

GMAC Prospective Students Survey

2023 Deans Summary

When it appeared the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic might finally be waning, new geopolitical challenges and refreshed economic uncertainty compounded the lingering complexities of the public health crisis. GME programs have approached an unpredictable operating environment with innovation and care. And results from this year's Prospective Students Survey indicate GME candidates are meeting the moment with personal reflection and resolve to build a better world.

In this year's survey, GMAC added new questions to give graduate business schools more insights into the motivations of prospective students. We wanted to know: How are first-generation candidates uniquely navigating their GME journey? Are candidates more motivated to pursue GME to find personal growth or seek more traditional outcomes like greater salaries or career advancement? How do prospective students expect business schools and future employers to engage with the political and social challenges of our complex and interconnected world? This year's survey results bring new insights into these questions and evergreen topics on global prospective student populations.

About the Survey

The GMAC Prospective Students Survey – 2023 Summary Report explores new and ongoing trends in the GME candidate pipeline based on perspectives from more than 2,700 individuals worldwide who expressed interest in graduate business education in 2022.

For more than a decade, the GMAC Prospective Students Survey (PSS) has provided the world's graduate business schools with critical insights into the decision-making processes of people currently considering applying to a graduate management education (GME) program. Its questions—covering a diverse range of topics that impact prospective students' application and enrollment decisions—provide school professionals with timely, relevant, and reliable market intelligence to inform how they engage with candidates to build their incoming classes.

First-Generation Candidates: A Snapshot of Motivations and Barriers

For the first time, GMAC's Prospective Students Survey reports findings that explore the experiences and preferences of first-generation candidates.

First-generation prospective students share similar motivations to pursue GME compared to prospective students whose parents have bachelor's degrees, but first-generation candidates are more likely to seek out GME to support their families. Forty-one percent of first-generation candidates seek GME for this reason compared to 35 percent of non-first-generation candidates.

Most candidates globally cite cost as their top barrier to applying for GME. But 41 percent of first-generation candidates report cost as a barrier that may prevent them from pursuing GME compared to 29 percent of non-first-generation candidates, indicating a more acute financial concern among first-generation candidates. Thirty-nine percent of first-generation candidates cite current debt as a moderate or significant barrier compared to 29 percent of non-first-generation candidates.

2023 Survey Sample Stats

2,710 Total respondents

131 Countries of citizenship represented

40% Female

44% Younger than 24

21% Underrepresented population within US respondents

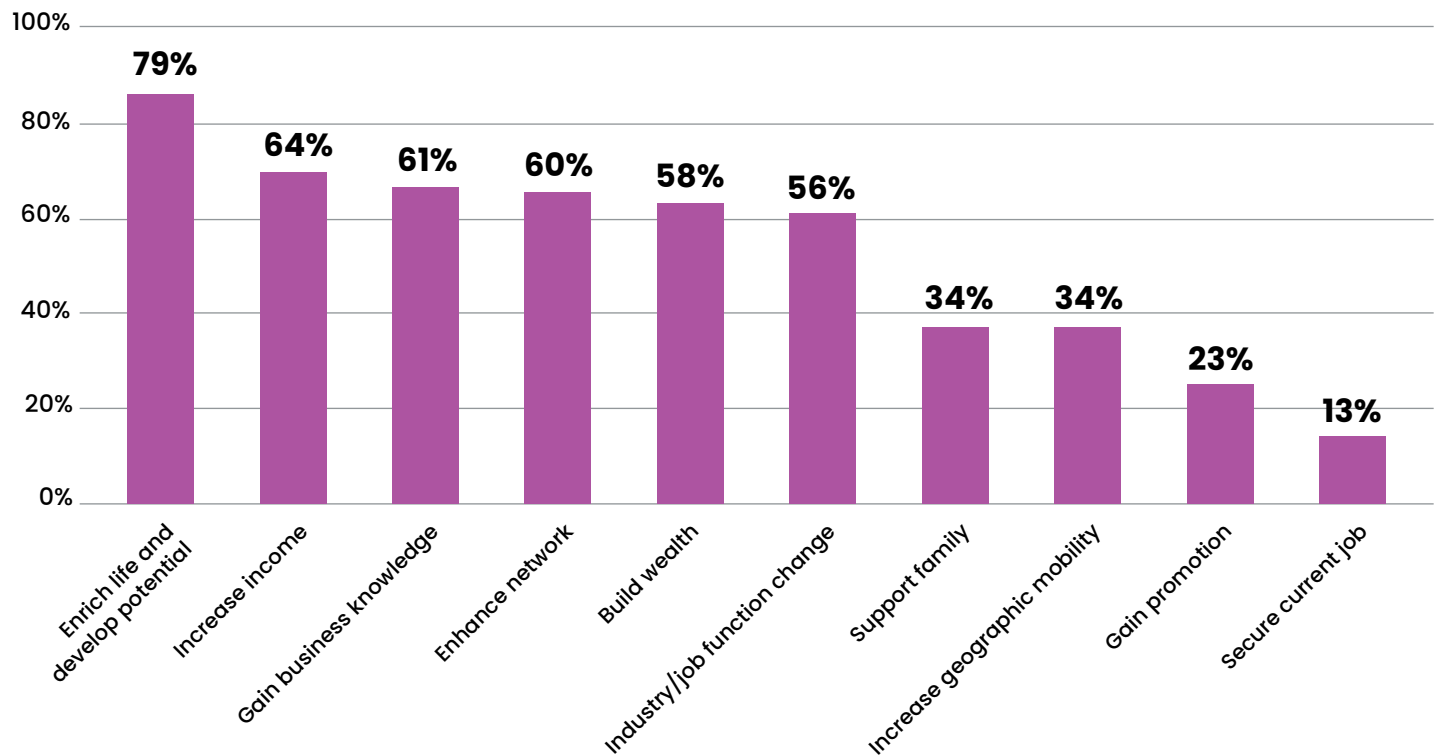
55% Respondents who majored in a non-business field as undergraduates

