

## SOCIAL INNOVATIONS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESSES IN UKRAINE

*L. S. Bezuhla, D.E., Professor, Bezuhla.l.s@nmu.one,  
orcid.org/0000-0002-6520-4325, Dnipro University of Technology,  
T. V. Herasymenko, Ph. D (Geology), Associate Professor, herasymenko.t.v@nmu.one,  
orcid.org/0000-0002-5437-437X, Dnipro University of Technology,  
M. V. Bieloborodova., Ph. D (Econ.), Associate Professor, Bieloborodova.m.v@nmu.one,  
orcid.org/0000-0001-8329-7679, Dnipro University of Technology,  
M. O. Nechepurenko, Post-graduate Student, Nechepurenko.m.o@nmu.one,  
orcid.org/0009-0009-5789-8871, Dnipro University of Technology*

**Methods.** During the research, such methods of scientific research were used as abstraction – when determining the essence of the concepts «social investments», «social entrepreneurship», «green technologies» and «silver technologies»; the method of classifications and comparison – when forming the structure of the main economic indicators for large, medium and small enterprises, as well as carrying out a comparison in the countries of the European Union and Ukraine; statistical – when determining the dynamics of capital investments of small and medium-sized businesses of Ukraine.

**Results.** Based on open statistical data, the main quantitative indicators of the economic activity of small and medium-sized businesses in Ukraine are summarized, taking into account their influence on the level of involvement in social innovations, and their dynamics for the period 2010–2022 are analyzed. The analysis of the peculiarities of the functioning of small and medium-sized businesses in Ukraine allowed to highlight specific features of the existing model of involvement in social innovation activities of business structures. A trend towards more stable small business activity was revealed, which, however, is characterized by a sufficiently low level of profitability (except for 2021). This actualizes the issue of financial security and requires more active support from the state for this type of business structure.

**Novelty** highlights the characteristic features of the Ukrainian model of the involvement of small and medium-sized businesses in the implementation of social innovations and determining their impact on the functioning of the social sphere of the national economy.

**Practical value.** The problems identified during the research in the functioning of the Ukrainian model of social investment of medium and small businesses can be used as examples of negative processes in the field of social responsibility of business structures. Taking them into account when developing the directions of state social policy can contribute to its higher efficiency.

**Keywords:** innovative activity, social innovations, global trends of innovation, small and medium-sized business, state, civil society, social responsibility of business, social obligations.

**Statement of problem.** The main goal of entrepreneurial activity is, first of all, systematic profit-making. This is the nature and essence of entrepreneurship. Also, an equally important function of an entrepreneur is to be an innovator, implement innovations and thereby be a conductor of economic development.

However, every year in Ukraine and abroad, more and more companies and individual entrepreneurs do not limit themselves to the commercialization of their projects, conquering markets and achieving their well-being, but take on social responsibility, solving important socially-oriented tasks during entrepreneurial activity.

Small and medium-sized enterprises are the most important element of the economy of any country. It determines the rates of economic growth, the structure and quality of the gross national product, while ensuring the formation of a competitive environment and the implementation of entrepreneurial initiative, and also performs socioeconomic functions of ensuring employment, which, in turn, increases the welfare of the population. It is a small and medium-sized business that is an indicator, its activity allows us to conclude the degree of penetration of ethical values into the life of society and the business environment.

The social responsibility of small and medium-sized businesses plays a significant role in the system of interaction within the economic system. On the one hand, compliance with its principles allows attracting a larger number of customers and investors, increasing ratings and improving the image. On the other hand, the amount of free funds does not always allow making a significant contribution to the implementation of social innovations, including the implementation of socially responsible activities, in the case of small and medium-sized business entities. This contradiction reflects the specifics of the functioning of enterprises under the conditions of compliance with the order of sustainable development.

