

RURAL SETTLEMENTS OF THE MIL-MUGHAN ECONOMIC REGION AND THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE RURAL POPULATION

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Abstract

Rural settlement plays an important role in the spatial distribution of the population across regions. For many years, the rural population was the main source of population growth in the republic. However, at present, as in the total population of the country, natural increase among the rural population has sharply declined. Difficulties that have emerged in agriculture - the economic base of villages during the years of independence - have also negatively affected the development of rural settlement. As a result, the growth rate of the rural population has significantly decreased; medium-sized and large villages, which play an important role in settlement patterns, are unable to maintain their demographic potential, and migration processes continue.

Taking these factors into account, the study of rural settlement is becoming increasingly relevant. In the Mil-Mughan economic region—one of Azerbaijan's key rural settlement regions—identifying ways to preserve the demographic potential of medium-sized and large villages, to enhance their role within the settlement system, to develop agricultural sectors, and to improve the organisation of socio-cultural services for the population is of significant scientific and practical importance. To this end, it is necessary to carry out a classification of villages and to examine the changes that have occurred based on population census data conducted at ten-year intervals. The study of rural settlement is also essential for determining directions for regulating its development.

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1. Introduction

Villages are considered not only important settlement locations but also leading regions for the development of agriculture. Areas with favorable natural and climatic conditions have been densely populated during the historical-geographical development process and have been transformed into permanent residential areas. The high demand for labor in rural areas also necessitated a high level of natural population increase.

During the years of independence, agrarian reforms carried out in agriculture—particularly the distribution of land to the population in the form of small plots - have negatively affected the economic base of villages, depriving the rural population of their main fields of employment and sources of income. At the same time, most primary agricultural processing enterprises have been closed, and the operation of socio-cultural service facilities lags behind actual demand. These factors have led to intensive migration of

the rural population from the regions. In recent years, the decline in natural population increase has also had a negative impact on the growth of the rural population.

Taking these considerations into account, it is essential to implement measures aimed at the development of villages and the regulation of growth in their demographic potential. First and foremost, this requires enhancing the role of medium-sized and large settlements within the rural settlement system; restoring and developing agricultural sectors; reviving previously existing primary processing enterprises; and identifying effective approaches to the spatial organisation of socio-cultural service facilities. Measures undertaken in this field are regarded as important steps toward regulating settlement patterns in the regions.

Mil-Mughan Economic Region is located in the Kura-Aras Lowland. The region occupies the Mil Plain between the Kura and Aras rivers and

the Mughan Plain, which lies on the right banks of both rivers [10, 23]. A small part of Sabirabad district extends into the Shirvan Plain [10, p. 23]. The economic region comprises the administrative districts of Beylagan, Imishli, Saatly, and Sabirabad. Its area is 5.67 thousand km², covering 6.55% of the country's territory [3, p. 78; 18]. The region includes 4 cities, 18 settlements, and 190 villages [2, p. 72].

The Mil-Mughan Economic Region has a favorable economic-geographical location (EGL). Major national transportation routes pass through its territory, including the Hajiqabul–Horadiz railway and highways, as well as the Yevlakh–Aghjabadi–Bahrampapa and Bahrampapa–Bilasuvar highways [5, 12]. The southern borders of the Mil-Mughan Economic Region run along the state border with Iran.

The Kura and Aras rivers act as natural factors influencing the location of villages in the economic region. The leading sectors in its economy are grain production, cotton growing, horticulture and vegetable farming, fruit growing, and animal husbandry [1, 4, 12, 24].

Study of the topic. In Azerbaijan, research on population settlement and demographic potential at the national and regional levels has been conducted continuously since the second half of the 20th century. Among the scholars who carried out initial studies in this field are E.Q. Mehraliyev [19; 20], A.M. Hajizada [17], N.A. Babakhanov [24], S.Y. Goychayli [26], N.H. Ayyubov [20], R.H. Mammadov [21], and others.

In the years of independence, publications on settlement have evaluated the role of natural-geographical conditions, natural resources, and the natural-economic potential in the formation and development of settlements from an economic-geographical perspective. They have also examined the main trends of demographic development, the factors determining them, and directions for regulating demographic growth. During this period, studies on settlement and demographic development in the regions of Azerbaijan have been conducted by Z.N. Eminov [14; 15], H.M. Tahirova, N.H. Ayyubov, E.S. Badalov [13], V.A. Afandiyev [4], S.M. Muradov [22], among others. Of particular importance are their works published in "Geography of the Republic of Azerbaijan" (Volumes II and III) [11, 12], as well as monographs dedicated to individual economic regions [1].

At the same time, the role of regions located outside Absheron in the country's socio-economic

development remains limited. Migration from villages to the capital continues, the growth rate of the rural population is declining, and regressions in rural settlement are observed. Therefore, it is essential to continue research in the field of settlement and demographic development and to develop proposals and recommendations for their regulation.

