**Article**

**Challenges and Opportunities for the Development of Polish Enterprises in the Face of Crisis Threats**

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**Abstract:** Enterprises are currently facing difficult decisions due to the threats caused by the ongoing economic crisis, the war in Ukraine, and inflation. Due to broken supply chains, companies are struggling with rising costs and problems in the supply of raw materials. The economies have turned towards local markets. Companies are looking for ways to become independent from global suppliers and are trying to look for those who offer similar goods but in closer proximity to diversify supplies. Difficulties in recruiting appropriate staff cause problems related to staff turnover and changes in the organizational culture of the company. The research shows that companies focus less on strategies for entering new markets and focus on waiting out the difficult period and generating as few losses as possible. Companies that were already struggling with problems and did not manage to return to the pre-pandemic state after the pandemic are starting to implement a strategy of survival in the market. As research by other researchers indicates, innovation and the creation of new products are strongly related to the crisis. Companies, faced with changing market rules, are looking for new solutions. Companies that have been operating in the market longer cope better with changes and are more prepared for crises than young enterprises.

**Keywords:** pandemic; remote work; economic crisis; innovations; changes; enterprise; economic situation

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1. **Introduction**

Recent years have been difficult for entrepreneurs, especially for the small and medium-sized enterprise sector, because these companies are the most exposed to the consumption turbulence that occurs in the markets and are the first to be affected by the changes. Statistical data show that more and more small companies that do not have great revenues and try to function from month to month go bankrupt [1]. Sole proprietorships are disappearing and being replaced by corporations that are able to outbid and cut costs in order to capture a given market. Some companies decide to suspend their operations because it is a way to “wait” for a better moment without having to close their operations or declare bankruptcy [2].

Studies on the problems of companies and their ways of overcoming crises have appeared in the literature [3–6]. The areas of change concerned the development of business models in companies that experienced market turbulence. Changes were initiated after a strategic indication of the strategies that companies adopt and how they want to achieve their goals [7].

Many social, economic, political, and technological trends have a regional dimension, which indicates what changes are taking place in these regions. Companies operating in a specific environment must react very strongly to the immediate environment, because in many cases it determines the direction of changes. Global or even national solutions are not always appropriate because they do not take into account the specificity of regions. When faced with crises, companies look for solutions that quickly and efficiently improve
results. Resource policy determines the activities of enterprises and establishes the rules of competitiveness. A trend that operates globally is technology that influences the entire industry and sets its direction, regardless of the geographical location of the company. Access to raw materials and finished or semi-finished products determines the decisions made by producers and suppliers. Broken supply chains [8,9] and problems with raw materials are one of the biggest problems for companies, because what matters is the lowest delivery cost and its continuity and availability.

Enterprise change factors focus on the following:
- Innovation and investment in technology [10–16];
- New products [17–19];
- Changes in the areas of human qualifications and skills [20,21];
- Remote work and its use in problems with recruiting staff [22,23];
- Changes related to the organizational culture that resulted from the transition of a large part of employees to remote work [23–28];
- Effective energy policy of the company [29–33];
- Inventory and supplier management [34,35].

The aim of this work is to examine how companies respond to crisis challenges. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic initiated a number of difficulties for Polish companies that they had to face. The changes concerned interrupted supply chains and the resulting problems with supply and business continuity. Other aspects that caused problems were changes in employees’ work, i.e., remote work. Due to the changes that occurred after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and the subsequent energy crisis, companies had to face new challenges, i.e., rising prices of raw materials and ongoing inflation [36,37]. Another goal is to indicate what directions companies are taking in the face of threats that have occurred and what are their strategies for the future. The analysis of the research results is intended to answer which factors generate positive and negative factors for companies in the face of economic changes. The collected information will help determine whether companies have ideas on how to survive stagnation and improve their functioning. The research was carried out on a deliberately selected group of companies located in western Poland, representing various industries and sectors, in order to show the entire structure of companies in Poland.

