

DOI 10.31558/2307-2318.2026.2.11

УДК 338.432:334.722

JEL Classification: JEL Q13, Q17, Q18

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THE ROLE OF SMALL BUSINESS IN ENSURING FOOD SECURITY AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE IN UKRAINE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The paper investigates the role of small business entities in ensuring food security and economic resilience in Ukraine within the context of sustainable development. It is determined that small and medium-sized enterprises play a strategically important role in maintaining the stability of local food systems, employment, and regional economic development under conditions of geopolitical instability and wartime challenges. The study analyzes the dynamics of the number of enterprises, employment indicators, and the value of goods and services sold in Ukraine during 2019–2024. The results demonstrate that small enterprises dominate the structure of the Ukrainian economy and remain the primary drivers of entrepreneurial activity. Despite the negative consequences of the full-scale war in 2022, including reductions in employment and business activity, SMEs showed high adaptive capacity and recovery potential in 2023–2024. The research proves that small businesses contribute significantly to decentralized food supply chains, economic diversification, local market stability, and sustainable rural development. It is substantiated that SMEs perform not only economic but also social and stabilizing functions, strengthening community resilience and supporting post-war recovery processes. The study emphasizes the necessity of comprehensive institutional support, including financial assistance, infrastructure modernization, and innovation incentives, as a prerequisite for strengthening food security and achieving sustainable economic development in Ukraine.

Keywords: governance, sustainable development, economic resilience, small businesses, adaptation, the agricultural sector, national security, food security, agricultural potential.

2 tables, 10 ref.

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РОЛЬ СУБ'ЄКТІВ МАЛОГО БІЗНЕСУ У ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННІ ПРОДОВОЛЬЧОЇ БЕЗПЕКИ ТА ЕКОНОМІЧНОЇ СТІЙКОСТІ УКРАЇНИ В УМОВАХ СТАЛОГО РОЗВИТКУ

У статті досліджується роль суб'єктів малого бізнесу у забезпеченні продовольчої безпеки та економічної стійкості в Україні в контексті сталого розвитку. Встановлено, що малі та середні підприємства відіграють стратегічно важливу роль у підтримці стабільності місцевих продовольчих систем, зайнятості та регіонального економічного розвитку в умовах геополітичної нестабільності та викликів воєнного

часу. У дослідженні проаналізовано динаміку кількості підприємств, показників зайнятості та вартості реалізованих товарів і послуг в Україні у 2019–2024 рр. Результати показують, що малі підприємства домінують у структурі української економіки та залишаються основними рушіями підприємницької діяльності. Незважаючи на негативні наслідки повномасштабної війни 2022 року, зокрема скорочення зайнятості та ділової активності, малі та середні підприємства продемонстрували високу здатність до адаптації та потенціал відновлення у 2023–2024 роках. Дослідження доводить, що малі підприємства роблять значний внесок у децентралізацію ланцюгів постачання продовольства, диверсифікацію економіки, стабільність місцевих ринків та сталий розвиток сільських територій. Підтверджено, що МСП виконують не лише економічні, а й соціальні та стабілізуючі функції, зміцнюючи стійкість громад та підтримуючи процеси післявоєнного відновлення. У дослідженні наголошується на необхідності комплексної інституційної підтримки, зокрема фінансової допомоги, модернізації інфраструктури та стимулювання інновацій, як передумови для зміцнення продовольчої безпеки та досягнення сталого економічного розвитку в Україні.

Ключові слова: управління, сталий розвиток, економічна стійкість, суб'єкти малого бізнесу, адаптація, аграрний сектор, національна безпека, продовольча безпека, аграрний потенціал.

2 табл., 10 літ.

Problem statement. Small business plays a strategically important role in shaping Ukraine's socio-economic stability, particularly in the interconnected domains of food security, economic resilience, and sustainable development. In the context of ongoing geopolitical instability, disrupted supply chains, and structural economic transformation, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have become critical actors in maintaining the continuity, adaptability, and inclusiveness of the national economy. Their contribution extends beyond economic output, encompassing local food production, rural development, employment generation, and the reinforcement of decentralized economic systems.

