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Social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan as a tool for increasing employment among socially vulnerable population groups

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Abstract. The purpose of the study was to examine social entrepreneurship as a means of employment for socially vulnerable population groups in the Republic of Kazakhstan. A contextual analysis of the national labour market was conducted using the PEST framework and statistical data from the Bureau of National Statistics, the Asia Pacific Career Development Association, and the World Bank Group. The cases of three social enterprises in Kazakhstan, Green TAL, Garbar Group, and Kunde, were also analysed. The contextual analysis demonstrated that despite a relatively low average annual unemployment rate of 3.3-3.6%, certain categories of the working-age population remain the least competitive in terms of receiving job offers, earning competitive wages, or achieving career advancement. These categories include graduates of vocational and higher education institutions without work experience, women, and persons with physical disabilities. The case studies demonstrated the high potential of socially oriented enterprises in addressing systemic social issues, including job creation, training and retraining of specialists, elevating the status of specific professions, and reducing property inequality. Several strategy groups were developed to enhance the effectiveness of social enterprises in employing vulnerable population groups: expansion of state support and regulatory frameworks for social entrepreneurship; development of a financial and investment support system for socially oriented enterprises; educational and advisory initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of the prospects of social entrepreneurship; and the development of partnerships and infrastructure in the field of social enterprise. The findings may be used to improve the performance of socially oriented enterprises, the activities of which have only been legally regulated since 2021

Keywords: social entrepreneurship; employment; inclusive labour market; working-age population; income inequality; legislative regulation

Introduction

Being a driving force behind economic development, entrepreneurship also contributes to addressing socially important challenges such as the stigmatisation and isolation of specific groups. Vulnerable population groups, for instance, single parents, individuals with chronic illnesses, former prisoners, and others, require targeted support, which can be provided by social enterprises. Based on this statement, the analysis of the prospects and development trends of this form of entrepreneurship remains a highly relevant subject. The concept of social entrepreneurship is relatively recent. According to Y. Agarwal (2024), the core philosophical aspects of the phenomenon were first discussed by Milton Friedman in 1970. In the cited paper, social entrepreneurship was presented as a counterpoint to conventional entrepreneurship, which prioritised profit generation at any cost, including the violation of ethical standards. A. Ualiyeva (2024) indicated that in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the legal recognition of social entrepreneurship was only formalised in 2021. B. Tursynova *et al.* (2024) argued that the relatively short history of social entrepreneurship in the country explains the lack of comprehensive support for its development.

A.M. Yerzhanova *et al.* (2024) emphasised that social entrepreneurship emerged as a response to the government's inability to resolve pressing social issues, including rising unemployment and the associated social tensions. M.H. Sohel & M. Shamsuddoha (2020) noted that the empirically confirmed ability of social entrepreneurship to address systemic issues led to its growing popularity across many countries. J. George & K.A. Kumar (2024) highlighted the absence of a universally accepted definition of social entrepreneurship, identifying it as a potential source of strategic disagreement. In an effort to avoid such discrepancies, the cited researchers proposed that social entrepreneurship should be defined by its core feature: a

focus on addressing social issues and generating positive societal change through entrepreneurial activity. A similar approach was uncovered by L. Glasbeek *et al.* (2024), who underlined that the primary objective of social entrepreneurship is to create social value rather than to pursue personal or shareholder enrichment.

The advantages of social entrepreneurship were explored in numerous studies, including that of S.T. Okutayeva *et al.* (2021), who argued that this form of entrepreneurship contributes to the expansion of economic opportunities, particularly for marginalised groups, by providing employment, introducing innovative business models, and supporting initiatives aimed at enhancing innovation capacity. Similar conclusions were drawn in the study by S. Kumar & S.K. Yadav (2023), who applied their proprietary managed cooperation network model to demonstrate that the positive local-level impact of social entrepreneurship can be scaled to address global challenges. Studies conducted in various countries confirm that social entrepreneurship is consistently effective in tackling the global issue of unemployment, regardless of the prevailing economic context. One such study, by A.P. Mukherjee *et al.* (2023), focused on the development of social entrepreneurship in India. According to the authors, the growth of social enterprises in rural areas of the country supports the empowerment of women, thereby helping to mitigate the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Examining the experiences of 20 entrepreneurs in Uganda, P. Turyakira *et al.* (2025) concluded that, despite certain challenges, social entrepreneurship serves as an effective mechanism for achieving the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined by the United Nations. Drawing on the African context, P. Turyakira *et al.* argued that social entrepreneurship is particularly effective in advancing Goals 1, 4, 5, 8, and 10, which relate to poverty

reduction, quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, and the reduction of inequality. Analysis of data from a sample of 208 South Korean social enterprises between 2017 and 2019 enabled C.Y. Kim (2024) to establish a statistically significant positive correlation between the level of social entrepreneurship and the growth rates of overall employment, employment among vulnerable workers, and enterprises' financial performance. In summarising the experience of Malaysia, H. Halid *et al.* (2023) confirmed the role of social entrepreneurship in expanding employment opportunities, highlighting its particular relevance for addressing youth unemployment.

