

Managing Career Mobility Amid Inequality Of Opportunity: A Systematic Literature Review Of Generation Z And Inclusive Economic Development

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Abstract

The transition of Generation Z into increasingly dynamic labour markets raises important questions about whether career mobility can provide a pathway toward broader social and economic mobility when individuals begin their careers from unequal socioeconomic conditions. This systematic literature review examines how socioeconomic background and inequality of opportunity shape the career development and mobility of Generation Z, with particular attention to career-management and organisational mechanisms. Following the PRISMA 2020 framework, relevant literature was identified and synthesised thematically across four interconnected research streams: socioeconomic background and inequality of opportunity, Generation Z and career development, career management and organisational support, and career mobility in relation to social and economic mobility. The synthesis indicates that socioeconomic background influences career opportunities through differences in access to educational resources, information, networks, work experience, mentoring, and career guidance. However, socioeconomic background does not operate as a deterministic factor, as human capital, career adaptability, organisational support, and career-management mechanisms can shape how individuals convert available resources into career outcomes. The review further shows that career-management practices may function either as mechanisms for reducing inequality or as mechanisms through which inequality is reproduced, depending on their accessibility and distribution across socioeconomic groups. Career mobility therefore represents an important link between individual career development and broader social and economic mobility. The review identifies the need for more longitudinal, cross-contextual, and multilevel research examining how career-management mechanisms influence the capacity of Generation Z to convert capabilities into sustained career and socioeconomic mobility, thereby contributing to inclusive economic development.



Keyword: Generation Z; Inequality of Opportunity; Career Mobility; Career Management; Inclusive Economic Development.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from education to employment has become increasingly complex as young people enter labour markets characterised by changing skill requirements, evolving forms of employment, and increasingly diverse career trajectories. In this context, career mobility has become an important dimension of individuals' working lives because it reflects not only movement across jobs and occupations but also opportunities for career advancement and improvement in socioeconomic position. Career mobility can therefore be considered beyond an individual career outcome, as it may also represent a pathway through which individuals experience broader forms of social and economic mobility. Recent empirical evidence demonstrates a positive relationship between career mobility and social mobility, highlighting the relevance of career trajectories to individuals' changing social positions (Oh et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, opportunities to achieve career mobility are not equally distributed across individuals. Educational attainment, skills, and individual effort may contribute to labour-market outcomes, but they do not fully eliminate the influence of socioeconomic background. Evidence from the OECD indicates that young people from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds face additional barriers when attempting to convert their qualifications and experiences into successful employment, including access to high-status occupations. These differences are associated with unequal access to economic, human, social, and cultural capital, which can shape the resources available to individuals during the transition from education to employment (OECD, 2024).

This condition can be understood through the perspective of inequality of opportunity, which distinguishes between outcomes associated with individual choices and outcomes influenced by circumstances beyond individuals' control. In the context of career development, socioeconomic background may constitute an important circumstance because individuals with comparable educational qualifications or skills may nevertheless encounter different career opportunities. The OECD reports that socioeconomic background continues to be associated with labour-market outcomes among young adults even after accounting for academic achievement, skills, and other relevant individual characteristics. Such evidence suggests that career outcomes cannot be explained exclusively by individual merit and that differences in initial circumstances may continue to influence opportunities throughout the education-to-work transition (OECD, 2024).

The role of career management becomes particularly relevant under these circumstances. Career management encompasses processes through which individuals

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and organisations facilitate career development, including career guidance, mentoring, training, career development opportunities, and organisational support. These mechanisms can provide individuals with information, skills, experience, networks, and other resources required to navigate career transitions. However, access to career-development resources may itself be socially differentiated. OECD evidence indicates that young people from less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are generally less likely to participate in several forms of career-development activities. Consequently, career management may function as a mechanism for expanding career opportunities, but unequal access to career-management resources may also contribute to the reproduction of existing inequalities (OECD, 2024).

This issue is particularly relevant for Generation Z, which is entering or establishing its position in the labour market amid substantial changes in the nature of work and career development. For this generation, career trajectories are shaped by the interaction between educational attainment, employability, career-related competencies, social networks, organisational opportunities, and socioeconomic background. Importantly, Generation Z should not be treated as a homogeneous group. Differences in family resources, educational opportunities, social capital, work experience, and access to career support may produce substantially different career trajectories within the same generation. Consequently, examining Generation Z through the lens of inequality of opportunity allows career mobility to be considered not merely as a generational characteristic but as an outcome shaped by unequal starting conditions and access to career resources.

From a development economics perspective, the implications extend beyond individual career success. When individuals are able to move into better occupations, improve their employment conditions, and accumulate human and social capital, career mobility may contribute to broader processes of social and economic mobility. Conversely, persistent barriers to career advancement among individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may reinforce the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic inequality. Recent research by Oh et al. (2025) explicitly connects career mobility with social mobility and demonstrates that career mobility can predict social mobility after accounting for other career-related factors. Their study, drawing on Human Capital Theory and Career Construction Theory, provides an important conceptual and empirical bridge between career development and social mobility.

Although research on social origin and career outcomes has expanded considerably, the relevant literature remains fragmented across several research streams. Andresen and Stapf (2023), in a systematic review of 59 studies, demonstrate that social origin is associated with different dimensions of career success and identify individual, organisational, and contextual mechanisms that may explain differences in



career trajectories across social backgrounds. Their review also highlights the need to integrate organisational perspectives into research on social origin and career success and to investigate mechanisms that may either reinforce or mitigate origin-based inequalities.

At the same time, research focusing on Generation Z has largely developed around issues such as career development, employability, career adaptability, work readiness, and career decision-making, while management research has examined career development, mentoring, organisational support, and related career-management practices. A further stream of research has begun to conceptualise career mobility as a pathway to social mobility. However, these streams have not yet been sufficiently integrated into a systematic framework that simultaneously considers socioeconomic background, inequality of opportunity, Generation Z, career management, and inclusive economic development. This fragmentation leaves an important question insufficiently addressed: how do unequal socioeconomic starting conditions shape the career mobility of Generation Z, and under what career-management and organisational conditions can such inequalities be reduced or reproduced?

Addressing this gap is important because career mobility should not be understood solely as an individual outcome of talent, effort, or career decisions. It may also reflect the interaction between individual capabilities, socioeconomic circumstances, organisational practices, and institutional opportunities. From this perspective, career management represents a potential mechanism through which unequal opportunities may be addressed, but it may also reproduce inequality when access to career-development resources is concentrated among individuals who already possess greater economic, social, or cultural resources. Understanding this dual possibility is particularly relevant to the broader objective of inclusive economic development, in which economic opportunities and the benefits of economic progress are expected to be accessible across different social groups.