From the perspective of food security, small businesses, especially agricultural microenterprises, family farms, and local food processors, form the backbone of domestic food supply chains. Unlike large agro-industrial corporations that often focus on export-oriented monoculture production, SMEs are more closely integrated into local and regional markets. This allows them to respond flexibly to shifts in demand, logistical disruptions, and regional shortages. In Ukraine, where wartime conditions have significantly damaged infrastructure and disrupted agricultural logistics, small producers have played a stabilizing role by ensuring continued food availability at the community level. Their proximity to consumers reduces dependency on long and vulnerable supply chains, thereby enhancing overall food system resilience.

In addition, small business development contributes directly to economic resilience by diversifying the economic structure and reducing systemic vulnerability. A diversified SME sector mitigates the risks associated with overconcentration in large-scale industrial or agricultural production. SMEs generate employment in both urban and rural areas, supporting household incomes and sustaining purchasing power during periods of economic crisis. In Ukraine, where labour migration and wartime displacement have significantly affected demographic stability, small enterprises provide flexible employment opportunities and support the reintegration of internally displaced persons into local economies.

Within the framework of sustainable development, small businesses are increasingly recognized as key agents of environmentally and socially responsible economic growth. Many SMEs in Ukraine are adopting resource-efficient production methods, engaging in

organic farming, reducing food waste, and implementing localized circular economy practices. These approaches align with global sustainability goals, particularly in relation to responsible consumption and production, climate resilience, and sustainable rural development. Moreover, small enterprises often demonstrate greater sensitivity to community needs and environmental constraints, which enhances their long-term viability and social legitimacy.

The integration of small business into Ukraine's food security architecture also has important policy implications. Effective state support through access to finance, regulatory simplification, infrastructure development, and innovation incentives is essential for strengthening SME capacity. In particular, targeted agricultural subsidies, credit guarantees, and digitalization initiatives can enhance productivity and resilience. Strengthening cooperative models among small producers can further improve market access and bargaining power, enabling SMEs to compete more effectively within both domestic and international markets.

However, significant challenges remain. These include limited access to capital, inadequate logistics infrastructure, uneven regional development, and the heightened risks associated with military conflict. Addressing these constraints requires a coordinated policy approach that integrates economic, agricultural, and security dimensions of development strategy. International support and integration into European value chains also present important opportunities for enhancing SME resilience and modernization.

Analysis of the latest research and publications. The issues of food security, sustainable development, and the functioning of small business entities have become increasingly relevant in modern economic research, particularly in the context of global instability and the military challenges faced by Ukraine. Scientific studies by Androshyuk I., Riabovolyk T., Riabovolyk Yu. [2] emphasize the strategic role of the agrarian sector in ensuring national and global food security, highlighting the importance of stable agricultural production and market sustainability. Similar conclusions are presented in the works of Svydoruk I., Klepanchuk O., and Pidlypna R. [4], who investigate the restoration of the agro-industrial market as a mechanism for strengthening food security under crisis conditions. The impact of military conflict on Ukraine's food security potential is comprehensively analyzed by Podsokha A., Havrylchenko O., Cherednyk A. [5], whose studies underline the importance of adaptive economic mechanisms and resilient local production systems during wartime. In addition, the research of Bochko O. Kubrak N. [1] focuses on territorial food security mechanisms within the paradigm of sustainable development, emphasizing the necessity of balancing economic, environmental, and social dimensions of development policy.

At the same time, a significant body of scientific literature addresses the development of small entrepreneurship and its institutional role in Ukraine's economy. The studies of Sydoruk I. [7], Krasnonosova O., Ponomarenko Ye. [9] examine the current condition, challenges, and strategic directions of small business development in Ukraine, emphasizing its role in economic diversification and employment generation. Important institutional aspects of entrepreneurship and cooperation are explored in the monograph edited by Lupenko Yu., Malik M. [8] where entrepreneurship is viewed as a critical factor in rural and regional economic sustainability. Furthermore, Kovbasa O., Maksychka A. [10] analyse the contemporary development of small entrepreneurship in the agrarian sector, confirming its importance for local food systems and economic resilience. Nevertheless, despite the substantial contribution of these studies, insufficient attention has been devoted to the integrated analysis of the role of small business entities in simultaneously ensuring food security, economic resilience, and sustainable development in Ukraine under wartime conditions, which determines the relevance and scientific significance of the present research.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of small business entities in ensuring food security and economic resilience in Ukraine within the context of sustainable development through the analysis of their economic significance, structural dynamics, employment contribution, and capacity to maintain the stability of food systems and national economic processes under conditions of socio-economic transformation and external challenges.

