

DETERMINANTS OF GENERATION Z'S ATTITUDES TOWARD DISABILITY INCLUSIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract: Contemporary enterprises face challenges related to diversity management, particularly in adapting HR strategies to the evolving expectations of Generation Z employees. Growing up in a world saturated with digital media has influenced their attitudes towards inclusivity, equality, and corporate ethics. The aim of this article is to analyse Generation Z's perception of diversity, including individuals with disabilities, and to identify the challenges this presents for HR practice. The study was conducted on a sample of 469 students using descriptive statistics, the Shapiro–Wilk test, the Mann–Whitney U test, and Spearman's correlations. The results showed that women have significantly more positive attitudes towards working with individuals with disabilities than men, and residents of large cities are more likely to declare their willingness to work in teams with individuals with disabilities. While the amount of time spent on social media was not significant, the descriptive data suggest that exposure to inclusive content plays a more vital role in shaping open attitudes. The findings underscore the need for organisations to implement consistent diversity policies that go beyond mere declarations and genuinely support an inclusive work environment. The study fills a gap in the literature by demonstrating that Generation Z expects employers to be genuinely committed to creating environments that foster the full participation of individuals with disabilities in professional life.

Keywords: discrimination, Generation Z, human resource management, statistical analysis, inclusivity

JEL Classification: J14, J71, M14

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Introduction

The contemporary labour market is experiencing dynamic changes, significantly influenced by the arrival of a new generation. Young people born after 1995, the so-called Generation Z, are characterised by attitudes, values, and expectations regarding professional life that differ from previous generations (Jayatissa, 2023). This shift in values presents new and complex challenges for traditional models of organisational and human resource management.

An important factor shaping the worldview and value system of Generation Z is the ubiquity of media, including social media, which is their primary channel of communication and source of information. The values promoted in the media are absorbed by this generation as norms and become the basis for their expectations of future employers. Young employees not only expect organisations to declare their support for inclusive values, but also demand that they implement socially responsible practices in a genuine and transparent manner (Siagian & Juliana, 2023).

Values that were often perceived as “soft” attributes of organisational culture in the past now translate into “hard” business expectations, affecting the market competitiveness of companies (Coman et al., 2022). As a result, organisations that fail to meet these expectations may face negative perceptions and significant difficulties in recruiting talented young employees (Wandhe, 2024). For this reason, human resources (HR) departments must go beyond their traditional role and become strategic partners capable of understanding these powerful changes in the labour market.

Despite the existence of studies on the general characteristics of Generation Z (Schroth, 2019; Chillakuri, 2020), the author has identified a research gap in the mechanisms shaping Generation Z's attitudes towards specific aspects of diversity, such as disability in the workplace. Previous studies have focused primarily on the digital literacy of this group. There is therefore a theoretical and empirical need to verify whether the declarative inclusiveness of this generation is merely a result of generational affiliation or the effect of specific exposure to content promoting diversity.

Despite growing awareness of diversity in companies, the issue of inclusiveness towards individuals with disabilities remains an area where numerous barriers still exist. Research indicates that individuals with disabilities (IWD) continue to encounter obstacles in accessing the labour market, including stereotypes, prejudices and insufficient structural and procedural support (Stolarska-Szeląg, 2025). There is a clear need to fill a research gap that links several key areas: the specific values and media habits of Generation Z, the impact of media exposure on their attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, and the implications of these relationships for human resource management practices.

This study aims not only to analyse Generation Z's attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, but also to assess how these attitudes translate into specific challenges and requirements in human resource management. The main rationale for addressing this topic is that Generation Z expects employers to be genuinely committed to creating environments that truly support the full participation of individuals with disabilities in working life.

