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Generation Z in the Kazakhstan Labor Market: Expectations, Motivation, and Management Approaches

Aidana Sydykova¹, Ainur Boranbayeva², Aliya Karakozhayeva³, Laila Bimendieva⁴

Abstract

This study aims to examine the work values and motivational drivers of Generation Z in Kazakhstan as they transition into the labour market. Using a structured survey administered to 104 university students and analysed with SPSS Statistics 29, the study explores how intrinsic, extrinsic, and social work values influence employment expectations and preferences. The findings show that while financial stability, job security, and career advancement are dominant extrinsic motivators, Gen Z respondents also prioritise supportive social environments, meaningful tasks, and personal development opportunities. Statistically significant differences were found between respondents with different geographic job preferences, indicating that aspirations for international employment correlate with stronger preferences for innovation, interdepartmental experience, and creative work settings. This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by offering empirical evidence from Kazakhstan, a context underrepresented in global discussions on youth employment. The findings offer practical insights for employers, HR professionals, and policymakers to design strategies that align with the expectations of a new workforce generation. Recommendations are made to support inclusive, flexible, and innovation-driven management practices suitable for Kazakhstan's evolving labour landscape.

Keywords: Generation Z, Kazakhstan, work values, motivation, labour market, human resource management, SPSS.

Introduction

Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, represents a unique cohort that has grown up in an era of unprecedented digital connectivity. This digital immersion has shaped their perspectives, behaviours, and expectations, particularly as they enter the workforce. Globally, this generation is distinguished by its adaptability to technology, preference for flexibility, and a strong desire for meaningful work. As organisations strive to engage this talent pool, they are rethinking traditional management practices to align with Generation Z's distinct values and priorities.

In Kazakhstan, Generation Z's integration into the workforce is taking place amidst significant economic and societal transformations. With the government prioritising digitalisation and economic diversification, opportunities abound for this tech-savvy generation to contribute to emerging industries. However, there is limited research into how Kazakhstan's cultural and organisational landscape meets the needs of Generation Z professionals. This study seeks to explore their expectations, motivations, and the management approaches best suited to their integration. Despite the growing interest in Generation Z worldwide, research on their entry into the Kazakhstani labour market remains scarce. Employers in the region often rely on traditional management practices that may not align with the evolving expectations of this new generation. These include demands for flexible working arrangements, a strong organisational purpose, and opportunities for growth. Moreover, cultural nuances, such as the emphasis on family and social cohesion, further differentiate Generation Z's needs in Kazakhstan from global trends.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring the following research question: What are the work values and key motivational drivers of Generation Z in Kazakhstan? The study's objectives are twofold: (1) to identify the work values of Gen Z employees in Kazakhstan, (2) to understand their key motivational drivers.

¹Higher School of Economics and Business, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, a.daurenkyzy@gmail.com (corresponding author)

²Higher School of Economics and Business, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, boranbaeva7777@gmail.com

³L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan, aliya.coach48@gmail.com

⁴Higher School of Economics and Business, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, bimendiyeva@kaznu.edu.kz

This research offers valuable insights for multiple stakeholders. For employers and HR professionals, it provides actionable strategies to attract, engage, and retain Generation Z talent, ensuring organisational resilience in an increasingly competitive global economy. Policymakers may use the findings to inform labour policies that reflect the aspirations of Kazakhstan's youth, contributing to national development. Additionally, the study fills a critical gap in academic literature by providing an in-depth exploration of Generation Z in the Kazakhstani context, enriching our understanding of how this generation's expectations intersect with the unique socio-economic realities of the region.

The paper is structured as follows: the Introduction outlines the research background, objectives, and significance. Literature Review examines key studies on Generation Z's expectations, motivations, and management strategies, with a focus on Kazakhstan. Methodology describes the research design, data collection, and analysis methods. Results present key findings from survey, while Discussion interprets these findings in relation to the literature, highlighting implications and limitations. Finally, Conclusion summarises the research and offers practical recommendations for employers and policymakers, as well as suggestions for future research directions.

Literature Review

Generation Z, also referred to as post-millennials, iGen, Gen 2020, or Gen Zs, encompasses individuals born during or after the rise of the internet (Pichler et al., 2021). This generation follows the Silent Generation (1925–1945), Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1981), and Generation Y or Millennials (1982–1999) (Twenge, 2010). Much of the existing research on Generation Z focuses on their experiences as children or adolescents, often adopting perspectives from education, culture, or marketing. However, few academic studies examine Gen Z as young adults, leaving a significant gap in understanding their transition into the workforce. Additionally, popular media often offers conflicting portrayals of this cohort. For instance, they are described as preferring electronic communication over face-to-face interaction (Turner, 2015), yet also as valuing in-person communication with peers and manager (Silva & Carvalho, 2021). Similarly, while some sources suggest they are unconcerned about privacy and freely share personal information (Clark, 2017), others highlight their heightened awareness of online privacy, favouring anonymous social media platforms (Williams, 2015). These contradictions highlight the need for rigorous, evidence-based research.

There is greater consensus on the shared socio-economic context that shaped Gen Z, particularly in Western societies. Socio-economic conditions significantly influence generational characteristics (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010). Gen Z came of age during an “unsafe world” marked by terrorism, conflict, high unemployment, and economic instability (Rainsford et al., 2019; Turner, 2015). Consequently, both Gen Z and their parents prioritised financial and physical security, earning the generation the nickname “bubble-wrap generation” due to their overprotective upbringing (Malone, 2007).

In Kazakhstan, economic instability has deeply affected Generation Z. The 2011 international bailout, rising youth unemployment, widespread wage reductions, and skilled worker emigration (“brain drain”) created a precarious environment for young people (Suleman & Figueiredo, 2020). These challenges have shaped Gen Z's employment expectations, often lowering their aspirations and leading to disenchantment with the labour market (Cerdeira et al., 2016). A defining feature of Gen Z is their immersion in technology, characterised by the pervasive presence of wireless internet, smartphones, and digital tracking devices (Pichler et al., 2021). Internet access in family households has become a near-universal experience for this generation, influencing how they interact, learn, and approach the world.

