

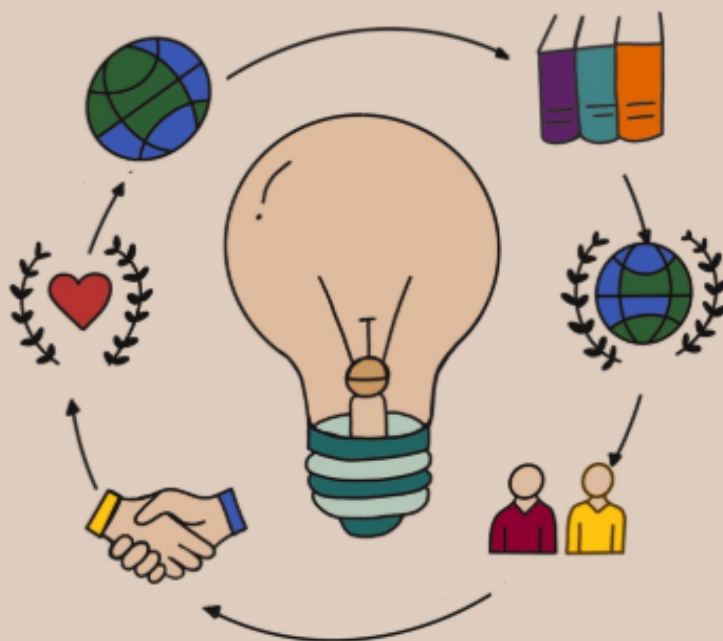
Global Awareness Movement
GAM

GAM

RESEARCH PRESENTS

Turning Passion into Impact

Are Young People Ready
for Social Entrepreneurship?



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Expert Commentary

The study conducted by Sophia Nikolova, under the supervision of Olga Drygała as part of the Global Awareness Movement (GAM), represents a well-structured and logically organised contribution that clearly sets out its aims, presents the results, and situates them convincingly within the relevant context. The obtained results provide valuable insights into the state of youth knowledge about social entrepreneurship – from the perspective of both the opportunities provided by educational institutions as well as young people’s motivations towards entrepreneurship. The findings also point to the constraints that young people face while engaging with social entrepreneurship, suggesting how they could be overcome.

While this research has some methodological limitations, particularly regarding sample diversity, which may limit the generalisability and wider applicability of the results, the findings work effectively as a first step for future research. This research can surely inspire further studies in the area of education research and beyond, to explore how to further champion entrepreneurship around young people; such contributions could provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers alike. Overall, the project is a solid basis for further inquiry and practical application. I am convinced that, with the right support, Sophia Nikolova has potential to produce high-quality social sciences research which both acknowledges its limitations and contributes to the existing stock of knowledge.

Maksymilian Łudziński

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GAM Research

Global Awareness Movement (GAM) is an initiative created by young people from Poland that is spreading all over the world. We aim to highlight the importance of social and environmental issues by creating awareness campaigns, projects, competitions, and online events. We want to provide a safe space for active discussions and allow people to learn from each other and inspire one another. We believe that even the smallest actions can drive positive change.

GAM Research is where you can find all the data, statistics, and knowledge we have gathered while working on our projects. We believe it is extremely important to explore what we are passionate about as it is the best way to learn and we do that in collaboration with experts from different fields.

From climate action projects to grassroots community programs, young people around the world are proving that social entrepreneurship can be a powerful force for change. These stories show that when creativity meets purpose, they can solve real problems in ways that traditional approaches often cannot. More and more of us are looking for careers that make a difference - how ready are we to turn our ideas into something that truly helps others?

Olga Drygała

Global Head of Projects, Education and Research at GAM

About the Authors

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High-school student at the English Language School “Prof. Ivan Apostolov” in Sofia, Bulgaria. Founder & CEO of *BioBliss*, a student-led start-up. Featured speaker at international events, including the Green Transition Forum 5.0 and the Spinoff Europa Conference 2025. Experience includes internships at Cleantech Bulgaria and The City Media Group, Head of Country at Global Awareness Movement and participation in international programmes such as the HISA International Fellowship 2025.

Olga Drygala, Project Supervisor

Global Head of Projects, Education and Research at Global Awareness Movement. A Data Science graduate from University College London with experience in data collection, harmonisation, and analysis. Multiple conference producer with an interdisciplinary approach to learning and a passion for creating a positive impact. Summer Biomedical Engineering Researcher at the University of Tokyo. Interested in medicine, digital health, project management, computing, and education.

Introduction

Did you know that less than 30% of high school students report learning about social entrepreneurship in school (Deloitte, 2025)? Moreover, a Eurobarometer survey found that only one-third of young people aged 15-30 in the EU are familiar with the concept of social entrepreneurship (European Commission, 2023). While this lack of formal education on social entrepreneurship is concerning, over 74% of young people say that they want their work to have a positive impact on the world (Deloitte, 2025). These contrasting numbers pose the question: what if the next generation of entrepreneurs was driven not by profit, but purpose?

Social entrepreneurship is all about that - solving social or environmental challenges while preserving financial stability for the business. Unlike traditional business that focuses primarily on profit, social entrepreneurs' goal is to create a positive impact in areas such as poverty, education, health, and sustainability (Penn's Venture Lab, 2023).