Literature review

The contemporary labour market is undergoing dynamic changes driven by the entry of Generation Z (individuals born after 1995), whose attitudes and expectations differ significantly from those of previous generations. Young employees place great emphasis on authenticity, transparency, and employer engagement in social issues (Eng & Kohsuwan, 2025). Inclusivity is no longer perceived merely as an image-related element but has become a “hard” business expectation affecting the competitiveness of enterprises (Coman et al., 2022; Wandhe, 2024). Despite these declarative values, individuals with disabilities still face structural, procedural, and cultural barriers, including deeply rooted prejudices (Stolarska-Szeląg & Król, 2024; Nota et al., 2014).

The literature indicates significant differences in social attitudes toward individuals with disabilities determined by gender (Timmons et al., 2024). In many studies, women achieve higher scores on empathy and acceptance scales, which is often explained by their greater sensitivity to social issues (Santilli et al., 2023; Rojo-Ramos et al., 2022). Some analyses suggest that women's attitudes may be shaped by their own experience of belonging to a marginalised group in the labour market, leading to greater inclusivity towards other groups at risk of exclusion. Conversely, men's attitudes are more frequently burdened by stereotypes regarding the lower productivity of individuals with disabilities, illustrating ableism in the professional environment (Mik-Meyer, 2016). Based on these premises, the first hypothesis was formulated:

H1: Women declare more positive attitudes toward individuals with disabilities than men.

Another significant factor differentiating attitudes is the size of the place of residence. The theoretical justification for this relationship is based on contact theory, according to which more frequent and positive intergroup interaction reduces prejudice (Vuong & Palmer, 2024). Large urban centres, characterised by higher population density and greater diversity, naturally foster such contact and offer greater visibility of inclusive initiatives (Selanon & Chuangchai, 2023; Fortune et al., 2022). Although the literature is not entirely consistent on this point, sometimes indicating the specific sensitivity of rural residents (Rojo-Ramos et al., 2022), it was assumed that:

H2: The size of the place of residence correlates with declared readiness to work in a team with individuals with disabilities.

Social media are the primary communication channel for Generation Z, shaping their norms and standards of behaviour (Siagian & Juliana, 2023; Ayuningtyas Y Hapsari et al., 2024). Through behavioural modelling mechanisms and viral campaigns, the media can both reinforce stereotypes and promote emancipatory narratives (Furr et al., 2016). Research indicates that it is not the time spent online itself, but exposure to inclusive content and positive portrayals of stigmatised groups that realistically influences pro-social attitudes (Tirocchi, 2024; Wang et al., 2021). On this basis, the following hypothesis was adopted:

H3: Greater exposure to media content promoting inclusivity correlates with more positive attitudes toward individuals with disabilities.

Research methodology

The study was conducted on a sample of N = 469 Polish students. Of all participants, 235 combined their studies with professional work. The analyses were conducted on a complete sample of N = 469 (all analyses described refer to this group). Detailed information on the structure of the sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Structure of the sample studied

		Value
Sample size (N)		469
Number of men		160
Number of women		309
Working persons		235
Age (mean ± SD)		21.67 (2.16)
Age (median ± IQR)		21 (20-23)
Age (range: min-max)		18-30
Encountering content about IWD on social media	Yes	369 (78.7%)
	No	100 (21.3%)

Source: Own study based on research

The research was conducted between October 2024 and June 2025. Data was collected using a convenience sampling method among students of Polish universities. The research tool was an online questionnaire distributed through student groups on social media platforms. The survey consisted of three parts: demographic data, social media usage patterns, and a special scale assessing attitudes towards IWD. The latter was measured using a five-point Likert scale (from 1 – ‘strongly disagree’ to 5 – ‘strongly agree’). The items were analysed as separate dependent variables, so they did not form a scale.

Respondents completed an anonymous survey containing personal details and a set of statements concerning attitudes towards individuals with disabilities (the tables include the abbreviation IWD).

