

SMES' CONTRIBUTION TO EMPLOYMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

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A*bstract:* The problem of employment has been the issue of concern to European governments in recent years. An important role in job creation belongs to SMEs. The purpose of this article is the analysis and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative characteristics of employment in SMEs in the Republic of Moldova. In particular, the dynamics of the number of employees in Moldovan SMEs in the pre- and post-crisis periods was revealed. The estimation of the contribution of certain groups of enterprises (micro, small and medium) to job creation is given. Aspects of employment related to female entrepreneurship are considered. Business issues related to personnel are identified.

Keywords: transition countries, small and medium enterprises, job creation, contribution of SMEs to employment growth.

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Introduction

Increasing employment is one of the main objectives that can ensure the socio-economic development of the European countries. In accordance with the

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"EUROPE 2020" Strategy one of three mutually reinforcing priorities of development is the inclusive growth, which covers fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion. On delivering jobs the priorities for 2013 are also focused, in the "Annual Growth Survey 2013: Charting the course to recovery", adopted by the European Commission and designed to guide the EU member states in 2013 (EC, 2012a). The problem of employment growth is no less relevant for those countries that are on the path of integration into the EU, which include the Republic of Moldova.

The purpose of this article is the analysis and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative characteristics of employment in SMEs in the Republic of Moldova. In particular, the dynamics of the number of employees in Moldovan SMEs in the pre and post-crisis periods are revealed. The estimation of the contribution of individual groups of enterprises (micro, small and medium) in the creation of jobs is given. Aspects of employment related to female entrepreneurship are considered. Business issues related to personnel are identified.

1. Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

The SME sector is actively involved in addressing the problem of employment. For the first time the role of this group of enterprises in job creation was noted in D. Birch's works, carried out in the USA in the late 70's of the 20th century (Birch, 1979). Since then, the contribution of SMEs to the employment growth is in the focus of researchers and policymakers.

A study conducted by J. Kok and others in 2011 confirmed that the jobs are created more often in the enterprises of small size: the high majority (85%) of the net total of new jobs in the period 2002-2010 was created within SMEs. This number is significantly higher than the rate of 67% of SMEs have in the total number of work places (Kok, 2011). The mentioned project covered 27 EU countries and 10 other countries (Albania, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Iceland, Israel, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia and Turkey), being carried out with support from the European Communities. In all EU countries, the SME sector employs more than half of those employed in the private non-financial sector: from 54.3% in the UK to 85.1% in Greece (EC, 2012b). In Central and Eastern Europe, the SME sector generates on average a relatively smaller share of jobs: the international project, carried out under the direction of A.Szabó in 2011 has shown that the share of employment in the SME sector is less than 50% in 7 of the 12 BSEC countries (Table 1).

Table 1. Share of SME labour in total labour force in BSEC countries, %

Country	2010
Turkey	77.9
Romania	70.1
Ukraine	60.4
Greece	60.0
Moldova	59.0
Bulgaria	47.4
Serbia	43.2
Armenia	42.2
Georgia	37.0
Russia	35.5
Azerbaijan	25.0
Albania	21.8

Source: Szabó, A. & Çetin, A., 2012.

Analysis of employment in the SMEs sector of the Republic of Moldova is performed using databases received from the National Bureau of Statistics and the results of surveys of entrepreneurs. Surveys were conducted within two projects:

- "Improving policy development of SMEs and strengthening the partnership between business and public administration bodies", carried out in the Institute of Economy, Finance and Statistics of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova in 2012 with the direct involvement of the authors. In this study, the problems of the Moldovan business were identified on the basis of a survey of 136 entrepreneurs from 27 districts of the country (IEFS, 2012).
- "Conditions of initiation and development of enterprises", performed by the National Bureau of Statistics with support from UNDP in 2009. The project was based on a survey of 15,500 entrepreneurs in all regions of the country; the analysis of the survey results was carried out by the authors (Aculai, 2009).

2. The role of SMEs in the economy of the Republic of Moldova

The SMEs¹ sector plays an essential role in the socio-economic development of the Republic of Moldova. Taking into account the multidimensional contributions that SMEs can make in socio-economic development of the transition countries (Smallbone, 1997), the Moldovan SMEs have a positive influence on the structure of the economy, contributing to the expansion of the private sector; providing employment; participating in the creation of value added; increasing income of citizens and state/regional budgets. According to statistics, the vast majority of all economic agents - 47,300 enterprises, or 97.5% - refers to SMEs. This sector involves 57.7% of the total employers in the national economy and creates 35.9% of the profits of all businesses. SMEs share in GDP accounts for 28.3% (Table 2).