Motivations and Social Impact: How Candidates Hope GME Will Shape Their Personal Enrichment and Societal Outlook

GMAC has long tracked the triggers that make candidates from around the globe submit applications as well as prospective students' broader curricular and career goals. But this year we asked candidates explicitly: Why are you pursuing a graduate business education? Though offered an array of financial, professional, and personal reasons, candidates—across gender, generation, and region—are most interested in enriching their lives and developing their potential over more familiar outcomes like increasing income or expanding their networks (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1: Candidates are most motivated to pursue GME to enrich their lives, followed by increasing their incomes and gaining business knowledge.

Enriching life and developing potential was the top motivator across gender, generation, and region, though the second-most common motivator varied across groups.

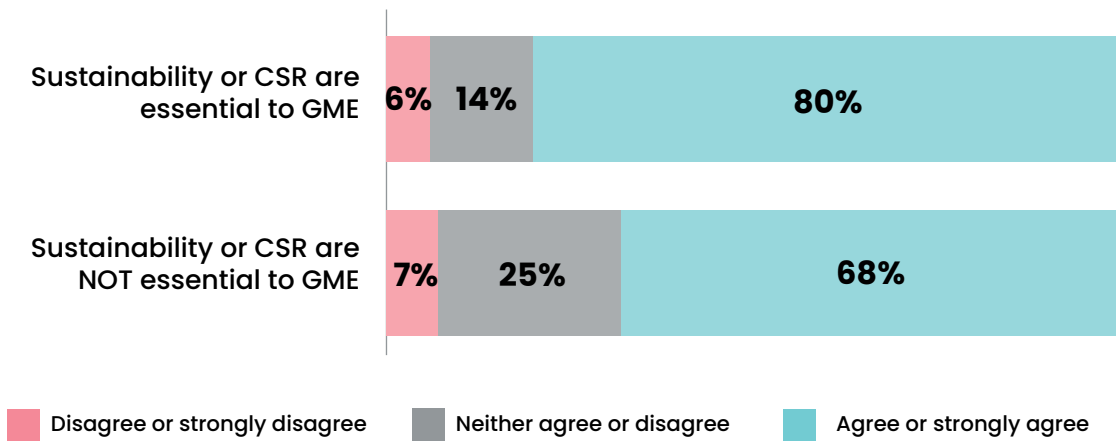


This year's survey results indicate that while prospective students continue to care about greater income and career advancement, they also want to better their personal lives and the world around them. About half of candidates view sustainability or corporate social responsibility (CSR) as essential to their GME curricula. While there are not meaningful differences between generations or regions regarding sustainability or CSR, 52% of women indicated these topics as essential to their GME curricula compared to 36% of men. This larger social engagement among women is consistent with other curricular and career goals reported by women in this year's survey.

Beyond what candidates expect in their GME curricula, prospective students expect their future employers to be socially responsible, too. Eighty percent of prospective students who view sustainability and CSR as curricular must-haves believe corporations have a social responsibility to the countries and people that support them (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Most GME candidates believe corporations have a social responsibility to the countries and people who support them, even among candidates who do not view sustainability or CSR as GME essentials.

Responses to the statement: "I believe corporations have a social responsibility to the countries and people that support them."



