ISSN: 2247-6172
Review of Applied Socio- Economic Research
(Volume 28, Issue 2/ 2024), pp. 163-178
URL: http://www.reaser.eu
e-mail: editors@reaser.eu

Comparative Analysis of Social Responsibility of Business in Kazakhstan and Developed Countries

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Abstract.
Corporate social responsibility of business is a crucial component both for increasing its competitive advantages and for achieving sustainable development goals. In this regard, the study of the principles of social responsibility among different companies is relevant. Thus, the study aims to investigate the reasons for the current pace of development of corporate social responsibility in Kazakhstan. Sociological analysis, as well as elements of economic analysis, and a comparison of fundamental concepts and modern approaches to the study of corporate social responsibility, was used. The study demonstrated that a prerequisite for the long-term and effective functioning of a business is an understanding of the dependence of financial indicators on the company image quality in front of investors, top management, consumers, and the public, which creates the necessary background of trust in a business that can be achieved by using the theory of reasonable corporate egoism in corporate social responsibility practice, as well as the implementation of integrated reporting. Furthermore, the research analysed statistical data that describes the level of corporate social responsibility in Kazakhstan and other countries. Based on the analysis, factors that influence the formation of corporate social responsibility in the country were identified, and practices that can be used in Kazakhstani business practices to improve the situation in the context of corporate social responsibility were described. The results obtained bring new knowledge for understanding the peculiarities of companies' activities in the context of approaches to corporate social responsibility.

Keywords: social responsibility, business, stakeholders, risk, partnership, transparency, philanthropy.

JEL Codes: M14, P33, O16

1. Introduction

Since the early 2000s, the field of business and entrepreneurship has moved beyond just job creation, wealth creation and income generation. With its development, new goals are emerging as big businesses start to play an increasing role in the development of the social component of the locality, region and country. Society, when assessing the performance of a business, has begun to look beyond operational and financial performance to the business behaviour of the organisation, its commitment to employee welfare and the extent to which its activities are aligned with the interests of other market players, residents and the wider community (Carroll, 2021; Knudsen et al., 2020). Interest in the theory and practice of business social responsibility, corporate social responsibility (CSR), socially responsible business behaviour, corporate

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ISSN: 2247-6172
Review of Applied Socio- Economic Research
(Volume 28, Issue 2/ 2024), pp. 163-178
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citizenship, and socially responsible investments in economic theory and sociology of the post-Soviet space appeared only less than two decades ago, while in developed countries the development of theory and generalisation of practice of these phenomena have been carried out since the middle of the 20th century. The subject of social responsibility of business was covered in many publications in the media of the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK). Many publications provided a qualitative increase in knowledge, both from the standpoint of the theory of the question and from the standpoint of the accumulation and analysis of empirical data.

The role of social capital in the development of the country was noted by Darmenova and E. Koo (2021). They noted that now social capital plays a huge role in ensuring the sustainable development of Kazakhstan. Researchers pointed out the role of social capital in achieving economic well-being but did not provide recommendations for its preservation. Problems in the sphere of sustainable development in Kazakhstan were, in turn, considered by Yelubayeva et al. (2023). They described the existence of problems in the sphere of education and some other components of the principles of sustainable development. It is worth noting, however, that ensuring social and corporate responsibility should also remain one of the important components of achieving these goals. Therefore, the state authorities, among others, should address this issue. As Sansyzbayeva et al. (2020), a consistently positive relationship between financial indicators, the value of equity capital and the level of disclosure of information about CSR or social performance in general. The focus of the companies' effective activities is shifting from shareholders to the side of stakeholders, while companies dropping out of CSR ratings are experiencing significant financial difficulties and a decline in their competitiveness.

Bulkhairova et al. (2023) addressed the issues of social responsibility in Kazakhstan. The scholars described trends in the development of this component and highlighted the importance of the country adopting a more systematic approach to policy development in this area. However, no statistical data were evaluated in this paper, which may make the findings unreliable. Orazayeva and Arslan (2021), in turn, studied factors that both hinder and facilitate CSR initiatives. They highlighted indicators such as corruption, weak stakeholder engagement and inadequate state control but paid little attention to how the negative effects of these variables on enterprises could be reduced. Moreover, a key aspect of disclosing information about CSR is to reduce the non-diversified risks of uncertainty, as well as the cost of monitoring the company's activities for the potential placement of capital in its assets. However, in Kazakhstan, as in all countries of the post-Soviet space, the understanding and appropriate implementation of the modern concept of CSR has not yet reached the level observed in developed countries. CSR is considered, to a greater extent, as following tradition and implementing the ethical principles of a leader. It is not considered as a source of competitive advantages and creates a positive image for foreign partners and investors. This limits the potential of CSR to strengthen international trust in Kazakh business and, in a broader aspect, increase the competitiveness of Kazakhstan as a country.

Further research is required on the problem of motivation and technologies for implementing CSR, trends in the development of social management and business participation in it, the mechanisms of interaction between the state, business, and civil society institutions in solving social problems and communication between them, as well as the development of joint responsibility of all its subjects. In this regard, the study aims to assess the reasons for the current trends in the development of corporate social responsibility in Kazakhstan.