Therefore, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to integrate the fragmented literature on inequality of opportunity, career mobility, career management, and inclusive economic development, with particular attention to Generation Z. The study aims to identify how socioeconomic background shapes career opportunities and mobility, examine the role of career-management and organisational mechanisms, and establish the connection between career mobility, social mobility, and inclusive economic development. Based on this objective, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. How does socioeconomic background shape inequality of opportunity in the career development of Generation Z?

RQ2. What factors influence the career mobility of Generation Z across different socioeconomic contexts?

RQ3. How can career-management practices and organisational mechanisms reduce or reproduce inequality of opportunity among Generation Z?

RQ4. How is Generation Z's career mobility associated with social mobility and inclusive economic development?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Inequality of Opportunity

Inequality of opportunity provides the primary theoretical perspective for understanding why individuals with similar levels of effort, education, or skills may nevertheless experience different economic and career outcomes. The central distinction in this perspective is between outcomes associated with individual choices and those shaped by circumstances that are beyond an individual's control, such as family background, socioeconomic status, parental education, and other conditions of origin. Roemer and Trannoy (2016) conceptualise equality of opportunity as a condition in which individuals should have comparable opportunities to achieve outcomes, while differences arising from circumstances beyond individual control represent an important source of inequality. They further argue that equality of opportunity can be incorporated into the analysis of economic development itself, extending the assessment of development beyond conventional income-based measures.

Applied to career development, this perspective suggests that career outcomes cannot be attributed exclusively to individual merit. Socioeconomic background may influence access to educational resources, social networks, career information, internships, mentoring, and other resources that shape subsequent career opportunities. Research on educational and occupational mobility similarly demonstrates the continuing relevance of family socioeconomic circumstances to differences in educational attainment and social mobility (Breen & Jonsson, 2005).

This perspective is particularly relevant to the relationship between social origin and career success. Andresen and Stapf (2023), based on a systematic review of 59 studies, show that social origin is associated with career success through a range of individual, organisational, and contextual mechanisms. Their review also highlights the need to investigate how inequalities associated with social origin may persist or be offset within occupational contexts. Thus, inequality of opportunity provides the macro-level and distributive lens through which differences in Generation Z's career opportunities can be examined.

Human Capital Theory and Career Mobility

Human Capital Theory provides a complementary explanation of how individuals develop productive capabilities that influence their position in the labour market. Education, training, skills, knowledge, and work experience represent forms of human capital that can enhance productivity and improve employment and career outcomes. Within career research, human capital represents one of the established categories of predictors of career success, alongside organisational sponsorship, social capital, sociodemographic characteristics, and individual differences (Ng et al., 2005; Seibert et al., 2024).

From this perspective, career mobility can be understood partly as a process through which individuals accumulate and deploy human capital to obtain better employment opportunities. Education and work experience may increase access to higher-quality occupations, while continuous learning and skills development can facilitate movement across organisational or occupational boundaries. However, Human Capital Theory alone does not fully explain why individuals with similar levels of human capital may experience different career outcomes. Access to opportunities to acquire, signal, and utilise human capital can itself be shaped by socioeconomic background and organisational structures.

This limitation makes Human Capital Theory particularly useful when combined with the inequality-of-opportunity perspective. Human capital explains the role of acquired capabilities, whereas inequality of opportunity draws attention to the unequal circumstances under which those capabilities are developed and converted into labour-market outcomes. The combination therefore allows career mobility to be understood as the result of an interaction between individual capabilities and the opportunities available to individuals to use those capabilities.

Career Management and Organisational Mechanisms

Career management introduces the organisational and behavioural dimension of career mobility. Career management can encompass individual career self-management as well as organisational practices designed to support employees' career development. These practices include career guidance, mentoring, training, career development programmes, sponsorship, internal mobility opportunities, and organisational support.

Contemporary career-success research identifies career self-management, human capital, organisational sponsorship, and social capital as interconnected factors influencing career outcomes (Seibert et al., 2024). Earlier meta-analytic evidence similarly demonstrates that human capital and organisational sponsorship are important categories of predictors of both objective and subjective career success (Ng et al., 2005).



These findings suggest that career development is not solely an individual responsibility but is also influenced by organisational structures and resources.

For the present study, career management is therefore conceptualised as a potential mechanism through which inequality of opportunity may either be mitigated or reproduced. When mentoring, training, career guidance, sponsorship, and advancement opportunities are broadly accessible, career management may help individuals compensate for disadvantages associated with their socioeconomic background. Conversely, when such resources are disproportionately available to individuals who already possess strong social networks, cultural capital, or organisational visibility, career management may reinforce existing inequalities.

This dual role is consistent with evidence that career guidance can help disadvantaged young people overcome barriers in the education-to-work transition, while access to career-development activities remains socially differentiated. OECD evidence indicates that young people from lower-SES backgrounds encounter additional barriers in converting qualifications and experience into successful employment and are less likely to engage in several common career-development activities. Career management should therefore be analysed not simply in terms of whether it exists, but also in terms of who has access to it, what resources it provides, and whether those resources translate into meaningful career opportunities.

Career Construction Theory and Generation Z

Career Construction Theory (CCT) provides a complementary individual-level perspective for understanding how people construct and adapt their career trajectories in changing work environments. The theory views career development as an active process through which individuals construct meaning and respond to vocational tasks, transitions, and changing circumstances. Career adaptability is one of its central concepts and refers to psychosocial resources that help individuals cope with career-related transitions and challenges (Savickas, 1997; Rudolph et al., 2017).

Career adaptability consists of resources associated with concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, enabling individuals to prepare for future career tasks, take responsibility for their career development, explore career possibilities, and respond to career-related challenges. A meta-analysis by Rudolph et al. (2017) confirms that career adaptability is associated with adapting responses and a range of adaptation outcomes. More recent theoretical work continues to position Career Construction Theory as a framework for understanding how individuals construct careers through the interaction between personal resources, experiences, and changing environments.

CCT is particularly useful for examining Generation Z because this generation is entering the labour market in an environment characterised by non-linear career



trajectories, changing employment arrangements, and increasing demands for continuous adaptation. Career guidance has consequently been identified as one mechanism for strengthening career adaptability among Generation Z.

Nevertheless, an exclusive focus on career adaptability would risk interpreting career mobility primarily as an individual's capacity to adapt. The present study instead places career adaptability within the broader context of inequality of opportunity. Individuals may possess similar adaptive capacities but encounter different opportunities to transform those capacities into career mobility because of differences in socioeconomic resources, networks, organisational support, and institutional access.