Work values represent beliefs about preferred outcomes or aspects of work, serving as a framework for individuals to evaluate job attributes, activities, and outcomes. These values manifest as preferences, goals, or expectations and influence various work-related attitudes and behaviours, such as career choice, career intentions, entrepreneurial aspirations, and long-term job satisfaction (Chow et al., 2017). A widely recognised framework for work values categorises them into three dimensions: *intrinsic* (focused on the meaning and interest of the work itself), *extrinsic* (emphasising material rewards, such as salary and job security), and *social* (relating to connections with colleagues and supervisors).

Work values typically emerge during adolescence and remain relatively stable in early adulthood. While earlier generations showed changes in work values after entering the workforce, millennials exhibited stability during the school-to-work transition. Consequently, university students' work values may provide reliable insights into their future work preferences and outcomes (Chow et al., 2017). Generational differences in work

values have garnered considerable attention, with studies reporting notable variations between successive generations (Silva & Carvalho, 2021). These differences are often attributed to the distinct sociocultural environments in which generations are socialised, shaped by key economic, social, cultural, technological, and political events during formative years (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010).

Unemployment, precarious jobs, or mismatched employment opportunities can weaken both intrinsic and extrinsic values (Silva & Carvalho, 2021). They observed that extrinsic values tend to dominate in early adulthood but decline over time, a finding supported by Rainsford et al. (2019) in their study of young Europeans. Additionally, individuals who perceive themselves as overqualified often place greater importance on extrinsic rewards (Rainsford et al., 2019). While intrinsic values have shown minimal generational variation (Gallie, 2019; Twenge et al., 2010), some studies note a slight decline (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). In contrast, extrinsic values have consistently increased across generations (Krahn & Galambos, 2014; Lyons et al., 2015; Twenge & Donnelly, 2016). For millennials, social values were highly significant (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Ng et al., 2010). However, for Generation Z, greater reliance on digital communication and reduced face-to-face interaction may lead to underdeveloped social skills (Pichler et al., 2021).

Research on the work values of Kazakhstani individuals published in international journals is scarce. There is a study by Chaves et al. (2016), which examined the work values of 1,000 graduates from Lisbon's two largest universities. Data for this study were collected in 2011, with 75 % of participants aged 31 or younger, effectively representing a sample of millennials. The study focused exclusively on intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of work values. Findings indicated that millennials prioritised financial independence from their parents (extrinsic) as their top concern, followed closely by having an interesting job (intrinsic) that supports knowledge acquisition and autonomy. Jobs offering stability, security, and high wages (extrinsic) ranked lower but were still valued.

Building on these findings and considering the economic recession's impact (Johnson et al., 2012; Rainsford et al., 2019), it is expected that Kazakhstani Generation Z will place even greater emphasis on extrinsic values compared to intrinsic ones. Regarding social values, cultural influences are considered. Insights from the GLOBE project highlight that Kazakhstani culture is characterised by a strong in-group collectivism, valuing social loyalty and group connections (Jesuino, 2007). Therefore, it is anticipated that *Kazakhstani Gen Z will prioritise social values above other dimensions*.

In Kazakhstan, the characteristics and expectations of Generation Z are influenced by a unique blend of global trends and local cultural factors. Economic initiatives such as "Digital Kazakhstan" have accelerated the adoption of technology, providing opportunities for Gen Z to thrive in tech-driven industries (Zarubina et al., 2024). However, traditional workplace norms, including hierarchical management styles and rigid working hours, often clash with this generation's preference for flexibility and innovation. Studies specific to the region reveal that Kazakhstani Gen Z professionals place significant importance on financial stability and career growth, much like their global counterparts. However, they are also heavily influenced by cultural values such as family obligations and societal expectations (Davies, 2019). Talapbaeva et al. (2023) highlight that many young professionals in Kazakhstan seek jobs that offer not only economic security but also the ability to support their families, reflecting a strong sense of interdependence.

Despite these findings, there remains a notable gap in understanding how Kazakhstani organisations are adapting to the needs of Generation Z. This lack of research underscores the importance of exploring management approaches that balance traditional values with the innovative aspirations of this generation. Understanding the expectations and motivational drivers of Generation Z is crucial for creating an engaging work environment. Globally, Gen Z employees are drawn to organisations that provide clear pathways for career growth, mentorship, and opportunities to develop new skills. They prioritise flexibility, with a strong preference for remote work options and customised schedules that allow them to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Kazakhstan's Labour Market Context

The unemployment rate, measured using the ILO methodology, fell by 0.1 percentage points to 4.7 % compared with the first quarter of 2023 as shown in Figure 1. As of the end of March 2024, employment agencies under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan had 294,000 registered unemployed individuals. This represented 3.1 % of the labour force—an increase of 0.3 percentage points from the same period in 2023. The youth unemployment rate (ages 15–34) remained at 3.1 %.