Table 2. The main indicators of SMEs' contribution in the Republic of Moldova, 2011

The share of the SMEs sector	%
Number of enterprises	97.5
Including (SMEs=100%):	
<i>medium-sized enterprises</i>	3.0
<i>small enterprises</i>	20.0
<i>micro-enterprises</i>	77.0
Number of employees	57.7
Sales income	34.6
Profit before the taxation	35.9
GDP (2010)	28.3
Export (2009)	about 12.0

Source: calculated by the authors on the basis of Statistics Databank of Moldova (NBS, 2012); Aculai, 2009.

Over the years, the contribution of the SMEs sector in the national economy has changed significantly; meantime the main trend indicators are contradictory. Thus, despite the crisis, the number of SMEs increased steadily every year.

¹ According to the Law on supporting the SMEs sector (2006), those enterprises refer to the SMEs sector where the annual average number of employees does not exceed 249 persons, the annual amount of income from the sale and the annual value of assets are not more than 50 million MDL (3.16 million EUR according to the exchange rate of the National Bank of Moldova as of January, 10, 2013).

There was an increase in profit for the whole analyzed period with the exception of 2009, when there was a sharp decline (by 2.4 times). SMEs share in GDP since 2006 constantly declined from 35% to 28.3%. The employment rate in the pre-crisis period showed a growth, but beginning in 2008 it diminished (Table 3). More detailed characteristics and trends of employment in the SME sector will be discussed below.

Table 3. Development of the main indicators of the SMEs sector of the Republic of Moldova

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number of enterprises, units	35542	39320	41109	43658	45600	47337
Number of employees in SMEs, persons	332720	343525	328065	316244	309500	294184
Profit before the taxation at the enterprises from the SMEs sector, mil. MDL	1748.1	3777.5	5483.2	2243.2	5456.9	5180.2
Share of SMEs in GDP, %	35.0	34.4	31.9	28.9	28.3	--

Source: calculated by the authors on the basis of Statistics Databank of Moldova (NBS, 2012).

The Policy of small and medium enterprises' support in the Republic of Moldova is defined in the Strategy for SMEs sector development between 2012-2020, approved by the Government. One of the six priorities of the Strategy aims to develop the human capital, but it also concentrates on the promotion of entrepreneurial competences and culture. Issues of increasing employment, including in the SMEs sector are contained in the National Strategy on the Policies of Employment between 2007-2015. In order to increase the competitiveness of SMEs, in the Strategy the simplification of legislative and administrative acts necessary for the creation and development of businesses, facilitation of the SMEs access to financial resources, the use of new technologies in SMEs, promotion of entrepreneurial training programs is planned.

3. Contribution of MOLDOVAN SMEs in job creation

3.1. Dynamics of the number and share of employment in the SMEs sector

One of the main elements of the contribution of the Moldovan SMEs to economic development is the growth of employment. In 2011, 294.2 thousand persons

were employed in Moldovan SMEs, representing 57.7% of the total number of employees of the national economy.

In the EU countries, the average value of the indicator of the share of employment in SMEs is relatively higher and amounts to 67%. A comparison of this indicator in the Republic of Moldova with the one of the countries from The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Region, which are closer in terms of the level of economic development, shows that Moldova is in the middle of the ranked list, in its upper part, in which the extreme positions belong to Albania (21.8%) and Turkey – 77.9% (Szabó, 2012).

For the period 2006 to 2011, the share of employees in the SMEs sector in the total number of persons employed in the national economy almost did not changed, declining from 57.9% to 57.7%. However, the total number of employees in all enterprises, including in the SMEs sector declined significantly. As a result, the SMEs sector lost 38.5 thousand people; the number of employees in 2011 accounted for 88% compared to 2006. Changes in employment in this period were characterized by two opposing trends: in 2006 and 2007 the number of employees increased (the annual growth rate was 104.9% and 103.3%, respectively). In the following 2008-2011, the employment rate trend was reversed: there was a steady decline in the annual number of employees and the annual index accounted for 95% and 98% respectively (Table 4).

