



Promotion of the Principles of Corporate Social Responsibility and their Implementation by Large Businesses in Kazakhstan

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Abstract

The article discusses the features of promoting the principles of corporate social responsibility in the Republic of Kazakhstan. All components of promoting the principles of corporate social responsibility in Kazakhstan are considered as a single system, which defines the conceptual framework, stakeholders in the development of corporate social responsibility, as well as legal support for its development in the country. The authors characterized the Kazakh model of corporate social responsibility of large businesses and gave examples of the practical implementation of its principles at the present stage. Social investment of subsoil user companies in the territory of their presence in the Pavlodar region was analyzed. The considered social investment was carried out within the framework of memorandums of mutual cooperation with local executive authorities. The authors formulated conclusions that the Kazakhstani corporate social responsibility model is still evolving, with a combination of state regulation and business interaction, and further efforts are needed to increase corporate social responsibility commitments and embrace global initiatives.

Keywords: Profit, Gross regional product, Stakeholders, Social partnership

JEL Codes: L21; M14; M21

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1. Introduction

The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1995) stipulates that the highest values of the state are a person, his life, rights, and freedoms. Human rights to free, safe work, remuneration, rest, and labour disputes, also guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, provide the joint responsibility of business to employees. However, the social responsibility of business, provided by the legislation of the country, does not adequately meet the modern needs of society to improve the socio-economic and environmental conditions for realizing human potential. Today, it is appropriate, according to the authors, to consider corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a voluntary and agreed-upon with stakeholders obligation of a company to implement significant internal and external social programs at its own expense.

It cannot be said that CSR is a one-sided game, where the business will only give away, gaining nothing in return except moral satisfaction. The benefits of the implementation of CSR for a company are its promising assistance to the development of a company (increasing production efficiency, increasing sales), improving its reputation, and expanding partnerships with the government, business partners, and local communities (Ringov & Zollo, 2007; Social programs of social..., 2018). From these positions, the definition of corporate social responsibility as a tool with which it is possible to influence society, to ensure sustainable development becomes clear (Khalina & Vasileva, 2019; Yehorycheva et al., 2022).

In light of the latest world events related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the implementation of CSR has become very important for Kazakhstan. In Kazakhstan, in order to reduce the spread of the disease, the business activity of most enterprises was significantly limited, and, consequently, revenues to the state budget and the population decreased (Mozghovyi et al., 2021). The situation caused by the coronavirus has become a real test of social responsibility for the Kazakh society. To avoid catastrophic social tension in Kazakh society, the state made social payments to citizens. The measures taken by the state to support enterprises and the population cannot be called sufficient. Part of enterprises and citizens, having shown real social responsibility, provided all possible assistance in providing medical supplies and means of protection to those in need. Also, business owners and employees of enterprises carried out volunteer assistance for vulnerable groups of the population (Leonavičienė & Burinskienė, 2021). It is still difficult to assess the economic and social losses incurred during the quarantine. But already now, it can be said that some jobs have been lost, and medium and small businesses have suffered significantly. Small businesses in the service sector were particularly affected.

The adoption of the CSR principles set out in the Global Compact should become a guiding and organizing basis for the full implementation of the sustainable development strategy of Kazakhstan by all large business entities. Kazakhstan's sustainable development strategy, launched in 2012, sets out a vision for the country's development across various sectors, including economic diversification, social welfare, and environmental sustainability. It aims to search for a new model of economic growth and increased productivity; boost the business environment and scale up new technologies across sectors; improve institutional performance and effectiveness of key state and sectoral programs and budgets; modernize law enforcement and judicial systems; improve the quality of education and health care; and supporting regional economic development, especially in remote areas. As of the beginning of 2019, 15 Kazakhstani companies are parties to the United Nations Global Compact (hereinafter U.N.), although there are only 178 companies on the list of subsoil users making tax payments. Raising awareness about the Global Compact and its potential benefits, providing support and resources to assist companies in implementation, and developing supportive policies or incentives can encourage more companies in Kazakhstan to adopt the U.N. Global Compact Principles and contribute to sustainable development efforts. The Republic of Kazakhstan has a focus on raw materials, and its GDP of more than 30% is formed at the expense of

subsoil users (Report on progress made, 2018; National report, 2019). Many entrepreneurs are not satisfied that the benefits of CSR participation will become visible years later, thanks to the improved economic, social and environmental conditions for realizing consumer opportunities (Szostak, 2022). This mainly explains the low activity of CSR adoption by companies.

The purpose of the presented article is to study the implementation of the principles of corporate social responsibility in Kazakhstan's large enterprises. The novelty of the study is that the definition of the CSR model and the system of its promotion in Kazakhstan was considered based on an analysis of the ongoing activities to promote CSR and the practice of its implementation by individual companies. The study used general scientific methods of cognition, including economic and statistical methods, methods of comparative and correlation analysis, and generalization.