2. Materials and Methods

The purpose of the research on rural settlement in the Mil-Mughan Economic Region is to identify recent changes in this field, to study the trends in the distribution of villages by groups, and to develop proposals for enhancing the role of medium-sized and large settlements in regulating settlement patterns.

For this purpose, methods such as comparison, historical-geographical analysis, mathematical-statistical techniques, analysis and synthesis, and cartographic methods were employed. In preparing the article, data from the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan on population, labor resources, and regional periodic statistics [2, 3, 6], as well as results from population censuses conducted every ten years [7, 8, 9], were used. Additionally, provisions from State Programs on the socio-economic development of the regions and scientific findings from studies on the use of the country's population and labor resources were considered primary sources.

3. Analysis and Discussion

Dynamics of the Rural Population. Since the number of administrative districts within the economic region is small, the rural population is also relatively low. At the beginning of 2025, the total population of Mil-Mughan was 527.5 thousand, of which 393.3 thousand were rural residents [2, p. 96]. This accounts for 5.16% of the country's total population and 8.44% of the rural population (Table 1), with the rural population share reaching 74.6%, which is significantly higher than the national average of 45.6% [3, pp. 71, 78]. This is largely because the socio-economic and demographic potential of the administrative district centers in the economic region is weak. Except for Beylagan district, the settlements and their populations are small. A high level of natural population growth among the rural population has, for many years, ensured an increase in its size. These growth indicators have been recorded above the national average [14, p. 130].

Table 1

Changes in the Rural Population by Administrative Districts

Administrative Districts	Population, thousand people					Growth rate, %		
	1989	1999	2009	2019	2025	1989-99	1999-09	2009-19
Beylagan	53,8	62,7	49,9	57,5	59,6	16,5	-20,4	15,2
Imishly	56,2	69,3	77,6	88,0	91,8	23,3	12,0	13,4
Saatly	51,5	66,2	75,2	86,9	91,0	28,5	13,6	15,6
Sabirabad	91,7	109,6	123,4	142,7	150,9	19,5	12,6	15,6
Economic Region	253,2	307,8	326,1	375,1	393,3	21,6	6,0	15,0
Share of the economic region, %	7,88	7,91	7,80	8,32	8,44	-	-	-
Azerbaijan Rep.	3215,3	3889,2	4183,3	4511,1	4662,0	21,3	7,3	7,8
Based on Total Population								
Azerbaijan	7021,2	7953,4	8922,4	9951,4	10224,9	13,3	12,2	11,5
Economic region	328,7	402,0	444,7	505,3	527,5	22,3	10,6	13,6
Share of the economic region, %	4,68	5,05	4,98	5,08	5,16	-	-	-

Sources: Final results of the 1999 population census of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Part I. Population size, sex-age structure. Baku: SSC, 2000. Pp. 25–35. Final results of the 2009 population census of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Part I. Population size, distribution, sex, age structure, and marital status. Baku: SSC, 2010, Pp. 24–30. Population census in the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2019. Part I. Population size, distribution, sex, age structure, and marital status. Baku: SSC, 2022, Pp. 30–32. 2024 “Demographic indicators of Azerbaijan – 2024.” Statistical compendium. Baku, SSC 2025. Pp. 74–82, 83–88.

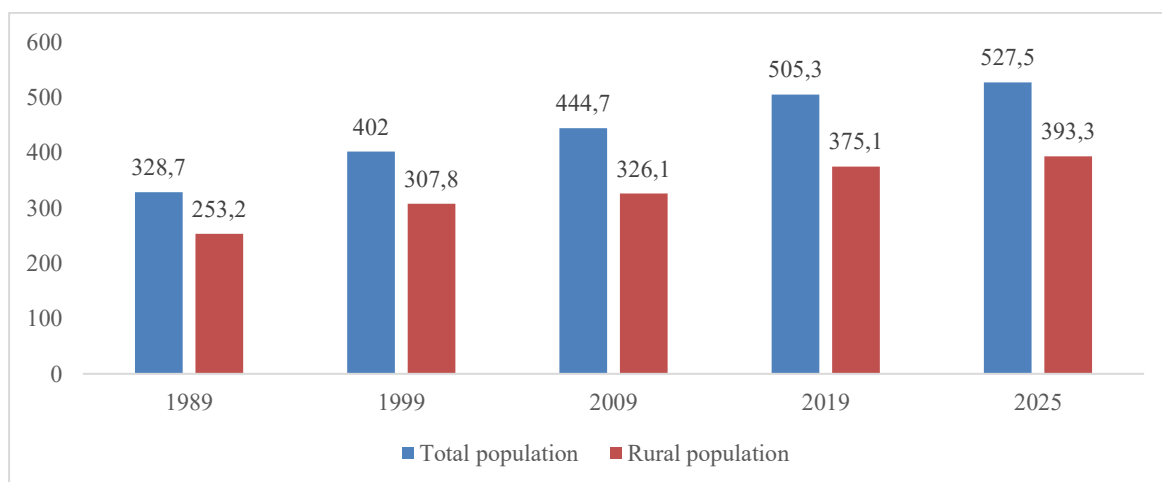


Figure 1. Changes in the Total and Rural Population in the Mil-Mughan Economic Region, Thousand People

Within its current boundaries, the rural population of the Mil-Mughan Economic Region was 253.2 thousand in 1989 (Table 1, Figure 1). The region accounted for 7.88% of the country's rural population (Table 1), and the share of rural residents in the region's total population was 77.0% [2, pp. 74–82]. The high share of the rural population during this period is related to the fact that Beylagan district had only two settlements (Gahramanli and Aras).

