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Impact Assessment of Regional & National E-Business Policies

Final Impact Assessment Report

Annex 2.5: Go-Online - Greece

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission.

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1 Policy Objectives and Activities

1.1 The Policy and its Context

Go-Online is a joint Action Line of the Operational Programmes 'Information Society' and 'Competitiveness' both funded by the 3rd Community Support Framework (CSF) of the European Union for Greece over the period 2000-2005. Go-Online has been implemented as part of the European **Go Digital** initiative aiming to familiarise Greek SMEs with ICTs and the Internet.

Its main objective has been to increase the ICT literacy of the very small and medium sized enterprises (vSMEs) and to enhance their e-business awareness and readiness. The particular focus on the specific target group (the very small enterprises with less than 10 employees) stems from the fact that they represent approximately 91 per cent of all enterprises in the country with up to 1000 employees.

No formally declared policy action with similar objectives existed prior to Go-Online. SMEs owners and employees could attend IT courses at Vocational Training Centres at their own expenses as every other individual. However, since its conception, the policy has been in line with national policies supporting SMEs as well as with the overall objectives of the Operational Programme for the Information Society and the Operational Programme for Competitiveness. It also is in line with national policy for SMEs as it aims to minimise the digital exclusion of SME's and to promote e-business networking among them (e.g. in the form of business communities and electronic marketplaces).

For the purposes of Go-online, Greek SMEs were classified into three main categories:

- Computer-illiterate enterprises with no IT infrastructure (i.e. hardware and software) to connect to the Internet.
- Computer-literate enterprises with access to the Internet and an active e-mail account.
- Computer literate enterprises, operating a web site enabling electronic transactions with customers and/or suppliers (B2C and B2B).

Based on the above classification, the Go-online Programme consists of two interrelated but separately administered activities.

- The first activity provides financial support to SMEs of the categories 1&2 above of up to 40% of the total cost of purchase of either of the two IT equipment baskets that form the subject of the grant (see Exhibit 1.1). Total budget allocated to this activity amounts to 44 million Euros.

Exhibit 1 'Basket of Services' Covered by the Grant Allocation Scheme of Go-Online

Type of Basket	Services covered
Basket 1 (addressed to vSMEs of Category 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase of basic terminal equipment (Desktop PC, office automation software, printer) • Internet access for two years • Technical support for 3 years
Basket 2 (addressed to vSMEs of Category 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domain Name • Development of commercial web site • Maintenance and virtual hosting for two years • Technical support for 3 years

- The second activity provides educational and training support to vSMEs and includes the actions indicated in Exhibit 1.2. Total budget allocated to this activity amounts to 22.360.638,02 Euros. The Training Support Scheme runs in parallel but independently of the financial support scheme of Go-Online. It has been in operation since early 2002 and the application process will continue until mid-2007. Although initially designed to target only those vSMEs that benefited from the financial support scheme, since May 2003 Training Support has expanded to cover all vSMEs interested in this action (as long as they comply with the eligibility criteria set by the Programme – see next section) irrespective of their participation to the financial support scheme. This change in target population took place because policy makers realised that there is a significant unmet demand for ICT training by SMEs beyond those directly benefiting from the financial support scheme.

The e-business consultants involved in the Training Support Scheme are adequately trained individuals, selected from the ranks of graduate students, young IT professionals, high-school IT tutors, etc. An inventory of nearly 4.000 candidate consultants is being maintained in the www.go-online.gr, where individuals interested in the scheme can submit their CVs on-line.

Exhibit 2 Services provided by the Educational and Training Support Scheme of Go-Online

Type of Action	Services covered	Implementing body
Action 1	Design and implementation of multimedia educational material on line on e-business practices and case studies Set up, operation, and management of a web-based portal (the Go-Online portal) for continuous information & support Help-Desk addressed to SMEs seeking assistance Through the phone (operates during office hours from 10:00 am to 16:00 pm) By fax By e-mail By completing an on-line application form	One consortium of academic establishments responsible for the running of this action across the country
Action 2	In-site training and support at SMEs' premises by specially trained e-business consultants. It includes 3 x 4 hour visits by trained e-business consultants who Install and set up the terminal equipment and Internet connection Provide training to personnel on Internet use, e-mail, and e-government services. (This does not include the training provided by the equipment supplier	16 regional consortia each responsible for a specific region of the country

The Financial Support Scheme of Go-Online has been running in two phases.

Phase I, started in January 2001 and was completed in August 2004 with a budget of 44 million Euros, of which 25% represented the national contribution and the rest 75% came from EU sources (mainly the European Regional Development Fund). Given that at the time the Go-Online Programme was conceived as a policy action there were no recent empirical data confirming the assumed backwardness of Greek SMEs (especially of the very small) regarding ICTs adoption and use,¹ the Programme set *a priori* targets. These targets were set along the following line of reasoning: In the first phase of the Programme (2001-2004), the total amount for which subsidy could be claimed was set to 1750 Euros. Thus, the amount of financial support that each eligible company could claim could not exceed 700 euros. This amount corresponds to 40% of the maximum expenses endured by a vSME (1750 Euros).

¹ Nevertheless, the original assumptions were subsequently verified by empirical surveys, which indicated the low penetration of ICTs and the Internet in particular among Greek SMEs.

The target number of SMEs that could benefit from the Programme derived from dividing the budget of Phase 1 (44 million Euros) with the amount of subsidised expenses credited to each participating vSME (1750 Euros). This resulted to an estimated number of vSMEs beneficiaries of approximately 25,000.

Phase II started in late April 2005 and will last until mid-2007. Total budget of Phase II comes up to 50.212.505 Euros and the target for this phase of the Programme is to reach about 16,000 SMEs. The amount of subsidy received has increased to 1250 Euros. This increase has been due to a change in policy that now calls for faster take up of the available financial resources (see also section on Policy Outputs). The amount of 1250 Euros corresponds to 40% of the maximum expenses that can be endured by an SME, which have now increased to 3.125 Euros.

Apart from the size of the subsidy received, there are a few other equally significant differences between Phase I and Phase II of Go-Online.

In Phase I, eligible for participation to Go-Online were vSMEs that conformed to the following criteria:

- Fit in categories 1 & 2 specified above,
- Employed up to ten persons and their annual turnover is up to 600.000 Euros.
- Had been active for at least a year at the time of submitting the application form (annual turnover)
- Belonged to one of the following sectors: Manufacturing, Construction, Wholesale and retail trade, Services (Hotel and catering services, and other service provision activities). These categories account for nearly 100% of the total vSMEs universe and were selected as most typical for this type of firms.
- The sector of activity should not be included in those sectors excluded by EU regulations from financial support
- Applicant vSMEs should conform to the de minimis provisions
- Joint stock companies (SAs) and self-employed individuals were excluded.