2. Theoretical Overview

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Within the Kazakh context of business and academia, social responsibility is often seen through various lenses, such as charity, patronage, corporate social responsibility, social marketing initiatives, sponsorship, and philanthropy (Maier, 2021; Velte, 2022). The notion of business social responsibility is understood as the influence that business activities have on society. It represents the accountability of business decision-makers to those who are affected, either directly or indirectly, by their decisions (Zaman et al., 2020; Kalna-Dubinyuk et al., 2023). Moreover, businesses are increasingly facing pressures that encourage them to act responsibly, driven not just by legal requirements but also by the expectations of both internal and external stakeholders. These include the authorities, political parties, the media, public organizations, their workers and employees, and shareholders (Zyma et al., 2020). Businesses in Kazakhstan are increasingly using the terms 'corporate social responsibility" and "social investments". Meanwhile, the real social policy of companies is often limited to ordinary charity. Many entrepreneurs engage in charity work, but these actions are fragmented (Rexhepi, 2023). For Kazakh business, the approach of the classic CSR suggested by Friedman (the theory of corporate selfishness) to understanding CSR is more typical: according to this approach, the main task of a business is to "make money" for shareholders and clients within the legal framework while paying all the necessary taxes.

For Kazakhstan to position itself among the world's effectively developing nations, the establishment of universally high Corporate Social Responsibility standards is crucial. The country is championing the ethical responsibility of businesses, grounded in what could essentially be described as a Kantian "moral obligation". This perspective, known in CSR discourse as the theory of corporate altruism, stands in stark contrast to Friedman's theory, which originated from the Committee on Economic Development. The core premise here is that businesses should not solely focus on profit maximization but should also actively contribute to addressing social issues, enhancing the well-being of citizens and communities, and preserving the environment (Rasche et al., 2017). This approach, however, meets with resistance from the business community and leads to avoidance of CSR responsibilities, highlighting that such polarized views do not facilitate the smooth and effective advancement of business social responsibility in Kazakhstan. In contrast, a more balanced and effective approach known as "intelligent self-interest" or "enlightened self-interest" offers a way to reconcile these opposing views. This theory suggests that CSR is a strategic business practice because it mitigates long-term profit risks. Investments in social and charitable initiatives may reduce short-term earnings, but they foster a supportive social atmosphere that leads to sustainable profitability (Haski-Leventhal, 2018).

With the great popularity of the term "corporate social responsibility", there are ambiguous interpretations and understandings of it. This term is directly related to the term "sustainable development". In general, corporate social responsibility can be viewed as a concept that supports the principles of sustainable development. As a rule, CSR goes beyond the obligations and responsibilities established by law and involves voluntary initiatives by organisations to take measures that contribute to sustainable development (Morokhova & Boiko, 2022). It is customary to point out the threefold approach when defining the term "sustainable development". This approach implies the harmonious development of society (also applicable at the scale of an individual organisation) in the following three dimensions: social dimension, environmental dimension, and economic dimension (Yevdokymova et al., 2019). The success and effectiveness of an organisation in these dimensions testify to an effective, sustainable development process. From a practical standpoint, adherence to the principles of CSR and its declaration can serve as a competitive advantage.

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3. Materials and Methods

Developing countries, which include Kazakhstan, do not have many indicators that could help assess the situation in terms of the social responsibility of enterprises. This complicates the process of conducting the research, but despite this, it was still possible to find some indicators that can help assess CSR in the country. Thus, the Social Progress Index (SPI) was used, which has been calculated since 2011. It is a comprehensive tool for assessing the level of social and environmental development of countries or regions without relying directly on economic indicators such as gross domestic product per capita but focuses on measuring the well-being of society and the ability of a country to meet the basic human needs of its citizens. It includes components such as access to health care, housing, and security. Although this indicator did not allow for the direct assessment of the level of corporate social responsibility, it was used to conclude the social well-being of citizens, which enterprises also influence.

To assess the level of corporate social responsibility in Kazakhstan, several individual factors were used, most of which were taken from the source of the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which provides large amounts of different kinds of data in the country. The exception is the Social Progress Index (2024), which was used to assess the level of charity in Kazakhstan in comparison with other countries. To better comprehend the general state of the level of development of corporate social responsibility in the country, the author's index was constructed. During its construction, average levels were found for each of the indicators for the selected period (in the framework of the study – from 2010 to 2022); subsequently, the ratio of each indicator in year n compared to the average was found, and its normalisation was carried out by finding the square root of two. The final index value was calculated by finding the geometric mean of these indicators. All of this can be depicted as shown under Formula 1 and 2 below:

$$E_{mn} = \frac{F_{mn}}{F_{mav}}, \quad (1)$$

$$I_n = \sqrt[m]{(E_{n1} * E_{n2} * \dots * E_{mn})}, \quad (2)$$

where: Fmn – the value of indicator m in year n; Fmav – average value for indicator m in period n; Emn – the relative value of indicator Fm in period n; In – the value of the index in period n.