The implementation of socially responsible innovations of small and medium-sized businesses can also be considered as an opportunity to access financial resources. Socially oriented-investors take all indicators into account when making decisions. Companies are evaluated from the point of view of financial perspectives, ethical, environmental and social consequences of their activities, as it is believed that the integration of sustainable development goals into the business strategy ensures improved financial results in the long term, which in turn affects the effectiveness of investments [1]. Accordingly, socially oriented innovations represent a business opportunity for entrepreneurial structures to attract financial resources and expand the scope of activity.

**Analyses of recent papers.** Concepts such as «social innovations», «social entrepreneurship», «social entrepreneur», «green technologies» and «silver economy»,

which became widely used in Europe in the second half of the 20th century, are gradually entering the Ukrainian reality [2].

Social innovations are purposefully and systematically implemented by entrepreneurs following society's requests, aimed at solving acute social problems by introducing various types of innovations, effective use of resources and social potential of organizations [3].

Solving social issues becomes possible when certain rates of economic growth are achieved, innovative processes are implemented, and resources are effectively used by small and medium-sized businesses. Only effective small and medium-sized enterprises can introduce social innovations and be truly socially responsible companies [4].

At the initial stage, most of the studies, in particular such scientists, associated social responsibility and involvement in social innovation mainly with large corporations. Several modern researchers, including such international and domestic scientists as Bieloborodova M. et al. [5], Andrusiv U. et al. [6], Torkkeli L. and Durst S. [7], Raiko D. and Podrez O. [8] recognize the active role of small and medium-sized businesses in stimulating social innovation and development of the business environment based on sustainable development.

Thus, the commercialization of social innovations for small and medium-sized businesses is both an obligation and a business opportunity. The first can be considered as a responsibility related to the economic function of the organization, regulated by the legal framework and based on ethical norms or society's expectations regarding business. Social innovation becomes an opportunity for entrepreneurship as soon as it is integrated with business strategy. As a result, socially responsible activities open wide opportunities for companies in various directions, from gaining a competitive advantage to improving financial results.

**Aim of the paper** is to evaluate the effectiveness of the functioning of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ukraine as the main driver of the development of social innovations in business.

**Materials and methods.** The largest employer in Ukraine is medium and small

business, which accounts for more than 75% of all employed Ukrainians or 4.8 million employed persons. The remaining 25% or 1.6 million people are employees of large enterprises. The most popular sphere of activity of small and medium-sized businesses in Ukraine is trade (wholesale and retail) and motor vehicle repair, followed by logistics, industry, agriculture and construction.

The most important economic functions of a business are determined by its role as an employer, as a producer of goods and services, as a taxpayer, as an innovator, and as an economic agent. It should not be forgotten that small and medium-sized businesses play the most important social role.

Thus, through the organization of small and medium-sized enterprises, some people realize their creative and entrepreneurial potential, socially vulnerable groups of the population are involved in the production process (women, youth, students, disabled people, pensioners, etc.), the need of people for communication is actively realized at enterprises in the service sector.

Small and medium-sized businesses have several advantages over large enterprises, such as proximity to local markets and a clear focus on customer needs, the ability to produce products in small batches, the absence of redundant management links, etc. Small businesses have what large companies are trying to achieve – differentiation and individualization of demand.

In general, the development of the small and medium-sized business sector has a positive effect on the development of the competitive environment, the creation of additional jobs, the increase of the population's income and the improvement of the quality of life. The establishment of a single value of the criterion of the number of employees for all types of activities and the introduction of a new indicator of activity results brought the Ukrainian practice of defining large, small and medium-sized enterprises closer to European standards [9]. We compare the main performance indicators of large, small and medium-sized businesses in Europe and Ukraine (table 1).

Table 1

Structure of the main economic indicators between large, medium and small businesses in countries of the European Union and Ukraine

Indicator	Countries of the European Union			Ukraine	
	large business	medium business	small business	large business	medium business
Number of enterprises	0,2	0,9	98,9	0,2	5,6
Number of employees	33,0	16,9	50,0	25,4	48,0
The volume of sold products	44,1	18,6	37,3	36,5	44,5

Source: compiled by the authors according to [11]

The number of medium and small businesses in the European Union and Ukraine is the same and amounts to 99.8%. In European countries, the share of employees in small and medium-sized businesses is about 66.9%, in Ukraine – 74.6%, the share of products created by enterprises of the sector reaches 55.9% of the GDP of European countries, 63.5% in Ukraine. In Ukraine, the development of small and medium-sized businesses practically does not lag behind the level of developed countries.