In recent years, young people have started to express their interest in contributing to their communities by choosing innovative career paths that support this goal (EY, n.d.). Faced with global issues like poverty, inequality, mental health problems, and climate change, many members of Generation Z and Millennials have committed to finding impactful solutions while aligning or even completely shifting their careers towards this focus (Ghazali et al., 2024). This change in people's mindset has reflected positively in an increased number of young social entrepreneurs. According to a study conducted by The Youth Entrepreneurship Policy Academy, "almost two in five social entrepreneurs in Western Europe are below the age of 34", further showing the strength of this movement (European Commission and OECD, 2024).

However, in spite of their enthusiasm, many young individuals don't get the chance to bring their ideas to life (OECD, 2022). This can be due to limited entrepreneurship education in schools or access to funding, incubators, and mentorship opportunities. All these become serious setbacks and are often the reason why young people are not able to carry out their vision. As a result, there is a gap between the wish to make a difference and the genuine readiness to go through the whole process of setting up a social enterprise.

While many studies have explored the field of social entrepreneurship from various aspects, we aimed to assess the personal awareness, motivation, readiness and any setbacks that limit young people's engagement in it, particularly at the high school and university level. This gap - combined with our interest in the experiences of people our own age and environment - led us to carry out this research: to better understand their aspirations, needs, and challenges while pursuing this field.

Objectives

- Determine how aware young people are of the concept and activity of social entrepreneurship.
- Examine to what extent educational institutions such as schools and universities have introduced the concept of social entrepreneurship to young people.
- Assess the motivating factors behind young people's drive towards social entrepreneurship.
- Investigate key barriers to social entrepreneurship among young people.
- Evaluate the perceived availability and effectiveness of workshops, hands-on projects, and programs.
- Evaluate the perceived impact of social entrepreneurship among young people.
- Develop recommendations for educational institutions on how to support and promote young social entrepreneurs.
- Assess young people's readiness to create positive impact through innovative business ideas and career paths.

Scope and Methodology

- The report is based on a single survey designed and distributed by the authors.
- The main author is Sophia Nikolova, working under the supervision of Olga Drygała, Global Head of Projects, Education and Research at GAM, and Jolanta Kulik, founder of GAM.
- The survey was conducted in March 2025 with the target participant group aged up to 30 years old.
- The survey was distributed mainly through social media and through the creators' acquaintances (convenience and snowball sampling). Respondents received a link to an online questionnaire (Google Forms) and completed it independently.
- The target group size was 100, and we had 82 participants. Eight participants were excluded from the study due to not meeting the age criteria.

Participant Characteristics

- Number of Participants: 74 individuals.
- Character of Participation: Participation was voluntary.
- Gender Distribution: The participants included 42 women (56.8%), 27 men (36.5%), and 5 (7%) individuals who answered “prefer not to say”.
- Age Range: The age range of respondents was up to 30 years old. Under 16 years old: 13 individuals (17.6%), 16-18 years old: 35 individuals (47.3%), 19-24 years old: 18 individuals (24.3%), 25-30 years old: 8 individuals (10.8%).
- Geographic Representation: While the majority of participants were from Bulgaria (66.4%), we also had participants from Albania, the USA, Poland, Ukraine, Colombia, Brazil, Iran, Egypt, France, Italy, and China. In total, we got responses from 12 countries across 5 continents.
- Educational Background: The participants represented a diverse range of educational backgrounds - 33.8% had completed secondary school, 24.3% primary school, 18.9% sixth form/college, 16.2% held postgraduate degrees, 5.4% undergraduate degrees, and 1.4% were currently finishing high school.
- Main Areas of Interest: The most common interest areas were Business (27%), STEM (23%), and Humanities and Social Sciences (14.9%). Other interests included Sports, Media & Communication, Arts, Environment, Aviation & Science, Engineering, and Entertainment.

Main Findings

Question 1: Have you heard of social entrepreneurship before?

- 48.6% of participants have heard of the term “social entrepreneurship” before, but weren’t fully sure they understood it, 14.9% claimed to know what it is, and 36.5% have never heard of it.

Question 2: What does social entrepreneurship mean to you? How is it different from traditional business?

- While the majority of respondents associated social entrepreneurship with solving social and environmental problems through innovation and purpose-driven business, a few responses revealed limited or no understanding, such as linking it to social media or simply describing traditional entrepreneurship.

Question 3: Which sectors do you think social enterprises are most active in?

- Respondents believe social enterprises are most active in environmental sustainability (79.7%), education and training (35.1%), and poverty alleviation (35.1%).

Question 4: Do you know any social enterprises or social entrepreneurs? Please list at least one.

- While 9 respondents couldn’t think of any examples of social enterprises, others listed some well-known ones like Patagonia, Tony’s Chocolonely, Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank, Blagichka Zero Waste, and DiFold.

Question 5: What do you think is the biggest challenge social entrepreneurs face?

- 60.8% of respondents think that lack of money or funding is the biggest challenge that social entrepreneurs face.

Question 6: How did you first learn about social enterprises?

- 27% of respondents weren’t familiar with social enterprises before completing the survey. Another 27% of participants learned about social enterprises through either school or university. Other sources included social media, news, and friends and family.

Question 7: In your opinion, what are the main goals of social entrepreneurship?