Furthermore, the analysis of its yearly dynamics was an important component, namely, how much it has become higher or lower compared to year 1 (2010). For this purpose, for each year except the first (for which the value of the indicator is 0), the difference between this indicator and the level as of year 1 was found.

Among the research methods used in this paper, it is worth mentioning the historical method, which was used to assess past trends in the formation of corporate social responsibility in Kazakhstan, as well as to evaluate statistical data that described the development of this trend. Furthermore, the normalisation method was used, as much statistical data was brought to common denominators for their evaluation. The method of comparison was also used to assess the dynamics of corporate social responsibility development in different countries.

4. Results and Discussions

Research in the field of social reporting as a separate area, which identifies key information about the impact on the internal and external social environment, intensified in the second half of the 1980s. It stood

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out from research in accounting and management accounting, where CSR reporting was regarded as complementary to financial information. Modern theory suggests that CSR reporting is part of the information space that forms the basis of social dialogue between the enterprise and the community (Al-Shammari et al., 2022). During the 1980s, there was no systematic understanding of the information that needed to be included in social reporting and the types of activities that needed to be disclosed to obtain public accreditation. In the 1990s, a considerable surge in the disclosing of information on the activities of companies was observed around the world. At the same time, new areas of disclosure of reporting appeared (especially in the field of ecology and employee training), and the tendency to unify reports within certain industries increased. In the post-Soviet space, a similar rise was observed a decade later, that is, in the mid-2000s. For more than a decade, the trend of transformation of the reporting published by companies has continued in developed countries. Meanwhile, from a theoretical standpoint, the complete disclosure of corporate social responsibility information serves as a powerful signal to the external environment and helps reduce information asymmetry between various groups of external and internal stakeholders.

In recent times, Central Asian countries have witnessed a surge in the advancement of Corporate Social Responsibility, with a growing number of organizations publishing annual CSR reports. Yet, this trend of transparency about CSR practices tends to be limited to larger corporations, while many small and medium-sized enterprises remain reticent, often not prioritizing CSR. Additionally, some major companies perceive social responsibility primarily as philanthropy and choose not to publicize their efforts for fear of being targeted by charitable organizations. Despite these challenges, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of business social responsibility in Central Asia. However, the understanding and implementation of CSR vary across countries within the region. Specifically, Kazakhstan stands out for having the most advanced CSR practices among the post-Soviet developing countries, according to some analysts. Kazakhstan is considered a leader in CSR in Central Asia, tracing back to the mid-1990s when foreign companies entering the market began to exhibit their commitment to social responsibility. Although the concept of CSR was new in Kazakhstan just five years ago, there has since been a rapid increase in both public and corporate awareness of social responsibility principles. Nevertheless, a unified perception of CSR has yet to be established in the country.

The first stage can be regarded as the initial stage in the development of the CSR system in Kazakhstan (Orazayeva & Arslan, 2021). It emerged in the context of entrepreneurship development in the late 1980s, when, during perestroika, the first commercial enterprises appeared and started engaging in charity work. These were mostly one-time “promotions”, and the owner determined the choice of the beneficiary according to personal preferences. Initially, CSR was expressed in the simplest forms of charity: gifts timed to coincide with annual holidays, distribution of food packages, financial support to needy employees of the enterprise, and other social events characteristic of this period. Therefore, it is essential that in Kazakhstan, from the very beginning, local authorities played an important role in strengthening and developing the traditions of charity. At the request of akimats (territorial and city authorities), regional businesses allocated funds to maintain social facilities or programs for which there was not enough government funding. As a rule, entrepreneurs met the wishes of the authorities, guided, among other things, by the prospects for obtaining benefits and preferences and reducing the risk of conflicts. The most ambitious type of charity on the part of business was the construction of mosques. Many businessmen built them at their birthplaces. At the time of gaining independence, 68 mosques functioned in Kazakhstan. Now, there are already 2.320 of them, as well as about 1.000 other religious buildings. Only in Almaty during the period under review the number of mosques increased from 2 to 31. The government of the Republic of Kazakhstan even adopted a special decree regulating the process of building mosques (Responsible Business Conduct…, 2014).

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According to the practice developed in Soviet times, the maintenance of social infrastructure facilities was often assigned to large city-forming enterprises. The privatisation of Kazakh enterprises in the 1990s led to the transfer of social facilities to the balance of local authorities, which, as a rule, did not have enough budgetary funds for their maintenance. As a result, large enterprises were forced to support social projects, events, sports clubs, and infrastructure as part of corporate philanthropy. Local sports teams in the republic are maintained mainly at the expense of corporate sponsors to this day, often in a semi-coercive manner. The second stage in the development of a modern CSR system in Kazakhstan was the period from 1994 to 2000. The President of the RK, N. Nazarbayev, signed a decree on social partnership in the field of socio-economic and labour relations, which became a regulatory basis for multi-layered social partnership (republic, industry, region) (Smirnova, 2012). The important external stimuli for the development of CSR at this stage include the beginning of the process of accession to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The latter prepared a special report on the prospects for introducing CSR principles in the republic. OECD experts took part in the development of the draft National Concept of Social Responsibility of Business, the first among the Central Asian countries (Responsible Business Conduct…, 2014).

