

## IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEMS IN SMALL ENTERPRISES IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### **ABSTRACT**

*As in the rest of the world, the economy of the Republic of Kosovo has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation created as a result of the pandemic has mostly affected micro-enterprises and small enterprises. For this reason, this paper has targeted small enterprises, to get a closer look at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the problems it has caused in the economy and in small enterprises in particular. The main purpose of this paper is to identify the problems of small businesses in two periods: **Quarantine period March-May 2020**, when almost everything was paralyzed and only a few businesses were allowed to operate and **The period after the removal of most of the restrictive measures** imposed by the Government of Republic of Kosovo, namely the removal of quarantine. The results of this paper are derived from the research work, respectively the empirical analysis (questionnaire) conducted with 60 small businesses of the Republic of Kosovo. Data analysis was done with SPSS statistical program. From the 21 Trade businesses surveyed, most were closed in the two-month quarantine period. The largest percentage of Manufacturing businesses have operated with limited capacity. Trade businesses (21) that participated in the survey, 26.7% are facing a reduction in the number of customers. Manufacturing businesses as a more pronounced problem have presented reduced productivity and lack of liquidity.*

**Keywords:** Covid-19 pandemic, small enterprises, quarantine period, economy.

**JEL classification:** M1

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

It has been more than a year since the world was facing the COVID-19 virus. Despite taking restrictive measures to prevent its further spread however the spread of the virus has spread to all countries of the world causing an increase in the number of infected persons. Along with the increase in the number of infected and has taken too many lives, COVID-19 had a significant negative impact on the economic aspect that led to the economic decline of businesses.

The spread of the virus in the social aspect caused social distancing between people, which as a result caused the closure of various businesses that were considered high risk, the cancellation of various activities. In Kosovo, food processing & retail, pharmacies, and certain businesses were allowed to work part-time. The whole situation created the paralysis of the economy in general around the world. Considering that no one was informed how long this situation could last, how it would be fought and how long it would take, all this created an unsafe environment for businesses by limiting new investments.

As in Kosovo and most countries of the world at the beginning of Covid-19 as the only way to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus was to stop almost all economic and social

activities and to make social distancing between people. Some of these measures in Kosovo were taken before the first cases affected by COVID-19 were reported, but they were reported in neighboring countries. Most business activities such as airlines, hotels, swimming pools, gastronomy were closed for a period of to 2 months. At the beginning of June 2020, the application of mitigation measures began for some sectors, where part-time work and limited capacity were allowed.

Restrictive measures imposed by the Government of Kosovo continue to be in force, where, depending on the pandemic situation, measures or exemptions of measures are made for businesses and citizens. As a result of this situation, many businesses risk bankruptcy and many employees lose their jobs. The Government of Kosovo has tried to help businesses in Kosovo by approving an emergency package.

To understand the problems that small businesses are now facing, we surveyed with a considerable number of small businesses. The research has managed to identify the main problems that small businesses in Kosovo face in the conditions of the pandemic. The complete study of the problem has defined the structuring of this paper which includes: Literature Review, Research methodology, Definition of small Businesses, The impact of Covid-19 on the Economy, Data analysis and interpretation, Conclusions and Recommendations.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Entrepreneurship is not a modern concept and the term is said to have originated with the 18<sup>th</sup>- century economist Richard Cantillon who used it to describe someone who bore risk made plans, organized and owned factors of production—land, labor, and capital (Coulter, 2001; Lee-Ross and Lashley, 2009). While (Karayiannis, 2003; Landstrom, H, 2005) argue that Entrepreneurial activities in society are mentioned by the ancient Greeks, and it was the philosopher Xenophon (approx. 430-354 B.C) who recognized the adventurous and opportunity-seeking activities of overseas merchants.

Entrepreneurs are the creators, the innovators, and the leaders who give back to society, as philanthropists, directors, and trustees, and who, more than any others, change the way people live, work, learn, play, and lead. Entrepreneurs create new technologies, products, processes, and services that become the next wave of new industries. Entrepreneurs create value with high potential, high growth companies which are the job-creation engines of the US economy (Timmons, 1999; Burns, 2016).

There is a great link between entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs and, small business firms though the three are not related. Not all small business firm owners are entrepreneurs and not all entrepreneurs own small firms. The entrepreneurial venture can start at any level (micro, small, medium, or large).

The role of small business plays a big role in job creation. The role of small firms in employment creation should not be looked on part of employment policy but also as part of urban and social policy (Kibassa, 2012).