Studying the state of small and medium-sized enterprises involves a comprehensive

assessment of the scope of its activities, the main resources necessary for development and an analysis of the effectiveness of their use; study of business investment activity and the main results of its activity [10].

The number of registered small and medium-sized enterprises is one of the main indicators characterizing their entrepreneurial activity. According to this indicator, during the analyzed period, the reduction of small and medium-sized businesses follows. Thus, until 2018, the number of small and medium-sized enterprises increased, and in 2019, the indicator

decreased by 1 and 2%, respectively. At the same time, the dynamics of the number of enterprises over the years show a clear tendency to increase the specific weight of small and medium-sized enterprises in their total number.

Statistical data on the demography of small and medium-sized enterprises (regarding the number of newly created, so-called «birth rates», «mortality» – bankruptcies and cessation of activity) in Fig. 1 show that with the general stabilization of the number of small and medium-sized enterprises (stable 5 units per 10 thousand of the existing population during 2010–2022), the number of small enterprises per 10 thousand population of Ukraine increased from 78 units in 2010 to 85 enterprises per 10,000 people in 2021, in 2022 it again decreased to 78.

Analysis of investments in fixed capital as the main indicator of entrepreneurs' confidence in future development revealed a rather low level of investment activity.

Studies show that the volume of capital investment in small and medium-sized enterprises is growing disproportionately and at an uneven pace. The study of the indicated indicators in their dynamics (Fig. 1) shows a higher investment capacity of medium-sized enterprises compared to small ones, since the capital investments of medium-sized enterprises in 2021 increased almost 4 times compared to 2010, while in small enterprises their volume became 3.5 times higher for the same period. The average capital expenditure per 1 UAH of income for medium and small businesses is almost the same 0.04 UAH for the analyzed period.

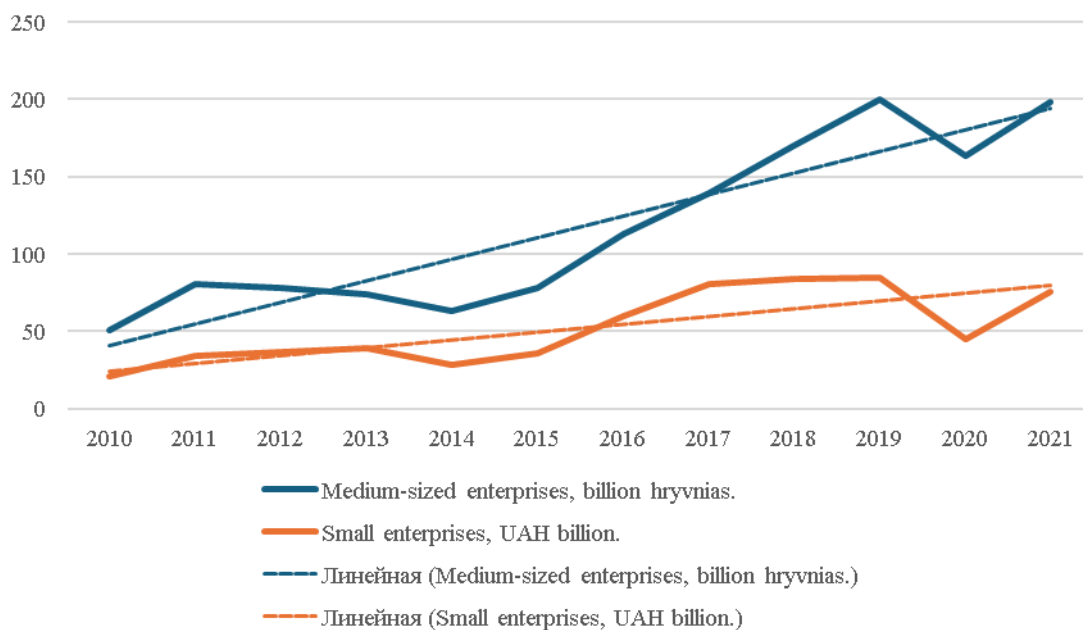


Fig. 1. Dynamics of capital investments of small and medium-sized businesses of Ukraine for 2010–2021

