

## **IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE WORK OF POSTAL OPERATORS**

*Ochichenko M.R. Savchenko L.  
National Aviation University*

At the end of 2019, the world faced an acute health and economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The global impact of the pandemic has had unexpected consequences, namely: border closures, lockdowns for more than half of the world's population, supply chain disruptions, social instability, reduced demand, and a drop in trade volumes, the total cancellation of cultural events and competitions, as well as a record increase in unemployment. This entire crisis has shown the modern world to be so vulnerable and defenseless in the face of such little expected situations. Like all other industries, the postal sector immediately began to make decisions regarding the changes in operation. The main purpose of the study is to analyze the impact of the pandemic on the work of Ukrainian and world postal operators.

The most difficult period for the postal sector can undoubtedly be considered the first half of 2020, which involved adapting to rapid change, unusual working conditions, making non-standard and innovative solutions to provide better services. The true courage of the postal services were shown during the period of restriction of movement of citizens of the country and total lockdown. Thanks to the proper organization of work, which was successfully adjusted to the peak of the coronavirus crisis, postal operators were able to accomplish their delivery routes effectively and efficiently, especially for essential goods, including medicines and medical equipment for people in isolation [3].

The chronology of the coronavirus crisis and its impact on the postal sector dates back to February 2020, when the processing of international incoming mail (letters, parcels) was suspended worldwide. March 2020 was characterized by difficulties in the operation of the postal logistics network and international postal services. In addition, during this period, many post offices in small towns and villages were closed and other post offices worked on a reduced schedule. April 2020 reflected the revision and optimization of the delivery algorithm as well as changes in the work of post offices. The period from May 2020 to September 2020 was characterized by the gradual resumption of postal operators and the normalization of delivery times. The last months of 2020 were successful for the postal sector, as changes in the work of post offices and adaptation to pandemic conditions helped to restore the lost stability of profits [3].

The response of postal services to the recession of coronavirus infection was instantaneous. Many postal services around the world have set up coronavirus response teams to ensure appropriate working conditions during quarantine restrictions. The main task of these groups was to take various measures to slow down the spread of infection. It is mandatory to wear masks and change them every 2 hours, disinfect the work area and preferably wear protective screens. In addition, the teams were divided into shift groups to minimize the concentration of workers in one room and the transmission of infection.

For less contact, the operators also closed post offices where there was usually a high concentration of people and set up special points for receiving and delivering goods. A Belgian independent audit company conducted an independent study to obtain indicators of wage cuts and staff reductions. A comparative study was conducted among 29 global postal operators, including Deutsche Post, Canada Post, and others. The results showed that only 1/9 of these companies dared to reduce salaries, even fewer companies have resigned employees.

One of the most reliable post operators can be definitely named is Deutsche Post, which is famous for being a leading postal provider that employs approximately 570,000 people in many different countries all over the world. Through the pandemic, on the contrary, the volume of parcels in the post office and parcels in Germany increased significantly at the end of the quarter [2]. Due to the increased demand for delivery, Deutsche Post hired 4,000 workers to ease the workload of other workers due to the increase in parcels. Currently, one of the strategic goals of the company is the digitalization of postal services, which will help reduce contact between individuals and enable faster and more efficient delivery. The number of parcels has increased significantly compared to 2019. If earlier this volume was 5.2 million on average per working day, then with the beginning of the pandemic, this figure has risen to 9 million. From Figure 1, it can be concluded that 2020 was the most successful year of all and brought a profit of 66 million euros.



Figure 1. Deutsche Post income from 2011 to 2020 (in euros)

What is more, in 2019 Deutsche Post was recognized as the best-selling logistics company in Germany in terms of domestic sales. The annual result of Deutsche Post has increased significantly in 2020 in comparison with the previous year. Such a leap can be explained by the global e-commerce boom because of the coronavirus pandemic. In general, 2020 was one of the most successful years in the history of Deutsche Post [1].

The largest Ukrainian postal operators-giants such as Nova Poshta and Ukr Poshta also benefited during the corona crisis. Express delivery continues to grow in quarantine, increasing profits and reducing unemployment. The period from 2015 to 2019 was characterized by a successful leap in development for Nova Poshta. During this time, the company opened large sorting terminals and increased the number of

post offices from 2,200 to more than 6,000. The deteriorating economic situation due to the coronavirus pandemic crisis did not affect the stability of Nova Poshta. Therefore, there was no reduction in wages or layoffs [4].

The total volume of shipments in March-June 2020 increased by 30% compared to the previous year. Moreover, the number of international shipments was 55% more than in 2019. In addition, the company is currently automating all internal processes. This applies to parcel sorting and customer service. No less important to mention that the document flow was translated into an online format and with the help of the application, there is an accelerated service of clients in post offices.

Ukrposhta also began to expand with the onset of the coronavirus crisis. The company has purchased 500 mobile offices to deliver parcels to residents of small villages and towns with a population of up to 2,000. Nevertheless, Ukrposhta's profit decreased significantly compared to 2019. UAH 164.9 million in 2020 and UAH 405.3 million in 2019. This has happened due to the fact that Ukrposhta was slower in optimizing processes and adapting longer to quarantine than Nova Poshta [4].

**Conclusion.** The period of quarantine restrictions has undoubtedly become extremely profitable for the postal sector. However, the reaction of not all postal operators was immediate. Deutsche Post was able to instantly adapt to unpredictable conditions and was able to increase its profits in 2020 in comparison with previous years. As for Nova Poshta, it was able to digitize processes to avoid congestion and minimize unwanted contacts between staff and customers. Ukrposhta was not able to show good financial performance, although it expanded its network of mobile offices to provide express delivery services to sparsely populated areas of Ukraine. To consolidate positions in the market of postal operators today, it is necessary to expand the use of modern information technology, contactless delivery points, ideal and convenient for customers tracking system for parcels and mail.

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