- 83.8% of respondents believe that the main goal of social entrepreneurship is to solve social and environmental problems, as well as improve community well-being (70.3%).

Question 8: To what extent do you agree that social enterprises can create long-term, sustainable change?

- 51.4% of respondents agree that social enterprises can create long-term, sustainable change, 23% remain neutral, and 10.8% disagree.

Question 9: Do you think young people can make a difference through social entrepreneurship?

- 52.7% of participants believe that young people can make a difference through social entrepreneurship, but only to some extent, 35.1% definitely agree that they can, 8.1% don't think they can, and 4.1% weren't sure.

Question 10: In your opinion, what is the most significant impact social enterprises have on communities?

- 32.4% believe that the most significant impact social enterprises have on communities is reducing environmental harm, 29.7% believe that it is raising awareness about social issues, 17.6% answered it is creating jobs and economic opportunities, and again 17.6% answered with improving access to essential services. Only 1 respondent thought it was about working together as a society, and 1 answered "none".

Question 11: How important do you think social entrepreneurship is in today's world?

- 44.6% believe that social entrepreneurship is very important today, 40.5% think it's somewhat important, 9.5% think it's not very important, and 5.4% think it's not important at all.

Question 12: What social or environmental issues are most important to you?

- According to the respondents, the three most pressing issues are poverty and hunger (51.4%), education and access to learning (39.2%), and healthcare and mental health (39.2%).

Question 13: Are you interested in starting or working for a social enterprise in the future?

- 29.7% of respondents expressed clear interest in starting or working for a social enterprise, and 50% were open to the idea.

Question 14: Briefly explain why you are / you are not interested in starting or working for a social enterprise in the future.

- Many respondents were motivated to pursue social entrepreneurship by the desire to create meaningful impact, help others or combine purpose with profit, often inspired by personal interests, or volunteering experience. Some setbacks and barriers identified included lack of time, confidence, funding, concerns about job security, or long-term impact, or simply not seeing themselves in that role. Although not interested in pursuing it personally, a few participants still found the concept fascinating.

Question 15: Have you ever purchased a product or service from a business that donates to charity or helps a social cause?

- 77% of respondents claimed to have purchased a product or service from a business that donates to charity or helps a social cause.

Question 16: Have you participated in any social entrepreneurship courses, workshops, or programs?

- 62.2% of respondents have not participated in any social entrepreneurship courses, workshops, or programs.

Question 17: Would you like to participate in any social entrepreneurship courses, workshops, or programs in the future?

- 59.5% of respondents would like to participate in social entrepreneurship courses, workshops, or programs in the future.

Question 18: Do you think social entrepreneurship should be included in school/university curricula?

- 58.1% of respondents said that social entrepreneurship should be included in school and/or university curricula, but as an elective, 35.1% said it's essential, and 6.8% said it's not necessary.

Question 19: What types of learning opportunities would be most helpful for understanding social entrepreneurship?

- The two most helpful for understanding social entrepreneurship learning opportunities, according to the respondents, are hands-on projects and simulations (66.2%) and case studies of successful social enterprises (50%).

Question 20: Do you think learning about social entrepreneurship can help young people develop new skills? If yes, what skills? If no, please type "no".

- Most respondents believe that learning about social entrepreneurship helps young people develop valuable skills such as problem-solving, leadership, creativity, communication, teamwork, financial literacy, empathy, and social awareness - only a few were unsure or said no.

Discussion

First, participants were asked if they had ever heard of or knew what social entrepreneurship is. Less than a quarter answered that they knew, and half that they had heard of it but didn't fully understand the concept, which is a positive start. However, 27 out of 74 people stated that they had never heard of it. This clearly shows that more awareness about social entrepreneurship still needs to be raised among young people.

When asked to define social entrepreneurship, many responses demonstrated a fair understanding, with the majority accurately recognising its goals. In spite of this, some participants who believed they understood the concept described it incorrectly. It is especially concerning that 20% of participants identified profit gain as a main goal and over 10% stated they believed social enterprises cannot create long-term, sustainable change. While this scepticism may be due to a misunderstanding of the concept or from associating long-term outcomes with large-scale initiatives, these findings suggest that the actual percentage of respondents who truly understand the field of social entrepreneurship is somewhat lower than what the initial responses indicated.

Participants were also asked to identify the sectors in which they believed social enterprises are most active. The most popular amongst the answers were environmental sustainability, poverty alleviation, and education and training. However, according to research conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), social enterprises are most active in education and training, followed by health and well-being, and only then environment and sustainability (European Commission, 2024). This inconsistency may be explained by the popularity of climate change and environmental topics in recent years. It appears that when people hear the word "social," their first association may be with environmental sustainability. While this is encouraging, as it suggests that there has been sufficient awareness raised around environmental issues, the lack of awareness in other equally urgent sectors is concerning. It highlights the need for social entrepreneurs and educators to help young people better understand the wide range of challenges that social entrepreneurship addresses.

These findings may also be to some extent related to the participants' interests - 27% of them chose Business as their main area of interest, followed by 23% in STEM and only a small portion in fields like Medicine, Education, or Social Sciences. The focus on business and innovation-related fields might explain the association of social entrepreneurship with scalable or sustainability-driven solutions. This suggests that personal interests may shape perceptions about the goals and activities of social enterprises and could partially account for differences between the participants' views and the OECD findings.

