

# The U.N. Global Goals as opportunity and threats for entrepreneurs' well-being in a post covid period

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### 1. Abstract.

The well-being of entrepreneurs has long been an indispensable topic in the field of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs engage in an increasingly vital role in the wealth creation of today's culture. It often energizes positive change in society providing breakthrough innovations that contribute to well-being. Hence, examining well-being and understanding the potential entrepreneurial behaviors will guide many to psychological well-being. Due to United Nations speeding up the process of implementing the Global Goals a new stressor for entrepreneurs appears. New regulations, investments, and even new value propositions for all businesses must be developed to follow regulations or even survive. Entrepreneurs are tasked to change their businesses dramatically from money-driven to impact-driven. A business meets requirements towards the right balance between economic and social value. Moreover, due to Covid-19, the risk has become even higher in the last two years. Additionally, after implementing a talent scan, the ME-scan including an outcome of the most suitable Global Goals, the entrepreneurs became aware of and better used, their talents. A team effort can be increased, a sustainable strategy can be developed for the enterprise owned by the entrepreneur. The study was aimed to explore mental well-being amongst entrepreneurs, knowing that in practice defining actual measures of well-being is a difficult task. An extensive review of available literature, journal articles, etc. was conducted. A quantitative research methodology was selected as a desirable approach to analyze data. Based on a survey on entrepreneurship well-being the reasons for the mental disease were obtained. Overall, 283 respondents confirmed entrepreneurs are at risk for mental disease. It was observed that there is a positive relationship between the impact of entrepreneurship on mental well-being. indicated that a large majority of the respondents still gave a positive rating of their mental well-being, as well as an overall positive link between their professional activities and their mental well-being. Further, with mental distress, most entrepreneurs turn to family, friends, and personal contacts with other entrepreneurs as their main sources of support.







Key words: Mental Well-being, Entrepreneurship, Sustainability, SME, UN Global Goals

## 2 Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a thrilling but risky business whether in times of certainty and/or uncertainty. Today, the pandemic disrupted many plans and changed the priorities of future endeavors. In this threatening environment, mental health especially for entrepreneurs has become more under pressure.

Mental health describes cognitive, behavioral, and emotional well-being. Hence, it can affect daily relationships and physical health. Moreover, mental health can sustain the power to enjoy life. Furthermore, conditions such as stress, depression, anxiety, etc. disrupt daily work-family routines.

In above mention context, it is critical to think about the mental health of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are tasked to balance life activities and responsibilities while trying to achieve established professional goals. Moreover, limited working capital means increase mental health disorders. Besides, limited support for entrepreneurs creates a dip where enterprises are on the edge to give up on ideas, projects, etc.

The process of setting up a new business, bearing risks, and enjoying the outcomes requires mental strength. Entrepreneurs are not born with the ability to overcome daily stressors. Working with innovation, new ideas, collaborations, etc. requires much more than we can see.

Covid-19 impacted small and medium-size enterprises, but not only. It brought more vulnerability to entrepreneurs, as leading crises and entrepreneurship demands a lot of mental health. Moreover, uncertainty surrounding the covid-19 increased awareness of how society looks and discusses entrepreneurs' mental well-being. However, it should be noted that the pandemic forced and encouraged a new generation of entrepreneurs. Due to new technologies and curiosity about new job structures, multiple levels of new ideas have emerged.

The study aimed to explore the relationships between entrepreneurship and mental well-being. Around 300 respondents from several countries were invited to complete the survey and share their thoughts. To navigate new normal, business and not only, must be aware of transitions in various industries and how they impact mental well-being. In this environment, we should monitor the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional elements of individuals.

Unfortunately, in the era of fast-developing technologies and constant sustainable pleasure, everyone is at risk of developing mental illness, no matter of sex, age, ethnicity, income, or lifestyle.

#### 3 Literature Review

Sustainability and economic growth -the integration and balance of social, environmental, and economic needs – is a salient concern for sustainable development and social well-being (Divito & Ingen-Housz, 2021).

Due to its wide-ranging relevance across scientific fields, empirical research on well-being has proliferated in recent decades. Researchers in entrepreneurial studies are increasingly interested in the psychological well-being of entrepreneurs (Ryff, 2019). Furthermore, well-being is an essential outcome of engagement in entrepreneurship, but the pathway is poorly understood (Nikolaev, Boudreaux, & Wood, 2022).