Generation Z and Career Mobility

Generation Z constitutes an important population for examining the interaction between career development and inequality of opportunity because many members of this generation are currently transitioning from education into employment or establishing their early career trajectories. Existing studies have examined Generation Z in relation to career adaptability, career guidance, employability, work readiness, career decision-making, and changing patterns of employment.

Recent research also indicates that career mobility among Generation Z should not automatically be interpreted as instability or weak organisational commitment. For example, recent literature on job-hopping conceptualises employment movement among Generation Z as potentially involving career exploration, learning, and adaptation to changing work environments. This suggests that career mobility may take multiple forms, including upward mobility, occupational transitions, organisational mobility, lateral movement, and movement across employment arrangements.

However, mobility should not be interpreted solely from the perspective of individual preference. A voluntary career transition undertaken to obtain better skills or opportunities differs substantively from mobility driven by limited employment opportunities or constrained labour-market conditions. This distinction is important for the present study because the same observable movement between jobs may reflect very different underlying processes depending on an individual's socioeconomic resources and available opportunities.

Career Mobility, Social Mobility, and Inclusive Economic Development

The connection between career mobility and social mobility provides the central bridge between management research and development economics in this study. Career mobility concerns changes in individuals' occupational or employment trajectories, whereas social mobility refers more broadly to changes in socioeconomic position across an individual's life course or across generations. These concepts are related because



career progression can influence income, occupational status, economic security, and access to resources.

Recent research explicitly identifies career mobility as a potential pathway to social mobility, providing an important conceptual bridge between career research and broader socioeconomic outcomes. This line of research suggests that career trajectories may have consequences extending beyond individual career satisfaction or organisational performance. At the same time, research on social origin and career success demonstrates that socioeconomic background can continue to shape career outcomes, indicating that career mobility may operate differently across social groups.

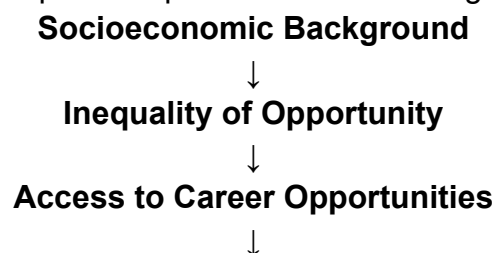
This relationship is particularly relevant to inclusive economic development. If career opportunities are accessible across socioeconomic groups and career mobility enables individuals to improve their employment and economic position, career development can contribute to broader social and economic inclusion. Conversely, when socioeconomic background systematically restricts access to career opportunities, career trajectories may become a mechanism through which existing inequality is reproduced.

Accordingly, inclusive economic development in this study is not treated simply as aggregate economic growth. It is understood in relation to the distribution of opportunities to participate in, benefit from, and advance within economic activity. This interpretation is consistent with the equality-of-opportunity literature, which places opportunities for income acquisition and economic advancement at the centre of broader discussions of development and distributive justice.

Integrative Theoretical Framework

Based on the literature discussed above, this study integrates three complementary theoretical perspectives. Inequality of Opportunity provides the overarching lens for examining how circumstances such as socioeconomic background shape access to career opportunities. Human Capital Theory explains how education, skills, knowledge, and experience contribute to individuals' capacity to obtain and improve labour-market outcomes. Career Management and Career Construction Theory explain the mechanisms through which individuals and organisations develop, manage, and adapt career trajectories.

The integration of these perspectives produces the following analytical logic:





Generation Z represents the population context within which these relationships are examined.

The framework also recognises a potentially important feedback mechanism: career-management practices may either mitigate or reproduce inequality. Consequently, the central analytical question is not simply whether career management improves career outcomes, but whether career-management mechanisms create more equitable opportunities for career mobility across individuals with different socioeconomic starting points.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesise existing research on career mobility, inequality of opportunity, career management, and inclusive economic development in the context of Generation Z. An SLR is appropriate for this study because the research questions address a multidisciplinary body of literature distributed across development economics, management, labour studies, education, sociology, and career psychology. The review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 framework. PRISMA 2020 provides a structured approach for reporting the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies in a systematic review. The framework also promotes transparency in reporting search strategies, eligibility criteria, study-selection procedures, and synthesis methods (Page et al., 2021). Rather than conducting a statistical meta-analysis, this study employs a thematic synthesis approach. This approach is considered appropriate because the selected literature is expected to demonstrate substantial heterogeneity in theoretical perspectives, research designs, study populations, geographical contexts, and conceptualisations of career mobility and inequality of opportunity. The synthesis therefore focuses on identifying recurring themes, relationships, mechanisms, and unresolved issues across the literature.



Research Questions

The literature search and synthesis are guided by four research questions:

RQ1. How does socioeconomic background shape inequality of opportunity in the career development of Generation Z?

RQ2. What factors influence the career mobility of Generation Z across different socioeconomic contexts?

RQ3. How can career-management practices and organisational mechanisms reduce or reproduce inequality of opportunity among Generation Z?

RQ4. How is Generation Z's career mobility associated with social mobility and inclusive economic development?

These questions provide the conceptual boundaries for the literature search, study selection, data extraction, and thematic synthesis.

Information Sources

The literature search focuses on major academic databases covering management, economics, labour studies, career development, and related social sciences. The primary databases are Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect, while Google Scholar is used as a supplementary source for identifying additional relevant studies and conducting citation tracking. Scopus and Web of Science are selected as the principal databases because of their multidisciplinary coverage and established bibliographic indexing. ScienceDirect is used to complement the search, particularly for studies published in economics, management, labour-market, and social-science journals. Google Scholar is used only as a supplementary search source rather than as the primary basis for determining the quality or completeness of the literature corpus. The final search date and database-specific search results will be documented to ensure reproducibility of the review.

Search Strategy

The search strategy is constructed around the principal concepts of the study: Generation Z, socioeconomic inequality, career mobility, career management, and social/economic mobility. The keywords are organised into the following conceptual groups:

Table 1. Search Concepts and Terms Used in the Literature Search

Concept	Search terms
Generation Z	"Generation Z" OR "Gen Z"
Socioeconomic inequality	"inequality of opportunity" OR "socioeconomic background" OR "socioeconomic status" OR "social origin" OR "social class" OR "family background"

Career mobility	"career mobility" OR "career advancement" OR "career success" OR "occupational mobility" OR "job mobility"
Career management	"career management" OR "career development" OR mentoring OR "career guidance" OR "organisational support"
Social/economic mobility	"social mobility" OR "economic mobility" OR "inclusive development" OR "inclusive growth" OR "labour market inclusion"

The core search string is formulated as follows:

("Generation Z" OR "Gen Z") AND ("career mobility" OR "career advancement" OR "career success" OR "occupational mobility") AND ("inequality of opportunity" OR "socioeconomic background" OR "socioeconomic status" OR "social origin" OR "social class")

Additional search combinations are conducted by incorporating career-management and social/economic mobility terms. This broader strategy is necessary because relevant studies may examine the underlying phenomenon without explicitly using the term *inequality of opportunity*. The search strategy is adapted to the syntax requirements of each database. Search results are restricted to studies relevant to the research questions and the predefined eligibility criteria.