The following research questions were formulated:
Q1: How do threats impact enterprises and what are their dimensions?
Q2: What are the potential directions of enterprise development, taking into account opportunities and threats?
Q3: What are the relationships between threats and how do they affect the functioning of companies?

A review of the subject literature allowed us to identify certain regularities regarding the business models that enterprises choose in the face of previously occurring crisis events, which became the basis for formulating our research hypotheses:

H1. The economic crisis stops the current activities of companies in the market and creates completely unknown conditions for the functioning of companies.

H2. During the crisis, companies face difficulties regarding human resources.

H3. During the crisis, enterprises focus on development and technological changes that will protect them from bankruptcy.

The hypotheses formulated in this way were verified through the prism of the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and its derivatives, i.e., inflation and the energy crisis, based on the analysis of international and domestic publications, the selection of which resulted from a review of the literature on the subject.
The first part of this article reviews the literature on the economic situation of Polish companies during economic crises, and the second part discusses the research carried out for the purposes of this study.

2. Economic Situation of Enterprises

Since the end of 2017, PMI indices (i.e., leading indicators predicting the future economic situation) have been falling in most countries of the world, especially in European countries [38]. The dynamics of PMI declines since 2017 are much faster than analysts have predicted, which means that the trend clearly indicates a deterioration in the market situation in the coming years (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Eurozone PMIs in industry and services. Source: [39].

Since November 2018, declines below the 50-point mark have been recorded in Poland after more than 4 years of the PMI index being above 50 points (the record high index occurred in 2014 and amounted to nearly 56 points) [40–42].

The decline in Poland’s PMI reflects both weak growth in new orders, production, and employment. The observed trend of PMI decline has been continuing since 2019. At that time, we had a pandemic that severely shook the markets and a temporary rebound in 2021 after the restrictions ended, when the economy started to grow slightly (Figure 2). Observing indices below 50 from 2022, we have a trend related to a significant deterioration of the economic situation and, consequently, an economic recession [40,42,43].

Figure 2. PMI measurement and forecast for Poland. Source: [40].

The economy in Poland has been experiencing strong disruptions since 2019, initially related to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The consequence of the war was an energy crisis and, finally, rampant inflation and a decline in the real incomes of the population. Poland was less affected by previous economic crises that hit Europe. Poland was saved by internal consumption and changes occurred very slowly. The effect of this phenomenon was a flattening of the economic growth structure, and we did not observe any sudden changes in the economic situation [43–45].
In Poland, in the first months of 2023, inflation exceeded 18%, which caused huge turbulence in the market. According to various economic forecasts, economic growth for 2023 may amount to 0.5–0.6%, which, in the context of the possibilities of the Polish economy, is a small percentage.

At the end of 2023, inflation slowed down regularly (Figure 3). Its average value in Poland in 2023 was 11.6%. Forecasts for 2024 are that the price growth rate will drop to 5.1%. At the same time, the double-digit rate of salary growth will be maintained, which is expected to reach 10.3% in 2024 [46]. Experts forecast that inflation will continue to decline in 2024, although it will still be far from the inflation target set by the National Bank of Poland, which is 2.5% +/− 1 percentage point (Figure 4). It is forecast that the downward trend will probably stop around the mid-year mark [47].

The economy in Poland has been experiencing strong disruptions since 2019, initially related to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The consequence of the war was an energy crisis and, finally, rampant tightening of the economic growth structure, and we did not observe any sudden changes in the economic situation [43–45].

Figure 3. Inflation structure forecast of the Polish Economic Institute. The dashed line marks the separation of the reported period from the forecast period. Source: [46].

Figure 4. Wage growth and inflation (percentage y/y). The dashed line marks the separation of the reported period from the forecast period (red solid line: remuneration, gray solid line: inflation, gray dashed line: forecast line). Source: [46].