Regarding how participants first learned about social entrepreneurship, roughly half of those who were aware of the concept reported having learned about it through school or university, with the other half mentioning other sources such as relatives or the Internet. Interestingly, while a little over one-third of participants had initially said they had never heard of social entrepreneurship, a quarter later stated that they were

introduced to the concept through this survey, as a brief explanation was provided for those unfamiliar with it. This indicates that even small-scale research projects like this one can be relevant in raising awareness about such topics. It also shows the potential of peer-to-peer education, where young people can educate and inspire each other through surveys, workshops or even open dialogue.

Building on this idea, the survey found that nearly 90% of participants agreed that young people can make a difference through social entrepreneurship, and 77% reported having contributed to a social cause - mostly by purchasing products or services from businesses that donate to charity or support social issues. Yet this brings up a critical question: if young people are aware of urgent global issues, understand what social entrepreneurship is, and believe it can create meaningful change, why do only 30% express interest in pursuing a career in this field? When asked about it, half of the respondents said they remain open to the idea at some point in the future, while others cited lack of time, confidence, or interest as barriers. Although the lack of time may be unavoidable, it is worrying that there is still so much scepticism, as well as a lack of confidence and interest in social entrepreneurship as a viable career path.

This hesitation toward pursuing a career in social entrepreneurship may also explain why 10.8% of respondents believe it cannot create long-term, sustainable change. If young people themselves lack confidence in their ability to make a difference, they will also likely doubt the overall ability of the field to make a change. This mindset could be addressed through better education, peer-led initiatives, and showcasing successful youth-led social enterprises so young people can be empowered to see social entrepreneurship as a feasible and impactful path.

However, 62% had never participated in any social entrepreneurship courses, workshops or programs, even though 66% believed that hands-on projects and simulations would be the most helpful learning opportunities for understanding social entrepreneurship. These numbers clearly show that while people are likely willing to contribute to such causes, they prefer to do so with minimal effort. They recognise that real-world experience is the best way to learn, yet many are still not ready (or able) to take this step. This further supports the conclusions above that more time, effort, and relatable real-world examples should be introduced to young people.

Notably, age may be a reason why many of our participants have not yet engaged in social entrepreneurship, as age may determine young people's perception and involvement with social entrepreneurship. However, an early introduction to the concept is important - teenage years are often a formative period for shaping opinions and career paths. Providing age-appropriate educational programs and combining them with relatable examples can empower younger individuals to further pursue the topic with greater curiosity and confidence.

Overall, the findings indicate that the main objectives of this study were successfully met, providing valuable insights into young people's awareness, motivations, barriers, and perceptions of social entrepreneurship. If we return to the central question of this research - "Are young people ready for social entrepreneurship?" - the answer, based on this study, is no. While not an optimistic outcome, this frames a conclusion which is rooted in several factors: lack of awareness and a deeper understanding of the field, limited engagement in educational or developmental

opportunities, and an ongoing lack of confidence and belief in their ability to pursue such a career path. It is urgent that educational institutions at every level - from kindergartens to universities - dedicate more time and effort to incorporating social entrepreneurship into their curriculum, as, at least in the case of our participants, young people would like to attend such opportunities, but this intention has not yet translated into action. The issues social entrepreneurs seek to address are some of the most urgent of our time, and young people are uniquely positioned to make a meaningful difference. They just need the knowledge, tools, and confidence to do so.

Limitations/Next Steps

While this research provides valuable insights into young people's awareness and readiness for social entrepreneurship, there are also a number of limitations that should be taken into account. These limitations also provide a direction for future action.

- **Sample size and scope:** The study had only 74 participants, which does not allow for generalising the findings to the broader population. The next step would be to conduct a larger study to strengthen the validity of the conclusions.
- **Participation selection:** Since most respondents were within the authors' extended networks or social media reach, this use of convenience sampling may have been a reason for bias. A more diverse selection of respondents would need to be included in order to get a better view on the topic.
- **Educational support structures:** The survey did not get detailed data on how educational institutions and programs have educated young people on the topic of social entrepreneurship in order to properly support the conclusions and recommendations. Further research should involve assessment of specific programs or curricula.
- **Demographic analysis:** The demographic distribution was not sufficient enough to analyse how factors like age, gender or educational background impact social entrepreneurship awareness and readiness.
- **Geographic representation:** Even though responses were collected from 12 countries across 5 continents, the majority of participants were from Bulgaria. Consequently, findings may reflect regional rather than global trends.
- **Age distribution:** More than half of respondents were under the age of 19. This may have influenced results related to confidence, understanding, scepticism, or readiness due to lower exposure to higher education.

Results in Figures

Have you heard of social entrepreneurship before?

