

Dependent Self-Employment in Slovakia – Opportunity or Necessity?

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Abstract

Recently, the European labour market has witnessed a shift in work structures, notably with self-employed individuals without employees. Many of these individuals are performing self-employment involuntarily, aiming for stable full-time employment. Due to insufficient income, instability, limited career prospects, and inadequate access to social protection, they are dissatisfied with their self-employed status. This dissatisfaction could potentially affect their overall job satisfaction and performance. The goal of this study, conducted on the basis of original primary survey among self-employed persons in Slovakia in 2022, is to explore the motivations influencing self-employment. Specifically, the research aims to examine the initial driving factors behind self-employment among 306 individuals, categorized into 194 traditional independent self-employed and 112 economically dependent self-employed persons. Results indicate that among economically dependent self-employed persons, necessity-driven motives prevail, particularly necessity to enter family business, job loss, and employer-induced self-employment. For traditional independent self-employed persons, opportunity-driven motives predominate, notably pursuit of better working conditions, desire for independence, and efforts to earn more.

Keywords

Self-employment, traditional independent self-employed persons, economically dependent self-employed persons, business motivation, opportunity-driven self-employment, necessity-driven self-employment

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of businesses owned individually, largely attributed to advancements in technology and the impact of globalization. This transition has underscored the rising significance of knowledge as a crucial factor in production, surpassing

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the importance traditionally given to capital. This shift has notably created new opportunities for small and micro enterprises. Alongside this increase in individually owned business across various countries, there has been a significantly growing trend towards self-employment.

Scholars and researchers highlight the crucial role of self-employment and entrepreneurship in driving economic development across nations, regions, and labor markets. Various initiatives like the Observatory of European Small and Medium Enterprises, the European Council for Small Business, and Eurobarometer underline policymakers' recognition of self-employed persons' significance in communities, emphasizing support frameworks for existing and prospective entrepreneurs.

A broad distinction often drawn in self-employment is between ventures born out of necessity and those arising from opportunity. Opportunity-driven self-employment typically begins after recognizing a viable business opportunity, while necessity-driven self-employment stems from the lack of viable alternative employment. While necessity-driven self-employed persons yield considerably lower turnovers compared to their opportunity-driven counterparts, their annual revenue, on average, is adequate for sustaining livelihoods (Van Stel and De Vries, 2015).

The objective of this study is to investigate the motivations behind entrepreneurial decisions among self-employed individuals in Slovakia, differentiating between traditional independent self-employed persons and economically dependent self-employed persons. The research aims to discern the primary drivers behind these distinct forms of self-employment, identifying whether necessity-driven or opportunity-driven motives prevail. Additionally, it seeks to analyse the correlation between these motives and the type of self-employment pursued, evaluating the impact on job satisfaction, particularly focusing on the lower job satisfaction observed among economically dependent self-employed individuals motivated by necessity. The study also intends to assess the repercussions of these motivations on job satisfaction, essentially aiming to fill the gap in understanding how these motives affect overall satisfaction levels. The study is divided into five parts, namely literature review, methodological part, results, discussion, and conclusion.

1 LITERATURE SURVEY

From the perspective of self-employment as an opportunity space, researchers emphasize its positive attributes, including autonomy in decision-making, freedom to choose tasks, flexibility in scheduling, and skill development (Verheul et al., 2002; Prottas and Thompson, 2006; Meager, 2015). There exist various narrower definitions based on specific criteria. For instance, De Vries et al. (2013) define self-employed as persons that offer only their labor (knowledge and skills) rather than goods. Another criterion, proposed by Rapelli (2012: 11), confines self-employed persons to service or intellectual activities, excluding farming, craft, or retail sectors, categorizing this group as 'I-pros' (independent professionals).

However, despite numerous studies exploring the positive outcomes for waged employees, there remains limited understanding regarding the subjective well-being (SWB) of self-employed individuals (Dolinsky and Caputo, 2003; Sevä et al., 2016 a, b). Findings from Blanchflower (2004), Benz and Frey (2008), Sevä et al. (2016 a, b), and Andersson (2008) have established a definite correlation between self-employment and SWB.

While the literature acknowledges that self-employment positively influences job satisfaction, its effects on other life domains and overall life satisfaction remain less clarified. Researchers have focused on overall life satisfaction and various domain satisfactions among self-employed individuals. Binder and Coad (2016) discovered that voluntary ('opportunity' or pull) self-employment yielded positive benefits beyond work satisfaction, leading to higher overall life satisfaction and increased health satisfaction in the initial three years of self-employment. However, individuals forced into self-employment ('necessity' or push) due to unemployment experience no such advantages. Moreover, both types of self-employments tend to result in growing dissatisfaction with leisure time. Although high work satisfaction among

the self-employed is often interpreted as greater happiness, the evidence supporting the relationship between self-employment and happiness is notably mixed and weaker than that for work satisfaction alone.

