

NEW GEM REPORT: ENTREPRENEURS ARE ADVANCING SUSTAINABILITY, POLICYMAKERS CAN HELP ADDRESS GAPS

The GEM Report explores how all entrepreneurs—not just social ones—address sustainability, blending profit goals with social and environmental impact.

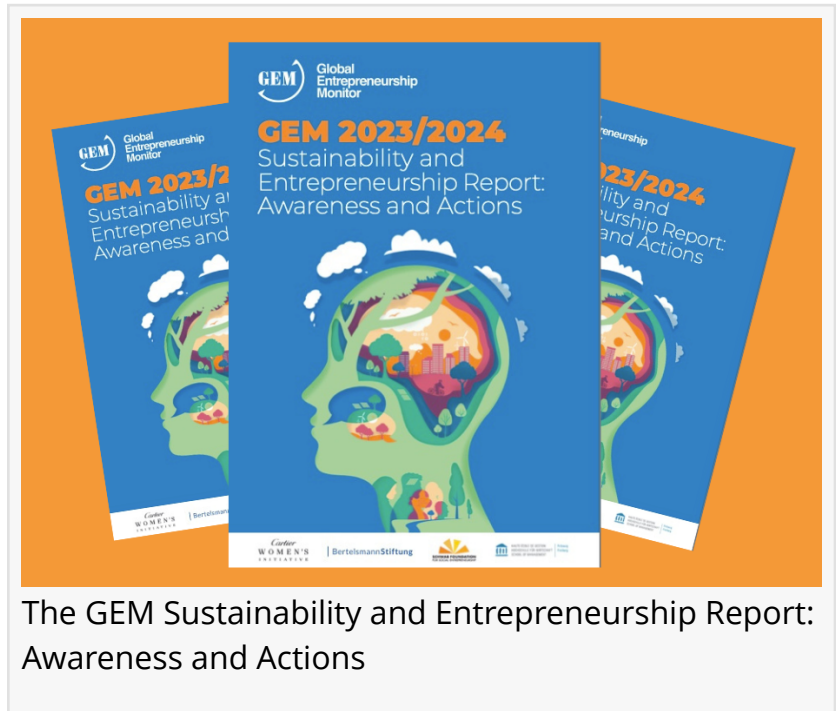
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Entrepreneurs worldwide are increasingly motivated by social and environmental concerns. While awareness of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is inconsistent globally, this does not prevent entrepreneurs from taking action. However, awareness of the UN SDGs is an indicator for more strategic approaches to integrating sustainability. These are among the findings highlighted in the [first-ever Global Entrepreneurship Monitor \(GEM\) report](#) dedicated to sustainability.

Much has been researched and written about social entrepreneurship, which prioritises reinvesting profits to achieve social or environmental objectives rather than solely maximising financial gain. The GEM Sustainability and Entrepreneurship Report: Awareness and Actions focuses on all entrepreneurs, thus including those operating in the more traditional, profit-driven mainstream.

GEM data show the proportion of adults in each participating economy who were starting or running a new business, or owning an established business, and met four key sustainability criteria. These so called “sustainable entrepreneurs” have:

1. a motivation to make a difference in the world;



The GEM Sustainability and Entrepreneurship Report: Awareness and Actions

2. taken action to promote sustainability in their business in the past 12 months;
3. built sustainability into their long-term business strategy; and
4. prioritised sustainability over profitability or growth.

Based on more than 150,000 annual interviews, the proportions of adults who were new entrepreneurs and fulfilled all four criteria were highly variable, ranging from an average of 15% in Guatemala to less than 1% in Kazakhstan. In many economies (29 out of 62), fewer than 2% of adults were starting or running a new business while meeting all four criteria.

At least 20% of new entrepreneurs met all four sustainability conditions in 34 of the 62 economies that participated in the GEM Adult Population Survey in at least one year between 2021 and 2023. For established business owners (those in business for 42 months or longer), at least 25% met all four sustainability conditions in 21 of 62 economies.

Integrating sustainability into strategic thinking

The GEM research examined whether those starting or running a new business and those running an established business are incorporating sustainability into their strategic decision-making.

The percentage of new entrepreneurs taking social impacts into account when making strategic decisions exceeded 70% in 42 of 62 economies. Entrepreneurs in high-income economies, especially those in Europe, were generally less likely to agree they take social and environmental implications into account in their longer-term strategic thinking, while entrepreneurs in the Latin America & Caribbean region were more likely to agree.

Entrepreneurs' awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

GEM data reveal that entrepreneurs who are aware of the SDGs tend to use these defined goals as a benchmark when setting priorities for their own business. However, awareness of the SDGs among entrepreneurs was at best fragmented across geographies and income groups. On average for 2021–2023, at least one in four new entrepreneurs reported that they are aware of the SDGs in 17 out of 23 Level A (high-income) economies compared to four out of 13 Level B (middle-income) economies and no Level C (low-income) economies.

According to the report, early-stage entrepreneurs who are aware of the SDGs may be better placed to identify new business opportunities and more incentivised to prioritise their businesses' social and environmental impacts above profitability or growth.

Policy implications

High percentages of entrepreneurs indicated that changing the world for the better is a key motivation for them. The report underscores the role of policymakers in fostering purpose-driven entrepreneurship.

“The world urgently requires entrepreneurs that create viable market solutions to our greatest sustainability challenges while avoiding the creation of long-term social and environmental liabilities,” said Aileen Ionescu-Somers, GEM Executive Director and a report co-author. “Through this timely report, GEM offers insights that enable policymakers to assess the extent to which a positive relationship between entrepreneurship and sustainability exists. With this understanding, they can make better-informed and actionable policy decisions.”

Niels Bosma, a member of the GEM-GERA Board and a report co-author, added: “Currently, there is a risk that policymakers are concentrating SDG investment efforts on large firms. Visionary policymakers should promote a sustainability mindset among entrepreneurs at all stages of business development and establish mechanisms to empower innovative solutions addressing local sustainability challenges, potentially driving significant impact.”

In addition to Ionescu-Somers and Bosma, Stephen Hill is the lead author. Also contributing to the report are members of several GEM National Teams:

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[Access the report.](#)

About GEM

[Global Entrepreneurship Monitor \(GEM\)](#) is a consortium of national country teams, primarily associated with top academic institutions, that carries out survey-based research on entrepreneurship around the world. GEM is the only global research source that collects data on entrepreneurship directly from individual entrepreneurs! GEM's Adult Population Survey (APS) provides analysis on the characteristics, motivations and ambitions of individuals starting businesses, as well as social attitudes towards entrepreneurship. The National Expert Survey (NES) looks at the national context in which individuals start businesses.

In numbers, GEM is:

- 26 years of data
- 150,000+ interviews a year
- 120+ economies
- 370+ specialists in entrepreneurship research

- 150+ academic and research institutions
- 150+ funding institutions

GEM began in 1999 as a joint project between Babson College (USA) and London Business School (UK). The consortium has become the richest resource of information on entrepreneurship, publishing a range of global, national and 'special topic' reports on an annual basis. More information is at www.gemconsortium.org.

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