Although the unemployment rate in the Republic of Kazakhstan remains relatively low, significant disparities persist in access to employment and the socio-economic benefits it entails. A. Ismagulova & S. Massakova (2024) stated in their study that wealth inequality continues to represent one of the most pressing systemic issues in the country. External shocks, including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, further exacerbated inequalities that have existed for decades. Social stratification, in turn, not only increases the likelihood of conflict between different social groups but also hampers the nation's economic development.

The development of social entrepreneurship could serve as a viable solution to the issue, yet its specific features within Kazakhstani society remain insufficiently explored. In light of these gaps, the study set out to examine social entrepreneurship as a means of increasing employment, a subject of clear contemporary relevance. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- to analyse selected case studies of social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan;
- to explore the potential for scaling the accumulated experience.

Materials and Methods

The material for this study consisted of statistical data obtained from the official website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan (n.d.). These statistics were employed to assess employment trends, including among socially vulnerable groups such as women and young people. Supporting materials included papers by G.Zh. Doskeyeva (2021), A. Bekenova (2022), and L.A. Kuanova & A. Anessova (2024). These sources were analysed to identify the population categories most affected by inequality in employment and investigate the underlying causes of such disparities.

The study was based on a combination of methods, including content analysis, contextual analysis, and case study methodology. Content analysis was applied to the industry reports and academic sources mentioned above. Sources were selected based on credibility and relevance, and preference was given to those published from 2020 onwards to enhance the currency of the findings. Contextual analysis was conducted to investigate the factors that shaped the development of the labour market in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the emergence of socially disadvantaged

groups within it. This analysis employed two tools: a framework for identifying key labour market indicators and the Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal (PESTEL) model. The former was developed using data from the Bureau of National Statistics (2024) and served to highlight and examine the principal characteristics of the labour market of Kazakhstan. PESTEL was used to analyse the external factors – political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal – that influence labour market development in Kazakhstan.

A case study methodology was used to explore the operations of specific socially oriented enterprises in the Republic of Kazakhstan in detail. Three enterprises were selected as case studies: Green TAL (n.d.), Garbar Group (n.d.), and Kunde (Video case..., n.d.). These organisations were chosen because their activities aim to achieve socially beneficial goals and address pressing societal issues. Socially oriented projects that failed to submit activity reports for the 2023-2024 reporting period were excluded from the sample. A standardised analysis was conducted by examining the following elements of each selected case: the history and focus of the enterprise's socially oriented activity, employment statistics for the most vulnerable population groups, and the outcomes of the most significant projects. The data extracted from these cases were used to develop recommendations for the planning and management of social enterprises to enhance employment opportunities for socially vulnerable groups.

Results

Development of the labour market in the Republic of Kazakhstan

The national labour market encompasses all citizens of the country who are capable of performing certain types of work. The Bureau of National Statistics (2024) applies a set of criteria to provide a comprehensive profile of the labour market of Kazakhstan. One of the key indicators is age, as the labour force includes individuals aged 15 and older. As of 2024, the working-age population between 15 and 64 years old accounted for 62% of the total population, equating to approximately 13 million people (Ministry of Labour..., n.d.). According to the Bureau of National Statistics' methodology, this group is further divided into those who are part of the labour force and those excluded from it for various reasons. Given that not all individuals aged 15-64 are engaged in the production of goods or services, it may be inferred that the actual size of the labour force in Kazakhstan is smaller than the aforementioned 13 million. This assumption is supported by experts from the Bureau of National Statistics, who report that the total labour force in the country stands at 9.664 million, of whom 9.214 million are employed. The employment rate among the working-age population, therefore, stands at 95.3%, a comparatively high figure. The same report indicates that employment levels are showing a slight but consistent increase: in the third quarter of 2024, the unemployment rate stood at 3.3%. The labour market of Kazakhstan is shaped

by a combination of external factors. The most influential among these are political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors. Their impact on the Kazakhstani labour market is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Factors influencing the functioning of the labour market in the Republic of Kazakhstan

