

YEeS- Youth Entrepreneurship Education and Skills - Serbia

1. Concept of youth entrepreneurship in the national level

The topic of entrepreneurship is closely related to education. The goal of education is one of providing knowledge and competencies to the youth, with the purpose of creating a functioning individual able to exist in society. A percentage of successful entrepreneurs indicates a functioning society, geared towards progress (Savrul, 2017). Within the mission of the European Union, one of the goals leads to changes and innovations for economic growth and a decrease of inequalities in economic opportunities. One of the possible solutions is through the development of entrepreneurship. More specifically the development of entrepreneurship competencies through entrepreneurship education. In 2016 European Commission created a European entrepreneurship competence framework (EntreComp), with the idea of providing assistance for entrepreneurship action in countries of Europe, in any possible field (OECD, 2022). During the last years development of competences of entrepreneurship is a priority on a national policy level. An important next step is the improvement of connection, communication and united actions between different levels of actors, giving the fact that there is a body that is overseeing this process. Moreover, Industrial Policy Strategy (2021-2030) identifies a bigger importance of entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship education is officially being systematically thought in the formal educational system in Serbia, with the possibility to develop network with programs outside the formal system. Exceptionally, certain modules of studies in faculties such as management and economy offer these courses. There is little mention of entrepreneurship during the primary and secondary school formal curricula, however there exists an aim of developing a way to train teachers and incorporate entrepreneurship education in the higher percentage in the future. More specifically, there are teams of school employees that deal with career counseling, thus, in some schools they organize workshops that are not obligatory for the pupils. During 2021 several projects were organized by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development with the goal of exploring entrepreneurial skills among pupils in higher education institutions. Important step to be attended to ensure the equal opportunities approach which was stated on the national level in National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021-2030).

2. The situation of youth entrepreneurship in the local and national levels

The statistical records of youth unemployment, aged 15-24 years, in the last quarter of 2022 was 24,3% (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2022). This data in combination with the general unemployment rate of 50,1% describes a quite bleak economic situation in Serbia (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2022). Therefore, one of the possible solutions to this issue could be entrepreneurship.

Research conducted in 2014 explored attitudes towards entrepreneurship of relevant stakeholders and the general public (CEVES, 2014). Their results suggest that a third of their sample expresses a desire to be self-employed. Moreover, this preference declines with age, with youth from 18 to 29 years being the most inclined for this step. On top of that, men show a bigger interest in self-employment (33%), as well as participants with a medium educational level (33%), compared to low (26%) and high (28%). They report that in the small business sector a bigger amount, about a third (approximately 24.000), represent so-called "companies out of necessity", which were established as private, have around 4 employees and do not grow.

In of the relevant actions the government has launched a website regarding social entrepreneurship (<https://preduzetnistvo.gov.rs/>). This website was created in 2018 with the help of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and is in the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Serbia. It points to all the programs of financial and non-financial support of small businesses such as help with the start of the business and the development. This is a step towards the development of a project of "EU for a better business environment" which is supported by the European Union. A total number of 9 guides for entrepreneurs who are starting their businesses are being planned, with the first one, for the IT industry already made. In the year 2022 two additional websites were created, one being Small Business informant (<https://informatior.preduzetnistvo.gov.rs/>) and another Startup Portal (<https://startup.gov.rs/>). A small business informant explains the legal side of creating a business with much educational relevant information, such as how to pay taxes for your business. On the other hand, the Startup Portal was created by the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Serbia in collaboration with the program United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Serbia. It gathers important information which is useful for startups in all phases of development, such as programs of support, financing, investing, benefits, and incentives. The additional section characterizes around 40 organizations that provide different levels of support for developers at the beginning of the startup creation.

3. Importance of entrepreneurship in social and economic level

The research conducted by CEVES (CEVES, 2014) highlights the advantages of small and medium enterprises, one of them being their flexibility and adjustability, which is a considerable assets in today's economy. Furthermore, the risk of failing in this sector causes fewer disruptions in the whole system, which is a benefit for the stable economic market. Besides, the chain of command is shorter which increases the possibility of innovation and development of a new idea. Another advantage is possible to direct contact which small business owners can create with others. Finally, anyone can become an entrepreneur, regardless of education, gender, age, or other possible aggravating characteristics, which in itself holds enormous potential.