Table 4. The index of the number of employees in enterprises of the Republic of Moldova, % to the previous year

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total number of enterprises, of which:	99,5	99,9	100,0	94,2	97,6	97,0
SME sector, including:	104.9	103.3	95.5	96.4	97,8	95,1
Medium-sized	98.6	98.2	89.1	91.7	94,6	83,7
Small	101.9	104.2	107.7	97.4	103,3	96,0
Micro	123.4	110.8	90.4	102.1	94,8	109,0

Source: calculated by authors on the basis of Statistics Databank of Moldova (NBS, 2012)

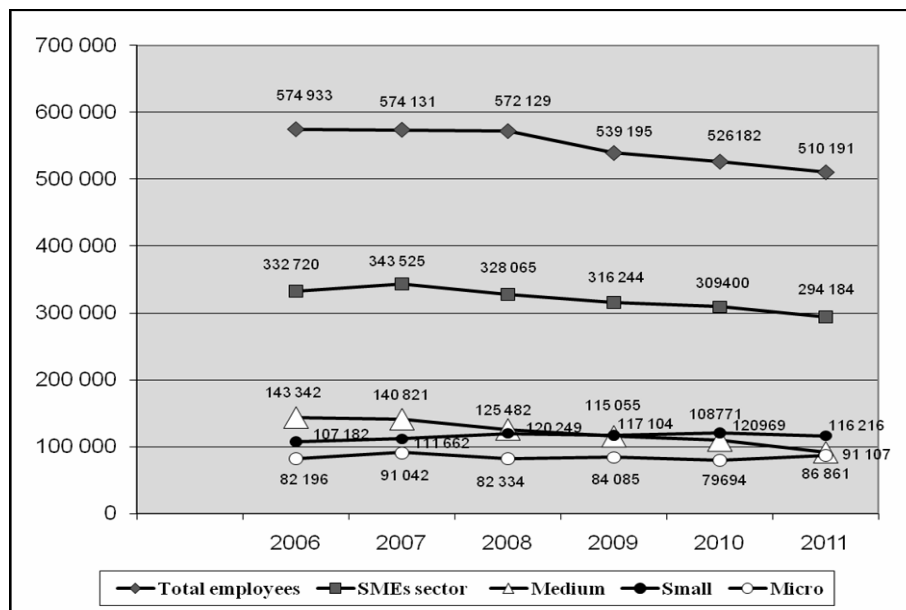
So, after a long and sustained growth of employment in the SMEs sector, which took place for almost the entire period of economic reforms (from the early 90's), the decline of this indicator began in 2008. This process corresponds to the overall trend of reducing the number of employed in the economy of Moldova. At the same

time, in the period 2006-2011 the employment rate dynamics differs significantly for businesses of different sizes - micro, small and medium (figure 1):

- the medium-sized enterprises are characterized by a consistent and most significant reduction in number of employees during the whole analyzed period (64%). In 2008 to 2009, the declining trend in employment worsened; in 2011 the maximum reduction rate took place: 83.7%, compared to the previous year.
- small and micro enterprises showed the employees' growth tendency during the mentioned period (108% and 106%, respectively). Only in 2008 and 2010 there was a decrease in this indicator, but in 2011 the situation improved, providing the employment growth for the whole period of 2006-2011.

Thus, the total reduction in employment in the SMEs sector was largely determined by the trend of job loss in the group of medium-sized enterprises.

Figure 1. Number of employees in the enterprises of the Republic of Moldova, persons

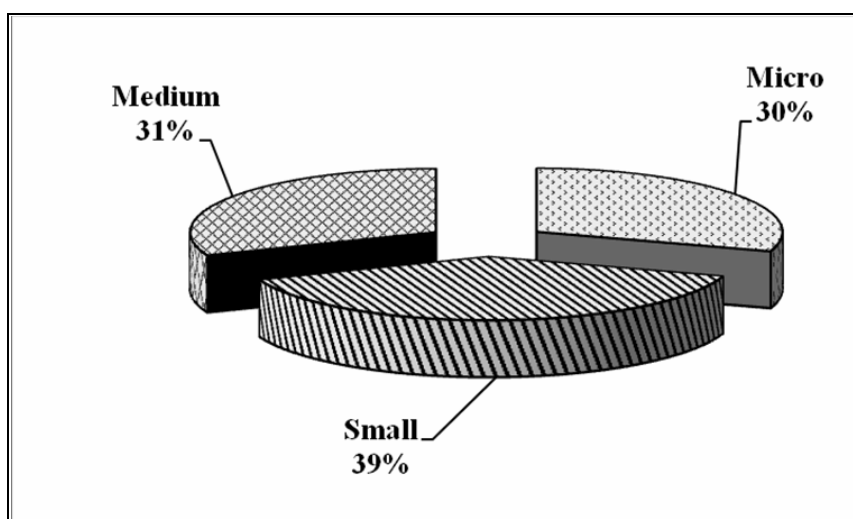


Source: calculated by authors on the basis of Statistics Databank of Moldova (NBS, 2012)

3.2. The role of micro-enterprises in increasing employment

SMEs combine groups of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, whose share in 2011 accounted for 77%, 20% and 3%, respectively. The largest proportion of workers is employed in small enterprises (39%). In the medium-sized businesses, 31% of all employees from the SMEs sector work, in micro enterprises - 30% (Figure 2). In 2011 compared to 2010, the share of employees in the group of micro enterprises increased (from 26% to 30%). At the same time, the given indicator decreased for medium-sized enterprises from 35% to 31%.