Statement of the main material. The analysis of the dynamics in the number of small business entities is essential for determining their role in ensuring food security and economic stability in Ukraine within the context of sustainable development, as quantitative changes in the SME sector reflect the level of entrepreneurial activity, economic adaptability, and resilience of the national economy under conditions of crisis and transformation [1]. Small businesses, particularly microenterprises and self-employed individuals operating in agriculture, food production, trade, and logistics, constitute a significant component of local food systems and regional economic structures. Therefore, examining trends in their growth, decline, or recovery allows researchers to assess the capacity of the business sector to maintain food supply continuity, preserve employment, support household incomes, and stimulate local economic development [2]. Moreover, the dynamics of SME numbers serve as an indicator of the effectiveness of state economic policy, institutional support mechanisms, and the broader sustainability of the economic environment. In the Ukrainian context, where wartime disruptions, migration, and infrastructure destruction have substantially affected entrepreneurial activity, studying these dynamics provides an empirical basis for understanding the contribution of small businesses to economic resilience, post-crisis recovery, and the achievement of sustainable development objectives.

Below we are going to analyze the dynamics of number of enterprises in Ukraine (Table 1).

The presented table provides a comprehensive overview of key performance indicators of Ukrainian enterprises and self-employed individuals over the period 2019–2024, including the number of entities, employment levels, and value of goods and services sold. The data allows for identifying structural shifts in the business environment, the resilience of small business segments, and the impact of external shocks, particularly the full-scale war in 2022.

The overall number of business entities demonstrates moderate growth with fluctuations. In 2019, the total number stood at 64,686, increasing to 70,175 by 2024. This indicates a gradual expansion of entrepreneurial activity despite significant macroeconomic instability. Small enterprises consistently dominate the structure of the Ukrainian economy, accounting for the overwhelming majority of all business entities. Their number increased from 53,247 in 2019 to 60,334 in 2024, confirming their central role in maintaining economic activity. Microenterprises represent the largest subcategory within small business, highlighting the highly fragmented nature of Ukraine's entrepreneurial landscape. A notable disruption is observed in 2022, where a decline in total enterprises (60,514) reflects the direct impact of military aggression, destruction of infrastructure, and forced relocation of businesses. However, the recovery trend in 2023–2024 indicates adaptive resilience and restoration of entrepreneurial activity.

Employment indicators reveal significant volatility, particularly in 2022. Total employment decreased from 316,445 persons in 2019 to 277,046 in 2022, reflecting wartime losses, migration, and business closures. However, partial recovery is observed in 2023–2024, reaching 287,609 employees. Small enterprises remain the primary employers within the business sector, although employment within large enterprises also shows relative stability and gradual recovery. The data suggests that SMEs play a critical stabilizing role in labor market absorption, especially during crisis periods.

Table 1 - Performance indicators for businesses in Ukraine in 2019-2024

	In general	Including								
Enterprises	Self-employed individuals									
In general	Large	Medium	Small	Among them	In general	Medium	Small	Among them		
Micro-enterprises	Microenterprises									
Number										
2019	64686	11439	15	671	10753	9313	53247	28	53219	52833
2020	66529	11104	14	644	10446	9028	55425	21	55404	55040
2021	65364	11254	22	639	10593	9182	54110	18	54092	53737
2022	60514	9079	22	592	8465	7180	51435	16	51419	51177
2023	67411	10226	18	561	9647	8365	57185	12	57173	56869
2024	70175	9841	24	564	9253	8027	60334	11	60323	60012
Number of employees, persons										
2019	316445	219987	29874	134735	55378	25246	96458	2340	94118	86545
2020	306395	209597	28068	128303	53226	23464	96798	1845	94953	88067
2021	303713	210152	35327	120332	54493	24745	93561	1495	92066	85412
2022	277046	194857	36860	109293	48704	20857	82189	1450	80739	75993
2023	282728	190247	37311	104741	48195	21010	92481	1197	91284	85705
2024	287609	191050	42537	100574	47939	21451	96559	1094	95465	89588

