to the results of the fourth quarter of 2025, the number of subjects reached 1,672 units.
Source: compiled by the author on the basis of regulatory and statistical data (Entrepreneurial Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015; Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025).		

The analysis shows that until 2021, social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan cannot be correctly assessed only through an official quantitative indicator, since the register of social entrepreneurship entities has not yet functioned. Therefore, for the period 2010-2020, it is advisable to apply an institutional and qualitative approach: to assess the availability of social business practices, the involvement of NGOs and small businesses, the development of charitable and inclusive initiatives, as well as the formation of expert discourse. This approach is consistent with the international understanding of social entrepreneurship as an activity combining entrepreneurial sustainability and a socially significant mission (Dees, 1998; OECD, 2013).

An important result of the study is to identify the relationship between the development of social entrepreneurship and the overall dynamics of small and medium-sized enterprises. Social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is formed mainly within the SME sector, since it is small enterprises, individual entrepreneurs, public foundations and LLP that most often implement socially oriented projects. According to the Bureau of National Statistics, as of October 1, 2025, 2,377.5 thousand SMEs were registered in Kazakhstan, of which 2,176.4 thousand were active. The number of employees in SMEs amounted to 4,522.4 thousand people, and the output of SMEs in January–September 2025 reached 73,180.1 billion tenge (Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2026).

Table 2 — General business base for the development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan, 2025

Indicator	Value as of October 1, 2025
Registered SME entities	2,377.5 thousand units
Existing SME entities	2,176.4 thousand units
Number of employees in SMEs	4,522.4 thousand people
SME output in January–September 2025	73 180.1 billion tenge
The share of sole proprietors in the structure of operating SMEs	71.7%
The share of small legal entities	16.9%
The share of peasant and farm farms	11.3%
The share of medium-sized enterprises	0.1%
Source: compiled by the author according to the data of the Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2026).	

The data in table 2 show that social entrepreneurship is developing in the context of a broad business base, but at the same time its share in the total SME sector remains small. If we compare 1,672 social entrepreneurship entities with 2,176.4 thousand operating SMEs, we can conclude that formally registered social entrepreneurs account for less than 0.1% of the total number of operating SMEs. This means that social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is at an early stage of institutional growth, although the pace of its expansion in 2024-2025 is high.

A particularly noticeable increase occurred in 2025. According to the Ministry of National Economy, according to the results of the fourth quarter of 2025, the number of social entrepreneurship entities amounted to 1,672, compared with 835 in 2024. Thus, the number of subjects has approximately doubled in one year. This indicates not only the quantitative expansion of the sector, but also the increased motivation of entrepreneurs to formalize the social orientation of their activities through inclusion in the register (Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025).

Table 3 — Dynamics of officially registered social entrepreneurship entities in Kazakhstan

Year	Number of subjects of social entrepreneurship	Characteristics of dynamics
2021	The beginning of regulatory clearance	Formation of the legal basis of social entrepreneurship
2022–2023	The initial stage of registry practice	The gradual inclusion of entrepreneurs in the official sector
2024	835	Expanding the registry and increasing status recognition
2025	1 672	An increase of almost 2 times compared to 2024.
Source: compiled by the author based on data from the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2025).		

The results obtained suggest that 2021-2025 has become a key period of institutional development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. If in 2010-2020 the sector developed mainly as a practice of social responsibility, charity and local business, then after 2021 it began to acquire the characteristics of an independent economic and legal category. At the same time, the Ministry of National Economy indicates that the register is formed on the basis of information from local executive bodies based on the results of consideration of materials by special commissions, and it is updated quarterly. This enhances the administrative transparency of the sector and creates a basis for monitoring its further development (Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025).

The regional aspect is also essential. The overall structure of SMEs shows the concentration of entrepreneurial activity in large cities - Almaty, Astana and Shymkent. As of October 1, 2025, 399,780 SMEs operated in Almaty, 269,694 in Astana, and 141,265 in Shymkent. These cities have a more developed infrastructure, access to markets, educational resources, digital services and support institutions, which creates more favorable conditions for the development of social entrepreneurship (Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2026).

Table 4 — Entrepreneurial activity in the largest cities of Kazakhstan as a base for social entrepreneurship, 2025

Region	Current SME entities as of October 1, 2025	Employed in SMEs, people	SME output in January–September 2025, million tenge
Almaty	399 780	1 030 862	21 811 468
	269 694	557 228	14 903 806
Astana Shymkent	141 265	254 528	3 332 993
Republic of Kazakhstan	2 176 392	4 522 420	73 180 136
Source: compiled by the author according to the data of the Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2026).			