4. Legal and political framework in the national level

The Lisabon Strategy in 2000 and the goal of making the European economy the most competitive and dynamic in the world marks a starting point (European Council, 2000). In the following years

entrepreneurship became present in every framework and a crucial objective for the European Union. Given the 2003 Eu-Western Balkans summit in Thessaloniki, Serbia was one of the countries to take part in the European Small Business Act created by European Commission in 2008 where entrepreneurship lifelong education was at the center. Moreover, a very crucial Europe 2020 Strategy was adopted in 2010, with a focus on economic development through a higher rate of employment and productivity rate. In the year 2013 European Union created a strategy called "Europe 2020" which consisted of, among others, an action plan for entrepreneurship 2020. It framed entrepreneurship as a crucial aid toward the goal of economic and social growth. More specifically, describes a high return on investments, higher employability, and the possibility of reaching out to specific groups (European Commission, 2010). Finally with Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2020 in the year 2013, which entails concrete steps which will incorporate entrepreneurship education in every level of education by the end of 2015 (European Commission, 2013). All these strategies and plans conveyed a very clear message of the importance of the economic and social level of entrepreneurship by the European boards.

In Serbia, the law on the basics of the educational system from 2009 specifies that the education system should stimulate children and adults to foster an entrepreneurship approach and be the drivers of change ("Službeni glasnik RS", 72/2009). In the strategy of development of education in Serbia until 2020 established in 2012, the importance of entrepreneurship direction seems to be crucial for industry and production. In the year 2022, the law on social entrepreneurship has been redefined which defined all crucial aspects. The law describes the regulations, rights and obligations of entrepreneurs, as well as the registration process, reporting and the steps for the encouragement of the development of social entrepreneurship. In combination the support for socially sensitive groups was established. Following the main subject and goal of the law, the main principles are defined. These are the principles of transparency, responsibility, sustainable growth and development, partnerships, and synergistic action of the public, private, and civil sectors. Moreover, a specific article focuses on the social role entrepreneurship should entail, mainly how it aims at solving social problems with the goal of bigger social cohesion. Further, the conditions for acquiring the status of social entrepreneurship and registration are described. The following article introduces a council for social entrepreneurship that aims at providing assistance. The council consists of six members of civil servants and seven representatives of social entrepreneurship. Finally, the role of the Republic of Serbia, autonomous province, and local self-government units are defined. Their support through the creation and implementation of public policy measures is crucial. Active, systematic support is necessary since they can provide governmental, financial, educational, promotional, and developmental support, tools, and actions. Most recently, the Chamber of Commerce of Serbia organized a conference about youth entrepreneurship in March 2023. Successful entrepreneurs shared their first steps with the youth and gave them some advice. This is one of the many initiatives the government is taking to encourage youth to start their own business after finishing their education.

Methodology

In the research, our study sample consists of 103 young participants, between 18 to 29 years. The research was conducted in Serbia, using the Competence Monitor Survey and Formal, informal and non-formal entrepreneurial learning questionnaires. Additionally, we conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders with different positions connected to the entrepreneurial field. First of all, the questionnaires were created online, therefore, increasing the probability of the sample being representative. Moreover, the media outlets as well as our own volunteer network were put in use to gather participants. The only challenge we faced at this phase was reaching out to the most participants and making sure they fill in the questionnaire until the end. Secondly, the mapping of the stakeholders aimed at grasping the entrepreneurship topic from every level of the organization. Therefore, we reached out to stakeholders working in different fields. The challenge we faced during this part of data gathering was the nonresponsiveness of some stakeholders. After initial challenges, we reached out to the partners of the organization connected to the entrepreneurial topic. Thus, we managed to conduct 10 interviews. These stakeholders were from different hierarchical levels since we aimed at analyzing the issue from a variety of perspectives. That is why our stakeholders are from a wide of roles: representative of national employee service, representative of women's collective, representative of an organization of people with disabilities, representatives of schools, representative of lgbtq+ association and representatives of foundations and projects. The presented results display an overall analysis of all these interviews.