Phase II 'opens up' the Programme to more (potential) beneficiaries as it includes the following changes:

- Self employed individuals can now participate to the programme at equal terms to vSMEs
- vSMEs from all categories of the secondary and tertiary sectors can apply to participate to the Programme
- The amount of subsidy allowance has significantly increased
- Phase I imposed certain conditions that participating vSMEs had to follow in order to be able to receive the subsidy for the purchase of terminal equipment and services. In Phase II these conditions have become looser and allow firms the required level of flexibility in terms of the type and timing of equipment purchase (see also section on Implementation and Communication).

The Training Support Scheme has been running in parallel to the Financial Support Scheme since 2002, having its own target objectives and following similar selection criteria for participation (see also section on Implementation and Communication). The total budget of the Scheme amounts to 22.360.638,02 Euros. No financial contribution on the part of participating vSMEs is expected. The Scheme covers the full cost of ICTs training for the vSMEs. The target set by the Go-Online Training Support Scheme, given the available budget, is for 50,000 vSMEs to be trained in ICTs by the end of the Programme (i.e. mid-2007). This figure translates into 10% of the Greek vSMEs' population being acquainted with ICTs and/or applying e-business practices by the end of this period.

In practical terms, and considering the uneven distribution of vSMEs across the country, this target translates into the following sub-targets:

- Athens and Thessaloniki urban areas
 - Number of vSMEs: 311.000
 - Target audience: 23.500 vSMEs
- Rest of the country
 - Number of vSMEs: 222.543
 - Target audience: 27.100 vSMEs

1.2 Implementation and Communication

The Go-online Programme was originally conceived at the Ministry of Development and then passed on for implementation to the Secretariat for the Information Society, Ministry of Economics and the General Secretariat for Research and Technology, Ministry of Development. The implementing authorities of Go-Online are

- The Hellenic Organization of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Handicraft SA (EOMMEX SA). EOMMEX operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Development and has been responsible for the administration and management of the Financial Support Scheme.
- The Greek Research and Technology Network SA (GRNET SA). GRNET operates under the supervision of the General Secretariat for Research and Technology and has been responsible for the administration and management of the Training Support Scheme.

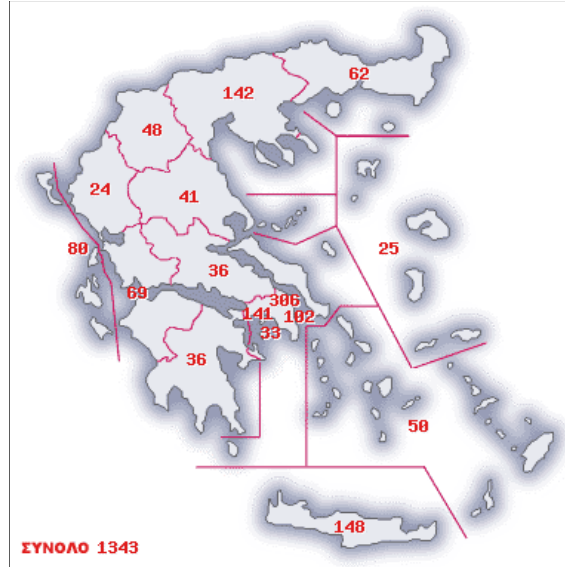
The Training Support Scheme, in particular, has been assigned to 17 regional consortia consisting of academic and technological institutions located in different parts of the country, regional Chambers of Commerce, private consultancy companies etc. Members of these consortia are responsible for the day-to-day implementation of ICT training at vSMEs' premises. One consortium has been assigned with the task of setting up the educational material, operating the helpdesk, as well as developing, operating and maintaining the Go-Online portal.

Human Resources

In terms of human resources involved in the implementation of the Programme:

- EOMMEX occupies 8-10 employees for the management of the Financial Support Scheme. Typical tasks include: collection and evaluation of application forms, communication with applicant vSMEs, operation of helpdesk, collection of necessary support documentation (supplier invoices, declaration forms, etc), maintenance and update of the Information System specially set up for the Financial Support Scheme, payment of subsidies to beneficiaries.
- GRNET SA occupies 5 people for the management of the Training Support Scheme. Typical tasks include: collection and evaluation of application forms by vSMEs, communication with, and supervision of, members of the Training Consortia who implement the initiative, maintenance and update of the Information System set up for the Training Support Scheme (separate from that of EOMMEX), assistance to local authorities for the organization of events related to the Programme.
- The consortia involved in the implementation of the Training Support Scheme in 13 regions of the country consist of local academic and technological institutes, Chambers of commerce, private companies etc. Trainers (e-business consultants) are adequately trained individuals selected from the ranks of graduate students, young IT professionals, high-school tutors, etc. By 5 May 2005, there were 1343 active e-business consultants spread across the country offering their services to vSMEs, as shown in Exhibit 1.3
- The consortium responsible for the set up of learning material, the operation of helpdesk, and the operation and maintenance of the Go-Online portal uses the services of eight people on a full time basis.

Exhibit 3 Distribution of E-business consultants by region (May 2005)



Source: <http://www.go-online.gr/graphics.ph4?id=syk> (last accessed 5 May 2005)

Selection criteria

In Phase I of the Programme, the selection criteria for participation to Go-Online (applicable both to the Financial and the Training Support Scheme) were the following:

- The size of the enterprise, measured in terms of number of employees and size of turnover.
- The geographical location of the enterprise (remote areas are in favor)
- The sector of activity of the enterprise and its susceptibility to e-business practices.

More specifically, each of the above criteria had been assigned with a specific weight as shown in Exhibit 1.4:

Exhibit 4 Weighting scheme for the selection criteria of Go-Online

Criteria	Grade	Weight factor
Size of enterprise (number of employees)	1-10	25%
Size of enterprise (size of turnover)	1-10	15%
Geographical location	1-10	40%
Sector of activity	1-10	20%

Source: http://www.go-online.gr/goonline/participate/training_support/criteria.html

Total grade is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Grade} = 0,25 * K1 + 0,15 * K2 + 0,4 * K3 + 0,2 * K4 + (1 : \text{IndSpecNeeds})^2$$

In Phase II, the selection criteria are much more relaxed and enterprises will be able to participate to the initiative on a first-come-first-served basis. This change in policy was seen as a necessary step in order to make the Programme even more user-friendly to vSMEs and easy to manage for the administrators at EOMMEX. Also, an additional motive was to enhance the faster take up of available financial resources, since a significant amount of funds from Phase I remained unused. It is expected that admittance of self employed individuals (doctors, lawyers, engineers, architects, etc.) to the Programme will give a much wanted boost in the exploitation of available financial resources.

² An enterprise that employs individuals with special needs gets one additional point.