The specific features of Kazakhstan are a high degree of state participation in the development of corporate governance and CSR, with a low activity of republican non-governmental organisations, active development of standards with a focus on the best international practices, relatively high participation of small and medium-sized businesses (compared to other states in Central Asia). There is a demand for CSR projects in the information and Internet environment, and corporate volunteering has been actively developing since 2010. Due to the national policy in the early 2000s, a modern vision of CSR and the corresponding management practice of organising projects, primarily social ones, developed in the business environment of Kazakhstan. This was also facilitated by the emergence of personal and corporate awards, such as the Tarlan personal award for outstanding achievements in the humanitarian fields of human activity. The award has been presented by the Club of Patrons of Kazakhstan since 2000 for outstanding achievements in humanitarian fields.

In his 2006 address, the first president of Kazakhstan highlighted the significance of the social responsibility of national companies, underscoring its value not just for businesses and their employees but also for the nation's interests. He advocated for aligning Kazakhstan's standards with a UN initiative aimed at adopting international social responsibility management standards for businesses. Nazarbayev called for the establishment and implementation of universally recognized norms for business social reporting and the enhancement of corporate social responsibility in addressing national challenges. This effort was to be supported by incentives for socially responsible businesses, focusing on environmental conservation, addressing significant national and regional issues, developing skilled professionals, protecting worker health, and fostering economic growth and citizen welfare (Smirnova, 2012). This move reflects the broader global emphasis on sustainable development and the need for a deeper understanding and regulation of CSR, including its analysis, measurement, and verification. In Kazakhstan, the practice of signing memorandums and agreements regarding corporate social responsibility has become widespread, including significant contributions in East Kazakhstan and the Pavlodar region. These investments by entrepreneurs are notably impacting social development across regions, leading to the construction of new educational, healthcare, rehabilitation, cultural, and sporting facilities, as well as support for the economically disadvantaged. The republic actively engages in social partnership, with an annual national tripartite General Agreement addressing critical social and labour issues such as job creation, unemployment reduction, remuneration improvements, and workplace safety. Additionally, around two hundred regional and nineteen sectoral agreements are currently active, with more than 31 thousand collective agreements signed (Sansyzbayeva et al., 2020).

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Considerable gaps in understanding of CSR were noted among government officials and representatives of the civil society. Both groups view the social responsibility of business as mainly charitable. In Kazakhstan, only 57% of companies believe in the necessity for businesses to engage in social responsibility. This belief is primarily held by large corporations, especially those in industries like oil, gas, and mining, which are perceived as having a significant impact on the environment and public health. Small businesses, in contrast, are less inclined or prepared to participate actively in CSR activities compared to their medium and large counterparts. The barriers to CSR implementation cited by companies include financial constraints, a lack of government incentives, insufficient knowledge and skills, regulatory shortcomings, a societal information gap, inadequate public recognition of corporate contributions to society, and challenges in measuring CSR outcomes (Sansyzbayeva et al., 2020; Kalyuzhna et al., 2024). Despite the Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 120-VI "On Taxes and Other Obligatory Payments to the Budget (Tax Code)" (2017) offering a 3% tax deduction for charitable contributions, many companies find this insufficiently motivating due to the low deduction rate and the bureaucratic process involved in claiming it.

The main reasons for the intensive development of corporate social responsibility include the activation of the movement of social groups that criticise the decisions and actions of businesses, the refusal of consumers to purchase goods and use the services of irresponsible companies, as well as the growth of the trade union movement (Teta & Xhafka, 2023; Konstantynovskyi & Zmicerevska, 2023). Therewith, there is a tightening of labour and environmental legislation; there are public initiatives aimed at the development of corporate social responsibility. It is known that social expectations about business have changed over the years, and these changes, in turn, have contributed to society's perception of the role of business. It is important here to distinguish between legal and social responsibility. On each issue, there are hundreds and thousands of laws and regulations, for example, how many toxic substances can be contained in industrial effluents, how to eliminate discrimination in employment, what are the minimum product safety requirements, and what type of goods can be sold to other countries. An organisation that is subject to all these laws and regulations is behaving in a legally responsible manner, but it will not necessarily be considered socially responsible either. International practice shows that one of the main indicators of the level of CSR development in the country is the adoption of the National Strategy for Corporate Social Responsibility. For example, the European Commission (2020) is responsible for developing and executing a common strategy for the European Union (EU), which member states subsequently modify to their specific socioeconomic conditions. Following the implementation of these policies, EU member nations develop individual action plans outlining responsible organisations, finances, and collaborations. However, without actual corporate participation in the formulation, execution, and continual refinement of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plans, which is based on strong motivation, these national strategies risk becoming mere formalities devoid of content and efficacy. In recent talks, there has been a greater emphasis on Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards, which are critical for ensuring that CSR activities are not merely theoretical but actually practical and effective in practice.

