

Navigating the Modern Workforce: Generation Z's Expectations, Motivators, and the Impact of Work Experience

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Abstract

This research investigates the job selection preferences, expectations, and motivational factors of Generation Z in Hungary, with a specific focus on the potential role of work experience. As Generation Z preferences may vary by age and years spent in the labour market, the online questionnaires reflection section on respondent age was divided into four subcategories. This allowed for a deeper identification of patterns in the data collected from 739 Generation Z respondents.

Contrary to our expectations, our findings showed that neither the prioritisation of an attractive physical work environment nor the demand for flexible working conditions differs significantly across various work experience groups within Generation Z. This suggests that these expectations consistently hold high priority for the generation, regardless of their current career stage. Furthermore, while career building opportunities are highly valued, we found no significant association between this priority and the pursuit of international job opportunities.

The study contributes to a better understanding of Generation Z's labour market behaviour in Hungary, highlighting the generation's workplace expectations. Despite the rapidly changing work environment, these expectations persisted. Practical implications suggest that employers should focus on providing attractive work environments and flexible work opportunities to attract and retain Generation Z.

Keywords

Generation Z, workplace expectations, work experience, work environment, work conditions

1 Introduction

One of the main challenges in today's job market is adapting to rapid changes in the work environment and effectively integrating new generations (Mileva et al., 2025). The arrival of Generation Z in the workforce has attracted significant interest from both researchers and human resource professionals. Individuals born after 1995 enter the job market with unique characteristics and expectations that are notably different from those of previous generations (Ozkan and Solmaz, 2015). It is essential to understand and manage this new employee generation effectively for organisations to maintain their competitive advantage (Zahari and Puteh, 2023). Generation Z's distinct way of thinking and personality traits are changing workplace dynamics, making it necessary to re-evaluate management approaches and retention strategies. Research indicates the importance of examining Generation Z's career expectations and their influence on human resource

management (Jayatissa, 2023). New motivations and expectations have emerged from Generation Z, who especially value workplace flexibility, a good work-life balance, and fast career progression (Ozkan and Solmaz, 2015). Their unique approach to work has led to trends such as "job-hopping", which presents a considerable challenge for employers (Zahari and Puteh, 2023). Frequent job changes result in high employee turnover and significant financial and non-financial costs for organisations. Recurring job-hopping could lead to counterproductive outcomes for Generation Z job seekers, as in specific situations their work experience won't increase meaningfully over the years, but they will instead repeat entry level positions.

By studying Generation Z's workplace expectations and how they make career decisions, and by understanding what drives their commitment, organisations can better prepare for the changing job market (Campbell et al., 2015;

Lyons and Kuron, 2014; Sobrino-De Toro et al., 2019). This allows them to develop strategies that help maintain their competitive advantage.

The goal of this study is to investigate the factors influencing Generation Z's job choices, specifically considering their work experience. This is because the experience of entering the workforce can differ greatly between a 16-year-old and a 28-year-old, leading to different expectations. Identifying these motivating factors can provide crucial information for employers when developing their recruitment strategies.

2 Theoretical background

The present study refers to the generational categories defined by Hungarian generational researcher Krisztián Steigervald (Steigervald, 2024), examining individuals born between 1995 and 2006 as members of Generation Z. One of the most comprehensive Hungarian studies on Generation Z, the "Gen Z Report" (Gen Z Report, 2025), investigated this generation's values, purchasing preferences, and spending habits. The research revealed that work-life balance is fundamental to this generation, though they approach the concept with a novel perspective. They increasingly refer to it as "life-work balance", thereby emphasising the prioritisation of their private sphere over their career. A significant portion of this generation still resides with their parents, yet many undertake work alongside their studies to achieve financial independence; 40% of respondents reported having their own income. However, their desired income substantially exceeds their current opportunities. These findings offer crucial guidance for employers and HR professionals on how to design workplace environments and work arrangements that meet Generation Z's needs and expectations.