One of the biggest challenges facing any academic study of small firms is to get an accurate definition of the term ‘small business’, or ‘small to medium enterprise’ (SME) (Headd & Saade, 2008; Mazzarol &Rebound, 2020). There is no single, universally accepted definition of a small business (Storey, 1994; Tonge, 2001; Mazzarol&Rebound, 2020).

While microenterprises appear to include any company with less than ten employees, one of the biggest differentiators between small businesses and microenterprise is revenues, along with lack of access to funding. For example, a typical loan for a microenterprise is less than fifty thousand dollars and is provided by creditors beyond banks through microcredit lending or microloans which are set up with higher interest rates (Hoy, et.al, 2012; Anastasia, 2015).

## **2.1 The impact of covid-19 on the economy**

The outbreak of the coronavirus, named COVID-19 (also known as SARS-CoV-2) by the World Health Organization (WHO), has been declared a pandemic by 11.03.2020. The rapid 'globalization' of the COVID-19 pandemic is something that the world perhaps has never encountered before. The infection of the COVID-19 virus was first reported in December of 2019 in Wuhan – the seventh largest city of China pneumonia and severe acute respiratory syndrome, heart failure, and subsequent death.

The economics of COVID-19: As the evidence of economic impacts keeps emerging, research think tanks and media outlets are in a race to publish commentaries, editorials, and analytical pieces. Among the first organized efforts, Baldwin and di Mauro (eds.) (2020) compile an eBook containing 14 briefs of different authors discussing the impacts of general macroeconomy and policy, trade, supply chain, finance, banking, travel, and regional sensitivities. While few of the works rely on simulation-based modeling, most are based on experience, real-time data, and intuitive and policy perspectives (Baruna, 2020).

The economic pain became severe as people were asked to stay at home, and the severity was felt in various sectors of the economy with travel bans affecting the aviation industry, sporting event cancellations affecting the sports industry, the prohibition of mass gatherings affecting the events and entertainment industries (Horowitz, 2020; Elliot, 2020; Ozili & Arun, 2020).

We can't impact the organic properties of the infection; however, we can change the measure of contact we have with one another by maintaining social distancing. The need for social distancing gave rise to the concept of "working from home concept (WFH)" for corporate for keeping alive the working spirit of the employees. Work from home (WFH) is where the employees can do their job from home through the massive use of digital platforms. After this pandemic, business trends have completely changed and a majority of business activities are performed through mobile or other digital platforms. Artificial Intelligence, analytics all have changed the way companies used to run and function of business (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). Research on the economic impact of previous pandemics has shown that countries, industries, and companies suffer significantly from the consequences of a global pandemic. This is due to a simultaneous demand and supply shock. Demand declines because consumers reduce their purchases of non-essential goods and services such as entertainment and travel. And layoffs reduce society's overall spending capacity (Cahyanto et al., 2016; McKercher & Chon, 2004; Sadique et al., 2007; Kraus et.al, 2020).

## **2.2 The impact of COVID-19 on the economy of Kosovo**

Kosovo, as well as other countries of the world, are trying to fight the invisible enemy which, in addition to causing the death of about 649 people from the beginning of the pandemic until 13.10.2020, has also affected the economic aspect. Given that Kosovo has long faced many problems in the field of economy, the period of the pandemic has only deepened the economic problem that has been accompanied by the closure of many businesses causing job losses and even greater growth of unemployment in the country. In order to prevent further economic damage caused by COVID-19, the Government of Kosovo, respectively the Ministry of Finance and Transfers in cooperation with other ministries have developed an emergency plan called emergency packages to stop the further economic decline and the viability of economic enterprises in the country.

During the first phase of the closing and restricting movement for the citizens of Kosovo, except for the food industry, the pharmaceutical industry, and the food sales sector, almost all other activities were paralyzed. This made the first effects of the economic shock immediately felt. As a result of the contraction of aggregate demand, almost all sectors were affected, even a part of those sectors which were allowed to operate at all times. The

emergency package and the measures envisaged in this package were viewed with skepticism by the private sector in Kosovo. According to them, the measures were more social in nature and as such could not address the acute problems caused by the temporary closure of the vast majority of the economy.

The Government of Kosovo in March 2020 approved the emergency fiscal package with 15 measures in response to mitigating the consequences caused by the pandemic. The total value of this package was 180 million euros or about 2.5% of Kosovo's GDP (Emergency Fiscal Package Implementation Implications and Challenges, RIINVEST INSTITUTE, June 2020).