Modifications during the programme

During Phase I, and in order to make the Programme run smoothly and faster, EOMMEX decided to introduce a few modifications to the implementation process to facilitate the vSMEs. Thus, in the early days of the Programme vSMEs could submit their applications to EOMMEX anytime a year but the evaluation process was taking place only twice a year. This made the whole process too long for the vSMEs who often had to wait many months until they were able to get the approval and proceed to the purchase of equipment. Over the last two years of Phase I, however, firms could purchase the necessary equipment at their own expense and risk before the approval of their application. As soon as they got the approval they could immediately put a claim for the subsidy by sending to EOMMEX the necessary documentation package. The whole procedure to receive the subsidy was as follows:

- Approved firms should consult the on-line directory about the minimum technical specifications of equipment and services for Basket 1 and Basket 2.
- Firms should look in their local market for the best available offers.
- Firms should ask their suppliers to provide them the services of the respective Basket they applied for according to the predefined technical specifications. Suppliers should provide vSMEs written confirmation that the services provided conform to those specifications.
- Firms should then request an invoice containing all the details of the purchase.
- Firms should also request the software licenses as well as the service contract with the ISP (if applicable).
- Firms together with their supplier should fill-in and sign a form confirming the proper installation and operation of equipment. If necessary, firms should seek the assistance of their supplier in order to fill-in electronically the necessary information regarding their purchase.
- In order to receive the subsidy, firms should send an application form requesting the subsidy along with the necessary documentation to EOMMEX. The complete documentation should be sent to EOMMEX at the latest within 15 days after the expiry of the three-months period firms have in their disposal to purchase the equipment and services.

The complete documentation package eligible companies should submit to EOMMEX SA to claim the subsidy, includes:

- Application form to EOMMEX requesting the subsidy
- A form certifying the proper installation and operation of equipment
- Details of bank account
- Photocopy of supplier invoice
- A non-approved invoice to EOMMEX
- Declaration form that the firm complies with the de minimis provisions.

Another modification during Phase I was that the President of EOMMEX - not the Minister of Development, as was the case in the early days of the Programme - eventually had to sign the formal decision for the approval of an application. Also, near the end of Phase I, approval decisions were issued every month, in an effort to eliminate long delays in the implementation of the Programme.

In Phase I, the Programme defined a set of minimum service requirements and technical specifications to which each participant vSME had to conform in order to be able to claim the subsidy.³ Some vSMEs expressed the view that some of these requirements were rather strict and asked for greater flexibility. For example, EOMMEX would not provide the subsidy to firms that had not bought a printer along with the PC (the printer was an integral part of the 'basket'), or had bought a laptop instead of a desktop, or had an open-ended service contract with an ISP (the requirement was for a *two-year* Internet connection with an ISP authorized by the National Communications and Posts Commission).

Some supplier companies also expressed their discontent regarding the slow progress of the initiative, which they attribute to the strict service requirements imposed by the Programme and the lack of flexibility regarding the type of equipment purchased (e.g. notebooks were generally excluded and accepted only under certain conditions).

To address these problems, Phase II introduces greater flexibility in the type of equipment to be purchased. Participating vSMEs in Phase II can now be subsidized for the purchase of equipment and services as follows:

- Personal Computer (desktop or laptop) (*)
- Operating System (*)
- Anti-Virus software
- Software applications
- Peripherals
- Two-year Internet connection (PSTN / ISDN / ADSL) (*)
- Technical Support

(*) The asterisk indicates that the purchase is compulsory. Items without an asterisk are optional. Laptops are acceptable provided they comply to the technical specifications set by the Programme. Internet connection is acceptable even if it exceeds two years (e.g. free access to the Internet provided to members of the Athens Chamber of the Commerce and Industry).

External communication

As regards the external communication of the Programme, the following points are important:

- During Phase I, EOMMEX (responsible for the administration and management of the Financial Support Scheme) had no formal communication plan as such. EOMMEX officials admitted that Go-Online is essentially a Programme that 'runs among friends' indicating that vSMEs usually get acquainted with the Programme by 'word of mouth' among colleagues and friends. This does not imply that certain public awareness campaigns and demonstration events did not take place at all. Rather, it emphasizes the limited effort put by EOMMEX on the promotion of the Programme among the vSMEs. This view is also shared by the vSMEs contacted by the author in the context of the present report. They all pointed out the role of friends and colleagues in providing essential information about the Programme and the limited information received from SME Organizations (including EOMMEX). Moreover, there were instances of e-business consultants of the Training Support Scheme acting as real promoters of the Programme. They took an active role in contacting SMEs' associations and informing their members about the objectives of Go-Online and the benefits of participation. Quite often, e-business consultants had the role of a mediator between their 'client' vSMEs and the administrators of the Programme (EOMMEX and GRNET) facilitating the communication among the two parties. On other instances, they acted as business consultants providing vSMEs advice and assistance on practical matters other than ICTs and e-business.

³ These are available on-line at http://www.go-online.gr/goonline/programme/basket_1.html

- GRNET SA, responsible for the Training Support Scheme of Go-Online, has made regular and coherent efforts to promote the Programme among the ranks of vSMEs through the operation of the Go-Online portal and assistance provided in the organization of demonstration events and public campaigns around the country. More specifically, according to the contract signed between GRNET SA and the consortium responsible for the set up of learning material, the operation of helpdesk, and the update of the Go-Online portal, the portal should be advertised in 20 search engines. In addition, each of the 16 consortia responsible for the implementation of the Training Support Scheme are also entrusted with tasks such as:
 - Set up local exhibitions, usually at the central city of the region they are responsible for
 - Provide printed material (leaflets) advertising Go-Online
 - Cooperate with local Chambers of Commerce for the regional promotion campaign of Go-Online
 - Set up mailing lists to inform vSMEs about the latest news of the Programme
 - Diffuse information through special articles in the local press and advertisements in local media

GRNET oversees the above activities and is responsible for the greatest part of communication activities. More specifically, GRNET is responsible for:

- All special issues dedicated to the Go-online initiative that appear in trade press
- The provision of printed material (leaflets) on Go-Online and its objectives
- Recording-in video best practice cases (in Greek and English)
- The advertising of the Go-Online portal on the Internet through banners
- The set up every year of a price award exhibition for best practice cases.

According to Greek policy makers, a brand new promotional campaign will be launched to mark the opening of Phase II, including TV and radio spots and advertisements in the national and regional media.

Internal Communication

As regards the internal communication between EOMMEX and GRNET SA the interviews with respective organisations revealed a rather gloomy picture.

- First, each organisation has set up and maintains its own Information System for the Programme. EOMMEX updates its own system with some delay, which is evident from the considerable time firms completing Action Line 1 (i.e. Purchase of Equipment) have to spend waiting to get into Action Line 2 (Training).⁴ GRNET SA, on the other hand, has developed a sophisticated monitoring system, part of which can be directly accessed and updated by the e-business consultants implementing the Training Support Scheme. Moreover, it has linked the Information System with the Go-Online web portal hence the information on the portal is the latest information available on the Programme.
- Second, there are problems in the relations between EOMMEX and the e-business consultants, who are normally supervised by GRNET SA. An interviewee who has been authorised e-business consultant, reported instances where vSMEs were contacting EOMMEX to ask information for the Training Support Scheme and EOMMEX employees were expressing total ignorance or were totally unhelpful.