74 отговора

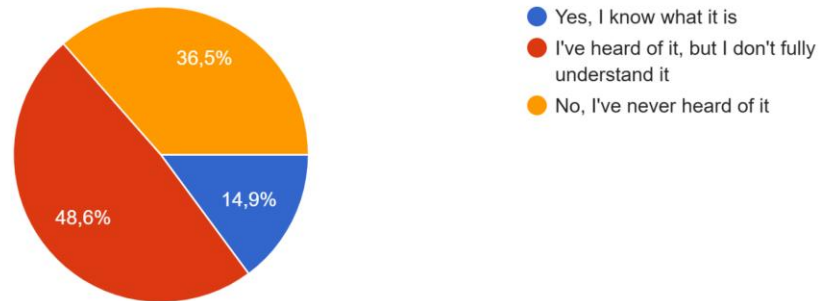


Figure 1. Participant Responses to Question 1.

Which sectors do you think social enterprises are most active in? (Please select up to 2)

74 отговора

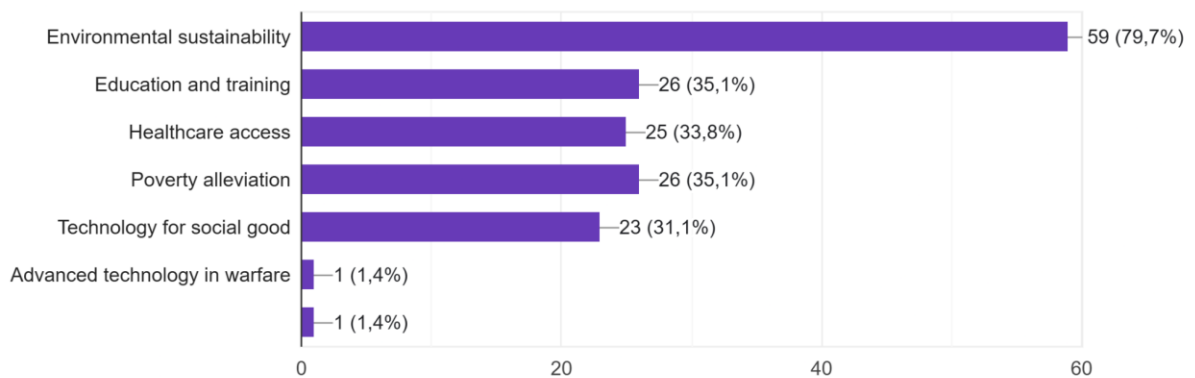


Figure 2. Participant Responses to Question 3.

What do you think is the biggest challenge social entrepreneurs face?

74 отговора



Figure 3. Participant Responses to Question 5.

How did you first learn about social enterprises?

74 отговора

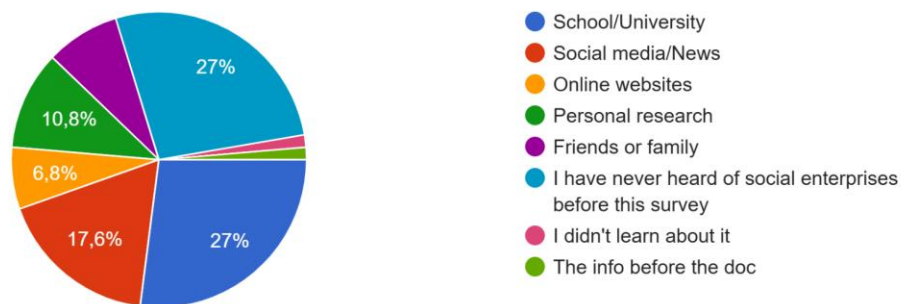


Figure 4. Participant Responses to Question 6.

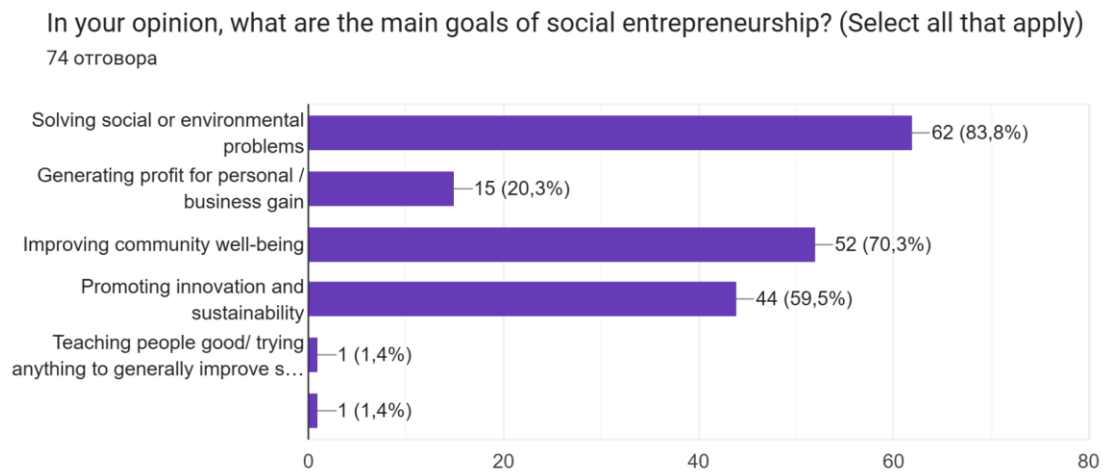


Figure 5. Participant Responses to Question 7.

To what extent do you agree social enterprises can create long-term, sustainable change?

