

Did COVID-19 boost society starting their business in Georgia

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Abstract

Background – The pandemic negatively impacted people’s health, economic and business activities, which caused mostly a reduction of consumption and supplement of goods and services, income and wages, some employers were left without jobs, and some entrepreneurs were made to close their small business, think and create different ways of a new business and job. The article aims to analyse if COVID-19 boosted society starting their business in Georgia.

Materials and Methods – The research was conducted from March 1, 2022, to August 31, 2022, by interviewing the physical persons in the surrounding area of the Public House of the Ministry of Justice in Tbilisi, Georgia if the Covid pandemic boosted people to start business, in which field and form of legal entity. During the research, were hired some volunteers. There were attempts to conduct interviews with about 500 physical persons but only 368 agreed to answer the questions. The questionnaires were planned according to the problems which were figured out in most of the world and of course in Georgia according to the secondary literature. The interviews lasted approximately 15 or 20 minutes. Furthermore, they also commented and expressed their attitude on this issue.

Results – The interviews were sorted, calculated, and given in the presented research.

Conclusion – COVID-19 boosted people to start mostly small businesses like courier services, information technologies, online shopping, etc. Some interviewers were even motivated to implement the innovation or start their SMEs for innovative activities, additionally, some of them preferred to have connections beyond the boundaries with non-resident persons or companies in the digital market.

Key Word: Small and medium-sized entrepreneurs (SME); digital market; Pandemic Covid-19, Georgia.

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I. Introduction

After December 2019 (spreading the Virus COVID-19) the Pandemic changed the traditional business for the ongoing processes without cancellation of them (Datta and Nwankpa, 2021). This made society increase the consumption of digital technologies to keep productivity. This also helped the country deglobalize and provide more or less self-saturation, additionally, it increased the consumption of digital technology at work and in everyday people’s lives as everyone needed to keep connections with each other (Zahra, 2021). Accordingly, various platforms, like e-business, delivery services, programming etc. became significant issues for businesses (Modgil et. al., 2022).

The virus caused changes in people, on the other hand, they did not have a big motivation to start their small businesses because they lost their jobs, or their income was reduced (Loan et al., 2021). On the other hand, the pandemic boosted local or potential businesses to meet the local demand and start new steps (Zahra, 2021).

In Germany, Covid-19 strongly impacted all companies and even start-ups, but innovative manufacturing industries and IT (Informational Technologies) services soared in registrations of start-ups (Fritsch et al., 2021). In 2020 new research was conducted in the Czech Republic to find out the effects of the Pandemic on Entrepreneurship: its activity grew and soared compared to the previous year; These activities were based on other business but unfortunately, not tourism, hospitality and other sectors as they were severely damaged (Dvouletý, 2021). According to the original research paper, in Saudi Arabia, SMEs and general entrepreneurs were forced to shift their utilizing online platforms to conduct their businesses (ALESSA et al., 2021).

It is significant to highlight that in the Public Republic of China, digital technology played a nodal role during the Pandemic and, in general, their economic recovery was a huge one. In addition, accordingly, Covid-19 helped the development of the digital economy as its significance is gradually increasing (Huang et al, 2021). According to a recent report, there are also remarkable changes and developments in starting the business in

information and communication technology (ICT) (digital technology) in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The COVID-19 pandemic boosted the government and people work online and use digital services and goods (Park et al., 2022). According to the Asian Development Outlook 2022 the of Asian Development Bank, starting a business has become easy and cheap, as all things can be done digitally. In general, crisis and of course Pandemic reasoned the compassion venturing – creating and running a new company, it aimed to properly deliver services/goods to the place where and to whom it is significant; one of the smart ideas of perfectly using the digital innovations were the following: crowd-based digital innovation which requires little processing capability for entrepreneurs to emerge inventory resources, where people will be able to share shelter facilities, generators, expertise food preparedness etc. innovation can also design knowledge management (Shepherd and Majchrzak, 2022). COVID-19 boosted the creation of new ideas like a panel dataset that includes flexible offline space market data which allows people or companies to share coworking spaces: knowledge sharing, collaboration and networking; this provides self-employed, start-ups, and corporates for begin or just running the businesses (Gauger et al., 2021).

Digitalization was accelerated during a pandemic and helped countries’ economies recover inclusive and sustainable development, and that also provided recovery of social life (United Nations, 2022).

II. Material and Methods

In Georgia quantities of registration of businesses and the fields given in Table I, additionally, forms of entities were withdrawn from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2023). In the research, there was used quantitative and qualitative analyses to reveal a tendency of COVID-19's impact on business activities.