The fourth quarter of 2023 brought an increase in consumption, which is a constant trend due to the holiday season and people’s shopping plans in this regard during this period. The latest data from the Central Statistical Office indicate an increase in household consumption in Poland. We should not draw hasty conclusions that this is a permanent trend that will cause dynamic growth [48,49]. Poles are still held back by high prices of goods and services, but this factor allows us to look into the future with optimism and forecast that consumption will grow in the coming months [50].

In Poland, 2023 started quite dramatically for entrepreneurs, as over 2.5 thousand companies declared insolvency in the first half of the year. This number is very large compared to the previous year, 2022, when a similar number of companies went bankrupt throughout the year [51].

Administratively, Poland is divided into administrative divisions, i.e., voivodeships. There are 16 voivodeships in the country as follows:

dolnośląskie (Lower Silesia);
kujawsko-pomorskie (Kuyavia-Pomerania);
łódzkie (Lodzkie);
lubelskie (Lublin);
lubuskie (Lubusz);
małopolskie (Lesser Poland);
mazowieckie (Masovia);
opolskie (Opole);
podkarpackie (Subcarpathia);
podlaskie (Podlaskie);
pomorskie (Pomerania);
śląskie (Silesia);
świętokrzyskie (Świętokrzyskie);
warmińsko-mazurskie (Warmia-Masuria);
wielkopolskie (Greater Poland);
zachodniopomorskie (West Pomerania).

It is not surprising that the most insolvent companies were recorded in the Masovian Voivodeship (459 companies), the Silesian Voivodeship (344), and the Greater Poland Voivodeship (251), because these are the voivodeships with the largest number of companies (Figure 5). Two voivodeships, namely Lower Silesia and Lesser Poland, recorded similar numbers and these are the voivodeships where companies are currently developing the most dynamically in the country and where the most start-ups are being established. The fewest companies went bankrupt in the Opole Voivodeship, where only 35 enterprises declared insolvency. The above data are for the first quarter of 2023, which shows how large the scale of bankruptcy is.

![Number of company insolvencies by region in the first quarter of 2023. Source: [52].](image)

The industries that recorded the highest growth rate in the number of insolvencies included transport (+259%), trade (+196%), industrial production (+161%), and services (+166%). Transport was most affected by the slowdown due to lower production, lower consumption, and the re-education of inventories that companies carried out to rebuild distribution channels after the pandemic [51] (Figure 6).

Analyzing the creation of new start-ups in the Visegrad Group countries, Poland is the leader, followed by the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia [53–55]. The emergence of new enterprises means that the potential is directed towards new concepts that have a chance to revolutionize markets. Therefore, bankruptcies and problems in industries can be viewed through the system of opportunities that appear in the environment and that are used for new ideas [55–57].

Transport was most affected by the slowdown due to lower production, lower consumption, and inventory re-education [58] carried out by companies to rebuild distribution channels after the pandemic.
Transport is a branch of the economy that reflects the economic situation in individual countries and industries [58,59]. The economic weakening experienced by European economic powers (Germany, Great Britain, and France) and the closure of eastern routes had a significant impact on the situation of carriers. International transport has experienced strong turbulence and this is where most of the unknowns remain [60–63]. In the country, there was a reduction in orders from the domestic industry, construction industry, and trade, which significantly reduced the demand for transport services. The tourism industry also suffered a major decline, as it relies on transport. The tourism industry was one of the first to suffer due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be observed that the susceptibility of tourism to situations of threat and uncertainty regarding market conditions is not accidental [63,64]. The transport industry is struggling with many costly challenges [65–67] (high fuel prices, constant lack of drivers and, consequently, wage pressure from employees, high interest rates, and higher operating costs related to the Mobility Package), which result in the insolvency of small entities that are most exposed to the above changes, who are in debt and struggling with the above problems.