74 отговора

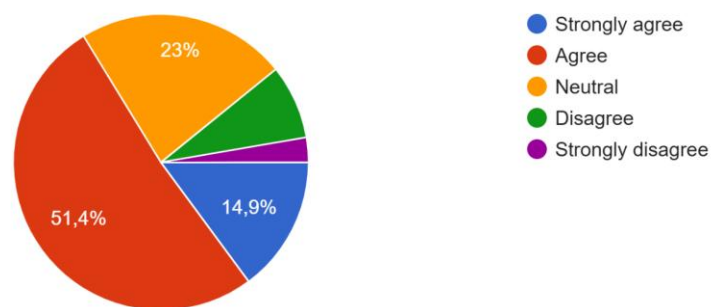


Figure 6. Participant Responses to Question 8.

Do you think young people can make a difference through social entrepreneurship?

74 отговора

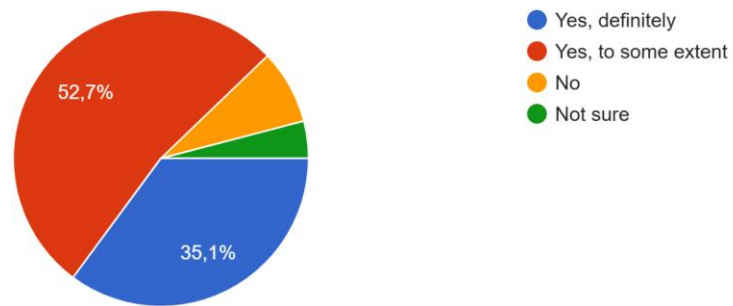


Figure 7. Participant Responses to Question 9.

In your opinion, what is the most significant impact social enterprises have on communities?

74 отговора

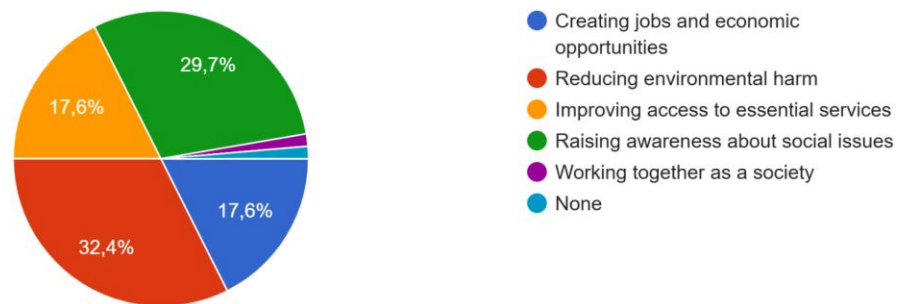


Figure 8. Participant Responses to Question 10.

How important do you think social entrepreneurship is in today's world?

74 отговора

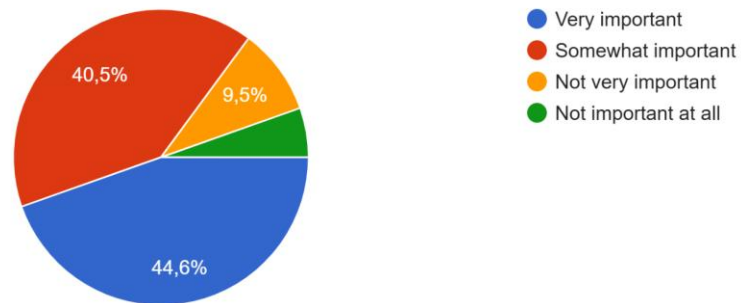


Figure 9. Participant Responses to Question 11.

What social or environmental issues are most important to you? Select top 2.

74 отговора

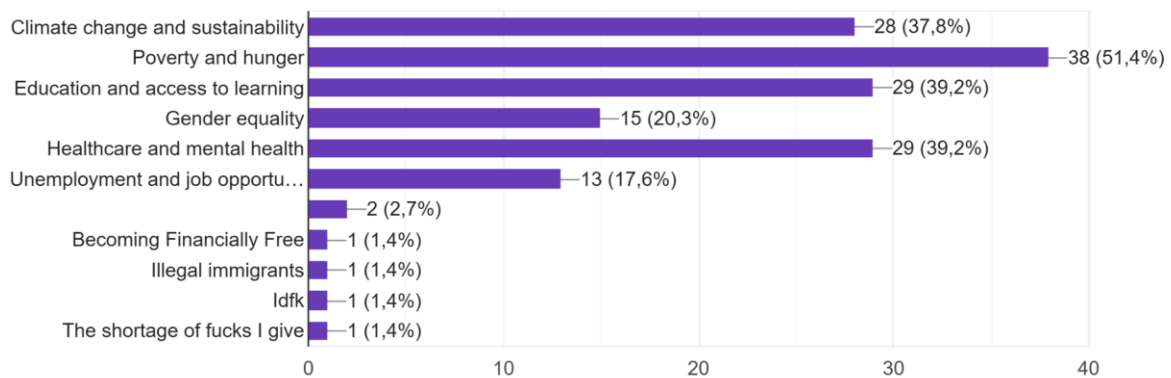


Figure 10. Participant Responses to Question 12.

Are you interested in starting or working for a social enterprise in the future?