As everything is not given in secondary literature and statistics, there were conducted interviews to study deeply peoples’ will to figure out the reasons for registrations/expansion of business, what forms they prefer to choose, if they were going to have employees etc.

As Tbilisi is the capital city of Georgia, it is a very active region and most of the people live here 1 201.8 thousand people – 32.6 % (of the total – 3 688.6 thousand people) by January 1, 2022, (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2023). For GDP of Georgia was 49 266.7 mln laris in 2021, and in Tbilisi, it was – 21 786.7 mln laris – 44.2 % (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2023). So, the research was conducted from March 1, 2022, to August 31, 2022, by interviewing the physical persons in the surrounding area of the Public House of the Ministry of Justice in Tbilisi, Georgia who were eager to register the private entrepreneurs or just needed various information there and then the granting the small business status at Revenue Service of Ministry of Finance.

During the research, were hired some volunteers. There were attempts to conduct interviews with about 500 physical persons but only 368 agreed to answer the questions. The questionnaires were planned according to the problems which were figured out in most of the world and of course in Georgia according to the secondary literature The interviews lasted approximately 15 or 20 minutes. Furthermore, they also commented and expressed their attitude on this issue.

There was also drawn official statistical data about registering and cancelling the registration of small business status from January 1, 2019, to August 31, 2022, from the Revenue Service of the Ministry of Finance (Service Department, Revenue Service, 2022). This information and the results of the conducted interviews will be compared and deeply analysed in the following section.

III. Result

Table I. Annual business activities according to the field in 2018-2022 in Georgia.

% Changes compared to last year	-1.7	% Changes compared to last year	-1.7	% Changes compared to last year	-18.3	% Changes compared to last year	26.8	% Changes compared to last year	50.6
2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
Field	Quantity	Field	Quantity	Field	Quantity	Field	Quantity	Field	Quantity
Total	51469	Total	50580	Total	41338	Total	52425	Total	78976
Unknown activity	28371	Unknown activity	23963	Unknown activity	20852	Unknown activity	31278	Unknown activity	67091
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE; REPAIR OF MOTOR VEHICLES AND MOTORCYCLES	9800	WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE; REPAIR OF MOTOR VEHICLES AND MOTORCYCLES	10466	WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE; REPAIR OF MOTOR VEHICLES AND MOTORCYCLES	8665	WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE; REPAIR OF MOTOR VEHICLES AND MOTORCYCLES	8531	WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE; REPAIR OF MOTOR VEHICLES AND MOTORCYCLES	2921
MANUFACTURING	2465	CONSTRUCTION	3020	CONSTRUCTION	2702	CONSTRUCTION	2597	INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION	2903

TRANSPORTATION AND STORAGE	1905	MANUFACTURING	2616	TRANSPORTATION AND STORAGE	1926	TRANSPORTATION AND STORAGE	2126	TRANSPORTATION AND STORAGE	1713
ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICE ACTIVITIES	1850	TRANSPORTATION AND STORAGE	2365	MANUFACTURING	1885	MANUFACTURING	1872	CONSTRUCTION	1180
CONSTRUCTION	1830	ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICE ACTIVITIES	2119	ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICE ACTIVITIES	1139	ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICE ACTIVITIES	1278	MANUFACTURING	721
PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ACTIVITIES	1021	PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ACTIVITIES	1262	PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ACTIVITIES	913	INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION	978	ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICE ACTIVITIES	595
ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT SERVICE ACTIVITIES	879	ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT SERVICE ACTIVITIES	996	INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION	629	PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ACTIVITIES	928	PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ACTIVITIES	545
REAL ESTATE ACTIVITIES	642	OTHER SERVICE ACTIVITIES	800	ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT SERVICE ACTIVITIES	594	ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT SERVICE ACTIVITIES	687	ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT SERVICE ACTIVITIES	356
OTHER SERVICE ACTIVITIES	570	INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION	651	AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHING	473	OTHER SERVICE ACTIVITIES	428	OTHER SERVICE ACTIVITIES	176
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION	462	AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHING	581	OTHER SERVICE ACTIVITIES	458	AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHING	427	EDUCATION	175

(Source: (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2023)).

The results of the conducted research are given in Table II.

Table II. The results of the conducted interviews from March 1, 2022, to August 31, 2022.

