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Socio-Economic and Demographic Development of the Regions of the Central Ecological Zone of Lake Baikal

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ABSTRACT

This study examines current demographic, economic, social, and environmental issues in the Irkutsk Region and Buryatia, which are part of the Central Ecological Zone of the Baikal Natural Territory. The research is based on statistical data from the Federal State Statistics Service, scholarly articles and monographs on the topic, sociological survey results, media reports, and information collected during a scientific expedition to Lake Baikal. The socio-economic development of municipalities within the Central Ecological Zone of Lake Baikal remains constrained by environmental legislation that restricts economic activity. The inability to fully utilize land resources contributes to out-migration among the local population. Tourism is one of the few economic sectors permitted in the coastal zone of Lake Baikal. However, the low level of diversification within municipal economies threatens sustainable socio-economic development, despite the growing number of tourists visiting the region each year. The region risks losing a significant share of its income in the event of political, economic, or epidemiological crises. The development of alternative economic activities would enhance the socio-economic security of the area. This potential is also influenced by the region's demographic characteristics: expanding local employment and improving workforce training would support the effective implementation of new development strategies. Diversifying economic activity is further justified by the negative impact of tourism on the Baikal ecosystem. Reevaluating the current economic, social, and environmental policy approaches applied in the region has therefore become a pressing issue.

Keywords: migration, employment, nature conservation, sustainable development, demographic potential