Factor	Explanation
Political	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State employment policy – development of employment support programmes, including “Enbek” and other initiatives aimed at upskilling workers. 2. Investment in the economy – state support for industrialisation, digitalisation and business development affects the creation of new jobs. 3. Political stability – a crucial factor in attracting investors and ensuring labour market stability. 4. Government reforms – implementation of educational reforms, development of vocational and technical education, and attraction of foreign investment.
Economic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Growth in gross domestic product (GDP) – Kazakhstan demonstrates moderate economic growth, which is reflected in the labour market. 2. Unemployment rate – remains stable at 4.8-5.0%, though there is a mismatch between labour demand and supply. 3. Inflation and wage levels – high inflation reduces purchasing power and increases demand for higher wages. 4. Dependence on extractive industries – the mining sector remains a key employer, though there is a trend towards economic diversification. 5. Development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – an increase in start-ups and SMEs is generating new job opportunities.
Social	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demographic changes – a growing youth population increases competition in the labour market. 2. Education level – the number of university graduates is rising, yet there remains a shortage of qualified technical specialists. 3. Labour migration – outflow of skilled workers abroad and inflow of migrants from neighbouring countries. 4. Gender issues – an increase in women in leadership positions is observed, although wage inequality remains a concern.
Technological	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Automation and digitalisation – the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and automation is reducing employment in conventional sectors. 2. Development of the IT industry – active development of the IT sector is generating opportunities for highly qualified professionals. 3. Remote work – following the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies adopted remote working arrangements. 4. Professional training – growth in online education and upskilling platforms (Coursera, Stepik, university courses).
Environmental	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Growth of the green economy – the emergence of jobs in the renewable energy sector. 2. Environmental standards – influence of international environmental, social, and governance (ESG) requirements on the labour market. 3. Industrial pollution – impact of environmental degradation on working conditions in mining and manufacturing industries.
Legal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Labour legislation – development of laws protecting workers’ rights, minimum wages, and working conditions. 2. Migration regulation – introduction of quotas for labour migrants and programmes aimed at attracting highly skilled specialists. 3. Taxation and incentives – tax benefits for businesses and start-ups contributing to job creation. 4. Workers’ rights protection – growing influence of trade unions and social initiatives on labour relations regulation. 5. Adoption of Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 52-VII ZRK “On Amendments and Supplements to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship and Compulsory Social Health Insurance” (2021).

Source: compiled by the authors based on Asia Pacific Career Development Association (n.d.), G.Zh. Doskeyeva (2021), A. Bekenova (2022), Bureau of National Statistics (2024), World Bank Group (2024a), L.A. Kuanova & A. Anessova (2024)

Table 1 demonstrates that the labour market in the Republic of Kazakhstan is developing under relatively favourable conditions shaped by government support for education and employment initiatives, stable economic growth, technological innovation, and legal advancements in the sector. Nonetheless, several external

factors influence the equitable distribution of employment opportunities, exacerbating challenges faced by socially vulnerable groups.

One such factor is uneven economic growth combined with rising inflation, which intensified income inequality within the country. According to the World Bank Group

(2024a, 2024b), the rapid economic expansion of Kazakhstan in the early 2000s brought the country close to attaining high-income status. However, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019-2020 slowed annual economic growth, which fell to 1.4% in 2021-2022. Modest economic growth, coupled with an inflation rate of 8.6% in 2024, led to reduced purchasing power for segments of the population and further deepening of socio-economic disparities (Bureau of National Statistics, 2024). The World Bank Group states that the poorest 40% of the population are most vulnerable to economic shocks, during which their consumption growth may stagnate or even turn negative. Z. Chulanova et al. (2024) also highlight a higher unemployment rate among the poorest population segments, linked to systemic issues such as limited access to education and proximity to critical infrastructure. Based on this evidence, there is a clear need to ensure stable employment for the poorest social groups as a means of supporting sustainable development within Kazakhstani society.

Table 1 further shows that employment among young people aged 15 to 34 constitutes a challenge. According to the Bureau of National Statistics (2024), there has been a slight but steady increase in the population within this age group, contributing to heightened competition in the labour market. Evidence for this is encountered in the unemployment rate of 4.6-3.7% recorded in Kazakhstan in

2024, with 3.1-3.2% attributed to individuals under the age of 34. The relatively high unemployment rate among young people may result in systemic issues, including population outflow, the diminishing prestige of vocational and higher education, and increased social tension. Based on these statistical indicators, young people represent a socially vulnerable demographic whose employment should be treated as a national priority.

A high level of vulnerability is also characteristic of women, who face difficulties in securing employment and receiving competitive wages. Evidence of gender inequality was presented by L.A. Kuanova & A. Anessova (2024), who compared the unemployment rates among the working-age male and female populations in Kazakhstan between 2011 and 2021. According to the authors, the average labour force participation rate for women during this period was 64.96%, compared with 76.38% for men. The rate of informal employment among women was also 4.5% lower than that of their male counterparts. The cited researchers emphasised that, despite comparable levels of vocational and higher education among working-age men and women, the female unemployment rate is higher, standing at 5.71% compared with 4.36% for men. Attention should also be given to people with disabilities, who represent one of the largest socially vulnerable groups. Key statistical data for this demographic are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Employment of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023-2024

Indicator	2023 (as of November 1)	2024 (as of November 1)
Total number of persons with disabilities	725,000	732,100
Number of working-age persons with disabilities	381,000	381,000
Number of employed persons with disabilities	148,000	148,700
Employment rate among working-age persons with disabilities	39%	39%

Source: compiled by the authors based on “More than 20.7 thousand persons with disabilities were provided with employment assistance measures” (2024), Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan (n.d.)

