

# THE ECONOMIC SECURITY OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZE LITHUANIAN COMPANIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic brought changes to every country's economy. The increasing number of cases, the lack of equipment and supplies, and the disruption of production and services, led to strong measures to stop the spread of the virus. The pandemic also had a significant impact on the stability of existing businesses. The announcement of lockdown and the resulting restrictions influenced consumer behaviour, and companies have had to adapt quickly to current changes in order to maintain economic security. The suspension or restriction of activities affected the income, profits and business continuity of companies. The main purpose of this article is to analyse how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the economic security of small and medium-size Lithuanian companies. What impact did the pandemic have on the Lithuanian economy and the business dynamics of organisations? Using research methods, scientific literature and statistical data, a comparative analysis was performed to assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Lithuanian organisations. Based on the results, Lithuania was the least affected by the pandemic in the context of the European Union. However, there was a lot of uncertainty at the beginning of 2021; but the economy grew faster than expected. The volume of industrial production increased, retail and international trade grew. Despite the pandemic, growth was maintained in the manufacturing, wholesale and retail sectors. The impact of the pandemic was felt most in the services sector: accommodation and food service activities, the arts, entertainment and recreation, service and administrative activities.

KEY WORDS: *Covid-19 impact, economic security.*

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## Introduction

The problem of the research. The economies of all countries currently face many systemic challenges arising from the restructuring of the world economy, increasing global competition, and crisis phenomena. To overcome these challenges, different approaches are used to ensure economic growth, sustainable development and the economic security of a country and its regions (Polyanin, 2020). The unexpected Covid-19 pandemic in the world has brought major changes in various industries. This is a factor that has caused social and economic unrest. To maintain economic security, companies have had to adapt quickly to the changed environment. The pandemic has affected the health systems, regional stability, and social and economic life. It has also had political and security consequences, disrupting education, mobility, tourism and leisure. New patterns of consumer behaviour and consumption have emerged. Unprecedentedly low demand or staggeringly high demand, depending on the category, have distorted supply chains, changed jobs, and caused social isolation, and all these changes, including bans and restrictions, have been the driving force for companies to rethink their organisations' strategies.

It should be emphasised that every state is responsible for the economic security of its society. The state legislates and lays down the rules for the country's economic life, and takes economic decisions. It must the-

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reformed be acknowledged that the role of the state, its economic power and its decision-making autonomy in ensuring the security of its citizens, are crucial, especially in the face of deepening regional integration and the globalisation of national economies. The stabilising effect of international economic cooperation should also be cleverly promoted, without being dependent on other countries and without restricting economic sovereignty. The ability to defend one's social and economic fabric, to regulate the market effectively, and to maintain the integrity of society, to work with others to create an international economic environment that results in enhanced military cooperation and economic benefits, are all key elements of economic security.

Small and medium-size businesses are always more likely to experience economic change. The coronavirus pandemic is expected to have even greater economic consequences than the economic crisis of 2008–2009. According to small and medium-size enterprises in Lithuania, the introduction of lockdown had the greatest impact, while neighbouring countries consider the economic slowdown to be the main cause of their problems.

Scientists are already analysing the impact of the pandemic by making recommendations on what to do or not to do during a crisis. The lessons of previous economic crises and recessions can be adapted to the pandemic situation, considering the specificities of Covid-19. Several studies with new insights have also already been conducted, focusing on the changed consumer behaviour.

Research object: the economic security of small and medium-size Lithuanian companies in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The purpose of the research: to analyse how the pandemic affected the economic security of Lithuanian companies, which are the main driving force of the economy. The main tasks of the study: to review the impact of Covid-19 on the Lithuanian economy and its business dynamics, to examine the importance and role of economic security, and to present business support measures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

Research methods: analysis and synthesis of scientific literature, analysis of statistical data, comparative analysis in assessing the impact of the pandemic on the economic security of Lithuanian companies.

## 1. The impact of Covid-19 on the Lithuanian economy

The shock caused by the Covid-19 pandemic at the beginning of 2020 completely changed the prospects for economic development in the world and in the EU, to which Lithuania also belongs. In 2020, the real GDP of the EU27 fell by 6.1% year on year, inflation stabilised at 0.7%, and the unemployment rate rose to 7.1%. In 2021, with the start of the vaccination process and the help of a large fiscal stimulus in the main world economies and EU countries, the situation changed radically (Lietuvos ekonomika 2021m.: spartusis augimas COVID-19 viruso aplinkoje).

When reviewing last year's results, it can be stated that in the context of the European Union, Lithuania is the country least affected by the pandemic. Although at the beginning of 2021 there was a lot of uncertainty about the future course of the pandemic and its management, the economy grew faster than expected. The growth of the economies in neighbouring countries slowed down in the second half of 2019 (A comparative review of socio-economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic [COVID-19] in the Baltic States), but by 2021, Lithuania's GDP amounted to 55.4 billion (see Fig. 1) euros at current prices. Compared to 2020, the real change in GDP, adjusted seasonally and to the working day, was 5.1% (without the removal, it accounted for 4.8%). Compared to 2019, the change in real 2020 GDP was 0.1%, in 2019 GDP amounted to 48.9 billion euros, and it increased by 4.6% compared to the previous period.