The first step of the analysis was to check the distributions of the quantitative variables. For this purpose, basic descriptive statistics were calculated along with the Shapiro-Wilk test to examine the normality of the distribution. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Basic descriptive statistics of the studied variables, together with the Shapiro–Wilk test

Dependent variable	M	Me	SD	Sk.	Kurt.	Min.	Max.	W	p
IWD arouses pity in me	3.12	3.00	1.15	-0.37	-0.96	1.00	5.00	0.87	<0.001
I believe that IWD will not work as efficiently as I will	2.87	3.00	1.21	0.04	-1.06	1.00	5.00	0.91	<0.001
I believe that IWD should not be employed	1.62	1.00	0.87	1.53	2.33	1.00	5.00	0.71	<0.001
I am willing to befriend a disabled colleague	4.06	4.00	0.96	-1.00	0.82	1.00	5.00	0.82	<0.001
I can work in a task force with IWD	4.19	4.00	0.92	-1.25	1.51	1.00	5.00	0.78	<0.001

Annotation: M – mean; Me – median; SD – standard deviation; Sk. – skewness; Kurt. – kurtosis; Min. – minimum value; Max. – maximum value; W – Shapiro–Wilk test result; p – p-value for the Shapiro–Wilk test.

Source: Own study based on research

Due to significant deviations from normality in the distributions shown by the Shapiro–Wilk test for the analysed items (e.g. IWD arouses pity in me: $W = 0.87$, $p < .001$; I believe that IWD will not work as efficiently as I will: $W = 0.91$, $p < .001$; I can work in a task force with IWD: $W = 0.78$, $p < .001$), the analytical plan provided for the use of non-parametric methods. A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was adopted.

To verify the hypotheses, a Mann–Whitney U test was performed to compare the groups, with the report providing the U value, the converted statistic from (Z), p and the effect size r ($r = z/\sqrt{N}$), as well as the medians and IQR for the compared groups. The relationships between ordinal variables and attitudes were examined using Spearman's rank correlation (ρ , N, p). The results of the Shapiro–Wilk test and the characteristics of the distributions justified the use of the non-parametric tests described above to verify H1-H3. All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 29. The distribution of the sample size is presented in Table 3.

The survey asked the respondents whether they would be guided by the fact that a company is free from discrimination when choosing an employer. Respondents answered the question on a Likert scale (1 – I will not be guided by this, 5 – this will be very important to me). The answers received are presented in Figure 1. Figure 1 provides a starting point to understand the general sensitivity of the study group to ethical issues, which lends credibility to further, more detailed questions about individuals with disabilities (IWD).

Table 3. Sample size distribution

Category	Subcategory	N (469)	%
Place of residence	Rural areas	188	40.1
	Cities with over 500,000 inhabitants	105	22.4
	Cities with 150,000 to 500,000 inhabitants	89	19.0
	Cities with 50,000 to 150,000 inhabitants	32	6.8
	Cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants	55	11.7
Time spent on social media	3-4 hours per day	151	32.2
	2-3 hours per day	134	28.6
	1-2 hours per day	141	30.1
	Up to 1 hour per day	43	9.2

Source: Own study based on research

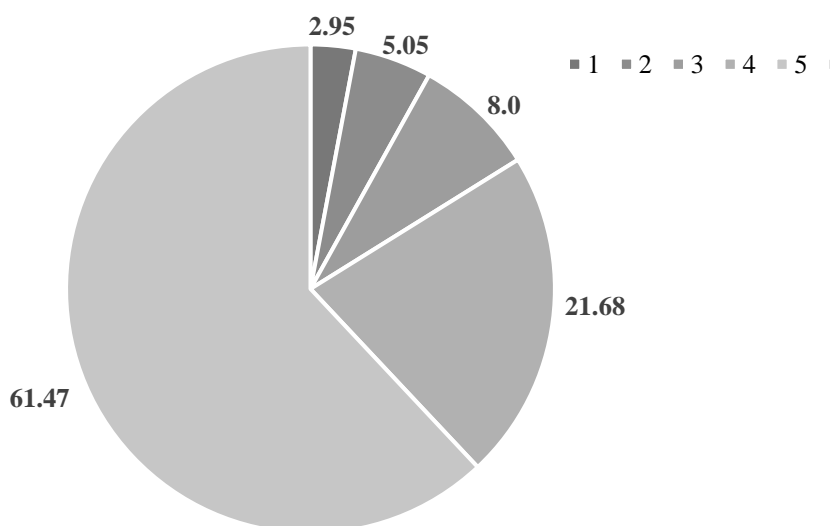


Figure 1. Distribution of responses to the question about the importance of non-discrimination by employers (%)