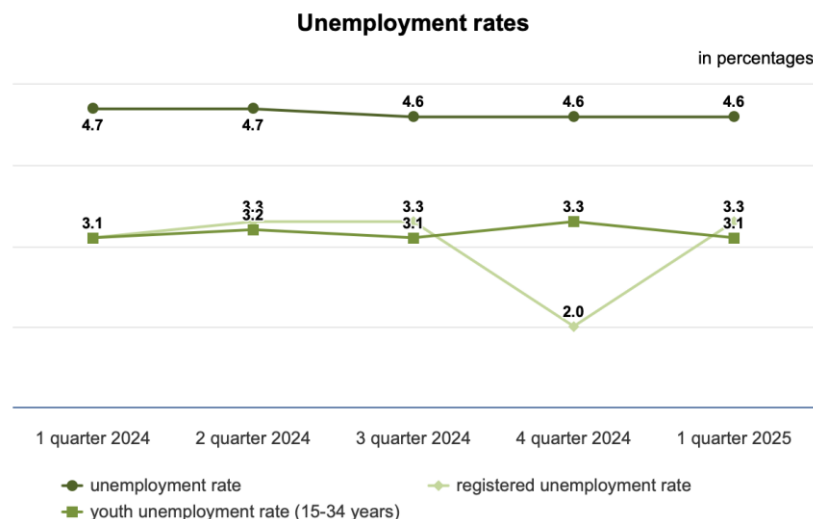


Figure 1. Unemployment rates in Kazakhstan

Table 1 shows that average monthly wages in Kazakhstan nearly doubled between 2019 (USD 415.14) and 2023 (USD 809.54). Both men and women experienced substantial wage growth, with men's earnings rising from USD 494.48 to USD 930.64 and women's from USD 335.06 to USD 691.59. Despite this positive trend, a significant gender pay gap persists. In 2019, women earned about 32 % less than men; by 2023, the gap narrowed slightly to 26 %. This suggests progress but also highlights continuing structural inequalities in the labour market.

Table 1. Average Monthly Wages in Kazakhstan (Converted from Tenge to USD, exchange rate used: 1 USD ≈ 450 KZT (average for 2023))

Year	Total (USD)	Men (USD)	Women (USD)
2019.0	415.14	494.48	335.06
2020.0	473.34	541.16	405.95
2021.0	556.25	624.98	489.24
2022.0	688.59	789.55	590.58
2023.0	809.54	930.64	691.59

Note – based on Stat.gov.kz, 2025

Figure 2 compares average monthly wages across occupational groups in Kazakhstan for 2023 and 2024, expressed in tenge (with an approximate exchange rate of 1 USD ≈ 450 KZT). Overall, wages increased across all categories, reflecting continued wage growth in the labour market. Leaders and civil servants remained the highest-paid group, with wages rising from approximately USD 1,333 in 2023 to USD 1,467 in 2024. Professional specialists followed, earning around USD 1,111 in 2023 and USD 1,178 in 2024. By contrast, unqualified workers earned the least, with monthly wages of about USD 356 in 2023 and USD 400 in 2024. The data also highlight significant disparities between occupational categories. While high-skilled groups, such as civil servants and specialists, earn more than three times as much as unqualified workers, even lower-skilled categories such as service and sales workers (USD 444 in 2023; USD 489 in 2024) and farmers (USD 556 in 2023; USD 600 in 2024) saw modest but steady increases.

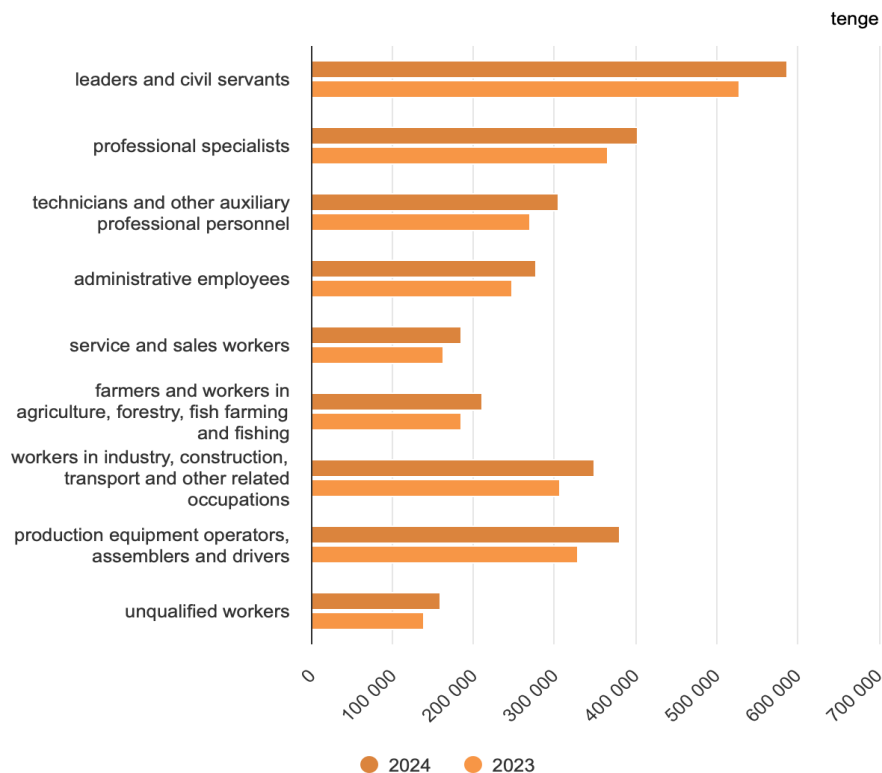


Figure 2. Average monthly wage by enlarged groups of occupations in tenge. Source: (Stat.gov.kz, 2025)

These results suggest that Kazakhstan's wage growth is broad-based but uneven, with structural gaps between occupational groups persisting. The widening earnings advantage of leaders and specialists relative to unqualified and service-sector workers raises questions about income inequality and labour market segmentation.

The challenges employers face when engaging Generation Z are not uniform, but vary by industry, organisational structure, and available resources. For instance, in the fintech and digital services sector, Kaspi.kz has emerged as one of Kazakhstan's most innovative employers, transforming from a traditional bank into a multi-service "super app" ecosystem serving over 75 % of the population (Buketov University Bulletin, 2024; Harvard Business Review, 2025). While Kaspi.kz offers flexibility, rapid career progression, and exposure to high-tech projects—features highly attractive to Generation Z—it faces the ongoing challenge of retaining young specialists in the face of regional competition from AI-driven fintech firms (AInvest, 2025). In contrast, state-owned enterprises, such as KazMunayGas and Kazakhstan Temir Zholy, operate within more rigid hierarchical structures. Promotions are often based on tenure and internal regulations rather than merit, which can discourage Generation Z employees who prioritise skill development, recognition, and innovation in career progression (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Moreover, youth labour market data show that many Gen Z graduates experience a "first-hire trap"—accepting roles that do not match their qualifications or career aspirations, often due to limited entry-level opportunities in their desired fields (Astana Times, 2024). This mismatch contributes to underemployment and increases turnover, creating additional recruitment and training costs for employers. These examples illustrate that the challenges employers face in adapting to Generation Z's expectations are complex and context-dependent. They include structural rigidity in public enterprises, retention pressures in high-growth sectors, and broader issues of skills-job mismatch in the youth labour market. Recognising these distinct dynamics allows for more targeted policy and organisational responses.