According to data from the Department of Statistics of Lithuania, it can be stated that the volume of industrial production increased, and retail trade and international trade grew. Industrial production grew by almost a fifth last year. It sold for 28.4 billion euros at current prices, which is 19.4% at constant prices more than in 2020. Production increased the most: chemicals and chemicals by 45.6%, motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers by 39.9 %, other vehicles and equipment by 34.9%, base metals by 28.9%, and computer, electronic and optical products by 28.2%. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 was very different for individual economic activities.

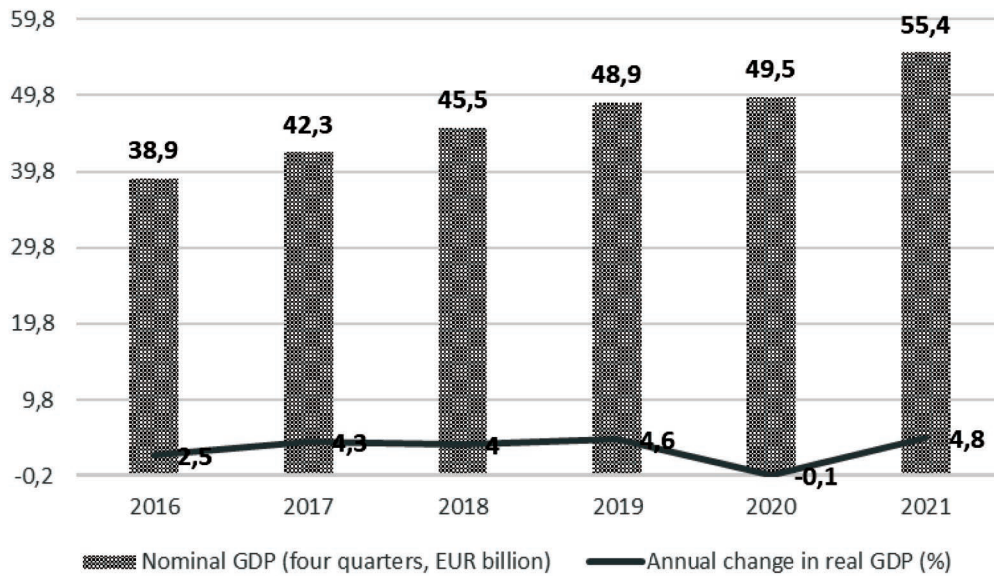


Figure 1. The GDP of the whole country in 2016–2021

Source: Compiled by the author, based on data from Statistics Lithuania (2022).

Agriculture, forestry and fishing (10.3% in 2019, and 9.4% in 2020), information and communication (11.9% and 7.2% respectively) saw further strong growth in value added. Despite the pandemic, growth was maintained in 2020, and manufacturing had the highest relative weight in terms of value added (4.0% in 2019 and 1.1% in 2020) in the wholesale and retail sectors (3.0% in 2019 and 1.4% in 2020). The greatest impact of the pandemic in 2020 was felt in the services sector: accommodation and food service activities (-30.9%), the arts, entertainment and recreation (-16.5%), other services (-7.5%), and administrative and support service activities (-7.0%) recorded the largest decline in value added. The negative impact of the pandemic in 2020 was reflected in all components: gross fixed capital formation decreased by 1.8% (it grew by 6.6% in 2019), household final consumption expenditure by 2.1% (+3.0% in 2019), imports of goods and services by 4.4% (+6.1% in 2019), and exports of goods and services, which grew rapidly in 2019 (9.9%), maintained modest growth (0.4%). In 2020, there was a fixed slowdown in remuneration for employees: in 2019 and 2020 it increased by 11.2% and 5.8% respectively (at current prices). Taxes on production and products grew by 7.5% and 2.0% respectively, and the impact of pandemic management measures in 2020 is the most pronounced change in subsidies: they were allocated 2.3 times more than in 2019 (1.879 million euros and 829 million euros respectively).

## 2. The importance and the role of economic security

The theory of economic security is one of the most important parts of the science of economics. The issue of economic security is important, and a priority in the activities of every state. Human activities are characterised by certain threats and risks that have to be assessed in order to achieve the goals of society, business and the individual. Failure to assess the consequences of security and economic reforms to the individual, society and the state may lead to severe failures that can even ruin the viability of the state and society (Simanavičienė, 2018).

According to Kunz (2021), economic security is a condition for the survival, prosperity, sustainable development and smooth functioning of society in a state. It must be a country where the economy can develop in a sustainable way and ensure a decent standard of living for its citizens through unhindered access

to raw materials, markets, capital, modern technology and information. It is worth noting that an important starting point here is the economic potential of the state. This can be an impetus for social and economic development, and one of the main conditions for the country's power and prestige in the international arena.

Šimašius (2006) equated economic security with good macroeconomic indicators, property security, individual social security, such as a certain level of income necessary for living, employment, secure jobs, and corporate profits.