The paper is divided as follows: Section 2 presents the features of promoting the principles of corporate social responsibility. Section 3 includes the characteristics of corporate social responsibility of large enterprises. Finally, Section 4 offers some concluding remarks.

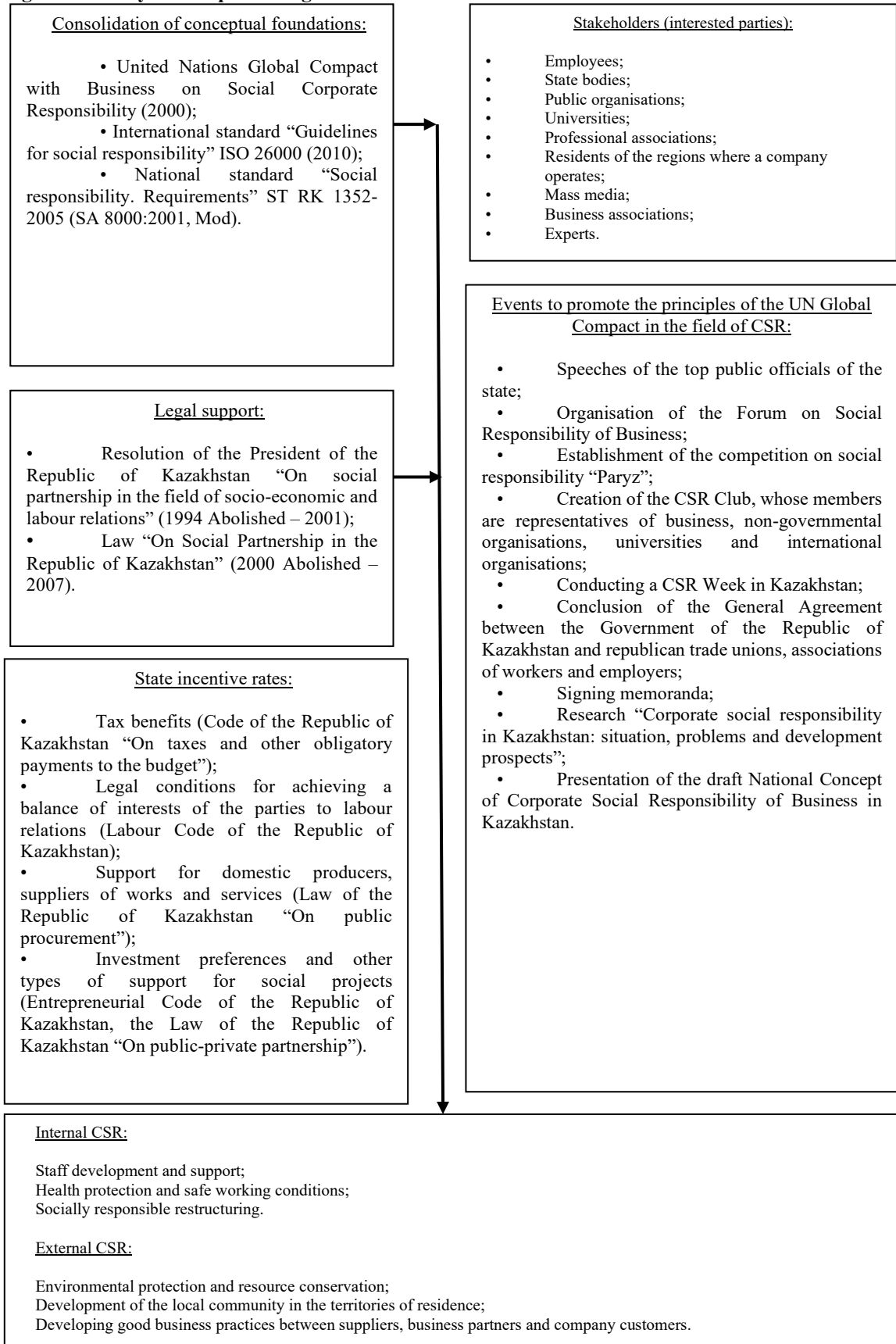
2. Features of Promoting the Principles of Corporate Social Responsibility in Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, the interaction of business structures and government authorities to ensure sustainable development is becoming increasingly common. This interaction is manifested in various forms and methods, envisaged by large companies in corporate strategies, in terms of social responsibility (Kabatova, 2018). The attitude of society and the acceptance of CSR by business depends on understanding its essence. There is no single formalized understanding of CSR in Kazakhstani society. Some see it as a concept of the voluntary decision of companies to participate in improving society and protecting the environment. There are those who perceive CSR as a means of achieving success, through the observance of moral values, and respect for people, the public, and the environment (Ali et al., 2022). Some entrepreneurs adhere to the opinion of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (1998) that CSR is the commitment of business to the concept of sustainable economic development in working with its employees, their families, local communities and society in general to improve their quality of life. For some, the meaning of social responsibility is in the conscious interest of the business that benefits society as a whole (Voznyak et al., 2019). This is in line with the definition given by the European Entrepreneurship Movement for Social Consolidation (Report "Meeting changing...", 2016). Large business, guided in the CSR of its strategy by the ISO 26000:2010 "Guide to Social Responsibility", understands the responsibility for the impact of decisions and their activities on society and the environment, contributes to sustainable development, including the well-being of society (International standard ISO 26000..., 2010).