Generation Z's distinct workplace expectations and preferences also emerge as significant influencing factors in numerous international studies, which help to understand the workplace engagement and satisfaction of this generation's members (Egerová et al., 2021; Septiawan and Masrunik, 2020), reflecting the broader view that different generations are characterised by distinct values, skills, traits, motivations and expectations (Sánchez et al., 2021). A recent systematic literature review by Shinde and Surve (2025) provides a comprehensive overview, confirming that the entry of Generation Z into the workforce significantly impacts organisational strategies and talent management. Their work emphasises that flexible work, fair pay, digital adaptability, and career development are

critically important for Generation Z's job satisfaction and retention. Furthermore, Shinde and Surve (2025) highlight the need for further exploration of cross-cultural differences and longitudinal studies on Gen Z's career evolution. Our current study investigates the job preferences and motivational factors of Generation Z in Hungary, aiming to address this research gap within a specific national context. Significant variation may also exist within a single generation, as differences in preferences – such as those related to physical work environment – can create distinct subgroups that prioritise a comfortable work environment with modern and ergonomic office equipment (Leslie et al., 2021). For Generation Z, flexibility is important not only in physical terms but also in work arrangements that allows work-life balance. A 2022 bibliometric analysis further reinforces this emphasis on flexibility (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022), revealing that members of Generation Z highly value flexible working hours and hybrid work arrangements, which allow them to work from both home and the office. This flexibility contributes to maintaining a balance between work and private life, and research indicates that for Generation Z members, the flexibility of the work environment and related arrangements has a significant impact on their workplace engagement and satisfaction, which in the long term affects their job performance and the success of companies (Carolus and Ginting, 2025; Jung and Yoon, 2021; Weideman and Hofmeyr, 2021). This perspective is strongly supported by the Deloitte Global 2025 Gen Z and Millennial Survey (Deloitte, 2025) which highlights that both generations are rejecting traditional career paths in pursuit of career satisfaction and happiness. Key drivers for them include work-life balance (Nguyen Ngoc et al., 2022), meaningful work, financial well-being, and opportunities to acquire new skills, often leading to career fluidity and job-hopping as a strategy for stability and personal growth. The strong preference for flexibility may also be linked to another characteristic feature of Generation Z: their willingness to work abroad (Baša et al., 2023). Openness to international mobility can be interpreted as an extension of their demand for flexible and non-traditional career paths, as working in a foreign country often requires adaptability both in professional and personal contexts. In this sense, international job opportunities may serve as a valuable means of career advancement, particularly for career-focused young individuals seeking to broaden their experience, develop new skills and enhance their long-term employability. In line with these individual-level

preferences, broader migration data reveals a notable shift. Emigration rates show a sustained increase in overall emigration, rising from approximately 67,364 individuals in 2020 to 84,286 in 2024 (Eurostat, 2026). This sharp increase in overall emigration raises an important research question as to whether this trend is connected to Generation Z's career-building strategies.

We assume that:

1. Respondents who have already worked full-time prioritise the work environment higher than those who have only entered the labour market as a student worker.
2. The prioritisation of flexible working conditions differs significantly across various work experience groups among Generation Z members.
3. Generation Z demonstrates conscious career planning, often seeking international job opportunities, which human resources can leverage as a motivational factor.

3 Method

3.1 Participants and procedure

The quantitative research questionnaire was the result of a joint doctoral collaboration. The research questions first focus on demographic information and workplace preferences, then after this common investigative section, they diverge into two topics, concentrating on workplace commitment and the examination of the work environment.

The pilot online questionnaire, completed in February 2025, received 124 responses. In order to increase reliability of the results, we expanded the participant pool in September 2025, recording an additional 616 responses. The analysis included 739 valid cases, representing 99.9% of the total sample. A minimal amount of missing data (0.1%) did not affect the statistical reliability of the findings.

Using this comprehensive dataset, our research investigated the job selection preferences of Generation Z in Hungary. A questionnaire was administered to representatives of this generation to map their underlying motivators. In addition to demographic questions, the following job selection factors were examined:

- Salary, as a factor, was excluded from the response options to avoid potential bias, based on the assumption that financial compensation is crucial to all respondents. Considering salary as part of the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory's basic human needs (Maslow, 1970) – with categorising salary to physiological and safety needs – led us to conclude that salary holds high importance for all participants. The finding is further supported by research from Surugiu et al. (2025) which concluded that members

of Generation Z are primarily motivated by salary. To provide a clearer overview of our research, we did not include salary as a possible answer choice. The key factors for this study represented by work environment, work conditions and career opportunities including international growth possibilities.

- Our study's first factor explores personal level, considering the importance of the work environment to understand the physical expectations in relation to work experience. We assumed that previous on-site work experience could provide insights into preferences and hold different significance for each employee.
- A wider range of factors include work conditions as another highly important factor, one that extends beyond physical space and offers flexibility on several levels. Remote work and flexibility have become basic expectations for the representatives of Generation Z, with certain factors efficiency could be affected positively to create beneficial working environments (Simon and Németh, 2021; Shinde and Surve, 2025).
- The third level of the observed factors reflects future opportunities and expectations related to career and international job opportunities.