The Table 2 shows that no substantial changes occurred in the employment figures for persons with disabilities between 2023 and 2024. As of 1 November 2024, 732,100 persons with disabilities were living in the country, approximately half of whom were of working age (More than 20.7..., 2024). Despite this sizeable working-age population, only 39% were officially employed. The presented statistics highlight the importance of social initiatives aimed at the active inclusion of persons with disabilities in the country's economic development.

Based on the analysis, employment opportunities in the Republic of Kazakhstan are unevenly distributed across different population groups, contributing to social inequality and generating a range of systemic issues. Socially vulnerable groups include individuals with low incomes, young people aged 15 to 34, and women. These categories of the population stand to benefit from the growth of socially oriented enterprises, which have seen increased development in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Socially oriented enterprises in the Republic of Kazakhstan

As of 2025, several socially oriented enterprises operate in the Republic of Kazakhstan, including Green TAL (2025). Founded in 2015 in Astana by Emin Askerov, Green TAL serves as a notable example of successful social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. The enterprise focuses on employment and professional development for individuals from socially vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, single mothers, orphanage graduates, and former prisoners. The primary objective of Green TAL is to establish a sustainable infrastructure that enables “special employees” to reach their full potential and become integrated into society through work and education. The enterprise's mission lies in addressing social issues through entrepreneurial activity, ensuring financial stability and potential for expansion. Green TAL operates through a number of production workshops, including the following: a carpentry workshop producing furniture, educational eco-toys, and wooden

souvenirs; a sewing workshop specialising in garments such as hoodies, vests, eco-bags, and other textile items; a felt workshop dedicated to handmade products including carpets, scarves, bath sets, and children's creative kits; and a printing division focusing on applying logos to promotional items through sublimation, thermal flex, and laser engraving techniques. Employees without formal vocational qualifications have the opportunity to undergo in-house training and continually enhance their skills through various courses. Since its founding, Green TAL has trained over 700 individuals and employed more than 50 staff members with special needs. Special attention is given to individuals with mental health conditions such as schizophrenia, autism, and intellectual disabilities, for whom the enterprise creates adapted working environments (Social enterprise Green TAL, n.d.). Since 2021, Green TAL has been actively expanding its operations, establishing branches in various regions of Kazakhstan, including Pavlodar and Ekibastuz. These initiatives are conducted with the support of the Samruk-Kazyna Trust fund and local akimats, contributing to the creation of new employment opportunities for socially vulnerable population groups.

Another example of a socially oriented enterprise is Garbar Group (n.d.), based in Astana, Kazakhstan. The company specialises in the production of furniture, including tables and chairs, and offers comprehensive solutions for furnishing cafés and restaurants. Garbar Group actively applies principles of social entrepreneurship, aiming to establish a sustainable business model that benefits society. A key aspect of its operations is the employment and vocational training of individuals from socially vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. The company provides opportunities to acquire in-demand skills in furniture manufacturing, contributing to social integration and improving the quality of life for these individuals.

As of the first half of 2025, the social enterprise Green TAL (n.d.) had employed 62 individuals in Kazakhstan, 53 of whom belong to socially vulnerable groups. Similar statistical findings are presented in the study by S.T. Okutayeva *et al.* (2023), which emphasised that Green TAL continues to expand its operations by establishing branches

in various regions of Kazakhstan, including Pavlodar and Ekibastuz. This expansion facilitates the creation of new jobs and enhances employment opportunities for a larger number of socially vulnerable individuals. Garbar Group is also developing professional training programmes focused on practical skills in carpentry and furniture production. These initiatives enable participants not only to acquire a new profession but also to increase their competitiveness in the labour market. The company collaborates with a range of organisations and public institutions, including the Samruk-Kazyna Trust, ArcelorMittal Temirtau JSC, Eurasian Resources Group (ERG), and the Toraygirov University NAO, to expand training and employment opportunities. Such partnerships contribute to the development of an inclusive environment and support socially impactful projects.

Among other socially focused enterprises is Kunde, a social café in Kazakhstan founded by Maulen Akhmetov, a graduate of Nazarbayev University. The café provides employment to individuals with mental health conditions, supporting their social integration and professional development (Tadamon, n.d.). The primary goal of Kunde is the creation of an inclusive environment where people with mental differences can work on equal terms with others (Video case..., n.d.). The café aims to challenge stereotypes and demonstrate that every person is capable of making a contribution to society. According to publicly available sources, the café employs 18 individuals with mental health conditions, in addition to 7 professionals, including chefs and administrators. A defining feature of Kunde is its focus on sustainable growth and continuous expansion. In 2024, Kunde received a USD 30,000 grant from Tadamon, which selected the project from among 250 global applicants. Further support was provided by organisations such as AB Restaurants, which donated essential tableware and kitchen equipment (Saby Charitable Foundation, 2018). In 2020, Kunde was named a finalist in the international Shell LiveWIRE Top-10 Innovators competition, highlighting the project's international relevance and high standard.