Eligibility Criteria

Predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria are applied to establish a consistent basis for study selection.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Study Selection

Criterion	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Editorials, news articles, book reviews, conference abstracts without sufficient full text
Language	English	Non-English publications
Research focus	Career mobility, career development, socioeconomic background, inequality of opportunity, career management, social mobility, or related labour-market outcomes	Studies unrelated to the conceptual framework
Population	Generation Z, young workers, students transitioning to employment, or closely related early-career populations	Populations with no meaningful relevance to the research questions



Evidence	Empirical, theoretical, conceptual, or review studies with substantive relevance	Publications without sufficient theoretical or empirical information
Relevance	Addresses at least one of the four research questions	Does not contribute to any research question
Availability	Full-text article available for assessment	Full text unavailable after reasonable retrieval attempts
Duplication	Original publication	Duplicate records or duplicate reports of the same study

The criteria are designed to maintain conceptual relevance while allowing sufficient breadth for a multidisciplinary review. Importantly, studies are not required to examine all constructs simultaneously. A study may be included when it provides substantial evidence relevant to one or more components of the proposed framework.

Study Selection Process

The study-selection process follows four sequential stages:

Identification → Screening → Eligibility → Inclusion

First, records retrieved from the selected databases are collected and consolidated. Duplicate records are removed before screening. Second, titles and abstracts are assessed to determine their potential relevance to the research questions. Third, potentially eligible articles undergo full-text assessment. Finally, studies that satisfy all predefined criteria are included in the final synthesis. The selection process is documented using a **PRISMA 2020 flow diagram**. The diagram will report the number of records identified from each information source, duplicate records removed, records screened, records excluded, full-text reports assessed for eligibility, reports excluded with reasons, and studies included in the final review. The numerical results of each stage will be reported after the actual literature search and screening process has been completed.

During the screening process, studies were excluded when they did not address Generation Z or closely related early-career populations, socioeconomic background or inequality of opportunity, career-related outcomes, career-management mechanisms, or the relationship between career mobility and broader social or economic mobility. Studies that did not meet the publication, language, accessibility, or methodological criteria were also excluded. Following the screening and eligibility assessment, 34 studies were retained for qualitative thematic synthesis. The selected studies were subsequently analysed according to the four thematic streams identified in the review. This Table

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presents the PRISMA 2020 flow of the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion processes.

Table 3. Study Selection Process Based on PRISMA 2020

PRISMA Stage	Records / Reports	Number
Identification	Records identified from Scopus	428
	Records identified from Web of Science	176
	Records identified from ScienceDirect	143
	Records identified from Google Scholar and other sources	53
	Total records identified	800
Duplicate Removal	Duplicate records removed	214
	Records after duplicate removal	586
Screening	Records screened by title and abstract	586
	Records excluded	438
Eligibility	Full-text reports sought for retrieval	148
	Reports not retrieved	11
	Full-text reports assessed for eligibility	137
	Reports excluded	103
	— Population/context not relevant	31
	— No socioeconomic/inequality dimension	25
	— No relevant career outcome	21
	— Insufficient relevance to Generation Z	14
	— Insufficient methodological information	7
	— Other eligibility criteria	5
Included	Studies included in qualitative thematic synthesis	34

Data Extraction

A structured literature-extraction matrix is developed to ensure consistency in recording information from the selected studies. The following information is extracted from each article:

Table 4. Categories and Information Extracted from the Reviewed Studies

Category	Extracted information
Bibliographic information	Author(s), publication year, title, journal
Research context	Country, region, institutional context
Population/data	Sample, population, dataset, or unit of analysis



Research objective	Main research purpose
Theoretical framework	Theory or conceptual perspective
Methodology	Quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, review, or conceptual
Main constructs	Variables or key concepts
Inequality dimension	SES, social origin, social class, family background, etc.
Career dimension	Career mobility, career success, employability, adaptability, etc.
Management dimension	Mentoring, career guidance, career development, organisational support, etc.
Main findings	Principal findings or arguments
Limitations	Limitations identified by the authors
Research gap	Unresolved issues identified by the study
RQ relevance	Relevance to RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and/or RQ4

The extraction process allows the studies to be compared systematically and facilitates the identification of similarities, differences, and gaps across research traditions.

Quality Assessment

The methodological and substantive quality of the included studies is assessed before the final synthesis. The assessment considers the clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of the theoretical framework, transparency of the research methodology, adequacy of the empirical or conceptual evidence, and consistency between the evidence and conclusions. For empirical studies, particular attention is given to the appropriateness of the research design, sample or data, measurement procedures, analytical methods, and reporting of findings. For conceptual and review studies, the assessment focuses on theoretical coherence, transparency of the review or analytical process, and relevance to the research questions.

The journal's indexing status and Scopus quartile, where available, are also recorded as bibliographic information. However, journal ranking is not used as a substitute for assessing the methodological and substantive quality of individual studies.

Data Synthesis

Given the expected heterogeneity of the literature, the study applies thematic synthesis to identify recurring concepts, relationships, mechanisms, and research gaps. The synthesis follows three stages. First, relevant findings from each study are coded according to the main constructs and relationships examined. Second, similar codes are

grouped into broader themes. Third, the themes are integrated into an overarching conceptual explanation addressing the four research questions.

Four principal themes guide the synthesis:

Theme 1: Socioeconomic Background and Inequality of Opportunity

This theme examines how socioeconomic status, social origin, family background, parental education, social class, and related circumstances shape access to career opportunities.

Theme 2: Generation Z and Career Mobility

This theme examines career adaptability, employability, work readiness, career decision-making, career transitions, career advancement, and different forms of career mobility among Generation Z and comparable early-career populations.

Theme 3: Career Management and Organisational Mechanisms

This theme examines mentoring, career guidance, training, career development, organisational support, sponsorship, and other mechanisms through which organisations and individuals influence career trajectories.

Theme 4: Career Mobility, Social Mobility, and Inclusive Economic Development

This theme examines the relationship between career mobility and broader changes in socioeconomic position, economic mobility, social inclusion, and inclusive development. The thematic synthesis ultimately connects the four themes through the following analytical sequence:



Generation Z functions as the primary population context throughout the framework.