In Kazakhstan, financial incentives remain a significant motivational factor, especially given the country's economic landscape. However, intrinsic motivators, such as meaningful work and opportunities for self-expression, are gaining importance among young professionals. The application of motivational frameworks, such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, reveals that Generation Z thrives when hygiene factors (e.g., salary and job security) are supplemented by motivators like recognition, autonomy, and opportunities for innovation. For employers in Kazakhstan, aligning organisational policies with these expectations requires a shift in tradi-

tional HR practices. Encouraging open communication, fostering a culture of feedback, and providing platforms for continuous learning can help bridge the gap between Gen Z's aspirations and existing workplace dynamics. The evolving expectations of Generation Z have necessitated significant changes in HR practices globally. Organisations are increasingly leveraging technology to create engaging employee experiences, from gamified training programs to AI-driven performance management systems. For example, Google has implemented mentorship schemes and flexible work arrangements to cater to the needs of their Gen Z employees, while Deloitte has prioritised inclusivity and mental health support (Faber, 2024).

In Kazakhstan, organisations are beginning to adopt similar practices, particularly in sectors undergoing digital transformation. Companies, such as Kaspi.kz, have introduced innovative approaches, including performance-based rewards and tech-enabled learning platforms, to attract and retain young talent. However, many traditional organisations continue to rely on hierarchical management styles that may alienate Gen Z employees. To remain competitive, Kazakhstani employers must embrace more dynamic HR strategies. This includes offering flexible working conditions, fostering an inclusive culture, and leveraging technology to personalise employee experiences. Such adaptations will not only enhance retention but also unlock the full potential of Generation Z within the workforce.

Methods

The birth years defining Generation Z vary across studies, ranging from 1991 (Malone, 2007) to early 2010 (Pichler et al., 2021). For this research, the reference year is 2003–2005. Consequently, the oldest individuals from this generation were 20–21 years old at the time of data collection.

University students were selected as the target population for this study, as they fall within the Gen Z age bracket and are in the transitional phase from higher education to employment. Data collection involved an online survey assessing the work values of Kazakhstani Gen Z students, targeting those enrolled in business and technology programs at major university in Kazakhstan. The survey was conducted between February and April 2025 through email databases, digital communication platforms, and the mobilisation efforts of student leaders. A total of 115 questionnaires were received, of which 10 (8.7 %) were excluded due to missed questions and significant incompleteness or patterns suggesting indiscriminate responses (e.g., consistent selection of categories 1, 4, or 7 on the Likert scales) (Malhotra, 2020).

We assessed three categories of work values: intrinsic (related to the meaning and interest derived from the work itself), extrinsic (focused on material rewards such as salary and job security), and social (pertaining to relationships with co-workers and supervisors). The initial set of 19 items was developed based on the employer attractiveness scale by Berthon et al. (2005), which evaluates the “envisioned benefits” of working for an organisation. This aligns with our conceptualisation of work values as preferences and expectations regarding work and the workplace (Judge & Bretz, 1992; Ros et al., 1999). The items underwent a translation and back-translation process to ensure accuracy (Behling & Law, 2000) and were reviewed for relevance by two senior recruitment managers and an academic specialising in human resource management. Following this, the list was refined to 14 items (see Table 2).

Table 2. Work Values Ranked by Importance When Choosing an Employer

Rank	Work Values	When Choosing an Employer, How Important Are the Following Aspects? (1—Not at All; 7—Absolutely Important)
1	I	“Working in an exciting environment”
2	S	“Having a good relationship with my colleagues”
3	S	“Feeling accepted and have a sense of belonging”
4	I	“Working in an enterprising place, with innovative work practices and a vision for the future”
5	E	“Having good promotion opportunities within the organisation”
6	S	“Having a good relationship with my superiors”
7	S	“Having supporting and encouraging colleagues”
8	E	“Having job security and stability”
9	I	“Working in an organisation that produces high-quality products and services”
10	I	“Working in an organisation that values creativity and uses my creative abilities”
11	S	“Having a fun work environment”
12	E	“Having an attractive overall compensation package”
13	E	“Having an above-average basic salary”
14	I	“Working in an organisation that produces innovative/attractive/exciting products and services”
1	Social (5 items)	
2	Intrinsic (5 items)	
3	Extrinsic (4 items)	

Note – based on data Berthon et al. (2005)

In the final survey, students were asked to rate the importance of various factors in response to the question: “When choosing an employer, how important are the following aspects?” They evaluated 14 items using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 7 (extremely important). Additionally, students provided information on their expected monthly salary upon graduation and their preference for the size of their first employer (micro, small, medium, or large). Other demographic and classification questions included age, gender, field of study (business or technology), and anticipated final GPA. The data obtained from the survey was analysed using the SPSS Statistics 29 software package. Cronbach’s Alpha reliability analysis was used to refine the scales. As a result, the final three-factor structure of work values consisted of 14 items.