3.2 Instruments

The two waves of the data collection were both conducted using an online questionnaire designed to explore Generation Z's job selection preferences, expectations, and motivational factors. The questionnaire comprised sections on demographic information and items investigating factors influencing job choice and specific workplace expectations.

Additionally, to the basic demographic questions (age, gender, place of living) work experience was measured by the "Do you work, or have you worked before?" question. This nominal variable categorised respondents' current or previous employment status into five groups: No work experience, Student worker, Intern, Part-time employment, and Full-time employment.

To examine job selection factors and workplace preferences, the questionnaire obliged the respondents to select from a predefined list the four most important factors that have the greatest impact on their job selection (salary was excluded as highlighted before). The prioritisation of each factor was recorded using binary variables (0 = not selected among the 4 most important; 1 = selected among the 4 most important). Variables relevant to this study included physical work environment, flexible working conditions, career building and international job opportunities.

The questionnaire was administered online, and the number of valid cases for the reported analyses was 739. All variables used in this study were either binary or nominal and were directly aimed at addressing research hypotheses.

3.3 Results

The results of the statistical analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses of the study. During data collection, measures such as anonymous questionnaire completion and clear question phrasing were implemented to minimise potential common method bias. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software, version 30 (IBM Corp., online). Given the nature of the variables within our dataset, primarily consisting of nominal and binary categories, appropriate non-parametric statistical methods, such as Chi-Square tests of independence, were employed to examine the associations between variables. The sample comprised 739 valid cases, as further detailed in the participants and procedure section.

3.3.1 Examination of work experience and workplace environment focus

To investigate our first hypothesis, which presumed that respondents with various work experience backgrounds prioritise the workplace environment differently, a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The independent variable was the type of work experience, while the dependent variable was the prioritisation of workplace environment importance. The importance of the workplace environment variable was coded as binary (0 = not prioritised, 1 = prioritised).

Descriptive statistics for the prioritisation of the workplace environment across different work experience groups are presented below: (number (N) = 739), No Work (N = 85): M = 0.32, SD = 0.468, Student Worker (N = 354): M = 0.29, SD = 0.454, Intern (N = 90): M = 0.28, SD = 0.450, Part-time Employment (N = 117): M = 0.27, SD = 0.448, Full-time Employment (N = 93): M = 0.30, SD = 0.461. The means across these groups exhibited a narrow range, varying between 0.27 and 0.32. Prior to performing the ANOVA, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was assessed using Levene's Test. The results indicated that the variances were homogeneous across the groups ($F(4, 734) = 0.562, p = 0.690$), thereby satisfying an important assumption for ANOVA.

The One-Way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant difference in the prioritisation of the workplace environment across the different work experience

groups ($F(4, 734) = 0.148, p = 0.964$). Given the non-significant overall ANOVA result, post-hoc tests were not formally required to identify specific group differences. Nevertheless, the Tukey HSD post-hoc test also confirmed that no statistically significant differences existed between any pairwise comparisons of the work experience groups regarding workplace environment prioritisation (all pairwise comparisons yielded p -values > 0.950). The effect size, as measured by Eta-squared, was 0.001, indicating that the type of work experience accounted for a negligible 0.1% of the variance in workplace environment prioritisation.

3.3.2 The influence of work experience on flexible working conditions prioritisation

Our second hypothesis proposed that the level of priority assigned to flexible working conditions based on their work experience, we employed a crosstabulation analysis and Pearson Chi-Square test. The independent variable was Work Experience, and the dependent variable was Prioritisation of Flexible Working Conditions. Given the categorical nature of both variables, the analysis was supplemented with Phi (ϕ) and Cramer's V as measures of association strength.

The crosstabulation table provides a detailed overview of the distribution of flexible working conditions prioritisation across different work experience groups. Overall, 67.9% of the total sample prioritises flexible working conditions, while 32.1% do not. The prioritisation rates within each work experience group were as follows:

1. In the "No work experience" group, 67.1% prioritised flexible working conditions.
2. In the "Student worker" group, 68.6% prioritised flexible working conditions.
3. In the "Intern" group, 67.8% prioritised flexible working conditions.
4. In the "Part-time employment" group, 68.4% prioritised flexible working conditions.
5. In the "Full-time employment" group, 65.6% prioritised flexible working conditions.

