



# **Entrepreneurship and Mental Well-being**

Survey results

September 2021

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## I. **Respondents**

During the course of May 2021, entrepreneurs throughout Europe received invitations in four different languages to fill in our online survey on entrepreneurship and mental well-being. Overall, 283 respondents filled in the survey, either completely or partially. Hence, as not all respondents provided answers to all questions, the actual sample size (N) reported in the following pages may differ from subject to subject. More explanation on the survey's methodology can be found at the end of this document.

A small majority (58%) of the respondents in the sample were female, with varying roles in the company. More specifically, most of the respondents (115 of them) were owners and/or CEO (69) of the company. Additionally, we identified 57 board members, either belonging to a board of directors or a board of advice.

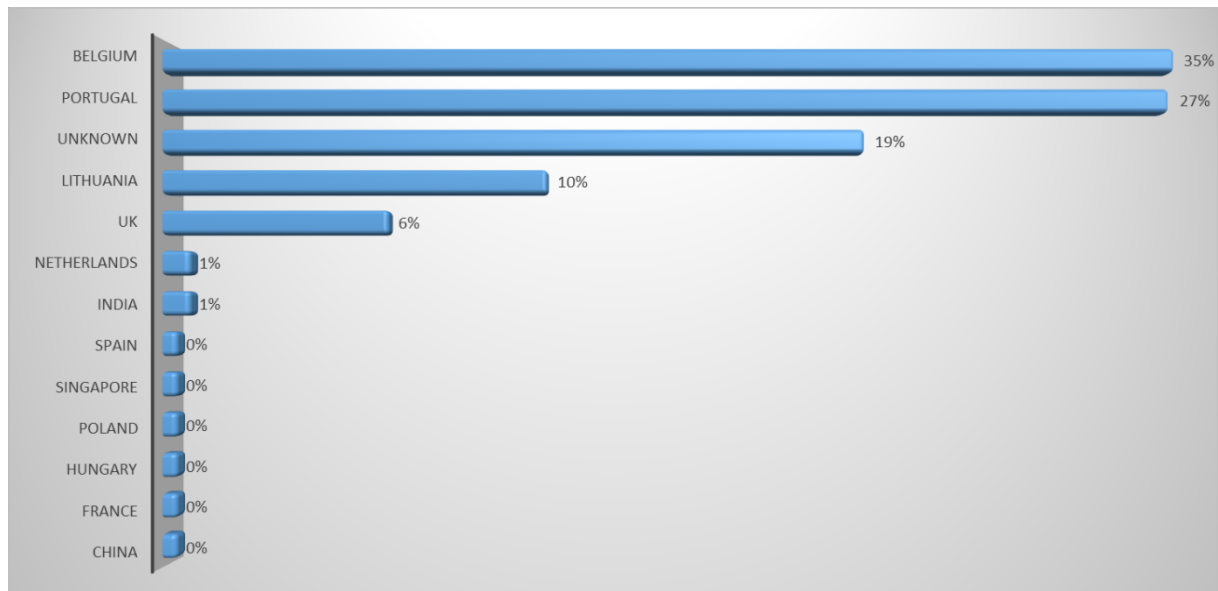
The majority of our respondents is between 41 and 60 years old, with over 80% of them having received either a bachelor or master level education (Table 1).

*Table 1: Respondents' age and education level*

Age	N	% of total	Education level	N	% of total
<i>20 or younger</i>	1	0.4%	<i>Primary school</i>	1	0.4%
<i>21-30</i>	16	6.8%	<i>Secondary school</i>	26	11.1%
<i>31-40</i>	56	23.9%	<i>College (Level 5)</i>	8	3.4%
<i>41-50</i>	65	27.8%	<i>Bachelor</i>	99	42.3%
<i>51-60</i>	73	31.2%	<i>Master</i>	89	38.0%
<i>61-70</i>	22	9.4%	<i>PhD</i>	11	4.7%
<i>71 or older</i>	1	0.4%			
<i>Total</i>	234	100.0%	<i>Total</i>	234	100.0%

