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Are Enterprises From Lagging Regions Digitally Connected?

This paper focuses on how enterprises located on lagging regions are using online resources and how can they enhance their usage. Most companies have transitioned to the “online world”, however, in rural and more deprived regions, we see that companies still have difficulties accessing some online resources or accessing qualified workers in ICT areas. As such, this paper focus on 29 enterprises from the northeast of Portugal, a recognized lagging region. In the context of an international project, CRECEER - creation of business cooperation networks in rural cross-border regions between companies in the gourmet agri-food and tourism sectors, we analysed the use of ICT, what online tools were used and what could be done to improve their ICT use in their business. As a result, we found that the majority of the companies only had a minimal investment in business online tools, they ar not aware of the majority of cloud computing software, and they do not use it in their business. Even though the studied companies were willing to evolve digitally, they recognized the severe restrictions they had, namely the requirement of specific currently unavailable knowledge, the necessity of qualified workers that they couldn’t afford, and even the hardware necessity they couldn’t supress. It is clear that for these companies had it not been the CRECEER project, even the smallest changes and improvements, would not be achieved in a short period. It is rather crucial to have European funds dedicated to enhance the ICT competencies of these businesses.

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