Between 1989 and 1999, the rural population in the economic region increased by 54.6 thousand people, or 21.6% (Table 1). This indicator is higher than the growth rate of the country's rural population (21.3%) but considerably lower

than that of the region's total population (22.3%). Due to the high level of growth in the rural population, the region's share in the country's rural population also increased, reaching 7.91%.

In 2000, a new law on “Territorial Structure and Administrative-Territorial Division” was adopted in Azerbaijan [16]. According to this law, rural settlements were granted the status of settlements. As a result, 14 new settlements were established in Beylagan district and were classified as urban-type settlements [18]. Consequently, the growth of the rural population in the economic region slowed, and in Beylagan district, the rural population even declined (Table 1). Therefore, between 1999 and 2009, the rural population in

the economic region increased by 18.3 thousand people, or 6.0%. The growth rates of the rural population during this period were 3.0–3.5 times lower than those of the previous decade [7, 8]. This rate was also considerably lower compared to the growth of Azerbaijan’s rural population and the total population of the economic region. As a result, the share of the economic region’s rural population in the country declined significantly.

Between 2009 and 2019, the observed steady natural increase among the rural population ensured its growth. As a result, during the period between the two censuses, the rural population in the economic region increased by 49.0 thousand people, or 15.0% (Table 1, Figure 1). This growth is above the national averages for both the total and rural population, as well as the total population of the economic region. Consequently, indicators reflecting the share of the rural population also increased, reaching 8.32% in 2019. In recent years, rural population growth continues, albeit at a slow pace [8, 9].

The administrative districts within the economic region differ in terms of rural population size (Table 1, Figure 2). Factors such as the area of the districts, the number of rural settlements, settlement conditions, and natural population growth influence these differences. In terms of rural population, Sabirabad district holds a leading position in the region. At the beginning of 2025, 150.9 thousand people lived in the district’s rural

settlements (Figure 3, Table 1), accounting for 38.4% of the rural population of the economic region [2, p. 96]. The large rural population and high natural increase have ensured continued growth in numbers. Thus, between 1989 and 1999, it increased by 19.5%, and between 2009 and 2019 by 15.6%. Since 2009, the rural population in the district has grown by 27.5 thousand people, or 22.3% (Table 1).

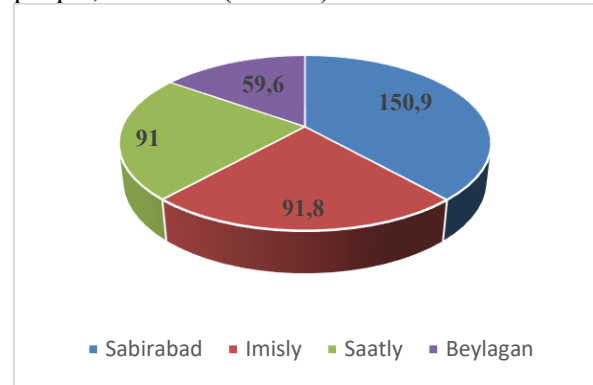
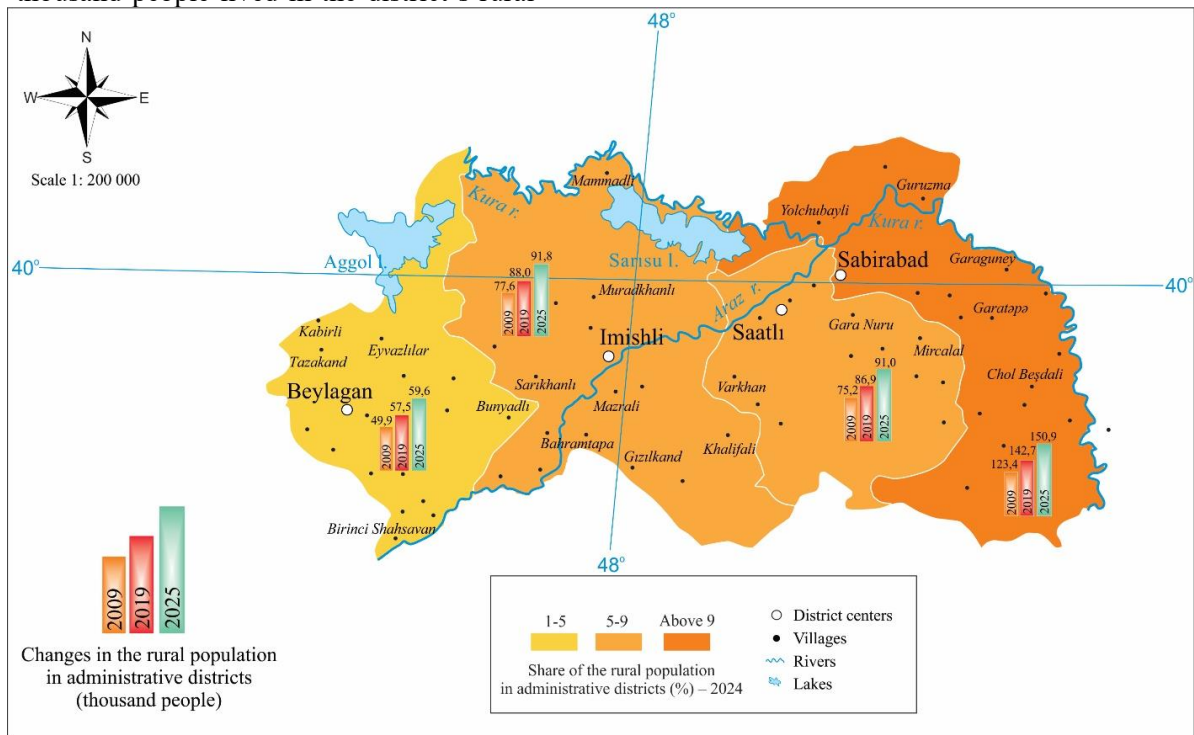