Kazakhstan society is going through a difficult road to accepting the principles of CSR, formulated in the U.N. Global Compact on Social Corporate Responsibility. The difficulty of the path is explained by the stereotypical views on social responsibility that have developed in the past Soviet experience, as well as by the collapse of the national economy during the country's transition from a socialist formation to market relations in the last decade of the last century (Ismayilov et al., 2021a). The large-scale privatization of state property carried out at that time gave a huge chance to the formation of a modern business community and, at the same time, contributed to the deep stratification of society in terms of material well-being and social status (Mura & Hajduová, 2021). In the country, little attention was paid to social responsibility issues at the beginning of the post-Soviet period, since private business was just in its infancy, and its tasks were reduced to survival, consolidation and expansion in the market. But already at the end of the 90s, the First President of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev began to voice in his speeches the growing public demand for the social responsibility of business to the country and noted the necessity to elevate the socially-oriented business to the rank of a national idea (Speech by President N.A. Nazarbayev, 2008).

To provide legal support for the development of CSR in the country, a number of regulatory and legislative acts were adopted (Resolution of the President..., 1994; Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan..., 2000). Extensive explanatory work was carried out at various forums and round tables for the adoption of CSR principles among the business community, employers, government officials, and non-governmental organizations. Entrepreneurs were motivated to develop CSR by the establishment of the Paryz competition in 2008 (Decree of the President..., 2008). International relations, primarily in the development programs of the United Nations, made it possible to attract advanced experience in promoting CSR principles in Kazakhstan. The conceptual foundations for the implementation of CSR are the principles and provisions of special standards and the U.N. Global Compact with business representatives. In 2013, the "Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia" (EFCA) initiated a study "Development of Corporate Social Responsibility in Kazakhstan: Situation, Problems and Development Prospects" within the framework of the project "Development of a unified approach to Promoting Corporate Social Responsibility in Kazakhstan" (Development of corporate social..., 2013). Based on the results of this study, recommendations were made for the development of the National Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility of Business in Kazakhstan. Thus, a system for promoting CSR ideas was formed in Kazakhstan, shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The system of promoting CSR ideas in Kazakhstan



3. Characteristics of Corporate Social Responsibility of Large Business Subjects

In Kazakhstan, the practice of corporate social responsibility is at an early stage of development in comparison with developed countries. In most of these countries, such as Finland, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, etc., the manifestation of social responsibility in companies of any level included in the Global Compact U.N. (Global Compact U.N.) is a standard requirement for the implementation of activities, although the CSR model in these countries differs (Kuznetsova & Maslova, 2013). This agreement includes responsible companies that support the principles of sustainable development. Among the participants of the Global Compact from Kazakhstan are such well-known companies as JSC "KEGOC", "Kazakhstan Temir Zholy", JSC National Company "KazMunayGas", "Olymp Medical Group" LLP, "Almaz Medical Group", etc. (Report on progress made..., 2018). Of the fifteen Kazakhstani participants in the Global Compact, four companies represent the medical sector. The oil and gas sector of the country is represented by one company – JSC National Company KazMunayGas. For comparison, at the beginning of 2019, the number of oil and natural gas production enterprises in Kazakhstan was 104 (Oil and gas industry, 2019).

Socially responsible activities as part of their strategy enterprises are implemented in different ways, depending on the understanding of their social responsibility and capabilities. When talking about opportunities, the authors mean the scale and economic sustainability of the business. Large enterprises implement CSR systematically and on an ongoing basis, based on the provisions laid down in the development strategy, in addition to what is required by the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Large enterprises in Kazakhstan may face several specific problems when attempting to implement CSR principles:

1. Some companies may lack a clear understanding of CSR principles and their potential benefits, resulting in limited commitment and engagement.
2. Allocating sufficient resources for CSR initiatives can be a challenge for large enterprises, especially if they perceive CSR as an additional cost rather than a long-term investment.
3. The cultural and social context of Kazakhstan may pose challenges in aligning CSR practices with local norms and expectations. Understanding and addressing these cultural nuances is crucial for effective implementation.
4. Inconsistent or unclear CSR regulations can create confusion and uncertainty for companies, making it challenging to navigate the legal requirements and obligations related to CSR.
5. Engaging diverse stakeholders, including local communities, and government bodies, can be complex. Companies may face difficulties in identifying and effectively collaborating with relevant stakeholders.