Results

The final sample consisted of 104 university students from Generation Z in Kazakhstan. The age distribution showed that the majority were 21 years old (62.5 %), followed by 20-year-olds (36.5 %), and a small proportion aged 22 (1.0 %). Regarding academic achievement, 58.7 % reported a GPA of 4.0 (“excellent”), and 41.3 % had a GPA of 3.0 (“good”). In terms of career aspirations after graduation, half of the respondents (50.0 %) indicated that they planned to start working immediately, while 30.8 % intended to continue their education at the postgraduate level (Master’s or PhD), and 19.2 % were unsure about their plans. These responses reflect a variety of potential career paths among Generation Z students. Geographical work preferences revealed that a majority (59.6 %) preferred to work in Kazakhstan, whereas 19.2 % favoured international employment, and 20.2 % remained undecided. Regarding work experience, 28.8 % of participants had engaged in internships or part-time jobs for over four months, while 26.9 % reported no work experience. Preferred working formats were predominantly remote (44.2 %) or hybrid (32.7 %), with a smaller group preferring full-time in-office roles. Salary expectations varied among respondents: 43.3 % anticipated a mid-level income (\$634–\$1,057 USD, based on an exchange rate of about 472 KZT = 1 USD (2024 average)), 32.7 % expected a below-average income (\$317–\$634 USD), and 23.1 % anticipated a higher income exceeding \$1,057 USD.

The majority of Generation Z respondents expressed openness to both domestic and international employment opportunities. Specifically, 65.4 % indicated that they would prefer to work mainly in Kazakhstan but are considering foreign options. This suggests a strong local orientation accompanied by a growing interest in global career paths. A smaller portion, 19.2 %, preferred to work only in Kazakhstan, reflecting a more domestically rooted outlook. Meanwhile, 13.5 % reported that the work location does not matter, indicating flexibility and adaptability in their job search. Only 1.9 % expressed a preference to work exclusively abroad. These results highlight that while the majority of young professionals still envision their careers within the country, a significant share is increasingly open to international opportunities, potentially driven by broader exposure, globalisation, and higher career expectations.

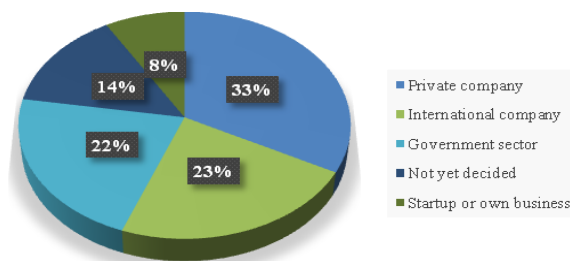


Figure 3. Sector Preferences After Graduation

Note – compiled by the authors based on the results of the conducted survey

The findings indicate a diverse range of career interests among Generation Z respondents in Kazakhstan, with many selecting more than one preferred employment sector as illustrated in Figure 3. The most frequently selected option was private companies, mentioned 63 times, suggesting strong interest in corporate careers perceived to offer flexibility, innovation, and growth opportunities. International companies were also a popular choice, cited 44 times, reflecting the global orientation and cross-cultural ambitions of many young professionals. The government sector received 42 mentions, highlighting continued appreciation for public service and perceived job security. Additionally, 27 responses indicated that individuals were undecided about

their preferred sector, reflecting a level of uncertainty or openness as they approach graduation. A smaller but notable number of respondents—16 in total—expressed interest in startups or launching their own business, indicating a growing entrepreneurial mindset among some members of Gen Z. Since respondents were allowed to select multiple sectors, these figures represent total mentions rather than exclusive choices. This suggests that many individuals are considering a range of pathways, combining local, international, public, and entrepreneurial possibilities as they shape their career aspirations.

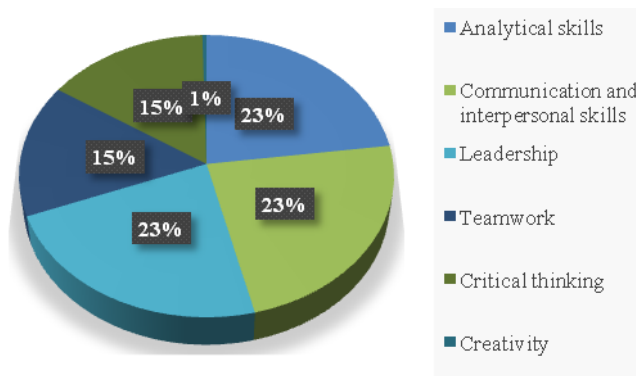


Figure 4. Key Career Skills

Note – compiled by the authors based on the results of the conducted survey

Respondents were also asked to identify the most important skills for their future careers, with the option to select multiple competencies. The results show a clear emphasis on a blend of cognitive, interpersonal, and leadership abilities (Figure 4). The most frequently selected skill was communication and interpersonal skills, mentioned 61 times, underscoring the strong importance placed on collaboration, emotional intelligence, and relationship-building in the workplace. Analytical skills and leadership followed closely, each with 60 mentions, reflecting Generation Z's recognition of the value of data-driven thinking and the aspiration to take initiative and lead within professional settings. Teamwork and critical thinking were both cited 40 times, further indicating that the ability to work cooperatively and evaluate information critically remains central to career readiness. Notably, creativity was mentioned only once, suggesting that while innovation may be appreciated, it is not yet viewed as a core skill priority by most respondents.

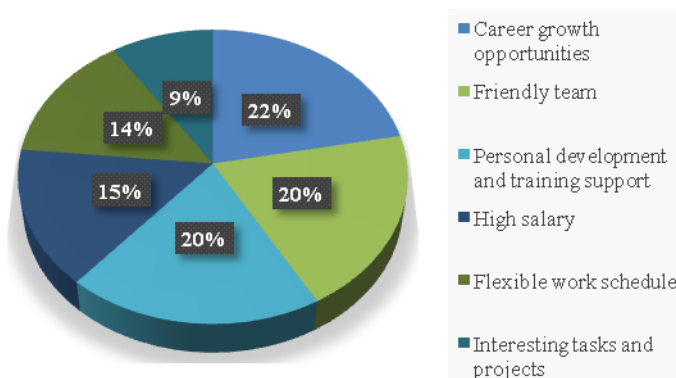


Figure 5. Motivational drivers of respondents

Note – compiled by the authors based on the results of the conducted survey

The analysis of respondents' expectations from their first workplace revealed several key motivational drivers that reflect the values and priorities of Generation Z in Kazakhstan (summarised in Figure 5). Among the most frequently selected aspects, career growth opportunities emerged as the dominant motivator, cited by 85 respondents (22 %). This suggests that Gen Z places high importance on structured pathways for advancement and professional development. Closely following, a friendly team (77 respondents, 20 %) and support for personal development and training (76 respondents, 20 %) were highly valued, indicating the genera-

tion's desire for a collaborative work environment and continuous learning opportunities. These findings highlight the social and intrinsic dimensions of work as significant to this cohort. High salary was chosen by 59 respondents (15 %), and flexible work schedule by 55 respondents (14 %), reflecting the importance of extrinsic rewards and work-life balance. Although these aspects ranked slightly lower than growth and social factors, they still represent essential components of Gen Z's motivation. Notably, interesting tasks and projects were mentioned by 36 respondents (9 %), suggesting that while task variety and creativity matter, they are less central compared to structural and relational elements of the work environment.