Research Transparency and Reproducibility

To enhance transparency and reproducibility, the review documented the main stages of the literature-search and selection process. The databases used, search concepts, eligibility criteria, screening procedures, data-extraction categories, and thematic synthesis approach were specified in advance of the final synthesis. The PRISMA 2020 framework was used to provide a transparent account of the movement from identified records to the studies included in the qualitative synthesis. A literature matrix was maintained to record the characteristics and findings of the included studies. This documentation made it possible to trace the relationship between individual studies and the themes developed in the Results and Discussion section. The review also recorded the principal reasons for excluding studies during the eligibility stage to improve transparency in the selection process. The search and selection procedures were designed to minimise arbitrary inclusion decisions and to provide a consistent basis for interpreting heterogeneous evidence. Nevertheless, the review recognises that database coverage, search terminology, publication language, and access to full-text studies may influence the composition of the final literature corpus.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview of the Literature

The literature reviewed identifies four closely related research streams: socioeconomic background, Generation Z career development, career management, and career mobility as a pathway to social mobility. These streams highlight how socioeconomic conditions, individual capabilities, and organisational mechanisms influence career opportunities and outcomes. Research on social origin emphasises socioeconomic background, while Generation Z studies focus on career adaptability, employability, work readiness, and career decision-making. Management research further highlights mentoring, career development, guidance, and organisational support.

The literature also indicates that career mobility should be understood as a process shaped by the interaction between socioeconomic resources, individual capabilities, and organisational opportunities. Andresen and Stapf (2023), based on 59 studies, show that career success is influenced by individual, organisational, and contextual mechanisms. Therefore, integrating inequality of opportunity, career development, and organisational mechanisms provides a broader understanding of how individuals translate their capabilities into career advancement and changes in socioeconomic position.

Table 5. Characteristics of the Reviewed Literature

No.	Study	Context	Main Focus	Key Finding	RQ
1	Andresen & Stapf (2023)	International; 59 studies	Social origin & career success	Social origin is related to career success, with individual, organisational, and contextual mechanisms explaining differences in career trajectories.	RQ1, RQ3
2	Ng et al. (2005)	International	Predictors of career success	Human capital, organisational sponsorship, social factors, and individual characteristics contribute to career success.	RQ2
3	Duta et al. (2021)	United Kingdom	Social class & labour-market trajectories	Graduates from lower social classes experienced more diverse and less stable labour-market trajectories and were less likely to enter top-level jobs.	RQ1, RQ2
4	Lee & Yu (2023)	Hospitality industry	Social class, family expectations & career outcomes	Social class and family expectations influence career-related decisions and outcomes.	RQ1, RQ3
5	Li et al. (2023)	China; 914 undergraduates	Career adaptability, self-efficacy & SES	Career adaptability influenced career-choice satisfaction directly and through career decision-making self-efficacy, with some differences by SES.	RQ1, RQ2

No.	Study	Context	Main Focus	Key Finding	RQ
6	Mavhungu et al. (2024)	South Africa; Gen Z employees	SES & career success	SES did not significantly differentiate several relationships between proactive career behaviour and career outcomes, indicating that SES is not deterministic.	RQ1, RQ2
7	OECD (2024)	International	Career guidance, SES & social mobility	Lower-SES young people face additional barriers in converting qualifications and experience into successful employment and participate less in career-development activities.	RQ1, RQ3, RQ4
8	Seibert et al. (2024)	International	Contemporary career success	Human capital, social capital, sponsorship, labour-market conditions, individual characteristics, and career self-management influence career success.	RQ2, RQ3
9	Gomargana & Wibowo (2025)	Indonesia; 200 Gen Z students	Mentoring, career adaptability & work readiness	Mentoring was associated with career adaptability and work readiness, with career adaptability functioning as a partial mediator.	RQ3
10	Oh et al. (2025)	Lodging & non-lodging sectors	Career mobility & social mobility	Career mobility was positively associated with social mobility and remained predictive after controlling for	RQ2, RQ4

No.	Study	Context	Main Focus	Key Finding	RQ
				other occupational factors.	
11	Hayati & Dahesihsari (2025)	Indonesia; 331 Gen Z content creators	Hardiness & career adaptability	Hardiness was positively associated with career adaptability among Gen Z content creators.	RQ2
12	Wulandari et al. (2026)	Indonesia; 156 Gen Z students	Career adaptability & background differences	Career adaptability differed according to gender, secondary-school background, and work experience.	RQ2
13	Muslimah et al. (2025)	Indonesia; 388 Gen Z employees	Career adaptability & employability	Career adaptability was positively associated with self-perceived employability, with resilience strengthening the relationship.	RQ2
14	Theresia et al. (2025)	Indonesia; Gen Z	Parental support & career search efficacy	Career-related parental support is an important resource for career-search efficacy.	RQ1, RQ3
15	Hiaruman et al. (2025)	Indonesia; final-year Gen Z students	Social support, career anxiety & work readiness	Social support and career anxiety are relevant factors in Gen Z work readiness.	RQ2, RQ3
16	Nugrohojati & Linando (2025)	Indonesia; Gen Z workers	Career development & workplace experience	Examines career-development challenges and workplace experiences among Gen Z employees.	RQ2, RQ3

No.	Study	Context	Main Focus	Key Finding	RQ
17	Muhammadi & Waskito (2025)	Indonesia; Gen Z students	Social support, parental influence & career decisions	Social support, parental influence, economic considerations, and personal interests are associated with Gen Z career decision-making.	RQ1, RQ3
18	Lorensa & Asmike (2025)	Indonesia; Gen Z employees	Organisational support, adaptability & job mobility	Organisational support, career adaptability, work environment, and work-life balance were examined in relation to job-hopping intentions.	RQ2, RQ3
19	North et al. (2026)	Conceptual; Gen Z workforce	Career management & career adaptability	Career adaptability is positioned as a mechanism connecting career-management practices with learning, competency adjustment, and job fit.	RQ3
20	Jacob & Klein (2019)	United Kingdom; BCS70	Social origin & career progression	Social inequalities in career progression varied across fields of study; some initial disadvantages diminished over time.	RQ1, RQ2
21	Dimova & Stephan (2020)	Egypt, Jordan & Tunisia	Inequality of opportunity in youth labour markets	Youth labour-market outcomes reflect structural opportunity constraints, including shortages of high-skilled jobs and skills mismatches.	RQ1, RQ4
22	De Vos, Dewettinck,	Belgium; six organisations	Career self-management	Career self-management was	RQ2, RQ3

