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Working Poverty in Kazakhstan: Causes and Solutions

Abstract

Objective: To consider the causes, consequences and possible solutions to the problem of working poverty in Kazakhstan.

Methods: The paper uses methods of statistical data processing, dynamic and structural analysis, and comparative analysis.

Results: Working poverty in Kazakhstan means that people, having jobs, cannot provide basic needs due to low wages, unstable employment and limited access to social guarantees. The main causes of working poverty include low wages in some industries with low labor productivity, a relatively high proportion of informal employment in some industries and regions, and uneven economic, infrastructural and demographic development of the country's regions.

Conclusions: The analysis of statistical data on the incomes of the population in Kazakhstan shows that the problem of working poverty has a multi-layered character and requires an integrated approach to solve it. It is necessary to regularly monitor data, develop and implement measures aimed at increasing wages, combating informal employment and improving the level of education and vocational training, and stimulating economic growth in regions with high levels of poverty. This approach will significantly reduce the level of working poverty and improve the quality of life of working citizens in Kazakhstan.

*Keywords***:** poverty among workers, standard of living, poverty, inequality, minimum wage.

Introduction

According to official statistics and data from various studies, many working Kazakhstanis receive insufficient wages to meet basic living needs. This indicates the need for in-depth study and solution of this problem.

In Kazakhstan, the minimum and average wages often do not correspond to the actual subsistence minimum. There are also significant differences in income and quality of life between urban and rural areas, as well as between different regions of the country.

The problem of poverty among workers leads to deterioration of people's health, limited access to quality education and medical services, as well as negative social consequences, such as a decrease in overall life satisfaction. It has a negative impact on the country's economy, as low income limits consumer demand and slows down economic growth.

The fight against poverty among workers is a key element of Kazakhstan's sustainable and equitable development.

Thus, the problem of poverty among workers in Kazakhstan is urgent and requires close attention from the state, business and society to develop effective solutions and support measures.

Literature Review

Working poverty is a global problem studied in different countries with different economic systems. International research focuses on factors such as minimum wages, working conditions, informal employment,

social guarantees. In advanced economies like Kazakhstan, working poverty is often associated with informal employment and insufficient social protection.

In the works of many foreign authors, such as (Anker, 2011), (Boeri, 2009), (Werner et al. 2016), (Adams et al., 2005), and (Buss et al., 2006) presents interesting research results on the assessment of the subsistence minimum and the establishment of the minimum wages.

According to Atabayeva A.K., Pritvorova T.R., Lambekova A.N., Syzdykova E.J. the reason for low wages is income instability due to unstable employment of non-standard workers, low insurance benefits due to insufficient work experience in insurance systems or their complete absence (Atabayeva, et.al., 2020).

According to the data Orynbasarova et.al., a significant part of the working-age population works in the informal sector, which leads to a lack of social guarantees and a decrease in income (Orynbasarova et.al., 2019).

In agricultural regions, such as the South Kazakhstan region, the seasonal nature of work in the agricultural sector leads to income instability and a high level of poverty among workers in the off-season (Brimbetova et.al., 2022)..

In his research Ezema et.al. show that poverty among working people leads to poor health, limited access to education and a decrease in living standards (Ezema et.al., 2024). According to research, people living in working poverty are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases because they do not have access to regular medical care and necessary medicines.

One of the key measures to overcome poverty among workers is to raise wages. This approach is aimed at ensuring a decent standard of living for all working citizens and eliminating financial instability. In Tolepbergen A, it is proposed to raise the minimum wage to the level of the subsistence minimum (Tolepbergen, 2022).

In line with inflation and rising cost of living, wage indexation is necessary to maintain workers' purchasing power and prevent a decline in their real incomes. In order to prevent abuse by employers and ensure fair pay, the State can introduce stricter norms and standards for the payment of wages in the private sector.

A review of the literature shows that poverty among workers in Kazakhstan is caused by a complex of factors, including low wages and informal employment. Additional research is needed to assess the effectiveness of social programs and study regional differences. Solving this problem requires a comprehensive approach, including economic and social measures.

Methods

The methodological basis of the study was theoretical approaches, methods of data collection and analysis. This approach will provide a complete and objective understanding of the extent, causes and consequences of poverty among workers, as well as propose reasonable and effective measures to overcome it. Information resources of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereinafter — the BNS), as well as data from international organizations (OECD, ILO) were used for data analysis.