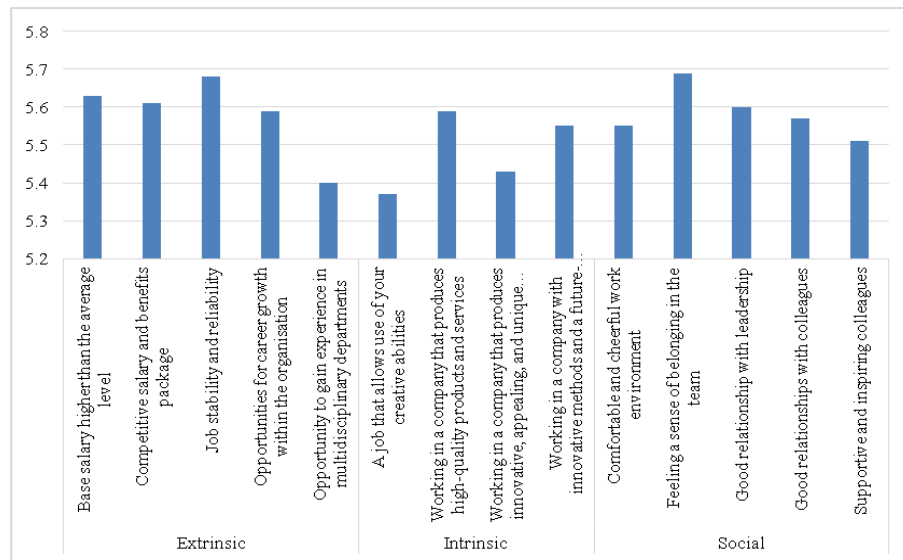


Figure 6. Mean scores of work value items, grouped into three categories: extrinsic, intrinsic, and social

Note – compiled by the authors based on the results of the conducted survey

To further explore the relative importance of different work values, the analysed aspects were categorised into three dimensions: **extrinsic**, **intrinsic**, and **social**, following established literature. Each item was rated by respondents on a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 (“not at all important”) to 7 (“absolutely important”). The results reveal distinct patterns in Generation Z's preferences regarding potential employers as shown in Figure 6. **Social values** were rated highest overall, with a cumulative mean score of **27.92**. Among these, *feeling a sense of belonging in the team* (mean = 5.69), *good relationships with colleagues* (mean = 5.57), and *a comfortable and cheerful work environment* (mean = 5.55) reflect the strong emphasis Gen Z places on interpersonal relationships and emotional well-being in the workplace. **Extrinsic values** were a close second, with a total mean of **27.91**. Notably, *job stability and reliability* (mean = 5.68), *base salary higher than the average level* (mean = 5.63), and *competitive salary and benefits package* (mean = 5.61) indicate that financial security and material rewards are critical motivational drivers. **Intrinsic values** received a slightly lower total mean score of **21.94**, but still reflect significant importance. Preferences such as *working in a company with innovative methods and a future-oriented vision* (mean = 5.55) and *working in a company that produces high-quality products and services* (mean = 5.59) show that meaningful work, creativity, and alignment with progressive organisational goals matter to respondents. Overall, the **grand total mean score across all values** was **77.77**, indicating a high level of importance assigned to all three value dimensions. These results suggest that Generation Z in Kazakhstan seeks a balance between financial stability, meaningful work, and a supportive workplace culture.

Reliability Analysis

To ensure the psychometric soundness of the scales used to measure work values among Generation Z in Kazakhstan, reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha coefficients was conducted. This method assesses the internal consistency of each dimension—namely, intrinsic, extrinsic, and social work values—indicating how closely related the items within each subscale are as a group. Cronbach's alpha is one of the most commonly used indicators for evaluating scale reliability in social science research, with values above 0.70 generally considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In the present study, all three dimensions demonstrated exceptionally high reliability, with coefficients well above the recommended threshold as illustrated in Table 3. Specifically, the social work values scale, which included five items reflecting interpersonal aspects of the

work environment (e.g., supportive colleagues, positive relationships with supervisors), achieved an alpha of 0.982. The intrinsic values dimension, comprising four items related to personal fulfilment and engagement with one's work (e.g., creativity, interest, purpose), yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.968. Similarly, the extrinsic dimension—assessing preferences for salary, job security, and advancement opportunities across five items—also recorded an alpha of 0.982.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for Work Value Scales

Work Value Type	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Social	5	0.982
Intrinsic	4	0.968
Extrinsic	5	0.982

Note – compiled by the authors based on the results of the conducted survey

These high coefficients confirm the robustness of the instrument in the Kazakhstani context. The internal consistency of the subscales indicates that respondents interpreted the items reliably and consistently. This affirms that the instrument is suitable for further analysis of work value orientations among Generation Z university students and can serve as a valid tool for both academic and applied HR research in Kazakhstan.