Research carried out in the Republic of Kazakhstan revealed different understandings of CSR among different groups of stakeholders – business, government bodies, and civil society organisations (Responsible Business Conduct…, 2014). The National Concept on CSR was prepared for a broad discussion of the issues of social responsibility of business and aims to bring stakeholders to a common understanding and comprehension of CSR, as well as to unite disparate efforts in promoting CSR in Kazakhstan. Particular attention to the concept is paid to the most effective use of accumulated experience, ways to encourage innovation in the field of CSR, creating greater transparency and strengthening the reliability of assessment and verification, which plays an important role in conceptualisation processes (Okafor et al., 2021). The document proposes a set of techniques based on expanding partnerships in which all parties play an active

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role. However, only the experience accumulated in Kazakhstan itself and, for some reason, in Russia is considered, which the authors of the document, albeit implicitly, refer to as a reference point. Meanwhile, as the results of the studies indicate, there is no complete understanding of CSR among business representatives. Therefore, only some of its areas are widespread. According to the survey results, Kazakh companies most of all implement such areas of CSR as:

– fair business practices (application of the principles of fair competition, respect for property rights, compliance with tax obligations);

– labour relations (observance of labour rights of workers; labour protection; provision of a social package; development and training of personnel);

– observance of human rights (non-discrimination).

The Kazakh CSR model is based on the preferences and interests, most importantly of the government. In this regard, corporate social responsibility is regarded as a joint activity between business and government, and companies are required to use part of the profits to meet social needs. A so-called Kazakh type of closed business society has emerged, where stakeholders such as employees, suppliers, and consumers do not have sufficient influence on the activities of companies, while many Western companies monitor the level of social responsibility even of their suppliers, developing special compliance requirements and refusing to cooperate with suppliers with a low level of CSR.

Competent CSR helps increase loyalty and trust from employees, customers, partners, and other stakeholders with whom the company interacts (Fatmawati & Fauzan, 2021; Trofimov et al., 2019). Thus, the establishment and development of mutually beneficial mechanisms of social investment, social partnership, and corporate citizenship should become a key element of a long-term strategy for constructive interaction between government and business structures in modern Kazakhstan. Notably, Kazakh companies that have integrated CSR into corporate (organisational) management have a special budget, a proper management structure at the management board level, a programme monitoring and evaluation system, social responsibility strategies, a CSR board, and even a semblance of social (non-financial) reports. However, since CSR is not integrated into the business strategy and business model in Kazakh companies, such reporting does not provide investors with a complete picture; it is a report for regulators. Meanwhile, the world's largest companies are actively involved in reporting in an integrated format. Currently, integrated reporting is being implemented in more than 25 countries around the world. At the same time, regional networks for integrated reporting are being created, allowing their participants to interact, share experiences, and exchange opinions.

To assess quantitatively the level of development of corporate social responsibility in Kazakhstan, individual indicators characterising the level of corporate social responsibility in the country in one way or another were assessed. These indicators provide critical insights into how corporate practices influence societal well-being and highlight the responsibilities of enterprises in the region. Environmental indicators, such as pollution emissions, are essential for understanding the ecological impact of businesses and assessing trends in corporate environmental responsibility. Labor rights indicators, such as gender wage ratio and occupational injury frequency, reveal how well companies uphold labor standards and protect employee welfare. These metrics are crucial for evaluating the social dimensions of CSR, as they reflect the treatment of employees and the commitment of businesses to fostering a fair work environment. These data are shown in Table 1.

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Table 1: Data on selected indicators characterising corporate social responsibility in Kazakhstan

Indicator	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**
Emissions of liquid and gaseous pollutants, thousand tonnes	1587.2	1715.2	1790.5	1731.5	1762.5	1714	1811
Emissions of solid pollutants, thousand tonnes	639.3	631.1	593.8	551.2	494.2	466	460.6
The ratio of average monthly wages of women to men, %	x	32	30.5	32.2	33	34.1	31.4
Share of informally employed in total employment, %	x	x	26	24.3	25.0	22.9	18.6
The ratio of employment in the 15-17 age category to total employment, %	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.2
Frequency of occupational injuries per thousand employees	0.48	0.47	0.45	0.42	0.39	0.33	0.32
Frequency of fatal occupational injuries per thousand employees	0.08	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.05
State compliance with labour rights as documented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and national legislation, %	87.4	88.6	92.2	92.4	92.8	93.1	93.3
Share of waste recycling and utilisation in the total amount of waste produced, %	x	x	17	18	23	23.12	26.8
World Giving Index	121	110	115	66	101	56	96
Commercial organisations that interacted with a public official at least once in the last 12 months and either provided a bribe to a public official or faced a bribe demand from a public official, %	x	x	x	x	x	17.4	36.8
Value	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**Change, %**
Emissions of liquid and gaseous pollutants, thousand tonnes	1882.1	1938.7	1975.4	1940.7	1915.8	1868.5	17.7
Emissions of solid pollutants, thousand tonnes	475.7	508	507.8	500.4	491.7	446.3	-30.2
The ratio of average monthly wages of women to men, %	32.2	34.2	32.2	25.0	21.7	25.2	-21.3
Share of informally employed in total employment, %	16.2	14.9	13.7	14.1	13.6	12.9	-50.6
The ratio of employment in the 15-17 age category to total employment, %	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.8	0.9	-1.5
Frequency of occupational injuries per thousand employees	0.29	0.25	0.23	0.23	0.22	0.21	-56.3
Frequency of fatal occupational injuries per thousand employees	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	-62.5