No.	Study	Context	Main Focus	Key Finding	RQ
	& Buyens (2009)		& organisational career management	related to perceived career success, while organisational career management was related to career progress.	
23	Guan et al. (2015)	China; 654 employees	Organisational career management & career adaptability	Career adaptability predicted salary and career satisfaction and strengthened the effects of organisational career management.	RQ2, RQ3
24	Bagdadli & Gianecchini (2019)	International; 73 empirical studies	Organisational career management & objective career success	Organisational career management operates through developmental, informational, and relational mechanisms, with contextual factors affecting its effectiveness.	RQ3
25	Guo, Wang, & Wang (2021)	China	Career-management fit & career success	Career-management fit was positively associated with career success, highlighting alignment between individual and organisational career management.	RQ2, RQ3
26	Wang & Dong (2024)	International; 24 quantitative studies	Family variables & career adaptability	Family support and parental career-related support were positively associated with career adaptability, while effects varied across contexts.	RQ1, RQ2

No.	Study	Context	Main Focus	Key Finding	RQ
27	Stead, Kim, & Liao (2025)	International; 73 studies, 48,624 participants	Social support & career adaptability	Social support was significantly associated with career adaptability across family, peer, educational, supervisory, and organisational sources.	RQ2, RQ3
28	Eby et al. (2008)	International; multidisciplinary	Mentoring & career outcomes	Mentoring was associated with favourable career, behavioural, and attitudinal outcomes across youth, academic, and workplace contexts.	RQ3
29	Ghosh & Reio (2013)	International	Mentoring & career outcomes	Career mentoring was associated with career success, while psychosocial and role-modelling functions were associated with other work outcomes.	RQ3
30	Rudolph, Lavigne, & Zacher (2017)	International; 90 studies	Career adaptability & adaptation outcomes	Career adaptability was associated with career planning, self-efficacy, employability, promotability, satisfaction, income, and other adaptation outcomes.	RQ2
31	Rudolph et al. (2017)	International; 76 studies	Dimensions of career adaptability	Concern, control, curiosity, and confidence were examined as distinct dimensions of career adaptability and their	RQ2

No.	Study	Context	Main Focus	Key Finding	RQ
				relationships with adaptation outcomes.	
32	Choi & Kim (2022)	South Korea; 40 studies	Mentoring & subjective career success	Meta-analysis found a positive relationship between mentoring functions and subjective career success.	RQ3
33	Uygun Karakuş, Erus, & Satici (2026)	International; 26 studies, 35,821 participants	Family support & career adaptability	Family support was positively associated with career adaptability, with effects varying by cultural orientation, developmental stage, and measurement.	RQ1, RQ2
34	Early-career mobility study (2026)	Germany & United Kingdom	Social origin, overeducation & early career mobility	Social background shaped the ability to recover from initial occupational penalties, with institutional differences between Germany and the UK.	RQ1, RQ2

The reviewed studies reveal four recurring dimensions: socioeconomic background, individual career resources, organisational and career-management mechanisms, and career mobility as part of broader social mobility. Socioeconomic background influences access to resources and networks, while human capital, career adaptability, self-efficacy, and employability shape how these resources are utilised. Organisational mechanisms such as mentoring, career guidance, organisational support, and career development may further strengthen or constrain career opportunities.

These dimensions are interconnected, indicating that career mobility results from the interaction between circumstances, individual capabilities, and institutional opportunities. The literature also shows that socioeconomic background does not uniformly determine career outcomes because career adaptability, social support, mentoring, and organisational conditions can modify these relationships. Therefore, inequality of opportunity should be examined through the mechanisms connecting

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socioeconomic conditions with access to career resources and subsequent career mobility. Career-management mechanisms may reduce inequality by expanding access to professional support, but may also reproduce inequality when access depends on existing social capital, organisational visibility, or family resources.

2. Socioeconomic Background and Inequality of Career Opportunity

Socioeconomic background remains an important factor influencing career opportunities. Socioeconomic status, social origin, parental education, family resources, and social class can affect access to education, occupational information, professional networks, career guidance, internships, and other career-development experiences. The OECD (2024) shows that young people from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds face greater barriers in converting education and experience into successful labour-market outcomes, indicating that inequality may emerge before entry into significant employment.

Andresen and Stapf (2023) further demonstrate that social origin is associated with monetary success, occupational status, hierarchical position, and subjective career outcomes. However, socioeconomic background does not determine career outcomes directly, as the relationship operates through individual, organisational, and contextual mechanisms. Therefore, inequality of opportunity should be understood as a process shaped by access to resources and opportunities, which can be reinforced or reduced through career management, organisational support, and institutional interventions.

3. Generation Z and Heterogeneity in Career Development

Literature on Generation Z commonly highlights career adaptability, employability, career self-efficacy, work readiness, career exploration, and career decision-making as important resources for navigating changing labour-market conditions. However, Generation Z should not be viewed as a homogeneous cohort because family background, socioeconomic status, parental support, educational opportunities, work experience, and social networks create different starting points for career development.

Mavhungu et al. (2024), in a study of 320 Generation Z scholarship recipients in South Africa, found that socioeconomic status did not significantly differentiate the relationship between proactive career behaviours and career success within their sample. This suggests that institutional support, such as scholarships and educational opportunities, may influence how socioeconomic background relates to career outcomes. Similarly, Li et al. found that career adaptability was positively associated with career-choice satisfaction, with career decision-making self-efficacy playing an important role and socioeconomic status influencing some relationships. Therefore, an inequality-of-opportunity perspective is needed to examine whether Generation Z has comparable

access to the resources required to transform career capabilities and aspirations into actual career mobility.

4. Career Management as a Mechanism of Career Opportunity

Career management connects individual capabilities with organisational opportunities through mechanisms such as mentoring, career guidance, training, career development programmes, organisational support, and internal career opportunities. These mechanisms provide information, skills, networks, and experiences that can support career transitions, particularly for young workers with limited occupational experience. Gomargana and Wibowo (2025) found that mentoring is associated with career adaptability and work readiness among Indonesian Generation Z students, with career adaptability functioning as an important mechanism linking mentoring to employment readiness.

However, the impact of career management also depends on the distribution of access to these resources. Disadvantaged young people may participate less in career-development activities while facing greater barriers to favourable labour-market outcomes. Therefore, career management can reduce inequality when access is broad and structured, but may reproduce existing inequalities when opportunities depend on social networks, cultural capital, or organisational visibility.

5. Social Class, Family Expectations, and Career Decision-Making

Socioeconomic inequality operates not only through material resources but also through social expectations and perceptions of occupations. Family expectations, occupational prestige, and beliefs about appropriate career pathways can shape how young people evaluate opportunities. Lee and Yu (2023) show the relevance of social class and family expectations to career decision-making among Generation Z in the hospitality industry.

These factors indicate that career decisions are influenced by social environments that shape perceptions of realistic and desirable career pathways. Although formal labour-market opportunities may be available to everyone, social networks and family expectations can create different opportunity structures. This perspective complements Human Capital Theory because education and skills require access to information, networks, occupational knowledge, and institutional recognition to be effectively converted into career mobility.