Self-employed persons constitute a highly heterogeneous labor force with varying productivity levels. Highly skilled freelancers on one end of the spectrum provide professional services, fostering innovation, flexibility, and resilience for businesses (Burke, 2012). Conversely, less productive economically dependent self-employed individuals, lacking alternative employment options, exhibit weak entrepreneurial potential (Van Stel and De Vries, 2015). Specific subset of self-employed persons are solopreneurs, it means self-employed without employees (Pilková, 2019; Stam and Van de Vrande, 2017; Waas, 2017). Literature also refers them as freelancers (Huđek, Tominc and Širec, 2020; Hussenot and Sergi, 2018), home-based business owners (Stam and Van de Vrande, 2017; Reuschke, Clifton and Fisher, 2021), or own-account self-employed persons (Petrescu, 2016; Van Stel and De Vries, 2015). According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Bosma and Kelley, 2018), a solopreneur operates independently without co-founders or employees and does not seek to employ others. This definition aligns closely with the widely accepted notion of solopreneurship, particularly as emphasized by the European Union's distinction (European Commission, 2005), where the key differentiator for solopreneurs from other Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) lies in their lack of responsibility for additional employees.

The decision to embark on self-employment is undoubtedly a complex one that not only impacts the aspiring self-employed persons but also significantly affects close family members, their way of life, and financial security. Simoes and Crespo (2016) comprehensively reviewed studies exploring motivational factors driving individuals toward self-employment. They summarized 12 critical entry factors into self-employment, categorizing them into seven groups: 1. individuals' background characteristics (age, gender, marital status, and children); 2. family background (parents, partners); 3. personal characteristics (mainly psychological attributes like self-esteem, optimism, risk attitude, and emotional stability); 4. human capital (education, experience); 5. health status; 6. nationality and ethnicity; 7. access to finance. The authors note that while certain factors yield clear conclusions regarding their significance based on prior research, most require further study to establish their importance definitively.

In entrepreneurial theory, a pivotal aspect is the motivation propelling business initiation, which significantly influences the quality of self-employment activities. Previous research scrutinized whether the motive driving self-employment is opportunity-based or out of necessity. Paul Reynolds, credited as the father of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, highlighted these two fundamental motive types in a 2001 report (Van Stel et al., 2003). Nevertheless, as highlighted by De Vries et al. (2013), the research literature still lacks comprehensive coverage of the diverse range of motives inspiring individuals to become self-employed. Addressing this shortfall, their study examines 3 hypotheses: 1. whether self-employed persons driven by necessity as their initial motive exhibit less resilience than those propelled by opportunity; 2. what is the impact of formal education on the performance of self-employed persons categorized by motive (opportunity-driven and necessity-driven); 3. what is the impact of on-the-job training on the performance of self-employment, segmented by motive (necessity and opportunity).

While their research partially confirms Hypothesis 1, indicating differences between the two groups of self-employed persons, they conclude that these distinctions aren't substantial enough for policymakers to influence the trend of self-employment activities. Similarly, the discernible impact of human capital remains inconclusive, necessitating further investigation. Recommendations include exploring the innovativeness and growth aspirations of self-employment. However, these suggestions bear limitations, especially considering that more innovative and growth-oriented self-employed persons may tend to recruit partners, thereby transitioning away from the category of solopreneurs.

To explore the self-employment as an opportunity, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a framework for studying human motivation and personality, analysing their roles in cognitive and social development. It concentrates on social and contextual factors influencing individuals' well-being,

performance, and overall initiative. The theory posits three universal factors affecting individual motivation, performance, and well-being: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2000; Deci and Ryan, 2000). Autonomy pertains to self-regulated actions, independence, and self-organization. Competence involves deriving satisfaction and outcomes from activities, evolving, and obtaining desired benefits. Relatedness directs on the need for interpersonal connections, mutual interaction, sharing, altruism, and social well-being.

Research underscores differences between own-account self-employed persons (Petrescu, 2016; Van Stel and De Vries, 2015) and those with additional employees concerning their subjective well-being (SWB), job satisfaction, and work-family conflict (Binder and Coad, 2013; Bunk et al., 2012; Sevä et al., 2016 b; Stephan and Roesler, 2010). Mixed research results exist regarding the relationship between self-employment and happiness or life satisfaction. Some studies show significant effects for specific groups, highlighting the heterogeneity within this category (Binder and Coad, 2013). Certain studies suggest that self-employed individuals with employees report higher life satisfaction compared to regular employees, while those without employees show less satisfaction and enthusiasm for business development and growth (Sevä et al., 2016 b). Additionally, Petrescu (2016) revealed that self-employed persons with employees reported higher happiness levels than those who work alone. These variations could be due to waged employees not experiencing the same degree of freedom and autonomy as self-employed individuals with employees, which significantly influences overall job satisfaction (Lange, 2012).

Overall, it appears that self-employment enhances the well-being of individuals only when chosen voluntarily, fulfilling thus their need for autonomy (Deci and Ryan, 2000). However, when unemployed individuals are forced into self-employment by necessity, the anticipated benefits may not materialize. While self-employment can serve as an escape from unemployment, policymakers should recognize that those pushed into it may not reach independency and the same benefits as a comparison group of regular employees.

The trend of self-employment is expected to expand due to emerging gig economy models, the sharing economy, and project-based labor approaches. In the European Union, statistics from 2016 indicated that 40% of self-employed individuals without employees held managerial, professional, or technical roles (Eurostat, 2017). While entrepreneurial activities within independent self-employment (possibly also with employees) remain relatively stable, the rising percentage of dependent self-employment is driving the upward dynamics (Pilková et al., 2019: 32).