Figure 2. Distribution of the Rural Population by Administrative Districts, Thousand People, 2025

In Imishli and Saatly districts, the rural population is close to 91–92 thousand people [3]. Each district accounts for approximately 23.3% of the rural population. In Saatly district, the rural population is growing at a faster rate. The highest growth levels occurred between 1989 and 1999, ranging from 23% to 28.0% (Table 1).



Source: Population Census Data of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
 Figure 3. Changes in the Rural Population by Administrative Districts

The rural population in Beylagan district is small. The 59.6 thousand rural residents in the district account for 58.4% of its total population. Since many villages were reclassified as settlements in 2000, the rural population in 1999 was 62.7 thousand but decreased to 49.9 thousand by 2009, representing a 20.4% decline. In subsequent years, the rural population has increased [2, p. 82].

Classification of Villages and the Rural Population. The Mil-Mughan Economic Region is one of the country's key rural settlement areas. The region has high figures in terms of the rural population size and its share within the total population. According to the results of the 2019 population census, 375.1 thousand people lived in the 190 rural settlements of the economic region [9]. Of the 4,244 rural settlements in the country, 4.48% were located in this economic region [3, pp. 68–70].

Analysis of the classification of villages shows that villages and the rural population are unevenly distributed, with most villages having populations of over 500 people. The number of villages with populations between 500 and 1,000, as well as their rural population, is steadily decreasing, as they move into higher population groups (Figure 4).

In the economic region, villages with populations of up to 500 people are few, with a total of 3,733 residents living in just 11 villages, accounting for 1.0% of the rural population (Table 2).

In 2019, 29 villages in the economic region fell into the population group of 500–1,000 people, with a total of 22.8 thousand residents (Figure 4, Table 2). The share of these settlements accounted for 15.3% of the villages and 6.1% of the rural population. Since 1999, the number of villages in this group has decreased by more than 2 times, and their share of the rural population fell from 14.8% to 6.1% [14, p. 426]. This indicates that the population in villages is steadily increasing, with settlements moving into higher population groups. The number of villages with 500–1,000 residents and their rural population is declining, while in the higher population categories, both the number of villages and their populations continue to grow steadily.

Therefore, in 2019, villages with populations between 1,000 and 2,000 people (8 villages) and their rural population (120.1 thousand) occupied a leading position in the classification. Their relative shares were 43.2% of the villages and 32.0% of the rural population, respectively (Table 2).

Since 2009, 5 more villages have been added to this group, increasing the population by 10.4 thousand people (9.5%). In 1999, the decrease in the number of villages in this group had resulted in a decline in population as well.

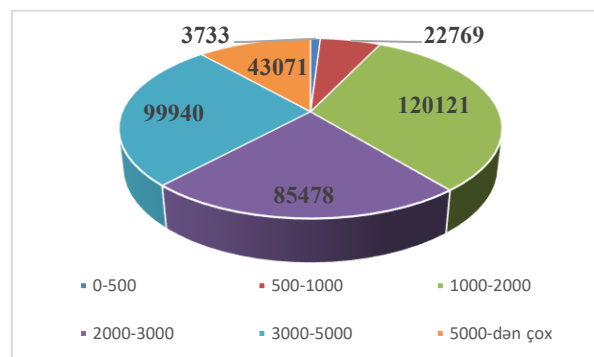


Figure 4. Distribution of the Rural Population by Village Groups in 2019, person

The number of villages with populations between 2,000 and 3,000 people, as well as their rural population, increased after 1999. Between 1999 and 2009, 7 villages were added to this group, and between 2009 and 2019, 1 more village joined. In 2019, 35 villages had a total population of 85.5 thousand, accounting for 18.4% of the villages and 22.8% of the rural population, respectively. In 1999, these indicators were 13.4% by number of villages and 20.8% by rural population (Table 2).