To overcome these problems, large enterprises in Kazakhstan can employ several strategies:

1. Companies can conduct awareness campaigns and provide training programs to educate their employees and stakeholders about CSR principles, their importance, and the potential benefits for all parties involved.
2. Embedding CSR principles into the core business strategy ensures long-term commitment and resource allocation. This integration allows for the identification of synergies between business goals and CSR objectives.
3. Engaging with relevant stakeholders, including local communities, and government bodies, through collaborative initiatives and partnerships enhances the effectiveness and impact of CSR efforts.
4. Dedicated CSR departments or roles within organizations can streamline CSR implementation, ensure accountability, and facilitate the integration of CSR principles into business operations.

5. Regularly reporting on CSR initiatives and outcomes, both internally and externally, fosters transparency and accountability. It helps build trust with stakeholders and showcases the positive impact of CSR activities.

Large, medium, and small businesses have different requirements and approaches to CSR. For example, the state holding JSC "National Welfare Fund Samruk-Kazyna", being a large business entity, integrated CSR into the overall strategy. The holding's development strategy for 2012-2022 provides raising the standards of social responsibility in the group, including through:

- regulation of social and labour relations based on the principle of social partnership;
- ensuring environmental sustainability and safety at work;
- determination of a unified policy in the field of social project implementation.

The holding includes a subsidiary company, "Samruk-Kazyna Trust", which promotes social projects (Social Projects Development, 2019). An example of the successful implementation of the principles of corporate social responsibility is the Eurasian Resources Group (hereinafter ERG) – a leading diversified company in the field of extraction and processing of natural resources. The ERG Group operates in fifteen countries on four continents and owns integrated mining, smelting, processing, energy, logistics and marketing businesses. The scale of the ERG group's activities is of strategic importance for the development of the entire economy of the country. It affects the interests of a large number of people. The company strives to ensure the sustainable development of its business and pays increased attention to the social component of its activities in the regions of its presence. The company implements the principles of social responsibility through the creation of new jobs, social programs for personnel, sponsorship and charity, and environmental and educational campaigns.

The most important member of the Eurasian Group (ERG) stakeholders are the governments of the host countries. This is due to their potential impact on operations through government policy, legislation, regulation and the issuance of new licenses. The Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan owns a 40% stake in ERG, and its representatives are members of the Group's Board of Managers. Interaction with the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan is carried out in accordance with the Code of Corporate Conduct, according to which the ERG group cannot, directly or indirectly, support political activities, except in special circumstances previously approved by the Board of Managers. Any political contributions must be authorized in accordance with internal company regulations and applicable laws.

An important project in the development of interaction with stakeholders is the preparation of a corporate non-financial report on sustainable development. A comprehensive, systematic presentation of significant information about the Company's activities for society and specific stakeholders is intended to increase the growth of confidence in it, and helps to identify significant issues and the most urgent tasks of cooperation (Tran et al., 2022). Since 2016, the ERG group has been providing the results of environmental monitoring for publication in the State of the Donated Register of Pollutant Emissions and Transfer of Kazakhstan. In addition, consultations are held with local communities in the regions of the presence of the group's enterprises to assess the impact of their activities on the environment.

It is important to note that while the analysis of social investments was conducted specifically in the Pavlodar region, it may not necessarily be representative of CSR practices throughout Kazakhstan as a whole. There could be significant variations in CSR practices between regions due to various factors such as economic development, industrial specialization, and local priorities. Consider the manifestation of corporate social responsibility of large companies of subsoil users of the Pavlodar region (Table 1). These companies include enterprises of the ERG group, the "KAZ MINERALS" company, and "Bogatyr" LLP. Table 1 presents data on the social investment of these companies in the Pavlodar region for three years. The social investment was carried out at the expense of the company's own funds, in addition to those funds that they paid to the budget for tax

obligations and other mandatory payments to the state budget in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