A subset of necessity-based (push) self-employed persons comprises dependent self-employed workers, who execute the same tasks for their client firms as they did previously when employed (Dvoutěý and Nikulin, 2023). Their job responsibilities remain largely unchanged, yet their employment protection is lower than when they were employees. Additionally, client firms (former employers) benefit by not having to contribute to their social security obligations (Román et al., 2011), and by avoiding complicated process of employment contract termination (Brodie, 2005; Román et al., 2011).

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor findings in 2018 (Bosma and Kelley, 2018), dependent self-employment among Slovaks typically exhibits the following characteristics:

- Entrepreneurs predominantly enter self-employment due to necessity, reflected in a notably low motivation index. This type of entrepreneurship appeals more to older age groups, particularly those aged 45 and above, as well as seniors aged 55 and older;
- It is a more favourable choice for women compared to men;
- Regarding education, dependent self-employment tends to be favoured by individuals with secondary and post-secondary education;
- Their perception of entrepreneurs and their social attitudes towards entrepreneurial status are more positive. However, they display lower confidence levels and exhibit more fear of failure;
- Aspirations for innovation and international orientation among Slovak dependent self-employed persons are lower compared to early-stage entrepreneurs.

2 DEPENDENT SELF-EMPLOYMENT IN SLOVAKIA

Existing analyses and findings (Analýza vybraných aspektov podnikania, 2020) indicate that official data on the number of self-employed individuals fail to acknowledge the phenomenon of dependent self-employment, which is quite frequent in Slovakia. This involves individuals formally appearing as solopreneurs (usually traders) but, in reality, performing tasks that meet the criteria of dependent employment defined in Act No 311/2001 Coll. the Labour Code (i.e., an employer-employee relationship characterized by employer superiority, employee subordination, work conducted as per employer directives, on behalf of the employer, and within employer-determined working hours).

This concept, known as bogus/false self-employment (Thörnquist, 2015; Heyes and Hastings, 2017) or the the 'švarcsystem,' is named after Czech entrepreneur Miroslav Švarc, who was among the first to significantly utilize the services of self-employed individuals instead of hiring employees (Myant, 2013; Schneider and Kearney, 2013). Although subsequently prohibited, the term is still used today to describe the type of dependent work performed by formally independent self-employed persons.

Despite displaying characteristics of dependent employment, the work conducted under this system lacks an employment relationship based on an employment contract between the contracting party and the performing party. Instead, it constitutes a commercial-legal association designed to optimize tax treatment for both involved parties. The 'švarcsystem' prevails notably in the construction industry (Kösters and Smits, 2021; Nikulin, 2021) but is also observable in other sectors (Kirk, 2020; Turnbull, 2020; Gruber-Risak, 2021).

The only official source of data on the size and structure of the labour force is the Labour Force Survey, which is the largest household survey in Europe. It provides quarterly and annual information on persons aged 15 and over. The content of its ad-hoc module for 2017 was to obtain key insights on the self-employed and those with ambiguous occupational status, in addition to knowledge of background variables. One of its main purposes was to estimate the number of dependent self-employed.

According to the operational definition adopted by Eurostat, economically dependent self-employed defined as self-employed without employees who worked during the last 12 months before the reference week of the survey for only one client or for a dominant client and this client decides about his/her working hours. In terms of the LFS ad-hoc variables, economically dependent self-employed persons are those who are self-employed without employees with only one or one dominant client who decides his/hers working hours (Eurostat, 2018: 97).

The results of the ad-hoc survey indicate that only a small percentage of the self-employed are classified in the category of dependent self-employed (as defined above). At EU level, the dependent self-employed amount to 3.5% of the self-employed and 0.5% of the total employment. The share of dependent self-employed exceeds 1% of the total employment only in two countries (Slovakia and the United Kingdom – see last column of Table 1). This very low share creates problems concerning the analysis of the results (it is worth noting that the estimated number of dependent self-employed is below the publication threshold in 7 countries) (Eurostat, 2018).

The results of the 2017 ad-hoc module show that Slovakia has the highest share of economically dependent self-employed persons among the EU28 countries (9.9%), followed by Cyprus (7.5%) and the United Kingdom (6.8%). The above-mentioned results are documented in the penultimate column of Table 1.

At the EU level, the percentage of self-employed with one (or one dominant) client is about 17% of the total self-employed and ranges from 8% in Croatia to 33% in Slovakia. The main reason for the low percentage of dependent self-employed is the fact that the number of self-employed who reports that their clients decide their working time is small (Eurostat, 2018).

Table 1 Employed persons by professional status (in thousand persons)