The concept of economic security was examined quite extensively by Simanavičienė (2018), who states that 'the analysis of economic security concepts conducted by researchers shows that economic development and stability are valued in all cases. Therefore, such a position allows to define economic security as a state of economy and government, when the protection of national interests, the development of the country, and sufficient defence potential are ensured. At present, practically no one has any doubt about the establishment of economic security systems in every medium-size or large company. The economic security of a company is a system of legal, production, organisational relations, material and intellectual resources of a company that ensures the stability of its operation, and financial and commercial success.'

Tsvetkov *et al.* (2019) emphasised that a company's economic security depends directly on the level and structure of the development of its production activities, the efficiency of the use of available resources, the skills of its employees, and the prevailing environmental conditions. To ensure sustainable operations and development, a company must establish its own security system. A company's economic security system is a set of theoretical approaches and practices that aim to protect the company's vital interests as much as possible from threats that may be caused by the company's internal business processes and external environment.

The Covid-19 global pandemic created an unprecedented situation in the world's economies that has not been seen in the world since the Spanish Flu. If a normal economic crisis affects one part of the socio-economic system, and only after a certain time affects the rest of the whole system, then the Covid-19 pandemic affected the whole socio-economic system at once, that is, the whole economy began to function in an epidemiological model, from the state and the central bank to enterprises and the consumer. Governments immediately faced challenges in developing not only health policies and measures to protect human lives, but also economic policies and measures to alleviate and help businesses weather the economic shock (Norvaišienė *et al.*, 2021). According to Baldwin and Weder di Mauro (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on economic security can be compared with other pandemics that have affected the world. Similarities can be seen with the 1957 Asian Influenza (H2N2), the 1968 Hong Kong Influenza (H3N2), the 2002 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the 2009 Avian Influenza (N1H1), and even the second wave of the Ebola (EVD) virus in 2014–2016. However, Covid-19 spread rapidly around the world with the large movement of people, which affected the economies of all countries very quickly.

Goodell (2020) singled out several factors affecting the economic security of states:

- the cost of 'limping' health-care systems, both public and private, in terms of medical treatment and outbreak control for infected people; the strain on health systems in failing to address more common health problems during outbreaks;
- the decrease in labour productivity;
- social isolation disrupting economic activity;
- the impact on tourism and foreign direct investment;
- reduced domestic consumption under conditions of uncertainty;
- the long-term impact on corporate financing and capital costs;
- the decrease in the turnover, liquidity and profitability of companies.

The Covid-19 crisis was an unexpected event with enormous consequences to almost every aspect of our daily lives. Apart from the pandemics mentioned, which occurred in very different socio-economic contexts, there are no historical parallels to the current crisis, making it difficult to predict the future.

During the pandemic, it was particularly important for countries to maintain economic security in order to further their economic development and to provide a sense of security and guarantees that solutions will be sought to tackle the spread of the infection (Kozicki *et al.*, 2020). Covid-19 demonstrates vividly the vulnerabilities of a globalised economy. At the peak of the crisis in Europe, the supply of life-saving medical equipment could not be guaranteed. Governments around the globe rushed to restrict medical exports for fear of national shortages, threatening the ability of other governments in the global economy to meet their immediate health security needs effectively (Gehrke, 2020)

### 3. The impact of the pandemic on the business dynamics of Lithuanian companies

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a great deal of volatility in the economy, and posed many new challenges to both companies and workers. During the turmoil associated with the virus, entrepreneurs were forced to limit or change their practice, and to use hitherto unused legal and fiscal instruments (Kunz, 2021).

According to Šontaitė-Petkevičienė *et al.* (2021), in order to cope with the crisis, organisations had to resort to innovation: first to change what was being done at the time, then to define and develop, and finally to transform. The pandemic affected all the functions of organisations, so that they had to become agile and reorganise their operations; the pandemic required innovative thinking.

Business is the engine of the whole economy; its success depends on good planning, market knowledge, and an understanding of various economic processes, and according to Elyta *et al.* (2020), it is most influenced by external negative factors.

The Covid-19 pandemic, which affected the economies of various countries, also had a significant impact on the stability of existing businesses. The announcement of lockdown, the suspension or restriction of the activities of organisations, affected the income, profits and business continuity of companies. According to Norvaišienė *et al.* (2021), the restrictions imposed on small and medium-size enterprises due to the global pandemic have had a particularly strong impact. The study showed (see Fig. 2) that 55% of all surveyed companies felt the strong impact of the pandemic on business. Micro-enterprises (up to four people) were hit the hardest, at 64%, while large enterprises accounted for 43%.