⁴ The average time is between 6 months to a year.

- Third, the communication between EOMMEX and GRNET SA is not the best possible. This is because the two organisations operate at different 'wavelengths', they follow different internal procedures - by definition EOMMEX is more traditional and bureaucratic, whereas GRNET is an organisation of the younger, '.com style' generation- and exhibit different levels of diligence in pursuing their objectives - EOMMEX appears to be suffering to come up with the enormous administrative cost of running the Programme whereas GRNET has adopted a completely different approach for its part in the Programme by outsourcing the key activities to regional consortia and retaining for itself the role of supervisor.

1.3 The Policy Outputs

The Financial Support Scheme

During Phase I, the Financial Support Scheme achieved the output shown in Exhibits 5 and 6.

Exhibit 5 Go-Online Financial Support Scheme: Overview of Output Achieved in Phase I (21 April 2005)

Region	Target number of vSMEs	Number of vSMEs' approved to take part in Go-Online	vSMEs whose applications for subsidy have been processed and await payment	vSMEs already paid with the subsidy	Subsidies paid (in Euros)
East Macedonia & Thrace	1.750	2.316	1.142	1.094	746.506,32
Central Macedonia	2.250	7.575	3.817	3.698	2.562.025,36
Western Macedonia	2.000	1.448	727	707	484.947,21
Epirus	1.750	1.307	621	602	414.277,71
Thessaly	1.000	3.202	1.709	1.662	1.156.451,90
Ionian Islands	500	1.360	576	560	386.479,73
Western Greece	1.500	2.410	1.167	1.126	779.531,83
Central Greece	1.500	1.868	877	858	594.274,26
Attica	9.500	12.424	6.445	6.182	4.239.462,97
Peloponnesus	1.250	2.600	1.278	1.238	855.625,51
North Aegean Islands	500	1.604	980	961	665.879,60
South Aegean Islands	500	2.062	1.024	974	673.083,17
Crete	1.000	3.926	2.131	2.074	1.429.974,84
TOTAL	25.000	44.102	22.494	21.736	14.988.520,41

Source: EOMMEX (2005)

Exhibit 6 Distribution of SMEs by 'Basket of Service'

Type of basket	Number of vSMEs
Basket 2	Approx. 2.200
Basket 1	Approx. 20.000

Source: Estimates provided by EOMMEX (2005)

A closer look at these exhibits reveals the following:

- The majority of vSMEs benefited from the 'basic' services of Basket 1 whereas the more 'sophisticated' services of Basket 2 attracted a relatively small number of vSMEs.
- The initiative was originally designed to have a strong regional dimension, which it managed to achieve. The majority of beneficiaries are vSME located in peripheral areas and remote regions of the country as compared to those in metropolitan areas and urban centres.
- The original target of 25.000 vSMEs expected to benefit from the Programme not only was achieved but also was nearly doubled (44.102 vSMEs have been approved to take part in the Financial Support Scheme). However, only about half of these firms (22.494 firms out of 44.102) managed to collect the necessary documentation on time (i.e. within 3 months after the approval of their application) and submit it in the way requested by EOMMEX in order to be able to get paid up the subsidy. As a result, a significant part of the original budget allocated to this particular activity of Go-online remains untapped. According to EOMMEX officials, there are several reasons behind the observed failure to fully reach the original budgetary targets. The following are the most prominent:
 - Many vSME owners had a false impression about the Programme. They hadn't realised the Programme would only pay them a subsidy for specific type of equipment. Rather, they expected it to cover the full cost of any IT equipment purchased;
 - The Programme is addressed to very small firms with up to 10 employees. In practical terms, the majority of applicant firms in Phase I were firms with either no employees at all (37% of total cases), or with just one employee (28% of total cases). The owners of such small firms often find a hard time with state bureaucracy, in terms of completing forms and collecting the necessary documentation, no matter how simple these tasks may eventually be.
 - In addition, the severe financial situation many vSMEs were facing at the time of application made them unable to contribute their share to the full cost of the purchase (firms had to pay 60% of total expenses out of their own pocket). Consequently they abandoned the initiative and were classified as non-implementers.
 - IT equipment suppliers played a catalytic role in the process. More than often, vSMEs discovered the opportunity offered by the Programme from suppliers who saw a golden opportunity to financially benefit from the transaction. Suppliers also had to be prompt in properly filling in and returning the full documentation to vSMEs. Failure to timely conform to this arrangement could cause the firm miss the subsidy.
 - Last, but not least, the significant delays by EOMMEX in the approval process, particularly experienced in the early days of the Programme, made many firms abandon the initiative altogether. Moreover, it was often the case that by the time the application was approved the firm had either closed down or changed hands and the new owner was not interested in the Programme.

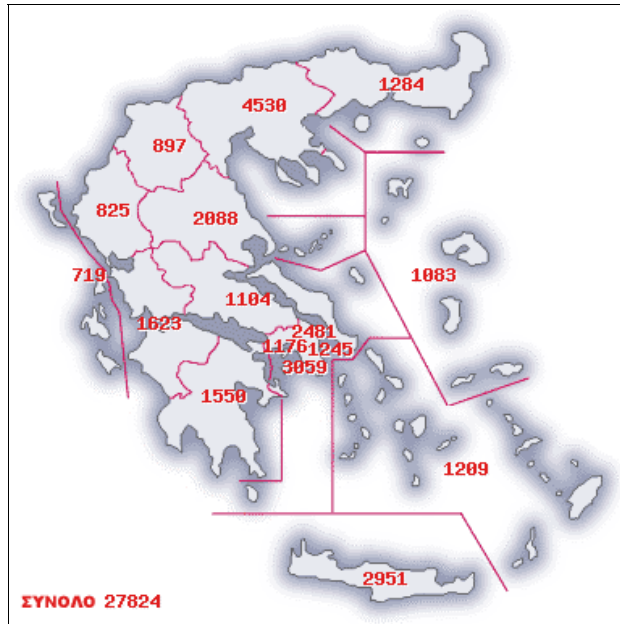
The Training Support Scheme

The Training Support Scheme set its own target objective, which is 50.000 vSMEs to be trained in ICTs by mid-2007. The output achieved so far (5 May 2005) is shown in Exhibits 1.7 and 1.8. Exhibit 1.7 indicates the total number and regional distribution of vSMEs approved to participate to the Training Support Scheme. Exhibit 1.8 indicates the total number and regional distribution of vSMEs already having received training. So far, the Training Scheme has achieved its objectives by 41%, that is 41% of the target figure of firms expected to benefit from the initiative have already received training by e-business consultants. Total figures between Exhibits 1.7 and 1.8 vary. This is because training involves three visits at vSMEs premises, which may take some time to materialise as they depend on the availability of both the trainer (e-business consultant), and the trainee (the vSME owner and employees). vSME owners are often busy and prefer to have more sessions of shorter duration (e.g. 6x2 hour sessions instead of 3x4 hours), a decision which prolongs the duration of the training activity and delays its completion. Still, there is a small but significant number of vSMEs (around 4.200 firms) who dropped out of the initiative altogether. The exact reasons are unknown but may involve, among others, lack of interest and/or diligence by vSMEs' owners, a change in their circumstances, etc.