Villages with populations of over 2,000 people play a backbone role in settlement patterns. They are usually located in areas with favorable economic-geographical conditions, well-developed transport and communication networks, and access to socio-cultural service facilities. Agricultural lands around these villages play an important role in crop production. Therefore, there are significant opportunities to establish networks of enterprises for the primary processing of these products. The economic and socio-cultural infrastructure also supports demographic development [13].

The development potential and opportunities of these villages should also be utilized to promote the growth of surrounding rural settlements. Measures in this area ensure the sustainable development of villages, reduce rural population migration, and expand the possibilities for preserving demographic potential locally.

The growth in the number of villages and rural population is more intensive in settlements with populations between 3,000 and 5,000 people.

Table 2

Classification of the Rural Population in the Economic Region

Groups, person	1999				2009				2019			
	Villages		Village population		Villages		Village population		Villages		Village population	
	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%
0-50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
50-100	2	1,0	170	0,1	1	0,5	90	0,03	1	0,5	86	0,02
100-200	1	0,5	165	0,1	1	0,5	138	0,04	1	0,5	105	0,03
200-500	11	5,5	4086	1,3	11	5,8	4063	1,3	9	4,7	3542	0,9
500-1000	61	30,5	45413	14,8	43	22,6	33370	10,1	29	15,3	22769	6,1
1000-2000	79	39,5	115609	37,6	77	40,6	109681	33,7	82	43,2	120121	32,0
2000-3000	27	13,5	64109	20,8	34	17,9	81097	24,9	35	18,4	5478	22,8
3000-5000	14	7,0	48747	15,7	18	9,5	64126	19,6	27	14,2	99940	26,6
More than 5000	5	2,5	29579	9,6	5	2,6	33419	10,3	6	3,2	43071	11,5
Total	202	100,0	307878	100,0	190	100,0	325984	100,0	190	100,0	375112	100,0

Sources: Final Results of the 1999 Population Census of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Part I. Population Size, Sex-Age Structure. Baku: SSC, 2000, pp. 25–35. Final Results of the 2009 Population Census of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Part I. Population Size, Distribution, Sex, Age Structure, and Marital Status. Baku: SSC, 2010, pp. 24–30. Population Census in the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2019. Part I. Population Size, Distribution, Sex, Age Structure, and Marital Status. Baku: SSC, 2022, pp. 16–410.

Table 3

Classification of the Rural Population by Administrative Districts, 2009

Groups, person	Beylagan		Imishli		Saathl		Sabirabad		Economic region	
	Village	Popul.	Village	Popul.	Village	Popul.	Village	Popul.	Village	Popul.
0-50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
50-100	1	90	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	90
100-200	-	-	1	138	-	-	-	-	1	138
200-500	1	218	2	792	1	460	7	2593	11	4063
500-1000	7	5437	12	9202	10	8096	14	10635	43	33370
1000-2000	6	8287	22	29402	19	26852	30	45140	77	109681
2000-3000	7	16873	4	9973	8	18752	15	35499	34	81097
3000-5000	1	4349	6	21388	4	14712	7	23677	18	64126
More than 5000	2	14598	1	6675	1	6258	1	5888	5	33419
Total	25	49852	48	77570	43	75130	74	123432	190	325984

Source: Final Results of the 2009 Population Census of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Part I. Population Size, Distribution, Sex, Age Structure, and Marital Status. Baku: SSC, 2010, pp. 24–30.

Between 1999 and 2019, the number of such villages increased 1.9 times, reaching 27, while the rural population grew 2.1 times, rising to 99.9 thousand, accounting for 26.6% of the rural population (Table 2).

In the economic region, the number of villages with populations over 5,000 is small, and their establishment requires long-term favorable natural-economic potential. This group includes 6 villages, with a total population of 43.1 thousand, accounting for 11.5% of the rural population (Figure 4). Although the number of villages is

small, their population is growing rapidly. Between 1999 and 2019, the rural population in this group increased by up to 1.5 times. These villages are distinguished by their special significance in rural settlement [15, 24].

In terms of the number of villages, Sabirabad district holds a leading position in the economic region. In 2019, 142.7 thousand people lived in the 74 rural settlements located within the district [9] (Table 3). The large number of villages is associated with the flat relief of the area, favorable conditions for agricultural activities, the

cultivation of labor-intensive crops (cotton, fruits, and vegetables), and high natural population growth among the rural population. At the same time, the absence of other cities and settlements in the district, apart from the administrative center, also contributes to this situation.