The government program approved in June this year and related to the budget review envisages an intervention of 1.2 billion euros during 2020 and 2021. This program has 2 basic components - urgent measures to support businesses to prevent exit from the market and economic recovery. This document is operationalized with the activities of their bearer and indications related to financial resources. In the next step, the time planning of activities should be done (Living with Covid-19: three pillars of recovery, Riinvest Institute, July 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic presented in early 2020 was an unknown virus in the world. There was no scientific work related to it in this field of study. The paper is realized in the period September-October 2020, and in this period of time-related to this field of study, there were few papers published in the world. Considering that the largest number of businesses in the Republic of Kosovo are small businesses and in the conditions of the pandemic were the most affected ones, it is necessary to conduct a study on a topic that touches on some of the main problems of these businesses.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In the first part of this paper is the analysis of scientific literature used by various authors as well as the analysis of some scientific papers which examine the topic of COVID-19 in general and its impact on the economy in particular. This literature is currently scarce as this type of virus is not yet well known. The material for the definition of small businesses and the change that has had over the years has also been reviewed.

In the second part of the research, we used the quantitative method, which is used to process the data which will be presented in the form of statistics. The primary source is the survey method where for the basic instrument we used the questionnaire.

#### **3.1. Sample**

As a sample, 60 small businesses in the Republic of Kosovo are taken in three municipalities of Kosovo (Pristina, Gjilan, FusheKosova).

The empirical analysis conducted with 60 respondents in the small businesses in the Republic of Kosovo shows that the largest percentage of respondents 38.3% are in the group 31-40 years old and 20% belong to the group 18-30 years old, a relatively young age of owners and managers who lead small businesses. Also, businesses that have participated in the research 71.7% of them are male and 28.3% are female. From the result achieved we see that men dominate in a higher percentage in decision-making positions compared to women. About 61.7% of businesses are individual businesses and 38.3% are co-partnership. The businesses that have participated in this research are businesses that in terms of the number of employees vary from 10 employees minimum to businesses with 47 employees maximum, mean of employees is 19.38.

*Table 1. Sample statistics*

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Number of employees	19.38	10.236
Age		
Variables	Nr. of businesses	% from total number of businesses included in the sample (N=60)
Type of activity		
Trade	21	35.0
Service business	24	40.0
Manufacturing	11	18.3
Construction	4	6.7

*Source: Survey from author, 2020*

### 3.2 Questionnaire

The primary source is the survey method where for the instrument we used the questionnaire. The questionnaire contains 21 questions. Closed questions are 18 and 3 questions are open while two questions are dedicated to the personal data of the respondents. The questionnaire was conducted in small businesses in the Republic of Kosovo (in the municipalities: Pristina, Gjilan, Fushe Kosova). The survey was conducted in the period 7-19 September 2020. The answers to the Questionnaire from these businesses were realized by survey face to face and through the online form. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) program was used to process the results achieved through the questionnaire.

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The elaborations below are the concrete analysis and interpretation of the data we obtained through the questionnaire, which was completed by 60 businesses in the Republic of Kosovo. Data analysis and interpretation will be accompanied by numerous charts and graphical representations (with SPSS) that we believe will convey reliable, valuable information related to the analysis of the impact of covid-19 on small businesses in Kosovo.

From the analyzed businesses, 35% answered that their business activity is Trade, 40% answered that their business activity is Service business, and we have the smallest percentage of businesses represented in the field of construction and manufacturing. More than half of respondents, 63.3% are businesses run by the owner/ co-owner. Most respondents, 91.7% consider that the Covid-19 has had a negative impact and 36.7% consider that pandemic has reduced revenue from 5% to 20%.

Most respondents 96.7% have stated that they did not increase the prices of products/services during the pandemic period. However, this does not match the complaints of the citizens of Kosovo about the price increase.

Only 13.3% of them have accepted that they already have laid off in the first 6 months of the pandemic and most of them 65% do not predict the layoffs of workers. The maximum number of employees that a business has laid off is five (5) employees.

Businesses that have been declared to have laid off workers 6.7% of them had returned workers who had been laid off during the pandemic. More than half of the surveyed

businesses 60% are expressed that work is not going on with the same intensity as before the pandemic, which means that the pandemic period has left and continues to have consequences in the economy. Almost half of businesses 46.7% consider that the main problem their business is facing now is the reduction in the number of customers. Only 13.3% of businesses are satisfied with the emergency measures taken by the Government, 48.3% of businesses are somewhat satisfied. About 63.3% think that the measure Covering expenditures for the monthly wages in the amount of 170 € has had a positive effect in their enterprise and 25% consider that Rent subsidy up to 50% of the rent value for small and medium enterprises for the month of April and May has had a positive effect.