Based on the raw percentage data, no significant differences are visually identifiable across the work experience groups regarding the prioritisation of flexible working conditions; the percentages range within a narrow margin (65.6%–68.6%).

A Pearson Chi-Square test was conducted to examine the statistical association between work experience and the prioritisation of flexible working conditions.

The Chi-Square value was 0.358 (degrees of freedom, $d_f = 4$), with an asymptotic significance (2-sided p -value) of 0.986. As this p -value is higher than the conventionally accepted significance level of $p < 0.05$, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant association between the type of work experience and the prioritisation of flexible working conditions among Generation Z members.

Both Phi (ϕ) and Cramer's V, measures of association strength, yielded values of 0.022. These extremely low values indicate a very weak or negligible association. The corresponding asymptotic significance level was also 0.986. These results further confirm the lack of a meaningful relationship between the two variables.

3.3.3 Association between career planning and prioritisation of international job opportunities

This assumption is partly grounded in prior literature suggesting that Generation Z's preference for flexibility and non-traditional career paths may be associated with a greater openness to international mobility as part of more conscious career decision-making. To examine whether this assumed relationship can be observed empirically, the third hypothesis, was tested by analysing the binary variables of the prioritisation of career building and prioritisation of international job opportunities using frequency distributions and a cross-tabulation, complemented by a Chi-Square test.

The frequency analysis of the prioritisation of career opportunities variable revealed that the majority of respondents, 64.4% ($N = 476$), prioritise career building. In contrast, for the importance of international job opportunities variable, only 13.3% ($N = 98$) of the sample indicated that international job opportunities were important (Table 1).

This dramatic contrast highlights that while career building is a prominent consideration for Generation Z, pursuing an international career path is not as widely preferred by the majority. Gender distribution crosstabulation analysis did not result in a significant difference, indicating that international job opportunities and career opportunities are almost equally important for both men and women (Table 2).

To further explore the association between these two binary variables, additional crosstabulation was generated (Table 3).

Table 1 Frequency analysis of prioritisation on career building variable

Prioritised factor	Answered with Yes	Percentage
Importance of international job opportunities	98	13.3
Importance of career opportunities	476	64.4

Table 2 Crosstabulation analysis on gender preferences in career prioritisation

		Woman	Man
Importance of career opportunities	Count	254	222
	Percentage	63.3%	65.7%
Importance of international job opportunities	Count	50	48
	Percentage	12.5%	14.2%

Table 3 Crosstabulation analysis for importance of international job opportunities and importance of career opportunities

		Importance of international job opportunities			
Statistic		Not important	Important	Total	
Importance of career opportunities	Not important	Count	221	42	263
		Expected count	228.1	34.9	263
		% within importance of career opportunities	84%	16.0%	100%
		% within importance of international job opportunities	34.5%	42.9%	35.6%
		% of total	29.9%	5.7%	35.6%
	Important	Count	420	56	476
		Expected count	412.9	63.1	476
		% within importance of career opportunities	88.2%	11.8%	100%
		% within importance of international job opportunities	65.5%	57.1%	64.4%
		% of total	56.8%	7.6%	64.4%

An interesting observation emerged: among respondents who *did not* prioritise career building ($N = 263$), a slightly higher proportion (16.0%) prioritised international job opportunities compared to those who *did* prioritise career building ($N = 476$), where this proportion was 11.8%. This trend suggests a direction contrary to our initial hypothesis, which implied that conscious career planning would be associated with an active pursuit of international opportunities.

The statistical association between the two variables was examined using a Pearson Chi-Square test. The analysis revealed no statistically significant association between the prioritisation of career building and the prioritisation of international job opportunities ($\chi^2(1) = 2.604$, $p = 0.107$). As the p -value (0.107) exceeds the conventional significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, indicating no statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The strength of the association, as measured by Phi and Cramer's V values, was also very weak, both at 0.061 ($p = 0.107$), reinforcing the conclusion that any existing association is negligible in strength.

4 Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the factors influencing Generation Z's job choices in Hungary, specifically by considering their work experience, and to understand their workplace expectations and motivators. Through the analysis of three hypotheses, our findings highlighted the overall importance of the identified key factors (work environment, working conditions and career opportunities including international growth possibilities), as further analysis of the age groups did not bring the expected deeper insights.