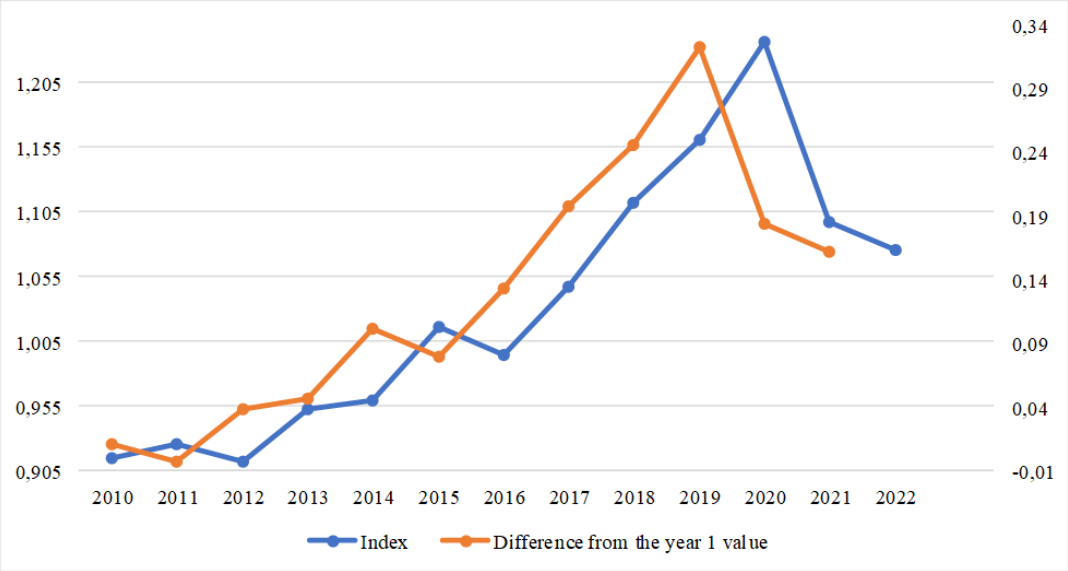
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State compliance with labour rights as documented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and national legislation, %	93.3	94.4	95.5	97.1	98.1	97	11
Share of waste recycling and utilisation in the total amount of waste produced, %	30.86	32.2	34	36.02	38.23	40.03	135.5
World Giving Index	87	96	96	96	98	93	-23.1
Commercial organisations that interacted with a public official at least once in the last 12 months and either provided a bribe to a public official or faced a bribe demand from a public official, %	21.6	16.1	8.5	2.8	6.6	10.8	-37.9

As can be seen, the dynamics of different indicators in Kazakhstan that characterise corporate social responsibility are changing at different rates. Thus, emissions of liquid and gaseous pollutants are gradually increasing, while emissions of solid pollutants are decreasing. At the same time, calculating the sum of pollutant emissions, their amount for the whole period has increased, which may indicate that companies in Kazakhstan are not efficient enough in their efforts to combat environmental pollution. In terms of equality of remuneration for women and men, there are positive trends: the difference in remuneration decreased from 32% to 25.2%. There has also been a decrease in the proportion of informally employed persons, a decrease in the injury rate, and an increase in the level of respect for labour rights: all of these are positive trends. The recycling rate has increased significantly, the number of companies dealing with corruption has decreased, and the World Giving Index, which shows the level of charity in the country, has improved. Negative trends were observed in the indicator of the share of employed people aged 15-17 in the total number of employed people, or, more precisely, this indicator remained unchanged during the assessment period. Considering all the above analyses, the trends in Kazakhstan are generally positive. Nevertheless, to reach an unambiguous conclusion, an index for assessing the level of corporate social responsibility was formed, the values of which are shown in Figure 1.

ISSN: 2247-6172
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Figure 1: Author's index of corporate social responsibility in the period from 2010 to 2022



As can be seen from Figure 1, the value of the index is increasing, which indicates the existence of positive trends in this context in Kazakhstan. The only exception is a slight decline below the 2010 level in 2012. It is difficult to state clearly what this increase is primarily due to, as the country is gradually improving in many indicators at about the same time. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the situation in Kazakhstan in terms of corporate social responsibility is gradually improving. As mentioned earlier, there are currently not many opportunities to compare the level of corporate social responsibility between different countries (including because many indices simply do not include Kazakhstan). An essential component in measuring CSR is the SPI, which assesses people's overall social well-being. Although the SPI does not explicitly analyse corporate social responsibility, it does give information on how businesses affect society outcomes. The SPI encompasses several characteristics, including access to healthcare, education, and safety, all of which can be influenced by business actions. For example, a corporation that invests in community health initiatives or educational programs boosts the SPI, improving social well-being. This relationship emphasises the significance of including SPI data in CSR evaluations, as it helps to demonstrate the broader impact of company activities on community welfare. One such option is to assess the SPI, the values of which for the Republic of Kazakhstan and some other countries are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: SPI values for individual countries, including Kazakhstan, from 2011 to 2023