74 отговора

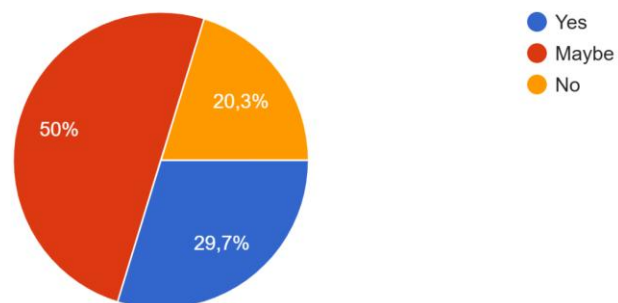


Figure 11. Participant Responses to Question 13.

Have you ever purchased a product or service from a business that donates to charity or helps a social cause?

74 отговора

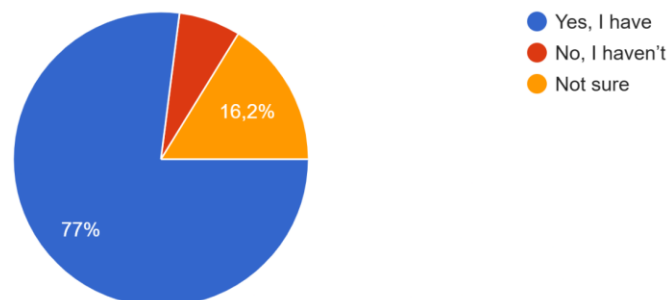


Figure 12. Participant Responses to Question 15.

Have you participated in any social entrepreneurship courses, workshops, or programs?

74 отговора

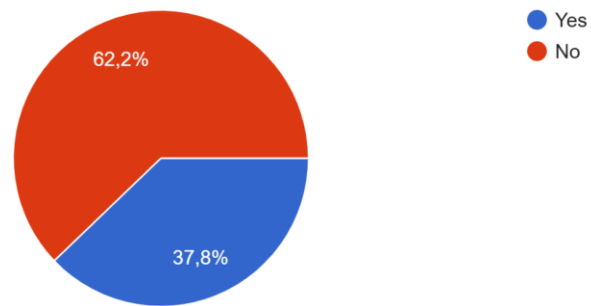


Figure 13. Participant Responses to Question 16.

Would you like to participate in any social entrepreneurship courses, workshops, or programs in the future?

74 отговора

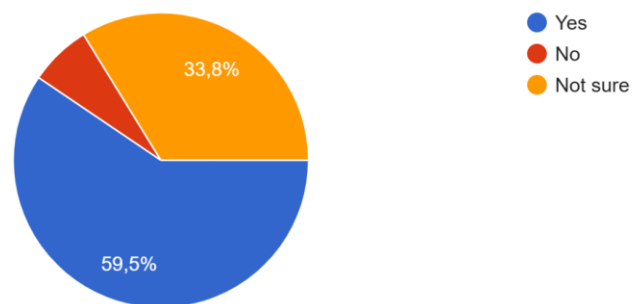


Figure 14. Participant Responses to Question 17.

Do you think social entrepreneurship should be included in school / university curriculums?

74 отговора

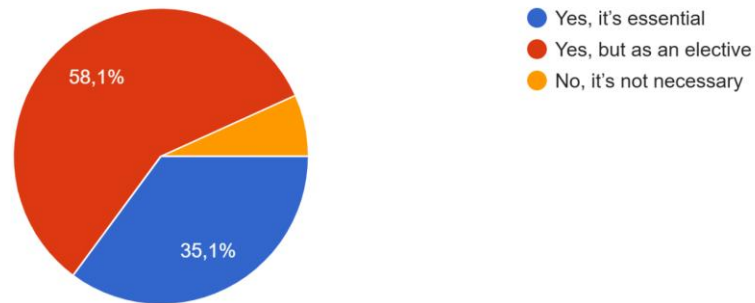


Figure 15. Participant Responses to Question 18.

What types of learning opportunities would be most helpful for understanding social entrepreneurship? (Select up to 2)

74 отговора

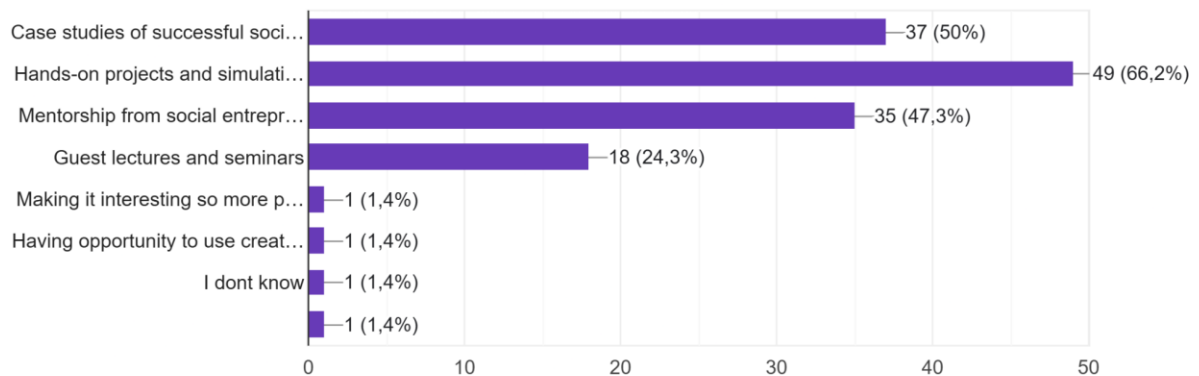


Figure 16. Participant Responses to Question 19.

