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MINA ANGELOVA, DANIELA PASTARMADZHIEVA
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ENTREPRENEURIAL INITIATIVES AND MOTIVATION IN A PANDEMIC PERIOD (THE CASE OF PLOVDIV, BULGARIA)

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PREFACE

This Book is produced as a result of a research project with the following formal details:

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As this Book is the final product of a research project, it is time to express my high appreciation for working with the project team. Their active participation and beneficial communication against completing the plan of tasks have great value to our common project.

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INTRODUCTION

Three years ago, in 2020, the world faced an unexpected new challenge and for more than two years everyone was wondering how the societies will go on. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic created various types of problems and challenges but also it created new opportunities, approaches, and connectivity.

As the countries around the world ended their state of emergency, declared because of the pandemic, the strengths and weakness of the selected approaches can be analyzed and assessed.

It is inevitable that the pandemic is mainly a health issue, but it affected almost every area of social life. The negative consequences on the economy have the potential to cause damages such as unemployment, poverty, lack of various raw material or products, disruption of trade chains, etc. To boost the function of a national economy, the entrepreneurial initiative need to be promoted across the society. However, the authorities can introduce effective and efficience measures only if they have knowledge on the real problems and real needs, which must be addressed.

The concepts of entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneur ecosystem are frequently discussed in Bulgaria. However, the development of successful cases and effective practices can only be seen in recent years. Bulgaria's economy is underdeveloped, lagging far behind that of the rest of the EU and that of other developing countries (Schwab 2016). Bulgaria also lags behind the majority of EU member states on the Global Competitiveness Index (Davidkov & Yordanova 2015). Bulgaria has little to no experience with a market economy because socialist planning and industrialization occurred concurrently.

Bulgaria, located on the Balkan Peninsula, has a land area of 110,994 km2 and a population of 6,823 million as of December 2022 (NSI). The traditional for the Balkans region numerous challenges, including history, interaction, connectivity, etc. (Stanev 2021) also affect

Bulgaria in every aspect. Small and medium-sized businesses, which account for nearly 98% of all businesses, are the economic backbone. Small businesses can mitigate the negative effects of the economic downturn by implementing strategies such as digitization, innovation, and expanding into new market niches (Gertler & Gilchrist 1994). The process of transforming Bulgaria's economy from planned to market has been slowed due to the country's unstable political situation and the impossibility of implementing large-scale reforms. The socio-historical cataclysms brought on by the country's unique geostrategic position produce a dynamic atmosphere that fosters the formation and development of the Bulgarian Entrepreneurial Initiative (Tsanov 2022).

The current COVID-19 crisis, as well as the government's containment measures and restrictions on businesses and citizens, have saved lives while harming Bulgaria's economy. According to several authors, pandemic-related lockdowns have caused the worst economic recession since the Great Depression (Chaturvedi & Karri 2021). Furthermore, SMEs that thrive in a downturn have a solid and long-term capital structure, better access to clients, and a flexible approach to strategy (Beaver & Ross 2000). The declaration of an emergency and the strict measures that followed had a significant impact on the country's economic life. A review of previous global epidemic literature, as well as modeling of potential macroeconomic consequences, demonstrates that the effect of such a shock differs from that observed in a financial and economic crisis. The pandemic is causing a severe short-term economic shock that affects everyone, albeit through different channels and to varying degrees. The pandemic has increased the need for Bulgarian businesses to seek out innovative business models and niches in order to combat the consequences of the country's deteriorating economic conditions.

Thus, the ***aim*** of the current study is to identify the attitudes toward entrepreneurial initiatives in Bulgaria and how COVID-19 pandemic affected it. The ***object*** of the study is the citizens and in

particular the people living in the city of Plovdiv, which is in central Bulgaria and has a central role in the Bulgarian economy. The ***focus*** of the study is the attitudes of the citizens towards entrepreneurship and its change because of COVID-19, alongside their assessment of the role of the authorities in dealing with the pandemic.

Our main ***thesis*** is that Bulgarians are not very initiative and prefer secure life over a risky one related to entrepreneurship. We believe that this has a negative impact on the entrepreneurial initiative. We supplement the main thesis with three additional hypotheses, namely:

1) Personal characteristics are to high extent relevant for the existence of enrtreprenurial initiative and its sustainability.
2) The inadequate measure introduced by the authorities force the distrust and the lack of entrepreneurial initiative.
3) During the crisis the political players used the pandemic to gain support from the people and caused more insecurity.

However, in our attempt to identify the attitudes of Bulgarians towards entrepreneurship we consider several limitations:

1) The study is limited to the city of Plovdiv and is representative only for this place. Nevertheless, it helps us to identify some tendencies, which can be tested on national level.
2) The study does not claim to cover absolutely all factors influencing the entrepreneurial initiative. We test the effects the environment of insecury caused by crises , the role of the socio-political environment and the effect of politicians' behavior in times of crises.
3) Our methods are limited to representative survey, performed once (not a time series) and in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs.

The book structure follows the main purpose and aims of the research, i.e., after the introduction, Chapter I presents a literature review based on current research in the field of entrepreneurship. Chapter II focuses on the research methodology. The latter serves as the study's

framework and as the foundation for Chapter III, which presents the empirical findings. The paper concludes with conclusions and recommendations for future examination of Bulgarian entrepreneurial environment and attitudes.

CHAPTER I.
FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY: THEORY AND ANALYSIS OF THE ENTERPRENEURSHIP[1]

1.1. ENTERPRENEURSHIP: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Entrepreneurship is defined as the ability and willingness to develop, organize, and manage a business while taking all risks to profit. The most common understanding of entrepreneurship is the start-up of a new business, but this is one of the myths that it is only associated with the start-up of a new business or the expansion of an existing one (Angelova 2017). According to the online version of the Oxford Dictionary, an entrepreneur is someone who starts a business or businesses. Entrepreneurs take advantage of new opportunities and are associated with upsetting market equilibrium. They frequently disrupt industries, upending long-standing technologies, business models, and dominant companies (Širec & Močnik 2017).

Entrepreneurship is comprised of both inputs and outputs. Inputs include entrepreneurial skills and qualities, with competition participation as the primary output. A firm is a vehicle for transforming entrepreneurs' personal qualities and ambitions into actions and outputs (Smallbone & Welter 2006). Context can be viewed as a third dimension of entrepreneurship because the specific internal organizational and external operating contexts provide the framework for the input and output dimensions to occur (De Wit & Meyer 1998).

[1] During the implementation of the research project KP-06-DK-2-7 from 2021 to the present moment, a serious database of sources has been accumulated. It was formed in the process of elaborating scientific research carried out within the framework of the project. This chapter represents a selection of sources that have been discussed in previous publications within the project.

According to some authors, not every newly established company can be considered entrepreneurial. An entrepreneurial small business, in addition to meeting perceived and created needs and opportunities, creates new value in the eyes of customers and experiences dramatic changes in its own growth and development, which typically exhibits exponential growth and development, as measured by increased investments, jobs, and profits (Petkovic et al 2016). Drucker's (2002) classic book on innovation and entrepreneurship explains what established businesses, public service institutions, and new ventures need to know and do to succeed in today's economy.

Numerous empirical studies have found that developed countries that have encouraged entrepreneurship and the development of the SME sector have experienced higher economic growth (Acs & Szerb 2007; Audretsch & Thurik 2000). The review of entrepreneurship in transition countries is of interest, as it assesses the extent to which theories and concepts of entrepreneurship developed in a market economy context can provide an appropriate interpretative framework.

There is also the struggle and adversity that comes with challenging the status quo of a market or industry for entrepreneurs (Dyer et al. 2008). An entrepreneurial culture appears to necessitate collaboration and sharing, but also something more. As a result, the notions of collaboration, communication, and sharing, as well as coordination and responsibility in the organization, are envisioned as part of cohesiveness.

Employees collaborate, accept responsibility for their actions, believe that the organization can do things on its own, trust that everyone is contributing in their own unique way and to the best of their abilities, and believe that they can rely on others in the organization. Mintzberg (2013) and Stewart (1989) define “mutual adjustment” among employees as a well-developed team with flexible and task-oriented networks, informal external and lateral communication, and weak departmentalism.

1.1.1. The Concept of Entrepreneurship

A crisis is a time when the management team's entrepreneurial abilities are put to the test. On the one hand, difficult conditions cause many businesses to fail, but they also provide opportunities to find niches, seek out new innovations, capitalize on hidden opportunities and turn threats into strengths. For decades, entrepreneurship was defined as the act of establishing a firm or business while accepting all risks in the pursuit of profit. It is the process of devising new ways to combine resources to increase the overall size of the economic pie (Carland et al 1984).

Entrepreneurs' critical role in pandemic response research has received insufficient attention. Joseph Schumpeter (1934) also emphasized the role of the entrepreneur as an inventor who introduces new products or new manufacturing processes to effect economic change. According to Schumpeterian theory, the entrepreneur is a disruptive force in an economy. In this sense, entrepreneurship refers to the establishment of new and/or the development of existing organizations based on new business models. In the entrepreneurship research community, when a firm is referred to as “entrepreneurial”, it frequently refers to entrepreneurial orientation (EO), or “what it means for a firm to be entrepreneurial at the most fundamental level” (Covin & Lumpkin 2011:861). EO is regarded as a strategic construct and is connected to the strategic posture of a company (or business unit within a company) (Anderson et al. 2009). According to the definition of EO, it consists “only of continuous behavioral patterns (showing risk-taking, innovation, proactiveness, autonomy, and/or competitive aggression) whose presence permits entrepreneurship to be recognized as a defining quality of the organization” (Covin & Lumpkin 2011: 858).

Finally, what is critical to understanding entrepreneurial initiative is a primary concern with opportunities and the motivation that arises from that concern. As a result, a conceptual definition of entrepreneurial initiative can be produced by combining a definition of entrepreneurship as a process centrally concerned with opportunities (Schneider et al.

2013) with an entity and general property information. The history of entrepreneurship initiative demonstrates the importance and interest in the relationships between entrepreneurship initiative and outcomes like performance and growth. The entrepreneurship initiative has a clear strategic goal.

Israel Kirzner (1974) defined entrepreneurship as a process of discovery. Kirzner's entrepreneur is someone who discovers previously undiscovered business opportunities and acts as a leveling force. Many authors expanded on the definition of entrepreneurship and the role of management teams in business survival. Mintzberg's (2013) book describes the manager's job by utilizing the findings of empirical studies conducted internationally at various levels of management. In this sense, entrepreneurship is linked to initiative. Entrepreneurship is regarded as one of the factors that would stimulate growth in the specialized literature (Galindo-Martn et al. 2021; Galindo-Martn et al. 2020). The idea behind this approach is that entrepreneurial initiative and entrepreneurial orientation will generate economic growth and employment, thereby bringing us out of the pandemic-caused economic crisis.

1.1.2. Entrepreneur: Personal Traits and Characteristics

One of the aspects of entrepreneurship studied in the scientific literature is the entrepreneurs' personal characteristics. The latter take advantage of new opportunities while disrupting market equilibrium. They frequently disrupt industries by destabilizing long-standing technologies, business models, and dominant companies (Sirec & Mocnik 2017). They innovate and take risks to achieve this. An entrepreneur is someone who acts in risky situations, or someone who buys products at a known price with the intent of selling them at an unknown price in the future (Hisrich et al. 2017). Entrepreneurship necessitates action – entrepreneurial action in the form of new product/process development and/or market entry, which can occur through a newly formed organization or within an established organization (Nikolova-Alexieva 2013).

Entrepreneurs' proactivity is related to the application of innovations. According to Lorenz and Potter (2019), learning organizations or discretionary learning SMEs are distinguished by prominent levels of employee task self-planning, teamwork, knowledge exchange with employees and supervisors, on-the-job training, and employee performance incentives. Countries with a high proportion of these SMEs have higher rates of new-to-market innovations among SMEs and SME innovation collaborations with other firms and organizations at the macro level. Their findings point to the potential role of administrative change policies in SMEs in stimulating SME innovation. However, in the context of entrepreneurship motivation, the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics, entrepreneurship education, and the intention to be an entrepreneur is critical (MacKenzie et al. 2005). According to the findings of Rahman et al. (2022)'s study, three dimensions of entrepreneur characteristics and entrepreneurial education are positively related to the intention to be entrepreneurs. Other authors provide substantial evidence for the interaction effects of financial, human, and social capital, as well as different measures of financial capital, human capital, and failure fear. Hanif et al. (2021) investigated these effects, as well as personal dispositional traits, on entrepreneurial intentions among early retirees in Pakistan's ICT sector. Following this logic, we included citizens in the empirical study to discover dependencies and correlations between them and business representatives. Ahmed et al. (2019) investigate personal characteristics in depth. Along with demographics, the authors looked at personal characteristics like innovativeness, autonomy, levels of internal locus, risk-taking proclivity, and stress tolerance.

Moreover, there are various studies that also examined different demographic characteristics of the entrepreneurs, such as gender (Soomro et al. 2019; Sasu & Sasu 2015; Chaniago 2021), age (Liang et al. 2018), education (Soomro et al. 2019, Chaniago 2021), work experience (Ahmed et al. 2019; Soomro et al. 2019; Liang et al. 2018),

family background (Ahmed et al. 2019, Sasu & Sasu 2015), position (Liang et al. 2018), etc. In our study, we concentrated on the investigation of demographic characteristics based on data availability. Age, education, and work experience are examples of these characteristics.

According to the authors, when it comes to the personal characteristics of the entrepreneur, people with sufficient work experience have the greatest potential for entrepreneurial initiative and motivation during the pandemic.

1.1.3. Entrepreneurial Initiative and Motivation

As part of the social sciences, the theoretical foundation for entrepreneurship includes contributions from mainstream economists and business representatives who provide different perspectives on the theory and practice of entrepreneurship. During this critical period of the pandemic, it should be emphasized that many of the insights generated by the social sciences could be directly applied to the entrepreneur initiative by searching for innovative business behavior in crisis conditions, which is not commonly done. During a crisis, businesses can strategically restructure to capitalize on their advantages and avoid many environmental challenges. In the face of the economic slowdown and the resulting environmental restrictions, SMEs must adopt an intensely positive and focused approach. Because of the high levels of economic uncertainty created during a crisis, the conditions for supporting entrepreneurship are especially difficult for entrepreneurs and small businesses (Pattinson & Cunningham 2022).

Entrepreneurial initiative and motivation can boost the Bulgarian economy, but an independent approach is required due to context specifics. As a result of the current empirical evidence, the identified attitudes' characteristics are rather significant for the development of specific measures for Bulgaria. The authors intend to propose to national and local governing bodies a strategy for dealing with crises and promoting entrepreneurship based on the examination of the obtained

results and proposals from businesses. It is interesting to investigate which of the state's support measures to businesses and employees are utilized by the organizations. The government must put in place measures to ensure not only the creation of new businesses, but also their survival (OECD 2022). In the event of a pandemic, providing relief and assistance to businesses is critical, but it is also important to determine how much the state's efforts are appreciated and approved by the organizations. The level of success of the measures reflects the strength of the state policy in terms of encouraging entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial initiative (Stanev & Rogoshev 2023). Because of COVID-19, most authorities are experiencing massive unemployment. This is particularly difficult in developing countries (such as Bulgaria), which had weak social protection systems and high unemployment and poverty rates prior to the pandemic. This scenario can expedite the "brain drain". To address these issues, entrepreneurship must be motivated, as small businesses create most jobs in developing countries. Overall, policymakers in developing countries are more likely to support greater adoption of entrepreneurial initiatives if there is experimental proof that the enterprises specifically benefit from well-developed policies and tactics to promote the establishment and development of organizations.

To the best of our knowledge, entrepreneurial initiative and motivation during a pandemic are still understudied, particularly in Bulgaria and the city of Plovdiv. One of the motivating factors for this research is to make a contribution by filling this gap. The scientific data and summarized attitudes of business representatives toward opportunities or entrepreneurial initiatives will assist policymakers in promoting entrepreneurship on a national scale. The authors aim to deliver a practical and concise presentation of entrepreneurial motivation and to demonstrate why it appears necessary in Bulgaria to implement adequate state policy.

1.1.4. The Role of Institutions on Entrepreneurial Initiative and Motivation

A large body of evidence from the literature indicates that in times of crisis, the state's efforts to develop a strong entrepreneurial culture and competencies in entrepreneurs in developing economies contribute to increased entrepreneurial initiatives (Ramadani & Schneider 2013; Estrin & Mickiewicz 2011). Furthermore, there have been studies on the establishment of a strong entrepreneurial culture in transition economies, with varying results (Welter & Smallbone 2017; Boeker & Karichalil 2002). This means that the findings of these studies are not only mixed, but also inconclusive. Most importantly, many of these studies only look into the factors that influence the founder's decision to leave. This finding does not specify whether or not the entrepreneurial initiative is influenced by state policies. This indicates a gap in the literature regarding the potential heterogeneity impact of the measures used to revive the economy. The capacity to comprehend or provide replies to the implication of any involvement on the entrepreneurial process is critical in many areas of evidence based economic research. The following research issues are addressed in this study to fill these gaps: Are the austerity policies to deal with the crisis positively rated by businesses, and are they appropriate in light of the circumstances and specifics of the enterprises? How do entrepreneurs rate the effectiveness of various economic stimulus measures? Do they use the programs suggested, and if so, to what extent?

1.2. ENTERPRENEURSHIP UNDER PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic is currently influencing how people behave across all continents, with consequences for their economic, physical, political, social, psychological, and cultural well-being. It raises several issues, the most important of which is the approach that governments must take to combat the pandemic's effects. The value of

entrepreneurs, however, extends beyond the impact they have on their businesses. They have an impact on their larger communities and, in some cases, the entire world.

Lately, crisis management is a key topic in research in various fields of science that focuses on proactive recommendations to overcome the negative consequences on the economy, political environment, social environment, and so on. In terms of economics and finance, the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the labor market, economic activity, poverty, and inequality in Bulgaria is steadily increasing and putting pressure on the government. What is happening is a constant search for a balance between the need to "restart" the national economy – to avoid social unrest and bankruptcies – and the need to avoid a subsequent pandemic wave. This is a critical juncture because a slowdown in growth raises the risk of the economic crisis spreading to the financial system. As a result, we must identify the conditions that will limit the crisis to a subsystem.

As part of the science of economics and management, the theoretical basis for crisis management has yet to find an integrative approach and has not developed and applied a methodology to assist in the prevention of emergencies in societies (including those aimed at the so-called "triangle of knowledge" science-business-society). The COVID-19 pandemic is a problem that creates new problems, and existing solutions are insufficient. The countries are still struggling, and the indiscriminate change in government approaches demonstrates that there is a market for developing new approaches or improving existing ones.

Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic affects people on all continents and has economic, health, political, social, psychological, and cultural dimensions. It raises many issues, the most important of which is the approach that governments must take to combat the pandemic's effects. On the one hand, this approach considers the economic measures unique to each society, but on the other hand, it should have a common framework that allows for cross-national coherence. This is especially true in economics, where overcoming the effects of COVID-19 is dependent on a variety of

external factors. The considered commitment is crucial for the European Union member states, to which Bulgaria also belongs.

The pandemic of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on society, business, and government institutions. First, the impact of isolation and social distancing on mental health and human capital qualities has a significant impact on their professional realization. Second, businesses may be required to regulate measures in response to changing policy environments. This crisis has alerted business leaders of the importance of adapting and testing their response and resilience plans against various disaster scenarios (including pandemics) with key suppliers and business partners on a regular basis. This includes using these investigations to test assumptions (such as recovery times) and to establish methods for measuring resilience, response, and recovery, as well as other key capabilities required to anticipate, withstand, recover from, and adapt to adverse conditions. Third, government agencies must compel adequate economic stimulus measures. At this critical juncture, these ideas can serve as a framework for taking responsible action.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on modern society is still in its early stages, because it is unfolding both temporally and spatially on a local, regional, and global scale. This is an excellent opportunity to conduct in-depth analyses of the problem at hand. In Bulgaria, the Institute for Economic Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences is conducting a comprehensive study to assess the macroeconomic consequences of the efforts against COVID-19 (https://www.iki.bas.bg/files/covid effects.pdf). It reflects the anticipated economic consequences of the pandemic for Bulgaria, the EU, and the rest of the world. The impact of these types of shocks on the economy has not been adequately studied, it is a new area, and due to a lack of experience, all the above are prerequisites for developing various hypotheses and situations in the short term.

Currently, field research is based on expert assessments, conclusions, and forecasts, which are constantly supplemented and

verified as new structural and functional changes occur. Numerous Think-Tank reports on COVID-19 are available on the sub-pages of the European Council and the Council of the EU, the data of which is quite important because it contains examples from various countries.

The first COVID-19-related scientific publications are primarily in the field of medical science. However, there is an increase in serious scientific publications in other scientific fields, the majority of which are in the form of articles (Rydzewski 2020; Landi et al. 2020; Miller 2020; Prasad, Sri, Gaitonde 2020). Outside of the medical literature, books on COVID-19 are currently value-leaden (Shammi M, Robi M R & Tareq S M 2020; Strang 2020), a mechanical sum of analyses (Du Toit (ed) 2020), or present primary interpretations and predictions of the pandemic's effects on various areas (Knorr (ed) 2020; Gans 2020) but lack a conceptualization of the processes. Many public resources and papers on the pandemic are available on the World Health Organization, John Hopkins University, European Council, World Economic Forum, and specific databases organized by almost every country's website.

In terms of tourist sector development, research indicates that it is one of the most affected by the pandemic (Uur & Akbyk 2020; Aburumman 2020). Numerous national and international organizations devote their resources and expertise to identifying problems and developing solutions. This is evident in documents issued by the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Union, and others. These research examples do not represent a thorough literature review, but rather emphasize the theme's significance and the effects of a global pandemic on societies. However, this most general overview demonstrates the wide range of topics examined in the field of social sciences, as well as the possibility of developing a conceptual model and mechanisms for mitigating these consequences through original research as well as research based on existing ones.