Results

Working poverty is a phenomenon where people, despite having employment, remain below the poverty line due to low wages, unstable employment, or lack of social guarantees. This phenomenon is a serious issue for many countries, including Kazakhstan.

Analyzing the dynamics of wage growth enables an evaluation of how income levels have evolved in recent years. (Figure 1).
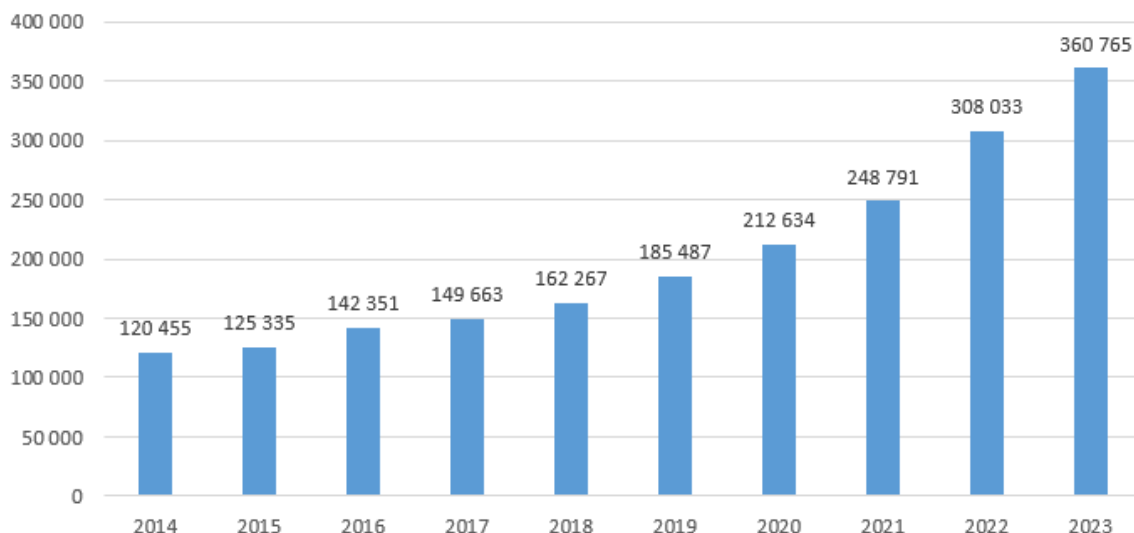
Figure 1. Average Monthly Salary in the Republic of Kazakhstan, KZT

Note – compiled by the authors based on the Bureau of national Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Figure 1 shows the increase in the average monthly salary from 2014 to 2023.

The analysis of the average monthly salary of employees in the image of the region is distinguished by their significant differentiation. (Figure 2) (Sauranbai, 2023).
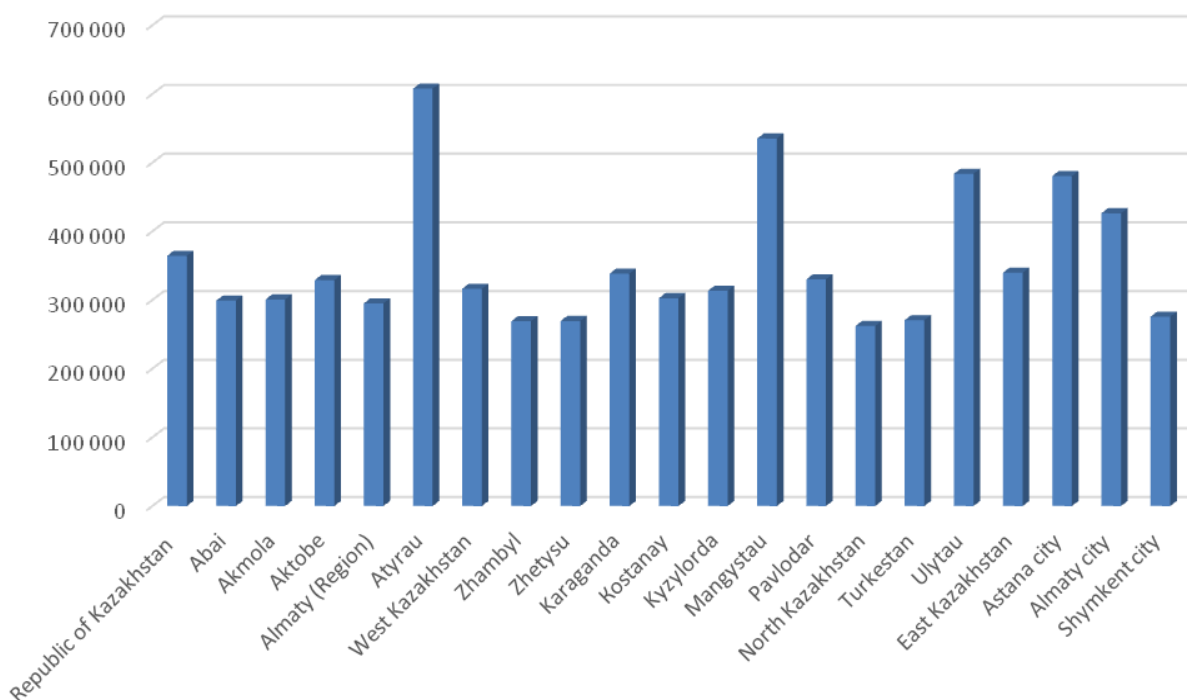