Interest in entrepreneurs' mental health and well-being is growing in recognition, however, relevant knowledge is dispersed across disciplines and yet unclear (Ute, 2017). Moreover, according to Johansson Seva, Vinberg, Nordenmark, & Strandh (2016), knowledge of well-being among the self-employed, and the potential influence of contextual factors are somewhat limited. Moreover, according to To, Guaita Martínez, Orero-Blat, & Chau (2020), intentions are mental suggestions related to the pursuit of expected purposes and need motives to propel actions to accomplishment. In regards, to







entrepreneurship, there have been debates on motivations' significance and intentions on how to accomplish starting goals.

Well-being is generally defined as a state of being happy, healthy, and comfortable. However, it is a multifaceted, broad concept with many nuances, it encompasses both physical and psychological positive states of being (Lanivich, Bennett, Kessler, McIntyre, & Smith, 2021). Moreover, Giraldo, Farcia-Tello, & Rayburn (2020) elaborate more that well-being indeed is a multi-faced concept that relates to emotions of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Lastly, Ryff (2019) recognizes that entrepreneurial activity, by definition, is self-initiated and hence is fundamentally tied to ideas of autonomy and independence.

Entrepreneurs face many stresses as they start and run their ventures (Lerman, Munyon, & Williams, 2020). Moreover, the stressors can be coded as either challenges or hindrances and each stressor differently influences entrepreneurs' well-being and venture performance. Additionally, Bencsik & Chuluun (2021) indicate that self-employed also report more health problems and physical well-being.

According to Bujacz, Eib & Toivanen (2019), profiles of well-being are likely associated with demographic and work-related characteristics, meaning that some characteristics may make it more likely for an individual to develop a certain well-being profile. Job satisfaction, work engagement, and work burnout are well-recognized dimensions of work-related well-being. Together, these elements of work-related well-being paint a comprehensive picture of how entrepreneurs might develop positive feelings about their work, or avoid negative feelings, due to the social value that they generate through their business endeavors (Brieger, De Clercq, & Meynhardt, 2021).

It is important to note that psychological well-being has emerged as an interesting phenomenon in entrepreneurship (Gorgievski & Stephan, 2016). Besides, individuals pursuing entrepreneurial careers face a distinct set of job stressors and pressures such as greater risk-taking and job uncertainty while also enjoying benefits like greater decision autonomy and talent actualization that impact psychological well-being (Marshall, Meek, Swab, & Markin, 2020). Moreover, due to its effects on psychological autonomy, entrepreneurial work is also more likely to lead to greater feelings of personal mastery and competence, or core self-efficacy, than non-entrepreneurial work (Shir, Nikolaevc, & Wincent, 2019).

Interest in the subjective well-being of individuals, including those that choose entrepreneurship (or self-employment) as an occupation, has risen in recent years (Amoros, Cristi, & Naude, 2021). According to Shir, Nikolaevc, & Wincent (2019) entrepreneurship grants opportunities for self-motivated skill utilization and continuous learning, which are vital for feeling effective.

Entrepreneurs play an increasingly important role in the wealth creation of today's society. Moreover, examining entrepreneurial intentions can improve understanding of the potential entrepreneurial behavior (Zhang, Wang, & Owen, 2019). Further, individuals are drawn to entrepreneurship by the allure of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, security (for self and family), and self-sufficiency (Lanivich, Bennett, Kessler, McIntyre, & Smith, 2021).

Entrepreneurs experience more flexibility in their working lives and find their jobs more satisfying (Xu, He, & Yang, 2021). Moreover, it has been widely recognized that digital trends create new opportunities for entrepreneurs, as well as risks for well-being (Torres & Augusto, 2020).

# 4 Research Methodology

This study examines the importance of mental well-being amongst entrepreneurs. Quantitative research methods were used to gather and analyze obtained data. The available literature on mental well-being and psychological distress among entrepreneurs was explored and an initial (English) survey was devised. Further, the first draft was pretested among the project partners, and thus modified







based on their feedback. Lastly, the final version was translated into Dutch, Lithuanian, and Portuguese languages. Qualtrics survey tool was used for data gathering.

Survey invitations were mailed to the project partners in May 2021. This was done through a variety of channels, including a direct mailing to about 7,000 companies. A reminder mail was sent to those companies towards the end of May.