1.2.1. The Effect of the Pandemic on the Entrepreneurship

On a personal basis, the global epidemics of COVID-19 and the comprehensive measures implemented in countries around the world to limit it have resulted in major changes in people's daily lives. They put to the test time-tested approaches to social, professional, and family functioning (Nikolova-Alexieva & Mihova 2017). On the one hand, this inevitably leads to increased levels of stress and expansion of negative experiences and states such as anxiety, fear, anger, depression, and others on an individual mental level. On the other hand, confronting such serious challenges may provide motivation to reconsider important life priorities and rediscover significant but overlooked necessities and requirements in normal circumstances. Finally, the social changes that have occurred because of the pandemic have an impact on family relationships, as well as behaviors and relationships in business organization and management.

In terms of economics and finance, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor market, economic activity, poverty, and inequality in EU-27 countries is steadily increasing and putting pressure on governments. What is happening is a constant search for a balance between the need to “restart” the EU economy – to avoid social unrest and bankruptcies – and the need to prevent a second pandemic wave. In our opinion, this is a critical juncture because the risk of a slowdown in growth is the possibility of the economic crisis spreading to the financial system. The major events characterized the financial markets during the pandemic: 1) the largest one-day decline (11%) in the history of the European STOXX Europe 600; 2) the largest one-day decline (9%) in the last 33 years of the Dow Jones (^ DJI); 3) the largest weekly increase (11%) of the S&P 500 and (12%) of the Dow Jones since 1974.

In the political sphere, regardless of the foundation of the EU's structure and functioning, there is something akin to a return of the nation state, restoration of state borders, questioning democracy as such, and so on. Furthermore, states' political responses to the pandemic can be

divided into two categories: proactive and reactive. Some imposed strict restrictions as soon as the first cases were reported in the country, while others waited for the pandemic to spread before acting. We believe that individual countries' approaches, as well as their compliance with both objective conditions and respect for civil society, are critical for the subsequent resolution of the crisis.

1.2.2. Approaches of the National Governments to Support the Enterprenurship

The COVID-19 pandemic created emergency situations around the world. Government approaches have varied around the world, but one thing they all have in common is a constant search for the best solution. The authorities had to deal with a variety of issues, and it appears that prioritization was not a strong suit of the decision makers.

The relationships between citizens and state authorities are one of the factors that influence how states function. The behaviorist revolution institutionalized this aspect of the political process by focusing research on citizens as a variable. Behavioral studies are more concerned with the informal aspects of politics and the behavior of individuals and political groups than with institutions and formal rules (International Encyclopedia of The Social & Behavioural Sciences). Furthermore, Almond and Verba (1989) argue that a match between political culture and political system is required for the latter to be stable. As a result, governments' policy-making processes must be guided by citizens' values, expectations, and priorities.

This requirement is especially critical in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the situation may cause social tension and instability. The relationship between the state and society determines the overall stability and performance of the states, which also holds true for supranational entities such as the European Union (EU). To ensure its stability, the latter's member states must respond to their citizens' expectations and priorities.

When it comes to choices, behaviorism is like the theory of rational choice. It employs the concept of restricted rationality. Psychological methods are employed, and the social approach is linked to surveys as a tool for investigating political choices and attitudes, particularly voter behavior (Dahl 1961).

In this context, political culture theory becomes popular in the mid-twentieth century. Reflections on political culture can be found as far back as classical antiquity (Olick & Omeltchenko 2007), but they were popularized in modern political science by Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba (1989). The authors discuss the processes in the new democracies and emphasize that formal institutions such as "universal suffrage, political parties, and elective legislatures" are insufficient. They argue that the democratic political system "requires a political culture that is also consistent with it" (Almond & Verba 1989).

The consistency of values with the system is required for the government to function effectively. Political culture consists of various elements, but in general it is the psychological and subjective dimension of politics and is a product of both a political system's collective history and the stories of its members and is thus rooted equally in social events and personal experiences (Pye 1968). However, there are two types of elements in the structure of political culture: normative elements and axiological elements. Political traditions and norms are normative elements, while political values, political knowledge, political ideas, and ideals are axiological (Blagoeva 2014). All these taken together determine the behavior of the citizens in the political process.

Citizens form their own priorities about important issues in their countries based on their political culture. This is another aspect of citizens' participation in the political process because it determines their preferences and expectations of political institutions. A variety of variables can be used to assess citizens' priorities and preferences. They can be attitudes toward the country's future, the importance of work and leisure time, work-life balance, the quality of public services (Harrison et

al. 2011), public budget priorities such as healthcare, social protection, education, order and safety, the environment, and so on (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2018). Furthermore, it is not uncommon to investigate EU citizens' preferences and priorities. Harrison et al. (2011) investigate the values, attitudes, and preferences of EU citizens and identify associations between GDP, age, income, and the variables under consideration. As a result, these factors influence the dynamics of the priorities, and the next stage of the current research can be improved by identifying similar associations.

In terms of income as a factor, it is relevant at both the supranational and national levels. On the one hand, rich and poor countries have different priorities, and on the other, rich and poor people within countries have different priorities. Such result is significant for the way the priorities turn into legislation and how the legislators react to people's demands (Flavin & Franko 2016). People's income level may affect the agenda of the politicians to some level but alongside the politicians can influence the priorities, especially those groups who support them (Schindler et al. 2018).

Healthcare has traditionally been important for the majority of a country's citizens. However, it can have several implications, one of which is related to the debate over personal responsibility for health. "There was a tension between the lack of fault for having a disease and the need for accountability for health behavior that influences solidarity and rising health costs," write Schindler et al. (2018).

Prioritization of environmental issues is typically associated with the rise of post-materialism. Environmental protection and a focus on energy policies are becoming more popular in Western Europe. EU citizens from Central and Eastern Europe place less emphasis on environmental issues, particularly energy policy (Butler & Hassel 2018).

COVID-19 has caused an incredible and unpredictable change in our way of life and daily routines, causing tremendous human suffering, and challenging the most fundamental foundations of societal well-being.

The pandemic fundamentally altered our lives, affecting both professional and personal relationships, including interpersonal trust and a sense of security (COVID-19, 2020). This novel situation has compelled governments all over the world to act quickly and implement novel solutions to protect various stakeholders (Hammad et al. 2021). Furthermore, international cooperation was hampered because each country faced its own serious challenges, necessitating time to adjust to the new situation and consider joint solutions (Pereirinha & Pereira 2021). In such situation the governments need to act in flexible manner and to "provide critical tools to support real time sharing of lessons on what is working, what is not, what could work and for whom" (OECD 2022).

In this context, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development identified fourteen key insights from evaluations of COVID-19 responses at the start of 2022 (OECD 2022). Alongside with the measures concerning healthcare system, economy, internal communication, care for most vulnerable groups, etc., there are two insights directly related to the current study, namely:

- "More targeted, informed and coherent messaging is needed to foster trust."
- "Governments could involve civil society, the private sector and local actors more to increase transparency in decision-making and facilitate the implementation of crisis management responses."

The OECD emphasizes the importance of well-structured communication between the central and local levels. The emphasis on "using both traditional and new digital platforms for internal communication can lead to greater stakeholder buy-in" (OECD, 2022).

The pandemic put pressure on governments, and their decisions elicited a range of reactions across societies. "If populations face food, job, or medical supply shortages, one outcome could be that governments are perceived as unable to respond to social concerns, which could lead to political discontent or civil unrest in some areas"

(Burns 2020). There have been studies that show a link between stringency of measures and political instability. According to the findings, “the implementation of stringent measures was less likely to occur in countries characterized by political instability” (De Simone & Mourao 2021). Such outcomes are understandable given that the pandemic and the measures taken to combat it sparked civil unrest, unrest, and protests (van der Zwet et al. 2022). In fact, it has become clear that the Coronavirus is a threat not only to health and the economy, but also to political stability (Woods et al. 2020). One of the reasons is economic insecurity, which is a prerequisite for a decrease in trust and, as a result, political instability (Perry 2021). There is evidence that protests governments are a symptom of political instability, and that restrictions, economic challenges, and limitations on civil liberties can cause such civic unrest (Herbert & Marquette 2021).

Governmental restrictions on economic freedom appear to have different effects on entrepreneurial activity depending on the freedom restricted by the government and the entrepreneur's motivation for engaging in entrepreneurial activity (McMullen et al. 2008). Entrepreneurship and innovation are inextricably linked. This association is typically traced back to the work of Joseph Schumpeter, who defined the entrepreneur as an innovator and a person who executes new combinations, regardless of position within a business (Van Praag 1999).

Many researchers are now focusing their efforts on addressing global crises. The book edited by Bartunek (2022) discusses the role of social scientists in creating knowledge that is directly relevant to global difficulties and crises and must be incorporated into actions taken to address them. It contributes to our understanding of social processes related to planetary disasters. The book also demonstrates the ongoing personal development required to effectively address global problems by revealing interventions through first-hand accounts of people dealing with difficulties and crises. The scientific data pertain to the multidimensional social dynamics at the heart of these problems, as well

as the organizational actions that could be taken to address them, and it aids in our understanding of the complexities of global crises such as pandemics and climate change. During a pandemic, entrepreneurs perform similar critical economic and societal tasks. According to Storr et al. (2022) discussion, entrepreneurs can play significant roles despite operating in a setting that limits the scope and type of their entrepreneurial activity. Radlovic et al. (2021) examine the position of the entrepreneur in the Republic of Croatia, as well as the main issues that entrepreneurs face during the coronavirus pandemic. According to the research findings, the coronavirus pandemic has significantly altered how entrepreneurship and business activities are conducted. To adapt their supply to market demands, many businesses are forced to lower their prices for goods and services, implement corporate information technology, and invest in employee training. COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on entrepreneurship, as well as other economic issues. Many businesses have failed because of the significant drop in demand caused by confinement and other significant restrictions on travel imposed by countries to stop the spread of the disease. Those businesses that continue to operate do so at a lower yield due to decreased demand, and many are concerned about the future due to the emergence of new coronavirus outbreaks caused by the disease's increased virulence (Galindo-Martn et al. 2021; Galindo-Martn et al. 2020).

According to Ben Hassen (2022), the pandemic demonstrated the importance of advancing non-hydrocarbon industries by strengthening the fundamental tenets of the knowledge-based economy: information and communication technology (ICT), innovation, research, and development (R&D), education, entrepreneurship, and the economic and institutional framework. According to his research in Qatar, the country is well-positioned to transition to a knowledge-based economy. He also makes some structural reform proposals in Qatar to promote innovation, entrepreneurship, and education. Economic diversification may help countries reduce their exposure to recessions, market fluctuations, and

technology changes, increasing their resilience to external shocks. The economic crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic could be an opportunity to boost diversification efforts toward a knowledge-based post-oil economy.

According to Hadjitchoneva (2022), the pandemic has given entrepreneurship and innovation a new impetus. Because we are still in the grip of the pandemic, the return to normalcy in society and the economy is a work in progress, and these issues must be addressed. Environmental hostility and proactiveness clearly have an impact on the growth of small and medium-sized businesses. Numerous studies on these factors show that corporate executives should take the lead in developing business strategies (Omisakin et al. 2022). Organizations should conduct a thorough scan of their external environments to capitalize on opportunities for business sustainability. In this sense, successful enterprises during pandemics establish innovative practices based on the entrepreneurial culture of their managers. Stokke (2021) determined that policies should be implemented using a hands-on methodology, with the main goal of transferring valuable knowledge to the business community, based on empirical data.

The relationship between entrepreneurial orientation (EO), strategy, organizational configuration, and firm outcomes are very important features of the EO construct. The research of McMullen et al. (2008) investigated opportunity-motivated entrepreneurial (OME) activity and necessity-motivated entrepreneurial (NME) activity on 10 factors of economic freedom and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita for 37 nations. They found that both OME and NME are negatively associated with GDP per capita and positively associated with labor freedom, but that various other factors of economic freedom are uniquely related to either OME or NME. In this sense, various factors that affect entrepreneurship can be considered.

In such a complicated situation, such as the COVD-19 pandemic, how national governments react and communicate with business has an

impact on entrepreneurial initiative. This statement is based on the importance of trust in national entrepreneurship institutions (Eesley & Lee 2022; Lo et al. 2021; Era et al. 2021). The World Economic Forum emphasizes the importance of building trust between businesses and governments in the post-pandemic world, particularly in the context of the pandemic (Collie 2022).

Qudah's (2018) research demonstrated the positive impact of entrepreneurship activities on business creativity and innovation. Culture, management support, technology, strategies, and resources appeared to be the most influential aspects, in that order, according to him. Innovation is a strategic tool for corporate transformation, change, profitability, management, and overall sustainability. However, the entrepreneur's guts and willingness to take the risk of profiting or losing money due to unforeseen and unpredictable circumstances. Other researchers hope to demonstrate how different institutional arrangements and characteristics can generate or mitigate uncertainty, thereby facilitating or impeding entrepreneurial action (D'Andrea 2022).

The entrepreneurship ecosystem refers to the collaboration of institutional actors and individuals for the development of entrepreneurial projects through public-private partnerships (Fuerlinger et al. 2015). According to Morales et al. (2022), a lack of entrepreneurial culture impedes and diminishes the creation of new business initiatives, emphasizing the critical role of institutions in promoting entrepreneurship. The creation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem is without a doubt the most difficult challenge that every country's public-private institution must face. This is also true for Bulgaria, and many authors have focused their attention on the role of the so-called knowledge triangle: science-education-business, and its significance in the development of entrepreneurial initiatives (Angelova et al. 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly had an impact on many economies and continues to be a public health concern in many areas. As a result, it is possible that business owners who are not

sufficiently responsive may still face problems because of their inability to recognize opportunities. Policymakers and academics, on the other hand, should provide evidence of whether entrepreneurs were successful because of their responses to the pandemic, as well as how these decisions affected the entrepreneurial activity rates of entire economies (Wright 2020).

National governments immediately implemented measures to prevent bankruptcy and aid in the restoration of businesses following the start of lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each state initiates activities related to its own policies and business needs, as well as a plan for the post-crisis period (Belas et al. 2021; Meng et al. 2022; OECD 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic inevitably hampered the global economic situation and, in particular, entrepreneurial initiatives (Pattinson & Cunningham 2022; Chaturvedi & Karri 2021; Storr et al. 2022). However, it should be noted that while entrepreneurship may contribute to economic revival (Galindo-Martn et al. 2020; Ben Hassen 2022, Hadjitchoneva 2022), the state must first initiate measures to support it (Galindo-Martn et al. 2021, OECD 2022).

The impact of demographic factors and personality traits has received a lot of attention in the scientific literature. However, in this case, we concentrated on demographics, specifically age, education, and work experience. Soomro et al. (2019) used nearly identical demographics to our study. The authors came to the conclusion that these characteristics are important for entrepreneur success. Age was also found to be relevant by Liang et al. (2018). They investigated the relationship between a country's median age and rates of entrepreneurship, and their findings indicate that older societies are negatively associated with entrepreneurship. As regards the age and work experience, Chaniago reached the conclusion that “in difficult times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, having young leaders who are experienced will make it easier to achieve business success” (Chaniago 2021: 399). Among the demographic factors studied, age and work

experience proved to be important for entrepreneurship. During a pandemic, younger people are more likely to see opportunities and the younger entrepreneurs are more open to seeing opportunities than the older ones. However, in terms of work experience, the youngest are once again prepared for innovations during the pandemic. Such findings contradict Chaniago's conclusion. Because Chaniago's research was conducted in Indonesia, this difference could be attributed to the overall cultural context. As a result, this may require further investigation.

The way the entrepreneurs perceive the national government's commitment to dealing with the pandemic and especially the problems of the business affect the trust. The latter is rather significant for the overall entrepreneurial initiative and motivation, especially in times of crises. Positive association between the levels of trust in the government and entrepreneurial initiative was identified by Eesley and Lee (2022). A similar conclusion was reached by Çera et al. (2021), who examined a context very close to Bulgarian, namely Albania. Moreover, the World Economic Forum suggests that the development in the post-pandemic period requires building trust between business and the state (Collie 2022). Our focus on the perception of the state's behavior during the pandemic aims at identifying if during this period a trust was build or if it was hampered additionally. The results give ground to conclude that the government's behavior led to lower levels of trust among entrepreneurs. The latter are not convinced that the state introduced the best possible approach in dealing with the pandemic. Furthermore, they do not think that enough efforts were made to achieve it. Additionally, communication with businesses is not seen as effective. The entrepreneurs tend to believe that the government did not even have a communication strategy. Finally, the entrepreneurs do not recognize their problems as a priority of the state. This leads us to the conclusion that entrepreneurs perceive the behavior of the government during the pandemic as poor. Such a perception hampers the level of trust, and thus, the motivation for entrepreneurship. In this context, the role of the state

during the pandemic has had a negative impact on the entrepreneurial initiative and motivation.

The role of state in providing measures for entrepreneurs to recover and develop their businesses in the pandemic and post-pandemic period is inevitable (OECD 2022; Cirera et al. 2021, Assefa 2021), although some studies have reached the conclusion that "government support has no significant effect on entrepreneurial spirit" (Hidayat et al. 2021). In our study, we discuss the result from the perspective that the state has a crucial role in reviving the economy and entrepreneurship. From this point of view, we aimed at finding how Bulgarian entrepreneurs assess the state's measures to overcome the COVID-19 consequences on business and their proposals for improvement. The study's findings support the conclusion that the state should focus more on securing the entrepreneurial environment, consistent policies, and direct financial support. Block et al. (2021) provided a different perspective on how to benefit from government assistance. They concentrated on the self-employed, believing that those who rely on government assistance and bootstrapping are more motivated to protect their business. This conclusion highlights new directions for our research. According to our findings, more than half of entrepreneurs did not benefit from the government's COVID-19 business measures. It would be interesting to learn why they did not – whether it was because they did not meet the requirements, were refused, or did not even apply for such assistance.

CHAPTER II.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. RESEARCH METHODS

To carry out an in-depth analysis of the motivation and initiative for entrepreneurship in the conditions of the pandemic, two representative studies were conducted – with persons, residents of the city of Plovdiv, and with enterprises registered on the territory of the city of Plovdiv. Alongside, in-depth interviews were performed with entrepreneurs.

2.1.1. Conceptual Model: Research Methodology and Techniques

The research with individuals is based on a representative sample of the general population of adults permanently living in the territory of the city of Plovdiv. The representative sample was drawn as a random sample of 300 persons, stratified by gender (male/female) and by age (18-34, 35-59, 60+ years), and the units in the individual strata were selected by random sampling proportional to the population in the strata of the general population. The stratification was carried out according to the data of the National Statistical Institute for the population of the city of Plovdiv, distributed by strata, for the year 2020. The survey of the individuals from the sample was conducted through a "face-to-face" type of interview, using a survey questionnaire in online format, which was pre-programmed in the LimeSurvey software product. The questionnaire has a volume of 6 standard pages (size A4) and includes 15 closed questions. The field work was carried out by the research company Noema, with the average duration of an interview being around 10 minutes. All persons included in the sample were surveyed successfully.

2.1.2. Questionnaire Design of the Representative Study

The questionnaire consists of fifteen questions which are grouped in two sections – entrepreneurial attitudes and demographic characteristics. In the first group, there are six main questions and two additional (subquestions) and the second section consists of seven questions (Table 1).

Table 1. *Survey questions and answers*

ENTREPRENEURIAL ATTITUDES
Q1. Before the pandemic (announced in Bulgaria on March 12, 2020) did you have an intention or business plan to start your own business? 1. Yes 2. No 3. I have developed a business plan (startup), but the pandemic limited the possibilities for its realization. 4. I am currently part of a working business. Question type: *closed-ended, single answer* Measurement level (Scale type): *nominal*
Q2. In the conditions of a pandemic, is it possible to develop entrepreneurial initiatives and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria? 1. Yes 2. No Question type: *closed-ended, single answer* Measurement level (Scale type): *nominal*
Q2.1. Please indicate which prerequisites would contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative. 1. People who are innovative and use niche markets that are created or liberated as a result of the pandemic. 2. Applied adequate measures for business. 3. Availability of adequate support from the state and / or the EU 4. Other Question type: *closed-ended, multiple choice* Measurement level (Scale type): *nominal*

Q2.2. Please indicate the reasons that you think hinder the development of the entrepreneurial initiative.

1. The pandemic has created insecurity and psychological instability.
2. Fear of the unknown blocks the motivation for entrepreneurship.
3. The legal environment does not create opportunities for entrepreneurship.
4. Soaring prices (incl. electricity)
5. Lack of enough financial resources
6. The war in Ukraine
7. Other

Question type: *closed-ended, multiple choice*
Measurement level (Scale type): *nominal*

Q3. Please determine the extent to which each of the following statements apply to you using a scale of 0 to 10 (where: 0 is "Does not apply at all" and 10 – "Completely applies")?

Q3.1. I had my own business that went bankrupt due to the Covid-19 restrictions and now I prefer to work for someone else.

Q3.2. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.

Q3.3. I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.

Q3.4. The Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary phenomenon and would not stop my business initiatives.

Q3.5. I have a business that is suffering from the pandemic, but I have no intention of giving it up.

Q3.6. I always wanted to have my own business, but with this Covid-19 pandemic, I gave up.

Q3.7. I started/will start my own business despite the pandemic, it doesn't bother me.

Q3.8. I never wanted to have my own business; I'd rather work for someone else.

Q3.9. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.

Q3.10. The pandemic has created better working conditions, which are very motivating.
Q3.11. Due to the pandemic, new forms of work have been introduced, including from home, which pleases me.
Q3.12. Working from home depresses me and I am unable to work.
Q3.13. Due to the new working conditions as a result of the pandemic, I can better balance my professional and personal life.
Q3.14. Balancing personal and professional life has become even more difficult due to the pandemic.