Figure 2.Average Monthly Salary of Employees by Region

Note — compiled on the basis of data from the BNS of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The data shows significant growth in wages in the mining industry, high-tech, and financial sectors of Kazakhstan's economy in 2023. These sectors demonstrate leading growth rates, indicating their importance to the country's economy. High wages in the mining, financial, and insurance sectors, as well as in information and communication, reflect a trend towards increasing incomes in key and rapidly developing sectors of the economy. (Figure 3).
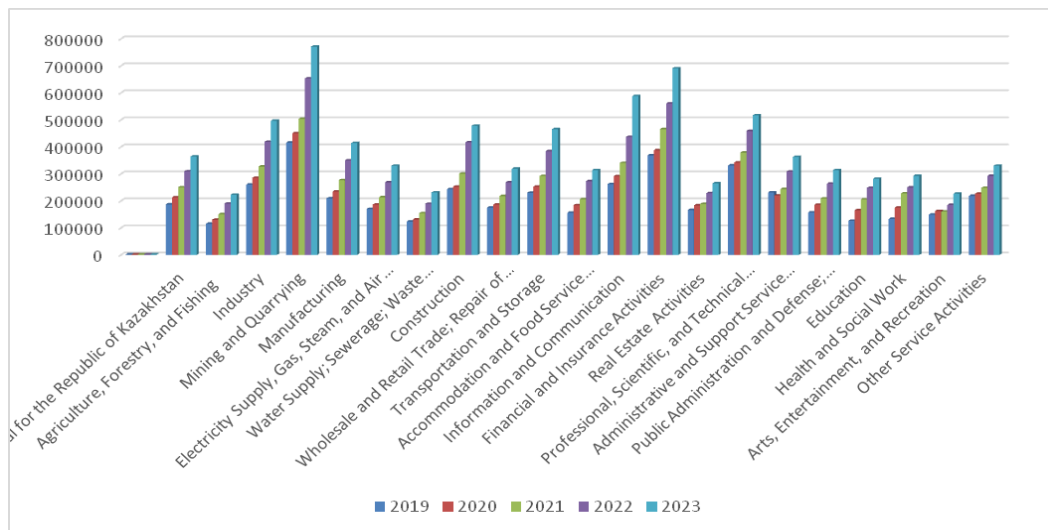
Figure 3.Average Monthly Salary by Economic Activity

Note — compiled on the basis of data from the BNS of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The data show a significant increase in wages in the mining industry, high-tech and financial sectors of the economy of Kazakhstan in 2023. These sectors show outpacing growth rates, which indicates their importance for the country's economy. These industries have salaries well below the national average, which indicates income problems in these sectors.