Number of employees, persons										
2019	258391	215180	29874	134711	50595	20707	43211	2312	40899	33712
2020	248144	206771	28068	128287	50416	20778	41373	1824	39549	33027
2021	245850	206399	35327	120308	50764	21185	39451	1477	37974	31675
2022	223090	192336	36860	109268	46208	18511	30754	1434	29320	24816
2023	222864	187568	37311	104722	45535	18499	35296	1185	34111	28836
2024	224163	187938	42537	100560	44841	18484	36225	1083	35142	29576
Value of products (goods, services) sold, in thousands of UAH										
2019	326605337,9	296530330	121635193	123352836	51542301	18443972	30075008	1629768	28445239,6	27062520,4
2020	341223736,7	304845090	122308583	123650842	58885665	21099036	36378647	1691677	34686970	32956510,7
2021	461169157,4	415507052	183349956	158528409	73628686	24456648	45662106	971285,4	44690820,3	42442938,2
2022	324746781	320063123	98236686,9	154531874	67294562	22403945	4683658	1534197	3149460,7	1317902,6
2023	375757319,2	369883805	101174514	179884278	88825013	29711802	5873515	1768518	4104996,7	1747949,6
2024	463113950,4	454957647	156750384	218375867	79831397	29168899	8156303	2515314	5640989	2545362,3

Source: [3].

A long-term trend of gradual decline in employment within some micro and small business segments indicates ongoing structural transformation, including automation, labor optimization, and business model adjustments under conditions of uncertainty.

The value of goods and services sold demonstrates a strong upward trend despite disruptions. Total output increased from approximately 326.6 billion UAH in 2019 to 463.1 billion UAH in 2024, indicating substantial long-term growth in productivity and market value creation. A sharp increase is observed in 2021, followed by a decline in 2022 due to war-related shocks, and a significant recovery in 2023–2024. The strongest performance is recorded in 2024, suggesting adaptation of enterprises to wartime conditions and restructuring of production and distribution channels. Small enterprises contribute a substantial share of total output, reinforcing their role not only as employment generators but also as significant economic contributors. The data confirms that SMEs are not marginal actors but integral components of national value creation.

The overall structure of the Ukrainian economy, as reflected in the data, is characterized by a high concentration of small and micro enterprises, combined with a relatively stable but smaller group of medium and large enterprises. This structure enhances flexibility but also increases vulnerability to external shocks. The 2022 disruption represents a critical stress test for the Ukrainian business environment. Despite significant declines in employment and enterprise stability, the rapid recovery in subsequent years demonstrates strong adaptive capacity. This resilience is particularly evident in the SME sector, which absorbed shocks and facilitated economic continuity.

Thus, the analysis of 2019–2024 data confirms that small business in Ukraine plays a systemic role in ensuring economic stability and recovery. It functions as the dominant structural component of the business ecosystem, a key employer, and a major contributor to economic output. Despite severe external shocks, including full-scale war, the SME sector demonstrates strong resilience, rapid recovery capacity, and structural adaptability. These characteristics highlight its strategic importance not only for short-term stabilization but also for long-term sustainable economic development and post-crisis reconstruction of Ukraine.

Table 2 - The role of small businesses in ensuring food security and economic stability in Ukraine within the context of sustainable development

Dimension	Role of Small Businesses	Contribution to Food Security	Contribution to Economic Stability	Sustainable Development Aspect
Agricultural production	Small farms and microenterprises produce agricultural goods for domestic markets	Ensures continuous supply of food products at local and regional levels	Supports diversification of the agricultural sector and reduces dependence on large agroholdings	Promotes sustainable rural development and balanced resource use
Food processing	SMEs engage in processing raw agricultural materials into food products	Increases availability and accessibility of processed food	Creates added value and stimulates local industrial activity	Encourages efficient use of local resources and reduction of waste