The analysis of Table 4 shows that Almaty is the strongest center of entrepreneurial concentration. The city accounts for a significant part of the employment and output of SMEs, which objectively increases the likelihood of social business models in the fields of education, inclusive services, healthcare, creative industries, recycling, eco-services and support for vulnerable groups. Astana, in turn, has the advantages of an administrative center, where access to government programs, development institutions and public initiatives is higher. Shymkent has growth potential due to its demographic structure, youth entrepreneurship and demand for social services.

By industry, the most significant bases for social entrepreneurship are services, trade, education, healthcare, social services, creative industries, waste recycling, agricultural cooperation, and local services. According to the Bureau of National Statistics, in 2025, wholesale and retail trade, car and motorcycle repairs accounted

for the largest share of the number of subjects, employment and output in the SME sector. However, for social entrepreneurship, not only the scale of the industry is important, but also the ability of the business model to solve social problems: employment of people with disabilities, support for women and youth, rural development, accessibility of educational and social services, environmental initiatives (Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2026; European Commission, 2025).

As a result of the analysis, four main models of social entrepreneurship can be identified, typical for Kazakhstan in 2010-2025. The first model is inclusive employment, in which the company creates jobs for socially vulnerable groups of the population. The second model is social services focused on education, care, rehabilitation, and support for families, children, the elderly, and people with special needs. The third model is territorial development, in which an entrepreneurial initiative is aimed at solving the problems of rural and small urban communities. The fourth model is ecological and responsible entrepreneurship related to recycling, reuse of resources, sustainable consumption and local environmental initiatives.

Table 5 — Main models of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan

Model	Content	Social impact
Inclusive employment	Employment of people with disabilities, women, youth, socially vulnerable groups	Increased employment and reduced social exclusion
Social services	Education, care, rehabilitation, counseling, support for families and children	Increasing the availability of social services
Territorial development	Projects in rural areas, small towns, and local communities	Strengthening the local economy and social infrastructure
Environmental entrepreneurship	Recycling, reuse projects, eco-products, sustainable consumption	Reducing the environmental burden and building an ecological culture
Creative and educational entrepreneurship	Courses, workshops, cultural projects, craft initiatives	Development of human capital and local identity
Source: compiled by the author on the basis of generalization of approaches of Dees (1998), OECD (2013), European Commission (2025) and regulatory practice of Kazakhstan.		

Thus, the results of the study show that the development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan in 2010-2025 has gone from informal socially useful business initiatives to an officially recognized business sector. The main quantitative shift occurred in 2024-2025, when the number of social entrepreneurship entities increased from 835 to 1,672. However, this growth does not yet mean that the sector is fully mature. Social entrepreneurship remains small in relation to the general SME sector, and is dependent on regional infrastructure, administrative support, availability of financing, and the quality of intersectoral cooperation.

The key scientific conclusion is that social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is developing as a hybrid institution located at the intersection of small business,

social policy, local development and civic initiatives. Its further sustainability will depend on the extent to which government support is focused not only on the inclusion of entities in the register, but also on measuring social impact, access to procurement, preferential financing, training, acceleration and expansion of sales markets. International experience shows that for the sustainable development of social enterprises, not only legal definitions are important, but also a full-fledged ecosystem of support, including financing, consulting services, market access and social impact assessment (OECD, 2013; OECD, 2025).

Discussion. The results show that social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2010-2025 did not develop as an independent formed sector from the very beginning of the period under study, but as a gradually institutionalized area of entrepreneurial activity. At an early stage, especially in 2010-2015, socially oriented business practices existed mainly in the form of local initiatives, projects of non-governmental organizations, charitable foundations, inclusive workshops, educational and service projects. However, the lack of a special legal status did not allow the state to keep systematic records of such entities, and researchers could not conduct a full-fledged quantitative analysis of the sector. Therefore, the development of social entrepreneurship in this period should be viewed primarily through the prism of institutional prerequisites, rather than through official statistics.

The results of the study confirm that the key turning point occurred after the legal recognition of social entrepreneurship. The introduction of relevant norms into business legislation and the formation of a register of social entrepreneurship entities have created the basis for the official recognition of this sector. This is consistent with international approaches, according to which the development of social enterprises requires not only the initiative of entrepreneurs themselves, but also a clear legal environment, administrative support, access to finance, and social impact assessment mechanisms (OECD, European Commission, 2013). In the Kazakh case, legal registration has become a necessary condition for the transition from disparate social initiatives to a more formalized system of support and monitoring.