Source: compiled by the authors according to [12]

It is necessary to note the reduction of investments in fixed capital by Ukrainian entrepreneurs, this is due to the sectoral structure of business. In recent years, the number of small and medium-sized enterprises has increased in areas that do not require equipment, construction and equipment of

production areas (education, health care, financial activities, etc.).

To characterize the economic efficiency of small and medium-sized business entities, we will analyze the dynamics of enterprise income, production costs, and financial results.

According to the presented data, in

general, the income of medium-sized enterprises amounted to 4,906.8 billion UAH in the crisis year of 2022, which is by 1,000 UAH billion less than in 2021. It should be noted that the income of an average business for the period 2010–2021 (Fig. 2) has a growing trend (the average annual growth rate is 111%). At

the same time, small businesses are also seeing an annual increase in their income, only in 2022 the reduction in turnover amounted to 475 million UAH, which is associated with an increase in the number of liquidated organizations (the average annual growth rate for the analyzed period is also 111%).

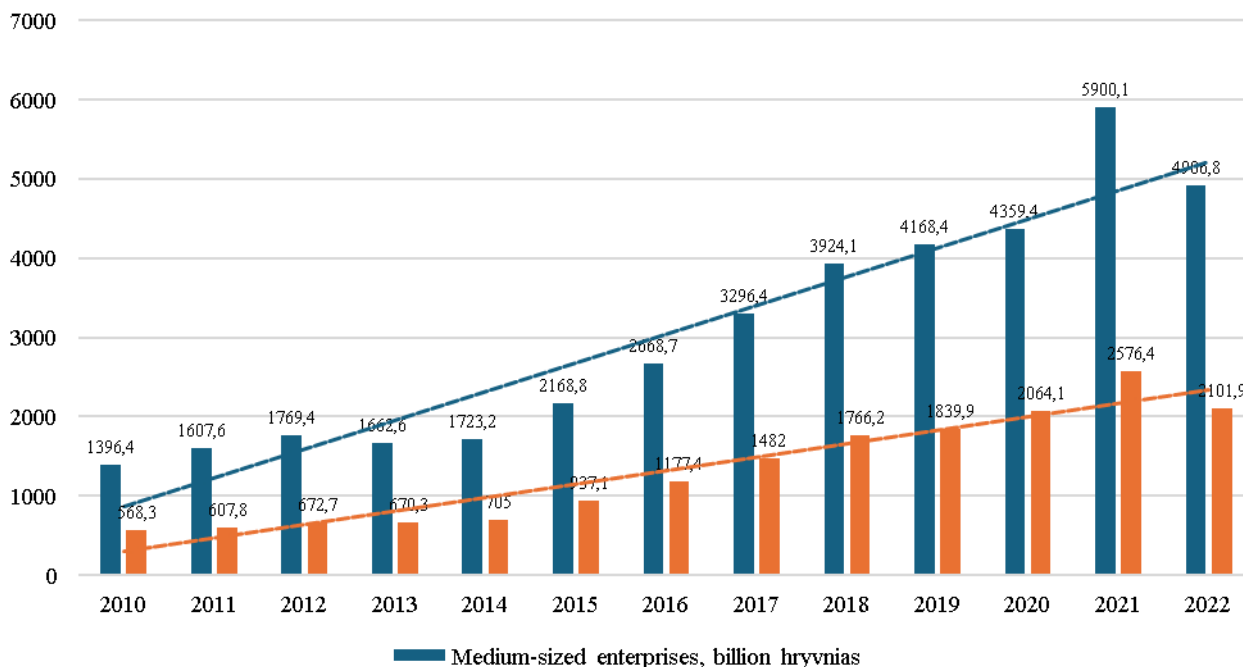


Fig. 2. Volume of products sold (goods, services) by small and medium-sized businesses for 2010–2022