The industry in Poland is very closely related to internal demand [68–70], as well as being closely related to the European economy, where Polish companies are subcontractors of components or participants in the production of the final product [71–74]. While domestic demand has slowed down significantly, a slight rebound is already visible in the activities of domestic customers; the trend related to the international slowdown may last longer and the recovery time may be longer. A strong labor market in Poland and one of the lowest unemployment rates in the entire EU [72,75–78] is a good prognosis for overcoming the recession in production and beyond. Further actions aimed at increasing social support are worrying, as they may contribute to another wave of inflation growth. The emerging inflation will result from growing internal demand, not the global increase in raw material prices, which means that the effects of such a price increase will also be different because companies will face pressure on margins. Due to decreasing demand from the construction industry and production related to household appliances, there has been a downturn in the steel industry in recent months and companies from this industry are facing a lack of order.

The highest growth rate of bankruptcies was recorded in the wood processing industry. The wood industry is facing a significant drop in demand. The largest declines were recorded in wooden garden architecture, construction joinery, and furniture. High prices of raw materials offered by the State Forests, as the main supplier of domestic raw materials, weaken the competitiveness of companies [79,80]. Wood of illegal origin appears in the market and is offered at much lower prices than wood of legal origin. Most often, this wood is obtained without the consent of national authorities or imported from countries in violation of sanctions imposed on Russia and Belarus. When supplying wood from Belarus, it is often falsely declared that the wood or wood products come from Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan [45]. Estimates of the Polish Chamber of Commerce for the Wood Industry show that, for example, the production of windows and doors decreased by an average...
of 35%. In turn, sawn timber—depending on the type—decreased from 29 to 43 percent. Furniture decreased by 30 percent, and floors by 35 percent [81].

Food producers did not experience such changes in the market and in this case, 7% fewer insolvencies were recorded in the last half of 2023 than in the last half of 2022, and twice as many were recorded in an annual comparison. Companies producing Polish food benefit from exports through high-quality products and a price that is competitive compared to other players in this market [82,83].

The situation is much more complex in construction. This industry is heterogeneous and covers various sectors that are not developing evenly. Construction is one of the industries that is experiencing a shift in response to economic fluctuations. The industry as a whole recorded an increase of approximately 3.5%, but this was influenced by the activities of the engineering sector, as its increase was above 12.5% [84–86]. On average, the market for specialized works and the market for works related to the construction of buildings (i.e., housing construction) are growing twice as slowly. Road and railway construction industries are faced with the problem of underestimated tender values, due to the underestimation of costs, due to the rising prices of raw materials and labor values. Large companies that diversify their service portfolios are in a more favorable situation than small local companies dependent on one or two investments from one area [87]. The construction industry is currently facing weak demand, rising costs, and the outflow of employees who, in the face of the threat, are looking for other opportunities to earn money and are struggling even with a profile change.

At the beginning of the pandemic, services were the group that recorded the highest insolvency due to the restrictions that affected them. Long-term problems with settling their obligations were reported and continue to be reported primarily by sole proprietorships, which currently constitute approximately 80% of service providers. Small entrepreneurs who survived the pandemic, thanks to the shields proposed by the government and largely due to the savings these companies have, are facing problems. Due to the small size of the company, spouses or family often supported the entrepreneur during a difficult period, and in fact, the pandemic and the assistance offered only postponed the inevitability of closing the company due to a lack of funds. The largest group of insolvent companies are as follows: the scientific and technical industry, the hotel and catering sector (HoReCa), and medical services. The HoReCa industry is an abbreviation used to collectively describe the hotel and catering sectors (Hotel, Restaurant, and Catering/Café) [88]. The concept of HoReCa covers everything that falls within the scope of services provided by the catering and tourism (mainly hotel) sectors. Therefore, it refers to products, services, logistics points, used equipment and accessories, warehouses, production halls, and service premises [89].

Despite the announcement of the end of the pandemic in May 2023, the revival of many service segments is hampered by the decreasing purchasing power of Poles. Many Poles are limiting their expenses due to the rising cost of living. Poles eat out less often, do not plan weekend trips, and holiday trips are becoming shorter and shorter. Companies do not plan training and integration trips because they cannot afford them [90,91].