The revealed dynamics of 2024-2025 is of particular importance. The increase in the number of social entrepreneurship entities from 835 to 1,672 indicates an almost twofold growth of the sector in one year (Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025). This indicator can be considered as a sign of increased interest of entrepreneurs in the official status of a social entrepreneur, as well as as a result of the intensification of the work of local executive bodies and commissions considering applications for inclusion in the register. However, such growth should not be interpreted as the complete formation of a mature ecosystem of social entrepreneurship. Rather, it reflects the initial stage of the administrative registration of the sector, when a significant number of entrepreneurs are just beginning to enter the official register.

A comparison of the number of social entrepreneurs with the general entrepreneurial base of Kazakhstan shows that the sector remains quantitatively

small. With more than 2.1 million operating small and medium-sized businesses, officially registered social entrepreneurship entities account for less than 0.1% of the total number of operating SMEs (Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2026; Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025). On the one hand, this indicates the limited scale of the sector. On the other hand, a low percentage can be considered as an indicator of significant growth potential, especially considering that socially oriented business practices may exist outside the registry.

In this context, the question of the relationship between formal and actual social entrepreneurship is important. Formal social entrepreneurship includes entities that are officially registered in the register. Actual social entrepreneurship is broader: It may cover businesses that employ vulnerable groups, implement educational, environmental, inclusive or socially significant projects, but for various reasons do not have an official status. Therefore, the registry is an important but not exhaustive tool for measuring the sector. For a more accurate assessment, it is necessary to take into account not only the number of registered entities, but also the actual social results of their activities.

The discussion of the results also shows that social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is developing in close connection with the SME sector. This is natural, since most social enterprises by their organizational nature are small legal entities, individual entrepreneurs or local initiatives. Therefore, social entrepreneurship should not be opposed to traditional entrepreneurship. On the contrary, it is advisable to consider it as a socially oriented segment of small and medium-sized businesses, in which the entrepreneurial model is used to solve social problems. This approach corresponds to the position of Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern, according to which social and commercial entrepreneurship have a common entrepreneurial nature, but differ in their priority goals: profit in one case and social mission in the other (Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern, 2006).

The regional aspect is particularly important for Kazakhstan. The concentration of entrepreneurial activity in Almaty, Astana and Shymkent creates favorable conditions for the emergence of social enterprises in the fields of education, care, rehabilitation, creative industries, inclusive services and environmental projects. However, the social need for such initiatives is often higher in rural areas, small towns, and regions with limited access to quality social services. As a result, there is a spatial contradiction: resources, markets, and infrastructure are concentrated in large cities, while social demand for inclusive and affordable services is particularly high in the periphery.

This means that further government policy should be focused not only on the quantitative expansion of the registry, but also on the territorial alignment of the conditions for the development of social entrepreneurship. Concessional financing, grant support, training for entrepreneurs, access to government and quasi-government procurement, digital promotion platforms and consulting support are especially important for rural areas and small towns. Without such measures,

social entrepreneurship may remain a predominantly urban phenomenon, while its potential for solving regional social problems will not be fully realized.

From a theoretical point of view, the results of the study confirm the applicability of international approaches to the Kazakh context, but at the same time reveal the institutional specifics of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In Dees' works, the social entrepreneur is seen as an agent of social change, capable of using innovative solutions to achieve a public mission (Dees, 1998). In Kazakhstan, this logic is reflected in the activities of enterprises focused on the employment of vulnerable groups, social services, education, environmental initiatives and the development of local communities. However, unlike countries with more mature social economies, the Kazakh sector is still more dependent on state recognition, administrative inclusion in the register and legally defined criteria.

An important area of discussion is the problem of measuring the social effect. At the current stage, the focus in Kazakhstan is more on the legal status and number of registered entities. However, international practice shows that the maturity of social entrepreneurship is determined not only by the number of organizations, but also by the quality of their impact on society: the number of jobs created for vulnerable groups, the level of accessibility of social services, the degree of improvement in the quality of life of target groups, the environmental impact, the sustainability of the business model and the ability to scale social solutions (OECD, European Commission, 2015). Therefore, in the future, Kazakhstan needs to develop a social impact assessment system that is adapted to small business opportunities and does not create an excessive reporting burden.

The issue of financing deserves special attention. Social enterprises are often in an intermediate position: on the one hand, they must be economically sustainable, on the other hand, their social mission may limit commercial profitability. For example, the employment of people with disabilities, the provision of affordable services, or work in small towns can reduce business margins, but create a high social impact. Therefore, traditional banking instruments are not always suitable for social enterprises. Special mechanisms are needed for the development of the sector: social grants, concessional loans, guarantees, impact investments, cost subsidies, social procurement and partnership programs with large businesses.