Source: Own study based on research

For a significant proportion of the students surveyed, the absence of discrimination in the workplace is very important. The high percentage of responses (rating 4 or 5) indicates that a genuine commitment to inclusiveness is not just a ‘soft’ attribute for this group, but a ‘hard’ business expectation. The visual representation in Figure 1 highlights a clear consensus among respondents, which serves as a benchmark to compare their specific attitudes toward IWD in the workplace.

Results

Gender differences in perceptions of individuals with disabilities

First, the differences between the female and male respondents were tested in terms of their perception of colleagues with disabilities. The Mann–Whitney U test was used to check for differences, and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Gender differences in perceptions of colleagues with disabilities – Mann–Whitney test results

Dependent variable	Men (N = 160)			Women (N = 309)			Z	p	r
	average rank	Mdn	IQR	average rank	Mdn	IQR			
IWD arouses pity in me	250.04	4.00	2.00	227.21	3.00	2.00	-1.82	0.069	0.08
I believe that IWD will not work as efficiently as I will	271.51	3.00	2.00	216.09	3.00	2.00	-4.32	<0.001	0.20
I believe that IWD should not be employed	249.28	1.00	1.00	227.61	1.00	1.00	-1.85	0.064	0.09
I am willing to befriend a disabled colleague	213.56	4.00	2.00	246.10	4.00	1.00	-2.62	0.009	0.12
I can work in a task force with IWD	197.89	4.00	2.00	254.21	5.00	1.00	-4.61	<0.001	0.21

Annotation: N – number of observations; Mdn – median; IQR – interquartile range; Z – test statistic value; p – statistical significance; r – effect size index.

Source: Own study based on research

The test results proved to be statistically significant for three of the five variables tested. Men were statistically significantly more likely than women to agree with the statement that individuals with disabilities do not work as efficiently as they do, but the strength of this effect was weak. Women, on the other hand, were statistically significantly more likely to befriend a disabled colleague and work with them in a task force. In these two cases, the strength of the effect was also weak. No statistically significant gender differences were found in the perception that individuals with disabilities elicit pity and should not work. Based on these results, hypothesis H1 was partially supported, as women showed significantly more positive attitudes in the key dimensions of social and professional cooperation.

The relationship between place of residence and perceptions of individuals with disabilities

In the next step of the analysis, the relationships between the size of the place of residence and the opinions about individuals with disabilities were examined. Due to the ordinal nature of the variable size of the place of residence, Spearman's non-parametric rho correlation analysis was used for this purpose (Table 5).

Table 5. Relationship between the size of the place of residence and the perception of individuals with disabilities – Spearman's rho correlation

Variable	Specification	Place of residence
IWD arouses pity in me	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	-0.04
	statistical significance	0.433
I believe that IWD will not work as efficiently as I will	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	0.04
	statistical significance	0.336
I believe that IWD should not be employed	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	-0.06
	statistical significance	0.194
I am willing to befriend a disabled colleague	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	0.07
	statistical significance	0.148
I can work in a task force with IWD	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	0.12
	statistical significance	0.012

Source: Own study based on research

A statistically significant relationship was found between place of residence and willingness to work in a task force with individuals with disabilities. The larger the town where the respondents lived, the more willing they were to work in a task force with individuals with disabilities, and the strength of this effect was weak. No statistically significant correlations were found between the size of the place of residence and the other statements about disabled employees.

Consequently, hypothesis H2 was partially supported, specifically regarding the declared willingness to work in a task force with IWD.

The relationship between social media usage and perceptions of individuals with disabilities

Next, we examined whether the amount of time spent daily on social media was related to the respondents' opinions about individuals with disabilities. Due to the ordinal nature of the measurement of time spent on social media, we again used Spearman's non-parametric rho correlation analysis (Table 6).