№	Questions	№	Answers	Quantity	Percentage
1	What is the reason for starting a business?	A	I was unemployed before and after the pandemic but now I simply decided to start a business	69.0	18.8 %
		B	I have a job, but I need extra income	79.0	21.5 %
		C	I lost my job during the pandemic and decided to start a business	170.0	46.2 %
		D	I will refrain from answering	10.0	2.7 %
		E	I just want a seasonal start	40.0	10.9 %
2	In what field do you want to start your business?	A	Courier service	93.0	30.3 %
		B	Online shopping	37.0	10.1 %
		C	Construction and repair work	22.0	6.0 %
		D	information technologies (software, web hosting, etc.)	64.0	17.4 %
		E	Trading (directly in-store or in-store online)	49.0	13.3 %
		F	Agricultural work	20.0	5.4 %
		G	Hostel services	31.0	8.4 %
		H	Other	52.0	9.1 %
3	What legality do you want to register?	A	Entrepreneur natural person (private entrepreneur)	80.0	21.7 %
		B	Entrepreneur natural person who will be granted the status of a small business	203.0	55.2 %
		C	LLC or other legal entity	39.0	10.6 %
		D	Other	46.0	12.5 %
4	Are you going to hire someone?	A	Yes, I am	29.0	7.9 %
		B	No, I am going to work alone	232.0	63.0 %
		C	Maybe if the business is justified	107.0	29.1 %
5	Are you going to engage in business activities (supplying goods/providing services)?	A	With resident persons	100.0	27.2 %
		B	With non-resident persons	51.0	13.9 %
		C	with both of them	182.0	49.5 %
		D	I do not know yet	35.0	9.5 %
6	Are you going to introduce any new/innovative things?	A	This is why I want to start a business	31.0	8.4 %
		B	No, I will work as standard as others	316.0	85.9 %
		C	Maybe	21.0	5.7 %

7	Do you plan to have digital services (online shopping, online consulting, delivery services)?	A	Yes, I do, it is very demanding, especially against the pandemic	140.0	38.0 %
		B	No, I do not, I'm planning on a small scale, and I don't think I'll need it	100.0	27.2 %
		C	Maybe	128.0	34.8 %
8	Do you want to create a business internationally?	A	Yes, I do, I planned it from the beginning	72.0	19.6 %
		B	Yes, but after receiving some income	60.0	16.3 %
		C	No, I don't	100.0	27.2 %
		D	Yes, I do but I lack information about it and it will be difficult for me to do	136.0	37.0 %

Source: own study.

During research there was an interesting issue, most entrepreneurs preferred the registration of small business status for some reason. The results of the registration and cancellation of Small Business Status between January 1, 2019, and August 31, 2022 are given in Figure II.

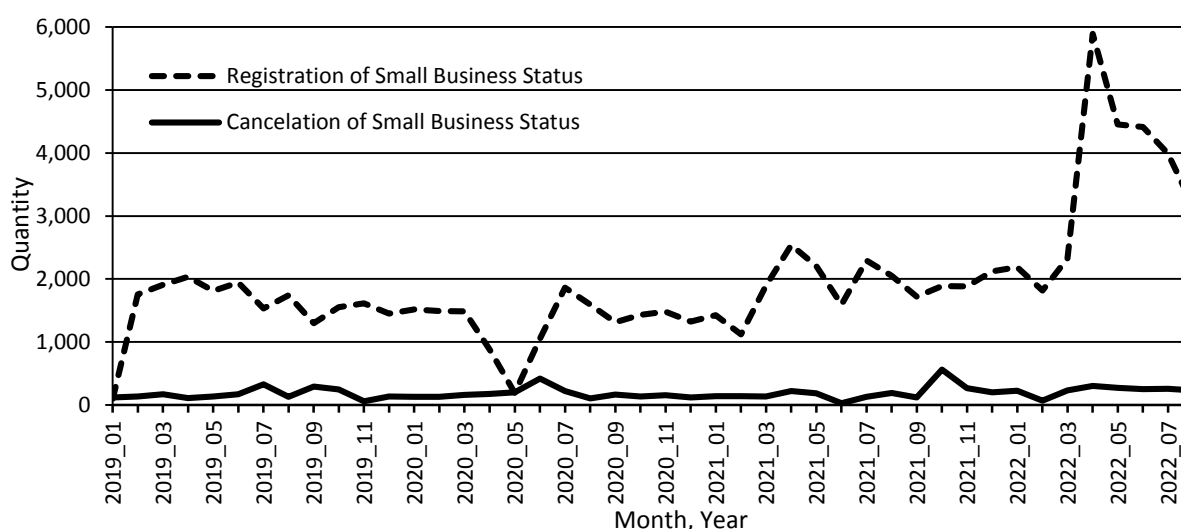


Figure 1: Registration and Cancellation of Small Business Status between January 1, 2019, and August 31, 2022.