SPI	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**
Germany	86.9	87.12	87.43	87.48	87.37	87.55	87.29
Czech Republic	81.03	81.24	81.57	81.6	82.15	82.61	83.45
United Kingdom	84.88	84.98	83.37	85.06	85.17	85.01	85.04
United States of America	83.09	83.16	83.52	83.32	83.35	83.4	83.25
Poland	78.65	78.68	78.71	78.99	79.75	79.85	80.03
Ukraine	66.16	66.54	66.89	66.75	66.65	67.83	68.75
Kazakhstan	64.17	64.89	66.17	66.16	66.27	66.92	67.36
China	58.28	59.25	59.41	60.03	61.61	62.1	63.21
India	49.75	50.3	51.03	52.04	53.73	54.11	55.31
SPI	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**Change, %**
Germany	87.36	87.63	88.03	87.28	87.73	87.64	0.9

ISSN: 2247-6172
Review of Applied Socio- Economic Research
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Czech Republic	83.41	83.61	84.08	84.84	84.92	84.82	4.7
United Kingdom	85.15	84.94	85.02	84.73	84.53	84.49	-0.5
United States of America	82.91	83.01	83.25	82.84	82.07	81.7	-1.7
Poland	80.07	80.1	80.27	79.97	79.74	79.53	1.1
Ukraine	69.54	69.86	71.21	71.56	71.51	70.47	6.5
Kazakhstan	67.66	68.49	69.3	70.09	69.93	69.73	8.7
China	83.41	64.8	65.75	66.7	67.57	67.61	16.0
India	56.24	57.28	57.62	58.54	58.98	58.06	16.7

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from Social Progress Index (2024).

As can be seen from Table 2, the index value in Kazakhstan is gradually increasing, and at a higher rate than in other countries (except China and India), which also indicates that the situation with corporate social responsibility in the country is improving, as the author's index analysis in Figure 1 shows. Nevertheless, the country is still lagging behind the highly developed countries in this respect, so the government authorities should still pay more attention to increasing the level of CSR.

Thus, Kazakhstan has a long history of corporate social responsibility development. Initially, CSR in Kazakhstan was characterised by simple charitable actions of enterprises. The government played a significant role in developing a culture of charity, which led to a significant increase in the construction of mosques and other social facilities, and already, the privatisation of the 1990s led to corporate support for social projects. Despite the achievements, the understanding and implementation of CSR varies: large corporations are more transparent about their CSR practices than smaller enterprises. Challenges in the country include viewing CSR primarily as philanthropy and a lack of comprehensive understanding and implementation across sectors. The government of Kazakhstan has taken steps to align with international CSR standards and promote corporate social responsibility through national and regional initiatives. As the analysis of statistical data has shown, there are positive trends in this context. However, gaps in CSR awareness and participation remain, particularly among small businesses and government officials.

Business social responsibility encompasses four primary categories. The foundational responsibility, economic, involves job creation and tax payments to support governmental functions (Penkovsky et al., 2022). Legal responsibility mandates adherence to both local and international regulations. Ethical responsibility calls for both individual employees and the organization to follow universally accepted moral standards in dealings with peers, competitors, the state, and the broader society. The pinnacle of social responsibility is the voluntary category, which includes investments in societal projects that may not yield immediate financial returns but significantly benefit the community, such as environmental conservation, public health initiatives, literacy programs, infrastructure development, and poverty reduction efforts (Yatsiv et al., 2024). American and European corporations are often praised for their practical approach to fulfilling economic and legal responsibilities. Furthermore, companies committed to CSR tend to attract and retain highly motivated, loyal employees who align with the company's values. Lastly, CSR can significantly enhance a company's investment appeal and overall value through the cultivation of goodwill. The concept of enlightened self-interest, which encapsulates these CSR benefits, could significantly promote CSR advancement within the Kazakhstani business sector. This approach posits CSR as a flexible set of commitments, tailored to a company's specific needs and growth stage, developed through stakeholder engagement, and primarily funded by the company itself. It aims to support internal and external social programs that foster company growth, enhance reputation and brand identity, and strengthen partnerships with government bodies, business allies, local communities, and civil organizations.

Integrated reporting, paying great attention to CSR and its results, focuses on the fact that during product value creation, not only material goods are involved, but also intangible assets that come to the fore (for

ISSN: 2247-6172
Review of Applied Socio- Economic Research
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URL: http://www.reaser.eu
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example, the company's reputation, product brand, reporting transparency confidence of interested users in its quality and integrity). As mentioned in Yevdokymova et al. (2019) work, the new integrated reporting model is considered an opportunity to obtain a complete picture of the company's activities, which reflects the risks and opportunities while more logically linking "Environmental, Social, and Governance" (ESG) factors and the financial results of the company. For stakeholders, information about social responsibility as a separate function that accompanies business is not enough – they want to see systemic impact. International research indicates a direct correlation between a company's socially significant initiatives and its profitability. Such initiatives increase the company's brand value by up to 11%. Strategic CSR projects attract talented professionals to enterprises who strive for meaningful work. As a result, companies receive an increase in employee performance by up to 13% and a decrease in staff turnover by up to 50%; at the same time, the cost reduction per retained employee is, on average, 90% to 200% of the annual salary (Zhang et al., 2017). Thus, corporate social responsibility must be embedded in the very foundation of the business model. The study also noted that corporate social responsibility brings significant benefits to enterprises, society, and the state itself (as noted above, to all stakeholder groups). Nevertheless, it is not sufficiently emphasised in Kazakhstan now, which suggests the role of paying more attention to this component in the country.