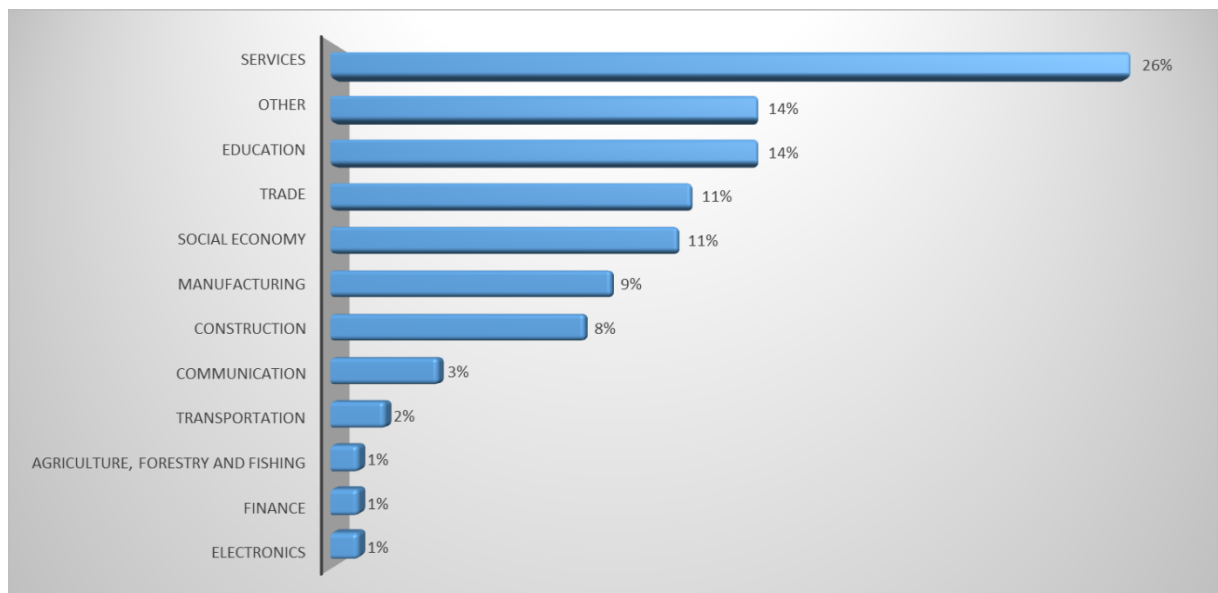
With regard to the respondents' workplace, our sample contains data from at least 12 countries, with most of the respondents working in Belgium (35%) and Portugal (27%), followed by Lithuania (10%), the UK (6%) and the Netherlands (1%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Workplace



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 2).

Figure 2: Industry



As Table 2 shows, our sample contains mainly small and medium enterprises. Over 42% of the respondent companies employ from 2 to 9 people (including the respondent), while another 29% of the companies has from 10 to 49 employees. Additionally, 14% of the respondent companies are one-man businesses.

Table 2: Company size (number of employees)

	N	% of total
1	33	14.2%
2-9	100	42.9%
10-49	68	29.2%
50-249	17	7.3%
250 and above	15	6.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

As shown in Table 3, one respondent company is quite old, with 477 years, but if we exclude this outlier the mean company age in our sample is 27 years. The mean respondent's tenure in his or her current company, on the other hand, is 15 years.

Table 3: Company age and respondent tenure

	Company age (Years)*	Respondent tenure (Years)
<i>Mean</i>	29 (27)	15
<i>Median</i>	23 (23)	12
<i>Maximum</i>	477 (181)	54
<i>N</i>	216 (215)	224

\* The numbers between brackets show the descriptives without the 477 year old company

## **II. Mental well-being**

In order to gauge the respondents' mental well-being, we used three alternative measures.

First of all, we asked the respondents to provide 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').

For our second measure we used the short, 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). This measure consists of 12 questions (e.g. 'During the past year, have you generally been able to concentrate on what you're doing?', '... lost much sleep over worry?' and '... been losing confidence in yourself?'), with answer categories ranging from 1 to 4 (Gorgievski, Bakker, Schaufeli, van der Veen and Giesen, 2010; Griffith and Jones, 2019).