Question type: *closed-ended, single answer per each row*
Measurement level (Scale type): *ordinal*

Q4. On a scale of 0 to 10 (where: 0 – "I do not agree at all" and 10 – "I completely agree"), how much do you agree with the following statements:

Q4.1. The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.
Q4.2. In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.
Q4.3. The Covid-19 pandemic is being used for more control over people.
Q4.4. The Covid-19 vaccine, even if not sufficiently tested, will help stop the pandemic.
Q4.5. The Covid-19 pandemic is a medical experiment.
Q4.6. It is important that people get vaccinated against Covid-19 to stop the spread of the disease.
Q4.7. Vaccines against Covid-19 are uncertain and dangerous.
Q4.8. People must protest against any Covid-19 measures to protect their freedom.
Q4.9. People in countries like Portugal, Israel, Spain and others have done the right thing by getting vaccinated.
Q4.10. People in Bulgaria have done the right thing by not getting vaccinated.
Q4.11. Bulgarian politicians didn't care at all about the citizens during the pandemic.
Q4.12. The messages from politicians are contradictory and confusing, with the lack of unity creating mistrust and thwarting entrepreneurial initiative.
Q4.13. The politicians don't have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one.

Q4.14. The politicians in Bulgaria are not learning from the countries that deal well with the pandemic.

Q4.15. The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.

Q4.16. It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic.

Q4.17. In managing the pandemic, politicians are focusing more on public health and less on business concerns.

Q4.18. In managing the pandemic, politicians are focusing more on business concerns and less on public health.

Question type: *closed-ended, single answer per each row*
Measurement level (Scale type): *ordinal*

Q5. Please assess on a scale from 2-poor to 6-excellent the measures taken by the authorities in relation to the Covid pandemic in the following stages:

1. Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)
2. Second Wave (Fall 2020)
3. Third Wave (Spring 2021)
4. Fourth Wave (Fall 2021)
5. Fifth Wave (Early 2022)

Question type: *closed-ended, single answer per each row*
Measurement level (Scale type): *ordinal*

Q6. A political party (PP) with what views on Covid would you support?

1. PP, which denies the existence of the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19
3. PP urging people to get vaccinated.
4. PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic.
5. PP, which will introduce a lockdown.
6. My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Question type: *closed-ended, single answer*
Measurement level (Scale type): *nominal*

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

D1. Gender

1. Man
2. Woman

Question type: *closed-ended, single answer*
Measurement level (Scale type): *nominal*

D2. Age

1. Up to 30
2. 31 to 40
3. 41 to 50
4. 51 to 60
5. Over 60

Question type: *closed-ended, single answer*
Measurement level (Scale type): *ordinal*

D3. Education

1. Primary education or lower
2. High school
3. University

Question type: *closed-ended, single answer*
Measurement level (Scale type): *ordinal*

D4. Work experience

1. Up to 1 year
2. 1-5 years
3. 6-10 years
4. 11-15 years
5. 16-20 years
6. Over 20 years

Question type: *closed-ended, single answer*
Measurement level (Scale type): *ordinal*

D5. Employment

1. Employer/Self-employed
2. I exercise a free profession.
3. Worker/Employee in a private company
4. Worker/Employee in public administration/enterprise
5. Student/Pupil
6. Pensioner
7. Housewife
8. Other
9. I'm not working at the moment.

Question type: *closed-ended, single answer*
Measurement level (Scale type): *nominal*

D6. Position in the organization

1. Worker/Employee
2. Specialist
3. Manager
4. Support staff
5. I'm not working now.

Question type: *closed-ended, single answer*
Measurement level (Scale type): *nominal*

D7. Management Level

1. Top management
2. Middle management
3. Lower or operative management
4. Workforce
5. I'm not working now.

Question type: *closed-ended, single answer*
Measurement level (Scale type): *nominal*

2.1.3. Questionnaire Design of the In-depth Interviews

The employed methodology has been put to the test in earlier work by the authors. Direct interviews are believed to be used in the Research Design approach to look into the research problem. These interviews are based on hour-long open-question sessions. Responses and statements made during interviews are used to collect data. Based on data collection, analytical information was developed and synthesized for the research. In fact, through our direct involvement in a conversation style with the Top Executives and CEOs, the data collection technique for the research was standardized. All the entrepreneurs are skilled managers and leaders who have contributed to the creation and expansion of enterprises. These people are recognized as authorities on entrepreneurship and organizational culture because of their leadership and lengthy employment at respective companies. The entrepreneurs were chosen for their ability to thoroughly examine the challenges to businesses and the implementation of the state's initiatives.

To get the entrepreneurs' opinions of how the Bulgarian government responded to the pandemic, we employed a semi-structured, custom questionnaire. We asked them how much they agreed with the following statements: political communication, unified EU support, government communication strategy, etc. on a scale of 0 to 10 (where 0 means “I do not agree at all” and 10 indicates “I strongly agree”). In the case of a pandemic, we asked them to assess the business support measures. We first inquired as to whether the business owners had benefited from any state initiatives. We also wanted to know what else could be done to support them from the replies. We posed an open-ended inquiry to them regarding recommendations in relation to government acts and what lawmakers should do better. The respondents assessed the veracity of claims that most accurately reflected their opinions on how to support their enterprises and enhance the entrepreneurial environment in Bulgaria.

In addition to the interviews, desk research was done to make sure the data was not contradictory and to create an accurate and current logical model of reasoning.

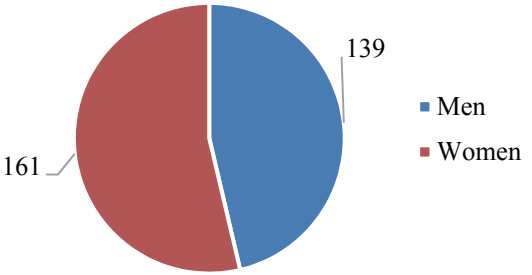
2.2. DATA COLLECTION

The survey was performed from 25 March to 04 April 2022 by Noema Bulgaria Ltd.[2]. The survey of the individuals from the sample was conducted through a "face-to-face" type of interview with 300 respondents using TAPI[3] approach.

Respondents

The dataset consists of the replies of 300 respondents. The next figures show their distribution according to the demographic characteristics:

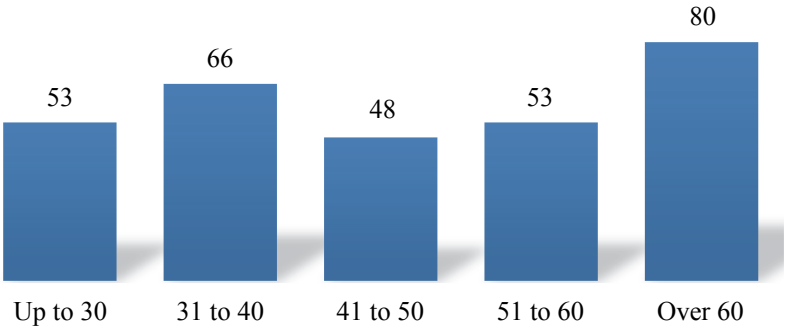
Figure 1. *Distribution according to the gender of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

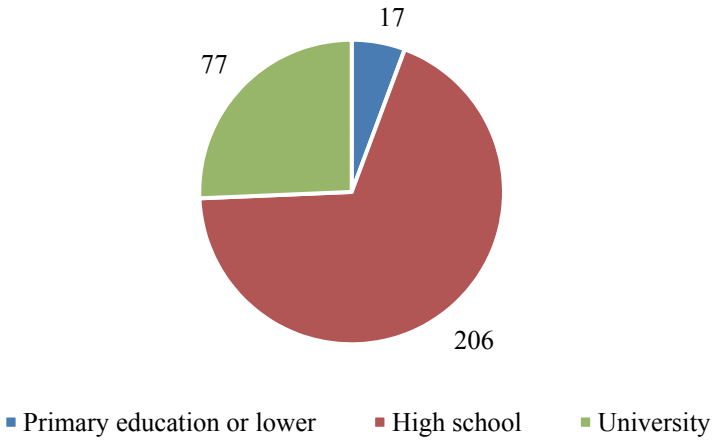
[2] http://www.noema.bg/
[3] Tablet-assisted personal interviewing

Figure 2. *Distribution according to the age of the respondents*



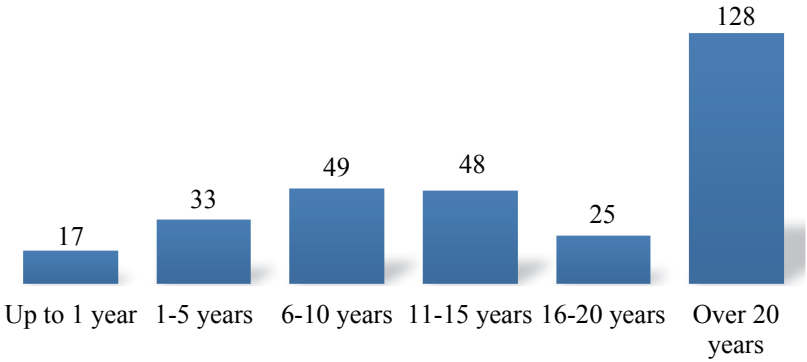
Source: Representative survey

Figure 3. *Distribution according to the education of the respondents*



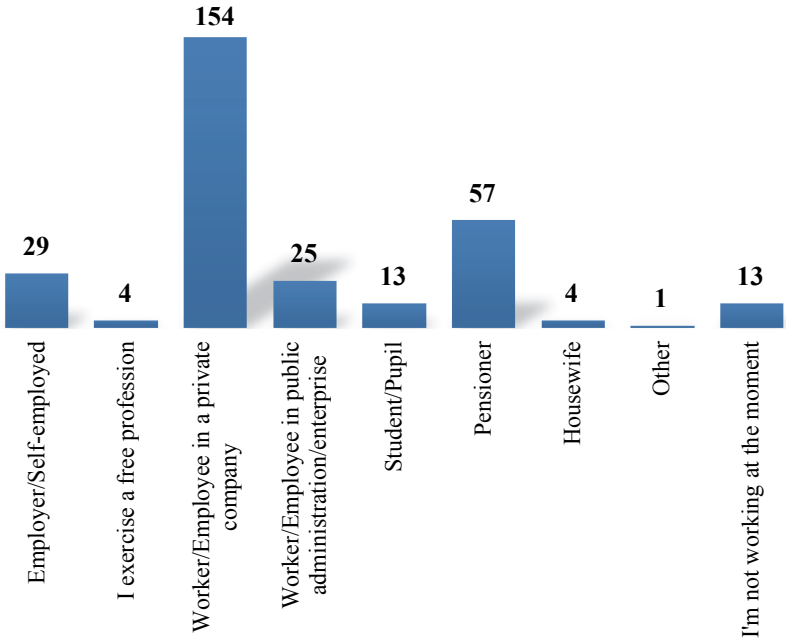
Source: Representative survey

Figure 4. *Distribution according to the work experience of the respondents*



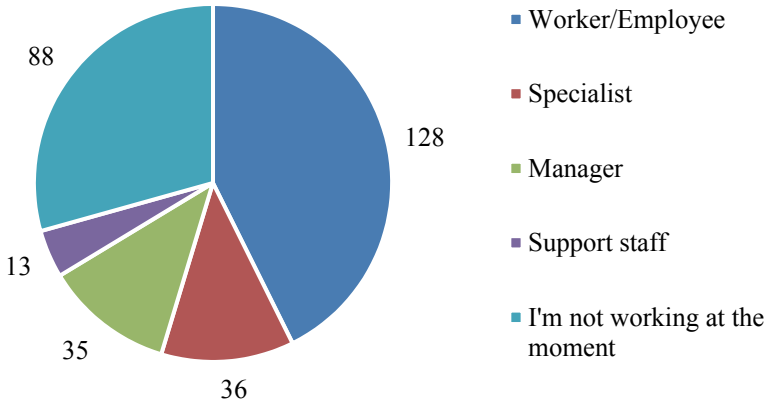
Source: Representative survey

Figure 5. *Distribution according to the employment of the respondents*



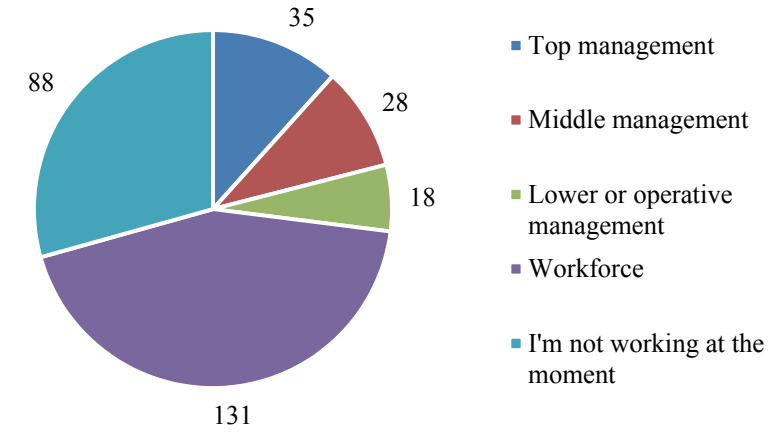
Source: Representative survey

Figure 6. *Distribution according to the position in the organization of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

Figure 7. *Distribution according to the management level in the organization of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

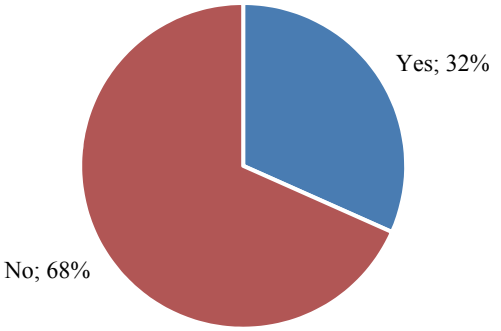
CHAPTER III.
POTENTIAL FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL INITIATIVES AND MOTIVATION OF ENTREPRENEURS IN PANDEMIC PERIOD

3.1. QUANTITATIVE OUTPUT

3.1.1. Prerequisites and Obstacles to the Entrepreneurial Initiative

To assess the potential for entrepreneurial initiative first we had to identify from psychological point of view whether the entrepreneurs are positively or negatively minded about such initiative during a pandemic. Thus, we asked them whether in the conditions of a pandemic it is possible to develop entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria.

Figure 8. *Attitudes toward the possibility to develop entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria during a pandemic*

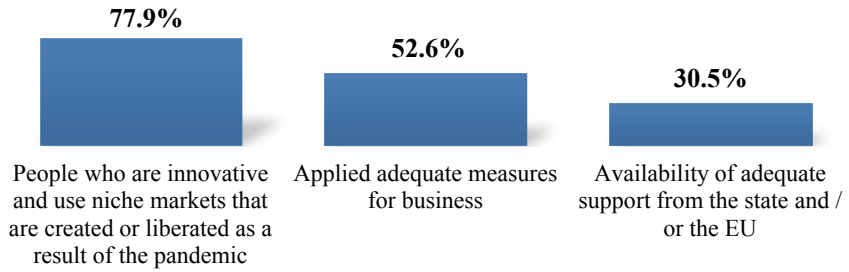


Source: Representative survey

The results on Figure 8 show that the respondents are predominantly negatively minded about such possibility as 68% of them selected answer “No”.

Certnainly, the respondents of each of the groups have their arguments to express such attitude. Thus, our next goal was to identify the prerequisites, which according to those, who answered positively, would contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative during pandemic.

Figure 9. *Factors, which contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic*

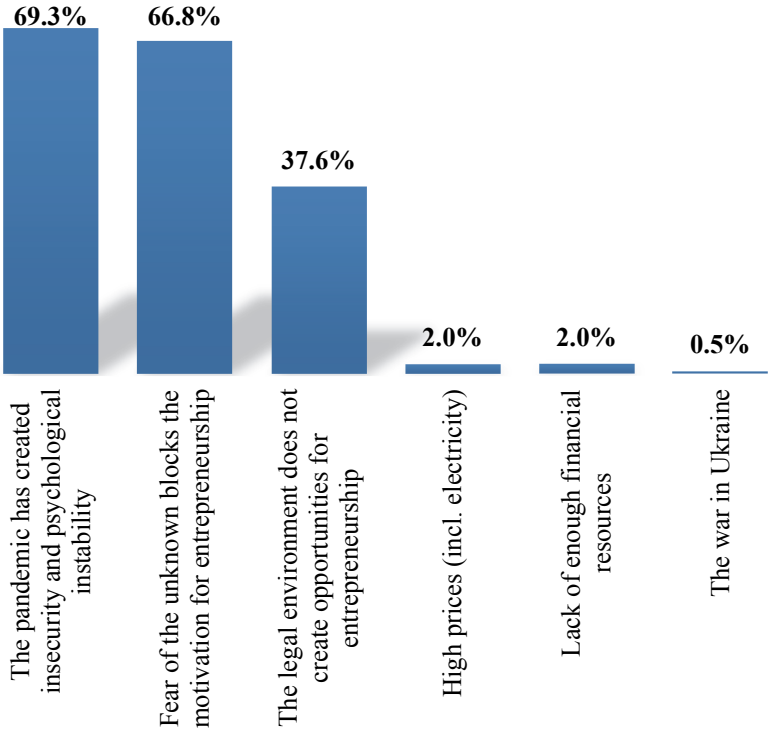


Source: Representative survey

The results clearly demonstrate that according to the respondents (77.9%) the personal characteristics of the people is the most relevant factor for initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in crisis times. The successful people are those who identify the opportunities and through innovativeness deal with the crisis situations. Furthermore, more than a half of them believe that entrepreneurial initiative under a pandemic is possible through state measures for the business (52.6%). The support from the state or EU is seen as a factor by about one third of the respondents (30.5%).

Alongside, we wanted to determine why most of the people are pessimistic about the realizitaion of entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic. Thus, we asked them to indicate the reasons, which according to them hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative.

Figure 10. *Factors, which hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic*



Source: Representative survey

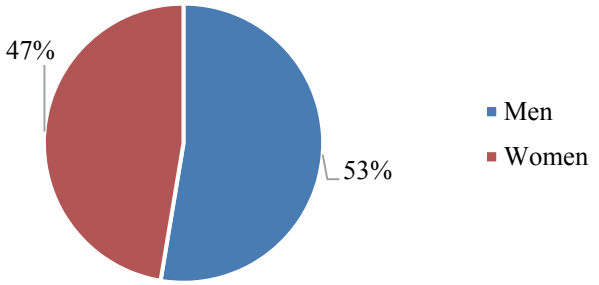
Again, psychological impact of the pandemic on the people's beliefs and attitudes is more relevant than other factors. The sense of insecurity and psychological instability is the most relevant factor according to the respondents as almost 70% of them believe so. Very similar (66.8%) is the share of the respondents, who are convinced that the fear of the unknown blocks the motivation for entrepreneurship. The legal environment is a factor for about one third of the respondents (37.6%) and factors like high prices, lack of financial resources and the war in Ukraine are important for only 2% of them (Figure 10).

Furthermore, we aimed at identifying if any demographic factors are relevant to the oppinions of the respondents. The determination of associations between variables will help to dedicate effort to support the identified group. The demographic factors, used in the current study are gender, age, education, work experience, employment, position in the organization, management level.

Gender

As concerns the gender of the respondents the results displayed on Figure 11 clearly show that the men are more positively minded about entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic. Such result can be explained through the typical for men psychological specifics such as being more decisive and acting riskier compared to women. However, the difference in the numbers is not very significant.

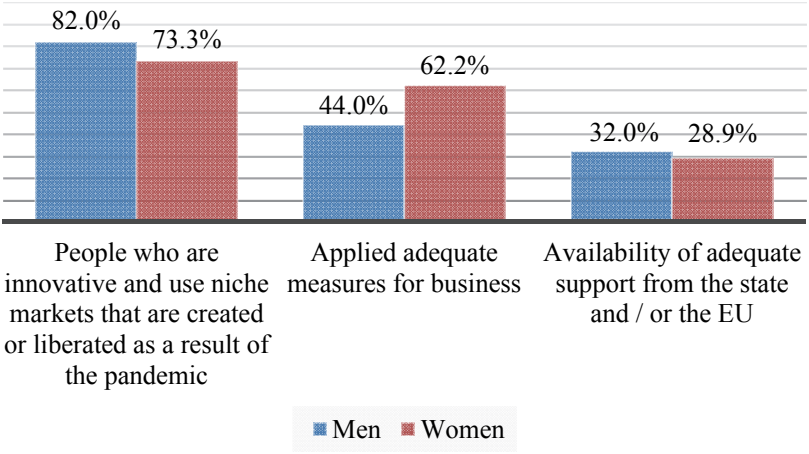
Figure 11. *Positive attitudes toward the possibility to develop entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria during a pandemic according to the gender of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

There is a little variety in the way the men and women assess the prerequisites, which would contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative during pandemic (Figure 12).

Figure 12. *Factors, which contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the gender of the respondents*

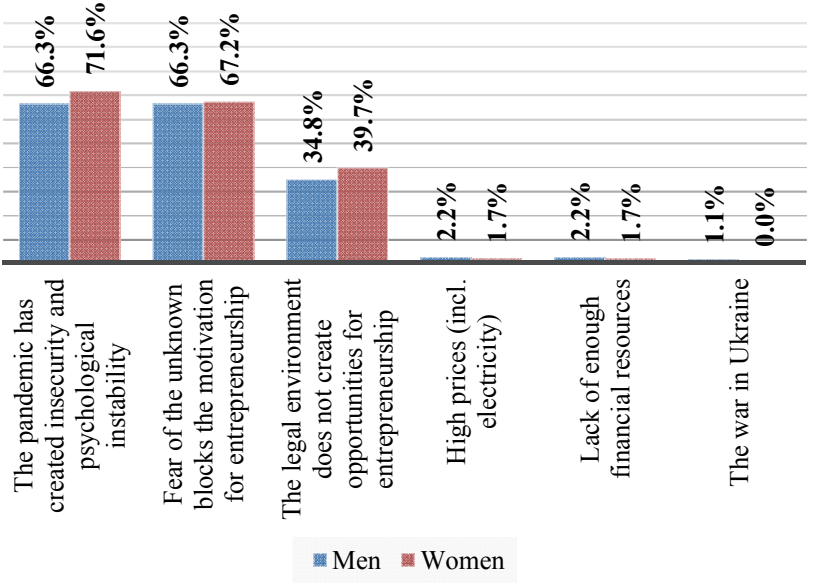


Source: Representative survey

As concerns the support for the relevance of the psychological factors, they are mostly supported by men. On the other hand, the adequate measures for the business as a factor, which can boost the entrepreneurial initiative under a pandemic is selected by 62.2% of the women. This result is almost 20 percent point higher than the share of men who think so. As concerns the support from the state or EU, the shares of both genders are almost equal (Figure 12).