A decade ago, scientists at the Harvard Business School conducted a large-scale study, which revealed that companies that implement socially significant programs in their activities have higher company indicators than those not using them. The study by Kolk and Van Tulder (2010) reveals that investments in corporate social responsibility (CSR) have significant financial returns, with $1 invested in social activities in 1993, yielding $7 by 2010, compared to only $4 for companies without social programs. This underscores the critical role of CSR in a company's development and long-term sustainability. Internationally, CSR is seen as a business's voluntary effort to contribute to societal development across social, economic, and environmental domains, extending beyond mere legal compliance and closely linked to the company's core operations. Globally, CSR initiatives are viewed as strategic business practices that enhance a company's reputation, increase its capitalization, and foster strong, balanced relationships with various stakeholders, including the state, shareholders, consumers, employees, partners, and local communities (Matala, 2022). This study also noted, in general, that corporate social responsibility is an important component for companies that have a desire to develop more rapidly and qualitatively. This is attributed to the fact that such enterprises are treated more favourably by both the state and the population, which leads to better economic results, among other things. In addition, well-developed corporate social responsibility leads to a better quality of work for the personnel at the enterprise, which also increases the efficiency of the enterprise. In this regard, paying more attention to this component in Kazakhstan, among others, is relevant.

The importance of corporate social responsibility was noted among others by Carrera (2022), Fatima and Elbanna (2022). The former study considered CSR as an essential criterion for social and economic planning, with profound implications for territorial cohesion and social well-being. The scholars emphasised the role of rethinking the concept to enhance its subsequent implementation in countries' economic processes. They also emphasised the need for a more homogeneous legal framework in the context of corporate social responsibility principles. Another study also focused on how to apply and understand the principles of corporate social responsibility. Researchers suggested that this could be done through individual practices, which would be aimed at more active implementation and application of the concept. The current study also focused on the role of corporate social responsibility but with an emphasis on the current conditions in Kazakhstan. The conclusion was made about the role of this concept, as well as the need for its more active introduction and use in the future to more effectively achieve the principles of sustainable development. It is worth noting that the methods discussed above will also be relevant in this context.

ISSN: 2247-6172
Review of Applied Socio- Economic Research
(Volume 28, Issue 2/ 2024), pp. 163-178
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Cezarino et al. (2022) explored the role of corporate social responsibility. The scholars affirmed that the concept of CSR is the main component for achieving sustainable development goals. They also described the challenges faced by businesses in emerging markets, with special emphasis on corruption, social inequality and political instability. Researchers believed that a deeper implementation of the CSR concept would better combat these negative effects and achieve sustainable development goals faster. This study also mentioned the role of corporate social responsibility in the development of the country. It is worth noting that this component is one of the most important for achieving sustainable development goals. Therefore, Kazakhstan needs to create conditions for conducting its activities in a socially responsible manner. For these purposes, it is worth pursuing an appropriate policy that should be aimed at stimulating such enterprises' activities, both through the infusion of public funds and the formation of an appropriate legislative framework.

5. Conclusions

The study analysed the history of corporate social responsibility development at enterprises in Kazakhstan. It was shown that the concept began to be formed in the 1980s but is still in the active phase of its development. The country still has problems in this area, especially in terms of the impact of corporate social responsibility beyond large corporations on small and medium-sized companies. There are also differences in companies' understanding of corporate social responsibility, for which the concept is often limited to beneficence, although it is more profound in its essence. Nevertheless, based on statistical data, positive trends in the development of corporate social responsibility have been identified, as well as prospects for its future formation.

In this regard, its most important duty is to remain effective for employees, shareholders, and customers, making a tangible contribution to the economy, the well-being, and competitiveness of the country and society. The study revealed that the use of CSR principles is an element of development that needs to be introduced into the practice of Kazakh businesses to increase the investment attractiveness of enterprises in the long term. CSR is one of the most important levers for managing the reputation component of a company’s investment attractiveness.

The disclosure of information on social policy in integrated reporting can indirectly influence the decisions of investors and other third parties, reducing information asymmetry between decision-makers. Thanks to the disclosed information, potential investors can judge the quality of internal business processes without additional costs for internal monitoring of business processes. Further research should focus on finding effective methods for the development of corporate social policy in Kazakhstan.

6. Acknowledgements

N/A.

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Manuscript received: 20.06.2024

Manuscript received in revised form: 14.08.2024

Manuscript accepted: 16.08.2024