The gap between the maximum and minimum values of the average wage by industry was 3.6 times in 2019, decreased to 3.5 times in 2020 and 3.3 times in 2021, then began to increase to 3.5 times in 2022 and 2023. This shows the preservation of a relatively high differentiation of wages by sectors of the economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Graph 2 shows the distribution of employees by level of accrued wages in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2024. The largest number of employees is observed in the salary range from 100,001 to 400,000 tenge. These groups make up the majority of workers, reflecting a concentration of wages from the average to a relatively low level. (Figure 2).
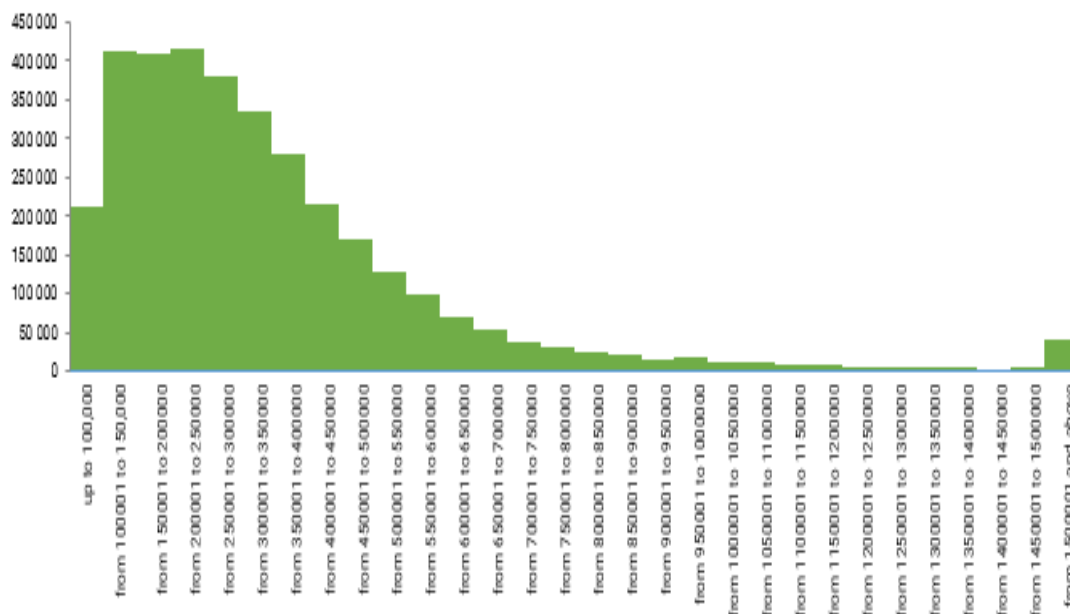

Figure 2. Distribution of employees by accrued salary for 2024

Note — compiled by the authors based on the Bureau of national Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

These figures show that more than half of the workers are concentrated in low-paid groups, which can be attributed to the average level of income. In the face of inflation and rising cost of living, the level of wages in these ranges may not be sufficient to meet all basic needs.

Taking into account the demographic and economic realities of Kazakhstan, those with a salary of up to 100,000 tenge can be classified as "working poor".

In 2024, the subsistence minimum per person in Kazakhstan will be 46,228 tenge. The minimum required total income for a family of 4 people is 184,912 tenge. An income of up to 100,000 tenge covers only 54 % of the basic needs of a family of 4 people, which is why such employees are classified as "working poor".

In 2024, 61,819 people received an amount lower than the minimum wage of up to 85,000 tenge according to the indicator of the distribution of workers by the amount of accrued wages.

The following table 3 shows the median salary of employees of the Republic of Kazakhstan by type of economic activity from 2019 to 2024. (Table 3).

Table 3. Median wages of employees by type of economic activity of the Republic of Kazakhstan

	2 019	2 020	2 021	2 022	2 023
Total	112 281	142 718	165 816	204 149	251 356
maximum	261 888	319 715	322 447	420 272	471 381
minimum	77 856	107 713	102 004	133 719	166 967
the ratio between the maximum and minimum value	3,4	3,0	3,2	3,1	2,8
Note — compiled by the authors based on the Bureau of national Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan					

In general, the average salary for all types of economic activity increased from 112,281 tenge in 2019 to 285,677 tenge in 2024.

The level of wages in agriculture, although growing, remains below the national average, making the sector unattractive for workers.

The gap between the maximum and minimum median wages in the sectors of the economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan decreased from 3.4 times in 2019 to 2.8 times in 2023. This shows a decrease in the degree of wage inequality in the sectoral context.