| Working status | Employed persons | Employees | Self-employed persons | Self-employed persons with employees (employers) | Self-employed persons without employees (own-account workers) | Independent self-employed without employees (own-account workers) | Dependent self-employed without employees (own-account workers) | Self-employed without employees (own-account workers), dependency not known | Contributing family workers | No response | % of dependent self-employed over self-employed | % of dependent self-employed over employed |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------------------|--|---|---|---|---|-----------------------------|-------------|---|--|
| EU-28 countries (2013–2020) | 227 457.1 | 192 131.2 | 32 837.2 | 9 286.8 | 23 550.4 | 21 939.3 | 1 124.8 | 486.4 | 2 436.3 | 52.4 | 3.43 | 0.49 |
| Belgium | 4 627.5 | 3 963.5 | 630.4 | 195.5 | 434.9 | 425.0 | 9.4 | : | 33.6 | : | 1.49 | 0.20 |
| Bulgaria | 3 147.2 | 2 773.6 | 352.1 | 113.7 | 238.4 | 229.8 | : | : | 21.5 | : | | |
| Czechia | 5 207.3 | 4 330.2 | 855.5 | 159.6 | 695.9 | 638.1 | 50.2 | 7.7 | 21.3 | : | 5.87 | 0.96 |
| Denmark | 2 790.8 | 2 558.2 | 223.3 | 97.3 | 125.9 | 116.9 | 9.1 | : | 9.3 | : | 4.08 | 0.33 |
| Germany | 41 481.8 | 37 213.8 | 4 155.6 | 1 836.2 | 2 319.4 | 2 132.0 | 83.4 | 104.0 | 112.4 | : | 2.01 | 0.20 |
| Estonia | 651.9 | 586.2 | 64.3 | 30.1 | 34.2 | 33.0 | : | : | : | : | | |
| Ireland | 2 171.1 | 1 839.7 | 319.0 | 97.2 | 221.8 | 178.1 | 7.0 | 36.7 | 12.3 | : | 2.19 | 0.32 |
| Greece | 3 786.3 | 2 504.0 | 1 130.8 | 271.8 | 859.0 | 834.9 | 4.9 | 19.2 | 151.4 | : | 0.43 | 0.13 |
| Spain | 18 816.9 | 15 682.1 | 3 037.7 | 1 027.8 | 2 009.9 | 1 949.4 | 39.6 | 20.9 | 90.2 | 6.9 | 1.30 | 0.21 |
| France | 26 823.3 | 23 727.0 | 3 002.5 | 1 114.6 | 1 887.9 | 1 804.5 | 50.5 | : | 93.8 | : | 1.68 | 0.19 |
| Croatia | 1 631.3 | 1 428.1 | 184.4 | 89.9 | 94.6 | 93.9 | : | : | 18.7 | : | | |
| Italy | 23 017.8 | 17 720.9 | 4 992.4 | 1 380.3 | 3 612.1 | 3 371.4 | 218.3 | 22.5 | 304.4 | : | 4.37 | 0.95 |
| Cyprus | 379.3 | 332.1 | 44.1 | 7.8 | 36.3 | 33.0 | 3.3 | : | 3.0 | : | 7.48 | 0.87 |
| Latvia | 891.7 | 782.3 | 100.0 | 38.9 | 61.1 | 58.6 | : | : | 9.3 | : | | |
| Lithuania | 1 355.5 | 1 189.1 | 154.8 | 34.5 | 120.4 | 118.8 | : | : | 11.6 | : | | |
| Luxembourg | 271.2 | 244.1 | 23.9 | 9.5 | 14.4 | 10.1 | : | 3.6 | 2.3 | : | | |
| Hungary | 4 419.6 | 3 970.5 | 437.7 | 208.4 | 229.3 | 214.8 | 8.7 | 5.8 | 11.4 | : | 1.99 | 0.20 |
| Malta | 220.6 | 187.0 | 33.4 | 10.8 | 22.7 | 22.0 | : | : | : | : | | |
| Netherlands | 8 579.4 | 7 228.2 | 1 327.2 | 323.0 | 1 004.2 | 917.9 | 71.4 | 14.9 | 24.0 | : | 5.38 | 0.83 |
| Austria | 4 247.6 | 3 730.5 | 461.8 | 197.3 | 264.5 | 253.1 | 11.4 | : | 55.4 | : | 2.47 | 0.27 |
| Poland | 16 460.0 | 13 151.7 | 2 864.5 | 617.6 | 2 246.9 | 2 162.1 | 73.2 | 11.6 | 443.7 | : | 2.56 | 0.44 |
| Portugal | 4 693.1 | 3 927.6 | 743.7 | 218.2 | 525.5 | 378.3 | 10.5 | 136.7 | 21.8 | : | 1.41 | 0.22 |
| Romania | 8 967.1 | 6 381.7 | 1 744.7 | 92.0 | 1 652.8 | 1 574.9 | 76.0 | : | 840.6 | : | 4.36 | 0.85 |
| Slovenia | 952.7 | 813.1 | 112.7 | 37.3 | 75.4 | 70.3 | 5.1 | : | 26.9 | : | 4.53 | 0.54 |
| Slovakia | 2 526.2 | 2 141.8 | 382.7 | 81.5 | 301.1 | 259.0 | 37.9 | : | : | : | 9.90 | 1.50 |
| Finland | 2 473.2 | 2 151.4 | 310.7 | 93.3 | 217.3 | 173.5 | 6.5 | 37.3 | 11.1 | : | 2.09 | 0.26 |
| Sweden | 5 021.8 | 4 590.7 | 421.7 | 155.8 | 265.9 | 248.3 | 17.6 | : | 9.4 | : | 4.17 | 0.35 |
| Iceland | 195.6 | 173.5 | 21.6 | 7.0 | 14.5 | 13.0 | 1.3 | : | : | : | 6.02 | 0.66 |
| Norway | 2 651.4 | 2 474.9 | 174.4 | 47.7 | 126.7 | 110.4 | 6.8 | 9.5 | : | : | 3.90 | 0.26 |
| Switzerland | 4 605.0 | 3 919.9 | 596.1 | 287.7 | 308.5 | 303.5 | 3.4 | : | 88.9 | : | 0.57 | 0.07 |
| United Kingdom | 31 845.3 | 26 982.1 | 4 725.4 | 746.8 | 3 978.7 | 3 637.7 | 319.2 | 21.8 | 93.4 | 44.3 | 6.75 | 1.00 |
| Turkey | 28 377.2 | 19 099.4 | 6 019.1 | 1 313.4 | 4 705.7 | 4 626.7 | 78.9 | : | 3 258.7 | : | 1.31 | 0.28 |

Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey (2017)

The Slovak Business Agency also publishes the LFS data in its study (Analýza vybraných aspektov podnikania SZČO, 2020), which states that in Slovakia there were almost 240 000 sole traders without employees in the 1st quarter of 2019, and in the period from 2010 to 2019, the share of those whose work showed signs of dependent activity was between 40 and 48%. However, the methodology for identifying this share is absent in the paper and in the corresponding materials.

The notably high proportion of dependent self-employed in Slovakia raises concerns, prompting the necessity to address this situation, particularly concerning their specific status within the labour market. This encompasses aspects such as individual well-being and the requirement for equitable legal protections tailored to their circumstances.

3 METHODS

Although the LFS in Slovakia is an unambiguous source of data on the number of employed people, there is currently no official methodology for identifying dependent self-employed from observed data, which would allow estimation of their numerical status and multidimensional structure.

The “gap” in this information segment is attempted to be substituted by empirical research that theoretically builds on the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Bosma and Kelley, 2018) that placed special emphasis on solopreneurship in 2018. The empirical online survey aimed to explore the status, challenges, advantages, and disadvantages associated with sole proprietorship marked a unique pilot study observing the Slovak entrepreneurial landscape with a specific. Additionally, it served as a cognitive testing phase, validating the clarity and comprehensibility of various question types.

For our survey, we adopted a modified and rigorously validated international methodology utilized in the GEM research project. Given the constrained resources of our project – limited personnel, time, and financial capacity – we concentrated on specific determinants of self-employment potential within the aforementioned methodological framework:

1. Social perspectives on self-employment:
 - Consideration of self-employment as an advantageous career choice,
 - Evaluation of the social status of self-employed persons in Slovakia,
 - Assessment of the ease associated with commencing a business.
2. Self-assessment of knowledge, skills, and self-employment abilities:
 - Self-appraisal and confidence in self-employment traits,
 - Apprehension regarding potential failures.
3. Motivations behind initiating a self-employment:
 - Pursuit of opportunities for increased independence or income,
 - Compelled by necessity, offering an alternative to unemployment.

Questionnaire survey was conducted in December 2022. The introductory part of the questionnaire outlined the topic and purpose of the survey and assured the respondents of anonymity. The questionnaire comprised six sections including various aspects: basic information about respondents, details regarding trade business, business relationships, reasons for initiating the business, current perceptions of the trade business, and finally, two open-ended questions, summing up to a total of 29 questions. Most questions were close-ended, offering single-choice responses, with three allowing multiple-choice selections. For scaling queries, a 5-point Likert scale was employed.

Within the scope of factors influencing self-employment potential, we focused on motivational aspects. Our inquiry aimed to validate the premise of two fundamental groups, categorised as follows: 1. motivation driven by opportunity (seeking improved working conditions, aspiring for independence/being one’s own boss, and the ambition to enhance earnings – motives 1–6 in Table 2), and 2. motivation arising from necessity (such as strengthening family business, job loss, challenges in securing employment, and forced commencement of a trade at the employer’s request –

motives 7–10 in Table 2). Degree of agreement with the choice of motive for starting a business was expressed on a scale of 1 (complete disagreement) to 5 (full agreement). Simultaneously, we assessed these motivational factors with regard to self-employed persons' gender and the duration of their business.

Table 2 Motives for starting self-employment

| | Motive |
|----|--|
| 1 | Family reasons – I wanted to work from home |
| 2 | I wanted to be independent “my own boss” |
| 3 | I wanted better working conditions |
| 4 | I wanted to earn more money |
| 5 | There was an opportunity to get resources to start a business |
| 6 | I saw an opportunity to sell my products/services |
| 7 | I had trouble finding a job |
| 8 | I became redundant in the company where I worked (lost my job) |
| 9 | I joined a family business |
| 10 | My employer wanted me to have a trade |

Source: Own questionnaire survey

The research population consisted of sole traders without employees doing business in Slovakia, the size and structure of which is the subject of the LFS (Štatistický úrad SR, 2023). The sample was composed of persons willing to fill out the questionnaire, using the pre-trained interviewers. No specific criteria for choosing the participants (except of being self-employed trader without employees) was used. These interviewers addressed the respondents, explained the purpose of the survey, and explained how to complete the questions. They then provided respondents with a link, which respondents used to complete the online questionnaire. We did not pre-determine the sample size, leaving it up to the willingness of potential respondents to complete the questionnaire, with a final sample size of 306 respondents. For this reason, it was not possible to determine non-response.