About 80% of surveyed businesses equipped employees with an employment contract and 20% equipped only certain of them. More than half of the surveyed businesses, 66.7% of them completed the amount up to their full wage and only 30% of them paid the employees the full wage as before the pandemic even though they received 170 euros from the Government.

Trade businesses (21 businesses that participated in the survey), 26.7% most of them are facing a reduction in the number of customers. Manufacturing businesses (6.7%) as a more pronounced problem have presented reduced productivity and lack of liquidity. From 4 types of businesses, we see that construction businesses have paid their employees the full wage in addition to 170 euros received from the Government of Kosovo. However, this type of business is the least represented in the research (only 4 businesses that have participated in the research). Trade, Service, and Manufacturing businesses have only completed the amount up to their full wage.

In table no. 2 we have presented crosstabulation of types of business activities and business reaction after government measures to prevent the distribution of the Covid-19. The largest percentage of trade businesses (13.3%) were closed in the period of almost two months of quarantine. Most manufacturing businesses in this period have worked with limited capacity. Most service businesses (18.3%) were totally closed or operated at limited capacity (like Delivery Service). Construction businesses in this period have been totally closed.

*Table 2. Cross-tabulation of the type of activity of the researched businesses and the reaction of the businesses after taking measures to prevent the distribution of the Covid-19 pandemic.*

**Type of activity \* How did your business react after the government took actions to prevent the spread the Covid-19 pandemic?**  
**Crosstabulation**

			How did your business react after the government took actions to prevent the spread the Covid-19 pandemic?					Total
			The business was completely closed	We worked part time	We worked with limited capacity	The pandemic has not had any impact	We performed some of the activities from home	
Type of activity	Trade	Count	8	6	2	3	2	21
		% of Total	13.3%	10.0%	3.3%	5.0%	3.3%	35.0%
	Manufacturing	Count	2	2	5	2	0	11
		% of Total	3.3%	3.3%	8.3%	3.3%	0.0%	18.3%
	Service business	Count	11	5	7	1	0	24
		% of Total	18.3%	8.3%	11.7%	1.7%	0.0%	40.0%
	Construction	Count	3	0	1	0	0	4
		% of Total	5.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%
Total		Count	24	13	15	6	2	60
		% of Total	40.0%	21.7%	25.0%	10.0%	3.3%	100.0%

*Source: Survey from author, 2020*

In table no.3 we have made a crosstabulation of the type of business activities and the main problems that businesses are currently facing in this period of the pandemic that has not been faced before. Trade businesses (21 businesses that participated in the survey), 26.7% most of them are facing a reduction in the number of customers. Manufacturing businesses (6.7%) as a more pronounced problem have presented reduced productivity and lack of liquidity.

Also, 16.7% of service businesses as the main problem have presented the reduction of the number of customers and the difficulty with paying wages to workers. Construction businesses have presented as a problem the reduction of the number of customers and lack of raw material.

*Table 3. Cross-tabulations between the type of business activities and the main problems that businesses are currently facing in this period of pandemic*

**Type of activity \* What is the main problem your business is currently facing at the time of the pandemic that was not present before? Crosstabulation**

		What is the main problem your business is currently facing at the time of the pandemic that was not present before?								Total	
		Reducing the number of customers	Lack of liquidity	Reduction of productivity	Inability to pay all tax obligations	Difficulty with paying wages to workers	Problems with work organization	Lack of raw material	Unfair competition		
Type of activity	Trade	Count	16	1	0	0	2	1	0	1	21
		% of Total	26.7%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%	1.7%	0.0%	1.7%	35.0%
	Manufacturing	Count	0	3	4	2	0	0	1	1	11
		% of Total	0.0%	5.0%	6.7%	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%	18.3%
	Service business	Count	10	1	0	5	7	0	0	1	24
		% of Total	16.7%	1.7%	0.0%	8.3%	11.7%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	40.0%
	Construction	Count	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	4
		% of Total	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	6.7%
Total		Count	28	5	4	7	10	1	2	3	60
		% of Total	46.7%	8.3%	6.7%	11.7%	16.7%	1.7%	3.3%	5.0%	100.0%

*Source: Survey from author, 2020*

In table no. 4 we have presented the crosstabulation of two tables regarding the type of business activity that participated in the research and the satisfaction of businesses with the measures taken by the Government of Kosovo to support businesses. From the table presented we can see that of the four types of businesses that have been part of the research, trade businesses (21.7%) are more satisfied with the measures taken by the Government of Kosovo. Manufacturing businesses (8.3%) are somewhat satisfied with the mentioned measures. Service businesses (15%) are dissatisfied with the measures taken by the government. Construction businesses should take into account that they are businesses with low representation in research (5%) are somewhat satisfied with these emergency package measures.