It was also interesting to identify whether there any difference between the opinion of women and men on the reasons that hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative. The results presented on Figure 13 do not indicate any significant differences. It seems that the women are a little bit more convinced on the significance of the psychological factors for hindering the entrepreneurial initiative under a pandemic.

Figure 13. *Factors, which hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the gender of the respondents*



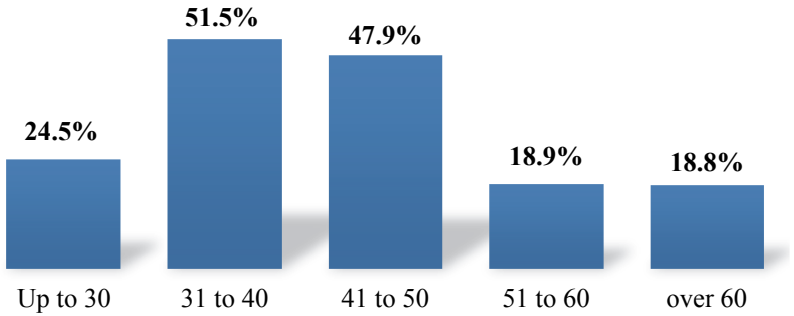
Source: Representative survey

Thus, it seems that men are more likely to believe that entrepreneurial initiative is possible under the pandemic. For women the psychological factors and the adequate measures have almost equal weight as boosters of such initiative. Both genders agree that the psychological factor predominantly relevant for hindering the development of entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic.

Age

It is quite interesting and important to find out whether the different generations perceive differently the entrepreneurship during a pandemic.

Figure 14. *Positive attitudes toward the possibility to develop entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria during a pandemic according to the age of the respondents*



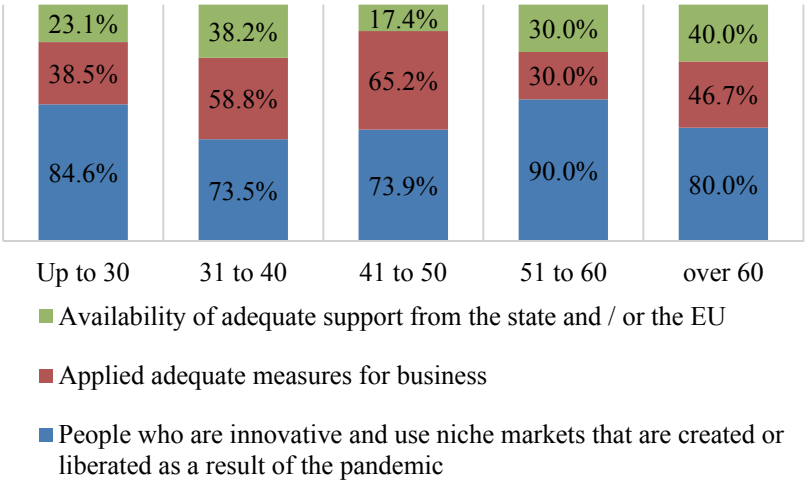
Source: Representative survey

About 50% of the respondents aged between 31 and 50 years old are postitively minded about developing an entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic. Almost ¼ of the youngest respondents share such attitude and less than 20% of the people aged over 50 believe in the possibility for entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic (Figure 14).

It does not seem that there are any significant differences between the age groups as concerns the factors, which motivate the entrepreneurship during pandemic. The only specific is across the respondents aged between 41 and 50, where the difference in the share of those who prioritize the psychological factors and the adequacy of the measures is only 10 percent points (Figure 15).

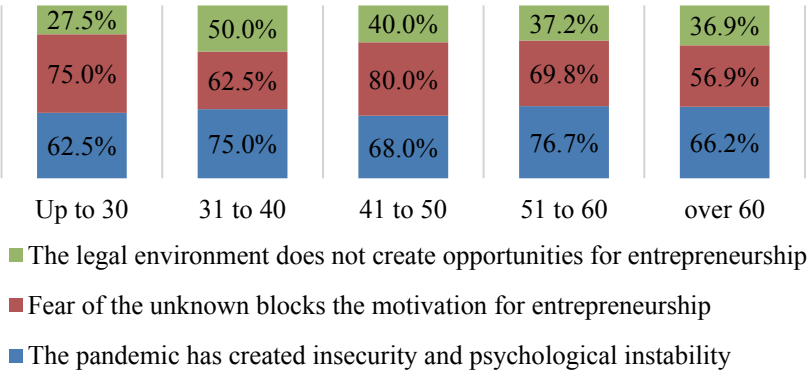
As concerns the factors, which hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative there are difference only which of the psychological determinants was put on first place. For those up to 30 and 41 to 50 years old it is the fear of the unknown, which blocks the motivation for entrepreneurship. The other age groups select mostly the insecurity and psychological instability, created by the pandemic (Figure 16).

Figure 15. *Factors, which contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the age of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

Figure 16. *Factors, which hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the age of the respondents*

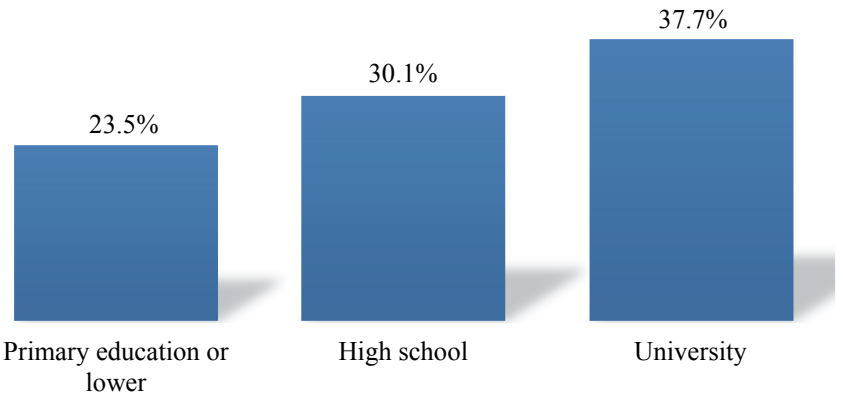


Source: Representative survey

Education

As concerns the education of the respondents, the share of postitively minded about entrepreneurial initiative and motivation under a pandemic is largest among the people with university education. It decreases with the decrease in the educational level. This share is lowest among the respondents with primary eduation or lower. It looks like that the education is relevant and the more educated the people are, they are more initiative and motivated for entrepreneurship even in pandemic (Figure 17).

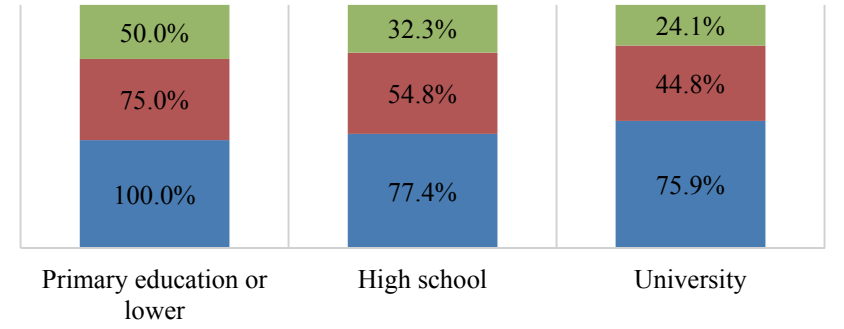
Figure 17. *Positive attitudes toward the possibility to develop entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria during a pandemic according to the education of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

There is no significant variation across the different educational groups as concerns the prerequisites, which would contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative during pandemic (Figure 18).

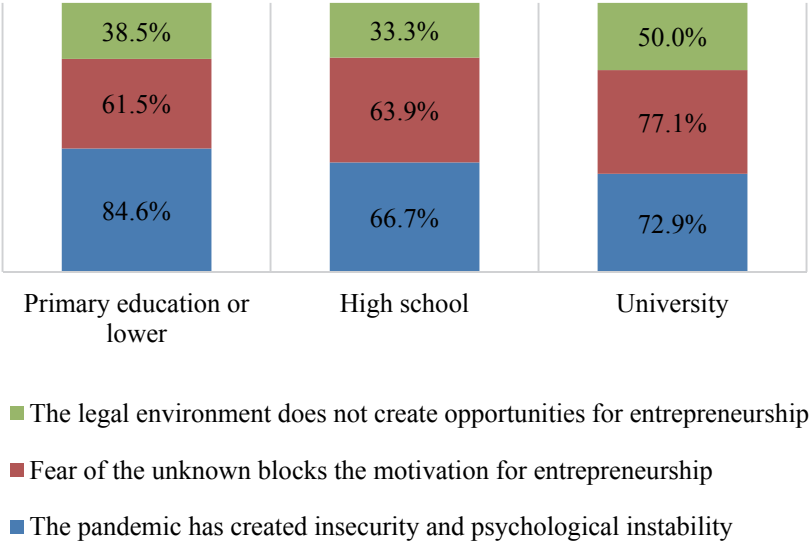
Figure 18. *Factors, which contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the education of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

There is a little variety on the reasons that hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative under pandemic. The respondents with university education put on first place (77.1%) the fear of unknown, which blocks people's motivation. On other hand, the people who have primary or lower education select mostly the insecurity and psychological instability caused by the pandemic (84.6%). The people, whose highest level of education is high school have almost equal preferences to both types of psychological aspects – 63.9% for the fear of the unknown and 66.7% for the insecurity and psychological instability. However, the difference between the age groups do not seem quite significant (Figure 19).

Figure 19. *Factors, which hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the education of the respondents*

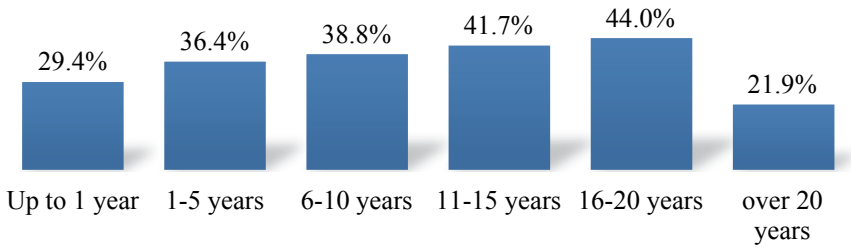


Source: Representative survey

Work Experience

The work experience of the respondents seems to certain level relevant for their positive attitude towards entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria during pandemic. This positive attitude starts from 29.4% among the people with work experience less than one year. This share grows with the work experience and reaches 44% among the respondents with work experience from 14 to 20 years. However, there is one expection and these are the respondents with over 20 years off work experience. Only 21.9% of them are positively minded (Figure 20).

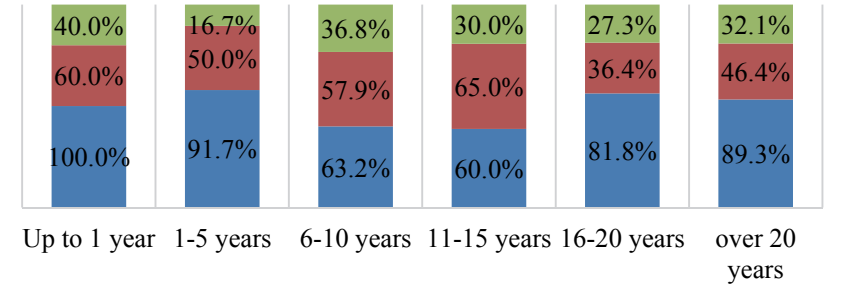
Figure 20. *Positive attitudes toward the possibility to develop entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria during a pandemic according to the work experience of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

The only work experience group which puts on first place the adequate measures for the business as main prerequisite to contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative is those with 11 – 15 years of work experience. The other age group prioritize the psychological aspects (Figure 21).

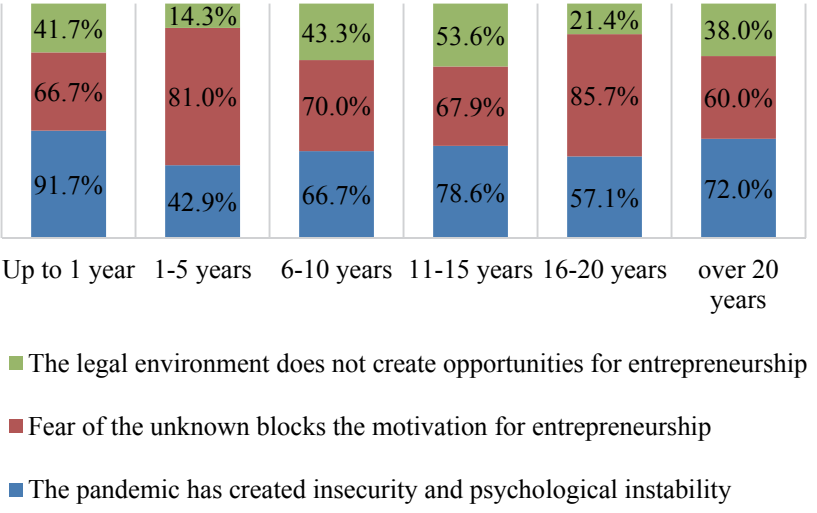
Figure 21. *Factors, which contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the work experience of the respondents.*



Source: Representative survey

Across the psychological factors, which may hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic the work experience does not seem to be a significant factor. Some of the groups put on first place the fear of unknown (1 – 5 years; 6 – 10 years; 16 – 20 years) and others put on first place the insecurity and psychological instability (up to 1 year; 11 – 15 years; over 20 years) (Figure 22).

Figure 22. *Factors, which hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the work experience of the respondents*



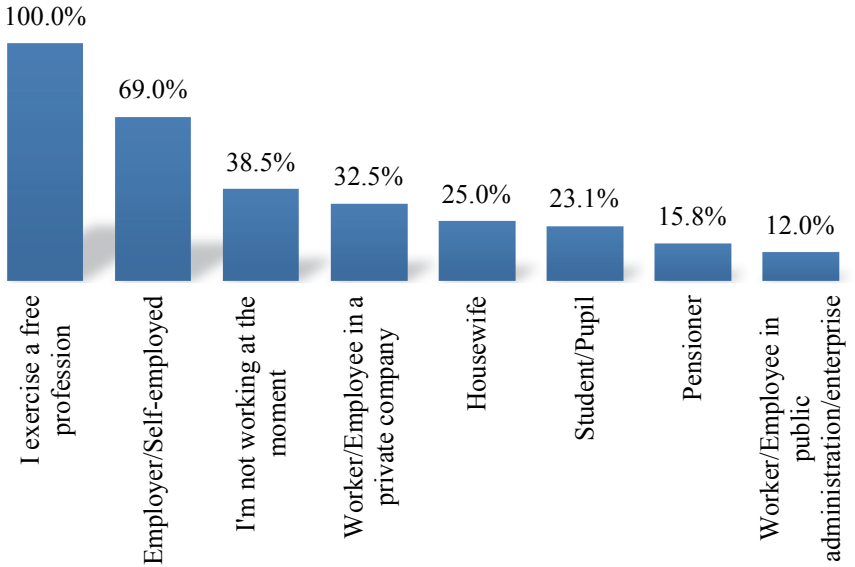
Source: Representative survey

Employment

According to their employment the most positively minded people towards the opportunity for entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship under pandemic are those, who exercise free profession (100%) and those who are employer or self-employed (69%). Such result seems expected because these are the groups of people, which are

expected to be most initiative. The least positively minded on this topic are the people, who work in the public sector (12%) (Figure 23).

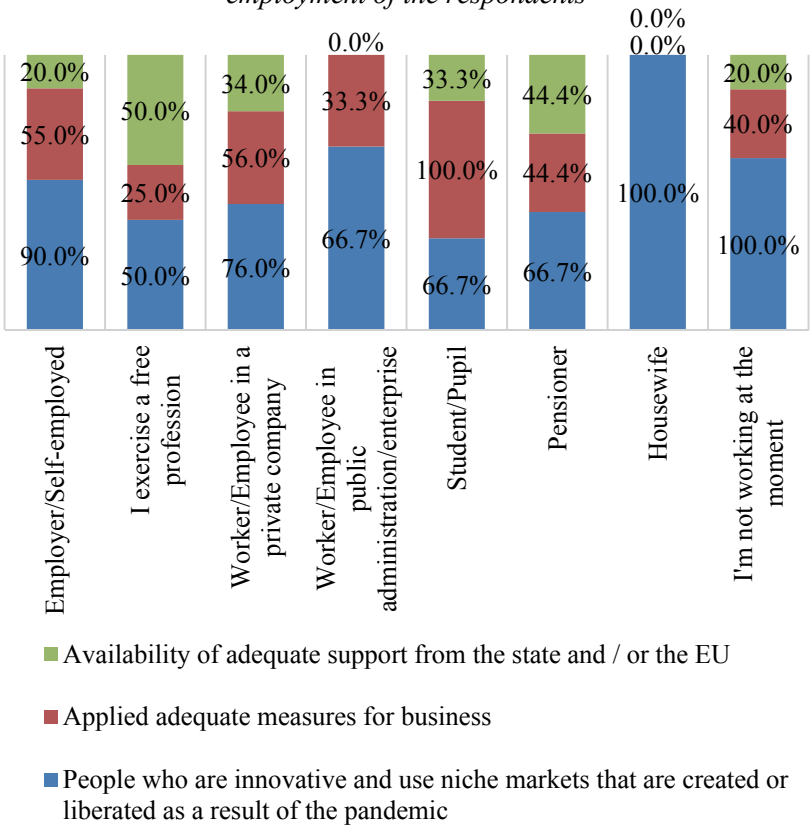
Figure 23. *Positive attitudes toward the possibility to develop entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria during a pandemic according to the employment of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

Here also most of the groups put on first place the personal characteristics as prerequisite for development of an entrepreneurial initiative under pandemic. The only expection are the students/pupils who prioritize the applied adequate measures for business (100%).

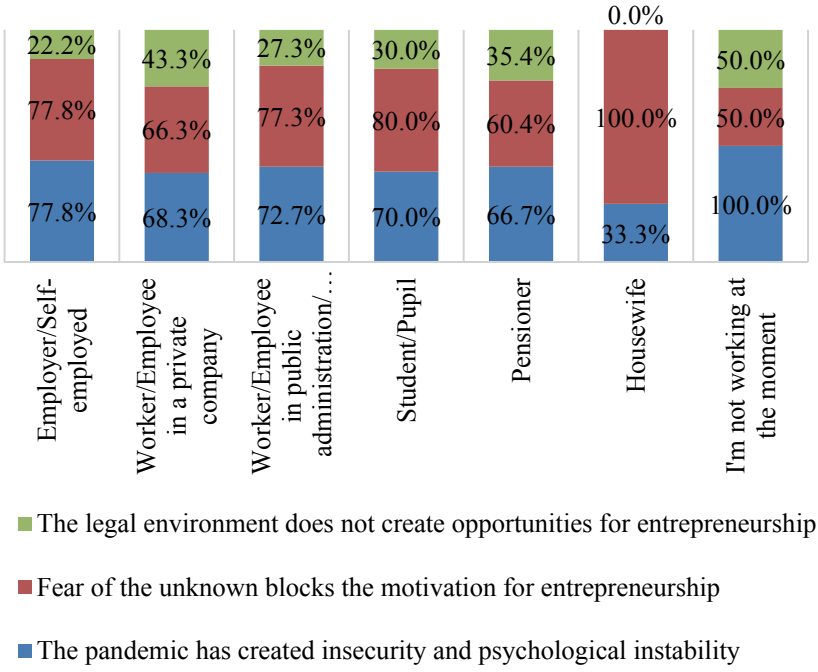
Figure 24. *Factors, which contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the employment of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

The employers and the self-employed give parity to fear of unknown and the insecurity and psychological instability as reasons, which hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative. In the other groups there is variety. The employment does not seem relevant for the opinion on this topic.

Figure 25. *Factors, which hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the employment of the respondents*

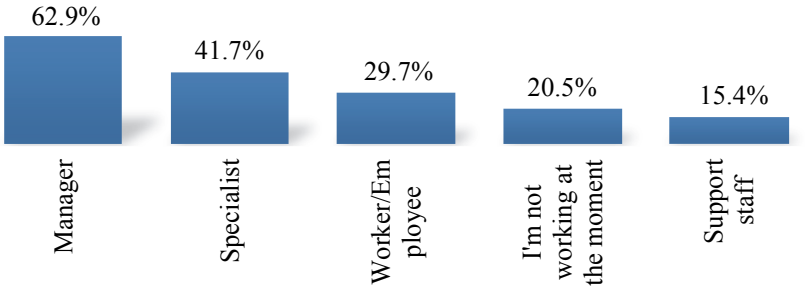


Source: Representative survey

Position in the organization

It is no surprise that according to the position in the organization the managers are the one, who are mostly postitively minded about the entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship under pandemic (62.9%). The next group is the one of the specialists (41.7%) and the group with the least positive attitudes on this topic are the support staff (15.4%) (Figure 26).