Results and findings

In this research collected a sample of participants is 103. The percentage of female male participants is fairly balanced, with slightly more females (55). Regarding the age of the participants, the majority belong to the youngest category 18 - 21 years old (61.2%), then 26 - 29 years old (20.4%), and finally the middle category of 22 - 25 years old (18.4%). More than 80 percent of our sample is currently studying to obtain a bachelor's degree. Other participants' education level splits into different categories: master studies (10.7%), technical degree (5.8%), and doctoral studies (2.9%). Our entire sample is residents of the country of Serbia. Finally, most of our respondents are still in the possession of finishing their education. Of the rest of our participants, the majority are employed (25.2%) and some are not employed (7.8%). Some of our participants chose the option other but without an explanation (5) and only one participant is currently looking for a job.

In the next part of the results section of this research, we present the results per each competency area. There are 18 competencies relevant to entrepreneurship. Firstly, more than 60% of our participants think they have a basic or intermediate competence for scanning the environment to obtain relevant information, with 25% considering they are advanced in this. Secondly, the indicator of **scanning opportunities** is the possibility to identify challenges by questioning mainstream ideas which almost 36% of our participants find as an expertise of theirs; and another 50% that they are basic or intermediate on this competence. More than 40% of our sample considers themselves advanced and 18,4% are experts in creating opportunities. Similarly, the majority (85%) of our participants describe

themselves as either intermediate, advanced, or experts regarding the possibility of discovering opportunities by interacting with others. **Creativity** expressed through the activity of questioning the current situation most find well developed in them, except 18% of our participants who do not. Our participants mostly have an intermediate understanding of promoting and leading disruptive changes (35.9%), and almost 30% have an advanced understanding. Exactly 68% of participants think they are either experts or advanced in solving problems creatively. Connected to this, generating ideas and developing them is also fairly developed in our participants, with almost 30% being intermediate and almost 36% advanced. The participants' responses on developing and implementing innovations are distributed equally on all possible categories questionnaire categories, meaning some participants are not familiar with it, while others are. Next competence in the vision is rather developed with our participants. A very important development of an inspiring **vision** for an entrepreneurial idea 28% of participants think they have basic knowledge and 30% intermediate. Only 11% do not have any knowledge on this topic. More than 25% of participants find that they could use more knowledge of strategic planning for the development of an idea. Specifically on the activities regarding the action plan our participants show a normal distribution of answers, with the majority in the middle of the scale, so think they have intermediate knowledge (31.1%) on this topic. Around 40% of participants believe they have advanced and almost 30% intermediate knowledge on developing strategies to assess the value of new ideas. Moreover, almost 60 % think they can either in an intermediate or advanced manner identify the preferences of each stakeholder. The aspect of **valuing ideas** that our participants face issues with is protecting and sharing intellectual property since most of them do not possess any knowledge (27.2%). Regarding **ethical and sustainable thinking**, almost 60% of participants suppose they have a fair understanding, with only 5% of them admitting they have no knowledge of promoting ethical behavior in the process of transforming the idea into action. In our sample, more than 22 % are experts in thinking about the sustainable impact of actions before executing them and 35% are advanced. For monitoring and assessing the impact of actions our participants mainly consider they have knowledge in this area since each answer, except without knowledge, counts over 20% of respondents. Concerning ensuring accountability over 50% of participants believe they are either experts or advanced in understanding this competence. Next competence of **design** described through the possibility of developing a user-oriented offering is normally distributed in our sample, with the highest percentage of answers in the middle category of intermediate understanding (32%). Similarly, the indicators concerning needs show the highest percentages (around 30%) of intermediate understanding. Our participants admitted they mainly do not have experience with testing prototypes (25.2%), or basic knowledge (24.3%). Finally, for the indicator of collaboration with others mainly (35%) they consider they have a good understanding. The percentage of answers regarding the competence of **self-awareness and self-efficacy** shows us that in this sample people in the majority consider themselves as advanced in the aspect of following their aspirations by translating them into achievable goals (42.7%). Similarly, a fairly big percentage of our sample (40.8%) believes they can implement projects even in a rather difficult environment. A high percentage of answers describes our participants as active in shaping their future by developing necessary skills, and only 10% find themselves with a small amount of knowledge on this topic. Questions on resilience, focus, and maintenance of passion