A comparative analysis of the strategies employed by the aforementioned enterprises is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparative analysis of strategies adopted by selected social enterprises in the Republic of Kazakhstan

Criterion	Green TAL	Garbar Group	Kunde
Target group	People with disabilities, single mothers, orphanage graduates, former convicts, individuals with mental health conditions	People with disabilities and other socially vulnerable groups	Individuals with mental health conditions
Social mission	Social integration through employment and training	Improving quality of life through skills development	Creating an inclusive environment and challenging stereotypes
Integration strategies	On-site training, continuous professional development, tailored conditions for mentally unstable employees	Vocational training, internships, employment in the hospitality sector	Vocational training, internships, employment in the hospitality sector
Partner support	Samruk-Kazyna Trust, akimats	Samruk-Kazyna Trust, ERG, ArcelorMittal Temirtau, Toraygirov University	AB Restaurants, Tadamon, Saby Charitable Foundation

Source: compiled by the authors based on Video case "Social enterprise Kunde" (n.d.), Garbar Group (n.d.), Green TAL (n.d.), Tadamon (n.d.)

Table 3 indicates that the development strategy of a social enterprise is influenced by several factors, including the target audience and the overarching social mission, which in turn shapes the goals and objectives related to integration. Among the most widely applied strategies for the inclusion of socially vulnerable groups are vocational training programmes, often delivered directly in the workplace. This type of training enhances the competitiveness of vulnerable groups and strengthens their participation in national economic development. Another commonly implemented approach involves forming partnerships with public institutions, international foundations, and other agents of social change. Such collaborations serve as a source of tangible and intangible resources required for improving employability and increasing the competitive standing of socially vulnerable populations (Istrefi *et al.*, 2025).

The Republic of Kazakhstan is thus witnessing the growth of socially oriented entrepreneurship, with a strong emphasis on the employment of disadvantaged groups. These groups include young professionals, women, individuals with disabilities, and others. The experience accumulated by enterprises such as Green TAL, Garbar Group, and Kunde can be expanded into various sectors of the national economy.

Strategies for the development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan

Based on the case studies discussed above, a set of development strategies for social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan can be devised, with a particular focus on improving employment opportunities for socially vulnerable populations. The key strategies and their core components are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4. Strategies for the development of socially-oriented entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan

Strategy	Description
Government support and regulation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of a legal framework that encourages social entrepreneurship. 2. Grant programmes and tax incentives for social enterprises. 3. Establishment of state funds and support programmes (e.g., through DAMU, JSC "Baiterek"). 4. Inclusion of social entrepreneurship in national business development initiatives.
Financial and investment support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of social investment mechanisms (funds, grants, subsidies). 2. Creation of venture capital funds for social start-ups. 3. Crowdfunding and other forms of collective financing.
Educational and advisory programmes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of university and business school courses on social entrepreneurship. 2. Implementation of acceleration programmes, training sessions, and workshops. 3. Mentorship and guidance from experienced entrepreneurs.
Awareness and outreach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organisation of forums, competitions, and events for social entrepreneurs. 2. Creation of platforms for knowledge sharing and collaboration. 3. Engagement of mass media in showcasing successful case studies.
Development of partnerships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaboration with international organisations (UN, World Bank, etc.). 2. Engagement with the private sector in joint social initiatives. 3. Expansion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes.
Infrastructure development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establishment of hubs and incubators for social start-ups. 2. Creation of a support ecosystem: legal assistance, accounting services, marketing support.

Source: compiled by the authors based on Saby Charitable Foundation (2018), Video case "Social enterprise Kunde" (n.d.), Garbar Group (n.d.), Single Platform of Volunteers (n.d.), Tadamon (n.d.)

Table 4 demonstrates that the development of social entrepreneurship aimed at improving employment opportunities for vulnerable population groups requires the application of several strategies, including government support. This is exemplified by the adoption of Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 52-VII ZRK (2021), which formally establishes the legal status of social enterprises and defines their criteria, including population categories in need of additional support. Government backing for social entrepreneurship was also reinforced through the Order of the Minister of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 130 "On Approval of the Rules for the Implementation of Support for Social Entrepreneurship Development Initiatives by Government Agencies, National Holdings, National Development Institutions and Other Organisations" (2023). These policy documents confirm the state's recognition of the importance

and diversity of social entrepreneurship, and its commitment to providing comprehensive support for the sector. However, these legal instruments contain certain limitations and unresolved issues that, if addressed, would strengthen state support for social enterprises. One key concern is the absence of clearly defined mechanisms for tax incentives and state-backed support for social enterprises. It is therefore recommended that secondary legislation be developed to specify support measures in greater detail, thereby increasing the motivation of enterprises to employ individuals from socially vulnerable groups.

