

## **Relazione sintetica**

### **Piccole e medie imprese**

#### **Istruzioni**

**Si elabori una sintesi in italiano del testo allegato evidenziando la questione centrale affrontata nell'articolo.**

**La sintesi deve essere basata esclusivamente sull'articolo fornito.**

**La sintesi non deve superare le 20 righe.**

**Il tempo a disposizione è di 60 minuti.**

**Buon Lavoro!**

## **SMEs in the crisis: Employment, industrial relations and local partnership**

By Andrea Broughton (tratto da: Eurofound > EIROnline, 24.6.2011)

This section examines the main views of the social partners in EU Member States on the functioning of SMEs and the particular issues and difficulties that SMEs face, together with their views on the measures available to help SMEs to weather the crisis and employment issues.

Although the views of employer and employee representatives, set out below, differ in many respects, there are some common themes that can be drawn out. For example, in some countries, such as Ireland and Romania, both employer and employee representative bodies have been critical of government support for SMEs during the crisis, particularly as the government did not implement social partner suggestions designed to help SMEs, including support for the establishment and development of SMEs, reduced taxation and less bureaucracy. In Ireland, employers and unions have both called for the introduction of a support or stimulus package designed to boost employment in SMEs. They are concerned that in addition to the jobs crisis and labour costs, SMEs in Ireland face issues concerning fixed costs and the cost of utilities. A lack of access to credit is also considered to be a major problem for Irish SMEs.

In Romania, employers and unions have criticized the government's strategy for helping the SME sector. Much of the employer discontent in Romania centered on the taxation of SMEs, and the government responded by abolishing a particular tax introduced for micro-enterprises in 2009.

By contrast, in Austria there is broad consensus that SMEs are very important for the national economy and employer and employee representative bodies are in agreement that the course taken by the government during the crisis has been the right one. In Spain both employer and employee representative bodies also agree that SMEs are of vital importance for the Spanish economy. Trade unions and employer organizations representing SMEs in Norway generally coordinate their views, and there is reported to be general consensus also in Malta.

As noted elsewhere in this overview, one of the main problems facing SMEs is a lack of access to credit, particularly during the crisis. Both employer and employee representatives have therefore highlighted this problem as one that needs addressing.

### **Employer views**

The concerns of employers representing SMEs focus on areas such as the competitiveness of SMEs, which in turn is related to issues such as reducing bureaucracy, increasing access to credit and reducing taxes and other types of costs, such as social security contributions.

Access to credit and venture capital is a particularly important issue for SME employer bodies in most countries, with employer representatives in Cyprus, the Netherlands and Lithuania engaged in lobbying the government to try to improve access to loans and improve the credit flow for SMEs. This is also an issue explicitly cited by employer representatives in Luxembourg as well as Greece, where employers have put forward the idea of establishing a bank that exclusively finances SMEs.

Lower levels of regulation is a major theme for SME employers in many countries. In the UK, the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) is calling for less regulation of SMEs, in addition

to exemptions from social security payments, in order to help smaller companies weather the crisis. In Poland, employer efforts centre on trying to simplify administrative procedures when accessing EU funding, which they believe would help SMEs considerably. Small business representatives in the Netherlands and Luxembourg are also focusing on trying to reduce the administrative burden. In Germany, small business representatives are advocating exempting companies with fewer than 20 employees from statistical reporting obligations.

Lower taxes are a focus for employer organisations representing SMEs in some countries. In Slovenia, employer organisations have been successful in getting the government to agree to abolish an unpopular tax on micro-enterprises. In Germany, reducing tax for SMEs is a priority for small business representatives. This is also an issue of importance cited by employers in Greece.

Late payment and non-payment of invoices sent to clients (including other companies and state bodies) for work already carried out is another financial issue that affects SMEs in particular. Employer organisations representing SMEs in Slovenia are therefore focusing on highlighting the negative effects on SMEs of late and non-payment, in addition to the existence of the informal economy, and proposing to the government new legislation aimed at tackling this. Non-payment or late payment is also an issue for SME employer representatives in Belgium, who are lobbying the government to introduce new legislation on this topic.

Relatively low SME membership of employer organisations is an issue in some countries. In Bulgaria, for example, it is thought that low levels of SME membership are linked to the high incidence of home working and work in the informal economy.

In Cyprus, the General Confederation of Small Business' and Retailers' Unions (POVEK) has been lobbying the government to intervene to restrict the development of large supermarkets and shopping malls. POVEK would also like to see the creation of a special fund to help SMEs to modernise and invest in new technology and relocation to industrial zones. Small employer organisations in Greece have set out similar demands.

Collective bargaining systems are not a major concern for many SME employer organisations. One exception, however, is Spain, where SME employer body CEPYME would like more decentralisation of collective bargaining in order to allow SMEs more freedom in making wage adjustments. They claim that this would increase the SMEs' ability to maintain employment levels.

Regarding employment trends, employer organisations representing SMEs in some countries, such as Norway, have been arguing for more flexibility in terms of temporary and fixed-term contracts.

Training is an issue that has not featured highly in many employer representative body views as reported for this study. However, in France, the small business employer representative body CGPME and other organisations stress that access to training is an issue of special importance for SMEs, particularly during the crisis.

### **Employee representative views**

Employee representative bodies in many countries have been lobbying their governments to try to improve the employment situation in SMEs. In Ireland, for example, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) has stated that it would like to see the Irish government intervene directly to support job creation, by means of public support and funding. In the UK, a TUC spokesperson indicated that one of the problems faced by SMEs in the UK is a lack of

management skills and management qualifications, although they noted that this is to be expected as the SME sector is dominated by self-employment.

Employee representation in SMEs is a key issue for employee representative bodies and trade unions in some countries. In Austria, trade unions have indicated that they would like to see an increase in employee representation in SMEs, in the form of more works councils, particularly in the smaller SMEs. Employee representation in SMEs is also a concern for trade unions in Spain. Here, unions are trying to resist any attempts on the part of employers to decentralise collective bargaining, in the belief that this would lead to a deterioration in employment terms and conditions for SME employees, which, in the trade unions' view, are already relatively poor. Spanish trade unions also state that low trade union membership and the low number of works councils in SMEs means that it is difficult to monitor whether the provisions of collective agreements are being respected in SMEs. In Belgium, trade unions are suggesting lowering the threshold for the formation of works councils, in order to increase the number of works councils present in SMEs. Hungarian trade unions are also concerned about low levels of representation in SMEs and are working to support the establishment of works councils.

In terms of employment trends in SMEs, the crisis has had an adverse effect on employment levels in most countries. In the UK, the TUC noted that SMEs in some sectors were increasing their levels of employment, and that access to venture capital was desirable in order to support this.