regarding the development of an entrepreneurial idea on the scale of **motivation and perseverance** receive mainly high scores, with approximately 15% of participants answering with no or basic knowledge. Others feel they have developed this competence, with around 30% describing themselves as experts in resilience and perseverance. Lower percentages are found in the questions revolving around the **mobilization of resources**. Around 20% have a basic, 20% intermediate, and 30% advanced understanding of making the most out of limited resources; similar percentages go for obtaining resources and building the network. Very crucial items on understanding **financial and economic literacy** display uniformly distributed answers, with all categories of answers receiving approximately 20%. A big percentage of participants (20%) have no understanding of how to create a proactive budget plan, and almost 30% have intermediate knowledge of this activity. Similarly, around 25% of participants believe they have no knowledge of funding, taxation, or implementation processes of an entrepreneurial idea. Regarding **mobilization of others** over 55% of our participants share that they have role models for inspiration. Almost 40% feel they have obtained desired outputs in inspiring others, and another 30% feel the same regarding convincing others to join their entrepreneurship idea. Over 30% of participants feel they are confident with using ethical strategies for negotiating and communicating their message. The main difficulty they are facing is the mobilization of others through media where they possess no knowledge (20%), albeit some are handling it well (22,3 and 14,6%). Our participants show a good understanding of digital marketing by positioning themselves high on the right part of the scale (50% in two right categories) regarding answers about digital tools and the use of graphs. However, they might need help with digital security since around 25% have some experience and 20% have none. Also, they could use assistance with complex digital tools because around 45% have no basic understanding of those tools. The youth in our sample has no problem with **taking the initiative** in view of the fact that 60% of them consider they are very good at taking responsibility. An extreme amount of our participants 54% think they are experts in independent work, with no participants believing they have no experience in this type of work. They mainly believe they have had great results in initiating action on new idea (over 60% with the two last categories). **Planning and management** are important and our participants are fairly good with respect to the ability to define an achievable goal (3 categories with over 80% in total), slightly less in the part of the organization (3 categories with over 70% in total). With regard to defining a priority and creation of a sustainable plan of action for an entrepreneurial idea biggest percent of our participants (29.1%) find they have some experience in it. Monitoring progress with the use of proper metrics 58 of our participants believe they have either good or desired experience and more than 30% have no or basic experience. Around 30% consider they have the experience to adapt their plans to change and around another 30% with desired results. Only 8% believe they have none or basic experience with adapting to change. Moreover, on the proper manner of adjusting to team changes, most of our participants find they have experience with it (35.9%). The final item on the competence of **process management** is flexibility in work which our respondents have in an advanced amount (37.9%). The skill of **coping with uncertainty, ambiguity, and risk** our participants find mildly developed, with 33% admitting they have some experience with it and over 31% sharing they have advanced experience. Answers on other items of this competence consisting of calculation of the risk, risk management, and refining the base idea are normally distributed with almost

all categories of answers receiving from 10 to 30%. The next competence is **working with others** which is well-developed in our sample. With respect to the inclusion of different team participants, emotional intelligence, proactive listening, and with teams with balanced skills most of the participants find themselves in the left half of the distribution therefore being either advanced or experts in these topics (over 55% up to 65% in two left categories). A slightly smaller percentage has experience with proactively working on expanding their network with the majority describing they are some experience in it (31.1%) or just basic (20%). The final competence of **learning through experience** shows that our participants reflect on their failures and achievements in a big amount, as they find themselves experts (35.9%) in it or advanced (33%). Similar percentages go on proactively trying to grow and work on their strengths and weaknesses (around 70% for 2 right categories) and learning from experience (around 75% for 2 right categories).