Based on the table, the development of social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan is not feasible without adequate financial and investment support. The fact that social entrepreneurship was only formally recognised at the state level in 2021 highlights the insufficient development of mechanisms for its investment support

(Adilov, 2025). As of 2024, the involvement of international institutions, such as the United Nations and the World Bank, in financing social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan remained limited (Baltabayeva *et al.*, 2024; Suieubayeva *et al.*, 2025). Given this context, it is recommended that investment be increased through the creation of venture capital funds for social enterprises, the expansion of concessional lending systems for businesses employing socially vulnerable groups, and engagement with global financing programmes to attract international investors. On the national level, funding for social entrepreneurship may be facilitated through cooperation with the DAMU Fund, JSC “Baiterek”, and other relevant organisations.

In addition to the proposed strategies, the development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan may progress through the implementation of appropriate educational initiatives. Limited access to educational materials on social entrepreneurship in the country may lead university graduates to develop a biased view of this type of activity. Several higher education institutions, including AlmaU, Astana International University, and Nazarbayev University, took steps to address this stigma by offering dedicated courses on social entrepreneurship. The experience of these institutions could be scaled across other educational establishments throughout the country to raise awareness among stakeholders regarding the potential and opportunities of social entrepreneurship, along with the tools available for its development in support of employment for socially vulnerable groups. Scaling successful practices would entail the integration of a “Social Entrepreneurship” course into the curricula of vocational and higher education institutions, the development of multilingual online courses to reach a wider audience, and the establishment of specialised training centres for the education and retraining of socially-oriented entrepreneurs.

The development of educational strategies may be implemented in parallel with broader efforts to raise public awareness regarding the prospects of social entrepreneurship (Al-Nuimat *et al.*, 2023). A central aim of such outreach is to increase public trust in this form of activity and to attract stakeholders involved in its advancement (Berisha & Rexhepi, 2022). These stakeholders include entrepreneurs, investors, representatives of socially vulnerable population groups, and public leaders. Tools for raising awareness and promoting social entrepreneurship include business festivals and forums such as “Atameken”. While participation in these events is common among representatives from various economic sectors, the presence of socially-oriented businesses remain limited. It is recommended that to increase the involvement of social enterprises, an annual national forum on social entrepreneurship be held, alongside competitions offering grants and investment for leading social start-ups, and thematic events hosted at universities and business incubators (Rexhepi & Murtezaj, 2024). Public outreach may be facilitated through popular social platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, which are accessible to a broad demographic. Social enterprises

can utilise these platforms to showcase their work, thereby attracting the interest of potential employees and investors.

Infrastructure development is also recommended as a means of enhancing the effectiveness of social enterprises and strengthening their collaboration with vulnerable population groups. As of 2025, the Republic of Kazakhstan is home to the Kazakhstan Association of the Universities Business Incubators and Accelerators (n.d.), which includes prominent institutions and organisations such as Ahmet Yassawi University, Deutsch-Kasachische Universität, StartUp Academy, and TAU University. A key advantage of this association lies in its promotion of knowledge and resource sharing, which supports entrepreneurial development. A substantial limitation, however, is the low participation of socially-oriented enterprises, which restricts employment opportunities for vulnerable social groups. A similar issue is evident in co-working spaces in Almaty and Astana, where few participants identify as social entrepreneurs. In light of these limitations, it is recommended that dedicated incubators and hubs be established for social enterprises, regional support centres be developed for socially-oriented entrepreneurs, and co-working spaces be created with preferential rental conditions for businesses employing members of marginalised communities.

Based on the analysis conducted, social entrepreneurship remains a relatively new phenomenon within the economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and several aspects of its functioning require further legal regulation. The development of social entrepreneurship necessitates increased public engagement, which would support more active efforts to employ socially vulnerable groups, including graduates, women, and persons with disabilities. Strategies are proposed to increase public and private sector involvement in advancing social entrepreneurship as a means of addressing systemic challenges.