Prioritisation of Work Values Among Generation Z: Intrinsic, Extrinsic, and Social Dimensions

To determine which types of work values are prioritised by Kazakhstani Generation Z respondents, descriptive statistics—namely, the mean and standard deviation—for each of the three core dimension were computed. These statistics provide insight into the central tendencies and variability in the importance attributed to each value type. As shown in Table 4, the highest average rating was assigned to extrinsic values ($M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.75$), indicating a strong preference for financial compensation, job stability, and opportunities for advancement. This result aligns with previous findings that suggest Gen Z places high importance on economic security, especially in socio-economic contexts characterised by volatility or uncertainty (Rainsford et al., 2019). In the Kazakhstani context, this emphasis may reflect students' concerns about employment prospects, cost of living, and familial responsibilities. Closely following extrinsic values were social values ($M = 5.60$, $SD = 1.72$). This result reinforces the culturally embedded significance of group cohesion and interpersonal harmony within Kazakhstani society, as identified in studies on in-group collectivism (Jesuino, 2007). The high prioritisation of social aspects—such as positive team dynamics and supportive supervisors—suggests that Gen Z jobseekers value emotionally safe, inclusive, and collaborative environments. Intrinsic values ranked slightly lower ($M = 5.49$, $SD = 1.77$), though still well within the high-importance range. This suggests that while creativity, meaningfulness, and personal development are appreciated, they are slightly deprioritised relative to economic and social factors.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Work Value Dimensions (N = 104)

Work Value Type	Mean	Standard Deviation
Intrinsic	5.49	1.77
Extrinsic	5.61	1.75
Social	5.60	1.72

Note – compiled by the authors based on the results of the conducted survey

Nevertheless, the close proximity in mean values across the three dimensions points to a generally balanced perspective among Gen Z, with all value types being important to some degree. Taken together, these findings challenge simplistic portrayals of Generation Z as solely driven by passion or idealism. Instead, Kazakhstani Gen Z appears to approach employment decisions with a pragmatic lens—valuing not only meaningful work but also tangible rewards and supportive social environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the evolving work values of Generation Z in Kazakhstan, revealing both alignment with global trends and unique national characteristics. Consistent with established frameworks by Ros et al. (1999) and Twenge et al. (2010), Gen Z's work values can be divided into intrinsic, extrinsic, and social dimensions. However, the Kazakhstani context introduces distinctive nuances.

Quantitative results indicate that extrinsic and social values dominate the employment expectations of young Kazakhstani respondents. Among the top-rated factors were “a sense of belonging in the team”, “job stability”, and “competitive salary packages”, all with mean scores above 5.6 on a 7-point Likert scale. These

priorities strongly reflect the collectivist culture of Kazakhstan, where social cohesion and financial interdependence with family remain deeply rooted (Talapbaeva et al., 2023; Davies, 2019). The importance placed on financial rewards also aligns with findings from transitional economies, where job market instability encourages a focus on economic security (Rainsford et al., 2019).

Remarkably, while intrinsic values ranked slightly lower, they still held considerable importance. Respondents showed strong preferences for “creative autonomy”, “opportunities for cross-departmental experience”, and “working with inspiring colleagues”, especially among those aiming for careers abroad. This confirms previous research suggesting that Gen Z globally seeks meaningful and innovative work environments (Pichler et al., 2021; Turner, 2015). Respondents who expressed a desire to work internationally consistently rated intrinsic values, such as creativity, innovation, and stimulating work settings, higher than their peers. This suggests that aspirations for overseas employment may be driven by perceived misalignments between traditional Kazakhstani organisational structures and Gen Z’s preference for flexibility and autonomy (Zarubina et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the significant valuation of interpersonal relationships—reflected in the high ratings of good relationships with colleagues and supervisors—echoes social work values identified in earlier studies on Millennials and Gen Z (Ng et al., 2010; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). However, in Kazakhstan, this is further reinforced by local expectations of workplace harmony, hierarchy, and collectivist norms (Jesuino, 2007).

The findings of this study reflect broader regional and global patterns while also highlighting notable contextual distinctions. Consistent with the results from Silva and Carvalho (2021), intrinsic values, such as personal growth, meaningful work, and achievement were highly prioritised by Kazakhstani respondents. Similarly, our participants valued stability and financial security, mirroring the top-ranked dimensions in both Silva and Carvalho’s Portuguese youth sample and the multinational sample of Generation Z students from China, Germany, Thailand, and the Netherlands (de Boer et al., 2021).

However, the Kazakhstani sample placed even more pronounced importance on extrinsic work values, especially job security and salary. This emphasis aligns with the Russian youth study conducted by Gudkov et al. (2020), which found that 80 % of young respondents considered salary important, and 78 % prioritised job security. In both countries, this preference may reflect post-Soviet socio-economic uncertainty and the continuing importance of material stability during career formation.

In contrast, altruistic and social engagement values (e.g., giving back to the community, working with people) were consistently rated lower across our sample, echoing the Russian study where only 46–51 % of youth found these factors important. Meanwhile, in the cross-national study by de Boer et al. (2021), Thai and Dutch students assigned comparatively more value to altruism and social interaction, suggesting stronger collectivist or socially oriented orientations in those contexts. These cultural differences reinforce Hofstede’s framework, which posits that national context significantly influences work-related values. The ranking of learning and promotion opportunities as top priorities by Kazakhstani youth is also reflected across other settings. De Boer et al. (2021) found that learning (IN1) and promotion (EX2) were among the top values for Generation Z globally. These findings reinforce the importance of developmental opportunities for younger generations, regardless of geography, though the degree of prioritisation may vary.

Interestingly, values such as status and respect—part of extrinsic motivation—were rated lower both in this study and globally. In Kazakhstan, as in the multinational survey, values linked to visibility of impact and skills sustainability were more highly regarded, suggesting a shift away from traditional hierarchical motivations toward competence- and growth-driven aspirations.