We wanted to include not only traditional self-employed people in the survey, but also a specific group known as dependent self-employed persons. Since, as already mentioned, there is no official methodology in characterizing this labour market segment, the survey considered them as individuals who operate independently without co-founders or employees (based on Code of Practice on Determining Employment Status, 2021; Economically dependent self-employed workers, 2014; Decent Work Agenda in Portugal, 2023). Furthermore, it acknowledged that self-employment represented the primary income source for such individuals (Code of Practice on Determining Employment Status, 2021; Status of self-employed persons, 2007), with their activities predominantly directed towards one business partner (Competition Act, Ireland; Status of self-employed persons, Spain), generating at least 75% of their income from activity for one partner (Status of self-employed persons, 2007; www.scheinselbststaendigkeitstest.de; Fornero Law No 92/2012, Italy).

Descriptive statistics and multiple response analysis techniques were used to evaluate respondents' responses to each question. Frequency tables and visualization techniques were used to describe and visualize the distribution of variables, factor analysis served to reduce the range of variables, and binary logistic regression modelled the classification of traders into classic and dependent groups, and a significance level of 0.05 was used for inductive procedures.

This paper unveils distinctive findings, particularly concerning the third monitored component – motivation to commence a business.

4 RESULTS

Since the conducted research is a pilot probe into the pre-problematics of dependent self-employment in Slovakia, the ambition of the authors was to obtain unique information about dependent self-employed persons regardless of achieving the representativeness of the sample in terms of all key features.

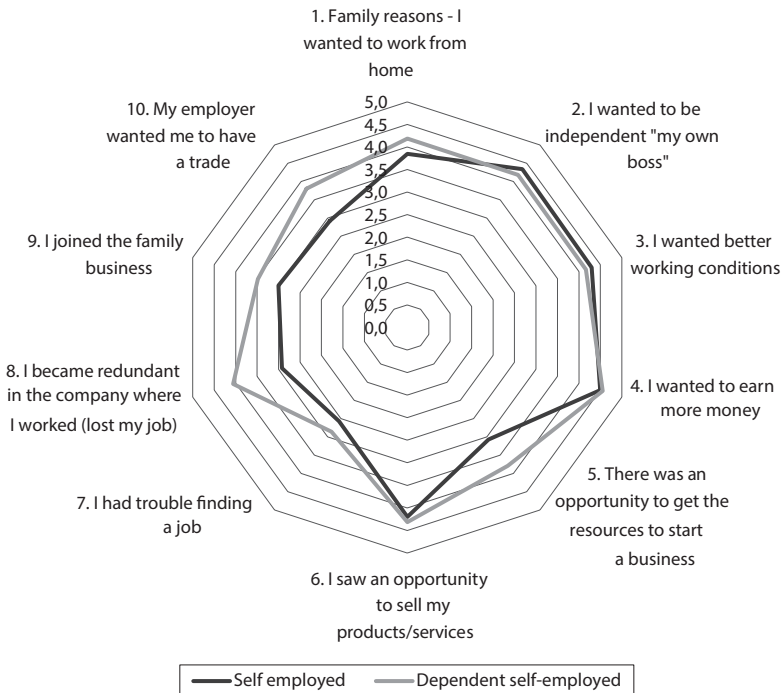
The examined respondent sample consisted of 306 self-employed persons, comprising 194 classical traders (63.4%) and 112 dependent self-employed persons (36.6%). We verified the quality of the sample using data on the Statistical Office (Štatistický úrad SR, 2023). Sample was representative by the gender (p-value = 0.11), the age category and education variables didn't follow the same distribution as the whole population of self-employed persons in Slovakia (both p-values < 0.001).

The sample of respondents included 166 younger respondents (under 40 years of age), of which 55.4% were classical traders and 44.6% were dependent self-employed persons. In the subsample of older respondents (above 40 years), the representation was strongly in favor of classical traders (72.9%), the proportion of dependent self-employed persons was 27.1%.

Within the domain of motivations driving business commencement, respondents were presented with a selection of 10 reasons that influenced their decision to initiate a business (Table 2).

We categorized the provided motives into two distinct groups. Motives 1 to 6 were categorized as 'opportunity motives,' signifying the perspectives and opportunities that attract individuals to embark on self-employment. On the other hand, motives 7 to 10 were classified as 'necessity motives,' reflecting the impetus to start a business due to external pressures or internal compulsions. Evaluation of the motives by respondents in the structure by the self-employment type can be seen in the Figure 1.

Figure 1 Degree of agreement with the choice of motive for starting a business by type of self employment



Source: Own elaboration

We used the factor analysis to reduce the number of self-employment motives and to generate a set of motives as new factors. The outcomes of the factor analysis conducted on all participating self-employed persons are presented in Table 3 (Varimax method, KMO = 0.734). Out of the ten themes presented, only seven proved to have statistical significance in forming the components. This method naturally categorized the offered self-employment motives into the anticipated groups – Component 1 being necessity and Component 2 being opportunity.

Within the necessity factors, the primary motivation was to join (support) a family business, followed by motives 9, 8, and 10. Concerning the opportunity factors, the strongest was motive 3 – the aspiration for improved working conditions – along with motives 2 and 4. Three opportunity motives (1, 5, and 6) were deemed insignificant and thus excluded from the components. The factor scores derived from both components were utilized in the subsequent phase of the analysis.