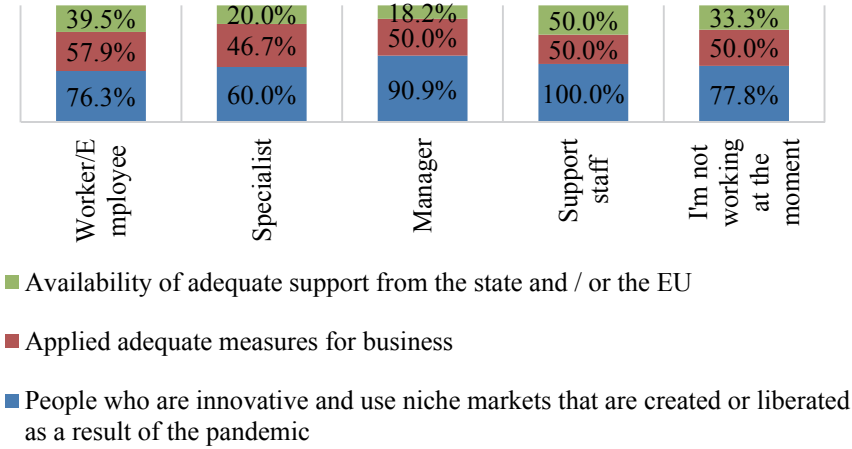
Figure 26. *Positive attitudes toward the possibility to develop entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria during a pandemic according to the position in the organization of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

All the groups select the personal characteristics as the most relevant factor for the development of an entrepreneurial initiative in pandemic (Figure 27).

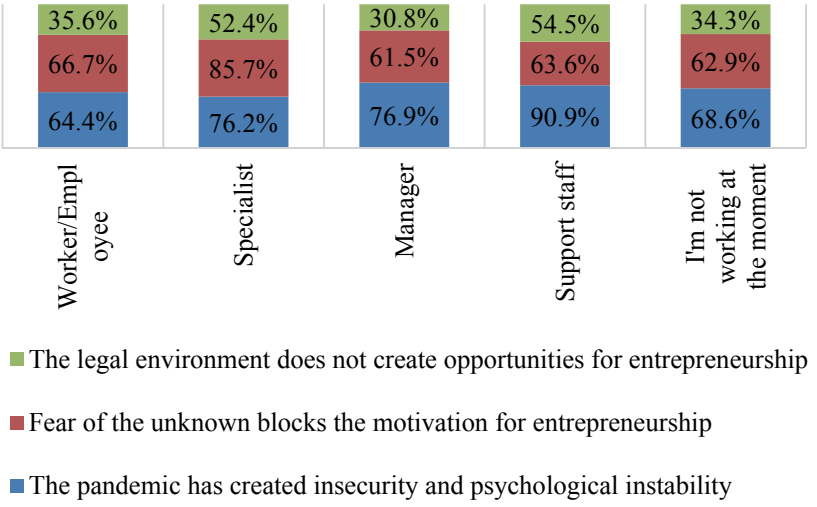
Figure 27. *Factors, which contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the position in the organization of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

As concerns the reasons, which have the potential to hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative the workers/employees and specialist put on first place the fear of unknown, which blocks the motivation for entrepreneurship. The managers, the support staff and those, who do not work now prioritize the insecurity and psychological instability (Figure 28).

Figure 28. *Factors, which hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the position in the organization of the respondents*



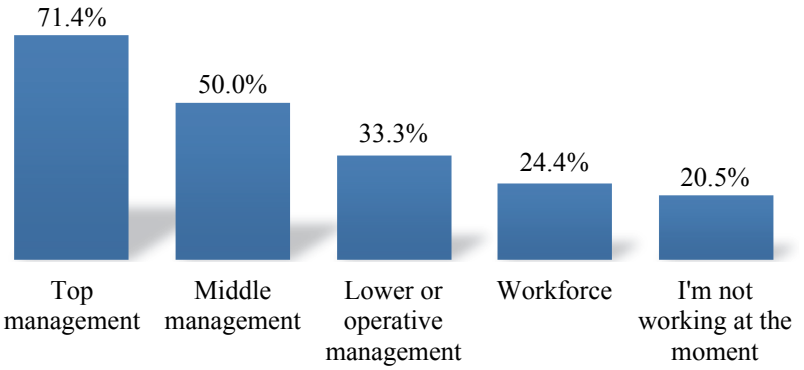
Source: Representative survey

Management Level

The results, displayed on figure 29 show that the higher management level the respondents occupy, the higher is the share of the people positively minded about entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria under pandemic. 71.4% of the top management share such

attitude, while this share is only 24.4% among the workforce and as low as 20.5% among the people, who are not working.

Figure 29. *Positive attitudes toward the possibility to develop entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria during a pandemic according to the management level of the respondents*

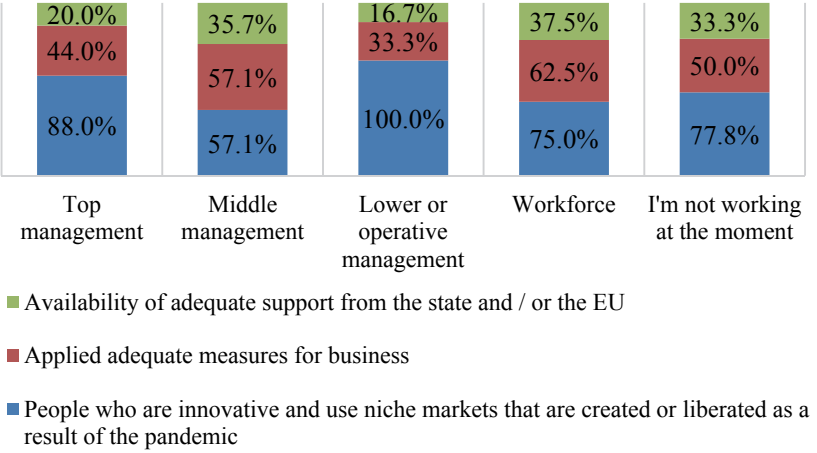


Source: Representative survey

In every group predominant is the opinion that the most relevant prerequisite for the development of an entrepreneurial initiative is the ability of people to be innovative and use niche markets that are created or liberated because of the pandemic. The group of people, who occupy middle management level have the same result for the adequacy of measure for business (Figure 30).

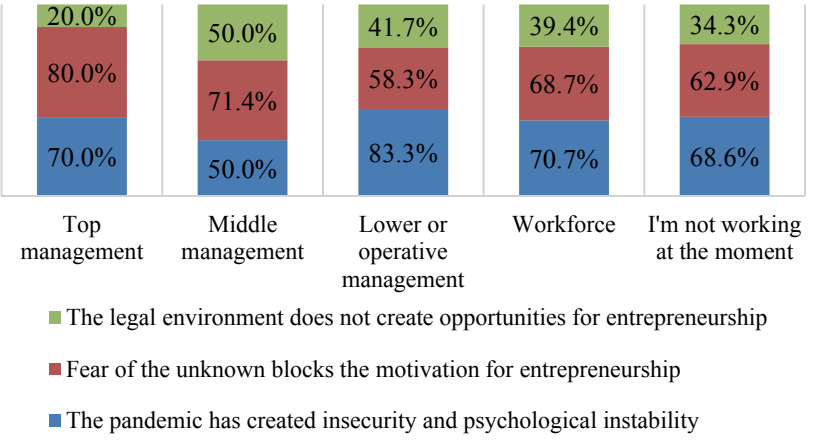
According to the top and middle management development of entrepreneurial initiative is mostly hindered by the fear of unknown, while the other groups give priority to the insecurity and psychological instability (Figure 31).

Figure 30. *Factors, which contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the management level of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

Figure 31. *Factors, which hinder the development of entrepreneurial initiative during a pandemic according to the management level of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

Based on the results, displayed on the figures presented above, we made assumptions on the associations between the variables and the demographic characteristics of the respondents. To identify whether our assumptions are correct we performed tests for the statistical significance of the associations.

Table 2. *Statistically significant associations between attitudes towards entrepreneurial initiative and motivation under pandemic and the demographic indicators*

Variable 1	Variable 2	Coefficient of significance (sig)
Q2. In the conditions of a pandemic, is it possible to develop entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria?	Age	0,000
	Work Experience	0,048
	Position in the organization	0,000

Source: Based on data from representative survey

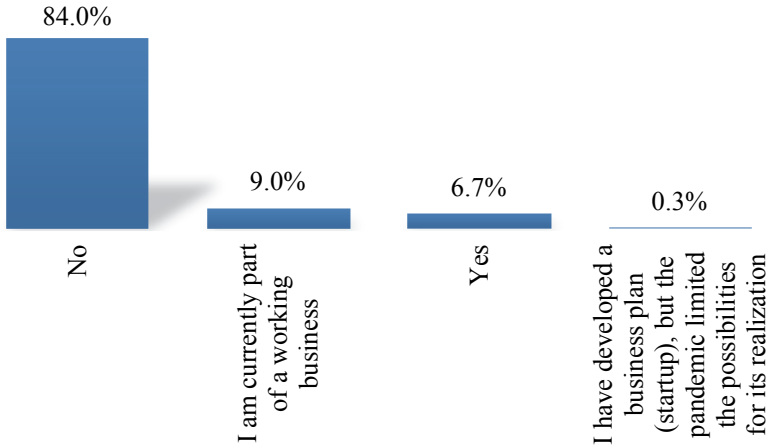
The results presented on Table 2 demonstrate that there are three demographic characteristics, which are relevant for the attitude towards the possibility of development of entrepreneurial initiative and motivation for entrepreneurship in Bulgaria during a pandemic. These are age, work experience and position of the respondents in their organization.

3.1.2. Entrepreneurial Initiative and Working Environment under Pandemic

Most of the participants in the survey are workers/employees in private companies (Figure 5). Nevertheless, we wanted to identify whether they had intentions to start their own business and to what extent the pandemic thwarted their intentions. Thus, we asked them if before the pandemic (announced in Bulgaria on March 12, 2020) they an intention

or business plan had to start their own business. The answers are presented on Figure 32.

Figure 32. *Business plans thwarted due to the pandemic*



Source: Representative survey

The results show that most of the respondents did not have such intentions (84%). Only 9% are currently part of a working business and although 6.7% share that they had such plans as low as 0.3% of the respondents have their business plans thwarted by the pandemic.

The data acquired through the previous question does not provide enough clarity about the entrepreneurial initiative in Bulgaria in general. Thus, we prepared a list of statements, regarding the attitudes towards the entrepreneurship in general, entrepreneurship during the pandemic and the working environment. We asked the respondents to determine the extent to which each of the statements apply to them. They had to use the scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "Does not apply at all" and 10 – "Completely applies".

On table 3 we present the share of the respondents, who selected 8, 9 or 10 for each statement and we group them in "It rather applies to me".

The statements are sorted descending, thus, they start from the most supported statement to the least supported one.

Table 3. *Support for statements, regarding the entrepreneurial initiative and working environment*

	Statement	It rather applies to me
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business; I'd rather work for someone else.	49.0%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	43.3%
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	34.0%
Q3.12.	Working from home depresses me and I am unable to work.	29.0%
Q3.2.	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	28.0%
Q3.14.	Balancing personal and professional life has become even more difficult due to the pandemic.	23.7%
Q3.13.	Due to the new working conditions as a result of the pandemic, I can better balance my professional and personal life.	20.3%
Q3.11.	Due to the pandemic, new forms of work have been introduced, including from home, which pleases me.	20.0%
Q3.10.	The pandemic has created better working conditions, which are very motivating.	18.7%
Q3.6.	I always wanted to have my own business, but with this Covid-19 pandemic, I gave up.	15.0%
Q3.4.	The Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary phenomenon and would not stop my business initiatives.	13.7%
Q3.5.	I have a business that is suffering from the pandemic, but I have no intention of giving it up.	9.0%

Q3.7.	I started/will start my own business despite the pandemic, it doesn't bother me.	7.0%
Q3.1.	I had my own business that went bankrupt due to the Covid-19 restrictions and now I prefer to work for someone else.	3.7%

Source: Representative survey

Own business versus working for someone else.

The most supported statement across the respondents is about the preference of the people to work for someone else rather than having own business as 49.0% of them would rather agree with it. Furthermore, 43.3% would prefer a secure job, although not highly paid and promising. These two top selected answers demonstrate the sense of insecurity and the search for a secure income although it may not be sufficient. It seems that the pandemic boosted such attitude because another 28% share that due to the Covid-19 pandemic they began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job. And finally there is a share of 3.7% who had their own business that went bankrupt due to the Covid-19 restrictions, which made them to prefer working for someone else (Table 3).

However, there is a small share of respondents, who are positively minded about having their own business. 15% of them share that they have always wanted to have their own business, but they gave up because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Another 13.7% are convinced that the Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary phenomenon and declare that it will not stop their business initiatives. 9.0% are determined to continue with their business althouth it suffers from the pandemic. Others (7%) intent to start their own business despite the pandemic (Table 3).

Working environment

Although the pandemic created some valuable working approaches it seems that most of the respondents do not share positive attitude toward this transformation. According to 34% of them since the beginning of the

pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated them. Furthermore, the working from home mode is depressing for 29% of them and they are unable to work. And as concerns the balance between personal and professional life, 23.7% of the respondents find it even harder to achieve such balance because of the pandemic (Table 3).

However, very close is the share of those, who consider the new working conditions because of the pandemic providing better balance between professional and personal life (20.3%). Another 20% are pleased with the new forms of work, which have been introduced, including work from home. Furthermore, there are 18.7% who are convinced that the new working conditions, created because of the pandemic are better and motivating (Table 3).

Before we started to analyze the demographic differences, we identified the statements with the highest average (Table. 4).

Table 4. *Support for statements, regarding the entrepreneurial initiative and working environment (average)*

	Statement	Average
Q3.3.	I have always believed it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	5.73
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business; I'd rather work for someone else.	5.72
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	5.19
Q3.12.	Working from home depresses me and I am unable to work.	4.84
Q3.14.	Balancing personal and professional life has become even more difficult due to the pandemic.	4.78
Q3.2.	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	4.54

Q3.13.	Due to the new working conditions as a result of the pandemic, I can better balance my professional and personal life.	4.45
Q3.11.	Due to the pandemic, new forms of work have been introduced, including from home, which pleases me.	4.41
Q3.10.	The pandemic has created better working conditions, which are very motivating.	3.99
Q3.4.	The Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary phenomenon and would not stop my business initiatives.	3.38
Q3.6.	I always wanted to have my own business, but with this Covid-19 pandemic, I gave up.	2.20
Q3.5.	I have a business that is suffering from the pandemic, but I have no intention of giving it up.	1.11
Q3.7.	I started/will start my own business despite the pandemic, it doesn't bother me.	0.96
Q3.1.	I had my own business that went bankrupt due to the Covid-19 restrictions and now I prefer to work for someone else.	0.49

Source: Representative survey

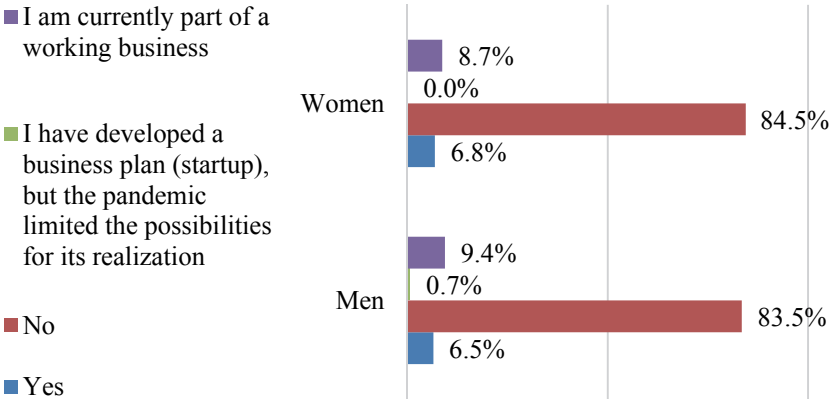
As shown on Table 4 the average for each statement clearly demonstrates that the top three preferred statements are:

- I have always believed it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.
- I never wanted to have my own business; I would rather work for someone else.
- Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.

Gender

The results displayed on Figure 33 do not give ground to assume that there is any significant difference between women and men as concerns the existence of business plans before the pandemic.

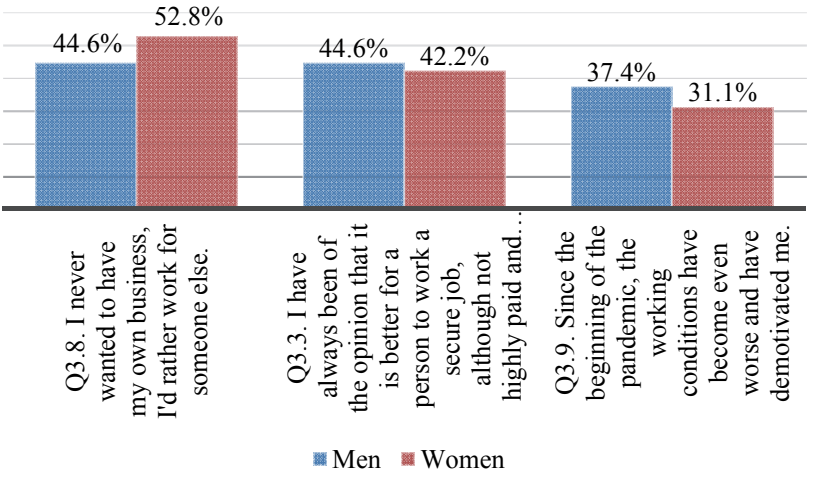
Figure 33. *Business plans thwarted due to the pandemic according to the gender of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

As concerns the selection of most agreed selections, there are few differences between men and women. The share of women, who prefer to work for someone else rather than having their own business (52.8%) is bigger than the share of men (44.6%). Their position is almost equal as concerns the preferences for secure job over a highly paid one and promising. The share of men (37.4%), who give negative assessment of the new working conditions created by the pandemic, is a little bit higher than the share of women (31.1%) who have such attitude.

Figure 34. *Support for statements, regarding the entrepreneurial initiative and working environment, which rather applies to the respondents according to their gender*

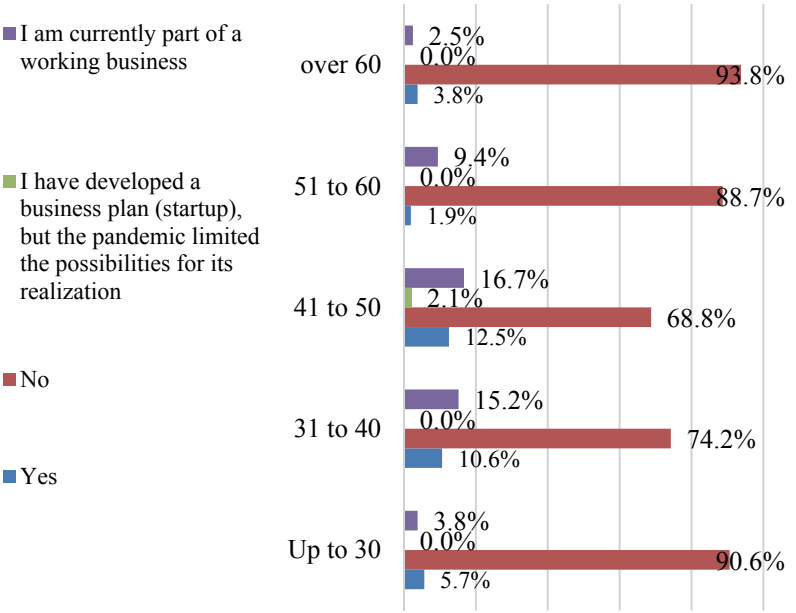


Source: Representative survey

Age

The age of the respondents is to some extent relevant for the business plans of the respondents. The youngest (under 30) and the oldest (over 60) are the groups with biggest share of people, who did not have business plans before the pandemic. The respondents between 41 and 50 years old are the only group, which have a certain share of people with business initiatives, thwarted by the pandemic. However, this share is as low as 2.1%. In the same age group there are 16.7% of the people who currently are part of a working business. This share is the highest compared to the other age groups. The same is valid for those who had business plans before the pandemic. They are 12.5% of the population aged 41 to 50, which again is the highest share compared to the other age groups.

Figure 35. *Business plans thwarted due to the pandemic according to the age of the respondents.*



Source: Representative survey

According to the youngest respondents (up to 30 years) the most problematic aspects of the examined are the working conditions, which according to 35.8% of them have become even worse and demotivated them. The people between 31 and 40 years old prioritize the preference of secure job over highly paid and promising (36.4%). The other three age groups put on first place their negative attitude to having own business and the preference to work for someone else. As concerns the age, there is one exception on the top three supported statements. On third place with 33.3% sharing that because of the pandemic they started to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job (Table 5).

Table 5. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the entrepreneurial initiative and working environment, which rather apply to the respondents according to their age*

	Up to 30	
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	35.8%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	34.0%
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	30.2%
	31 to 40	
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	36.4%
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	33.3%
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	33.3%
	41 to 50	
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	43.8%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	35.4%
Q3.2.	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	33.3%
	51 to 60	
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	56.6%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	54.7%
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	34.0%

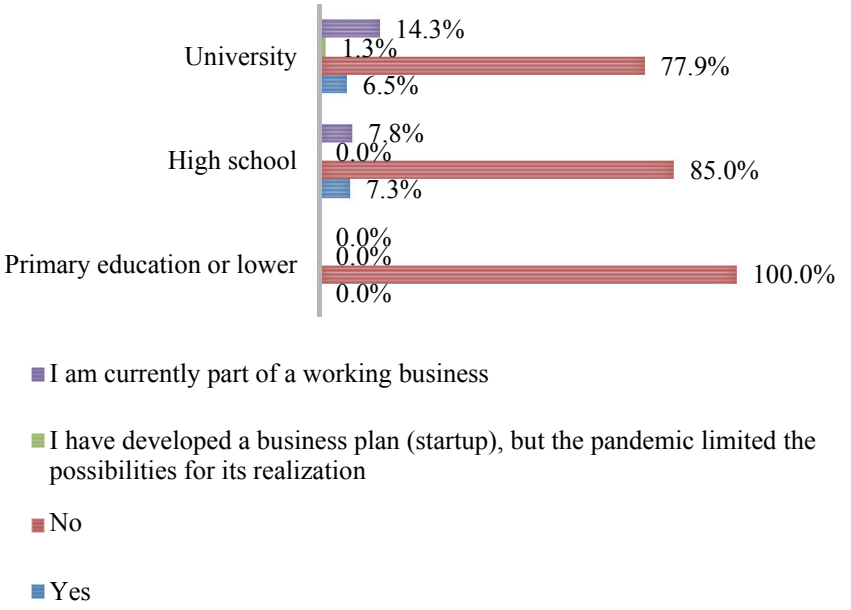
	over 60	
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	72.5%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	52.5%
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	35.0%

Source: Representative survey

Education

The results on Figure 36 show that the education is to some extent relevant for the business plans before the pandemic. All the people with primary education or lower declared having no business initiative before the start of the pandemic. Across the respondents with high school education this share is 85%, but none of them declares thwarted business plans. The share of people with no business initiative before the pandemic is lowest among the people with university education. Also, there are 14.3% of them, who are currently part of a working business or declare having business plans before the pandemic (6.5%). As low as 1.3% of them share that the business plan they had before the pandemic were thwarted.