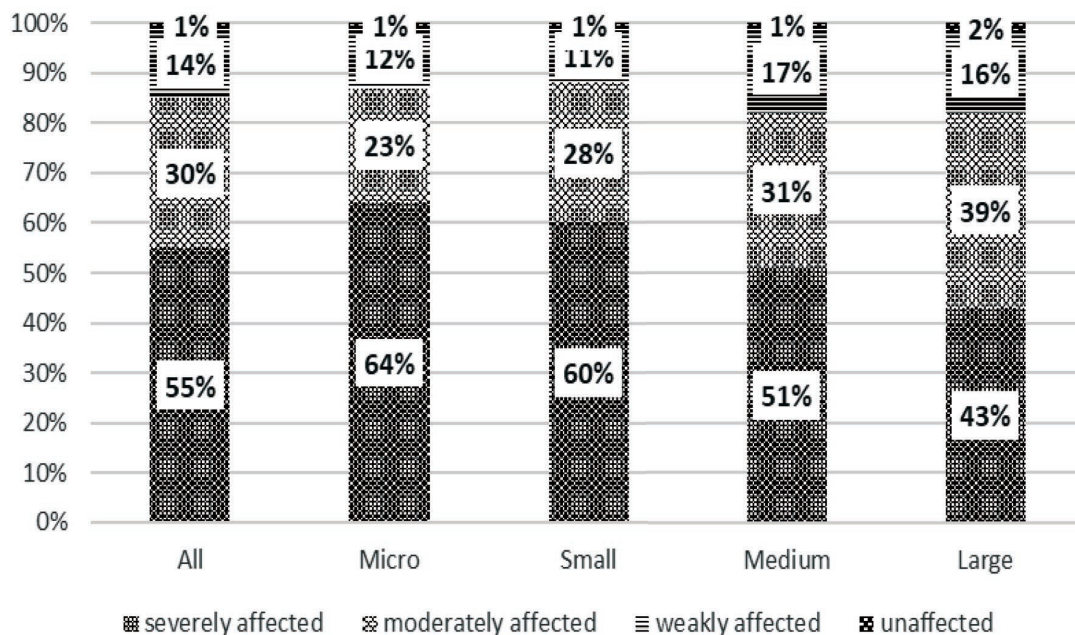


Figure 2. The extent of the impact of Covid-19 on companies of all sizes around the world, %

Source: Norvaišienė *et al.* (2021).

In terms of the impact of the pandemic on businesses by sector of economic activity, the accommodation and catering sector was the hardest hit (76%), along with non-food production (66%), retail and wholesale trade (65%), and travel and transport (61%), while companies in the IT sector were the least affected (35%). Almost all companies experienced a decline in revenue, and only a small proportion of companies experienced a slight increase in revenue.

The Covid-19 pandemic, which has been going on in Lithuania for almost two years, has changed the life of the whole country, and changed the economic picture. At first glance, it may seem that the new reality and the increased uncertainty about the future may have slowed down some processes, but at the same time it has opened up new possibilities. This is evidenced by an increase in the number of start-ups and organisations in recent years.

According to data from the Lithuanian Department of Statistics, on 1 January 2021, although the country was affected by the pandemic, there were 108,258 economic entities operating in Lithuania (excluding natural persons engaged in economic activities), which accounted for 45% of all economic entities on the Register of Legal Entities. This was 814 companies more than in the previous period (see Fig. 3).

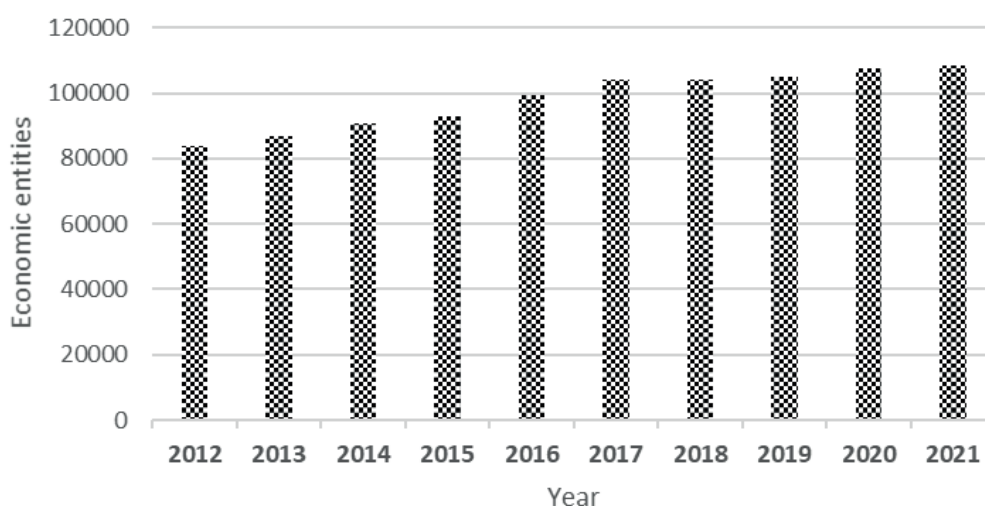


Figure 3. Operating economic entities from 2012 to 2021

Source: Compiled by the author, based on data from Statistics Lithuania (2022).

According to Benedetti Fasil *et al.* (2020), it is very likely that in the future the Covid-19 crisis may have a severe impact on newly established companies, leading to a slight decrease in the start-up rate, an increase in the number of deregistered companies, and a slowdown in growth. According to EU estimates, this could lead to a reduction in overall employment between 2021 and 2030, and may reach up to 74,000. A full recovery can take more than a decade, even if initial activity recovers to pre-crisis levels within a year.

The largest share of economic entities by economic sector (81%) was in industry (9%), construction (8%) and agriculture (2%) (see Table 1).

In difficult economic conditions, the largest share of the services sector was the wholesale and retail trade (22%), professional, scientific and technical activities (10%), and transport and storage (8%). In industry, most companies were active in manufacturing (7%) (see Fig. 4).