The gradual increase in the minimum wage has made it possible to achieve positive changes in the dynamics of the Keitz Index. So in 2019, the Keitz index was 37.9 % in the Republic of Kazakhstan and decreased to 27.8 % by 2023. By industry, relatively high values of the Keitz index have developed in agriculture (40 % and above), although the index is also declining from 49.4 % to 41.9 %. Also, relatively low wages have developed in the field of "Water supply; sanitation; waste collection, treatment and disposal, pollution control activities" and in "Art, Entertainment and recreation".

It is expected that the increase in the minimum wage to 85 thousand tenge in 2024 will have a positive impact on the Keitz index in its reduction in Kazakhstan as a whole. Although the change in the minimum wage will reflect to varying degrees the dynamics of the Keitz index by industry. For example, the mining industry is relatively "smoothly" reducing the values of this index from 16.2 % in 2019 to 13.2 % by 2021, but by 2022 and 2023 it has grown again to 14.3 % and 14.8 %, respectively. The pace of growth of wages in high-paying units is increasing, as well as the pace of growth of minimum wages in low-paying units.

Discussion

The analysis of wage dynamics from 2014 to 2023 reveals the following key points:

- In Kazakhstan, wages increased 3.5 times from 2014 to 2023.

- In 2023, the poverty rate in Kazakhstan was 5.2 %. In the Turkestan and Zhetisu regions, the poverty rate is significantly higher, which requires attention from government agencies and the development of targeted poverty reduction programs. In the large cities of Almaty and Astana, as well as in the Atyrau region (https://unfccc.int/, 2022), the poverty rate is significantly lower. This is due to higher incomes and the level of economic development in these regions.

- the dynamics of the Keitz index in 2019-2023 shows a positive trend: along with the growth of the minimum wage in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Keitz index is decreasing both in the Republic of Kazakhstan as a whole and in most sectors of the economy. The rate of decline in the Keitz index varies by industry over the years, and wage growth rates are higher in low-wage industries than in high-wage industries.

This has a positive effect on reducing the wage gap between industries. The state's policy of increasing the minimum wage played a big role in this.

In 2023, reducing the poverty rate to 5.2 % is an important achievement for Kazakhstan, but it is necessary to continue efforts to improve economic conditions and improve the standard of living of the population.

The problem of working poverty in Kazakhstan has serious consequences for individual workers and for society as a whole. Low wages and poverty among workers can slow down a country's economic growth, as this can reduce consumer demand and investment in human capital. Income inequality and a sense of injustice can lead to increased social tension and instability in society.

Raising the minimum wage and wages in Kazakhstan can play a key role in improving the situation of poverty among workers and the general standard of living of the population, helps to reduce the gap between workers' incomes and the cost of living, contributing to greater social justice and reducing inequality. With the next increase on January 1, 2024 to 85,000 tenge, the MW will have doubled in three years. Primarily, this increase will affect "low-paid" workers. Secondly, employers who set wages based on the MW will also review the salaries of other categories of workers according to the inter-grade qualification system. As a result, the income of approximately 1.8 million employees in all sectors, including about 350,000 public sector employees, will rise. Increasing the MW to 85,000 tenge is a significant step and covers a large number of employees, including those in both the private and public sectors. This change is aimed at improving workers' living conditions and reducing working poverty in the country.

Social benefits and support for low-paid workers play an important role in ensuring social justice and support for the least protected segments of the population.

Vocational training and advanced training play a crucial role in the development of human capital and increasing the competitiveness of the labor market. Therefore, in order to reduce poverty among workers in Kazakhstan, it is necessary to develop skills for the modern labor market. Training programs must meet modern labor market requirements, including digital technologies, project management, soft skills development, etc.

The introduction of modern technologies and digital solutions stimulates the improvement of production efficiency and the provision of new opportunities to businesses and the public.

An effective combination of these and other measures will create conditions for sustainable and inclusive economic growth in regions with high levels of poverty, contributing to improving the quality of life and reducing social inequality.

Conclusions

The main causes of working poverty include low wages, a high share of informal employment, and uneven regional development, leading to disparities in living standards. Working poverty exacerbates social inequality, affects health and access to education, and limits opportunities for personal development and social integration.