Our third 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 as a result of any emotional problems (such as feeling depressed or anxious)? a. Cut down the amount of time you spent on work, b. Cut down the amount of time you spent on other activities, c. Accomplished less than you would like, d. Didn’t do work or other activities as carefully as usual’. Each of these items could be answered with ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. We call this measure ‘SF-4’.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the respondents’ answers to our first, general measure of mental well-being. As can be seen from the figure, a large majority of the respondents give a positive rating of their mental well-being (i.e. high values), although we observe a distinctly negative shift since the start of the COVID pandemic.

Figure 3: Overall mental well-being

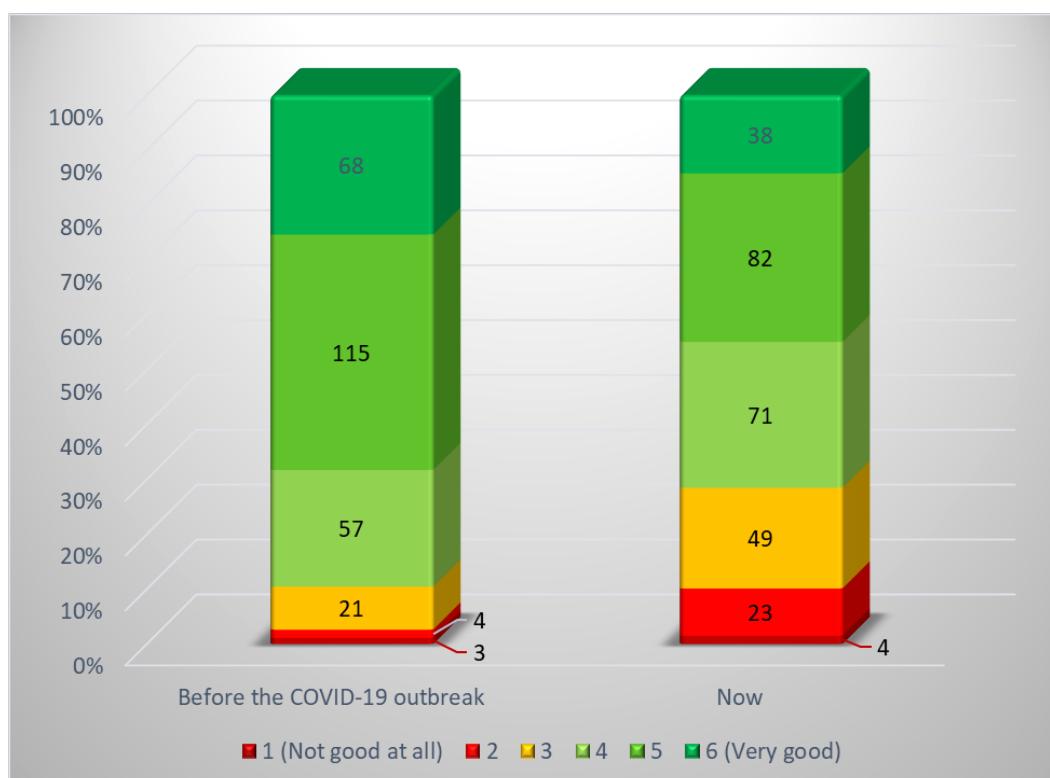


Table 4 shows the results of our two alternative measures, based on the GHQ-12 and the SF-4 respectively. Instead of taking the sum of the different sub-items of each measure, we opted to calculate the mean to avoid distortions due to missing data. Hence, the GHQ-12 measure potentially ranges from 1 to 6, while the SF-4 ranges from 0 to 1. Contrary to our general measure of mental well-being, for both the GHQ-12 and SF-4 **lower** values represent a good state of mental well-being.

With a mean value of 2.2 out of 6, the GHQ-12 yields a generally positive result, confirming the answers to our previous, more general question regarding mental well-being. Likewise, the SF-4 measure also paints a positive picture, with a mean value of only 0.4 (out of 1).