Source: compiled by the authors according to [14]

Analyzing expenses for ten years, we conclude that they are growing at a higher rate compared to the growth of SME incomes, so the average annual increase in expenses of medium-sized businesses is 112.3%, and for small businesses – 114.5%. This leads to the fact that SMEs operate with worse financial results, it should also be noted that in 2022, the share of medium-sized businesses that made a profit significantly decreased from 78.9% in 2021 to 71.5% in 2022; among small business enterprises, there was a decrease of 10% from 72.5% to 62.5%.

One of the key reports for small and medium business owners is the balance sheet. It is thanks to it the entrepreneur can control the balance of money on the accounts, how much and to whom he owes, who owes him, and can also assess the financial stability of his business. Analyzing the ten-year period, we note the annual growth of the currency of the

SME balance sheet (on average 110.4% medium business, 112.2% small business). This demonstrates an increase in the assets and liabilities of enterprises, which indicates the strengthening of business activity and acquisition of assets (this phenomenon can be considered positive for medium and small businesses) [13]. The study confirms the positive features of small business, such as flexibility, mobility, speed of response to changes, adaptation to the external environment, but at the same time it also has negative features, such as high sensitivity to negative changes in the general economic situation, vulnerability to changes in prices, inflation, cost credit resources, solvency of the population, etc.

Taking into account these features, small business activity is more stable, but with a rather low level of profitability (except for 2021), without a margin of financial security

and in need of more active support from the state than an average business.

Solving social issues becomes possible when certain rates of economic growth of business structures are achieved, which, in turn, is determined by the efficiency of the use of production factors. Social innovations are becoming a new paradigm of conducting business in modern conditions.

At the same time, the practical implementation of social innovations is held back by the lack of a unified understanding of the essence and limits of social responsibility of business, in particular small and medium-sized businesses, which form the basis of the Ukrainian economy [6].

Despite a significant variety of methodological approaches to assessing the state of social responsibility of business and its involvement in social innovations, a comprehensive system of assessing the social responsibility of small and medium-sized businesses, taking into account the expectations and possibilities of meeting the needs of stakeholders at the regional level, has not been formed. Important from this point of view is the ability of SMEs to determine and perceive the needs of stakeholders in social innovations, it is about the process of receptivity to social innovations and the results of the behavior of small and medium-sized businesses are presented in Fig. 3.