Table 1. Structure of existing enterprises

	Farming	Industry	Construction	Wholesale and retail trade	Professional, scientific and technical activities	Transport and storage	Real estate activities	Accommodation and food service activities	Administrative and support service activities	Others
Number of enterprises, thousand	2318	9522	9364	24398	11524	8501	5581	3791	3805	33054
Share (from the total number of economic entities), %	2,07	8,51	8,37	21,81	10,30	7,60	4,99	3,39	3,40	29,55

Source: Compiled by the author, based on data from Statistics Lithuania (2022).

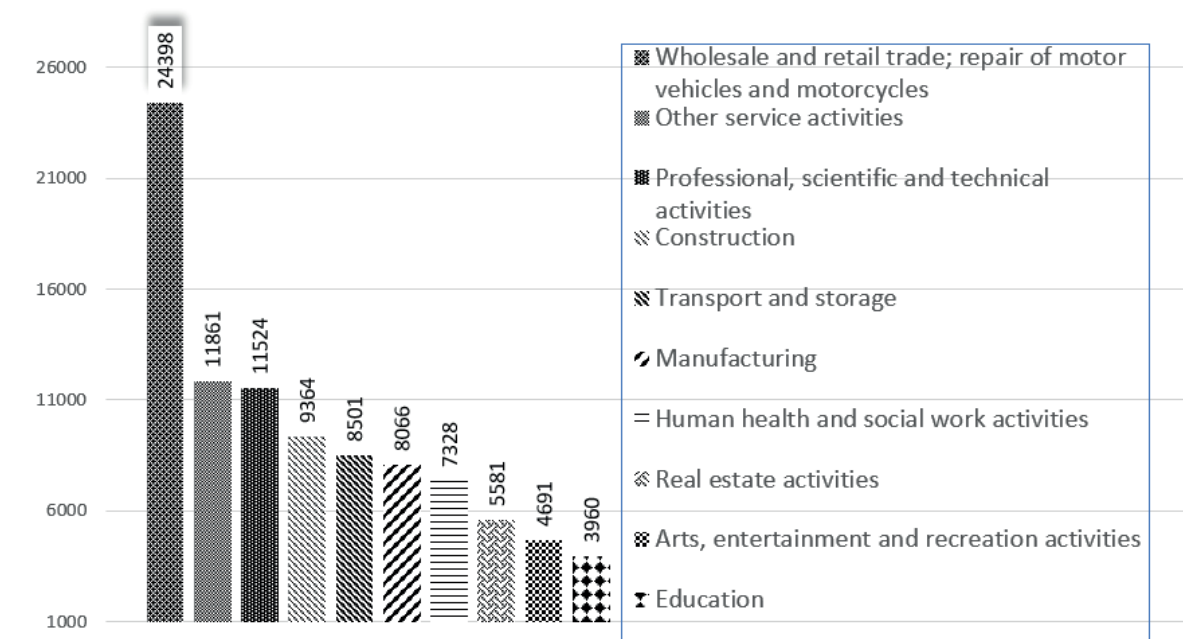


Figure 4. Operating economic entities by economic activity in 2021

Source: Compiled by the author, based on data from Statistics Lithuania (2022).

The majority (82.6%) of operating economic entities were small enterprises with up to nine employees (see Fig. 5). From 2020 to 2021, the number of companies operating during the year increased by 0.8% (or 816 companies), while during the period 2019 to 2020, this figure was 2.18% (or 2,351 newly registered companies). The growth of the smallest enterprises with up to four employees (a 1.6% increase) had the largest positive impact on growth in recent years, while the number of enterprises with five to nine employees (a 1.2% decrease) had a negative impact.