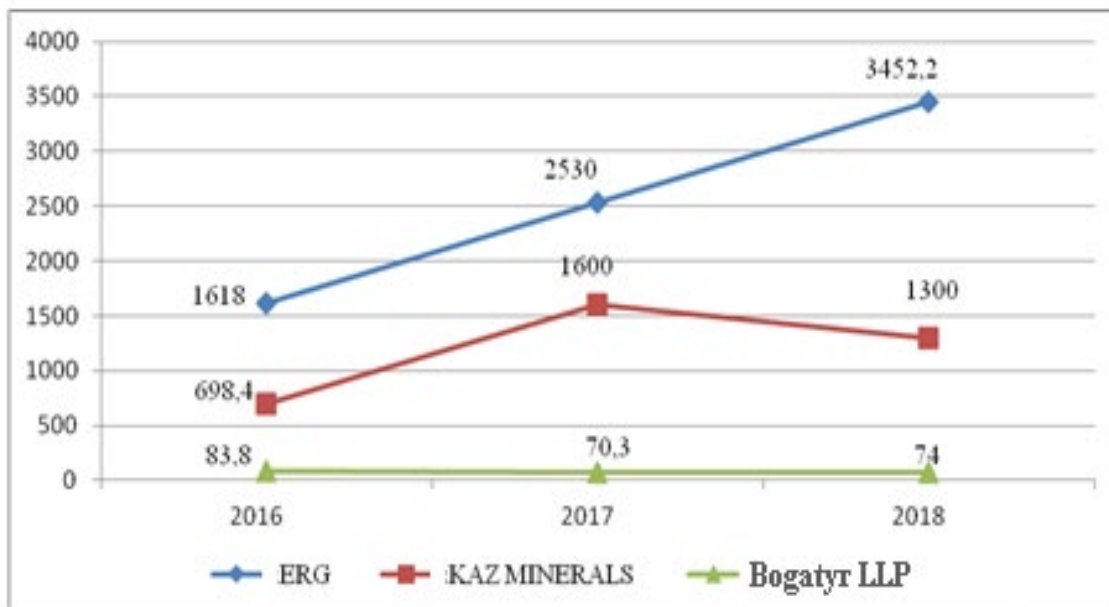
Table 1: Social investments of the largest subsoil users within the framework of Memorandums of mutual cooperation with the Akimat of the Pavlodar region (million tenge)

Sphere of social investment	Companies									Total		
	"ERG"			"KAZ MINERALS"			LLP "Bogatyr"			2016	2017	2018
	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11(2+5+8)	12(3+6+9)	13(4+7+10)
Social protection	33	120	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	33	120	0
Health care	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0
Education	382	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.3	-	382	0.3	0
Sport	953	2410.00	3152.2	165	1600	226	67	10	-	1185	4020	3378.2
Religion and culture	-	-	300	-	-	-	0.8	-	-	0.8	0	300
Other	250	-	-	533.4	-	1074.00	16	60	74	799.4	60	1148
Results of the company's social investments	1618	2530	3452.2	698.4	1600	1300	83.8	70.3	74	2400.2	4200.3	4826.2
Growth rate of the company's social investments, %	x	56.4	36.6	x	56.4	-18.8	x	-16.1	5.3	x	75	15
Company revenue	86 731.6	102128.5	105974.2	331398	631981.8	746971	62462.7*	79528.1*	91014*	480592.3	813637.6	943959.2
Growth rate of the company's revenue, %	x	17.8	3.8	x	90.7	18.2	x	27.3	14.4	x	69.3	16.0
Profit of a company before tax	17419.9	36790.4	13696.5	75240	189138	221811	16038.7*	28488.8*	35667.7*	108698.6	254417.2	271175.2
Company's paid taxes	17600	22200	18500	59166	103373.7	110905.5	12732.1	15113	18531.3	89498.1	140686.7	147936.8
Share of social investments from the company's profit, %	9.29	6.88	25.20	0.93	0.85	0.59	0.52	0.25	0.21	2.21	1.65	1.78
The ratio of the company's social investments to paid taxes, times	0.092	0.114	0.187	0.012	0.015	0.012	0.007	0.005	0.004	0.027	0.030	0.033
Gross regional product (GRP) of the Pavlodar region							1 975 487.30			2 369 297.80		2 746 652.10
Refined budget of the Pavlodar region (expenditure part)							121462.4			148959.4		214 430.2
* Average dollar to tenge exchange rate for the year, tenge to dollar							342			326.1		345.5

Note: Compiled by the authors based on sources (Consolidated report on expenditures, 2018; Report to consumers and others, 2019; 23. Analytical report on profit..., 2019; Consolidated financial statements; 2018)

The total amount of social investments of subsoil users in the Pavlodar region during 2016-2018 more than doubled from 2400.2 million tenge to 4826.2 million tenge. If we consider the dynamics of social investments in the context of companies, it can be noted that only "ERG" demonstrates a clear upward trend. The growth rate of social investments of "KAZ MINERALS" in 2018 and "Bogatyr" LLP in 2017 have a negative value of -18.8 and -16.1, respectively. Graphically, trends in the dynamics of changes in the number of social investments of three companies are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Dynamics of changes in social investments of subsoil users in the Pavlodar region



Note: Compiled according to Table 1

The significance of the scale of activities of the subsoil users under consideration is confirmed by the comparison of their total revenue, which in 2018 amounted to 943959.2 million tenge with the Gross Regional Product (GRP) in the amount of 2746652.10 million tenge for the same period. The growth rates of the companies' proceeds for three years have positive values, including the growth in prices for the extracted raw materials and the increase in their sales volumes.