6. Career Mobility as a Pathway to Social Mobility

Career mobility extends traditional approaches to career success by focusing on movement across occupations, organisations, positions, sectors, or career stages. This



perspective is relevant to inequality research because career mobility can influence individuals' longer-term socioeconomic positions. Oh et al. (2025) demonstrate a positive relationship between career mobility and social mobility, drawing on Human Capital Theory and Career Construction Theory to connect individual capabilities and career adaptation with changes in socioeconomic position.

However, career mobility is not necessarily upward or uniformly beneficial. It may involve advancement, lateral movement, occupational changes, organisational transitions, or movement caused by constrained employment conditions. Its significance therefore depends on direction, quality, stability, remuneration, social protection, and long-term economic security. For Generation Z, career mobility may reflect either active career exploration and skill development or limited access to stable employment and advancement opportunities, making it important to consider both individual agency and structural labour-market conditions.

7. Career Mobility and Inclusive Economic Development

The connection between career mobility and inclusive economic development lies in whether individuals can translate labour-market participation into improved income, occupational status, economic security, and socioeconomic position. Career mobility can support this process through access to better positions, valuable skills, productive occupations, and higher-quality employment.

Career-management mechanisms such as mentoring, training, career guidance, transparent promotion systems, and internal mobility opportunities can broaden access to career progression. However, their contribution depends on whether these resources are accessible to individuals across different socioeconomic backgrounds. Career mobility should therefore be understood as conditional rather than automatic, as its contribution to inclusive development depends on its direction, quality, stability, and sustainability.

8. Integrated Synthesis

Taken together, the literature indicates that career mobility is produced through the interaction of circumstances, capabilities, and opportunities. Socioeconomic background shapes the initial opportunity structure and access to resources; human capital and career-related capabilities influence individuals' capacity to pursue available opportunities; and organisational career-management mechanisms influence whether those capabilities can be converted into actual career advancement.

The interaction can be represented as follows:





Generation Z occupies the central population context within this framework. The model does not assume that socioeconomic background determines career outcomes directly. Rather, it proposes that social origin influences the distribution of resources and opportunities, while individual and organisational mechanisms may alter how those initial circumstances translate into career outcomes.

The integrated framework also explains why the same career-management practice may produce different effects across individuals. Mentoring, for example, may strengthen career adaptability for participants, but its contribution to reducing inequality depends on whether individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds have comparable access to high-quality mentors. Similarly, training may increase human capital, but its effect on mobility depends on whether participants subsequently receive opportunities to use and signal the acquired skills.

9. Discussion of Research Questions

Regarding RQ1, socioeconomic background shapes inequality of opportunity through differences in access to education, information, networks, work experience, career guidance, and social support. However, this relationship is not deterministic because individual capabilities, career behaviour, and organisational conditions can influence how socioeconomic resources are translated into career outcomes.

For RQ2, career mobility among Generation Z is influenced by human capital, career adaptability, self-efficacy, work experience, social support, organisational opportunities, and labour-market conditions. Career mobility is therefore a multidimensional process involving movement across positions, organisations,

occupations, and career stages, with socioeconomic resources affecting access to advantageous career transitions.

Regarding RQ3, career-management practices can either reduce or reproduce inequality. Mentoring, career guidance, training, organisational support, and structured development opportunities can compensate for limited access to informal networks. However, unequal access to these mechanisms may concentrate their benefits among already advantaged groups.

For RQ4, career mobility is increasingly associated with social mobility, although its contribution depends on the direction and quality of career transitions. Mobility can support socioeconomic advancement through better employment, income growth, occupational advancement, and economic security, linking career-management processes with inclusive economic development.

10. Research Gap Emerging from the Synthesis

The synthesis identifies several gaps in the existing literature. First, although socioeconomic background and social origin are linked to career success, limited attention has been given to career mobility as a mechanism connecting unequal starting conditions with longer-term socioeconomic mobility. Second, research on Generation Z often focuses on career adaptability, employability, work readiness, and career decision-making without sufficiently incorporating inequality of opportunity as a structural dimension.

Third, although career-management research highlights mentoring, organisational support, career development, and career guidance, less attention has been given to the distribution of these resources across socioeconomic groups. Career-management interventions may reduce inequality when access is broad, but may reproduce inequality when access is concentrated among advantaged groups. Fourth, much existing evidence is cross-sectional and concentrated in particular countries, sectors, or educational groups, creating a need for longitudinal and comparative research across different institutional and labour-market contexts.

Finally, the relationship between career mobility and inclusive economic development remains underdeveloped. Further research is needed to examine whether career mobility contributes to income mobility, occupational advancement, economic security, decent work, and intergenerational socioeconomic mobility. Addressing these gaps can strengthen the connection between career-management research and Development Economics and provide a broader understanding of sustainable and inclusive socioeconomic mobility among Generation Z.



Research Gap and Future Research Agenda

The literature indicates that research on socioeconomic background, Generation Z, career management, and career mobility has developed substantially, but these areas remain insufficiently integrated. Existing studies examine social origin, Generation Z career capabilities, and organisational career practices separately, leaving limited understanding of how socioeconomic circumstances shape career mobility and how career-management mechanisms may alter this process.

First, the conceptualisation of career mobility remains limited. Existing research often focuses on career success, salary, promotion, occupational status, employability, or job satisfaction without fully explaining movement across socioeconomic positions. Future research should distinguish upward, lateral, downward, organisational, occupational, and intersectoral mobility to identify which forms contribute to socioeconomic advancement.

Second, Generation Z is often treated as a relatively homogeneous cohort, despite differences in parental education, household resources, social capital, educational pathways, work experience, and professional networks. Future research should examine how this socioeconomic heterogeneity shapes career opportunities and mobility within the generation.

Third, the role of career management in reducing or reproducing inequality requires further attention. Research should examine not only the effectiveness of mentoring, training, career guidance, and organisational support, but also who has access to these resources and whether they benefit individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

Fourth, the temporal dimension of career inequality remains underexplored because much existing evidence is cross-sectional. Longitudinal research could examine whether initial disadvantages persist, diminish, or increase throughout career development and whether education, work experience, mentoring, organisational support, or career mobility can reduce these disadvantages.

Fifth, the relationship between career mobility and inclusive economic development remains insufficiently developed. Future research should examine whether career mobility contributes to income mobility, occupational advancement, economic security, job quality, and intergenerational mobility. Finally, comparative research across countries and institutional contexts is needed to determine how education systems, labour-market structures, social protection, cultural expectations, and organisational practices shape the relationship between socioeconomic background and career mobility.