Table 6. Relationship between the amount of time spent on social media and the perception of individuals with disabilities – Spearman's rho correlation

Variable	Specification	Time spent on social media
IWD arouses pity in me	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	0.09
	statistical significance	0.053
I believe that IWD will not work as efficiently as I will	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	0.00
	statistical significance	0.952
I believe that IWD should not be employed	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	0.05
	statistical significance	0.265
I am willing to befriend a disabled colleague	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	-0.08
	statistical significance	0.067
I can work in a task force with IWD	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	-0.02
	statistical significance	0.662

Source: Own study based on research

No statistically significant correlations were found between the amount of time spent on social media and opinions about employees with disabilities. The analysis did not reveal any correlation between the total time spent on social media and attitudes (Table 6). However, considering the descriptive data indicating that as many as 78.7% of respondents encounter content about persons with disabilities (Table 1) and the high declarative importance of non-discrimination (Figure 1), it can be assumed that it is the quality of the message, rather than its quantity, that shapes the sensitivity of the study group. The vast majority of the group had been exposed to inclusive content, and at the same time, this group shows very high rates of willingness to cooperate (*Mdn* = 4.00 or 5.00 in Table 4), so the co-occurrence of these phenomena suggests a positive influence of the media, even if this has not been demonstrated by correlations. H3 was rejected in quantitative terms (time), but observations suggest that further research is needed on the qualitative aspect.

Conclusions

The primary objective of this study was to analyse Generation Z's perception of diversity, particularly regarding individuals with disabilities, and to identify the resulting implications for human resource management. The results indicate how demographic variables, such as gender and place of residence, intersect with modern media consumption, shaping the professional values of the youngest cohort entering the labour market.

The empirical results confirm that women exhibit significantly more positive attitudes toward cooperation with individuals with disabilities than men, suggesting a higher level of social empathy and openness. Furthermore, the data support contact

theory, as residents of large urban centres showed a greater readiness to work in integrated teams. A conclusion directly referring to contemporary debates on “digital natives” is that the time spent on social media is not a significant predictor of inclusive attitudes. Instead, qualitative exposure to inclusive content fosters openness. This justifies the claim that for Generation Z, the substantive nature of digital consumption has a significantly greater impact than screen time alone.

This study extends existing academic knowledge focused on research into “quantitative” digital influence, proving that content quality is the decisive factor in value formation. The study also indicates that contemporary prejudices among young men are often linked to concerns about organisational productivity. This allows for a theoretical mapping of how ableism adapts to modern corporate environments.

This study has a methodological limitation in that it is not possible to verify the results obtained in a control group consisting of people who do not use the media. In the analysed demographic group, the phenomenon of complete lack of exposure to the media is marginal, which makes it practically impossible to select a representative control group. Another major limitation is the difficulty in isolating the influence of the media, due to the fact that media communication is a commonly occurring variable and not an isolated factor of influence. Under such conditions, it is difficult to clearly determine to what extent inclusive attitudes are the result of direct consumption of content and to what extent they are the result of general socialisation in the digital world. This study did not statistically analyse the direct impact of media content type on attitudes, focusing solely on exposure time. Future research should include an in-depth correlational analysis between specific content types and levels of diversity acceptance.

The author also wishes to point out the possibility of replicating the study. The study focuses exclusively on students, so the results cannot be generalised to the entire Generation Z population, including those who do not pursue higher education. The sample includes only students from Poland, so the results may reflect the specific cultural and social conditions of that country. The article describes in detail the construction of attitude indices towards people with disabilities, providing sample statements, which allows the questionnaire to be used in groups with different levels of education and from different cultural contexts. If you wish to compare the magnitude of effects in meta-analyses, you can use the test parameters indicated by the author of the study. An added value in this respect is also the fact that the structure of the study allows easy replication in order to compare Generation Z with other cohorts, which could verify whether the observed trends are unique to Generation Z.