Most of the social investments are directed by subsoil users in the sports sector. The structure of social investments by spheres of life of the population in the Pavlodar region is presented in Table 2 and Figures 3-5.

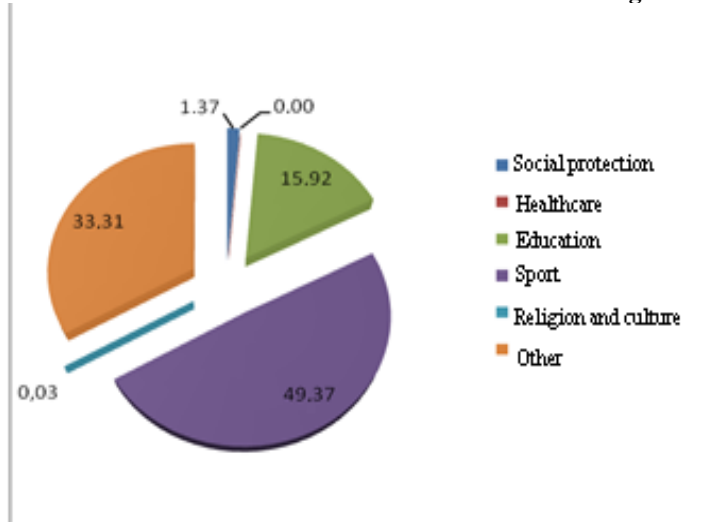
Table 2: The structure of social investments of subsoil users in the Pavlodar region

Sphere of social investment	2016		2017		2018	
	Sum, mln tenge	Share, %	Sum, mln tenge	Share, %	Sum, mln tenge	Share, %
Social protection	33	1.37	120	2.86	—	—
Health care	—	—	—	—	—	—
Education	382	15.92	0.3	0.01	—	—
Sport	1185	49.37	4020	95.71	3378.2	70.00
Religion and culture	0.8	0.03	—	—	300	6.22
Other	799.4	33.31	60	1.43	1148	23.79
Total amount of social investments of the company	2400.2	100	4200.3	100	4826.2	100

Note: Compiled according to Table 1

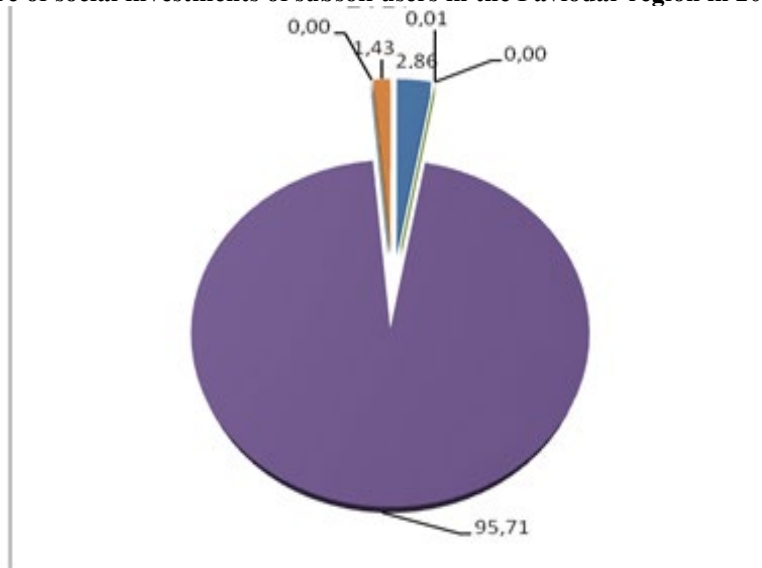
In 2016, 49.37% were allocated to sports, and almost 16% of social investments of subsoil users in the Pavlodar region were directed to education. In 2017, 96% of social investments were already directed to sports. In the next two years, investments were no longer directed to education. In 2018, compared to 2017, the share of investment by subsoil users in sports decreased to 70%. An interesting fact is that social investments in the healthcare sector in 2016-2018 were not made by the companies under consideration in the Pavlodar region.