Table 3 Motives and their assignment to components (the result of using factor analysis)

| Motive number | Motive | Component | |
|---------------|--|-----------|-------|
| | | 1 | 2 |
| 9 | I joined a family business | .859 | -.005 |
| 8 | I became redundant in the company where I worked (lost my job) | .854 | .033 |
| 10 | My employer wanted me to have a trade | .777 | .074 |
| 7 | I had trouble finding a job | .739 | .033 |
| 3 | I wanted better working conditions | .092 | .849 |
| 2 | I wanted to be independent "my own boss" | .034 | .822 |
| 4 | I wanted to earn more money | -.016 | .810 |

Notes: Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Source: Own elaboration

We utilized the logistic regression method to construct a model predicting the likelihood of an individual being either a traditional self-employed persons or a dependent self-employed one. Assuming a representative sample, we could interpret the results as follows.

Analysing the outcomes of logistic regression method (as illustrated in Table 4), the opportunity factor emerged as statistically insignificant (p -value = 0.941), showing no significant correlation with the trade type (traditional or dependent self-employment). This was further supported by correlation analysis, which revealed Spearman's $\rho = -0.066$ and a p -value of 0.288. Motives associated with the opportunity factor seem to exert an equally negligible influence on both traditional self-employed persons and dependent self-employed, failing to distinctly delineate the self-employment types. For modelling purposes, the dependent variable was defined as follows: 0 – 'traditional' self-employed persons, 1 – dependent self-employed persons. Statistically insignificant sociodemographic variables such as age (8 age categories from 1 – less than 20 years to 8 – 65+), education (7 educational categories from 1 – no education to 7 – 3rd level university education), marital status (4 categories: 1 – married, 2 – single, 3 – divorced, 4 – widowed), and region (8 regions in Slovakia) were excluded from the model (all p -values > 0,05), only the variables gender (0 – male, 1 – female) and length of trade (how many years they have been running the trade) were included in the model. We also incorporated the opportunity and necessity factors into the model.

Table 4 Binary logistic regression model (with the necessity and opportunity factors)

| Variables in the equation | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------|------|-------|----|------|--------|
| | B | S.E. | Wald | df | Sig. | Exp(B) |
| Gender | -.902 | .316 | 8.139 | 1 | .004 | .406 |
| Length of trade | -.057 | .018 | 9.533 | 1 | .002 | .945 |
| Necessity motive | .270 | .136 | 3.962 | 1 | .047 | 1.310 |
| Opportunity motive | -.010 | .138 | .006 | 1 | .941 | .990 |
| Constant | .119 | .216 | .303 | 1 | .582 | 1.126 |

Source: Own elaboration

Next model includes only the necessity factor (correlated with type of trade, Spearman's rho = 0.113, p-value = 0.068) and other statistically significant variables.

Table 5 Binary logistic regression model (included only statistically significant variables)

| Variables in the equation | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------|------|-------|----|------|--------|
| | B | S.E. | Wald | df | Sig. | Exp(B) |
| Gender | -.904 | .315 | 8.249 | 1 | .004 | .405 |
| Length of trade | -.057 | .018 | 9.624 | 1 | .002 | .945 |
| Necessity motive | .270 | .136 | 3.965 | 1 | .046 | 1.310 |
| Constant | .121 | .215 | .315 | 1 | .575 | 1.128 |

Source: Own elaboration

Based on the 2022 questionnaire survey data among self-employed persons in Slovakia, our classification of self-employment motives and the model predicting self-employed person's likelihood of belonging to the dependent self-employed group suggest that individuals in this category are more likely to be male, operating as sole traders for a relatively shorter duration, and driven more strongly by necessity motives for self-employment.

However, the model's accuracy is relatively low (Nagelkerke R square = 0.117), correctly classifying 68.1% of respondents, with 90.7% identified as traditional self-employed persons and only 27% as dependent self-employed persons. Factors beyond those incorporated in the model (or questionnaire) are likely to significantly impact the classification of an individual as a dependent self-employed person.

A more in-depth analysis of self-employment motives and perceptions concerning the benefits of self-employment versus employment reveals that when the solopreneur group is more influenced by necessity motives (dependent self-employment), they exhibit lower job satisfaction (indicating lesser satisfaction with their job as a benefit of solopreneurs; Spearman's rho $r_s = -0.242$, p-value = 0.019). Conversely, they perceive higher work efficiency and performance as advantages of solopreneurs ($r_s = 0.23$, p-value = 0.022). In the cohort of traditional self-employed persons, a statistically significant positive correlation is evident between the pursuit of opportunity motives and perceiving higher income as self-employment advantage ($r_s = 0.157$, p-value = 0.043). In other words, a stronger inclination towards opportunity motives results in self-employed persons perceiving higher income as a benefit of solopreneurs.

Regarding future self-employment preferences, there is a positive association with the influence of opportunity motives – self-employed persons with a prevalence of these motives tend to lean towards remaining self-employed rather than seeking employment in the future ($r_s = -0.145$, p -value = 0.064).

5 DISCUSSION

Various international and domestic studies (Rapelli, 2012; Binder and Coad, 2016; Deci and Ryan 2000; Burke 2012; Pilková et. al., 2019; Analýza vybraných aspektov podnikania SZČO) including GEM reports for 2018 and 2019 indicate that dependent self-employed persons primarily venture into self-employment due to the lack of alternative job opportunities, essentially driven by necessity.