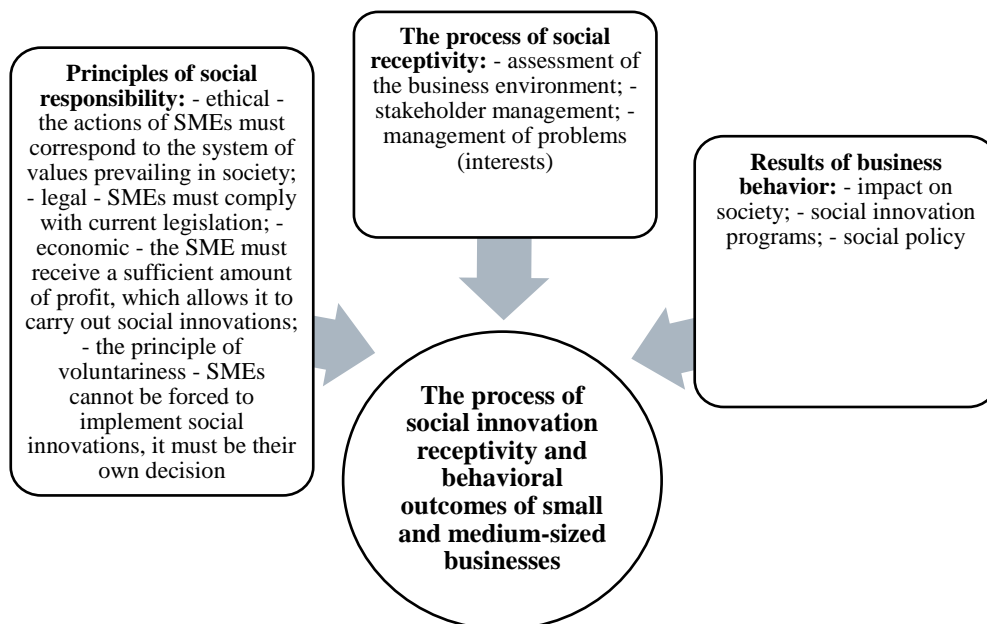


Fig. 3. The process of social innovation receptivity and behavioral outcomes of small and medium-sized businesses

Source: compiled by the authors

This model can be classified as the most acceptable, since it combines the elements of a normative analysis, which defines the forms of responsibility of small and medium-sized businesses to society, and a positive analysis with the definition of practical recommendations for responding to the relevant requirements, expectations and wishes of society. The logic of building this model corresponds to managerial perception: the principles of socially responsible business are embodied in the processes of receptivity to social innovations, which, in turn, lead to

measurable results of appropriate economic behavior.

According to the analysis of the functioning of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ukraine, it is possible to distinguish the distinctive features of the model of the implementation of social innovations in business structures.

The first distinctive feature of the model of involvement in social innovations in small and medium-sized businesses is the widespread practice of non-compliance with the principles (conditions) of socially responsible behavior by



the vast majority of business structures. It is believed that a business can be socially responsible, if it has, under the conditions of current legislation and moral and ethical norms, a sufficient amount of profit for the implementation of social innovations.

At the same time, the authors are forced to state that in modern conditions in Ukraine, the vast majority of business entities are to a greater or lesser extent connected with «shady» aspects of doing business, which in itself contradicts the signs of a socially responsible company. Thus, according to expert estimates, «the shadow economy» covers the field of small business from 30 to 40% of the volume of products and services provided [13]. However, non-compliance with current legislation is not the only obstacle on the way to building a model of socially responsible behavior in small and medium-sized businesses.

A more significant obstacle is the inability of most small and medium-sized business structures to function effectively and obtain an acceptable amount of profit within existing institutional constraints.

Today's realities are such that in most small and medium-sized enterprises, the dominant strategy is survival in a changing environment, not growth. In Ukraine, the average life cycle of a small and medium-sized enterprise is a little more than four years and the rate of return on average is 5%. It is clear that for such a short life cycle of companies, the meager amount of profit does not guide them to choose a socially responsible line of behavior and does not allow them to carry out social innovations.

In turn, the low profitability of small and medium-sized enterprises is explained not so much by the inability of domestic businessmen to work effectively, as by the imperfection of the institutional environment, as well as the presence of systemic problems in the state policy of supporting small and medium-sized enterprises [8].

Currently, many SMEs face acute problems related to the shortage of personnel, the lack of production and office premises, and the lack of financial resources for business development. Also reduces the level of profitability and high costs of doing business: taxes, rent and other payments.

The low degree of profitability of small and medium-sized businesses turns into a powerful restraining factor in the establishment of the institution of social responsibility in business. Therefore, calling on entrepreneurs to be socially responsible, the state is obliged to create the necessary institutional conditions for their full development.

The second feature of the model of involvement in social innovations is the lack of a managerial approach to issues of socially responsible behavior.

In today's conditions, many large Ukrainian companies are gradually beginning to consider their social responsibility as a strategic direction of activity, fix their strategic intentions in this direction in program documents and publicly present them [15]. Thus, approximately 50% of large business enterprises already have a formalized policy or strategy in the field of socially responsible behavior.

The third feature of the model of involvement in social innovation of small and medium-sized firms is that the latter face a narrower circle of interested persons, unlike large companies.

So, for example, shareholders are not key stakeholders for small and medium-sized companies. This is explained primarily by the specifics of the smallest business. Small businesses are mostly small firms with a limited number of employees. If a medium-sized enterprise is created as a joint-stock company, its shares are usually distributed among a narrow, well-known circle of persons. Unlike large corporations, which are characterized by the separation of ownership and management. Small and medium-sized businesses, on the contrary, are characterized by a combination of ownership and management functions in the same hands [7]. Therefore, in small and medium-sized enterprises, conflicts between owners and managers regarding the development of the company, including issues of socially responsible behavior, are practically impossible.