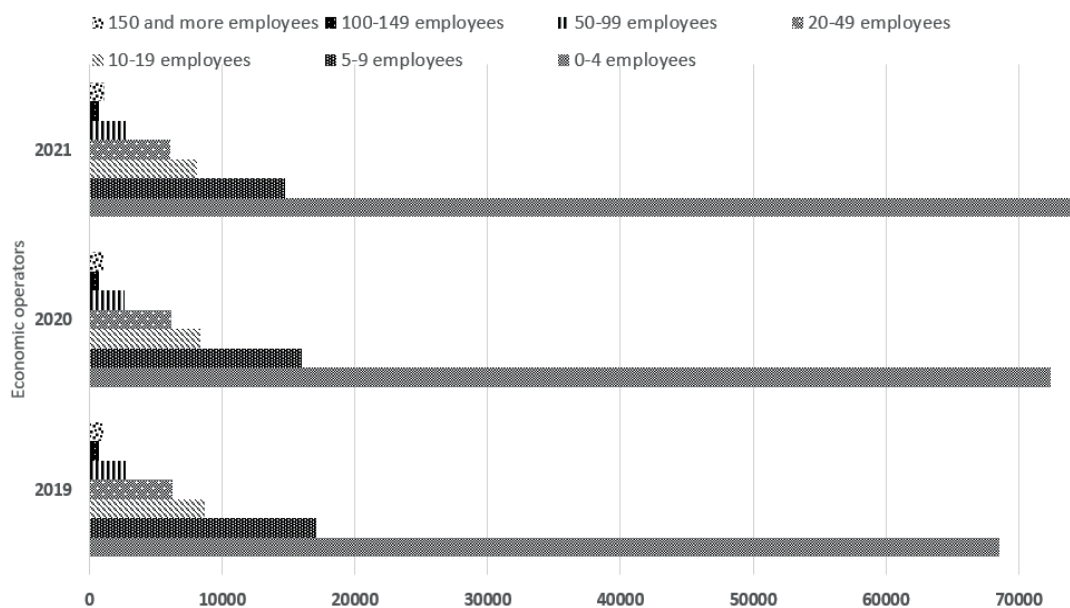


Figure 5. Operating economic entities by number of employees in 2019–2021

Source: Compiled by the author, based on data from Statistics Lithuania (2022).

Observing the trend in the number of registered and deregistered small and medium-size enterprises, it can be stated that even in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of legal entities has continued to grow.

In 2020, the number of small and medium-size enterprises increased by 6%. According to data from the Lithuanian Department of Statistics, 11,830 new small and medium-size enterprises were registered in 2020, which is 677 more than in 2019. During the same period, significantly fewer de-registrations took place: 1,070 companies, which accounts for 27%.

Most were very small companies (0–9 employees), at 82.3%. Small businesses accounted for 13.5% (10–49 employees), and medium-size (50 and more employees) enterprises accounted for 4.2% (see Fig. 6).

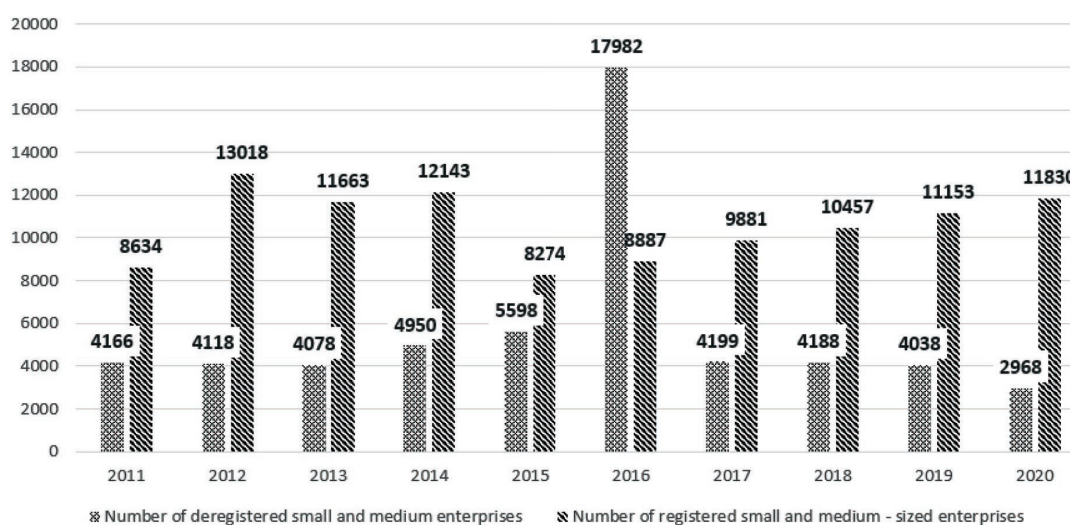


Figure 6. The number of registered and deregistered small and medium-size enterprises, 20.11.2020

Source: Compiled by the author, based on data from Statistics Lithuania (2022).



The turnover of small and medium-size enterprises amounted to almost 64.2 billion euros, and declined by 0.9% compared to 2019; 37% of turnover was earned by small businesses, and 36% by medium-size businesses. The turnover of micro-enterprises accounted for 27%.

Small and medium-size businesses earned 3.9 billion euros net profit, which was almost 0.6 billion euros, or 17.1%, more than in previous years. The net profitability of these companies was 6.1% (5.29% in 2019). The most profitable companies were very small, with a profitability of 8.5%.

#### 4. Business support measures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic

According to Kunz (2021), the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is much more serious than the financial crisis of 2007–2008, as it hit households, businesses, financial institutions and markets around the world at the same time. The economic impact of the epidemic lasted much longer than was initially thought. The supply of goods and services was limited, as factories and offices closed, and production declined.

At a microeconomic and macroeconomic level, the pandemic has had the following consequences:

- a decrease in corporate and household income;
- a decrease in private investment;
- production problems;
- problems in the labour market;
- rising factory prices.

According to Mogaji (2020), the government has a great responsibility to support its citizens and businesses in dealing with the consequences of the pandemic. Key indicators, such as a country's GDP growth rate, income distribution among its citizens, the unemployment rate, inflation and the level of household debt, affect the vulnerability of its citizens.

The Lithuanian government adopted the Economic and Financial Action Plan, which focused on five key areas: providing the necessary resources for the efficient operation of the health and social security systems, preserving jobs and incomes, maintaining business liquidity, and stimulating the economy. Lithuania's action plan was criticised for being too general, and using standard measures in exceptional circumstances, leading to several measures to change the plan (a comparative review of the socio-economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic [Covid-19] in the Baltic States).