*Table 4. Cross-tabulations between types of business activities and business satisfaction with emergency measures taken by the Government of Kosovo to support businesses*

**Type of activity \* Are you satisfied with the measures taken by the Government of Kosovo to support businesses through the emergency package? Crosstabulation**

			Are you satisfied with the measures taken by the Government of Kosovo to support businesses through the emergency package?				Total
			Not at all satisfied	Unsatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Satisfied	
Type of activity	Trade	Count	2	2	13	4	21
		% of Total	3.3%	3.3%	21.7%	6.7%	35.0%
	Manufacturing	Count	2	2	5	2	11
		% of Total	3.3%	3.3%	8.3%	3.3%	18.3%
	Service business	Count	5	9	8	2	24
		% of Total	8.3%	15.0%	13.3%	3.3%	40.0%
	Construction	Count	1	0	3	0	4
		% of Total	1.7%	0.0%	5.0%	0.0%	6.7%
Total		Count	10	13	29	8	60
		% of Total	16.7%	21.7%	48.3%	13.3%	100.0%

*Source: Survey from author, 2020*

In table no. 5 we can analyze the crosstabulation between the type of business activities and analyze which of these businesses has paid the full wage to the workers in addition to the government participation with 170 euros for the employees.

From 4 types of businesses, we see that construction businesses have paid their employees the full wage in addition to 170 euros received from the Government of Kosovo. However, this type of business is the least represented in the research (only 4 businesses that have participated in the research). Trade, Service, and Manufacturing businesses have only completed the amount up to their full wage.

*Table 5. Cross-tabulation between the type of business activity and business operations after the participation of the government with 170 Euros for employees for the period April and May 2020*

Type of activity \* After the participation by the Government with 170 € for employees for April and May, you as an enterprise: Crosstabulation

			After the participation by the Government with 170 € for employees for April and May, you as an enterprise:			Total
			You paid the employees the full wage as before pandemic even though they received 170 euros from the Government	You have completed the amount up to their full wage	You did not pay the employees at all	
Type of activity	Trade	Count	5	16	0	21
		% of Total	8.3%	26.7%	0.0%	35.0%
	Manufacturing	Count	4	6	1	11
		% of Total	6.7%	10.0%	1.7%	18.3%
	Service business	Count	6	17	1	24
		% of Total	10.0%	28.3%	1.7%	40.0%
	Construction	Count	3	1	0	4
		% of Total	5.0%	1.7%	0.0%	6.7%
Total		Count	18	40	2	60
		% of Total	30.0%	66.7%	3.3%	100.0%

*Source: Survey from author, 2020*

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

From the main findings of this paper we can conclude as follows:

Trade businesses have mainly expressed the reduction of the number of consumers as the main problem, manufacturing businesses consider reduced productivity and lack of liquidity, service enterprises as the main problem have presented the reduction of the number of consumers and the difficulty with paying wages to workers, while, construction businesses have presented as a problem the reduction of the number of consumers and lack of raw material.

Of these four types of businesses divided according to their business activity taken for review, trade businesses have expressed their satisfaction with the measures taken by the

Government of Kosovo with the emergency package, while the least satisfied are the service businesses.

Regarding the measures taken by the Government of Kosovo through the emergency package, a large percentage of businesses are somewhat satisfied. From this package is considered as the most favorable with positive effects, the partial payment of 170 euros for workers with employment contracts.

The results from this paper are derived from the analysis of a structured sample of 60 small businesses in three municipalities of Kosovo (Pristina, Gjilan, Fushe Kosova). We would recommend that a survey be conducted with a larger representation of small businesses in the research, with wider distribution in the main centers of Kosovo so that the results of the research are more reliable and more credible.

We recommend that the research be extended to other categories of businesses such as micro-businesses, medium and large businesses, and also to a greater regional extent. I also recommend reviewing the research results in these businesses and making a comparative analysis between them.

The above research has found the main indicators that have caused the stagnation of small businesses in Kosovo. For this reason, I recommend that this analysis be extended to the definition of the main indicators for the stagnation of businesses of other types. As well as comparing these indicators by type of business.

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