The role of the natural environment is less significant for small and medium-sized businesses. For large companies, the environment is a key stakeholder.

The modern Ukrainian sector of small and medium-sized enterprises is mainly represented by non-capital-intensive, narrow market-oriented firms in the field of public catering and service. In turn, the non-production sphere is less closely related to ecology. Therefore, only 15% of domestic small and medium-sized businesses have included the implementation of environmental functions in their statutory documents. It should also be noted that the role of various public organizations and business unions as stakeholders of enterprises is also insignificant.

Involvement of stakeholders and interaction with them should take place on an ongoing basis. Before showing activity in interaction, it is necessary to identify the main motives of the business and possible benefits. These include: understanding and alignment of goals, duration, constraints, time, resources, and the ability to influence decision-making within the business structure. Also, when developing a system of interaction, it is necessary to pay attention to the expectations of stakeholders, and for this, the company must monitor the business, social, economic and ecological environment and, if possible, be aware of events related to stakeholders.

Thus, the concept of stakeholders is the most suitable supporting system for determining the level of involvement in social innovations. The fourth characteristic of the model of involvement in social innovations of SMEs of Ukraine is that in recent years, many large enterprises have observed a tendency to realize the common economic interests of employees and employers. Both entities are economically necessary for each other. Therefore, it is no coincidence that now up to 50% of the total amount of spending on corporate social programs of large businesses goes specifically to personnel development.

The situation is fundamentally different in small and medium-sized businesses, where the practice of mass violation of workers' rights has developed. A distinctive feature of labor relations in small and medium-sized businesses is their informal nature.

The fifth feature of the model of involvement of Ukrainian SMEs in social innovations is that small and medium-sized enterprises are under more pressure from

regional and local authorities than large businesses. Large enterprises that have significant financial and material resources can afford to defend their interests, resist the government's proposals and win. Small and medium-sized businesses are under the full control of local authorities, in case of resistance by SMEs, the city administration has the leverage to punish recalcitrant businessmen - evict them from the premises, not renew the lease agreement, etc.

Most often, managers of small and medium-sized companies are forced to provide support to sectors of the social sphere, which are a priority for the local administration, but are not of significant business interest [16]. At the same time, representatives of the state government and local self-government admit that they do not have clear standardized mechanisms for working with businesses, and there are no transparent rules for the relationship between business and government.

As a result, both business and administrative bodies agree that the main problem in partnership formation is the lack of a systematic approach to the involvement of small and medium-sized enterprises in the social sphere.

Having analyzed the level of social obligations of business, it can be stated that a difficult and alarming situation is developing in this field. The facts show that mostly small and medium-sized enterprises stay away from the ideas of social innovations.

The current situation can be explained by the action of the following factors:

1) the difficult financial situation of enterprises, is caused in many ways by the imperfection of the institutional environment. Thus, the strategy of survival prevailing in small and medium-sized businesses disorganizes the desire of companies to build a socially responsible line of behavior;

2) disunity and passivity of civil society in Ukraine, which does not contribute to solving social issues by business. In addition, the potential of civil society in the field of control and stimulation of business to socially responsible behavior has not been fully realized;

3) the absence of a state program to introduce the principles of social responsibility



into the business community. A mechanism for state support of companies that demonstrate high achievements in the field of social innovation has not been developed;

4) insufficiently high level of business culture of business structures, which makes it difficult to adequately assess the company's actions by ethical standards;

5) underestimation by management of enterprises of benefits from socially responsible behavior;

6) the subjective unpreparedness of the management of many enterprises for the implementation of social innovations. The majority of Ukrainian businessmen believe that the social responsibility of business to society is exhausted by compliance with social obligations stipulated by current legislation.