In the district, villages in the lowest population group have more than 200 residents. Six villages with populations between 200 and 500 people have a total of 2,380 residents (Tables 3 and 4) [1, 9, 13]. Villages with small populations (such as Akhtachi, Balvar, Hajibabir, etc.) are located away from the district center, roads, and in remote areas, and their socio-economic and demographic development potential is weak, making future development challenging. Establishing socio-cultural facilities in these settlements is inefficient, employment opportunities are limited, and connections with surrounding settlements are difficult. Since 2009, the number of villages in this group and their total population have decreased, with a decline of 255 people or 9.8% (Tables 3 and 4).

In Sabirabad district, the population group of 500–1,000 people includes 12 villages. Their total population is 9,647 people (Table 4). Villages in this group account for 16.2% of all villages and 6.8% of the district's rural population. Since 2009, two villages from this group have moved to a higher population category, causing a decrease of 988 people (9.29%) in this group's population (Tables 3 and 4). This situation indicates that the number of villages and the rural population in the district is increasing, with many settlements moving into higher population groups.

In Sabirabad district, similar trends are observed in villages with populations between 1,000 and 2,000 people. According to the results

of the 2019 population census, 36.6 thousand people lived in 24 villages of this size in the district (Table 4). These villages account for 32.4% of all rural settlements and 25.7% of the rural population. In terms of both the number of villages and their population, this group holds a leading position.

Over the 10 years since the 2009 population census, villages in this group have also moved to higher population categories due to population growth. In 2009, 30 villages in the district had populations between 1,000 and 2,000 people, with a total of 45.1 thousand residents (Table 3). Their shares in terms of the number of villages and population were 40.5% and 36.6%, respectively, which are significantly higher than the levels recorded in 2019. During the past decade, the decrease occurred because 6 villages from this group moved to higher population categories, resulting in a reduction of 8,493 people, or 18.8%.

The social-demographic processes and the development of rural settlement in the district show that, despite the recent decline in natural population growth and ongoing migration, the population in villages is increasing and they are moving to higher hierarchical levels.

As a result, the number of villages with populations of 2,000–3,000 people and their total population continues to grow. According to the 2019 population census, 48.2 thousand people lived in 20 villages of this size [9] (Table 4). These villages accounted for 27.0% of all villages and 33.8% of the rural population. In 2009, 15 villages (20.3%) in this group had a total population of 35.5 thousand (28.8%) (Table 3). The increase of 12,695 people is explained by the inclusion of 5 villages from lower population categories into this group [8].

Table 4
Classification of the Rural Population by Administrative Districts, 2019

Groups, person	Beylagan		Imishly		Saatly		Sabirabad		Economic region	
	Village	Popul.	Village	Popul.	Village	Popul.	Village	Popul.	Village	Popul.
0-50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
50-100	1	86	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	86
100-200	-	-	1	105	-	-	-	-	1	105
200-500	1	284	2	878	-	-	6	2380	9	3542
500-1000	5	4214	6	4287	6	4621	12	9647	29	22769
1000-2000	8	11999	28	39862	22	31623	24	36637	82	120121
2000-3000	5	12530	2	5235	8	19519	20	48194	35	85478
3000-5000	3	11680	8	30342	5	18510	11	39408	27	99940
More than 5000	2	16755	1	7213	2	12642	1	6461	6	43071
Total	25	57548	48	87922	43	86915	74	142727	190	375112

Source: Population Census in the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2019. Part I. Population Size, Distribution, Sex, Age Structure, and Marital Status. Baku: SSC, 2022, pp. 16–410.

Although the number of villages in higher population groups is small, the population concentrated in them is large. Thus, 11 villages with populations between 3,000 and 5,000 people are home to 39.4 thousand residents, accounting for 27.6% of the rural population (Table 4). Since 2009, 4 additional villages have joined this group, increasing the population by 15,731 people (Table 3). Therefore, it can be concluded that villages with populations over 3,000 play an increasingly important role in settlement patterns.

In the classification of villages, those with populations of 5,000 or more occupy the highest hierarchical level. They do not form in all administrative districts because favorable socio-economic and demographic conditions, a strong infrastructure base, and suitable physical-geographical conditions are required. In Sabirabad district, the village of Qaraghay, with a population of over 5,000, had 5,888 residents in 2009 and 6,461 residents in 2019 [8, 9]. Between 2009 and 2019, the village's population increased by 573 people (9.7%). The transformation of the village into a town is possible, which could be an important step for its future development.

Among the administrative districts within the economic region, Imishli ranks second in terms of the number of villages and rural population. In 2019, 87.9 thousand people lived in 48 villages in the district [9]. The district's location on flat terrain, near freshwater sources, and the development of labor-intensive agricultural areas have allowed the formation of large rural settlements. In most villages in the district, the population exceeds 1,000 people.