During the analysis phase, the SPSS27 was used to obtain the various descriptive statistics mentioned in the research findings and analysis below. In addition, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions were performed to detect significant relationships between different variables.

## 5 Research Findings and Analysis

Overall, 283 respondents participated in the survey on entrepreneurship and mental well-being, either completely or partially. Due to the dropouts, the actual respondent number may differ from question to question. 58% of the respondents in the sample were female, with varying roles in the company. More specifically, most of the respondents were owners and/or CEO of the company. Additionally, authors identified 57 board members, either of a board of directors or a board of advice.

Many of respondents were in age group 41-60, with over 80% of them having has received a bachelor of master level education. Regarding the respondents' workplace, a sample contained data from 12 countries, with most of the respondents working in Belgium (35%) and Portugal (27%), followed by Lithuania (10%), the UK (6%) and the Netherlands (1%).

Over a quarter of the respondents are employed in the service sector. Education is the second most important industry sector (14%), while approximately 11% of the respondents are employed in trade or in the social economy (Figure 1).

The sample representatives were from small and medium enterprises. Over 42% employed between 2 to 9 people (including the respondent), while 29% of the companies between 10 to 49 employees. Moreover, 14% were one-man businesses. Besides, the mean company age in this sample was 27 years. On the other hand, the mean respondent's tenure in his or her current company was 15 years.

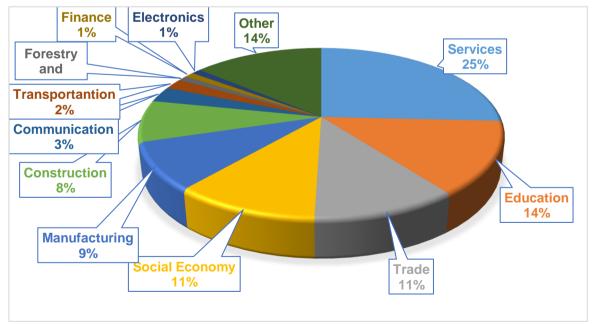


Figure 1 Industry Sector





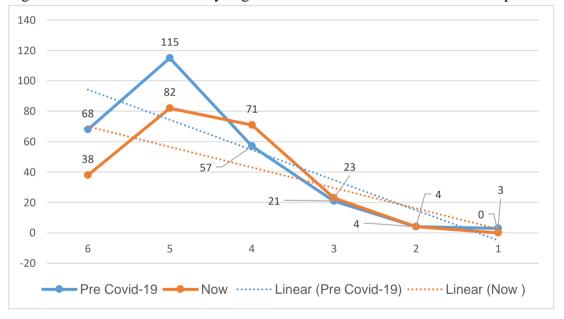


## 5.1. Mental Well-being

To examines mental well-being amongst entrepreneurs' respondents', authors used three alternative measures:

- First, the respondents provided an overall rating of their state of mental well-being, both before and after the COVID-19 outbreak, on a Likert scale ranging from 1 ('Not good at all') to 6 ('Very good').
- Second, the short, 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) was used. This measure consisted of 12 questions with answer categories ranging from 1 to 4 (Gorgievski, Bakker, Schaufeli, van der Veen and Giesen, 2010; Griffith and Jones, 2019).
- Third, a measure of mental well-being included 4 items from the Short Form Survey Instrument (SF-36) (Rand, 2021). Namely 'During the past 4 weeks, have you had any of the following problems with your work or other regular daily activities because of any emotional problems (such as feeling depressed or anxious). Each of the items included could be answered with 'Yes' or 'No'. It was called a measure 'SF-4'.

Figure 2. highlighted the distribution of the respondents' answers to general measure of mental well-being. As a result, a large majority of the respondents gave a positive rating of their mental well-being, although it was observed a noticeably negative shift since the start of the COVID pandemic.



**Figure 2** Overall Mental Well-being (Pre-Covid vs Now)

Table 1 below reveals the results of our two alternative measures, the GHQ-12, and the SF-4. Instead of taking the sum of the different sub-items of each measure, authors opted to calculate the mean to avoid distortions due to missing data. Hence, the GHQ-12 measure possibly ranged from 1 to 6, while the SF-4 ranges from 0 to 1. Contrary to the general measure of mental well-being, for both the GHQ-12 and SF-4 lower values represented a good state of mental well-being. Further, with a mean value of 2.2, the GHQ-12 yielded a generally positive result that confirmed the answers to general question regarding mental well-being. Likewise, the SF-4 measure also showed a positive picture, with a mean value of only 0.4.