Local supply chains	Small enterprises operate within short and decentralized supply chains	Enhances resilience of food distribution during crises and wartime disruptions	Reduces logistical dependence and strengthens regional markets	Supports sustainable and resilient economic systems
Employment generation	SMEs create jobs in rural and urban communities	Maintains household incomes and purchasing power necessary for food access	Reduces unemployment and social vulnerability	Contributes to inclusive economic growth and social sustainability
Rural development	Small businesses stimulate economic activity in rural territories	Preserves agricultural production capacity in local communities	Prevents depopulation and supports local economies	Strengthens territorial cohesion and community sustainability
Economic diversification	SMEs operate across multiple sectors of the economy	Reduces risks associated with concentration in large-scale production	Increases economic flexibility and crisis adaptability	Enhances long-term economic resilience
Innovation and adaptability	Small enterprises quickly adapt to market and environmental changes	Facilitates rapid response to food shortages and changing consumer needs	Improves competitiveness and business continuity	Encourages sustainable innovation and efficient resource management
Support during crises	SMEs maintain economic activity during wartime and economic instability	Helps stabilize local food systems under emergency conditions	Acts as a stabilizing factor for regional economies	Strengthens resilience within sustainable development frameworks
Environmental sustainability	Many small enterprises implement eco-friendly and resource-saving practices	Supports production of environmentally safe food products	Reduces environmental risks and long-term economic losses	Aligns with principles of green economy and sustainable production
Community resilience	SMEs are closely integrated into local communities	Improves food accessibility for vulnerable populations	Strengthens local self-sufficiency and social stability	Promotes socially oriented and sustainable economic development

Source: developed by the author based on [4-7].

The presented table demonstrates that small businesses constitute a fundamental component of Ukraine's economic structure and play a significant role in ensuring food security and economic stability within the framework of sustainable development [8]. The dominance of small and microenterprises in the total number of business entities reflects the

decentralization and flexibility of the Ukrainian economy, which is particularly important under conditions of economic uncertainty and military challenges. Small enterprises are deeply integrated into local food systems through agricultural production, food processing, retail trade, and logistics, thereby supporting the continuity of food supply chains and improving food accessibility for the population. Their regional distribution and operational adaptability enhance the resilience of local economies and reduce dependence on large-scale centralized production systems.

At the same time, the dynamics presented in the table reveal the vulnerability of the business sector to external shocks, especially during the period of full-scale war in 2022, when declines in the number of enterprises, employment, and production volumes were observed. Nevertheless, the subsequent recovery trends in 2023–2024 indicate the high adaptive capacity and resilience of small businesses, which continued to support employment, generate economic value, and maintain market activity despite adverse conditions [9-10]. This confirms that SMEs perform not only an economic but also a social and stabilizing function, contributing to sustainable development through job creation, local economic diversification, and support for community resilience. Consequently, strengthening institutional support for small businesses should be considered a strategic priority for ensuring Ukraine's long-term food security and economic sustainability.

Conclusions. In conclusion, the study confirms that small businesses constitute a strategically important component of Ukraine's socio-economic system and perform a multifunctional role in ensuring food security, economic resilience, and sustainable development. The analysis of performance indicators for 2019–2024 demonstrates that small and microenterprises dominate the structure of the Ukrainian business environment, ensuring continuity of economic activity, employment generation, and the functioning of local food systems. Despite significant external challenges, particularly the full-scale military aggression in 2022, SMEs demonstrated substantial adaptive capacity, maintaining production processes, supporting local markets, and contributing to the stabilization of regional economies. Their integration into decentralized food supply chains, flexibility in responding to market disruptions, and close connection with local communities significantly strengthen the resilience of Ukraine's food security architecture.

At the same time, the research highlights that the sustainable functioning of small businesses requires comprehensive institutional and state support aimed at overcoming structural constraints, including limited access to finance, logistical disruptions, and uneven regional development. The recovery trends observed in 2023–2024 indicate that SMEs possess considerable potential for post-war reconstruction, economic modernization, and integration into sustainable development strategies. Therefore, strengthening the SME sector should be regarded as a strategic priority of national economic policy, as it contributes not only to economic growth and employment stabilization but also to the formation of a resilient, socially inclusive, and sustainable economic system capable of withstanding future crises and ensuring long-term food security in Ukraine.

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 07.04.2026
Стаття прийнята до друку після рецензування 20.04.2026