As regards the Go-Online portal that supplements the Training Support Scheme, it counts more than 17.000 registered users and an average of 30.000 visitors per month. Some of the permanent features of the portal include:

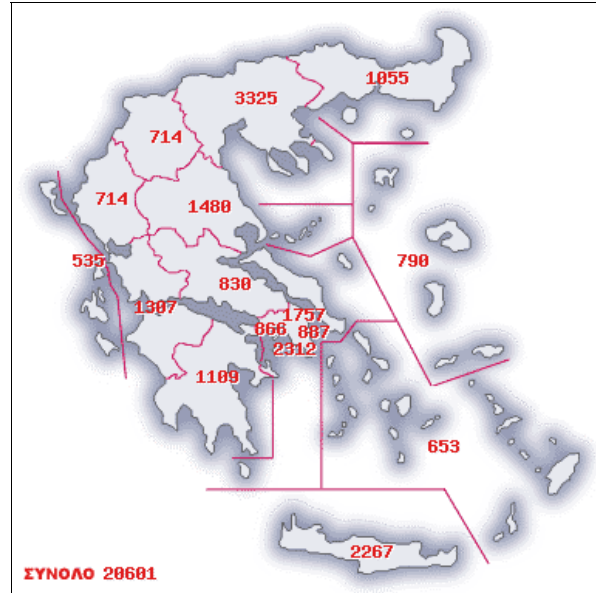
- a web based helpdesk where more than 9.000 requests have been processed
- an electronic library with more than 3.000 information articles, special guides, reports and presentations
- an online community (forum, chat) for the dissemination of views and ideas among visitors (vSMEs, e-business consultants, other individuals)
- a high-quality, interactive, educational material of 56 e-learning courses
- a directory of 1058 related links
- the latest worldwide news on e-business
- a glossary of terms
- a popular, all-inclusive newsletter sent bimonthly to registered users
- online polls
- a search engine
- a wide selection of articles related to the latest developments in the field of technology and e-business
- a list of 165 Frequently Asked Questions
- 115 questions for the evaluation of e-business consultants
- 260 questions for the self-evaluation of the vSME trainees.

Exhibit 7 Distribution of vSMEs approved to take part in the Training Support - Scheme by region



Source: http://www.go-online.gr/goonline/programme/results/mme_stats.html (last accessed 5 May 2005)

Exhibit 8 Distribution of trained vSMEs by region



Source: http://www.go-online.gr/goonline/programme/results/visits_stats.html (last accessed 5 May 2005)

1.4 The Efficiency of the Policy

The systemic efficiency of the policy

The Go-Online programme interacts positively and complements other similar policies at the national level as it provides to a special category of firms (the vSMEs) the means to make the first step into e-business. The initial conception of the programme was that it would fulfil a sort of 'universal service objectives' for equal participation even for the smallest SMEs to the Information Society. It provides an opportunity to those vSMEs that either do not care by themselves, or cannot afford, or do not have the means to buy the necessary IT equipment. Moreover - and this valued as equally if not more important by the more 'cognisant' of participating vSMEs - Go-Online provides individual basic IT training to vSMEs at their premises.

There are other policies with similar objectives that are either being implemented or ready to start in the e-business area. More specifically, a parallel initiative to Go-Online in terms of budget allowance and eligibility criteria is the *E-business Programme*, which has been in operation since 2003. The initiative covers up to 40% of the total expenses incurred by SMEs having between 5-200 employees to take up more sophisticated e-business practices (e.g. participation to e-market places, e-procurement, etc). The initiative is managed by the Ministry of Development and is funded by the Operational Programme for Competitiveness. The Eligibility criteria for participation to the *E-business* initiative are the following:

- The applicant enterprise should have at least two (financial) years of operation at the time of application.
- Turnover should be between 200.000 and 30.000.000 Euros
- Have between 5-200 employees.
- Sector of operation should not be included in the list of sectors excluded by the Commission (under the De Minimis criteria)
- The enterprise does not belong to other enterprises (i.e. is not controlled by shares or voting rights by over 25%) that are not SMEs.
- The enterprise should aim to one of the following actions:
 - Establish and operate an ERP system
 - Use an information system for business purposes by means of the ASP model
 - Participate in electronic marketplaces
 - Create, manage and distribute electronic content

A new initiative was announced in May 2005 called 'Participate' (METECHO in Greek). The Programme is considered as a follow up 'enhanced' version of Go-Online. It targets vSMEs having between 2-10 employees and assists them in making a second step into e-business by covering up to 50% of total expenses incurred. The initiative has a strong regional character with a budget of 2 million Euros per region.

The systemic efficiency of the implementation

The Programme has a good co-operation with the private sector. More specifically, the private sector (i.e. IT supplier companies and vendors) is involved in the implementation of the Financial Support Scheme in ways described in previous sections. In general terms, suppliers were helpful and promoted the programme among the vSMEs. However, according to EOMMEX, there also were few instances of (a) misinformation from the part of suppliers, (b) long delays in sending to beneficiaries the necessary documentation to be able to claim for the subsidy, and (c) fraud (e.g. over charging in order to claim higher subsidy).

In addition, the Programme has a very good co-operation with professional associations, regional chambers of commerce, as well as with the academic consortia that run the Training Support Scheme. Examples of good co-operation include the joint organisation of events at regional centres, the role of regional chamber of commerce as promoters and intermediaries, and the active involvement of professional associations in promotion activities among their members.

The adaptive efficiency

The implementation of Phase I revealed instances where some modifications were necessary and were thus introduced into the Programme (for example, applications were eventually evaluated throughout the year instead of twice a year as initially planned). However, more radical changes (e.g. regarding the eligibility criteria) did not come to materialise until the launch of Phase II of Go-Online.

Conclusions

Phase I of Go-Online may not have fully succeeded its quantitative targets in terms of number of firms having been subsidised to purchase IT equipment, but is surely on the right track in terms of its training objectives. Also, the majority of beneficiaries are vSME located in peripheral areas and remote regions of the country, which is indicative of the strong regional dimension of the Programme.

The delays observed in the approval process, especially for participation to the Financial Support Scheme, and in the payment of subsidies are due to (a) EOMMEX's bureaucracy and (b) the sluggishness of equipment suppliers. The false impression many vSMEs had about the provisions of the Programme, the hard time many vSMEs' owners have with state bureaucracy, and the severe financial situation they were facing made many potential beneficiaries abandon the Programme altogether.