Table 1 Mental Well-being.







	GHQ-12 (Mean)	SF-4 (Mean)
Mean	2.21	0.40
Median	2.08	0.25
Maximum	3.92	1
N	272	254

A correlation analysis of three different measures of mental well-being further confirmed that all of them are significantly correlated, indicating the respondents answered consistently across the different sets of questions.

Lastly, regressions analyses were performed on each of the measures of mental well-being to discover any potential links to the respondents' gender, age, or education level, as well as to their workplace (location), their company size or their organisation being a non-profit or a for-profit organisation. However, in overall, the results revealed no significant differences between the subgroups.

In addition to measuring the mental well-being, authors asked respondents whether, during the past year, they had considered giving up entrepreneurship or switching to another industry sector. Figure 3 below, highlighted a positive relationship. Most entrepreneurs were determined to continue their operations in the same sector.

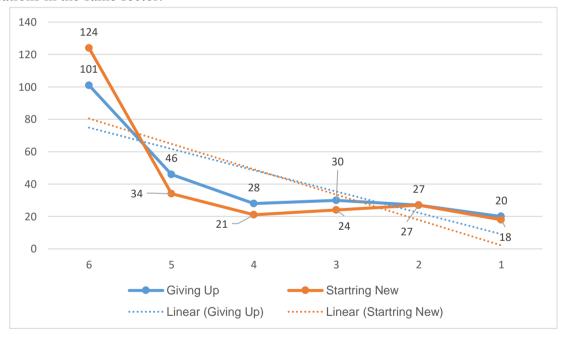


Figure 3 Giving Up vs Starting New Relationship

## 5.2. Entrepreneurship and mental well-being

For many entrepreneurs, their company represents a source of professional and personal fulfilment as well as autonomy. At the same time such a commitment is accompanied by responsibilities and the potential to decrease one's well-being.







To assess whether entrepreneurship has a positive or a negative impact on mental well-being, respondents were asked to what extent they consider their entrepreneurial activities linked to their state of mental well-being. The range differed from 'Extremely negative (professional life worsens mental well-being)' (value of 1), over 'Not at all' (3) to 'Extremely positive (professional life improves mental well-being)' (value of 5). On average, the entrepreneurs reported a slightly positive link between their professional activities and their mental well-being, with a mean and median score of 3.5 and 4 respectively.

Additionally, the entrepreneurs were asked for a more detailed perspective by enquiring how strongly different categories of professional problems decreased their mental well-being, on a scale of 1 ('Not at all') to 6 ('Very much'). The results in indicated that financial problems as the main source of worries, with a mean score of 4.3 out of 6. Problems with employees and problems related to sales were ranked second and third, both with a mean value of 3.6.

# 5.3. Coping with Psychological Distress and Need for Additional Support

When faced with psychological distress, people may have different options that can help or support them. Such support may come from their personal or professional network but also from government organisations. In our survey, eight questions were dedicated to sources of support and asked entrepreneurs to assess how helpful those had been to avoid, cope with or relieve psychological distress during their entrepreneurial activities, on a scale of 1 ('Not helpful at all') to 6 ('Very helpful').

Following results were obtained: family was a very important source of support when problems arise (mean value of 5.1), closely followed by friends (4.8) and personal contacts with other entrepreneurs (4.5). Professional activities and seminars were fourth and were also deemed helpful by most of the respondents (3.8). Opinions were divided about the usefulness of formal education and professional psychological help. Finally, non-profit organisations and especially government organisations were not generally viewed as helpful by most of the entrepreneurs.

Further authors explored whether the importance of different sources of psychological support depended on the respondent's characteristics (gender, age, education level, workplace (location), company size and non-profit versus for-profit organisation).

The results showed little impact of respondents' characteristics, except for country (workplace) effects.

- UK respondents showed significantly less reliance on family and friends as sources of support than respondents in other countries.
- Lithuanian respondents on the other hand, showed significantly more appreciation for formal
  education, government organisations and non-profit organisations as mechanisms to avoid,
  cope with or relieve psychological distress.
- The latter appreciation (non-profit organisations) was shared by Portuguese respondents, while Belgian respondents shared Lithuanians' appreciation of government organisations.
- One non-country effect does however stand out, as older respondents rely significantly more on formal education as a helpful tool to avoid or cope with mental distress than their younger counterparts.