Figure 36. *Business plans thwarted due to the pandemic according to the education of the respondents*



Source: Representative survey

As concerns the most supported statements regarding the entrepreneurship and working environment before and after the pandemic, there is no difference between the positions of the people with primary education or lower and those with high school education. They even arranged the top three statements the same way. Although the respondents with university education also support the idea that working for someone else is better than having your own business, they are more likely to see the good side of the new working conditions. They declare that with these new conditions they can better balance between professional and personal life and also they are please with the new forms of work, including work from home (Table 6).

Table 6. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the entrepreneurial initiative and working environment, which rather apply to the respondents according to their age*

Primary education or lower		
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	70.6%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	52.9%
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	41.2%
High school		
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	51.9%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	47.6%
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	36.4%
University		
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	36.4%
Q3.13.	Due to the new working conditions as a result of the pandemic, I can better balance my professional and personal life.	33.8%
Q3.11.	Due to the pandemic, new forms of work have been introduced, including from home, which pleases me.	31.2%

Source: Representative survey

Work Experience

The work experience of the respondents does not seem quite relevant for the existence of business plans and how they are affected by the pandemic. The biggest share of respondents who declare having

business plans before the pandemic is across the people with work experience between 1 and 10 years (12.1 – 12.2%). The only group, which declares thwarted business plans is of those with work experience between 11 and 15 years (2.1%). In the same age group is the largest share of respondents, who declare that they are currently part of a working business (20.8%) (Table 7).

Table 7. *Business plans thwarted due to the pandemic according to the work experience of the respondents*

	Up to 1 year	**1 – 5 years**	**6 – 10 years**	**11 – 15 years**	**16 – 20 years**	**over 20 years**
No	94.1%	84.8%	79.6%	75.0%	84.0%	87.5%
Yes	5.9%	12.1%	12.2%	2.1%	8.0%	4.7%
I have developed a business plan (startup), but the pandemic limited the possibilities for its realization	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%
I am currently part of a working business	0.0%	3.0%	8.2%	20.8%	8.0%	7.8%

Source: Representative survey

The results, displayed on Table 8 show that the respondents with different work experience prioritize different statements among the listed. The statement, which mostly applies to the least experienced workers (up to 1 year) is the satisfaction with the new working conditions as 41.2% of them think so. The same share of respondents in this group declared that they achieve better balance between work and personal life. However, almost 30% of them support the opposite position, namely the the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated them (Table 8).

The latter is the most shared belie in the group of people with work experience 1 to 5 years as 42.4% of them think so. Alongside 36.4% of them share a depressing effect and demotivation because of work-from-home approach. The same share of respondents prefers to have a secure job, although not highly paid and promising (Table 8).

The statement, which most refers to the people with work experience 6 to 10 years (36.7%) is the dissatisfaction with the working conditions introduced because of the Covid-19 pandemic, which demotivated them. Furthermore, 32.7% of them have always believed that a secure job is better, even not well paid, and promising. Another 30.6% have started to believe so because of the pandemic (Table 8).

The three priority statements of the group with work experience 11 – 15 years are focus on the security of the work and not the working conditions. Most of them (50%) have always preferred secure job although it may not be so well paid or promising or have started to prefer such job because of the pandemic (33.3%). 47.9% of the respondents from this group have never wanted to start their own business but prefer to work for someone else (Table 8).

The latter opinion is the most common across people with working experience 16 to 20 years as 36% of them think so. They are dissatisfied with the working conditions, introduced because of the pandemic and especially the working from home prevents them from well work performance and depresses them (32%) (Table 8).

The most experienced workers are very explicit in their reluctance to have their own business and the preference to work for someone else (67.2%). Another 53.9% have always been convinced that a secure job is better than the well paid and promising, but not so secure. As concerns the working conditions, 34.4% of the respondents from this group are dissatisfied with the change in the working environment since the beginning of the pandemic (Table 8).

Table 8. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the entrepreneurial initiative and working environment, which rather apply to the respondents according to their work experience*

Up to 1 year		
Q3.11.	Due to the pandemic, new forms of work have been introduced, including from home, which pleases me.	41.2%
Q3.13.	Due to the new working conditions as a result of the pandemic, I can better balance my professional and personal life.	41.2%
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	29.4%
1 – 5 years		
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	42.4%
Q3.12.	Working from home depresses me and I am unable to work.	36.4%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	36.4%
6 – 10 years		
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	36.7%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	32.7%
Q3.2.	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	30.6%
11 – 15 years		
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	50.0%
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	47.9%
Q3.2.	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	33.3%

	16 – 20 years	
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	36.0%
Q3.12.	Working from home depresses me and I am unable to work.	32.0%
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	32.0%
	over 20 years	
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	67.2%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	53.9%
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	34.4%

Source: Representative survey

Employment

Table 9 presents the differences in the elaboration of business plans before the pandemic and their eventual failure because of the pandemic, according to the employment of the respondents.

Table 9. *Business plans thwarted due to the pandemic according to the employment of the respondents*

	No	**Yes**	**I have developed a business plan (startup), but the pandemic limited the possibilities for its realization**	**I am currently part of a working business**
Employer/ Self-employed	0.0%	24.1%	0.0%	75.9%
I exercise a free profession	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	75.0%
Worker/Employee in a private company	92.2%	6.5%	0.6%	0.6%
Worker/Employee in public administration/enterprise	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Student/Pupil	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Pensioner	94.7%	3.5%	0.0%	1.8%
Housewife	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
I'm not working at the moment	92.3%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: Representative survey

As concerns the employment we can distinguish two main categories of employment type. The first category includes the employers, self-employed and the free professions and in the second second category are all the other types of employment. About 75% of the first category declare that they are currently part of a working business and none of them have had thwarted business plans due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the other category there is almost no variety as almost 100% in every employment type had no entrepreneurial intentions before the pandemic (Table 9).

There is not an unanimity among the respondents about the statements on entrepreneurial initiative and working environment but there is a variety across the different types of employment (Table 10).

The employers, self employed and those, expercising free professions have the same selection on the top three statements which mostly refer to them. They admit having business plan, which is affected by the pandemic. However, this will not prevent them from continuing their business. They realize that the Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary challenge, and they will continue with their entrepreneurial initiative. In general, the pandemic does not bother the business efforts of these two employment type groups (Table 10).

Respondents, who are employed in private or public sector have the same opinions. The predominant opinion among them is that it is better to work for someone else rather than having own business. Furthermore, they prefer secure job over well paid and promising. For some of them this attitude has been boosted by the pandemic (Table 10).

Students/pupils' the top three statements are focused on the working environment. They evaluate the transformation of the working conditions because of the environment as demotivating and the work from home as depressing. They also believe that the balance after this transformation is hard to achieve, i.e. the balance between professional and personal life. However, here it should be noted that these must be students and pupils, who are not occupied or are partly occupied. Thus, we can assume that they mean mostly the balance between personal life and studying (Table 10).

A significant share of the pensioner (78.9%) supports the preference to work for someone else rather than having own business. Another 52.6% believe that it is better to have a secure job, although not highly paid and promising. According to the working conditions have become even worse and demotivating because of the pandemic (Table 10).

The latter opinion is shared by 75% of the housewifes. They also to high extent support the statement that a secure job is better in comparison to

highly paid and promising, but not so secure. Some of them have started sharing this position exactly because of the pandemic (Table 10).

Unemployed people, who are not students/pupils, pensioners or housewifes, also believe that the pandemic has worsened the working conditions and demotivated people (61.5%). However, in this employment category there is a group of 30.8%, who share that the new working conditions provide better balance between work and personal life. In the group of unemployed there are 38.5%, who had the idea of having own business, but the Covid-19 pandemic discouraged them (Table 10).

Table 10. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the entrepreneurial initiative and working environment, which rather apply to the respondents according to their employment*

	Employer/Self-employed	
Q3.5.	I have a business that is suffering from the pandemic, but I have no intention of giving it up.	82.8%
Q3.4.	The Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary phenomenon and would not stop my business initiatives.	62.1%
Q3.7.	I started/will start my own business despite the pandemic, it doesn't bother me.	51.7%
	I exercise a free profession	
Q3.5.	I have a business that is suffering from the pandemic, but I have no intention of giving it up.	50.0%
Q3.4.	The Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary phenomenon and would not stop my business initiatives.	50.0%
Q3.7.	I started/will start my own business despite the pandemic, it doesn't bother me.	25.0%
	Worker/Employee in a private company	
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	50.6%
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	50.6%
Q3.2.	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	40.9%

Worker/Employee in public administration/enterprise		
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	72.0%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	56.0%
Q3.2.	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	32.0%
Student/Pupil		
Q3.12.	Working from home depresses me and I am unable to work.	38.5%
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	30.8%
Q3.14.	Balancing personal and professional life has become even more difficult due to the pandemic.	30.8%
Pensioner		
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	78.9%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	52.6%
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	36.8%
Housewife		
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	75.0%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	50.0%
Q3.2.	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	50.0%
I'm not working at the moment		
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	61.5%
Q3.6.	I always wanted to have my own business, but with this Covid-19 pandemic, I gave up.	38.5%
Q3.13.	Due to the new working conditions as a result of the pandemic, I can better balance my professional and personal life.	30.8%

Source: Representative survey

Position in the organization

As concerns the respondents' position in their organization there is some variety. Only 17.1% of the managers did not have business plans before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, while of the respondents, who are part of the support start did not have such. Among the managers there is a share of 62.9%, who are part of a working business and another 20% who had business plans before the pandemic but do not define them as "thwarted". Only in the group of specialists there are respondents, whose business plans were limited by the pandemic (2.8%) (Table 11).

Table 11. *Business plans thwarted due to the pandemic according to the position in the organization of the respondents*

	No	**Yes**	**I have developed a business plan (startup), but the pandemic limited the possibilities for its realization**	**I am currently part of a working business**
Worker/ Employee	94.5%	5.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Specialist	77.8%	8.3%	2.8%	11.1%
Manager	17.1%	20.0%	0.0%	62.9%
Support staff	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
I'm not working at the moment	95.5%	3.4%	0.0%	1.1%

Source: Representative survey

The workers/employees, specialists and support staff declare preferences to work for someone else rather than having their own business. Furthermore, all of them would choose a secure job rather than

well paid and promising but not secure enough. Some of them started having such opinion exactly because of the pandemic (Table 12).

The most selected statements among the maganers are related to the stability of their entrepreneurial initiatives. They admit that their business suffers from the pandemic but have no intention of giving it up. They are convinced that the Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary phemonemon and will not let it stop their initiative and they will continue with their entrepreneurial initiative despite the pandemic (Table 12).

The people, who are unemployed selected statements, regarding both the entrepreneurial initiative and the working environment. Most of them prefer to work for someone else rather than having their own business. Furthermore, the security of their job is more important for them than the payment or the growth opportunities. According to them the working conditions have become worse because of the pandemic and demotivated them (Table 12).

Table 12. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the entrepreneurial initiative and working environment, which rather apply to the respondents according to their position in the organization*

Worker/Employee	
Q3.3. I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	50.0%
Q3.8. I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	50.0%
Q3.2. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	39.1%
Specialist	
Q3.8. I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	58.3%
Q3.3. I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	50.0%
Q3.2. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	38.9%

Manager	
Q3.5. I have a business that is suffering from the pandemic, but I have no intention of giving it up.	68.6%
Q3.4. The Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary phenomenon and would not stop my business initiatives.	54.3%
Q3.7. I started/will start my own business despite the pandemic, it doesn't bother me.	42.9%
Support staff	
Q3.3. I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	76.9%
Q3.8. I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	53.8%
Q3.2. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	46.2%
I'm not working at the moment	
Q3.8. I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	58.0%
Q3.9. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	40.9%
Q3.3. I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	40.9%

Source: Representative survey

Management Level

Almost 70% of the top managers declare that they are currently part of a working business and only 14.3% of them did not have business plans before the pandemic. Another 20% of the top managers share having business plans before the pandemic. However, thwarted business plans are identified only among the middle level management (3.6%). Over 90% of this group did not have business plans before the pandemic. This share is similar in the other groups – lower or operative management, workforce and unemployed (Table 13).

Table 13. *Business plans thwarted due to the pandemic according to the management level*

	No	**Yes**	**I have developed a business plan (startup), but the pandemic limited the possibilities for its realization**	**I am currently part of a working business**
Top management	14.3%	20.0%	0.0%	65.7%
Middle management	92.9%	0.0%	3.6%	3.6%
Lower or operative management	83.3%	11.1%	0.0%	5.6%
Workforce	93.1%	6.1%	0.0%	0.8%
I'm not working at the moment	95.5%	3.4%	0.0%	1.1%

Source: Representative survey

Although top managers declare that their business suffers from the pandemic, they have no intention of giving it up. According to them the Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary phemonemon and will not let it ruin their initiative. They intent to continue with their entrepreneurial initiative despite the pandemic (Table 14).

Most of the respondents, occupying middle management positions (53.6%) declare preference to work for someone else rather than having their own business. Furthermore, 42.9% of them prefer secure job over well paid and promising. And as concerns the new working conditions, introduced because of the pandemic, including the work from home, they enjoy them (Table 14).

Similar is the opinion of the lower or operative management and the workforce. They also dislike the idea to have their own business and prefer

to work for someone else. 44.4% of them cannot be motivated by high payment or the opportunities for growth at work if the job is not secure. For 38.9% of them this idea occurred because of the pandemic (Table 14).

Most of the unemployed respondents prefer working for someone else than having their own business. They also believe that the pandemic has worsened the working conditions and demotivated people. This group of respondents prefer secure job over well paid and promising (Table 14).

Table 14. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the entrepreneurial initiative and working environment, which rather apply to the respondents according to their management level*

Top management		
Q3.5.	I have a business that is suffering from the pandemic, but I have no intention of giving it up.	68.6%
Q3.4.	The Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary phenomenon and would not stop my business initiatives.	54.3%
Q3.7.	I started/will start my own business despite the pandemic, it does not bother me.	42.9%
Middle management		
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	53.6%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	42.9%
Q3.11.	Due to the pandemic, new forms of work have been introduced, including from home, which pleases me.	28.6%
Lower or operative management		
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	50.0%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	44.4%
Q3.2.	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	38.9%

Workforce		
Q3.3.	have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	54.2%
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	53.4%
Q3.2.	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	45.8%
I'm not working at the moment		
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else.	58.0%
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me.	40.9%
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising.	40.9%

Source: Representative survey

There are five demographic indicators, which are associated with the studied variables. These are (Table 15):

- Age
- Education
- Gender
- Work experience
- Position in the organization

The position in the organization is the most significant demographic characteristic. It is relevant to eleven out of fourteen variables, where statistically significant associations are idenfied. It is relevant for the thwarted business plans because of the pandemic and to 10 of the statements, regarding the entrepreneurial initiative and the working environment, which are listed on Table 15.

Age and the education positively associate with nine variables, thus they are the second most important demographic indicator. After them comes the work experience, which is relevant to five of the variables. The gender as a demographic characteristc associates positively only with the statement "the Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary phenomenon and would not stop my business initiatives" (Table 15).

Table 15. *Statistically significant associations between the entrepreneurial initiative and working environment under pandemic and the demographic indicators*

	Variable 1	Variable 2	Coefficient of significance (sig)
Q1.	Before the pandemic (announced in Bulgaria on March 12, 2020) did you have an intention or business plan to start your own business?	Age	0.008
		Position in the organization	0.000
Q3.1.	I had my own business that went bankrupt due to the Covid-19 restrictions and now I prefer to work for someone else.	Age	0.010
		Position in the organization	0.016
Q3.2.	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to prefer lower paid and not very promising, but secure job.	Position in the organization	0.000
Q3.3.	I have always been of the opinion that it is better for a person to work a secure job, although not highly paid and promising	Age	0.018
		Education	0.017
		Work Experience	0.014
		Position in the organization	0.000
Q3.4.	The Covid-19 pandemic is a temporary phenomenon and would not stop my business initiatives.	Gender	0.038
		Position in the organization	0.000
Q3.5.	I have a business that is suffering from the pandemic, but I have no intention of giving it up	Age	0.001
		Education	0.005
		Position in the organization	0.000

Q3.6.	I always wanted to have my own business, but with this Covid-19 pandemic, I gave up	Age	0.036
		Education	0.003
		Work Experience	0.000
Q3.7.	I started/will start my own business despite the pandemic, it doesn't bother me.	Age	0.000
		Work Experience	0.011
		Position in the organization	0.000
Q3.8.	I never wanted to have my own business, I'd rather work for someone else	Age	0.000
		Education	0.004
		Work Experience	0.000
		Position in the organization	0.000
Q3.9.	Since the beginning of the pandemic, the working conditions have become even worse and have demotivated me	Education	0.026
		Position in the organization	0.001
Q3.10.	The pandemic has created better working conditions, which are very motivating.	Education	0.007
Q3.11.	Due to the pandemic, new forms of work have been introduced, including from home, which pleases me	Age	0.011
		Education	0.000
		Position in the organization	0.024
Q3.13.	Due to the new working conditions as a result of the pandemic, I can better balance my professional and personal life	Age	0.045
		Education	0.000
		Work Experience	0.009
		Position in the organization	0.025
Q3.14.	Balancing personal and professional life has become even more difficult due to the pandemic	Education	0.005

Source: Based on data from a representative survey

3.1.3. Socio-Political Environment and Entrepreneurship

As we already discussed above the socio-political environment in a society affects entrepreneurial initiative. Thus, with the survey we aimed at identifying how the pandemic affected the perception of the citizens of the situation with COVID-19 and how they assess the reaction of the authorities towards them.

First, the respondents were asked to point on the scale from 0 to 10 (where: 0 – "I do not agree at all" and 10 – "I completely agree"), how much they agree with statements, regarding the pandemic and authorities' reaction towards it. On table 16 we present the share of the respondents, who selected 8, 9, or 10 for each statement and we group them into "I would rather agree". The statements are sorted in descending; thus, they start from the most supported statement to the least supported one.

Table 16. *Support for statements, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in general and regarding the reactions of the authorities to dealing with it*

	Statement	I would rather agree
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	49.3%
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	47.3%
Q4.13.	The politicians don't have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one.	45.0%
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	44.7%
Q4.16.	It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic.	43.0%
Q4.7.	Vaccines against Covid-19 are uncertain and dangerous.	41.0%
Q4.3.	The Covid-19 pandemic is being used for more control over people.	39.3%
Q4.14.	The politicians in Bulgaria are not learning from the countries that deal well with the pandemic.	39.3%

Q4.12.	The messages from politicians are contradictory and confusing, with the lack of unity creating mistrust and thwarting entrepreneurial initiative.	38.7%
Q4.5.	The Covid-19 pandemic is a medical experiment.	38.0%
Q4.11.	Bulgarian politicians didn't care at all about the citizens during the pandemic	38.0%
Q4.4.	The Covid-19 vaccine, even if not sufficiently tested, will help stop the pandemic.	36.7%
Q4.9.	People in countries like Portugal, Israel, Spain and others have done the right thing by getting vaccinated.	34.3%
Q4.6.	It is important that people get vaccinated against Covid-19 to stop the spread of the disease.	32.3%
Q4.8.	People must protest against any Covid-19 measures to protect their freedom.	30.3%
Q4.10.	People in Bulgaria have done the right thing by not getting vaccinated.	27.3%
Q4.17.	In managing the pandemic, politicians are focusing more on public health and less on business concerns.	23.3%
Q4.18.	In managing the pandemic, politicians are focusing more on business concerns and less on public health.	17.3%

Source: Representative survey

Attitudes towards COVID-19 pandemic

The most agreed statement among the mentioned is that the pandemic is artificially caused (49.3%) and another 38% consider the pandemic as a medical experiment. This position to high extent is an expression of the general distrust among Bulgarians towards those who govern. Although people do not think that the pandemic is a naturally occurring crisis, 44.7% are convinced that in a pandemic, people must follow the rules to preserve everyone's health. Such attitude is a prerequisite for successful application of measures, introduced by the state governments. Nevertheless, there is a group of respondents, who have no trust in the vaccination process as they believe that the vaccines are uncertain and dangerous (41%) and express support for Bulgarians

not getting vaccinated. According to some of the respondents, the pandemic is an instrument for more control over people (39.3%) and thus people must protest any Covid-19 measures to protect their freedom (30.3%). However, there are people, who support the Covid-19 vaccination process even if the vaccines are not sufficiently tested because they will help stop the pandemic (36.7%). They also realize the importance of people get vaccinated against Covid-19 to stop the spread of the disease (32.3%) and declared support for people in countries like Portugal, Israel, Spain and others, where most of the citizens got vaccinated (34.3%) (Table 16).

Assessment of the behavior of politicians during the pandemic

Almost 50% of the respondents agree that the politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic (47.3%), but another 39.3% think that they are not learning from the countries, which managed to deal successfully with the pandemic. The second most agreed statement among the lack of communication strategy as 45% of the respondents agree that the politicians do not have a communication strategy because they do not think they need one. Furthermore for 43% of the people it seems that the authorities did not have a clear vision on how to deal with the pandemic. Additional mistrust and thwarting entrepreneurial initiatives come from the contradictory and confusing messages with the lack of unity coming from the politicians (38.7%). Some of them even feel like the politicians did not care at all about the citizens during the pandemic (38%). When evaluating the balance between the measures for business and public health, prevail the opinion that public health is more addressed than business concerns (23.3% versus 17.3%) (Table 16).