Discussion

The central argument of this study asserts that social entrepreneurship serves as a key instrument for addressing systemic social challenges. This assertion is supported by previous research, including the study by T. Dedilova *et al.* (2024), who analysed the potential impact of social entrepreneurship on sustainable economic development in the aftermath of large-scale military conflict and other crises. According to the cited authors, sustainable development is achieved through the strategic mission of social entrepreneurship, which lies in balancing the pursuit of financial gain with the resolution of social problems. S. Ghosh *et al.* (2024) emphasised the importance of social entrepreneurship in achieving sustainable development, reducing poverty, and narrowing the wealth gap within society. J.N.A. Quaye *et al.* (2024) argued that social entrepreneurship is an effective mechanism for achieving the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) declared by the United Nations. Among these goals, particular emphasis was placed on addressing acute social issues, including the eradication of hunger, improvement of education quality, promotion of gender equality, and the

provision of fair wages. L. Kiladze *et al.* (2024) highlighted the contribution of social entrepreneurship to the creation of a more inclusive and, as a result, economically prosperous society. S. Kumar & S.K. Yadav (2023) further stressed the capacity of social entrepreneurship to address challenges on both national and international scales. Based on a bibliometric analysis of 461 academic sources, T. Miah *et al.* (2024) concluded that the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship stems from its dynamism, the resilience of its entrepreneurial ecosystem, and its integration of innovative solutions. Collectively, these studies support the view that social entrepreneurship holds significant potential in addressing a range of societal challenges, including the focus of this paper: overcoming inequality in employment.

While social issues are diverse, the present study concentrated specifically on examining the impact of social entrepreneurship on reducing employment inequality. The contribution of social entrepreneurship to resolving this issue was also confirmed in prior research, such as that of V. Ratten (2025), which argued that social entrepreneurship plays a particularly important role in tackling inequality within developing economies. The study by V. Ratten asserted that the development of social entrepreneurship is a strategic priority for the Republic of Kazakhstan, which has not yet attained the status of a developed economy due to the economic disruptions of the early 21st century. Drawing on the experience of South Korea, J. Jeon *et al.* (2024) concluded that social entrepreneurship is a driving force of national economic development, as it enables the integration of previously underutilised human capital. An analysis of 209 studies enabled A. Bonfanti *et al.* (2024) to conclude that the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship in employing marginalised groups is partly due to its capacity to adopt hybrid forms. Based on the cited study, the argument presented in this paper – that social entrepreneurship offers a viable solution to the employment challenges faced by vulnerable population groups – is both timely and well-substantiated.

This study emphasised, however, that the development of social entrepreneurship and the employment of vulnerable population groups in the Republic of Kazakhstan remains a challenging task due to the existence of several barriers. One such barrier identified in this study is the low level of public awareness regarding the potential and benefits of social entrepreneurship in addressing systemic issues, including unequal access to employment opportunities. This obstacle was also explored in earlier studies, including that of X. Lyu *et al.* (2024). Drawing on interviews with 684 university students and graduates from Southern China, X. Lyu *et al.* highlighted that a lack of comprehensive information about the specifics of managing social enterprises reduces engagement among the target audience. Similar conclusions were reached by M. Karim *et al.* (2024), who investigated the relationship between awareness and engagement in social entrepreneurship among a sample of 334 students from Bangladesh. These studies support the relevance of the recommendations presented in this paper, including the need to raise awareness and promote social

entrepreneurship among students and graduates of secondary vocational and higher education institutions, as well as among active entrepreneurs.

This study also underscored the importance of state support in advancing social entrepreneurship and proposed strategies for increasing such support within the context of a developing sector. The conclusion that legislative regulation of social enterprises and the introduction of additional support measures are warranted finds support in previous research, including that of S. Tišma *et al.* (2022). Using Croatia as a case study, the authors found a statistically significant positive correlation between state policies aimed at supporting social entrepreneurship and the increasing number and diversity of social enterprises. C.J. Fox *et al.* (2023) surveyed 577 working-age respondents in the United States and concluded that there is a direct correlation between the perception of social support and the intention to engage in social entrepreneurship. The cited researchers, however, noted the absence of a direct correlation between the perception of institutional support and the intention to pursue social entrepreneurship, which contrasts with the conclusions presented in this study. Given this discrepancy, further investigation into the potential relationship between perceptions of social and institutional support and their impact on engagement in social entrepreneurship is recommended.

In addition to the aforementioned recommendations, this study also presented the idea of fostering collaboration with national and international organisations to advance social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan and promote the employment of socially vulnerable population groups. It was concluded that insufficient cooperation with institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and other alliances hinders the development of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. The importance of collaboration in the context of social entrepreneurship was also supported by earlier research, including the study by S. Kovanen (2021), which emphasised that collaboration forms the foundation of social entrepreneurship. The study also highlighted the multi-dimensional nature of such cooperation, involving interactions between the community experiencing specific needs and the state responsible for addressing them; between the state and socially oriented businesses; and between socially oriented businesses and the community. The importance of collaboration was likewise stressed by D. Shelenko *et al.* (2024), who argued that the creation of a well-developed system of interaction enhances the value of the social service provided and diversifies risks, thereby stimulating socio-economic development and improving the welfare of specific economic sectors or regions. Collaboration was also emphasised by F.J. Santos *et al.* (2025), who compared the performance of two conventional enterprises with that of two worker cooperatives. According to the researchers, enterprises operating as worker cooperatives exhibited greater efficiency, including in the development and implementation of innovative solutions. Drawing on these studies, the conclusion presented in this paper, that collaboration at national and international

levels represents an effective strategy for developing social entrepreneurship and addressing systemic social challenges in the Republic of Kazakhstan, appears well-founded.