Finally, communication between the policy itself and its target groups as well as the internal communication between EOMMEX and GRNET SA was not as effective as was the communication between GRNET SA and the regional consortia that implement the Training Support Scheme.

2 Policy Outcomes and Impacts

2.1 Policy Outcomes

In March 2005, the results of a preliminary evaluation of the Programme were announced.⁵ The evaluation took place among vSMEs that participated to the Programme. A total of 553 vSMEs responded to the on-line questionnaire hosted at the go-online portal. The main results that came out of the analysis were the following:

- The Programme contributed to an overall increase in the use of PCs among the vSMEs by 20%, and of the Internet by 30%.
- Participant firms were very satisfied from the Programme. More specifically, it was estimated that the Programme covered approximately 60% of the ICT needs of vSMEs. Satisfaction from the helpdesk service was estimated at 65%, whereas firms expressed satisfaction for the training received by e-business consultants which reached 70%.
- The main purposes of PC use were access to the Internet (19%), e-mail use (18%), office automation (15%), and other commercial applications (10%). A significant percentage of firms were using the PC for accounting applications (9%), warehouse management (8%), and entertainment purposes (8%), whereas more sophisticated applications, such as production planning and Management Information Systems received low percentages (1-2%)
- The main purposes of Internet use were e-mail (19%) and access to general information (16%), followed by purchase of services, access to e-government services, communication, and information on competitors' products (all between 7-8 %). Responses such as purchase of products, location of partners/employees, and e-business practices accounted for the smallest percentages (2-4%) with mobile commerce being the least favoured among vSMEs.
- Of the total number of vSMEs that completed the questionnaire, 33% did not maintain a website at all, 45% maintained a website for advertising/information purposes, and only 22% maintained a website for e-business purposes.
- The questionnaire sought to assess the current and future use of more sophisticated e-business applications by vSMEs. However, the responses of firms regarding the percentage of electronic sales and electronic purchases to total turnover were found unreliable in statistical terms.
- Approximately 80% of vSMEs believed they could use the knowledge acquired on ICTs to a considerable extent (average to very important use)
- According to the vSMEs, the biggest advantage of the Programme was the subsidy. Second to a lesser extent, came the connection to the Internet and the education/training on ICTs
- The biggest disadvantage of the Programme (according to vSMEs) was the low level of subsidy. As a result, the most important improvement that could be made to the Programme was to increase the level of subsidy.

It should be pointed out that because of the way the survey was conducted (on-line questionnaire where vSMEs were called to participate rather than being selected out of the total population), the size of the sample was small and could not account for the elimination of statistical variance that was expected to be found in the completion of questionnaires by the vSMEs.

⁵ The results are available on line at the Go-Online portal in .pdf form (in Greek).

However, having made this observation, the evaluators concluded that, irrespective of some weak points, the Programme fulfilled its objectives with success and that it is positively evaluated by vSMEs. This result is supported as much by 'objective' indicators (e.g. increase in PC use and Internet use by vSMEs) as by more 'subjective' indicators (e.g. vSMEs' satisfaction from available services and fulfilment of their needs).

The following pages include short case studies of vSMEs who participated to the Programme and benefited from it with more or less success. These case studies are indicative of

- the type of firms that benefited from the Programme,
- the reasons behind the successful or less successful implementation,
- the type of benefits and outcomes achieved

Case Study: LIFECOM-Pireaus

Abstract

LIFECOM is located in the suburb of Nikaia, Pireaus, Greece and is active in the packaging and wholesale distribution of condoms - an unusual business activity. The company participated to Go-Online in 2002, the year it was first launched, and benefited from Basket 1 (purchase of basic IT equipment). A year later, it applied for Basket 2 and set up a website with on-line selling facilities. Today, the owner/manager says the company has managed to extend its customer base both in Greece and abroad as a result of its web presence.

Background of the Company

The company was originally established in 1949. Wholesale distribution is mainly addressed to hotels and bordels. The current owner is an enthusiastic entrepreneur who bought the company in 1999. The company employs three people (two of them in sales) on a seasonal basis and offers a rather 'distinct' product, not particularly known for its e-business potential (as compared to other more traditional products and services, such as tickets, reservations, books, CDs, etc). The owner got information about Go-Online from EOMMEX out of a personal initiative. He thought the Programme triggered those vSMEs already planning to buy some basic IT equipment to take a faster decision to implement their plan and be compensated for. Therefore, he saw the Programme as a good opportunity that shouldn't be missed so he decided to fill-in an application form himself. Soon after his application was approved, he started to receive brochures and promotion material from local IT suppliers and vendors.

Activities

The company implemented Basket 1 of Go-Online in 2002 and Basket 2 in 2003. The costs sustained by the company for buying the basic IT equipment (60% of total expenses) were considered acceptable. Subsidy was received 2 to 3 months after the submission of claim to EOMMEX, which was regarded as adequate time for compensation. Although the owner had some prior familiarity with ICTs, the company also participated in the Training Support Scheme of Go-Online. According to the owner, this was the most interesting and useful part of the Programme, which he attributes mainly to the diligence of, and excellent co-operation with, the e-business consultant.

Benefits and outcomes achieved

As with the majority of vSMEs participating to Go-Online, the benefits accrued cannot be measured in absolute quantitative terms. Today the company maintains a website which simply provides information on company profile, and general information and advice on the use of condoms. There is also the availability of on-line orders, which according to the owner has remained inactive. The owner is the only person in the firm who uses the PC. However, the true benefit for the firm accrued from its excellent relationship with the e-business consultant and the eagerness of the owner to cooperate in the best possible way. He agreed to make his company the subject of a business plan prepared for educational purposes. The owner can now use the business plan to pave his way into e-business.

Case Study: Federation of News dealers - Athens

Abstract

There are approximately 1000 news dealers in Greece who act as intermediaries in the handling and distribution of newspapers from the publishers to newsagents and other places where newspapers are on sale. Some of them maintain their own private shops or storage areas while others use the facilities of one of the two central news agencies. Go-Online subsidised approximately 300 news dealers to buy basic terminal equipment (Basket I) and automate their transactions (i.e. handling and distribution). Today, news dealers admit that the introduction of PCs made their work easier, faster, and with less hustle.

Background of the sector

The news dealers sector has been a rather neglected area in terms of e-business practice. The traditional method of operation was based on paper work. Each dealer was keeping paper records of all transactions made between the newspaper publishers and the newsagent points. This made the whole process time consuming and prone to faults and mistakes. Some news dealers were planning to buy a PC for their work whilst others were expecting the central agency to take the initiative and contribute to the cost. The news dealers were not aware of Go-Online. They found out about the Programme from an e-business consultant who approached the federation and made a presentation about the scope and objectives of the Programme. Soon afterwards, most news dealers thought it was an opportunity not to be missed.