In the village of Hajimustafali, which has a population between 100 and 200 people, 105 residents live. There are also 2 villages with populations between 200 and 500 people (Aghcuyur and Allahmedtli) (Table 4). Although the number of villages in these groups was the same in 2009, during the intervening period the rural population in both groups decreased by 33 and 86 people, respectively (Tables 3 and 4).

In six villages with populations between 500 and 1,000 people, 4,287 residents live. These villages account for 12.5% of all rural settlements and 4.9% of the rural population. Since 2009, the number of villages in this group has decreased 2.0 times, and their population has decreased 2.2 times (Tables 3 and 4). The decrease is due to population growth in these villages, which has moved them into higher population categories.

In Imishli district, more than half of the large villages are concentrated in the group with populations of 1,000–2,000 people. In this group, 28 villages are home to 39.9 thousand residents. These villages account for 58.3% of all villages in the group and 43.3% of the rural population (Table 4). In 2009, 22 villages in this group had a total population of 29.4 thousand (Table 3). The high population growth is due both to natural growth within these villages and the movement of villages from groups with smaller or larger populations into this category.

In 2019, the group of villages with populations of 2,000–3,000 people included 2 villages (Becirevan and Aligulular), with a total population of 5.3 thousand (Table 4). In the district, the number of villages with populations of 3,000–5,000 people and their total population is also significant: 8 villages are home to 30.3 thousand people, accounting for 34.5% of the rural population. Compared to 2009, the population in this group increased by 8,954 people (Table 3). This growth is driven both by the inclusion of new villages in the group and by the natural population increase within existing villages.

In Imishli district, the village of Sarkhanli has a population of over 5,000 people. In 2009, the village had 6,675 residents, and in 2019, 7,213 residents [8, 9]. Its population size and socio-cultural potential make it eligible for town status, a process that would positively influence its development.

In Saatly district, the number of villages and rural population is only slightly different from that of Imishli district. The vast majority of villages in the district fall into the group with populations of 1,000–2,000 people. In this group, 22 villages are home to 31.6 thousand residents, accounting for 51.2% of the villages in the district and 36.4% of the rural population [9] (Table 4). Since 2009, 3 more villages have joined this group, increasing the rural population by 4,771 people (Table 3). In other groups, the number of villages and the rural population is smaller [13]

In the village grouping of the district, the smallest population is recorded in settlements with 500–1,000 residents. In 6 villages, 4,621 people live, accounting for 5.3% of the rural population. Since 2009, 4 villages from this group have moved to higher population categories. This indicates that both the number of villages and their populations are steadily increasing, and they are moving into groups with larger populations (Tables 3 and 4).

At the same time, between 2009 and 2019, the number of villages with populations of 2,000–3,000 people remained unchanged. In both periods, there were 8 villages in this group. In 2009, 25.0% of the district's rural population (18.8 thousand people) lived in these villages, and in 2019, 22.5% (19.5 thousand people) were concentrated in this group [8, 9] (Tables 3 and 4). In the group with populations of 3,000–5,000 people, 5 villages (Fataly, Orta Mughan, Garaly, Giraghly, Sancalar, and Nasimi) together have 18.5 thousand residents (21.3%).

In Gara Nuru village, which has a population of over 5,000, 6,258 people lived in 2009, and by 2019, the rural population had increased to 7,421. In 2019, the population of Shirinbayly village also exceeded 5,000 (5,221 people). Together, these two villages accounted for 16.6% of the district's rural population (Tables 3 and 4). These changes indicate that, even at a slow pace, population growth in Saatly district positively affects the development of villages, and the number of residents continues to increase.

In **Beylagan** district, since 14 settlements received urban-type (town) status during the independence period, the number of villages is small, around 25 [9]. The village of Vetaga has a population of 86 people. Since 2009, the population of this village has decreased (Tables 3 and 4). In the group of villages with 200–500 residents, Khachinabad village (284 people) is included, where the population has increased

In the district, five villages have populations between 500 and 1,000 people, with a total of 4,214 residents. They account for 7.3% of the total rural population. Since 2009, the population of two villages has increased, moving them into a higher group [13]. Villages with populations between 1,000 and 2,000 hold a leading position. Currently, this group includes eight villages, with a total population of 12,000 people, accounting for 20.9% of the rural population (Table 3).

Five villages with populations between 2,000 and 3,000 have a total of 12,500 residents. Over the last decade, both the number of villages and their population in this group have decreased because, as their populations grew, they moved into a higher group. Consequently, three villages (İkinci Shahseven, Kabirly, Tezekend) have joined the 3,000–5,000 population group. These villages have a combined population of 11,700.

Already in Beylagan district, the population of 2 villages exceeds 5000 people. These include Birinci Shahseven village with 9404 people and Dunyamalyar village with 7346 people. Together,

16.8 thousand people are concentrated there, the share of the group's village population is 29.1%, and according to the population, it holds a leading position among the groups (Table 3 and 4), [9].