The introduction of lockdown and most restrictions has forced businesses to react quickly to the situation by changing business models and managing their operations. For many, there were new opportunities, companies adapted to the changing environment and the needs of the Covid-19 pandemic: e-commerce, the transport of vital medical goods and equipment, teleworking, virtual communication, and more.

According to Norvaišienė *et al.* (2021), the most useful measures to support businesses are tax exemptions or temporary deferrals and various financial programmes. Rent subsidies and money transfers are also useful (see Table 2).

In 2021, the number of recipients of tax support for enterprises amounted to 42,000, and the number of subsidies amounted to 38,000, which accounted for almost 40% of all companies. One recipient received from 16,000 to 19,000 euros in tax support. The average subsidy per company decreased from 22,000 to 19,000 euros.

According to the Lithuanian Department of Statistics, business support has helped to mitigate the negative effects of Covid-19 on economic growth. More than a third of companies have received state support for Covid-19 victims. In 2020, tax aid amounted to 609,000,000 euros, and in 2021 to 788,000,000 euros. In 2020, subsidies exceeded one billion euros, and in 2021 they exceeded 730,000,000 euros.

Table 2. The most beneficial support measures for businesses

Micro enterprises		Small enterprises		Medium enterprises		Large enterprises	
Finance programs	59%	Exemptions or suspensions	64%	Exemptions or suspensions	70%	Exemptions or suspensions	71%
Exemptions or suspensions	54%	Finance programs	61%	Finance programs	63%	Finance programs	64%
Support for the self - employed	36%	Rental subsidies	34%	Employment programs	37%	Employment programs	39%
Rental subsidies	31%	Money transfers	33%	Rental subsidies	29%	Rental subsidies	28%
Employment programs	27%	Support for the self - employed	29%	Support for the self - employed	22%	Tariff reduction on imported materials	27%
Money transfers	24%	Employment programs	28%	Tariff reduction on imported materials	21%	Money transfers	17%
Tariff reduction on imported materials	16%	Tariff reduction on imported materials	15%	Money transfers	19%	Support for the self - employed	15%
Others	6%	Others	4%	Others	4%	Others	4%

Source: Norvaišienė et al. (2021).

## Conclusions

The theory of economic security is one of the most important aspects of economics. The issue of economic security is important, and is a priority in the activities of every state. The global Covid-19 pandemic created an unprecedented situation in the economies of countries, and affected the entire socio-economic system all at once. The crisis was an unexpected event with enormous consequences in almost every aspect of our daily lives. During the pandemic, it was particularly important for countries to maintain economic security in order to further their economic development.

In conclusion, in the context of the European Union, Lithuania was the country least affected by the pandemic. Compared to 2020, the real change in GDP, was 5.1% (without removal accounted for 4.8%). Compared to 2019, the change in real 2020 GDP was 0.1%, and increased by 4.6% compared to the previous period.

Production increased the most in chemicals and chemicals (45.6%), motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers (39.9%), other vehicles and equipment (34.9%), base metals (28.9%), and computer, electronic and optical products (28.2%). The greatest impact of the pandemic in 2020 was felt in the services sector. Accommodation and food service activities (-30.9%), the arts, entertainment and recreation (-16.5%), other services (-7.5%), and administrative and support service activities (-7.0%) recorded the largest decrease in value added.

The negative impact of the pandemic in 2020 was reflected in all components: gross fixed capital formation decreased by 1.8% (it grew by 6.6% in 2019), household final consumption expenditure decreased by 2.1% (+3.0% in 2019), imports of goods and services decreased by 4.4% (+6.1% in 2019), and exports of goods and services, which grew rapidly in 2019 (9.9%), maintained a modest growth (0.4%).

The pandemic also had a significant impact on the stability of existing businesses. In Lithuania in 2021, although the country was affected by the pandemic, there were 816 more economic entities than in 2020. By economic sector, the largest share of economic entities (81%) was in services and industry (9%), construction (8%), and agriculture (2%). Most of the operating entities were small enterprises with up to nine employees. From 2020 to 2021, the number of enterprises operating during the year increased by 0.8%, while

during the period 2019 and 2020, this figure was 2.18%. The growth of the smallest enterprises, with up to four employees, felt the largest positive impact on growth last year, while the number of enterprises with five to nine employees felt a negative impact. The establishment of legal entities continued to grow in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020, the number of small and medium-size enterprises increased by 6%. During the same period, the number of deregistrations was significantly lower, at 27% companies.

The impact of Covid-19 on the economic security of Lithuanian enterprises was relatively low. In general, the economic contraction will be less pronounced than was previously expected, due to the more favourable economic dynamics, less stringent labour market conditions, and additional fiscal, regulatory and monetary measures to support the economy. The case of Lithuania has shown that the ability to coordinate issues surrounding the consequences of Covid-19, addressed by consensus between governments and communities, is a way out of any crisis.