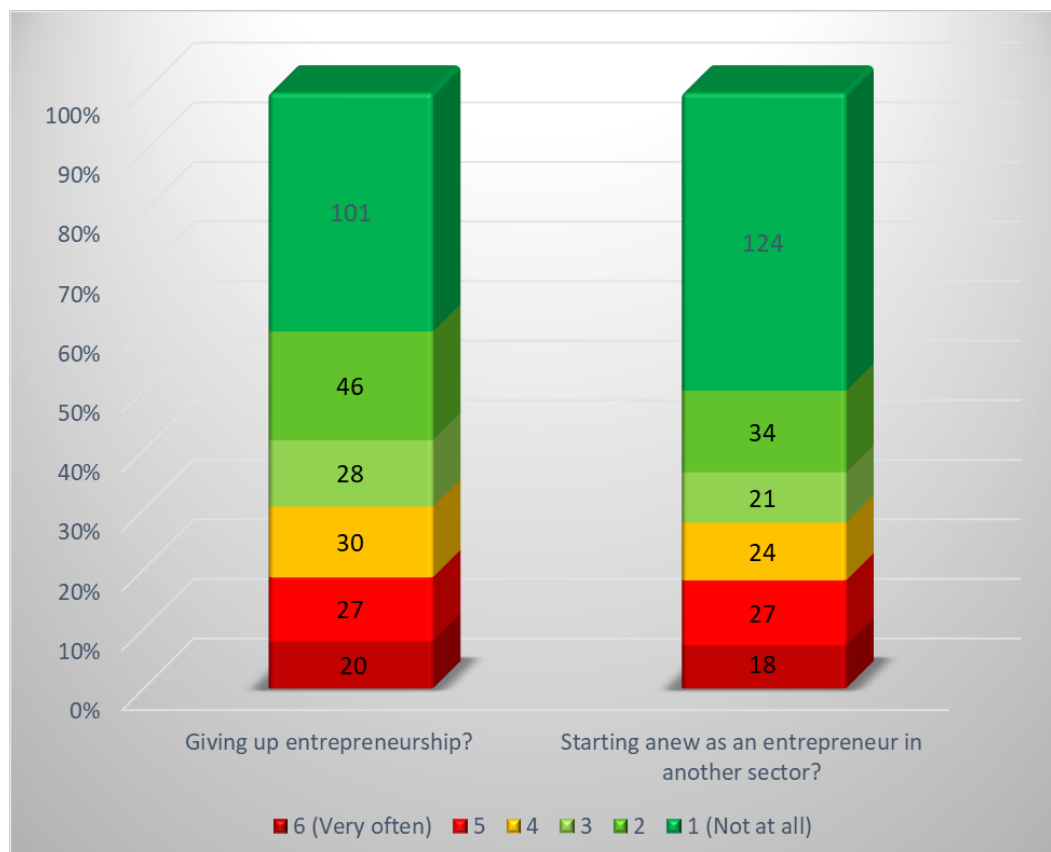
Table 4: Mental well-being

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

Finally, a correlation analysis of our 3 different measures of mental well-being further confirms that all of them are significantly correlated, indicating the respondents answered consistently across the different sets of questions.

In addition to measuring the mental well-being of the respondents, we also asked them whether, during the past year, they had considered giving up entrepreneurship or switching to another industry sector. The results are largely optimistic (Figure 4), with a considerable majority of entrepreneurs determined to carry on in the same sector.

Figure 4: During the past year, have you often considered...