The findings indicating that a substantial share of Generation Z respondents prefer international employment or express dissatisfaction with traditional workplace structures have important implications for Kazakhstan’s economic and social security. From an economic perspective, a strong preference for employment abroad may exacerbate the country’s ongoing “brain drain”, particularly in high-demand sectors, such as technology, finance, and engineering. The loss of highly educated and skilled young professionals can reduce the domestic talent pool, hinder productivity growth, and slow the country’s transition toward a knowledge-based economy (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

Socially, sustained emigration of younger cohorts could contribute to demographic imbalances, with a higher proportion of the working-age population concentrated in older generations. This dynamic may place additional pressure on social welfare systems and limit the availability of innovative human capital needed to drive public sector modernisation. Furthermore, dissatisfaction with rigid workplace hierarchies—especially prevalent in state-owned enterprises—signals a potential misalignment between institutional employment

structures and the evolving expectations of the youth workforce. Without targeted reforms, this mismatch could reduce job satisfaction, increase turnover, and weaken trust in domestic labour institutions.

Addressing these trends requires a dual approach: implementing policies that enhance the attractiveness of domestic employment opportunities through competitive wages, flexible work arrangements, and merit-based career progression, while also investing in sectors that align with Generation Z's values, such as digital innovation, sustainability, and social entrepreneurship. Such measures would not only improve retention of young professionals but also strengthen Kazakhstan's long-term economic resilience and social cohesion.

These findings have several practical implications for employers, educators, and policymakers in Kazakhstan and comparable post-transition economies. First, there is a need to enhance career development systems. Employers are encouraged to invest in transparent promotion pathways and provide continuous learning opportunities, as these elements play a crucial role in retaining Generation Z employees. Second, the emphasis placed by respondents on job security and financial stability suggests that clearly defined employment contracts, regular salary reviews, and comprehensive benefit packages are essential for attracting and maintaining young talent in the workforce.

Third, while altruistic or mission-driven values were rated lower than extrinsic or social factors, there remains potential for organisations to incorporate a sense of societal contribution into their identity and human resource practices. As individuals mature and gain more life experience, these values may become increasingly significant. Fourth, multinational companies operating in Kazakhstan should be cautious about applying global HR strategies uniformly. Instead, they should adapt their employer branding and incentive structures to reflect national cultural values and preferences.

Finally, there is an important role for policy support in facilitating youth employment. Government initiatives should focus on bridging the education-to-employment gap by developing structured internship programmes, entrepreneurship training, and soft skills development. These efforts align with the strong aspirations of Generation Z for personal growth and professional preparedness.

In conclusion, while Generation Z in Kazakhstan shares many of the global generation's aspirations, including a preference for meaningful work and career progression, the local emphasis on extrinsic stability underscores the need for culturally sensitive workforce strategies. Future research could explore how these values evolve as this cohort gains more workplace experience and faces shifting economic landscapes.

Overall, these findings confirm that Kazakhstani Gen Z is not homogenous. Their work values vary depending on personal career aspirations, particularly regarding geography. Those aspiring to international careers may be more attuned to intrinsic motivators and less accepting of hierarchical management practices still prevalent in Kazakhstan (Davies, 2019). Employers in Kazakhstan must recognise this internal diversity when designing human resource strategies. While financial incentives and job security remain crucial, increasing emphasis must be placed on meaningful work, innovation, and inclusion to meet Gen Z's full spectrum of expectations.

Conclusions

This study explored the work values and motivational drivers of Generation Z in Kazakhstan, revealing a complex interplay between global generational traits and local cultural dynamics. Findings showed that Gen Z values extrinsic and social aspects of work most strongly, particularly job security, competitive salary, and positive interpersonal relationships, reflecting both their formative experiences in a transitioning economy and Kazakhstan's collectivist traditions.

Nevertheless, a subset of Gen Z respondents expressed stronger preferences for intrinsic values, such as creativity, flexibility, and innovation, especially among those who envision careers abroad. This divergence highlights the emerging tension between Kazakhstan's traditional organisational culture and the evolving expectations of its youngest workforce. It also underscores the significance of tailoring HR practices not only to generational preferences but also to individual aspirations within the generation.

While the combination of idealism and pragmatism is common among youth worldwide, our survey results indicate that in Kazakhstan this mix is shaped by distinctive cultural and economic factors. Quantitatively, 62 % of respondents rated "good relationships with colleagues" and 59 % rated "a sense of belonging" as "extremely important" (score 7 on a 7-point Likert scale), placing social environment factors on par with or above salary considerations. This weighting is notably higher than the levels reported in comparable international studies (e.g., Twenge et al., 2010; Gallie, 2019), suggesting that workplace relational harmony plays a uniquely central role in employment decision-making for Kazakhstani youth.

Pragmatic priorities were also evident: 73 % of respondents selected “high salary” and 68 % chose “career growth opportunities” among their top three job expectations. Yet, the qualitative comments revealed that these material considerations were often discussed in the context of financial obligations to family — a reflection of the country’s strong in-group collectivism (Jesuino, 2007) and differing from patterns in more individualistic economies.

The “meaningful work” dimension in Kazakhstan also showed a distinctive orientation. While 41 % of respondents prioritised “interesting projects,” a significant portion linked “meaningfulness” to national development initiatives, for example, digitalisation projects, infrastructure modernisation, and contributions to social stability. This framing goes beyond the self-actualisation focus commonly found in Western contexts, indicating that for many Kazakhstani Gen Z workers, career fulfilment is intertwined with contributing to the country’s progress.

These data-driven insights demonstrate that, although idealism and pragmatism co-exist as in other youth cohorts, their expression in Kazakhstan is shaped by cultural collectivism, wage structures, and a sense of national purpose, distinguishing this generational profile from more universal patterns.

For Kazakhstani employers, the message is clear: to attract and retain Gen Z talent, a dual strategy is required. This includes maintaining financial and social security while progressively adopting flexible, tech-driven, and innovative work environments. Without such adaptation, the country risks losing its best talent to more agile and future-oriented employers abroad.

Future research could benefit from larger, more diverse samples across different regions of Kazakhstan and qualitative insights into how these values are negotiated in practice. Comparative studies with other post-Soviet countries could also deepen our understanding of the interplay between culture, economy, and generational change in workforce expectations.

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