Figure 3: The structure of social investments of subsoil users in the Pavlodar region in 2016



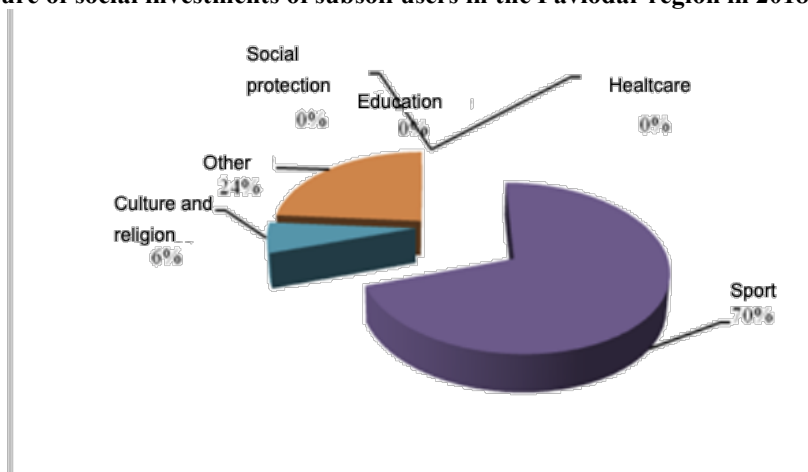
Note: Compiled according to Table 1

Figure 4: The structure of social investments of subsoil users in the Pavlodar region in 2017



Note: Compiled according to Table 1

Figure 5: The structure of social investments of subsoil users in the Pavlodar region in 2018

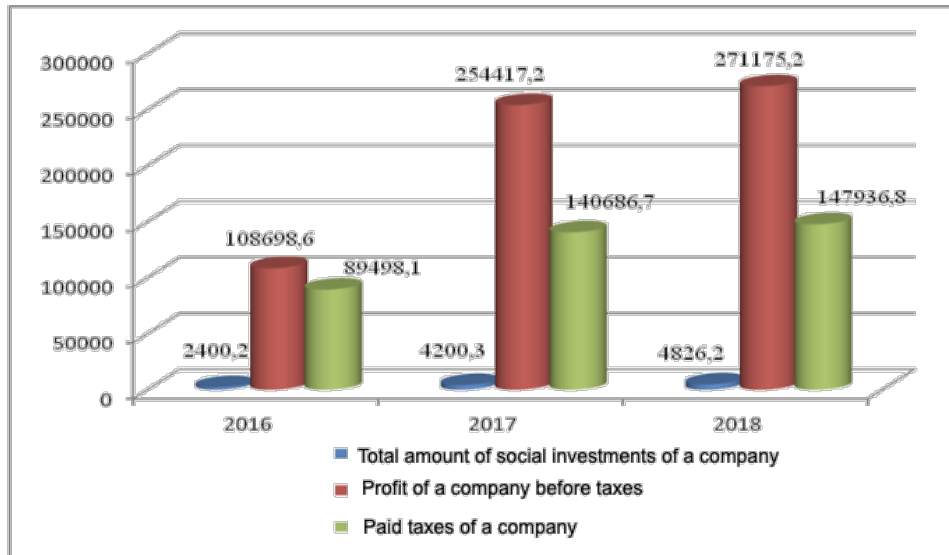


Note: Compiled according to Table 1

Culture and religion accounted for 6%, other spheres – 24% of the amount of social investments. Social investments of subsoil users in the Pavlodar region are insignificant in comparison with their profits. This is clearly illustrated in Figure 6. This trend has been observed over the three years under consideration.

The amount allocated for social investments by companies depends on their profits. The degree and nature of the relationship between these indicators reflect the indicators of correlation and variance, which can be determined using the data in Table 1: "Total amount of social investments of a company", "Profit of a company before tax".

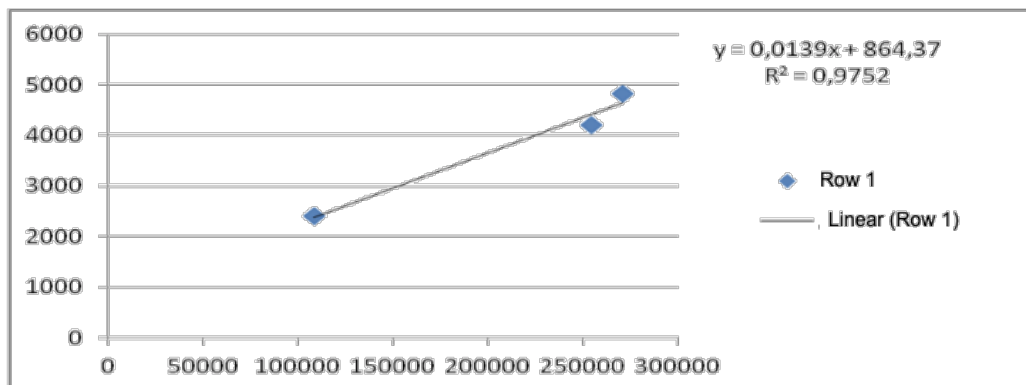
Figure 6: Comparison of social investments in the Pavlodar region, tax payments and profits of subsoil users