Activities

The e-business consultant assisted in the massive completion of application forms to the Programme in early 2004. She also facilitated the interaction of the news dealers' community with EDET SA and EOMMEX so that subsidies were paid on time and ICT training was taking place at convenient times for the trainees. Also, equipment suppliers provided useful advice during the selection of terminal equipment, for it had to support the special software run by the central news agency.

Benefits and outcomes achieved

Today, 300 out of 1000 news dealers have been equipped with a PC out of the Programme. The lack of appropriate space within the two central news agencies refrained others from participation. However, it is expected that as soon as space becomes available more news dealers will wish to take advantage of the programme. The news dealers are the owners and main users of the PCs. They admit a significant change in their work processes and organisation. Communication with the central news agency happens with e-mail and full records of all transactions made with the central news agencies and the points of sale are kept in electronic form. According to the news dealers, it is the Training Support Scheme that provided the added value to the Programme and which proved particularly useful to them. The critical success factor was the active involvement of the e-business and her scrupulous effort to bring in as many news dealers as possible to the Programme.

2.2 Policy Impacts

The implementation of the Programme and the opportunity offered to peripheral vSMEs and to those located in remote regions to get basic IT equipment had an overall positive impact on regional development. More specifically,

- The de-centralisation of procurement process has had an indirect positive impact on regional economic development. vSMEs across the 13 regions of the country could choose IT equipment and services from lists of local suppliers and could receive training from a local pool of e-business consultants available in their region.
- The formation of 16 regional consortia each consisting of local educational, commercial and business partners (Universities, Chambers of Commerce and local enterprises) was aiming at bringing these actors together the benefit of local communities. Despite the good intentions, cooperation among the actors did not always come as smoothly as originally envisaged. It was often the case that success depended on a few regional 'champions' who took up most of the work, whereas on other cases cooperation was doomed to failure.
- The Programme also gave students the opportunity to get a first hand experience of the real needs and problems faced by small businesses in peripheral regions.

Conclusion

Overall, irrespective of some weak points, the Programme has fulfilled its objectives of encouraging the deployment of ICTs among the vSMEs and of increasing the awareness of the benefits and prospects of ICTs among the vSMEs. The Programme is positively evaluated by vSMEs. Also, as indicated in the case studies the open-mindedness of vSMEs' owners and the diligence of e-business consultants had a catalytic role to the successful implementation of the Programme.

3 The Added Value of the Policy Initiative

3.1 The Innovativeness of the Policy

Go-Online has been regarded as an innovative policy measure by all actors concerned. The policy targeted vSMEs, which were regarded as mostly prone to exclusion from the Information Society mainly due to their small size and scope of business activities. This by itself was an innovative characteristic of the policy. Participating vSMEs thought it was the first time they were experiencing such the direct and immediate attention by policy makers. Firms were used to initiatives that had a disproportionate bureaucratic burden as compared to the real benefits they accrued to them (usually measured in financial terms). Apparently this was not the case with Go-Online, which despite the small delay in the payment of the subsidy left the enterprise with brand new equipment and valuable assistance on how to use it. The Training Support Scheme, in particular, has been highly praised by vSMEs. Not only were they very satisfied with the result (despite the fact that it was designed to take up a significant amount of their time), they also found an unexpected ally in the face of the e-business consultants, who were often more than willing to provide assistance and advice on company matters other than e-business.

3.2 Additionality of the Outcomes

As already discussed in a previous section, the on-line evaluation of the Programme cannot not be regarded as a reliable third party ex-post evaluation because of the methodology used. The only other point of reference, which can be used regarding the issue of additionality, is the annual survey of ICT use among Greek SMEs. This type of survey has been conducted annually since 2001 among SMEs having between 1-250 employees. The results available for 2001, 2002 and 2003 are presented in Exhibit 1.9.

The results reveal a rather contradictory picture. On the one hand, there has been an insignificant increase (only 1%) in the availability of PCs among the vSMEs (having between 1-10 employees), whereas, on the other, there has been a notable increase in the access to the Internet. This latter increase can partly be attributed to the Go-Online Programme. The reason is that between 2001 and 2003 the percentage of enterprises who are aware of the Go-Online Programme and believe it covers their basic needs has nearly doubled. As the number of vSME with PCs has essentially remained the same, the increase in the 'Go-Online-aware' vSMEs can be interpreted as an increase in the number of firms that took advantage of the Training Support initiative of Go-online. Unfortunately, the relevant figures for 2004 have not been available at the time of writing of the present report.

Another approach to the issue of additionality is the informal estimate given by the implementing organisations. According to EOMMEX, the Financial Support Scheme in Phase I of the Programme had a 50% additionality of scale, that is only half of participating vSMEs would have been able to cover the full cost of IT equipment themselves without the subsidy. Along the same lines, GRNET SA reported 100% additionality of scale in the Training Support Scheme.

3.3 Additionality of the Impacts

Additionality of impacts should be examined in a time frame that would exceed the original time frame of the policy. This is because the policy itself has multiplier medium and long term effects, which are difficult to be traced and measured in the short term. Such a long term impact would be for example, an increase in electronic networking among vSME, or an increase in their competitiveness. So far, there have been no concrete measures of such impacts. A study that would seek to assess these long term impacts is yet to materialise.

Conclusions

Go-Online has been regarded as an innovative policy measure in both scope and target objectives by all actors concerned. The Training Support Scheme, in particular, has been highly praised by vSMEs. Both hard (survey) data and the personal opinion of administrative officials at implementing Organizations indicate that additionality was greatest for the Training Support Scheme, which would not have been implemented without the funding, and to a lesser extent for the Financial Support Scheme. No hard data are available with regard to the additionality of impact since the policy itself has multiplier medium and long term effects, which are difficult to trace and measure in the short term.

Exhibit 9 Results of the annual survey of E-business and ICT use among Greek SMEs

Indicator	2001	2002	2003
vSMEs with PCs	33%	34%	34%
vSMEs with Internet access	43%	54%	52%
Coverage of ICT needs by Go-Online	Yes: 33% No:67%	Yes:35% No:65%	Yes: 60% No:40%

Source: <http://www.ebusinessforum.gr/index.php?op=modload&modname=Downloads&action=statisticsview&pageid=1004> (last accessed, 5 May 2005)

4 Sustainability of Policy Outcomes

4.1 Change of Work Processes

So far, the only survey including questions on the type of software applications used after the acquisition of terminal equipment was the on-line evaluation survey among participant vSMEs. Although, as already pointed above, the results are only tentative and should be treated with caution because of the methodology adopted, the following are indicative of any change that may have occurred in the work processes of beneficiary firms.