In our research, we were concerned with identifying factors that might influence the decision to enter into self-employment that exhibits characteristics similar to dependent self-employment. Interestingly, our survey indicated that the issue of job availability held the least significance in the decision to become a dependent self-employed person. This finding is in contrary to the research study in Romania (Grigorescu, Pirciog and Lincaru, 2020), or in the United Kingdom (Danson, Galloway and Sherif, 2021). On the other side, the research focusing on the OECD countries pointed that levels of unemployment were unrelated to the future levels of self-employment (Örtqvist and Ejdemo, 2021). However, it is noteworthy that entering the family business, recognized as the primary motivating factor, serves as a solution to the dearth of alternative job opportunities. This action might be interpreted as an attempt to avoid unemployment status or to counteract the lack of other occupational prospects in the labor market. This is also in line with the research findings of Gimenez-Nadal and co-authors (2018), who pointed out that self-employment represented a possible way for parents (mostly mothers) to have more control over the allocation and use of time (especially flexible working hours). Also, joining a family business may be an involuntary step (the so-called necessary evil for the purpose of preserving good family relations or for the purpose of preserving the business during generational turnover) (Vera and Dean, 2005; Ashourizadeh et al., 2021). On the other hand, such a decision can also be seen as taking advantage of the opportunity offered by the family, especially in a situation where the family business is prospering.

Other motives examined within the necessity-driven self-employment encompassed job loss and the push to establishment of trade by employers (so called 'švarcsystem' (Myant, 2013; Schneider and Kearney, 2013)). Our findings suggest that all scrutinized necessity-driven determinants are perceived and ranked as more potent catalysts for startup initiatives by dependent self-employed persons compared to their traditional counterparts.

The factor of opportunity as a motivational driver for self-employment appears stronger than circumstances compelling self-employment as a necessary career choice. However, the results from our survey suggest that the opportunity factor to initiate a self-employment is not statistically significant in the model, failing to classify individuals as classic or dependent self-employed. Variables associated with this factor equally affect both self-employment types. Nevertheless, it's important to note that for classic self-employed persons, the opportunity factors and their fulfilment are within their control, unlike for dependent self-employed persons. In the latter case, although the opportunity factors are perceived positively, their realization relies not solely on themselves but on the nature of the contractual relationship with the business partner under which they conduct their dependent self-employment. In particular, non-compliance with the Labour Code (regarding holidays, breaks, trade unions, etc.) tends to emerge as an issue. In our survey, the motivating factors representing opportunity in starting a self-employment included the desire for improved working conditions, autonomy (as one's own boss), and the ambition to earn more money.

Interesting findings are linked with the age of self-employed respondents. Results show higher proportion of dependent self-employed persons in the group of younger respondents (under years of age) than in the group of older respondents (over years of age). It is in accordance with the last European

Union report on dependent self-employment (Extent of dependent self-employment in the European Union, 2023) based on which the younger self-employed persons are more likely to be dependent than older ones. This is, however, in contrast to the GEM findings (Bosma and Kelley, 2018), according to which necessity driven self-employed persons (which we can identify as dependent self-employed) are more likely to occur in the older age groups, particularly those aged 45 and more. Possible explanation is influence of Covid-19 pandemic that has had an unprecedented impact on the labour market and the development of self-employment.

Our results are not consistent with GEM (Bosma and Kelley, 2018), either in terms of gender of dependent self-employed persons. Based on our research, males operating as sole traders for relatively shorter period and driven more strongly by necessity motives are more likely of becoming dependent self-employed. GEM (Bosma and Kelley, 2018), findings, on contrary, pointed to the more frequent occurrence of dependent self-employment in the group of women.

Not only status, it means traditional and dependent self-employment and motives of them, but also subjective perception of the satisfaction with the self-employment perception was the object of our research. Our results support findings of Binder and Coad (2016), Sevä et al. (2016 b), and Deci and Ryan (2000), that self-employed persons driven by necessity motives exhibit lower job satisfaction than those, driven by opportunity motives. From a theoretical standpoint, this finding aligns with self-determination theory, positing that individuals derive well-being benefits solely from autonomous action. Conversely, being pushed into self-employment is in contrary to the autonomy (Schwarz and Strack, 1999; Krueger and Schkade, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to explore the motivation factors influencing beginning of self-employment. In general, there are two fundamental approaches that elucidate the inclination towards self-employment: firstly, the aspiration to validate one's capabilities, exploit existing opportunities, and realize one's potential; and secondly, the less-than-optimal conditions prevailing in the labor market, which necessitate self-employment for the provision of resources for oneself and one's family. Using a modified international methodology that examines entrepreneurial potential (GEM), we monitored a group of traditional and so-called dependent self-employed persons whose activities can be described as forced ones. For both groups, we investigated self-employment motives, which the research methodology divides into opportunity motives and necessity motives.

The conducted research confirmed the fact that necessity prevails as the basic motivational factor to start a self-employment in the case of dependent self-employed persons compared to traditional ones. However, our research was conducted as a one-time study on a relatively small sample of respondents. Nevertheless, as there are no official statistical data on dependent self-employed persons in Slovakia, we consider our results to be exceptional and useful, not only for self-employed persons themselves but also for the decision-making sphere. However, it is necessary to at least periodically repeat the survey among self-employed persons, or to expand the research so that only dependent self-employed persons can be clearly identified and to focus specifically on this group. The results are inconsistent in several areas with the results of the GEM (2018) surveys, whose modified methodology was also used in our research. Therefore, we find it necessary to repeat the research using the same methodology to confirm or reject our previous results.

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