Source: (Service Department, Revenue Service, 2022).

IV. Discussion

First, the main question must be answered before expanding the Pandemic in Georgia, in 2020 business registration was reduced by 18.3% compared to 2019 and in 2022 it soared by 50.6% compared to 2021 data.

Second, in Georgia there were registered 897,287 companies by 1st of October, in 2022, but only 214,378 were actives which was only 23.9 % among the registered ones; as for individual entrepreneurs totally there were 525,001 natural persons registered but only 128,299 – 24.4 % were actives by 1st of October, 2022, among them, too; According to the official statistical data, from November, 2021 8.8 % of the interviewed respondents income were reduced, but 1.8 % lost their jobs; mostly (41.1% of interviewed respondents) people lost jobs because the demands in the right field of the companies were decreased, 9.6 % of them were infected with Covid-19 or have infected member of their families, 6.5 % of the respondents could not continue the working as the firms were closed, 2.4 % of their household members wages were reduced etc.; with the mentioned reasons 55 % of the respondents were made to spend their savings; from March, 2020 average income was reduced for 53 % of the respondent households, and 31.8 % of them lost their jobs (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2023).

Third, Information and Communication registration soared and during the last 4 years it took third place in 2022 than it was in 2018 in eleventh place; additionally, its registration was increased by almost 200 % (here it meant individual entrepreneurs as well as legal entities). During the COVID-19 virus, finances are too significant condition for their future challenges; Digitization helped and still helps them expand their access to finances to get income as well as to get credits online in Georgia (Surmanidze & Chagelishvili, 2022).

Fourth, according to Table 1, the first question generally reveals the motivation for starting a business during the Pandemic in Georgia. Most of the participant interviewers highlighted that they, unfortunately, lost their jobs because of COVID-19 and they made up their minds to start it (46.2 %), it is also noteworthy that 21.5 % of participants wanted an additional income source – it is clear that income was not simply enough for these persons

or families, there should be borne in mind most people needed many financial resources for treatment at home or hospitals. Interestingly, 18.8 % of interviewers began their business after starting the pandemic even though both of the time (before and after the pandemic) they were unemployed, maybe their family's income was reduced or lost their jobs which was a basic reason. As for the seasonal business, it is common for a developing country like Georgia. Mostly they mentioned registering small business status at revenue service with the reason of tax relief (which is explained at the beginning of the research).

The second question aimed to understand in what field they wanted to start their business, this helped the researcher to find out what the main tendencies and directions of the modern start-up businesses were during the Pandemy (and after that): courier service – took first place with 30.3 %, information technologies (software, web hosting, etc.) – 17.4 %, online shopping – 10.1 % etc. these are the parts of e-entrepreneurship and in total innovative business is 57.8 %. It means that globalization is also actual in Georgia, too. As for the other fields of business, they are construction and repair work, trading (directly in-store or in-store online), agricultural work etc. are not as actual as it was years ago, maybe before the development of technology.

The third question figured out which form of registration they preferred to have: 76.9 % had eagers registering as an entrepreneur natural person (private entrepreneur), whereas **55.2 %** of interviewers wanted to be granted the status **a small business status**. One of the basic reason is that the income for private entrepreneurs are taxed at 20 % after deductions and they need standard accounting, but as for the income of the small business status private entrepreneurs are taxed at only 1 % without deductions and they only need simplified accounting; Furthermore but also only deductions in the journals additionally after exceeding the limit of 100 000 laris after registering VAT payers they have to begin standard accounting (online or a material journal) (The Parliament of Georgia, 2022) (The Ministry of Finance, 2010). 10.6 % of interviewers needed to have an LLC or other legal entity. It is clear that society in the developing country attempts to survive on her/his family or herself/himself at least.

63 % of the interviewers do not want to have employers, so they are oriented to be self-employed, it can be said that they are the right entrepreneurs who are going to start a business in currier service and information technologies (software, web hosting, etc.). 7.9 % of interviewers are ready to have employers so this means that they need more support to expand the business to keep or increase hired people and 29.1 % of research participants regretted hiring them, in that case, they need strong support from the government; these kinds of experiences should be deeply studied to increase unemployment in developing countries.

As informational technologies are being developed on the fifth question, the start-uppers were going to supply goods or provide services with resident persons as well as non-resident persons – 49.5 %, but only for non-resident persons – 13.9 %, it is economy of scale so the market size would be gradually being increased for local small businesses. 27.2 % of the participants were going to deliver services only to residents' person, here they meant people who simply lived in Georgia or were tourists. 9.5% were the right people who were eager to have a small business to survive not just to realize themselves in various and astonishing directions or fields, they like and are ambitious.