The mentioned problems at the same time point to ways of establishing the institution of socially responsible behavior in the business environment. This requires the formation of relevant values in public consciousness, as well as the active participation of the state and institutions of civil society [17]. The key to the establishment and effective functioning of the institute of social responsibility of small and medium-sized enterprises is the interest of the business community itself in a similar line of behavior. This need, as a mass phenomenon, cannot arise by itself. It can be formed only as a reaction in response to demands from the public and as a result of purposeful state policy.

**Conclusions.** The main driving force of the transition of SMEs to the implementation of social innovations is the unification of the efforts of three economic entities: the state, civil society, and small and medium-sized businesses. In this, the leading role in the process of establishing the institution of social responsibility of business should belong to the state. The state should create conditions for socially responsible behavior of business structures. The state must combine the interests of competition, private initiative and obtaining high profits from solving social issues through its presence in market processes.

The results of the study showed the existence of the necessary conditions for the implementation of social investments, which modern businesses must focus on in their activities:

– ensuring the profitable operation of the enterprise;

– ensuring high quality of products (works, services);

– building long-term mutually beneficial relations with stakeholders;

– creation of attractive jobs with timely payment of «white» wages and investments in the development of human potential;

– implementation of tax, labor, environmental legislation, etc.;

– contribution to the formation of civil society through the implementation of local community development projects.

The perspective of further research is to improve the evaluation system of the initiative component of the implementation of social innovations of small and medium-sized businesses based on taking into account regional business conditions.

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## СОЦІАЛЬНІ ІННОВАЦІЇ МАЛОГО ТА СЕРЕДНЬОГО БІЗНЕСУ В УКРАЇНІ

*Л. С. Безугла, д. е. н, професор, НТУ «Дніпровська політехніка»,  
Т. В. Герасименко, к. геол. н., доцент, НТУ «Дніпровська політехніка»,  
М. В. Белобородова, к. е. н., доцент, НТУ «Дніпровська політехніка»,  
М. О. Нечепуренко, аспірант, НТУ «Дніпровська політехніка»*

**Методологія дослідження.** Під час виконання дослідження були використані такі методи наукового пошуку, як: абстрагування – при визначенні сутності понять «соціальні інвестиції», «соціальне підприємництво», «зелені технології», «срібні технології»; метод класифікацій та порівняння – при формуванні структури основних економічних показників для великих, середніх та малих підприємств, а також здійснення порівняння у країнах Європейського Союзу та Україні; статистичний – при визначенні динаміки капітальних інвестицій малого та середнього бізнесу України.

**Результати.** На основі відкритих статистичних даних узагальнено основні кількісні показники економічної діяльності малого та середнього бізнесу України із врахуванням їхнього впливу на рівень залучення до соціальних інновацій, а також проаналізовано їхню динаміку за період 2010–2022 рр. Аналіз особливостей функціонування малого та середнього бізнесу в Україні дозволив виділити специфічні ознаки існуючої моделі залучення до соціальної інноваційної діяльності бізнес-структур. Виявлено тенденцію до більш стабільної діяльності малого бізнесу, яка, однак, характеризується достатньо низьким рівнем рентабельності (окрім 2021 р.). Це актуалізує питання фінансової безпеки і потребує більш активної підтримки з боку держави саме цього виду підприємницьких структур.

**Наукова новизна** полягає у виокремленні характерних особливостей української моделі залучення малого і середнього бізнесу до здійснення соціальних інновацій та визначенні їхнього впливу на функціонування соціальної сфери національної економіки.

**Практична значущість.** Виокремлені під час дослідження проблеми у функціонуванні української моделі соціального інвестування середнього і малого бізнесу можуть бути використані як приклади негативних процесів у сфері соціальної відповідальності підприємницьких структур. Їхнє врахування при розробці напрямів державної соціальної політики може сприяти більш високій її ефективності.

**Ключові слова:** інноваційна діяльність, соціальні інновації, глобальні тенденції інноваційності, малий та середній бізнес, держава, громадянське суспільство, соціальна відповідальність бізнесу, соціальні зобов'язання.

*Надійшла до редакції 29.05.24 р.*