In summary, the findings of this study are consistent with existing research. The identified correlations suggest that the recommendations proposed are both relevant and viable. The experience of three socially oriented Kazakhstani enterprises may be scaled across specific segments of the economy to enhance employment opportunities and protection for socially vulnerable groups, such as young professionals, women, and persons with disabilities.

Conclusions

The study examined the potential of social entrepreneurship as a means of increasing employment among socially vulnerable groups in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Contextual analysis demonstrated that, despite the relatively low national unemployment rate, certain segments of the population continue to face barriers to accessing the labour market. These socially vulnerable groups include graduates of vocational and higher education institutions, women, former prisoners, and individuals with physical or mental disabilities. The challenges encountered by these groups include fewer job offers, poorer working conditions, or lower wages. Social enterprises, the activities of which aim to address systemic social issues, may provide significant benefits to these population categories. Although the demand for such enterprises is considerable, their presence in Kazakhstan remains limited, which may be attributed to the relatively recent development of the social entrepreneurship sector. Social entrepreneurship was formally regulated in Kazakhstan in 2021, with state initiatives aimed at its promotion and support introduced in 2003.

The study analysed the operations of three socially oriented enterprises: Green TAL, Garbar Group, and Kunde. The social focus of these enterprises is evident in their efforts to train and retrain individuals with limited competitiveness in the labour market, invest in social development, and address structural social problems, including social orphanhood and inequality. These enterprises support the employment of vulnerable populations by creating new jobs, offering grants and financial assistance, and promoting specific vocational activities.

The comparative analysis of the enterprises indicated that the choice of strategy depends on the target group and the social mission of the organisation. The most common strategies included training and retraining socially vulnerable individuals to enhance their competitiveness and integration into economic activity. Another widespread practice was collaboration with national institutions and international foundations, which serve as sources of material and non-material resources for implementing social initiatives. Based on the contextual analysis and the experiences of the referenced companies, several strategic groups were proposed to enhance the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship in employing vulnerable population groups. These strategies include: state support and regulation of socially oriented entrepreneurial activity; financial and investment assistance for enterprises that provide employment to vulnerable groups; educational and advisory programmes highlighting the prospects and advantages of managing social enterprises; development of national and international partnerships in the field of social entrepreneurship; and the expansion of infrastructure aimed at creating a network of social enterprises and connecting them with the most disadvantaged segments of the population.

This study is subject to several limitations, including the small number of socially oriented enterprises selected for analysis within the Republic of Kazakhstan. Future studies should consider expanding the number of enterprises under review and conducting a comparative analysis of social enterprise management practices in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Соціальне підприємництво у Республіці Казахстан як інструмент підвищення зайнятості соціально вразливих груп населення

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Анотація. Метою дослідження було вивчення соціального підприємництва як засобу працевлаштування соціально вразливих груп населення в Республіці Казахстан. Контекстуальний аналіз національного ринку праці проводився з використанням структури PEST та статистичних даних Бюро національної статистики, Азіатсько-Тихоокеанської асоціації розвитку кар'єри та Групи Світового банку. Також аналізувалися випадки трьох соціальних підприємств у Казахстані: Green TAL, Garbar Group та Kunde. Контекстуальний аналіз продемонстрував, що, незважаючи на відносно низький середньорічний рівень безробіття 3,3-3,6 %, певні категорії населення працездатного віку залишаються найменш конкурентоспроможними з точки зору отримання пропозицій роботи, отримання конкурентної заробітної плати або досягнення кар'єрного зростання. До цих категорій належать випускники професійно-технічних та вищих навчальних закладів без досвіду роботи, жінки та особи з обмеженими фізичними можливостями. Тематичні дослідження продемонстрували високий потенціал соціально орієнтованих підприємств у вирішенні системних соціальних проблем, включаючи створення робочих місць, підготовку та перепідготовку спеціалістів, підвищення статусу певних професій та зменшення майнової нерівності. Розроблено кілька стратегічних груп для підвищення ефективності соціальних підприємств у працевлаштуванні вразливих груп населення: розширення державної підтримки та нормативно-правової бази для соціального підприємництва; розробка системи фінансової та інвестиційної підтримки соціально орієнтованих підприємств; освітні та консультаційні ініціативи, спрямовані на підвищення обізнаності про перспективи соціального підприємництва; та розвиток партнерських відносин та інфраструктури у

сфері соціального підприємництва. Результати дослідження можуть бути використані для покращення ефективності соціально орієнтованих підприємств, діяльність яких законодавчо регулюється лише з 2021 року

Ключові слова: соціальне підприємництво; зайнятість; інклюзивний ринок праці; населення працездатного віку; нерівність доходів; законодавче регулювання