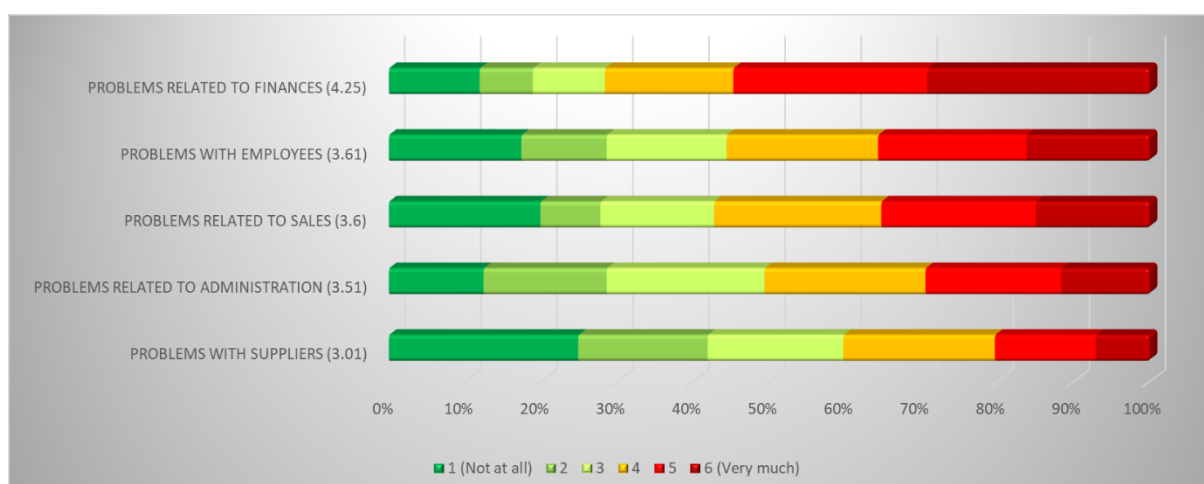
### III. Entrepreneurship and mental well-being

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.

In order to assess whether entrepreneurship has a positive or a negative impact on mental well-being we asked our respondents to what extent they consider their entrepreneurial activities linked to their state of mental well-being. The choices ranged 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, we asked the entrepreneurs 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 Figure 5 clearly show 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 are ranked second and third, both with a mean value of 3.6.

Figure 5: To what extent do the following professional problems decrease your mental well-being? (Mean scores between brackets)



### IV. Coping with psychological distress

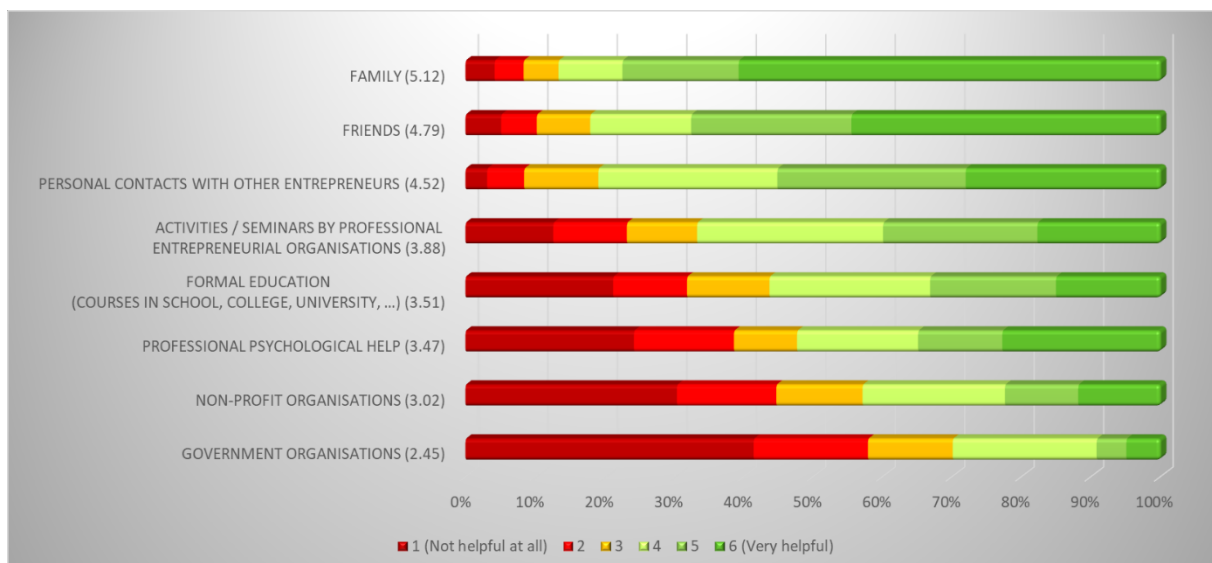
When faced with psychological distress, people may have different options that can help or support them. Such support may come from their personal or professional network but also from government organisations. In our survey we listed 8 potential sources of support



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').