To ensure the economic security of enterprises, much attention should be paid to improving the efficiency of an enterprise, which leads to the creation of new jobs, better employment, better living standards, growth in the country's economy, and the better protection of society from socio-economic threats. Therefore, for any company wishing to ensure economic security, adaptability to new conditions is a desirable feature. It is already possible to see how some companies are able to make their production more flexible, partly by switching to the most necessary items or equipment in the fight against the pandemic. Such a pattern of adaptability and flexibility should guide companies' actions in the future, in order to maintain economic security. And this is the most important challenge to today's businesses.

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## MAŽŲ IR VIDUTINIO DYDŽIO LIETUVOS ĮMONIŲ EKONOMINIS SAUGUMAS COVID-19 PANDEMIJOS KONTEKSTE

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### Santrauka

COVID-19 pandemija lėmė nemažai pokyčių kiekvienos šalies ekonomikai. Nuolat augantis ligos atvejų skaičius, įrangos ir atsargų trūkumas, gamybos bei paslaugų tiekimo sutrikimai skatino imtis griežtų priemonių, siekiant stabdyti viruso plitimą. Pandemija paveikė ne tik sveikatos sistemą, bet ir regionų stabi-lumą, socialinį bei ekonominį gyvenimą, turėjo ir politinių bei saugumo padarinių, sutrikdė švietimo proce-sus, mobilumą, turizmą ir laisvalaikį. Formavosi nauji vartotojų elgsenos ir vartojimo modeliai. Neregėtai maža arba stulbinančiai didelė, atsižvelgiant į kategoriją, paklausa, iškreiptos tiekimo grandinės, pasikeitusi darbo forma, socialinis atsiribojimas, visi šie pokyčiai, įskaitant draudimus ir suvaržymus, buvo varomieji veiksniai, privertę įmones peržiūrėti savo organizacijų strategijas.

Pagrindinis šio straipsnio tikslas – išanalizuoti, kaip COVID-19 pandemija paveikė Lietuvos įmonių, kurios yra pagrindinė ekonomikos varomoji jėga, ekonominį saugumą. Ši problema yra svarbi ir prioritetinga kiekvienos valstybės veikloje. Kokį poveikį pandemija turėjo Lietuvos ekonomikai ir organizacijų verslo dinamikai, be to, aptartos pagrindinės pandemijos poveikio švelninimo priemonės. Taikant turinio analizės bei stebėjimo tyrimo metodus, remiantis moksline literatūra ir statistiniais duomenimis, atlikta lyginamoji analizė, vertinant COVID-19 pandemijos poveikį Lietuvos organizacijoms.

Remiantis tyrimo rezultatais galima teigti, kad Europos Sąjungos kontekste Lietuva būtų mažiausiai pandemijos paveikta šalis. Nors 2021 m. pradžioje buvo daug neapibrėžtumo dėl tolesnės pandemijos eigos bei jos valdymo, ekonomika augo sparčiau nei tikėtasi: didėjo pramonės produkcijos apimtys, augo mažme-ninė ir tarptautinė prekyba, nepaisant pandemijos masto, išsilaikė apdirbamosios gamybos bei didmeninės ir mažmeninės prekybos sektoriai. Labiausiai pandemijos įtaka buvo juntama paslaugų sektoriuje: apgyven-dinimo ir maitinimo paslaugos, meno, pramogų ir poilsio organizavimo, aptarnavimo bei administracinė veiklos. Pandemija turėjo nemažai įtakos ir veikiančių įmonių veiklos stabilumui. Karantino paskelbimas, organizacijų veiklų stabdymas ar apribojimas turėjo įtakos įmonių pajamoms, pelnui, veiklos tęstinumui.

Lietuvoje 2021 m., nors šalį veikė pandemija, veikė 816 ūkio subjektų daugiau (neįskaitant ekonomine veikla užsiimančių fizinių asmenų) nei 2020 m. Pagal ūkio sektorius daugiausia ūkio subjektų veikė paslaugų sektoriuje, pramonėje, statyboje ir žemės ūkyje. Didžioji jų dalis – tai mažos įmonės, kuriose dirbo 0–4 ar 5–9 darbuotojai. Per metus (nuo 2020 m. iki 2021 m.) veikiančių įmonių skaičius paaugo 0,8 proc., tuo tarpu 2019–2020 m. laikotarpiu šis skaičius siekė 2,18 proc. Didžiausią teigiamą įtaką pastarųjų metų augimui darė smulkiausių įmonių, turinčių 0–4 darbuotojus, skaičiaus augimas, tuo tarpu neigiamą poveikį darė gerokai sumažėjęs 5–9 darbuotojus turinčių įmonių skaičius. COVID-19 pandemijos kontekste juridinių asmenų steigimas toliau augo. Per 2020 m. smulkių ir vidutinių įmonių (nefinansinių įmonių be fizinių asmenų, vykdančių individualią veiklą) skaičius padidėjo 6 proc. Per tą patį laikotarpį išregistruota gerokai mažiau – 27 proc. įmonių.

Siekiant užtikrinti įmonių ekonominį saugumą, reikėtų didinti įmonės veiklos efektyvumą, tai lemtų naujų darbo vietų kūrimą, aukštesnį užimtumo ir gyventojų gyvenimo lygį, šalies ekonomikos augimą, geresnę visuomenės apsaugą nuo socialinių ir ekonominių grėsmių.

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