The analysis of income statistics in Kazakhstan shows that the issue of working poverty is multifaceted and requires a comprehensive approach to address it. Regular monitoring of data, development, and implementation of measures aimed at increasing wages, combating informal employment, improving education and professional training, and stimulating economic growth in high-poverty regions are necessary. This approach will significantly reduce working poverty and improve the quality of life for working citizens in Kazakhstan.

Addressing working poverty requires a comprehensive approach from the government, business, and society to develop and implement effective measures aimed at improving the living standards of all citizens in Kazakhstan.

Hypothesis: working poverty in Kazakhstan has a different degree of spread across sectors of the economy. The increase in the minimum wage in Kazakhstan has a positive effect on the dynamics of reducing working poverty.

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Работающая бедность в Казахстане: причины и пути решения

Аннотация

Цель: Рассмотреть причины, последствия и возможные пути решения проблемы работающей бедности в Казахстане.

Методы: В работе использованы методы статистической обработки данных, динамического и структурного анализа, сопоставительного анализа.

Результаты: Работающая бедность в Казахстане означает, что люди, имея работу, не могут обеспечить базовые потребности из-за низких заработных плат, нестабильной занятости и ограниченного доступа к социальным гарантиям. Основные **причины работающей бедности** включают низкие заработные платы в некоторых отраслях с низкой производительностью труда, относительно высокую долю неофициальной занятости в некоторых отраслях и регионах, неравномерность экономического, инфраструктурного и демографического развития регионов страны.

Выводы: Анализ статистических данных о доходах населения в Казахстане показывает, что проблема работающей бедности имеет многослойный характер и требует комплексного подхода для ее решения. Необходимо проводить регулярный мониторинг данных, разрабатывать и внедрять меры, направленные на повышение заработных плат, борьбу с неофициальной занятостью и улучшение уровня образования и профессиональной подготовки, стимулирование экономического роста в регионах с высоким уровнем бедности. Такой подход позволит значительно снизить уровень работающей бедности и улучшить качество жизни работающих граждан в Казахстане.

Ключевые слова: бедность среди работающих, уровень жизни, бедность, неравенство, минимальная заработная плата.

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Қазақстандағы жұмыс істейтін кедейлік: себептері мен шешу жолдары

Аңдатпа

Мақсаты: Қазақстанда жұмыс істейтін кедейлік проблемасын шешудің себептерін, салдарын және мүмкін жолдарын қарастыру.

Әдісі: Жұмыста деректерді статистикалық өңдеу, динамикалық және құрылымдық талдау, салыстырмалы талдау әдістері қолданылды.

Нәтижелері: Қазақстанда жұмыс істейтін кедейлік адамдардың жалақысы төмен, Жұмыспен қамтудың тұрақсыздығы және әлеуметтік кепілдіктерге қолжетімділіктің шектелуіне байланысты негізгі қажеттіліктерді қамтамасыз ете алмайтындығын білдіреді. Жұмыс істеп тұрған кедейліктің негізгі себептеріне Еңбек өнімділігі төмен кейбір салалардағы жалақының төмендігі, кейбір салалар мен өңірлердегі бейресми жұмыспен қамтудың салыстырмалы түрде жоғары үлесі, ел өңірлерінің экономикалық, инфрақұрылымдық және демографиялық дамуының біркелкі включаютстігі жатады.

Тұжырымдама: Қазақстандағы халықтың табысы туралы статистикалық деректерді талдау жұмыс істеп тұрған кедейлік проблемасының көп қабатты сипатқа ие екенін және оны шешу үшін кешенді тәсілді талап ететінін көрсетеді. Деректерге тұрақты мониторинг жүргізу, жалақыны арттыруға, бейресми жұмыспен қамтуға қарсы күреске және білім беру мен кәсіптік даярлық деңгейін жақсартуға, кедейлік деңгейі жоғары өңірлерде экономикалық өсуді ынталандыруға бағытталған шараларды әзірлеу және енгізу қажет. Мұндай тәсіл жұмыс істейтін кедейлік деңгейін айтарлықтай төмендетуге және Қазақстанда жұмыс істейтін азаматтардың өмір сүру сапасын жақсартуға мүмкіндік береді.

Кілт сөздер: жұмысшылар арасындағы кедейлік, өмір сүру деңгейі, кедейлік, теңсіздік, ең төменгі жалақы.