Figure 6 shows the results, filtered to include only those respondents that have had actual experience with the source listed. As evident in Figure 6, family is 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 are in fourth place and are also deemed helpful by most of the respondents (3.8). Opinions are divided about the usefulness of formal education and professional psychological help. Finally, non-profit organisations and especially government organisations are not generally viewed as helpful by most of the entrepreneurs.

Figure 6: Which of the following have helped you to avoid, cope with or relieve psychological distress during your entrepreneurial activities? (Mean scores between brackets)



For those respondents without previous experience with the listed support mechanisms the main reasons for not using them seem to be the time they take up, especially with regard to formal education, and the difficulty of finding the appropriate support, especially when provided by non-profit or government organisations (Table 5).

Table 5: What are the main reasons preventing you from participating in/using the following items?

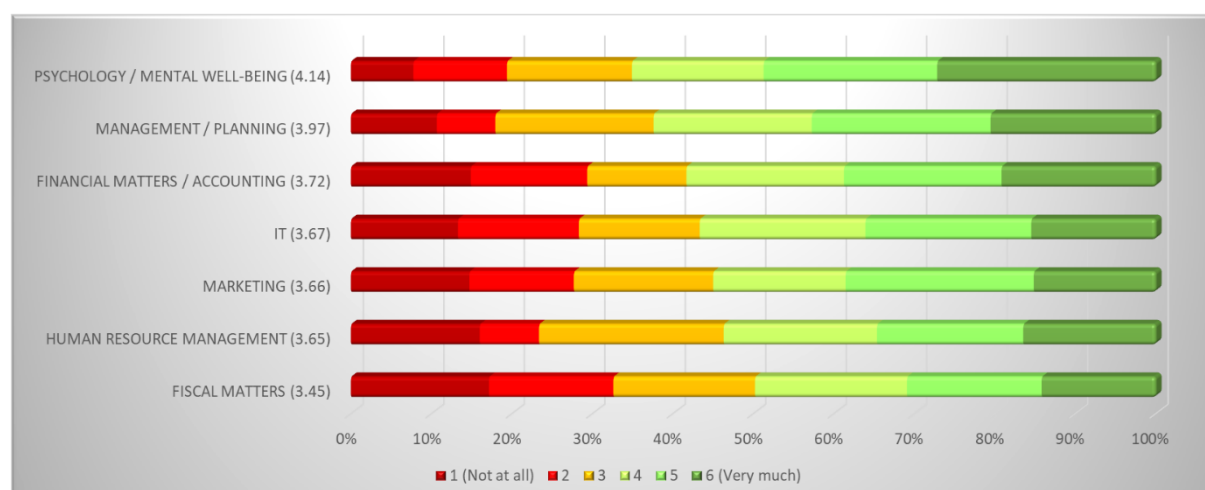
	I don't need it	I don't know where to find it	Too expensive	Too time-consuming	Shame
<i>Formal education</i>	41	4	11	28	0
<i>Activities by professional entrepreneurial organisations</i>	10	8	6	18	0
<i>Government organisations</i>	39	18	0	14	1
<i>Non-profit organisations</i>	39	24	0	10	3
<i>Professional psychological help</i>	73	6	13	11	5

### V. Need for additional support

Lastly, we set out to identify which additional knowledge or learning materials could be most useful for entrepreneurs in order to help them achieve or maintain a healthy work-life balance. Again, we provided a list of 7 different knowledge areas and asked entrepreneurs to assess how useful those would be, on a scale of 1 ('Not at all') to 6 ('Very much').