In the next section of the questionnaires, participants responded to questions related to their experiences with entrepreneurial education. Almost 75% of participants did not have experience with formal entrepreneurial education. Other percentages participated in subjects such as management, risk management, and management of small and medium enterprises during their bachelor studies. Topics that were covered in these subjects were product and service innovations, product design and development, development of entrepreneurial idea, finance, business and action plans, budget planning, marketing, and communications. Around 40% of participants believe this education did not help nor harmed the development of their skills, around 24% believe it really helped them and around 17% think it did not help them at all. The next group of questions focused on non-formal entrepreneurship education, for which almost 90% of participants elaborated that did not take part in in the last 12 months. The rest shared that the topics of trainings they participated in were financial freedom and business, which was organized by the organization in collaboration with their faculty, with the majority of problem-based approach tasks (60%). In these activities, 37% of participants could not decide if this training helped develop their entrepreneurial skills and 10% strongly believed they did. The third final group of questions was about informal entrepreneurial education, in which more than 80% did not participate in the last 12 months. The rest informed us that the topics covered were goal planning, goal setting, risk management, business opening, opening a business, taxes, copyright, and interviews with famous business leaders. The channels used in this process are mainly podcasts (38.5%), then videos and youtube (35.9%), and self-directed learning (30.8%). For this type of education, again around 30% were undecided on the usefulness of information, with around 20% realizing it has helped them gain some knowledge on entrepreneurial education. Finally, the topics they would suggest for the future were finding financing outlets, financial literacy, investment, development of entrepreneurial idea, entrepreneurship in science, networking, digital marketing, finding the proper target group, creating a brand, and skills of negotiating.

In the second part of the research, we represent an analysis of the 10 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. First of all, we attempted to map the understanding of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education. Some stakeholders focused on their personal experience in the entrepreneurship business, while others shared situations from the workplace or provided us with the

definitions. There was a big variety of answers from developing skills, mentorship, business plans, spin-offs, attitudes to workshops. In general, we can conclude that only few of them had a clear understanding of entrepreneurship and they rarely possessed any information on entrepreneurship education. Second of all, our interviewees gave us their perspective on the importance of youth entrepreneurship education. Worth mentioning are the possibility to obtain relevant information and attitudes, the possibility to be an entrepreneur, to be successful in their jobs in the future, to change the current mindset and to feel that you have the power to achieve desired goals and change your reality for the better. Moreover, about the legal and political framework on entrepreneurship our stakeholders had very limited knowledge which mostly focused on tax regulations, regulations on opening and closing of a business and contracts on self-employment. Furthermore, the stakeholders had limited amounts of information on factors which are influencing entrepreneurship. They mentioned the scarce information youth possess, ineffective attitudes and influence of family and school which could be counterproductive. In their answers factors and difficulties experienced by young entrepreneurs seemed intertwined. Our stakeholders described difficulties such as unhealthy competition, lack of security, fear of failure and not enough material resources to start. The most important factor they described is the environment which is not proper for youth entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, examples of successful entrepreneurs do not possess necessary visibility, the answers regarding benefits of engaging in entrepreneurship education did not provide a lot of information. Some mention bigger salaries, being independent, flexibility, personal growth and setting a good example for the bigger community. Finally, we aimed at receiving information about their knowledge of different programs, actions and strategies connected to the topic of entrepreneurship. Regarding strategies, most of interviewees did not possess any information. The rest were familiar only with the European 2020 strategy. Our stakeholder from the school was familiar with education program connected to carrier counseling where there is a mention of entrepreneurship. Except that, other interviewees were mainly aware of the self-employment action programme by the National Agency. Also, some noticed activities performed by some professors at the Faculty of management and foundations.