- After participation to the Programme, the frequency of PC use at vSMEs increased by 19%.
- Main purposes of PC use reported were access to the Internet (19%), e-mail use (18%), and office automation (15%).
- After participation to the Programme, the frequency of Internet use at vSMEs increased by 32%
- The vSMEs reported the use of e-mail (19%) and access to general information (16%) as main purposes of using the Internet
- In the immediate future, the vSMEs expressed particular interest to offer the following electronic communication services to their customers: information for products and services (22%), company news (18%), marketing and sales services (17%)
- In the immediate future, the vSMEs expressed interest to access the following electronic communication services: information on potential suppliers (21%), on-line ordering (19%), information on cost, product availability, etc. (16%)

From the above it is obvious that there have been no outstanding changes to the work processes of vSMEs. However, if one considers their small size, regional distribution, and sector of activity (e.g. trade, manufacturing) one would suggest that even the use of ICTs for as simple tasks as communication, access to information, and office automation is enough of a change already for this category of SMEs.

4.2 Creation of a Momentum

There has been a general sentiment among members of the two implementing organisations that the implementation infrastructure set up during Go-online will soon demolish after the conclusion of the initiative, unless there is a continuation of the policy with a similar implementation plan.

4.3 Continuity of the Policy Activities

A new initiative was announced in May 2005 called 'Participate' (METECHO in Greek). The Programme is considered as a follow up 'enhanced' version of Go-Online. It targets vSMEs of between 2-10 employees and assists them in making a second step into e-business by covering up to 50% of total expenses incurred for the set up of electronic communication services, access to marketplaces, e-procurement, etc. The initiative has a strong regional character as it provides a budget of 2 million Euros per region.

Conclusions

So far, the only survey including questions on the type of software applications used after the acquisition of terminal equipment was the on-line evaluation survey among participant vSMEs. The results indicate that there has been an increase in the use of basic ICT services (e-mail, access to information, and office automation) among participant vSMEs.

Go-Online did not create a particular momentum in terms of implementation infrastructure. The general feeling is that the networks, consortia and other implementation infrastructure set up for the purpose of the Programme will cease to exist soon after the conclusion of the initiative.

A follow up 'enhanced' version of Go-Online was announced in May 2005. The new Programme will target vSMEs of between 2-10 employees and will assist them in making their second step into the world of e-business.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Success, Innovation and Good Practice

Go-Online has been a national Programme launched by the Ministry of Development in the context of the 3rd EU Support Framework Programme for Greece with the aim to boost ICT access by the vSMEs, especially those in remote and peripheral regions. However, the good intentions of the Programme and the early enthusiasm by the vSME, have yet to bring in the benefits envisaged in terms of enhanced ICT adoption and use.⁶ The data presented above suggests that the approach of vSMEs to ICTs is still too slow and conservative. Notwithstanding, policy makers and implementers in Greece are aware of the nature of ICTs and wish to emphasise that the Programme has long-run outcomes and multiplier effects, which are yet to be seen in the years to come. The original objective of raising ICT awareness among the vSMEs will materialise in the long run as the Programme has only started to shape up a new class of ICT-aware vSMEs that are expected to raise both demand and supply of new technologies in the future.

At the same time, policy makers, implementing organisations and vSME beneficiaries all agree that irrespective of achieving or not the required quantitative targets, the Programme was highly innovative in character and scope. The Training Support Scheme, in particular, was highly praised by vSMEs' owners who, for the first time in their business career, got practical advice on ICTs by dedicated e-business consultants, all covered by public funds. Firms are keen on 'lean' procedures with immediate and observable results. Thus, participant vSMEs valued the 'direct and immediate' nature of the Programme as compared to other initiatives favouring regional economic development. Although the population of Greek vSMEs is immense and heterogeneous – as exemplified by the problems realised in the ability of firms to absorb the public funds - one could safely argue that the Programme has been set as an example of good policy practice among participant vSME.

⁶ The results of the evaluation of Phase I of the Programme indicate a slight improvement in the use of PCs and Internet access. However, these results need to be verified in a second evaluation study which will seek to investigate the impact of the Programme on the competitiveness of the vSMEs using a proper methodological instrument.

5.2 Facilitators and Barriers

The analysis revealed the low ability of vSMEs to absorb public funds as the main impediment to the realisation of target objectives. Their limited success was attributed to the following reasons:

- Many vSME owners had a false impression about the Programme in that they expected it to cover the full cost of IT equipment purchased;
- The owners of vSMEs often find a hard time with state bureaucracy, in terms of completing forms and collecting the necessary documentation, no matter how simple these tasks may eventually be.
- The severe financial situation many vSMEs were facing at the time of application made them unable to contribute their share (60%) to the full cost of the purchase.
- Suppliers had to timely complete and return the full documentation to vSMEs. Failure to conform to this arrangement could cause firms to miss the subsidy.
- There have been significant delays by EOMMEX in the approval process, particularly in the early days of the Programme, which made many firms abandon the initiative altogether.

As regards the implementing Organisations, the overall impression of EOMMEX is that, for a public Organisation, it exceeded itself in the effort to come up to the huge administrative burden of the Programme. The Training Support Initiative, on the other hand, owes much of its success to the efficient management and overall supervision of GRNET SA, which exhibited an impressive capability in the organisation and support of the initiative. From an administrative point of view, it would be wise in the future to set one single entity as responsible for running the whole Programme instead of splitting resources and creating duplicative administrative structures in two different organisations, which do not apparently share common visions and processes.

5.3 Learning Points

- The effective adoption of ICTs is neither automatic nor does it take place homogeneously and at the same speed in all firms. The effective incorporation of ICTs into the day-to-day business of any firm –and of a vSME in particular- is strongly conditioned by the type of activity of the firm, the organisation of the sector, and the economic dynamics of the region the firm is located. Policies, such as Go-Online, oriented towards strengthening the development and application of ICTs among SMEs should be designed with a long run perspective in mind. It normally takes a long time to reap the benefits and impacts of such policies whose long-term objective is to create a new ' ICT culture' to vSMEs than to solve immediate problems of financial nature.
- From an administrative point of view, it would be wise in the future to set one single entity as responsible for running the whole Programme instead of splitting resources and creating duplicative administrative structures in two different organisations, which do not apparently share common visions and processes.
- Communication and promotional activities are critical for such policies as Go-Online. Not only do they increase awareness of the initiative among members of the business community, they also serve as examples of reference introducing novel practices, tactics, and ways of doing things to vSMEs which can later adopt to their own business.

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Interviews with

- Mr Cristakos, Director, Administrative Agency for the Information Society Programme
- Mrs Evaggelia Sourlagka, Project Manager, Hellenic Organization of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Handicraft SA (EOMMEX SA)
- Mr Jacque Koune, Director, Project Management Division, GRNET S.A.
- Dr Xenophon Tsilibaris, Project Manager, GRNET S.A.
- Mr Anastasios Bilos, Director, Regional Chamber of Commerce – Chios
- Mrs Pella Karpathiotaki, IT Consultant – Training Specialist
- Mr Iordanis Kanonidis, SME
- Mr Elias Alevizos, Representative of the Greek Newsagents' Association
- Mrs Kalliopi Kamaradou, SME owner
- Mr Stratis Gdisis, SME owner
- Mr George Papaioannou, SME owner