In the sixth question, the researcher tried to figure out how the local societies of emerging markets in developing countries like Georgia are ready to start a business with innovative things. Interestingly and unfortunately, 85.9 % of the interviewers were not going to implement or create any new/innovative things, but only 8.4 % are eager to do it. 5.7 % of interviewers were concerned about introducing innovative steps in their small business. These results are alarming, as approximately 86 % of interviewers were not eager to do something new, which is it could be said one of the obstructive reasons for Georgia's status as a developing country. Indeed, there is a big quantity of reasons and challenges for these countries. This is on the other side of future research themes and it can be taken into account.

As the innovation economy is becoming significant in the modern world, it is important to figure out what the start-uppers are going to do about having digital services (online shopping, online consulting, delivery services). For this reason, in the seventh question, the author investigated what these existing or potential entrepreneurs attempted to do in this direction. 38 % of them would like to have online shopping, online consulting or delivery services but 34.8 % do not know, as they explained they did not have enough knowledge to have it as it would help them expand their business. As 27.2 % of interviewers simply preferred not to have digital services, they just needed stable small businesses with a small amount of income.

At the end of the research, the last question was the most significant, as it aimed to explain international entrepreneurship. As the interviewers were ready to deal with trading or servicing with both resident and non-resident persons, 37 % had lack of information about it and it would be difficult for them to do it, furthermore, this is also the question of new research: what makes them consider in this way and what the main challenges did develop it; 27.2 % of them did not want it. It was and still is important that 19.6 % wanted to have international business in small business, fortunately, 16.3 % of interviewers were also going to have access to international companies or persons after receiving some income.

According to the conducted interviews here can be formed the following graphic image of how international entrepreneurship was being developed in Georgia as a developing country, international entrepreneurship is in the stage of development. The basic motivation for starting the business was “lost jobs” with 46.2 % of the interviewers, 30.3 % needed courier service, 55.2 % small business, no hiring with 63 %, 49.5 % of them would use supply service, no innovative activities with 85.9%, 38 % would use digital services and 37% would prefer to have international business.

Overall, the conducted research shows that people in emerging online markets are new, they just needed to start a business because of the pandemic which officially started at the beginning of 2020 in Georgia.

As for the facts and discussions, according to the official statistical data (see Figure.: 2), the number of registrations of small business status has begun increasing since February 2019; During these almost three years most of the registered status quantity was in April 2022 with 5 892 and in May 2022 - 4 452, and the last one – in January 2019 with 97 and May 2020 with 188 (Service Department, Revenue Service, 2022). From the mentioned figure it is clear how the curve surged before May 2020 and since then it has fluctuated, and it reached its peak in April 2022 (5 892).

As for the cancellation of the small business status, it was not as big a quantity as the registrations (see Figure.: 2).

During the research potential or existing entrepreneurs or SMEs explained that they needed innovations to be brought abroad and they needed loans with a low rate for starting a business, employers etc. mostly young people (students) were interested in informational technologies, luckily, the older ones also had willed to use it properly and this is also a plan of future research, too.

V. Conclusion

It is clear that COVID-19 boosted people to start businesses with small business status in IT services independently.

Small business start-uppers even did not discuss other intellectual work or direction. This direction indicates how low their aim, motivation, ambitions etc. were to create something new on their own, even though, according to the Tax Code of Georgia, small business turnover is taxed at only 1 % till the income reaches the limitation of 100,000 lari (after that they must register value-added-cost payers and additionally pay 18% out of their income). Maybe they will try not to exceed this limitation and not be taxed more than 1 %. They were ready to start a business but it meant that they could become a stable basement of economic development in Georgia as a developing country. They were not going to hire other persons, but during the interviewing, they highlighted that some of them wanted to have a family business, too. Some of them decided to have a business activity with non-residential persons, which means that they will increase their scale of economy in future, as their income will increase, too. Not more than 50 % of interviewers were indeed ready to install innovation in their start-up business it is very attractive that approximately 15 % had the will to create something new in Georgia’s emerging online market. Digital services, digitization, the Pandemic, lockdowns, small business taxation etc. boosted people to use digital services, like online shopping, online consulting, and delivery services, in their small enterprises, their total amount was more than 70 %, and that is already an important indication in little businesses. Some of them wanted to have international connections and transform their business internationally, too.

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