Conclusion

To summarize, these 18 competencies capture the skills and knowledge of entrepreneurship. In our sample, there is a fair amount of variety in the answers of our participants. A general trend displays a small number of answers where participants had no knowledge of the topic. A positive conclusion is that for the majority of questions our participants show an advanced level of experience, meaning they possess the necessary skill, experience, and/or knowledge to achieve desired results despite obstacles, specifically with regard to scanning opportunities, self-awareness and self-efficacy, creativity, motivation and perseverance, taking the initiative, planning and management, process management, working with others and learning from experience. For other competencies such as ethical and sustainable thinking, design, mobilization of resources, digital marketing, and facing uncertainties these participants have a diverse experience. Finally, some indicators of a variety of competencies display a possibility of improvement. In this sample, competences of vision and creation of entrepreneurial ideas represent a space where more experience is needed, specifically regarding copyright strategies. Even

though this data represents a positive situation, we consider this might be a result of non-understanding the questions in adequate depth or possible social desirability in answering. This sample of participants is young in age and majority are still attending their bachelor studies, which could provide an explanation for the high amount of answers marked on expert level.

Conclusions from interviews with stakeholders paint a different picture of the reality in Serbia. Certainly there is a gap between the knowledge of entrepreneurship and specifically entrepreneurship education among the stakeholders from the sample. Each interviewee has a specific point of view which directs their knowledge and opinion. All in all, more awareness of the importance and benefits of youth entrepreneurship seems to be needed. In general, gaining more information on strategies and actions revolving around youth entrepreneurship is necessary for all these partners. Another conclusion we gathered from the interviews is the frequency of attributing the current situation to the environment. Undeniably, every person lives within its' context and the environment holds many crucial factors. However, there seems to be a lack of will to take responsibility or have a more active role in the system. Moreover, the understanding of the complex intertwined factors contributing to the question of entrepreneurship does not seem to be so profound within the most of interviewed stakeholders. More specifically, some of our stakeholders were representatives of groups with fewer opportunities, such as LGBTQ+, people with disabilities and female organizations. However, none of them mentioned any specific obstacle these groups might be facing. Even though at first glance that could be a positive finding, our opinion is that these individuals are not aware of all the possible ways different laws could improve their position.

Recommendations for action

In the next section we provide the recommendation for future steps based on obtained information from youth questionnaires and interviews with stakeholders about the topic of entrepreneurship in Serbia. Building an entrepreneurial society involves everything. The attitudes about entrepreneurial initiative and failure must be more positive. The most important for achieving that goal are precisely those on whom today's and future entrepreneurship depends. Collecting more data will help future research and social dialogue raise visibility and broader understanding of entrepreneurship. In Serbia, there is a little reliable information about processes and trends in the economy; statistics suffer from weaknesses, especially when it comes to SMEs and the category of legal entities called entrepreneurs.

In the future more concrete and visible actions toward entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education are needed. In general, several strategies are in place, yet there seems to be a necessity for **better implementation process**, and **monitoring and evaluation system** on a national and local level. Moreover, a crucial effort to be done is raising awareness of the **benefits** of entrepreneurship through success stories and the visibility of entrepreneurial role models. From youth questionnaires we can conclude that greater accessibility to **information** on entrepreneurship would benefit youth. Moreover, more possibilities to undertake different **entrepreneurial activities** can assist the youth to feel more comfortable in choosing entrepreneurial paths. From the analysis of stakeholder interviews it is evident that the **popularization** of the choice to become an entrepreneur would ensure a positive impact on

youth entrepreneurship. For example, one of our stakeholders suggested the implementation of more opportunities for peer counseling. The major issues which open a space for enhancement are improving the potential alternative financing sources, as well as more financial education.

It could be recommended to specify an official document at the highest level of government by which it will be declared the **intention** of Serbia to **actively engage** in the goal of increasing entrepreneurship. The ideal start would be for the Government or the National Assembly to adopt a document similar to the European Small Business Act, which would systematically begin spreading awareness of the greater importance of entrepreneurship for the Serbian economy. Systematically there needs to be more emphasis on professions and potential employability included in every subject of primary and secondary school. Perhaps, it is not a separate subject of entrepreneurship education that is needed, but rather education on entrepreneurship competencies, skills and attitudes incorporated in all subjects.

Setting a new approach in education by developing creative, innovative thinking, business and practical management skills. In addition, non-formal entrepreneurial education must be more accessible and of better quality in order to enable future and/or existing entrepreneurs to develop new skills that are needed in the various stages of the development of an entrepreneurial venture, from the establishment, development and complexity of the business.

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