As the sorted results in Figure 7 show, additional knowledge about psychology and mental well-being is deemed most useful by the respondents (mean score of 4.1 out of 6), followed in second place by management or planning knowledge (mean score of 4).

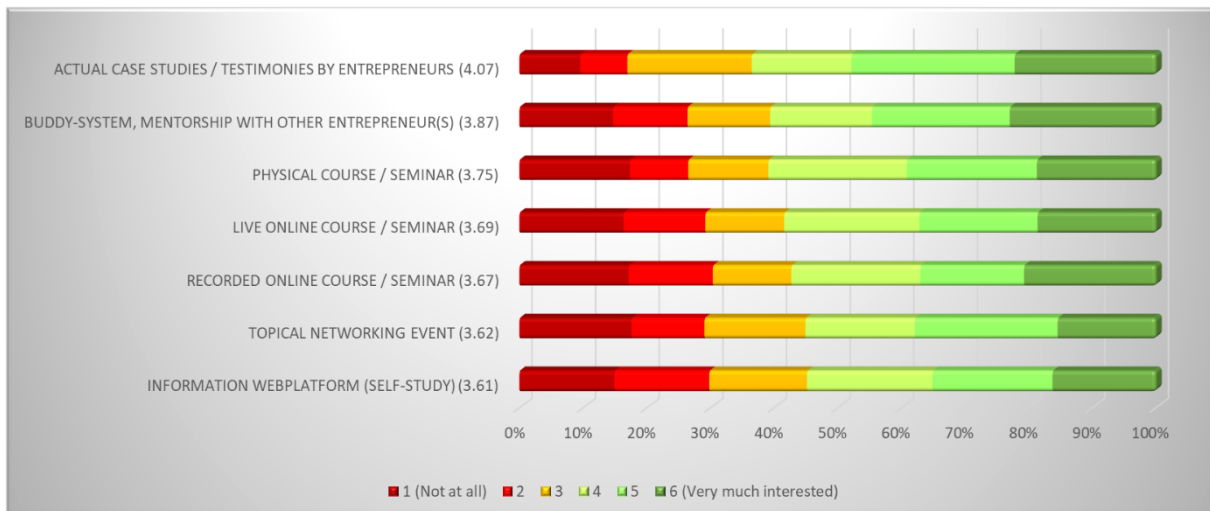
Figure 7: To what extent would additional knowledge of the following subjects help you achieve or maintain a healthy work-life balance? (Mean scores between brackets)



To gain some insight into the best way to provide additional knowledge to entrepreneurs, we asked them to indicate how interested they would be in specific forms or methods, again on a scale of 1 ('Not at all') to 6 ('Very much interested') (Figure 8).

Although a majority of the respondents were favourable to all of 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 method, a mentorship with other entrepreneurs, confirms this preference for peer-learning (mean score of 3.9). What follows are three formal, educational methods, namely physical courses, live online courses and recorded online courses. The least interesting forms were networking events and self-study by means of an information webplatform.

Figure 8: In which form would you like to acquire such additional knowledge? (Mean scores between brackets)



## **VI. Methodology**

As a first step towards the data collection, an initial (English) survey was constructed, based on previous literature on mental well-being and psychological distress among entrepreneurs. This first draft was then distributed among the project partners and adapted based on their feedback.

Next, the resulting, final version of the survey was translated into Dutch, Lithuanian and Portuguese by native speakers among the project partners. This resulted in four separate surveys, of which online versions were made using the Qualtrics survey tool.

Survey invitations, accompanied by an introductory text about the project, were subsequently sent out by the project partners during May 2021. This was done through a variety of channels, including a direct mailing to about 7,000 companies, including a reminder mail towards the end of May. Additionally, links to the online survey were distributed by the project members on various social and professional media (e.g. LinkedIn, professional organisations' websites, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp).

## **VII. References**

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- Rand (2021). 36-Item Short Form Survey Instrument (SF-36). Retrieved from [https://www.rand.org/health-care/surveys\\_tools/mos/36-item-short-form/survey-instrument.html](https://www.rand.org/health-care/surveys_tools/mos/36-item-short-form/survey-instrument.html).