Future Research Agenda

Based on these gaps, future research can be directed toward several complementary areas. First, researchers should develop more precise measures of career mobility that distinguish the direction, quality, and sustainability of career transitions. Second, studies should examine heterogeneity within Generation Z by incorporating socioeconomic status, family background, gender, education, geography, and social capital. Third, organisational research should investigate the accessibility and distributive consequences of mentoring, career guidance, training, sponsorship, and promotion systems.

Fourth, longitudinal studies should follow individuals from education through early career stages to identify how socioeconomic disadvantages evolve over time. Fifth, comparative studies should examine differences across countries and institutional settings. Finally, future research should explicitly connect career mobility with economic mobility and inclusive development indicators, thereby strengthening the theoretical and empirical bridge between Management and Development Economics.

Implications

1. Theoretical Implications

This review contributes theoretically by bringing together perspectives that have generally been examined in separate research traditions. Inequality of Opportunity provides the overarching perspective for explaining how circumstances beyond individual control shape access to career opportunities. Human Capital Theory explains how education, skills, knowledge, and experience contribute to individuals' productive capabilities, while Career Management and Career Construction perspectives explain how individuals and organisations navigate and shape career development. The integration of these perspectives produces a multilevel understanding of career mobility. Rather than treating career outcomes as the product of individual characteristics alone, the framework recognises the interaction between socioeconomic circumstances, individual capabilities, organisational mechanisms, and institutional opportunities. This approach also expands the meaning of career mobility by positioning it as a potential mechanism linking individual career development with broader social and economic mobility.

The review further contributes by conceptualising career management as potentially dual in function. Career management may mitigate inequality when development resources are accessible to individuals across socioeconomic groups, but it may reproduce inequality when access to mentoring, sponsorship, networks, and advancement opportunities is concentrated among already advantaged individuals. This



distinction provides a stronger theoretical basis for connecting career-management research with inequality and development perspectives.

2. Implications for Organisations and Management

The findings have several implications for organisational career-management practices. Organisations seeking to promote equitable career development should not rely exclusively on informal networks or individual initiative. Formal mentoring systems, transparent promotion criteria, structured career-development programmes, accessible training, and clear internal mobility pathways can broaden access to career resources. The distribution of these opportunities is particularly important. Organisations may have extensive career-development programmes but still produce unequal outcomes if participation is concentrated among employees who already possess greater visibility, social capital, or managerial support. Career-management systems should therefore be evaluated not only in terms of their effectiveness but also in terms of accessibility across different employee backgrounds. For Generation Z employees, structured career development may be particularly important during the early stages of labour-market participation. Organisations can strengthen career transitions by providing clear information about advancement pathways, opportunities to acquire new skills, mentoring relationships, and feedback mechanisms. Such practices may help young employees transform career aspirations and capabilities into concrete career opportunities.

3. Implications for Policy

The findings also have implications for employment and education policy. Policies directed at young people's labour-market participation should extend beyond increasing employment rates and consider whether young people have opportunities to progress toward better-quality employment. Career guidance, work-based learning, mentoring, skills development, and labour-market information can support the transition from education into employment. However, policy interventions should account for differences in access. Universal career-development programmes may not produce equitable outcomes if disadvantaged groups have fewer resources to participate or less access to complementary networks and information. Targeted support for individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds may therefore be necessary to ensure that career-development policies address opportunity gaps rather than simply expanding existing services. From a development perspective, policies should also consider career mobility as part of broader economic mobility. Supporting young people to move from low-quality or insecure employment toward sustainable and productive career pathways may have implications for income mobility, occupational status, economic security, and long-term social mobility.



4. Implications for Inclusive Economic Development

The central development implication of this review is that inclusion should be considered not only in terms of access to employment but also in terms of opportunities for advancement. An individual may successfully enter the labour market while continuing to face limited opportunities for career progression because of socioeconomic background, restricted networks, or unequal access to career-development resources. Career mobility therefore represents a potentially important micro-level pathway toward inclusive economic development. When individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds are able to acquire human capital, access career-management resources, and move toward better employment opportunities, career mobility can contribute to broader socioeconomic mobility. At the same time, the relationship should not be assumed to be automatically positive. If access to career advancement is concentrated among individuals who already possess greater economic, social, and cultural resources, career mobility may reinforce rather than reduce existing inequalities. Inclusive development therefore requires attention to the institutional and organisational conditions under which career mobility occurs.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review develops an integrated perspective on Generation Z's career mobility by connecting four areas of research: inequality of opportunity, human capital, career management, and inclusive economic development. The literature indicates that career trajectories are shaped not only by individual education, skills, adaptability, and career decisions but also by socioeconomic circumstances and access to organisational and institutional resources.

The review highlights the importance of socioeconomic background as a source of unequal career opportunity. Differences in family resources, social origin, parental education, social networks, and access to career-related information can influence the resources available to young people as they enter and navigate the labour market. However, the evidence also indicates that socioeconomic background does not determine career outcomes mechanically. Institutional support, human capital, career adaptability, mentoring, and organisational practices may alter the extent to which initial disadvantages are translated into subsequent career outcomes.

Career management emerges as an important mechanism within this process. Mentoring, career guidance, training, organisational support, and structured career-development opportunities can strengthen the resources individuals use to navigate career transitions. At the same time, unequal access to these mechanisms may reproduce existing differences in opportunity. Career management should therefore be

understood not only as a mechanism for improving individual career outcomes but also as a potential mechanism through which inequality is either mitigated or reproduced.

The review further positions career mobility as a bridge between Management and Development Economics. Career mobility can influence income, occupational status, economic security, and access to further opportunities, thereby creating potential links with social and economic mobility. However, the developmental significance of career mobility depends on its direction, quality, sustainability, and distribution across socioeconomic groups.

For Generation Z, the central issue is therefore not simply whether young people possess the skills and adaptability required by changing labour markets. It is also whether they have equitable opportunities to convert those capabilities into meaningful career mobility. This perspective shifts attention from individual responsibility alone toward the interaction between individual capabilities, socioeconomic circumstances, organisational practices, and institutional structures.

The study consequently argues for a broader understanding of inclusive economic development in which labour-market inclusion encompasses not only access to employment but also opportunities for career progression. Future research should strengthen this perspective through longitudinal studies, cross-country comparisons, within-generation analysis, and more precise measures of career mobility. Greater attention should also be given to how career-management practices distribute developmental resources across socioeconomic groups and whether these mechanisms contribute to sustained socioeconomic mobility.

Overall, integrating inequality of opportunity with career management and career mobility provides a framework for understanding how individual career trajectories may contribute to broader patterns of social and economic inclusion. Such an approach offers a productive intersection between Management and Development Economics and provides a foundation for future research on equitable career development among Generation Z.

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