Program Preferences: Trends in MBAs, Business Master's Programs, and Online/Hybrid Degrees

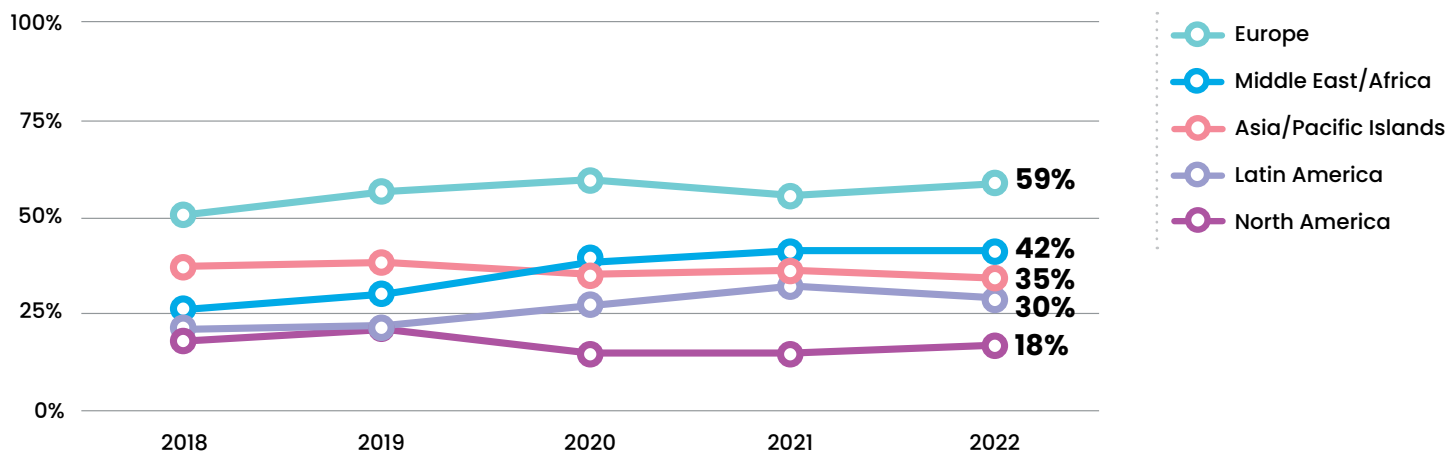
In addition to reporting on new questions, the 2023 Prospective Students Survey continues to highlight program and career trends related to candidates.

Since 2019, the two-year MBA has been the preferred program among candidates globally. This year, the one-year MBA surpassed it as the most popular program choice, though the difference remains within the margin of error. Taken together, the full-time MBA of any duration continues to surpass interest in more flexible or executive MBAs and business master's programs.

That said, regional preferences continue to shape what candidates choose to study. Over the past five years, business master's degrees have been most popular among European candidates, and the share has grown about 8 points since 2018 (**Figure 3**). There has also been growth in business master's interest over the past five years among Middle Eastern, African, and Latin American candidates. Interest in business master's degrees continues to be smallest and largely stable in North America, where the MBA still reigns supreme.

Figure 3: Most European candidates continue to prefer business master's degrees, and interest is growing in the Middle East and Africa.

Interest has grown to a lesser extent in Latin America, while interest among candidates in Asia/Pacific and North America has fluctuated year-to-year but remained largely stable since 2018.



Despite growing up as digital natives, Gen Z—individuals born after 1996 who now make up more than half of prospective students in the GME pipeline—are most attracted to in-person programs that help them build their nascent networks and advance their careers. While this preference for in-person learning is consistent with average global trends, interest in online and hybrid programs has increased since 2019 and remained largely the same in the past year. Online—and especially hybrid—programs have made in-roads with groups most likely to benefit from the flexibility they offer, such as women, first-generation, and millennial candidates.



Meaningful shifts in prospective student demographics are underway. Understanding candidates from Generation Z—now the largest generation applying to business schools—is critical as programs plan for the road ahead. Additionally, taking a closer look at the trends among women, first-generation, and U.S. underrepresented candidates equips schools with the knowledge to ensure every talented person can benefit from the best business education for them.

We trust that The Prospective Students Survey – 2023 Summary Report will be a helpful tool as we work together to build a more inclusive GME that develops collaborative, creative, and courageous leaders of today and tomorrow.