Note: Compiled according to Table 1

According to the authors' calculations, the relationship between social investments of subsoil users in the Pavlodar region and their revenue is expressed by a correlation coefficient (r) equal to 0.987514445. This means that the relationship between these indicators is strong and positive, despite the fact that compared to the profits of companies, their social investments in the territory of presence are insignificant. The correlation relationship between social investments of subsoil users in the territory of their presence in the Pavlodar region and the profit they received is shown in Figure 7.

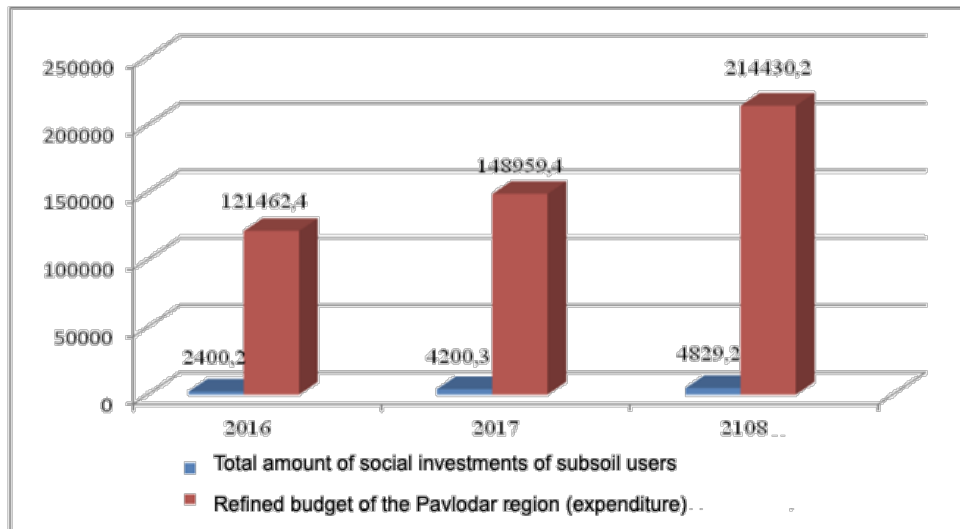
Figure 7: Correlation field of communication of social investments of subsoil users in the territory of their presence in the Pavlodar region and their profit for 2016-2018



Note: Calculated and compiled according to Table 1

The high degree of dependence of social investments on the size of the company's profits is confirmed by the dispersion indicator $R = 0.97518478$. It was determined that the amount of social investments of subsoil users in the territory of their presence by 97.5% depends on their profit. A comparison of social investments of subsoil users with the expenditure part of the regional budget is graphically presented in Figure 8. This comparison reflects the significance of these investments for the region.

Figure 8: Comparison of social investments of subsoil users in the territory of presence in the Pavlodar region and the regional budget for 2016-2018



Note: Compiled according to Table 1

Despite the observed growth of social investments during 2016-2018, their value is many times less than the regional budget. Although the total profit of these companies is not much less than the regional budget and, their revenue is quite comparable to the GRP.

4. Conclusion

The Kazakhstani CSR model has not yet been fully formed. It is characterized by a combination of active participation of the state in the regulation of socio-economic and environmental policy and the interaction of business structures with society without government intervention, regulated by corporations through a system of specially established incentives and benefits. A significant part of social investment in Kazakhstan is carried out within the framework of strategic partnership agreements, which are concluded annually with regional authorities. These partnerships play an important role in ensuring the social and economic development of local communities. Particular attention is paid to infrastructure development, education, youth development, sports development, health care and social cohesion. The analysis of social investments of subsoil users in the territory of presence in the Pavlodar region, carried out within the framework of the concluded memorandums with local executive authorities, indicates a tendency for their increase, although their value is insignificant in comparison with the profits received. These companies have the potential to increase their CSR commitments.

The expansion of its partnership with local authorities and communities, the growing public demand for a fair sharing of benefits from the growth of national income and the use of the country's natural resources, as well as the full acceptance of the concept of CSR will contribute to solving the problems of developing CSR business. The theoretical significance of the study is that it helps to expand the understanding of the role of CSR and its necessity in modern business. The practical significance of the study is that it can help large enterprises identify potential risks

associated with the non-implementation or insufficient implementation of CSR principles. The findings of the study provide an understanding of how non-compliance with these principles can affect a company's reputation, relationships with stakeholders, and financial results.

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