

THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES FOR SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

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In developed countries small and medium business (SMEs) are the main forms of an efficient economy. They provide a significant part of GDP and a significant part of jobs. However, the Republic of Belarus is still lagging behind the leading economies of the world in terms of its contribution to GDP: organizations of the SMEs form about 25% of GDP (14.9% belong to small business, 6.7% – to medium-sized and 3,1 % to individual entrepreneurs). By 2020, there is a task to increase this share to 40%.

In recent years, Belarus has carried out substantial work to improve the business environment: opening procedures, reduction of small enterprises, tax system's improving etc. Currently, all the necessary doing business institutional and economic conditions, legal framework's liberalization in the sphere of entrepreneurship are being created. Among them there are: the 7th Decree aimed by the President of the Republic of Belarus; «On the development of entrepreneurship» – Republic of Belarus' President Decree No. 9; «On some measures of state support of small business» - Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 31 «On the State Program of Innovative Development of the Republic of Belarus for 2016–2020»; Presidential Decree No. 8 «On the Digital Economy». All of them contribute to the improvement of our country's position in the global Doing Business ranking. Belarus ranked 37th in 2018 compared to 38th in 2017 (+1) and 44th in 2016 (+7). There have been positive developments in small business support, which can be one of the most important prerequisites for increasing its contribution to GDP and the wide spread of information and communication technologies (ICT). Active competition in the economy stimulates other companies to introduce information technologies to innovate their products, services, business processes and organizational structures.

The contribution of small business to GDP can be strengthened through the use of ICT, which are increasingly involved in the transformation of modern business, providing a fast, reliable and effective change of information. In the new economy, the information capital's role, which includes technological, scientific, technical, socio-economic information, is increasing. The information capital's basis is made up of information technologies that modify the market economy mechanism: the methods of competition are changing, local, regional, national and international information markets and telecommunication goods and services are being formed and nowadays operate on new principles. The use of ICT in SMEs affects the business development strategy, internal processes, the enterprise's structure, personnel policy and overall market behavior.

ICTs provide more and more opportunities for SMEs to participate in a knowledge-based economy, facilitating access and assisting in building a distribution network on a global scale, as well as opening new markets and sources of competitive

advantage. Potential benefits from the use of information technologies for SMEs increase business efficiency, lower costs, and increased productivity. Therefore, in many countries, programs are widely used to attract small businesses to the active introduction of ICT. However, there are many barriers that prevent small businesses from fully realizing the benefits of ICT. Many SMEs themselves may not see their advantages for developing their own business. In many cases, unlike large businesses, they face difficulties in finding the best ways to use ICT elements due to lack of time, information and staff qualification. Often small businesses don't have the human and financial resources for the use of ICT, due to the concentration of their attention on everyday operations, lack of additional resources. On the one hand, they are worried about the costs of creating and maintaining information technologies, and on the other hand, they are uncertain about the expected return on such investments. Often they use of information products for corporate management and communication. Also there are risks associated with the transaction mechanism for contracts concluded using Internet systems. The task of the state is to play a crucial role in overcoming such problems, concentrating on the development of IT infrastructure, broadband access, openness and confidentiality of information, raising the skills of small business workers and developing public-private partnership.

When implementing the Republic of Belarus's development programs, it is necessary to use the experience of other countries, taking into account the unique socio-economic and cultural-historical situation of the country. As for the strategy of more active ICT's introduction in the SME sector, it requires careful, balanced and comprehensive development. To do this, it is necessary to use a systematic approach to this problem's study, based not only on the benefits provided by high technology, but also to identify the obstacles that inhibit their activation.