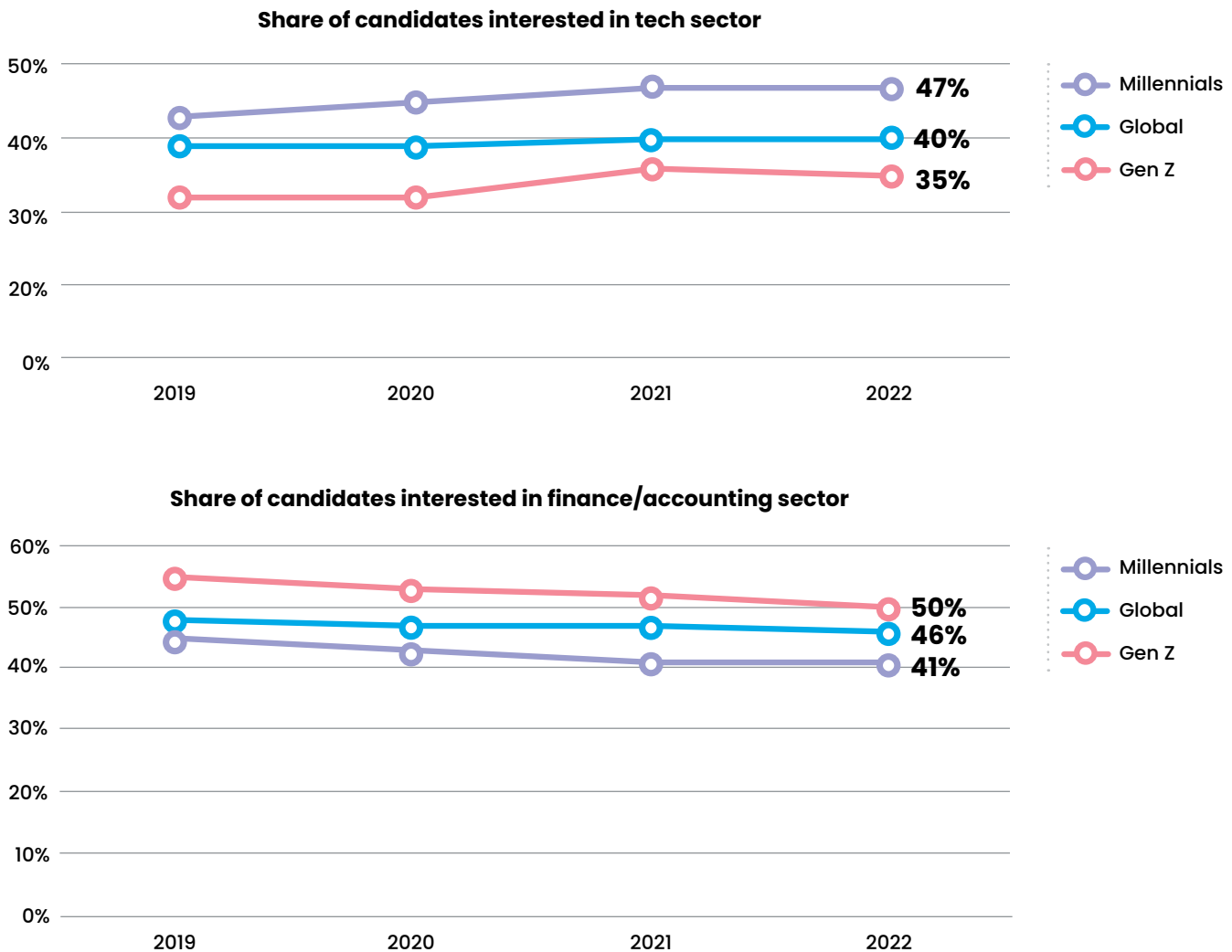
—Joy Jones, GMAC CEO

Career Aspirations: Consulting, Tech, and Finance Industries

Though consulting continues to be the industry with the most interest post-GME, change may be on the horizon for other sectors. While technology remains the second-most sought after post-GME industry, growth in interest previously seen among women and U.S. underrepresented populations stagnated this year. This was compounded by more Gen Z candidates, who tend to prefer finance and accounting over technology, entering the pipeline (**Figure 4**).

Figure 4: Gen Z candidates' interest in the tech sector is below the global average and less than their millennial counterparts.

Gen Z are more interested in post-GME careers in the finance and accounting industries, though this interest has also decreased since 2019.





Financial services is the third-most popular industry, with notable interest among Gen Z. Half of Gen Z indicated preference for the finance and accounting industry post-GME compared to 41 percent of millennials, who tend to express more interest in technology.

All said, prospective students are operating in a global context that is becoming more complex even as the most severe impacts of COVID-19 dissipate. Candidates are more interested in travel again, but also more interested in hybrid learning. Prospective students on average still want to become consultants and increase their income, but they want corporations to demonstrate social responsibility, too. There is not a new normal, per se. While the future remains ever uncertain, candidates want to take the best parts of the chaos from the past few years to build a better world for themselves and others.

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