Without a fundamental increase in real wages, the situation in the service industry will not change, and high inflation and pressure on wage increases will not make management easier [91].

Due to drought problems in 2021 and low purchase prices, agriculture recorded a sharp increase in insolvency and is currently showing a downward trend (a decrease of 9% in 2022 and 6% in 2023). Agriculture is the only industry showing a downward trend in the market, which is caused by the high base effect. Only 1.6% of insolvent enterprises reported sales revenues above PLN 50 million. The increase in business costs is the main reason for the financial problems of many enterprises. This led to the disappearance of over 10,000 stores from the Polish market [92–94].

In 2023, almost 2.3 thousand stores were completely closed. Additionally, over 8 thousand activities have been suspended. This is the second year in a row that the country has seen a decline in the total number of stores. This trend has been continuing
since 2019. The largest declines are in the retail sector, showing a decrease of 3.8% in tobacco shops, 2.8% in stationery stores, 2.2% in fish shops, and 1.8% in carpet, textile, and shoe stores [95].

Experts emphasize that the insolvency rate has been increasing for several years. Compared to the second half of 2022, the number of failing companies increased by 48%. In 2023, over 3000 shops, mainly small ones, were liquidated. Another 10 thousand suspended their operations. At the same time, large chains continue to grow [95,96].

The economic crisis is the result of many factors that affect enterprises [97,98], but what is important is how enterprises cope with unfavorable factors in the environment.

3. Materials and Methods

A survey was conducted for the purposes of this study. The questionnaire was developed based on the literature and sent to respondents by e-mail. The study was conducted in October and November 2023. A total of 256 companies were surveyed and selected using the quota (targeted) method. This method is described by Szreder in his publication Methods and techniques of opinion surveys [99]. Unlike other methods, it does not ensure a proportional share of the examined objects in the sample. Moreover, proportionality was not important in the selection procedure used. This activity was intended to ensure a sufficiently large share of selected types of surveyed enterprises (also small ones) so that comparative analyses, calculations, and conclusions were statistically correct. A similar scheme was used in the research of Matveenko and Mikhailishchev [100].

The companies came from Western Poland and represented the population of all enterprises in Poland. The adopted sample selection method makes it possible, for example, to draw conclusions about medium-sized and large companies, as a sufficiently large number of enterprises in these categories was surveyed. In a representative sample, due to the actual small percentage of such enterprises, there would be only a few enterprises and statistical conclusions would not be possible. Important criteria adopted in selecting the sample included:

- Regions diversified in terms of development;
- Various types of legal forms of the surveyed enterprises;
- Number of employees in the surveyed enterprises.

When determining the number of enterprises representing particular categories, attempts were made to optimize the number of individual types (depending on the legal form and employment level), and they were distinguished due to two criteria:

- The size of individual subcategories had to be large enough to enable statistically significant comparative analyses;
- Attention should be paid to the possibility of conducting surveys among enterprises.

The questionnaire was designed to contain statements (questions) related to the economic situation of enterprises and to show what actions companies intend to take in order to adapt to the current economic situation (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>How has the economic crisis affected your company?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Has your company used any special strategies to survive the crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>What factors do you consider to be the biggest challenges in the face of the economic crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>Have you noticed changes in customer behavior during the crisis?</td>
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<td>Q5</td>
<td>What actions are you taking to maintain financial liquidity in the face of the crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>Have you used any government support programs for entrepreneurs during the crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>What actions are you taking to protect jobs in your company in the face of the crisis?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. Cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q8</th>
<th>What aspects of your company’s operations do you consider most vulnerable to the effects of the economic crisis?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
<td>Have you noticed any changes in relationships with suppliers and customers during the crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q10</td>
<td>Are you planning to restructure your company in response to the economic crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q11</td>
<td>Do you have financial reserves in case of an economic crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q12</td>
<td>What actions are you taking to increase efficiency and reduce costs in the face of the crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q13</td>
<td>How do you assess the current effectiveness of actions taken to manage the economic crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q14</td>
<td>Do you see opportunities for the development of your company in the period after the economic crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q15</td>
<td>Do you plan to change your business strategy in response to the economic crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q16</td>
<td>What external factors do you consider to be the greatest threat to your company in the context of the economic crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q17</td>
<td>Have you observed changes in customer and market preferences during the crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q18</td>
<td>What marketing tools do you use to ensure business continuity during the crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q19</td>
<td>Are you looking for new sales markets in response to the economic crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q20</td>
<td>How do you assess the prospects for economic recovery after the crisis ends?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the surveyed companies, the largest group made up of 39.06% were small enterprises, 33.2% were medium-sized companies, and the smallest group were large companies. Micro companies accounted for 21.88% of all the respondents (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Size of the surveyed enterprise. Source: own study based on research.