It can be argued that the usefulness of some sources of psychological support depends on the situation and, more specifically, on the kind of problems causing psychological distress. Therefore, authors checked the impact of the answers to the previous set of questions, i.e. 'To what extent do the following professional problems decrease your mental well-being?'.

The regression results indicated following relationship:







- First, respondents that signal a high negative impact of financial problems on their mental well-being mention friends as a significantly more important, more helpful point of support.
- Second, coping with employee problems as a major source of psychological distress, respondents found both the formal education system and government organisations to be significantly less useful as support or coping mechanisms.
- Lastly, non-profit organisations were deemed to be significantly less important as a source
  of for those that report a high negative impact of administrative problems on their wellbeing.

For those respondents without previous experience the main barriers seem to be the time they take up, especially about formal education, and the difficulty of finding the appropriate support, especially when provided by non-profit or government organisations highlighted on Table 2 below.

**Table 2** The main reasons preventing from participating in/using the resources

Tuble 2 The main reasons prev	I don't need it	I don't know where to find it	Too expensiv e	Too time- consuming	Sham e
Formal education	41	4	11	28	0
Activities by professional entrepreneurial organisations	10	8	6	18	0
Government organisations	39	18	0	14	1
Non-profit organisations	39	24	0	10	3
Professional psychological help	73	6	13	11	5

To identify additional knowledge or learning materials that could be useful for entrepreneurs to achieve or maintain a healthy work-life balance, respondents were given seven different options to assess on a scale of 1 ('Not at all') to 6 ('Very much'). Additional knowledge about psychology and mental well-being was most useful by the respondents (mean score of 4.1 out of 6), followed by management or planning knowledge (mean score of 4).

After analysing the correlation in relationship with background characteristics, following results were seen:

- Firstly, there was a country effect regarding the reported need for knowledge regarding financial or accounting matters, which is significantly higher in Portugal, Lithuania, and the UK.
- Secondly, an age effect with younger respondents expressing a significantly higher need for knowledge on psychology and mental well-being and older respondents seeking more marketing-oriented knowledge.
- Finally, a higher education level was significantly related to a higher need for knowledge regarding management and planning issues.

Furthermore, respondents had asked them to indicate how interested they would be in specific forms or methods, on a scale of 1 ('Not at all') to 6 ('Very much interested'). Although most of the respondents were favourable to all the different forms listed, actual case studies and testimonies by actual entrepreneurs emerged as the best way to distribute new knowledge (mean score of 4.1 out of 6). The second-best was a mentorship with other entrepreneurs, confirms this preference for peer-learning (mean score of 3.9), followed by the three formal forms such, educational methods, live online





courses and recorded online courses. The least interesting forms were networking events and self-study by means of an information web platform.

A more in-depth analysis revealed little significant differences between different groups of respondents, apart from some limited country-specific effects. Belgian respondents to be less interested in both live and recorded online courses or seminars, while Lithuanian and Portuguese respondents are more interested in topical networking events.

#### 6 Conclusion

The Covid-crisis has undoubtedly made the previous two years stressful for entrepreneurs. However, even under such circumstances, our survey shows a large majority of the respondents still giving a positive rating of their mental well-being, as well as an overall positive link between their professional activities and their mental well-being.

When confronted with mental distress, most of the entrepreneurs in our survey turn to family, friends, and personal contacts with other entrepreneurs as their main sources of support. On the other hand, formal education and professional psychological help, as well as non-profit or government organisations are generally viewed as being less helpful.

Tools for selflearning are seen as helpful by entrepreneurs. Hence the fact entrepreneurs are not really focusing on their own mental well-being, tools for reading the signs would be appreciated.

A self-assessment talent scan, as used in the Me-scan will be helpful for entrepreneurs to get an objective overview of their own talents. The outcomes connects entrepreneurs' talents with the most suitable U.N. Global Goals. Based on the scan outcomes the positive rating of entrepreneur's mental well-being are expected to be effected in a slightly negative direction. Self-knowledge should be the basis for further knowledge development, and can be translated to focus work on generating a sustainable business strategy.

The entrepreneurs in our sample would appreciate additional information about psychology and mental well-being, as well as more elaborate management or planning knowledge. For most entrepreneurs, the ideal way to obtain such information would be through peer-learning, such as actual case studies and testimonies or via mentorship with other entrepreneurs.

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