Before we started to analyze the demographic differences, we identified the statements with the highest average (Table. 17).

Table 17. *Support for statements, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in general and regarding the reactions of the authorities to deal with it (average)*

Statement	Average
Q4.15. The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	6.65
Q4.13. The politicians do n't have a communication strategy because they do n't think they need one.	6.54
Q4.1. The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	6.36
Q4.11. Bulgarian politicians didn't care at all about the citizens during the pandemic	6.35
Q4.2. In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	6.31
Q4.16. It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic.	6.21
Q4.12. The messages from politicians are contradictory and confusing, with the lack of unity creating mistrust and thwarting entrepreneurial initiative.	6.20
Q4.3. The Covid-19 pandemic is being used for more control over people.	6.12
Q4.14. The politicians in Bulgaria are not learning from the countries that deal well with the pandemic.	5.94
Q4.5. The Covid-19 pandemic is a medical experiment.	5.89
Q4.7. Vaccines against Covid-19 are uncertain and dangerous.	5.68
Q4.4. The Covid-19 vaccine, even if not sufficiently tested, will help stop the pandemic.	5.52
Q4.17. In managing the pandemic, politicians are focusing more on public health and less on business concerns.	5.45
Q4.8. People must protest against any Covid-19 measures to protect their freedom.	5.18
Q4.9. People in countries like Portugal, Israel, Spain and others have done the right thing by getting vaccinated.	5.14
Q4.6. It is important that people get vaccinated against Covid-19 to stop the spread of the disease.	5.05
Q4.10. People in Bulgaria have done the right thing by not getting vaccinated.	4.93
Q4.18. In managing the pandemic, politicians are focusing more on business concerns and less on public health.	4.70

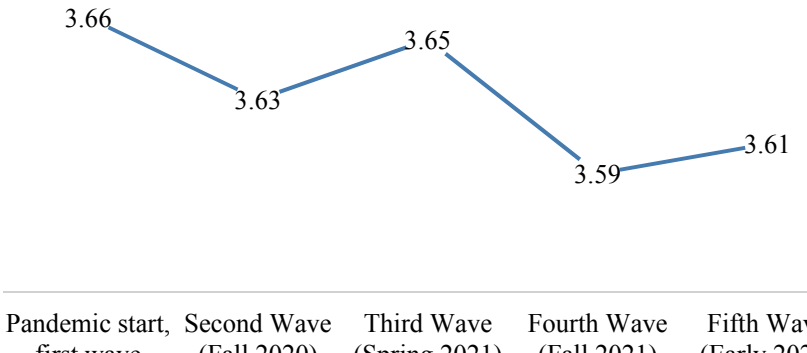
Source: Representative survey

As shown in Table 17 the average for each statement clearly demonstrates that the top three preferred statements are:

- The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.
- The politicians do not have a communication strategy because they do not think they need one.
- The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.

As concerns the assessment of the efforts of the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a decrease is observed. Furthermore, the approach during the autumn waves receives lower assessment than the authorities' efforts in the spring (Figure 37).

Figure 37. *Average assessment on a scale from 2 to 6 of the measures taken by the authorities in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic in each wave*



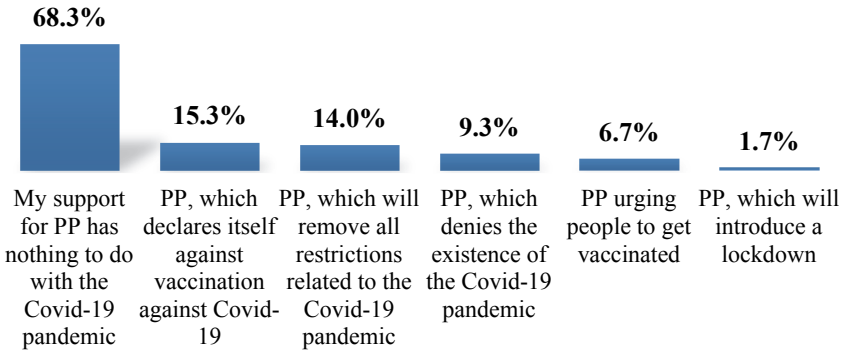
Source: Representative survey

During Covid-19 it became very popular for some political parties to use it for propaganda and to attract voters. There were politicians or whole parties, which started using messages against vaccination, against the measures, declaring that the freedom of people was endangered. Such

rhetoric distracts from the main issues, which need to be solved, and has the potential to create instability and exacerbate the problems in the complex health environment. Thus, we tested to what extent such propaganda affected the political preferences of the people and whether it has the potential to destabilize the whole environment, including the entrepreneurial.

The results presented in Figure 38 show that for most of the respondents, the opinions of a political party on the Covid-19 pandemic are irrelevant to supporting it (68.3%). However, there are groups, which are influenced by various messages or beliefs about the Covid-19 pandemic, shared by the politicians. There are about 15% of the respondents, who would support a party, which stands against the vaccination and another 14% that support a party planning to remove all restrictions related to Covid-19.

Figure 38. *Association between the support for a political party and its positions on Covid-19 pandemic*



Source: Representative survey

Gender

Men and women prioritize different statements, concerning the pandemic and the approach for dealing with it. According to 51.8% of the

men the pandemic is artificialy caused and 47.2% of the women believe so. However, the women mostly agree that the most important thing in pandemic is people to follow the rules to preserve everyone's health (50.3%). They also believe that the decision, taken by the authorities on good practices already tested in other countries (49.7%). The second most important statement for men is the belief that Bulgarian politicians do not look to have a vision and consistent policy in dealing with the pandemic (49.6%) and they also neglect the importance of a good communication strategy (45.3%) (Table 18).

Table 18. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in general and regarding the reactions of the authorities to dealing with it, which respondents rather agree with according to their gender*

Men		Women	
Q4.1. The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	51.8%	Q4.2. In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	50.3%
Q4.16. It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic.	49.6%	Q4.15. The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	49.7%
Q4.13. The politicians do not have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one.	45.3%	Q4.1. The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	47.2%

Source: Representative survey

The assessment of the measures, taken by the authorities in the different stages of the pandemic demonstrates little difference between men and women. Men give the highest assessment to state's activity during the start of the pandemic (3.6) and for women the best performance was during the third wave (3.75). However, both assessments are quite low (Table 19).

Table 19. *Average assessment on a scale from 2 to 6 of the measures taken by the authorities in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic in each wave according to the gender of the respondents*

Men		Women	
Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)	3.60	Third Wave (Spring 2021)	3.75
Third Wave (Spring 2021)	3.55	Second Wave (Fall 2020)	3.75
Second Wave (Fall 2020)	3.49	Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)	3.72
Fifth Wave (Early 2022)	3.47	Fifth Wave (Early 2022)	3.72
Fourth Wave (Fall 2021)	3.47	Fourth Wave (Fall 2021)	3.70

Source: Representative survey

Both for most of the men and women the support for a certain political party does not depend on the Covid-19 positions. However, 16.5% of men and 14.3% of women declare preferences for a party, which is against Covid-19 vaccinations. Similar share of men (13.7%) and women (14.3%) would support a party, which is ready to remove the restrictions, introduced because of the pandemic (Table 20).

Table 20. *Association between the support for a political party and its positions on the Covid-19 pandemic according to the gender of the respondents*

Men		Women	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	69.1%	My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	67.7%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	16.5%	PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	14.3%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	13.7%	PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	14.3%

PP, which denies the existence of the Covid-19 pandemic	11.5%	PP urging people to get vaccinated	8.7%
PP urging people to get vaccinated	4.3%	PP, which denies the existence of the Covid-19 pandemic	7.5%
PP, which will introduce a lockdown	0.7%	PP, which will introduce a lockdown	2.5%

Source: Representative survey

Age

The most shared view among the people aged up to 50 years is that the pandemic is artificially caused (from 54.2% to 58.2%). Those, aged up to 30 (56.6%) and between 41 and 50 (47.9%) also think that the politicians neglect the need of elaborating a working communication strategy to interact with the society. The age group 31 – 40 focuses mostly on the origin of the pandemic and the existence of some kind of hidden plan someone to perform a medical experiment (54.5%) and to exercise control over people (53%). Respondents between 51 and 60 also think that the pandemic has an artificial origin (49.1%) but they also focus more on the possible solutions as 54.7% of them agree that the authorities need to borrow good practices from countries, which successfully deal with the pandemic. However, they also realize that the politicians do not seem to have a vision of how to handle the pandemic issues (49.1%). The respondents over 60 years old prioritize the personal responsibility of following the rules to protect each other's health (57.5%). They also support the vaccination and define it as successful countries with a high level of vaccination (56.3%), while being positive about the effect of vaccines although not sufficiently tested (51.3%) (Table 21).

Table 21. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in general and regarding the reactions of the authorities to dealing with it, which respondents rather agree with according to their age*

	Up to 30	
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	58.5%
Q4.13.	The politicians do n't have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one.	56.6%
Q4.7.	Vaccines against Covid-19 are uncertain and dangerous.	52.8%
	31 to 40	
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	57.6%
Q4.5.	The Covid-19 pandemic is a medical experiment.	54.5%
Q4.3.	The Covid-19 pandemic is being used for more control over people.	53.0%
	41 to 50	
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	54.2%
Q4.13.	The politicians don't have a communication strategy because they do not think they need one.	47.9%
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	47.9%
	51 to 60	
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	54.7%
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	49.1%
Q4.16.	It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic.	49.1%
	over 60	
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	57.5%
Q4.9.	People in countries like Portugal, Israel, Spain and others have done the right thing by getting vaccinated.	56.3%
Q4.4.	The Covid-19 vaccine, even if not sufficiently tested, will help stop the pandemic.	51.3%

Source: Representative survey

The measures, taken by the state during the start of the pandemic receive the highest assessment by the people aged 31 to 50 (from 3.58 to 3.76). The youngest respondents and those aged 51 to 60 give the highest evaluation to the third wave (3.38 and 3.72). These two groups coincide with the general tendency. However, the oldest respondents think that the state dealt best during the final wave of the pandemic in the spring of 2022 (4.16) (Table 22).

Table 22. *Average assessment on a scale from 2 to 6 of the measures taken by the authorities in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic in each wave according to the age of the respondents*

Age	Wave with the highest assessment	Assessment
up to 30	Third Wave (Spring 2021)	3.38
31 to 40	Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)	3.76
41 to 50	Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)	3.58
51 to 60	Third Wave (Spring 2021)	3.72
over 60	Fifth Wave (Early 2022)	4.16

Source: Representative survey

As concerns the support to a political party because of its position on Covid-19, there is almost no difference between the different age groups. All the respondents up to 60 years old declare in the first place that their preferences for a political party do not depend on its declarations concerning the pandemic. The percentage of people who support this view varies from 58.5% (51 to 60) to 72.9% (41 to 50). Alongside, in all these age groups there is a small share of people, who would support a political party, declaring to remove the Covid-19 measures or which declares itself against Covid-19 vaccination. As concerns, the people over 60 most of them also find irrelevant the Covid-19 positions of a political party for its support (73.8%). Nevertheless, some of them (12.5%) would give their support to a political party, which

urges people to get vaccinated, and another 8.8% declare preferences for a party, which denies the existence of the pandemic (Table 23).

Table 23. *Association between the support for a political party and its positions on the Covid-19 pandemic according to the age of the respondents*

Up to 30	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	71.7%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	15.1%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	11.3%
31 to 40	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	63.6%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	21.2%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	19.7%
41 to 50	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	72.9%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	16.7%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	12.5%
51 to 60	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	58.5%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	24.5%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	18.9%
over 60	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	73.8%
PP urging people to get vaccinated	12.5%
PP, which denies the existence of the Covid-19 pandemic	8.8%

Source: Representative survey

Education

The respondents with the lowest education level focus on the doubts surrounding (41.2%) the pandemic and the failures of governance, in particular the way they communicate with society (47.1%). Those, who graduated high school also do not skip the suspicions related to the

pandemic (50%). Alongside, they point out the good approach that politicians must follow, namely borrowing good practices (47.1%) and the responsibility of society to follow the recommendations in order to overcome health issues (45.1%). The respondents with a university education put in first place the responsibility of the government to borrow good practices (53.2%). Alongside, 46.8% agree that the politicians in Bulgaria do not have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic. In this group there is also a share of respondents that the pandemic is artificially caused (49.4%) (Table 24).

Table 24. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in general and regarding the reactions of the authorities to dealing with it, which respondents rather agree with according to their education*

Primary education or lower		
Q4.13.	The politicians do n't have a communication strategy because they do n't think they need one.	47.1%
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	41.2%
Q4.7.	Vaccines against Covid-19 are uncertain and dangerous.	41.2%
High school		
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	50.0%
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	47.1%
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	45.1%
University		
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	53.2%
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	49.4%
Q4.16.	It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic.	46.8%

Source: Representative survey

As concerns of authorities' performance in the different waves of the pandemic the least educated people give highest mark to the fifth wave, while the other two groups believe that the state's approach was the best during the first wave (Table 25).

Table 25. *Average assessment on a scale from 2 to 6 of the measures taken by the authorities in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic in each wave according to the education of the respondents*

Education	Wave with the highest assessment	Assessment
Primary education or lower	Fifth Wave (Early 2022)	3.59
High School	Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)	3.66
University	Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)	3.86

Source: Representative survey

In the group of people with primary or lower education there is a little controversy as concerns their support for a political party, based on the latter's positions about Covid-19 pandemic. Of course, the biggest share belongs to those whose political preferences do not depend on Covid-19 messages (82.4%). However, 11.8% would give a support to a party, which may urge people to get vaccinated. Alongside, another 5.9% would support the vice versa – a party, which declares itself against Covid-19 vaccination (Table 26).

Table 26. *Association between the support for a political party and its positions on the Covid-19 pandemic according to the education of the respondents*

Primary education or lower	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	82.4%
PP urging people to get vaccinated	11.8%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	5.9%
High school	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	69.4%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	14.6%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	14.1%
University	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	62.3%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	20.8%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	15.6%

Source: Representative survey

Work Experience

As concerns the work experience there is little variation across the demographic groups. The most agreed statements among the least experienced respondents ascertain the suspicions that the pandemic is artificially caused and utilized to control people as 47.1% of them think so. The same share of this group focuses on the weaknesses of politicians' communication with the society, namely the lack of communication strategy. The people with 1 to 5 years of experience are also suspicious about the origin of the pandemic (63.6%) and dissatisfied with the efforts in communicating the pandemic with society (72.7%). However, this group also focuses on the way of overcoming the situation, namely borrowing good practices (60.6%). Those with 6 – 10 years of experience seem the most distrustful as concerns the pandemic. 63.6% of them

believe in the artificial origin of the pandemic and are convinced that it was used for controlling people (49%). However, they are also suspicious about the vaccines, which they refer to as "dangerous" (57.1%). The respondents, working between 11 and 15 years repeat the mentioned suspicions and are not convinced that the politicians know what they are doing (50%). The latter is the most agreed position among the people with work experience of 16 – 20 years as 52% think so. They also find the political messages contradictory and confusing (52%). Similarly to the other groups, 48% of them agree that the pandemic is artificially caused. Only among the respondents with over 20 years of work experience, the latter is not among the top three agreed statements. They put on first place the personal responsibility as according to 54.7% of them, the people must follow the rules to preserve everyone's health. Furthermore, they focus on the good approach, which must be applied, namely the application of good practices borrowed from other countries (51.6%). They also support the vaccination against Covid-19 (46.1%) (Table 27).

Table 27. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in general and regarding the reactions of the authorities to dealing with it, which respondents rather agree with according to their work experience*

	Up to 1 year	
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	47.1%
Q4.3.	The Covid-19 pandemic is being used for more control over people.	47.1%
Q4.13.	The politicians don't have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one.	47.1%
	1 – 5 years	
Q4.13.	The politicians do not have a communication strategy because they do not think they need one.	72.7%
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	63.6%
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	60.6%

	6 – 10 years	
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	63.3%
Q4.7.	Vaccines against Covid-19 are uncertain and dangerous.	57.1%
Q4.3.	The Covid-19 pandemic is being used for more control over people.	49.0%
	11 – 15 years	
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	52.1%
Q4.3.	The Covid-19 pandemic is being used for more control over people.	52.1%
Q4.16.	It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic.	50.0%
	16 – 20 years	
Q4.16.	It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic.	52.0%
Q4.12.	The messages from politicians are contradictory and confusing, with the lack of unity creating mistrust and thwarting entrepreneurial initiative.	52.0%
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	48.0%
	over 20 years	
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	54.7%
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	51.6%
Q4.4.	The Covid-19 vaccine, even if not sufficiently tested, will help stop the pandemic.	46.1%

Source: Representative survey

There is some variety across the work experience demographic groups as concerns their assessment of the state's approach and success in the different waves of the pandemic. The least experienced employees give the highest assessment to the final fifth wave of the pandemic. Those, who have been employed from 1 to 10 years think that state did the best work during the first wave. The same opinion is shared by the respondents with 16-20 years of work experience. The second wave

receives the highest mark by the people, who have been employed between 11 and 15 years. The most experienced employees believe that during the fourth wave the performance of the state was the best one (Table 28).

Table 28. *Average assessment on a scale from 2 to 6 of the measures taken by the authorities in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic in each wave according to the work experience of the respondents*

Work Experience	Wave with highest assessment	Assessment
Up to 1 year	Fifth Wave (Early 2022)	3.41
1 – 5 years	Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)	3.48
6 – 10 years	Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)	3.63
11 – 15 years	Second Wave (Fall 2020)	3.90
16 – 20 years	Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)	4.08
over 20 years	Fourth Wave (Fall 2021)	3.84

Source: Representative survey

There are two statements supported by respondents from all work experience demographic groups. The first is that a political party's views on the pandemic are irrelevant for the respondent's political preferences (between 57.1% and 84%). In every group there is share of people, who would support a party, which stays against the Covid-19 vaccination (between 6.1% and 24.5%). Most of the groups also declare preference for a party, which will remove the restrictions, introduced because of the pandemic. These are the respondents with up to 1, 6 to 15, and over 20 years of work experience (between 12.5% and 26.5%). 12.1% of people, who have been working from 1 to 5 years and 8% of those with 16-20 years of work experience would support a party, which denies the existence of the Covid-19 pandemic (Table 29).

Table 29. *Association between the support for a political party and its positions on the Covid-19 pandemic according to the work experience of the respondents*

Up to 1 year	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	76.5%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	23.5%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	17.6%
1 – 5 years	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	78.8%
PP, which denies the existence of the Covid-19 pandemic	12.1%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	6.1%
6 – 10 years	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	57.1%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	26.5%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	24.5%
11 – 15 years	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	66.7%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	12.5%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	12.5%
16 – 20 years	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	84.0%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	12.0%
PP, which denies the existence of the Covid-19 pandemic	8.0%
over 20 years	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	66.4%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	14.8%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	13.3%

Source: Representative survey

Employment

People demonstrate a variety of preferences according to their type of employment. The employers, self-employed, and workers and employees in public administration/enterprise focus on the ways to overcome the pandemic. Both groups support the belief that Bulgarian authorities need to borrow good practices from other countries and that the people must follow the rules for health reasons. The employers and self employed also declare dissatisfaction with the lack of engagement with a communication strategy by the authorities (51.7%). 56% of workers and employees in private companies support the Covid-19 vaccination. Such opinion is also shared by 54.4% of the pensioners and no other employment group. Alongside, they declare support for nations with high vaccination rate (57.9%). Retirees also believes in following the rules for overcoming the pandemic (63.2%). The latter opinion is supported by two other employment groups, namely the people with free professions (50%) and housewifes (50%). 75% of the people from both groups also believe in the artificial origin of the pandemic. The latter opinion is supported by 61.5% of the unemployed. The same share of this groups is suspicious about the quality of the vaccines, while this opinion is shared by 75% of people, exercising free professions. Housewifes are the only ones, who think that the messages from politicians are contradictory and confusing, with the lack of unity creating mistrust and thwarting entrepreneurial initiative (75%) (Table 30).

Table 30. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in general and regarding the reactions of the authorities to dealing with it, which respondents rather agree with according to their employment*

Employer/Self-employed	
Q4.15. The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	72.4%
Q4.2. In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	55.2%
Q4.13. The politicians do not have a communication strategy because they do not think they need one.	51.7%
I exercise a free profession	
Q4.1. The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	75.0%
Q4.7. Vaccines against Covid-19 are uncertain and dangerous.	75.0%
Q4.2. In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	50.0%
Worker/Employee in a private company	
Q4.1. The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	59.1%
Q4.13. The politicians don't have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one.	50.0%
Q4.5. The Covid-19 pandemic is a medical experiment.	47.4%
Worker/Employee in public administration/enterprise	
Q4.15. The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	72.0%
Q4.2. In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	56.0%
Q4.6. It is important that people get vaccinated against Covid-19 to stop the spread of the disease.	56.0%
Student/Pupil	
Q4.7. Vaccines against Covid-19 are uncertain and dangerous.	61.5%
Q4.16. It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic.	53.8%
Q4.14. The politicians in Bulgaria are not learning from the countries that deal well with the pandemic.	53.8%

	Pensioner	
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	63.2%
Q4.9.	People in countries like Portugal, Israel, Spain and others have done the right thing by getting vaccinated.	57.9%
Q4.6.	It is important that people get vaccinated against Covid-19 to stop the spread of the disease.	54.4%
	Housewife	
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	75.0%
Q4.12.	The messages from politicians are contradictory and confusing, with the lack of unity creating mistrust and thwarting entrepreneurial initiative.	75.0%
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	50.0%
	I'm not working at the moment	
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	61.5%
Q4.13.	The politicians do not have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one.	61.5%
Q4.7.	Vaccines against Covid-19 are uncertain and dangerous.	61.5%

Source: Representative survey

The evaluation of state's efforts to deal with the pandemic receive different assessment from different employment categories. However, three groups can be identified. Employers, self employed and those, practicing free profession give highest evaluation to the second wave. The second group consists of workers and employee in public and private sectors, and the students and pupils. They believe that the approach during the third wave was the most successful one. The pensioners, housewifes and the unemployed are mostly satisfied with the results achieved by the state during the final fifth wave of the pandemic (Table 31).