The smallest group among the respondents were companies that were established last year (Figure 8). Companies that have been operating in the market for over two years constitute over 80% of the respondents.
4. Results

Among the respondents, almost 88% of micro and small companies indicated that the economic crisis has severely damaged the financial situation of the company (Figure 9). Due to the high level of insolvency in Poland, there is a very high representation of small entities, which is confirmed by the conducted research.

In the current economic reality, the economic crisis caused by the war in Ukraine is indicated as the greatest challenge for operating companies. Social changes resulting from the lack of employees and problems with soft skills among candidates are less indicated by the surveyed companies. As the surveyed companies emphasize, they try to deal with these problems using systemic solutions. However, the factors that initiated or intensified the economic crisis are factors outside the company to which only the company can respond. Companies have no real influence on the prices of raw materials, broken supply chains, or geopolitical problems, so this area means that companies must find a way to adapt to the new situation on their own (Figure 10).
Among the factors related to the economic crisis that pose a threat to companies, the most frequently mentioned factors were the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis—both factors were indicated by approximately 60% of respondents. In total, 1/3 of the surveyed companies indicated problems with rising raw material prices and high interest rates. Geopolitical changes were also indicated by approximately 30% of the companies. According to the research conducted among micro and small companies, there were 1/3 more indications of significant problems observed with the implementation of their obligations. Small and micro companies show that they do not have a significant capital base that would allow them to maintain a cushion of safety against unfavorable changes in the market. Small entrepreneurs are heavily dependent on external financing, and often also on larger business partners for whom they are subcontractors of specific activities.

The surveyed companies indicate that the main reason for liquidation or suspension of operations in their industry is the rising costs of running companies—this factor was indicated by 90% of respondents. Overall, approximately 85% of respondents perceive the current economic situation as unfavorable compared to the previous year in 2022. Only 11% indicate that the current economic situation is slightly better than last year, and 1% of respondents maintain that the current economic situation is better than last year.

There have been no such bad ratings among entrepreneurs for years. Companies have lost savings due to the pandemic, which means that their ability to look for solutions due to depleted finances has significantly decreased.

More than 85% of the surveyed companies declare a decline in savings, and approximately 75% of companies declare problems with maintaining financial liquidity, which shows that the mood among the respondents is very bad. The decline in savings and liquidity problems suggest that companies may have problems obtaining external financing (Figure 11).

A big problem is the instability and complexity of the law, which affects the lack of stability and the ability to predict future periods. This aspect was indicated by over 80% of respondents and it was identified as one of the three main factors that make running a business difficult.

Businesses are struggling with weakening demand, which has hit retailers the most and large companies to a lesser extent. Another problem for companies turned out to be increases in energy prices, which resulted in costs that were difficult to estimate. The indications also included factors related to the problem of ensuring cybersecurity in the company. Almost ¼ of the surveyed companies focused on this aspect. Enterprises are
changing and developing very dynamically by participating in the digital process, which is why appropriate data security is increasingly important for companies.