The first hypothesis examined whether different types of work experience influence Generation Z's prioritisation of the workplace environment. The analysis did not support this hypothesis, as we found no statistically significant differences in the perceived importance of the workplace environment across various work experience groups ($F(4, 734) = 0.148, p = 0.964, \eta^2 = 0.001$). This suggests that the demand for an attractive and inspiring physical work environment is a universal characteristic of Generation Z, regardless of whether individuals have prior experience, are student workers, interns, or full-time employees. For companies, this implies that investing in the workplace environment is an attractive factor for all Gen Z employees, not just those at specific career stages.

The second hypothesis investigated the relationship between the prioritisation of flexible working conditions and work experience. This hypothesis proposed that the degree of prioritisation would differ significantly across various work experience groups. However, the analysis rejected this hypothesis, as we found no statistically significant association between the type of work experience and the prioritisation of flexible working conditions ($\chi^2(4) = 0.358, p = 0.986$). The strength of the association was also extremely weak (Cramer's $V = 0.022$). This crucial finding indicates that the demand for flexible working conditions consistently holds high priority across all work experience levels within Generation Z. Regardless of whether an individual has no prior experience, works as a student, intern, part-time, or full-time, flexibility appears as a priority in job selection at similar rates (approximately two-thirds). This confirms that flexibility is a fundamental, stable expectation for Generation Z, and not a factor that significantly changes with work experience.

The third hypothesis explored whether Generation Z members engage in conscious career planning and frequently seek international job opportunities. Although the majority of respondents (64.4%) prioritise career building, only 13.3% considered international job opportunities important. Furthermore, we found no statistically

significant association between the prioritisation of career building and the prioritisation of international job opportunities ($\chi^2(1) = 2.604, p = 0.107, \text{Cramer's } V = 0.061$). This suggests that while Generation Z is career-focused, this does not necessarily translate into a widespread demand for international mobility. Their career planning might focus more on domestic advancement, personal development, or specific industries, rather than geographical relocation.

4.1 Research contributions and future directions

This research contributes to the literature on Generation Z's labour market preferences, particularly within the Hungarian context, addressing a gap where empirical investigations remain limited. Our findings highlight that the demand for an attractive work environment and flexible working conditions emerges as a consistently high and stable expectation across all work experience groups within Generation Z. This insight challenges the assumption that these preferences would significantly alter with an individual's accumulated career experience, emphasising their nature for this generation. An additional contribution of our study is to highlight that while career building holds high priority, it is not significantly associated with the pursuit of international job opportunities. This provides a better understanding of Gen Z's career ambitions, which may rather focus on domestic development. These empirical data offer guidance for Hungarian employers and HR professionals to formulate targeted strategies for attracting and retaining Generation Z, considering their fundamental and stable expectations.

4.2 Limitations

This study also has limitations, which concurrently delineate directions for future research. The current cross-sectional design and binary measurement of preferences provided essential information, but future endeavours should investigate the depth and intensity of preferences using Likert-scale type questions, which would offer a deeper understanding of the relative weight of individual factors.

Secondly, the representativeness of the sample to the entire Hungarian Gen Z population might be limited (based on geographical, social, or educational background). Furthermore, while online questionnaire data collection is widely accepted among Gen Z, it might exclude certain subgroups. The generalisability of the results to other national or cultural contexts is also limited.

Increasing the granularity of the "work experience" variable (duration of experience, types of roles held) could provide deeper insights into its influencing power.

To comprehend long-term trends, longitudinal studies are warranted to track changes in Generation Z's workplace preferences over time. The inclusion of qualitative methods (e.g., focus groups, in-depth interviews) could help uncover the underlying reasons and motivations behind the observed statistical patterns. Furthermore, future research should incorporate explicit demographic and psychological control variables into analyses and conduct intergenerational comparative studies to identify truly generation-specific preferences. Following these research directions, a more comprehensive understanding of Generation Z's labour market integration and satisfaction can be anticipated.

5 Conclusion

Our findings provide several insights into Generation Z's workplace expectations and motivations in Hungary.

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- We highlight that the demand for an attractive work environment, as well as for flexible working conditions, are consistently high and stable expectations within this generation, regardless of an individual's current work experience. The priority of career building is strong, but it is not significantly associated with the general pursuit of international job opportunities. These findings offer guidance for employers and HR professionals to develop targeted strategies for attracting, motivating, and retaining Generation Z members in the Hungarian labour market.

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