As can be seen, although the number of villages in Beylagan district is small, the population in the existing village settlements continues to increase. Therefore, they move up to a higher level in the grouping. Transforming villages with a population of more than 5000 people into towns would further positively affect their development and increase the efficiency of utilizing the natural-economic potential of the areas.

Conclusion and Recommendations: In the settlement system of the economic region, rural settlements occupy an important place. Villages are located along the banks of the region's water arteries, the Kura and Aras rivers, on fertile lands cultivated through irrigation. Over many years, the high natural growth among the rural population and the availability of labor-intensive areas have enabled the formation of large village settlements. As the population in villages increases, they steadily move up the hierarchical scale, and both the number of large villages and the share of the rural population concentrated in them rise.

In the spatial organisation of rural settlements, in regulating their development, providing social and cultural services to the rural population, ensuring employment, and in the territorial organisation of primary processing enterprises for agricultural products, villages with a population of over 2,000 play a very important and increasingly significant role. In this process, alongside district centers and towns, large villages perform a backbone function. The future development prospects of rural settlements depend on their functional development.

In the economic region, the population of 6 villages exceeds 5,000 people, and the 43.1 thousand people residing in them account for 11.5% of the total rural population. The formation of this group of villages occurs in locations with favorable economic-geographical conditions and natural-economic resources. Therefore, granting them town status could ensure their socio-economic and demographic development in the future. Measures in this area are also of great importance for demographic development in the regions.

In the economic region, Sabirabad district leads in terms of the number of villages and rural population. High natural population growth has

ensured an increase in the rural population over many years. Among the villages in the district, those with a population of over 2,000 and the number of people living in them have steadily increased. In the Imishli and Saatly districts, the rural population exceeds 91–92 thousand and continues to grow, whereas in Beylagan district, the rural population is relatively low.

In order to regulate rural settlement in the region and ensure the demographic development of villages, it is necessary to provide employment, deliver social and cultural services at a modern standard, and reconstruct the transport and communication network. For agricultural areas to serve as the economic base of the villages, it is essential to prioritize the development of more profitable sectors, ensure material and technical support, and establish primary processing enterprises.

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MİL-MUĞAN İQTİSADİ RAYONUNUN KƏNDLƏRİ VƏ KƏND ƏHALİSİNİN QUR- PLAŞMASI

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Xülasə. Kənd məskunlaşması regionlarda əha-linin yerləşməsində mühüm yer tutur. Uzun illər ərzində kənd əhalisi respublikada əhalinin sayının əsas artım mənbəyi olmuşdür. Lakin hazırda ölkənin ümumi əha-lisi üzrə olduğu kimi kənd əhalisi arasında da təbii artım kəskin şəkildə azalmışdır, müstəqillik illərində kəndlərin iqtisadi bazasını təşkil edən kənd təsər-rüfatında yaranan çətinliklər kənd məskunlaşmasının inkişafına da mənfə təsir göstərir. Ona görə kənd əhalisinin sayının artım tempi ciddi şəkildə azalmışdır, məskunlaşmada mühüm rol oynayan orta və iri kəndlər öz demoqrafik potensialını saxlaya bilmir, miqراسياليار davam edir.

Bunları nəzərə alaraq kənd məskunlaşmasının öyrənilməsi aktuallığını artırır. Azərbaycanın mühüm kənd məskunlaşması regionlarından biri olan Mil-Muğan iqtisadi rayonunda da kənd məskunlaşmasında orta və iri kəndlərin demoqrafik potensialının qorunub saxlanması, onların məskunlaşma sisteminin, kənd təsərrüfatı sahələrinin inkişafı və əhaliyə sosial-mədəni xidmətlərin təşkilində rolunun artırılması yollarının müəyyən edilməsi mühüm elmi və praktiki əhəmiyyət kəsb edir. Bunun üçün kəndlərin qruplaşmasının aparılması, hər 10 ildən keçirilmiş siyahıyaalınma məlumatlarına əsasən baş verən dəyişikliklərin öyrənilməsi lazım gəlir. Kənd məskunlaşmasının öyrənilməsi onun inkişafının nizamlanması istiqamətlərinin müəyyən edilməsi üçün də vacibdir.

Göstərilən məsələlər ölkənin mühüm kənd məskunlaşması regionlarından biri olan Mil-Muğan iqtisadi rayonunda da aktualdır. Məqalədə iqtisadi rayonda siyahıyaalma məlumatlarının nəti-cələri əsasında kəndlər və kənd əhalisinin qruplaşmasında baş verən dəyişikliklər və onların tənzimlənməsi istiqamətləri tədqiq edilir.

Açar sözlər: kənd yaşayış məntəqələri, kənd məskunlaşması, iqtisadi rayon, inzibati rayon, kənd əhalisinin sayı, kənd qrupları, regional inkişaf, kənd təsərrüfatı, iqtisadi baza