Table 31. *Average assessment on a scale from 2 to 6 of the measures taken by the authorities in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic in each wave according to the emplyment of the respondents*

Employment	Wave with highest assessment	Assessment
Employer/Self-employed	Second Wave (Fall 2020)	3.62
I exercise a free profession	Second Wave (Fall 2020)	4.50
Worker/Employee in a private company	Third Wave (Spring 2021)	3.53
Worker/Employee in public administration/ enterprise	Third Wave (Spring 2021)	4.12
Student/Pupil	Third Wave (Spring 2021)	3.38
Pensioner	Fifth Wave (Early 2022)	4.28
Housewife	Fifth Wave (Early 2022)	3.75
I'm not working at the moment	Fifth Wave (Early 2022)	3.54

Source: Representative survey

All the employment groups on first place declare that their support for certain political party doesn not depend on party's messages concerning Covid-19. The exclusions from this principle are the same for almost all the groups, namely they would support a party, which declares itself against the Covid-19 vaccination and remove all the restrictions. The pensioners are the only who declare some support for parties, which denies the existence of the pandemic (7%) and urge people to get vaccinated (10.5%) (Table 32).

Table 32. *Association between the support for a political party and its positions on the Covid-19 pandemic according to the employment of the respondents*

Employer/Self-employed	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	65.5%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	24.1%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	17.2%
I exercise a free profession	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	50.0%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	25.0%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	25.0%
Worker/Employee in a private company	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	63.6%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	18.8%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	16.2%
Worker/Employee in public administration/enterprise	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	76.0%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	8.0%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	8.0%
Student/Pupil	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	76.9%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	23.1%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	15.4%
Pensioner	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	77.2%
PP urging people to get vaccinated	10.5%
PP, which denies the existence of the Covid-19 pandemic	7.0%
Housewife	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	100.0%
I'm not working at the moment	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	69.2%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	23.1%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	23.1%

Source: Representative survey

Position in the organization

Workers and employees seem most suspicious about the origin of the pandemic (60.2%) and declare distrust in the vaccination process (45.3%). They are also unhappy with politicians' approach and the lack of communication strategy (50%). The specialists also think that the pandemic is artificially caused (50%) and 66.7% agree that the politicians do not have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic. However, 52.8% of them identify the need for personal responsibility, believing that the rules must be followed to protect each other's health. The managers focus on steps, which need to be followed to overcome the pandemic as 71.4% of them think that the politicians must borrow good practices from countries, successfully dealing with the pandemic, but alongside they identify the problem with the lack of communication strategy (48.6%). They also believe that recommendations must be followed to overcome the health issues (60%). The support staff is suspicious about the Covid-19 vaccines (69.2%) and focuses on the weakness in the government communication (61.5%), while pointing the need for borrowing good practices (53.8%). The unemployed draw the attention to the personal responsibility by following the rules (50.0%) and the need for getting vaccinated (43.2%) as some of the countries did (46.6%) (Table 33).

Table 33. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in general and regarding the reactions of the authorities to dealing with it, which respondents rather agree with according to their position in the organization*

Worker/Employee		
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	60.2%
Q4.13.	The politicians don't have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one.	50.0%
Q4.7.	Vaccines against Covid-19 are uncertain and dangerous.	45.3%
Specialist		
Q4.16.	It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic.	66.7%
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	52.8%
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	50.0%
Manager		
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	71.4%
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	60.0%
Q4.13.	The politicians don't have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one.	48.6%
Support staff		
Q4.7.	Vaccines against Covid-19 are uncertain and dangerous.	69.2%
Q4.13.	The politicians don't have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one.	61.5%
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	53.8%
I'm not working at the moment		
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	50.0%
Q4.9.	People in countries like Portugal, Israel, Spain and others have done the right thing by getting vaccinated.	46.6%
Q4.4.	The Covid-19 vaccine, even if not sufficiently tested, will help stop the pandemic.	43.2%

Source: Representative survey

According to the position in the organization, most of the groups (specialists, managers, and support staff) give highest assessment of the state's performance to the second wave. Workers and employees are mostly satisfied with the authorities' approach during the third wave and as concerns the unemployed the approavel for fifth wave prevails (Table 34).

Table 34. *Average assessment on a scale from 2 to 6 of the measures taken by the authorities in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic in each wave according to the employment of the respondents*

Position in the organization	Wave with highest assessment	Assessment
Worker/Employee	Third Wave (Spring 2021)	3.63
Specialist	Second Wave (Fall 2020)	3.97
Manager	Second Wave (Fall 2020)	3.54
Support staff	Second Wave (Fall 2020)	3.38
I'm not working at the moment	Fifth Wave (Early 2022)	3.98

Source: Representative survey

The respondents from all the management level declare that their support for a certain political party does not depend on the party's oppionins on the Covid-19 pandemic. Alongside, in every demographic group there is a certain share of people, who would support a political party, which is against the Covid-19 vaccination (between 22.2% and 10.2%). A popular reason for political party support is also the intention of the party to remove all Covid-19 restrictions. This might be ground for support by the specialists (22.2%), managers (22.9%), support staff (15.45%) and the unemployed (8%). 14.8% of the workers and employees would support a party, which denies the existence of the Covid-19 pandemic (Table 35).

Table 35. *Association between the support for a political party and its positions on the Covid-19 pandemic according to the position in the organization of the respondents*

Worker/Employee	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	69.5%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	16.4%
PP, which denies the existence of the Covid-19 pandemic	14.8%
Specialist	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	47.2%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	22.2%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	22.2%
Manager	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	62.9%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	22.9%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	17.1%
Support staff	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	76.9%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	15.4%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	15.4%
I'm not working at the moment	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	76.1%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	10.2%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	8.0%

Source: Representative survey

Management Level

Top, middle, lower or operative management and the unemployed ones agree with the opinion that people must follow the rules to preserve everyone's health (between 57.1% and 50%). Top and lower managers as well as the workforce support the opinion that the authorities need to step on others' experience, which proved to be successful (between 68.6% and 44.4%). The lack of a communication strategy and its identification as a management weakness is indicated by the top managers (51.4%) and

workforce (56.5%). Dissatisfaction of the politicians' commitment to solving the crisis is declared by the middle management (60.7%) and lower or operational management (44.4%). Some of the groups agree to high extent with the statement on the artificial origin of the pandemic, namely the middle management (50%) and the workforce (59.5%). The unemployed support the need for getting vaccinated (43.2%) as some of the countries did (46.6%) (Table 36).

Table 36. *Support for the top three statements, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in general and regarding the reactions of the authorities to dealing with it, which respondents rather agree with according to their management level*

Top management		
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	68.6%
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	54.3%
Q4.13.	The politicians don't have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one.	51.4%
Middle management		
Q4.16.	It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic.	60.7%
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	57.1%
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	50.0%
Lower or operative management		
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	55.6%
Q4.16.	It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic.	44.4%
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	44.4%

Workforce		
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused.	59.5%
Q4.13.	The politicians don't have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one.	56.5%
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic.	48.9%
I'm not working at the moment		
Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health.	50.0%
Q4.9.	People in countries like Portugal, Israel, Spain and others have done the right thing by getting vaccinated.	46.6%
Q4.4.	The Covid-19 vaccine, even if not sufficiently tested, will help stop the pandemic.	43.2%

Source: Representative survey

There is a high level of variety across the management level groups as concerns their evaluation of the government' s approach in dealing with the pandemic. The top management and the workforce are mostly satisfied with the state's behavior during the beginning of the pandemic. The second wave' s approach is approved by the lower or operative managers. The middle management is pleased by the work of the authorities during the third wave. The final stage of the pandemic receives highest assessment by the unemployed (Table 37).

All the management level groups rather agree with two statements regarding the support for a political party based on its Covid-19 views. Of course, all of them on first place point out that a political party's position on Covid-19 is irrelevant for their support. However, all the groups also state that they would support a political party, which stands against the Covid-19 vaccination. Among the top managers there is a group, which declares preferences for a party, which will cancel the Covid-19 restrictions (22.9%). The same opinion is shared by 16% of the workforce and 8% of the unemployed. Some of the middle managers (25%) would support a party, which denies the existence of the pandemic. 16.7% of the

lower or operative management declare preference for a party, which will force people to get vaccinated (Table 38).

Table 37. *Average assessment on a scale from 2 to 6 of the measures taken by the authorities in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic in each wave according to the management level of the respondents*

Management Level	Wave with highest assessment	Assessment
Top management	Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)	3.63
Middle management	Third Wave (Spring 2021)	4.04
Lower or operative management	Second Wave (Fall 2020)	3.89
Workforce	Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)	3.64
I'm not working at the moment	Fifth Wave (Early 2022)	3.98

Source: Representative survey

Table 38. *Association between the support for a political party and its positions on the Covid-19 pandemic according to the management level of the respondents*

Top management	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	62.9%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	22.9%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	20.0%
Middle management	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	35.7%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	32.1%
PP, which denies the existence of the Covid-19 pandemic	25.0%
Lower or operative management	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	66.7%
PP urging people to get vaccinated	16.7%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	11.1%

Workforce	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	71.8%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	16.0%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	14.5%
I'm not working at the moment	
My support for PP has nothing to do with the Covid-19 pandemic	76.1%
PP, which declares itself against vaccination against Covid-19	10.2%
PP, which will remove all restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic	8.0%

Source: Representative survey

None of the demographics is relevant to the political party support, based on its messages on Covid-19. However, there are four demographic indicators, which are associated with the other two studied variables. These are (Table 39):

- Age
- Work experience
- Position in the organization
- Education

The age is the most significant demographic characteristic for the variables, related to the socio-political environment and entrepreneurship. It is relevant to sixteen variables, where statistically significant associations are idenfied. It is relevant both for statements on the pandemic in general and the evaluation of the state's performance during the different pandemic waves (Table 39).

Work experience positively associate with 14 variables; thus, they are the second most important demographic indicator. After the first two comes the position in the organization, which is relevant to ten of the variables. The eduation as a demographic characteristic associated positively with only three statements (Table 39).

Table 39. *Statistically significant associations between the socio-political environment and entrepreneurship on one hand and the demographic indicators*

	Variable 1	Variable 2	Coefficient of significance (sig)
Q4.1.	The Covid-19 pandemic is artificially caused	Age	0,000
		Work Experience	0,002
		Position in the organization	0,003
Q4.10.	People in Bulgaria have done the right thing by not getting vaccinated	Age	0,000
		Work Experience	0,005
		Position in the organization	0,032
Q4.11.	Bulgarian politicians didn't care at all about the citizens during the pandemic	Work Experience	0,047
Q4.12.	The messages from politicians are contradictory and confusing, with the lack of unity creating mistrust and thwarting entrepreneurial initiative	Work Experience	0,009
Q4.13.	The politicians don't have a communication strategy because they don't think they need one	Age	0,028
		Work Experience	0,001
Q4.15.	The politicians in Bulgaria should borrow good practices from countries that deal well with the pandemic	Education	0,024
		Work Experience	0,023
Q4.16.	It does not seem that the politicians in Bulgaria have a clear vision of how to deal with the pandemic	Position in the organization	0,010
Q4.17.	In managing the pandemic, politicians are focusing more on public health and less on business concerns	Position in the organization	0,041
Q4.18.	In managing the pandemic, politicians are focusing more on business concerns and less on public health	Education	0,037
		Position in the organization	0,038

Q4.2.	In a pandemic, people must follow the rules in order to preserve everyone's health	Age	0,041
		Work Experience	0,033
		Position in the organization	0,005
Q4.3.	The Covid-19 pandemic is being used for more control over people	Age	0,006
Q4.4.	The Covid-19 vaccine, even if not sufficiently tested, will help stop the pandemic	Age	0,001
		Work Experience	0,001
Q4.5.	The Covid-19 pandemic is a medical experiment	Age	0,002
		Work Experience	0,020
Q4.6.	It is important that people get vaccinated against Covid-19 to stop the spread of the disease	Age	0,000
		Work Experience	0,016
Q4.7.	Vaccines against Covid-19 are uncertain and dangerous	Age	0,000
		Work Experience	0,002
		Position in the organization	0,014
Q4.8.	People must protest against any Covid-19 measures to protect their freedom	Age	0,000
		Work Experience	0,000
		Position in the organization	0,016
Q4.9.	People in countries like Portugal, Israel, Spain and others have done the right thing by getting vaccinated	Age	0,000
		Work Experience	0,008
Q5.1.	Pandemic start, first wave (March-June 2020)	Age	0,034
		Education	0,036
Q5.2.	Second Wave (Fall 2020)	Age	0,004
		Position in the organization	0,009
Q5.3.	Third Wave (Spring 2021)	Age	0,021
Q5.4.	Fourth Wave (Fall 2021)	Age	0,001
		Work Experience	0,028
Q5.5.	Fifth Wave (Early 2022)	Age	0,000
		Position in the organization	0,024

Source: Representative survey

3.2. QUALITATIVE OUTPUT[4]

Asking managers and experts about their assessments of the Bulgarian government's response and suggested countermeasures for business during the pandemic was the goal of this part of data collection. The interviews attempted to confirm the proposed theories while also looking for changes and new ideas that might have an impact on how the construct develops. The main goal of this research phase was to compare managers' and experts' real-world expertise and experience with the mainly theoretical and literature-based conceptualization of economic and social strategies.

In this phase of the research participated 14 business owners who were chosen randomly from a convenience sample of SMEs with registered headquarters in the Bulgarian city of Plovdiv. It took some months to convince the top management to cooperate and complete the research because no such study had ever been done across the companies. Based on our closest professional connections, we chose a potential pool of 20 companies to approach for interviews. From April 2022 to June 2022, all the interviewees were contacted; 14 of them consented to be interviewed. Five of the interviews were done via online video conference, while nine were done at the manager's place of work. There were 64% male managers and 36% female. They all hold master's degree.

3.2.1. The Government's Concern for the Issues Facing Businesses

More than 80% of the business owners believe that Bulgarian lawmakers lack a clear strategy for dealing with the pandemic. According to the interviewees, the nation should adopt successful international pandemic management strategies. The findings indicate that

[4] The qualitative output was presented at XX Jubilee International Congress "Machines. Technologies. Materials", Winter Session, 08-11.03.2023, Borovets, Bulgaria.

most business owners have little faith in the government's ability to develop and carry out a sound plan for handling emergencies.

93% of respondents think the Bulgarian government's marketing tactics are inadequate. The lawmakers' messages are ambiguous and contradictory, and when combined with a lack of cooperation, they create distrust and sabotage for the entrepreneurial initiative. Experts in political management and communication must develop and implement the communication plan, but this is not the case in Bulgaria. Politicians are concentrating more on public health in managing the pandemic and less on business concerns that give the impression that their problems are underappreciated.

3.2.2. Evaluation of the State's Pandemic-Fighting Initiatives

We gave managers a comprehensive list of all the policies the government has put in place to support entrepreneurship during the pandemic. The results show that all the interviewees benefited of some of the introduced measures. Most of them (86%) benefited of the "60/40 Program" to retain their staff. The second-highest rated measure was "Support for medium-sized businesses to overcome the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic under the Operational Program 'Innovation and Competitiveness'". Additionally, they represent several opportunities made possible by the "Competitiveness and Innovations in Enterprises" program, which calls for the continuation of support for the nation's micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises through scientific research and the implementation of innovative production methods. This is a useful point for establishing communication between commercial and academic organizations and for taking part in collaborative projects and research.

All business owners took advantage of the "Preferential crediting steps" to reduce loss during the pandemic. They think that those who have weathered such severe crises will benefit more from the cyclical nature of business and economic processes, leading to more opportunities and growth.

Respondents were requested to offer their own suggestions for governmental policies in an open-ended question. The most suggested measure is providing direct financial aid to businesses. The pertinent laws are then changed, and it is forbidden to meddle in business decisions after that.

3.2.3. Suggestions for the Government's Future "Action Plan"

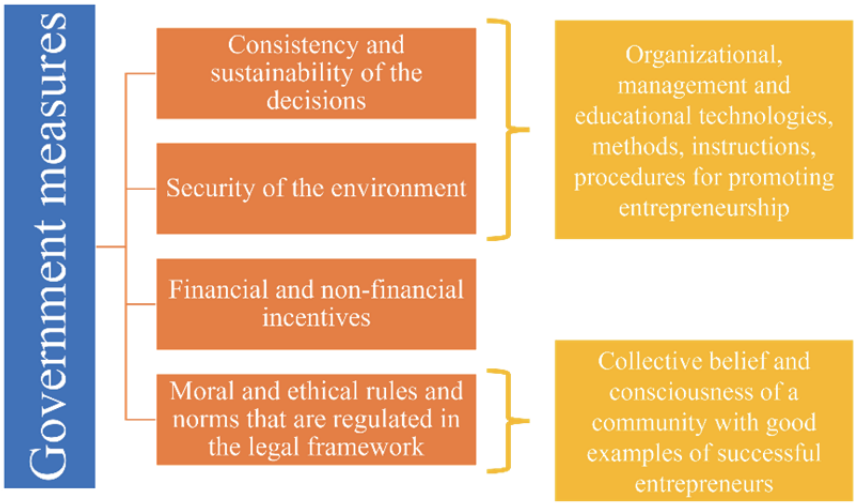
Entrepreneurs believe that a well-chosen policy will encourage entrepreneurial initiative, inspire entrepreneurs, and boost institutional confidence, among other positive effects. Entrepreneurs' perceptions of the national government's dedication to addressing the pandemic and business issues have an impact on the level of confidence. All the respondents are strongly in favor of the adoption of new machinery, tools, and technology and are taking part in various financing initiatives. All the participants state that the regulatory mechanisms of the institutions are not well developed and "Bulgarian institutions are an obstacle not a supporter for the growth of business initiatives".

Numerous studies evaluate how managerial efforts in innovation activities are launched as a result of entrepreneurial skills. The managerial skills and abilities, as well as their initiative, teamwork, and communication skills, are at the highest degree of value. The capacity to work in a team, proactivity, leadership, and strategic planning skills are among the most important traits of entrepreneurs who have been interviewed. However, additional strategies, such as focused instruction, must be used to encourage entrepreneurship. The results of the interviews, which included ideas like shared struggle, strategic planning, and motivated employees, however, seemed to describe ideas aside from work expectations and job duties. Instead, the focus should be on cooperation and assistance among teammates. When compared to more direct questions like depending on the organization and the government for support, accessing cohesion through work expectations and job duties may be too indirect.

There was a discussion of several question which focus on broad risk-taking and innovation instead of shifting to seek or create new opportunities during a pandemic. These innovative and risk-taking concepts seemed overly general and unrelated to the meant idea of opportunity-driven innovation and change. These might be associated with innovation and change, but they might also stand for philosophically distinct concepts.

The definition of developing entrepreneurship in the context of Industry 4.0 includes a wide range of technological solutions and business models that contribute to qualitatively new forms of economic activity. It is a component of the application of new digital technologies in the production sector. Enterprise staffing will become inextricably linked to the collaboration between entrepreneurs and specific research organizations and universities. Scheme 1 shows the results of the entrepreneurs' recommended actions in summary form.

Scheme 1. *Suggested government measures by entrepreneurs*



Source: Own interpretation

CONCLUSIONS

The empirical study with citizens of Plovdiv, performed for the purposes of the current project confirmed that the entrepreneurial culture of the Bulgarian society needs a further development. Our main goal is achieved as we identified the attitudes toward entrepreneurial initiatives in Bulgaria and how Covid-19 pandemic affected it. In fact, the effect of the pandemic was too little for the society, but it resulted in demotivating the entrepreneurial initiative of people, who are more hesitant, prone to insecutiry, but would start their own business. For example, 38.5% of the unemployed declare that they had plans to start their own business but gave it up because of the pandemic.

Our main hypothesis is to high extent confirmed because the answers of the respondents show that they prefer the security of their income, although not very high. It is evident that the entrepreneurship is related to some types of risks, but most of the people do not know about the possibility of risk management or how to do it. Thus, the entrepreneurial initiative in Bulgaria is to some extent hampered by this search for risk-free existence.

Such results lead us to conclusion that the personal characteristics of the people are to high extent relevant to entrepreneurial initiative. The respondents themselves admit that a top prerequisite for the entrepreneurial initiative are some personal qualities such as innovativeness and the ability of a person to use niche markets that are created or liberated because of the pandemic. Another confirmation to this finding is that the respondents in managerial positions are more likely to focus on the solutions to the problems rather than noting the problems or focusing on the supposed causes or source of the pandemic. But not only the position is relevant for such pragmatic point of view. The latter is shared also by the older respondents and those with more work experience. Thus, the experience accumulated during the ages can be shared and the youth need to be

encouraged to act as they are young, and not to expect them to become more enterprising and confident as the years go by.

As concerns the role of the state, it is evident that the Bulgarian authorities did not manage well to deal with it. Both the measures and the way of communication with the society were not highly assessed by the respondents. The traditional distrust of the Bulgarians towards the institutions was boosted by the inadequacy of their approach to deal with the pandemic.

The conclusion gives ground to suggest that the authorities need to focus more energy and resources in the following areas:

1) More precise identification of the needs of various stakeholders in times of crises;
2) More sophisticated analysis of the good practices of countries, which deals successfully with crises;
3) Developing entrepreneurial culture across the society from school age in order to create some basic knowledge and increase the levels of confidence across the youth to become entrepreneurs;
4) More direct financial support.

The current research gives ground to make a further study on the following topics:

1) Identifying more factors to hinder the entrepreneurial initiative by performing a wide range of in-depth interviews;
2) Examining an analysis of the governments' approaches in supporting entrepreneurship in other countries with characteristics similar to Bulgaria;
3) Studying the entrepreneurial initiative by performing a nationally representative survey.

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