The results obtained have a direct impact on HR practices in Polish organisations. They confirm that in order to attract and retain Generation Z talent, employers must abandon superficial declarations in favour of authentic actions:

- Findings indicating that men are more prone to performance stereotypes suggest a need for systematic anti-bias training that exposes ableism as a systemic and institutional phenomenon. Such training should be designed with the participation of individuals with disabilities to ensure authenticity and build empathy. This type of workshop can help build authenticity and allow stereotypes to be

confronted with reality. In this way, it will be possible to move from pity to a professional partnership based on recognising the competence of one's colleague.

- HR and marketing departments should use social media to tell credible stories about inclusion in their organisations. Presenting positive examples of cooperation and success has the potential to become an effective tool in combating stereotypes and attracting young, conscious employees. Organisations should publish specific case studies of the professional successes of employees with disabilities instead of general declarations of openness. As the analysis in the literature review section shows, social media are becoming a tool for young employees to verify the value of an employer, which is why the message should be transparent and ethical.
- Companies should create conditions for natural, positive contact between employees from different groups, e.g., through collaborative projects and intergenerational mentoring. Verification of the contact hypothesis in an academic environment suggests that such activities, when transferred to an organisational setting, can effectively reduce prejudice.

The conclusions indicate that diversity management should not be merely an image-building exercise, but an integral part of a business strategy aimed at attracting and retaining talent. Organisations should implement consistent diversity and organisational inclusion management policies that go beyond mere declarations, introducing transparent recruitment processes and training in diversity management.

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Authors' Contribution: Elżbieta Stolarska-Szeląg – 100%.

Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure: The article did not receive funding.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest.

Ethics Declaration: The study did not require ethical approval, participation was voluntary and anonymous, and participants were informed that they could discontinue the survey at any time.

AI Declaration: Artificial intelligence was used for linguistic correction in this article.

CZYNNIKI DECYDUJĄCE O STOSUNKU POKOLENIA Z DO INTEGRACJI OSÓB Z NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCIAMI W MIEJSCU PRACY

Streszczenie: Współczesne przedsiębiorstwa stoją przed wyzwaniami związanymi z zarządzaniem różnorodnością, zwłaszcza w zakresie dostosowania strategii HR do zmieniających się oczekiwań pracowników z pokolenia Z. Dorastanie w świecie nasycenym mediami cyfrowymi wpłynęło na ich podejście do inkluzywności, równości i etyki korporacyjnej. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza postrzegania różnorodności przez pokolenie Z, w tym osób z niepełnosprawnościami, oraz zidentyfikowanie wyzwań, jakie stwarza to dla praktyki HR. Badanie zostało przeprowadzone na próbie 469 studentów z wykorzystaniem statystyk opisowych, testu Shapiro–Wilka, testu U Manna–Whitneya oraz korelacji Spearmana. Wyniki pokazały, że kobiety mają znacznie bardziej pozytywne nastawienie do pracy z osobami z niepełnosprawnościami niż mężczyźni, a mieszkańcy dużych miast częściej deklarują chęć pracy w zespołach z osobami z niepełnosprawnościami. Chociaż ilość czasu spędzanego w mediach społecznościowych nie była znacząca, dane opisowe sugerują, że ekspozycja na treści promujące integrację odgrywa ważniejszą rolę w kształtowaniu otwartych postaw. Wyniki badania podkreślają potrzebę wdrożenia przez organizacje spójnej polityki różnorodności, która wykracza poza zwykłe deklaracje i rzeczywiście wspiera integracyjne środowisko pracy. Badanie wypełnia lukę w literaturze, pokazując, że pokolenie Z oczekuje od pracodawców prawdziwego zaangażowania w tworzenie środowisk sprzyjających pełnemu uczestnictwu osób z niepełnosprawnościami w życiu zawodowym.

Słowa kluczowe: dyskryminacja, pokolenie Z, zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi, analiza statystyczna, inkluzywność

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