The results of the study also allow us to identify several key barriers to the development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. The first barrier is the limited awareness of entrepreneurs about the possibilities of obtaining the status of a social entrepreneur. The second is the low availability of specialized financing. The third is the lack of development of the social impact assessment system. The fourth is the regional disparity in support infrastructure. The fifth is the insufficient integration of social enterprises into the system of public procurement, corporate social responsibility and sustainable development programs. These constraints may slow down the sector's transition from formal growth to a real expansion of social impact.

At the same time, Kazakhstan has significant potential for the development of

social entrepreneurship. Firstly, the country has a broad base of small and medium-sized businesses, which creates the basis for the emergence of new social business models. Secondly, the presence of an official registry allows you to gradually create statistics and a monitoring system. Thirdly, social entrepreneurship can become an important tool for achieving the goals of inclusive development, especially in the areas of employment, education, care, ecology, rural development and support for vulnerable groups. Fourth, the growing interest in ESG approaches and sustainable development creates opportunities for partnership between social enterprises, big business, government and NGOs.

Thus, the discussion of the results shows that social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is at the stage of early institutional maturity. The sector has already received legal recognition, is showing rapid quantitative growth and is gradually being integrated into the government support system. However, its further development requires a transition from simple registration of entities to the formation of a full-fledged ecosystem, including financing, training, acceleration, regional support, social procurement and measurement of public impact. The main task of the next stage is to make social entrepreneurship not only a formal category in the register, but also a real tool for solving social, regional and environmental problems in Kazakhstan.

Conclusion. The conducted research allowed us to establish that social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2010-2025 went from scattered socially significant initiatives to an emerging institutional sector of entrepreneurial activity. In 2010-2015, socially oriented practices existed mainly within the framework of the activities of non-governmental organizations, charitable foundations, local business projects and individual initiatives aimed at solving problems of employment, social support, education, inclusion and development of local communities. However, during this period, there was no unified legal definition, an official register, and systemic government support mechanisms, which limited the possibilities of statistical accounting and comprehensive assessment of the sector.

In 2016-2020, social entrepreneurship was gradually considered as a promising tool for solving social problems and expanding business participation in social development. This stage can be described as a period of expert and public recognition, when interest in social innovation, inclusive employment, sustainable local initiatives and partnership between government, business and the civil sector increased. At the same time, the lack of a special regulatory status continued to constrain the development of social entrepreneurship as an independent direction of economic policy.

The key turning point occurred after the legal consolidation of social entrepreneurship and the formation of a registry mechanism. In 2021-2025, social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan entered the stage of institutionalization. The appearance of the official register of social entrepreneurship entities allowed the state to start systematic accounting of this sector, and for entrepreneurs to obtain

official status and access to support measures. A particularly noticeable trend was observed in 2024-2025, when the number of social entrepreneurship entities increased from 835 to 1,672. This indicates an increased interest in this area and the expansion of the practice of official recognition of social enterprises.

At the same time, the results of the study show that social entrepreneurship still occupies a small share in the overall structure of small and medium-sized businesses. With more than 2.1 million active SMEs, officially registered social entrepreneurs account for less than 0.1% of their total number. Consequently, the sector is at an early stage of institutional maturity. Its quantitative growth is an important but insufficient indicator of development. To assess the real value of social entrepreneurship, it is necessary to take into account not only the number of registered entities, but also the quality of the social effect they create.

The most promising areas of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan are inclusive employment, social services, education, rehabilitation, care, environmental initiatives, creative industries, rural development and support for local communities. It is in these areas that social enterprises are able to combine entrepreneurial sustainability with solving specific social problems. The development of social entrepreneurship in the regions is of particular importance, since the need for affordable social services, employment and local initiatives is highest in rural areas and small towns.

The study revealed that the further development of social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan requires a transition from the stage of formal recognition to the stage of full-fledged ecosystem development. This requires specialized financial instruments, concessional lending, grants, social procurement, acceleration programs, entrepreneur training, consulting support, digital promotion platforms, and social impact assessment mechanisms. Without these elements, social entrepreneurship may remain limited in scope and fail to realize its potential as a tool for inclusive and sustainable development.

Thus, social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan should be considered as an emerging institution of a socially oriented economy located at the intersection of business, social policy and civic initiatives. Its importance lies not only in the creation of new enterprises, but also in increasing the employment of vulnerable groups, increasing the availability of social services, developing regions and forming new models of responsible business. In the future, social entrepreneurship can become an important mechanism for Kazakhstan's sustainable development if government policy is aimed not only at increasing the number of entities on the register, but also at supporting their real social, economic and regional impact.

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