How old are you?

74 отговора

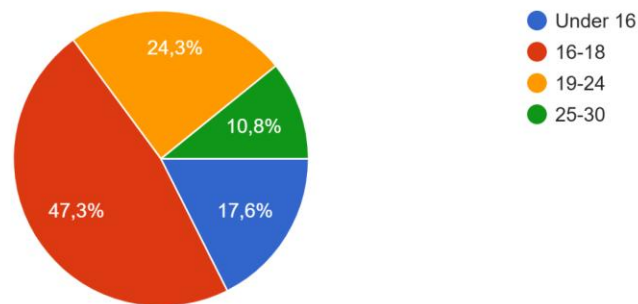


Figure 17. Participant Age Distribution.

What is your gender?

74 отговора

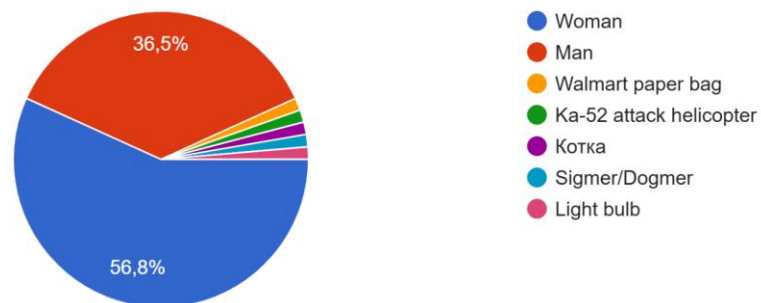


Figure 18. Participant Gender Distribution.

Where are you from? (Country)

74 отговора

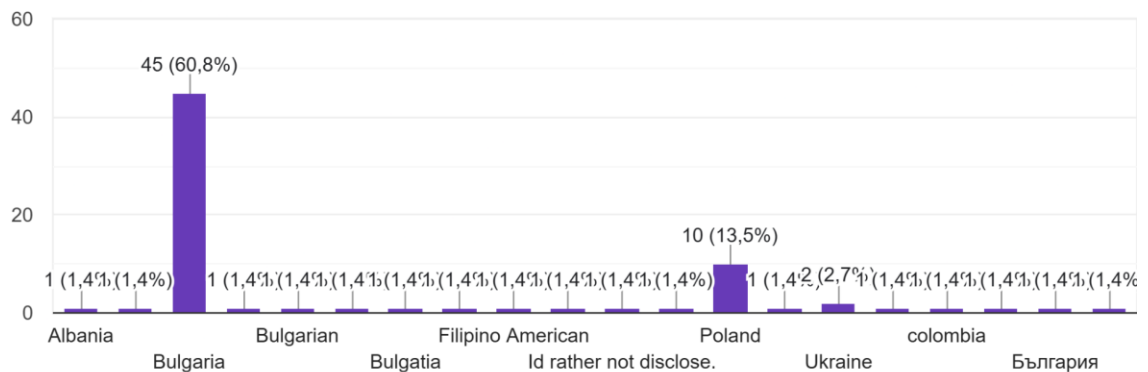


Figure 19. Participant Nationality Distribution.

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

74 отговора

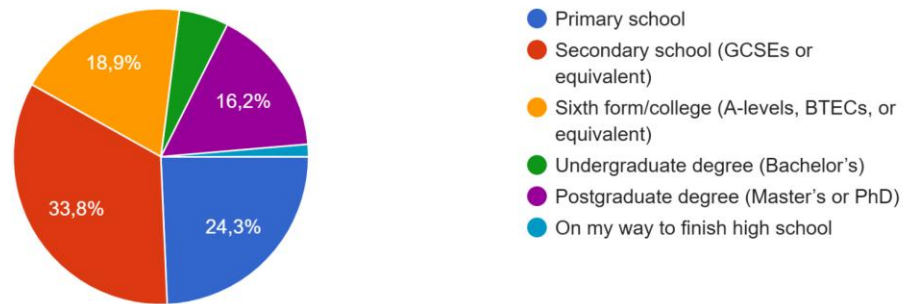


Figure 20. Participant Educational Background Distribution.

What is your main area of interest?

74 отговора

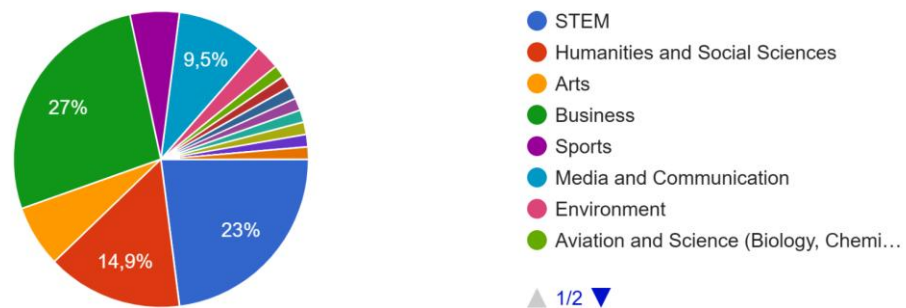


Figure 21. Participant Areas of Interest Distribution.

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