![Chart showing distribution of answers to the question about the main crisis factors for the company.](image)

**Figure 11.** Distribution of answers to the question about the main crisis factors for the company. Source: own study based on research.

The economic slowdown and crisis caused over 70% of the surveyed companies to enter survival mode. Declining orders, rising costs and, at the same time, employee pressure to increase wages put pressure on managers. Companies want to wait out the difficult period and not make sudden moves, as indicated by the majority of respondents.

However, staying in survival mode means not reacting and looking for other solutions for the future. Consequently, stagnation is not the best solution, as companies may lose their position and fail to notice emerging opportunities in the environment. About 60% of companies say that they are currently focusing on the most urgent problems and everyday
issues without looking far into the future. This attitude shortens the perspective and makes it difficult to see the wider environment, which is why the company tries to avoid risk. This leads to a lack of creativity and the search for new solutions, and thus increases the fears and anxieties of managers. Long-term dormancy leads to stagnation and, consequently, the collapse of companies, which is why companies should not give up and, just as they were looking for their own ways of development during the pandemic, they should now be looking for new, unconventional solutions.

The surveyed companies believe that problems with recruiting and retaining employees will get worse. The current research shows that currently 43% of the surveyed companies have problems with maintaining stable employment and they experience staff fluctuations that disturb long-term and stable functioning. In 32% of the respondents, the staff were aging and it was impossible to replace them with new, younger employees who would be strongly associated with the company for many years. Over 24% of companies categorically do not plan to employ foreigners in their management, and interestingly, 12% are open to such solutions.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This article focuses on the impact of the crisis on enterprises in Poland. Based on quantitative analyses of selected factors, it was found that they showed a variable trend during this period and were characterized by development disproportions. One of our conclusions was that during overlapping crises, companies face many problems from different areas. Most companies have recorded a decline in savings and are facing increasing costs of operating the company, and similar conclusions come from the publications by Sadocki [27] and Stec [29]. Post-pandemic experiences have a major impact on enterprises, which resulted in a change in the approach to human resources and their flexible use. Problems with employing an appropriate number of people result from the effects of the war in Ukraine, which was also noticed by Pajak [31].

The energy crisis, which affects all industries, is a serious threat. Problems with rising costs in this area are also confirmed by the research cited by Prokopowicz [32], which confirms the concerns and negative attitudes about this factor among the companies surveyed in this study. Factors related to the crisis analyzed in this work are strongly related to the work of Marciniak-Kluska [49], as we also analyze the post-pandemic situation.

The crisis hit all enterprises and they had to adapt to it. The near future remains unknown for business, as there is still confusion in the companies’ environment. Companies are looking for savings and ways to function more rationally. If they only focus on survival, as most respondents declare, this may result in a lack of opportunity for further development. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is confirmed: the crisis stops current activities and forces the search for other solutions. Despite the difficult period, companies should look for investments and ways to remodel their businesses, because only such an attitude will ensure their existence in the market. Events such as the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the weakening of supply chains, the energy crisis, and the increase in cyberattacks have changed the factors operating in the market. Companies that focus on innovation should take advantage of their opportunity, as confirmed by previous publications [13].

Changes always occur and how companies react to them indicates whether they are ready to adapt or will passively wait for events to unfold. The area in which we need to look for development opportunities is ongoing and further digitalization, which brings with it many pitfalls, but is the only path to a progressing economy.

The current crises have severely damaged the functioning of enterprises, which is why a long-term challenge for companies is to quickly respond to ongoing changes. Hypothesis 2 was also confirmed: during the crisis, companies are forced to lay off employees or, due to excessive fluctuations, look for new ones, which, due to the complicated situation on the labor market, causes employment problems resulting from the lack of appropriate employee qualifications.
The development of technology that forces action or the need to use it due to problems with human resources also confirms the third hypothesis that new technologies and innovations ensure the survival of companies in the market.

However, this contribution could be extended to future research aimed at assessing possible scenarios of future crises and their impact on the economy.

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