Figure 2. Distribution of employees in Moldovan SMEs by the size of enterprise, 2011, %



Source: calculated by authors on the basis of Statistics Databank of Moldova (NBS, 2012)

The growth in the number and proportion of micro enterprises in the SMEs sector, along with the increase of their capacity could boost the employment in the country. The significant impact of micro enterprises on the growth of employment in the last decade was confirmed by the study of J. Kok, etc. One of its conclusions: between 2002 and 2010, mainly micro enterprises (with less than 10 employees), having a share of 58%, were responsible for the biggest share in the total net growth in employment in the economy of enterprises (Kok, 2011).

In the Republic of Moldova, a study conducted several years ago, showed a great potential of micro enterprises in job creation. The survey of 521 enterprises from 3 districts of the country, located in the northern, southern and central regions, implemented within IEFS in 2006-2007 showed that micro enterprises' plan to create the most part of jobs (67.3% of respondents from this group). 42.5% of respondents from small enterprises planned to increase employment; from medium-sized enterprises - 34.8%; from big enterprises – 16.3% of the respondents (IEFS, 2007). However, in the Republic of Moldova, public authorities do not pay enough attention to micro enterprises. A significant part of them is not considered and analyzed in statistics. Micro enterprises are not considered by policymakers as businesses with a growth potential that can positively affect the social and economic development of the country.

3.3. Gender dimension in the analysis of employment

Analyzing employment in SMEs, it is useful to explore different groups of companies and entrepreneurs, also taking into consideration the gender of an entrepreneur. In Moldova, the number of male entrepreneurs is 2.6 times higher than the number of female entrepreneurs, the share of the latter is 27.5%. The above figure is significantly lower than the proportion of women in the economic workforce of the country (49.4%) and in the total population of Moldova – 51.9% (Aculai, 2009).

Enterprises owned and operated by women have relatively fewer workers. The share of women entrepreneurs who own and/or manage micro enterprises accounts for 79.4%, while the proportion of male entrepreneurs in the group of micro enterprises accounts for 67.8%. Men are mostly entrepreneurs of enterprises of other sizes. Moreover, the larger the business is, the higher the proportion of male entrepreneurs is:

- In small businesses, the share of male entrepreneurs is 1.4 times higher than that of female ones (men - 24.5%, women - 17.2%);
- In medium-sized companies this ratio is 2.3 times (6.6% and 2.9%);
- In big enterprises the proportion of male entrepreneurs is 3 times higher than the female ones (1.2% and 0.4%).

As long as women own/manage relatively smaller businesses that need special government support, the identification of gender differences allows the government to support women's entrepreneurship more directly. Currently, gender differences are recognized in policy documents, but practical measures to support women's businesses are not taken.

Moreover, in the SMEs - directed public policy, the differentiated support for individual groups of enterprises, including the purpose of creating new jobs, is not sufficiently developed. A certain attention is paid to young entrepreneurs and migrant workers who intend to initiate and develop their own business in Moldova. At the same time, it would be wise for policymakers to pay attention to the smallest-sized companies in need of special support - individual companies, family businesses, women in business, young and old entrepreneurs and self-employed. Public administration bodies do not consider nowadays these groups of entrepreneurs and enterprises as an important part of business. However, they perform serious socio-economic functions in society: create jobs, providing employees with flexible working time and involving the socially vulnerable groups in the public activity.

3.4. Reducing the size of Moldovan SMEs

The reduction in the number of people employed in the SMEs sector together with the increase in the number of enterprises lead to a decrease in the number of employees per one enterprise. In 2011 compared to 2006, the number of employees per one SME decreased from 9.4 persons to 6.2 persons. The reduction in the number of employees in one enterprise took place in all groups of SMEs - micro, small and medium ones (Table 5).

Table 5. The number of employees per 1 enterprise in the Republic of Moldova, persons

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total enterprises, including:	15.9	14.4	13.6	12.1	11.3	10.5
SME sector, including:	9.4	8.7	8.0	7.2	6.8	6.2
Medium-sized	83.1	79.4	74.5	72.4	68.0	60.7
Small	16.4	15.5	14.4	14.2	13.3	12.6
Micro	3.0	3.0	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.4

Source: calculated by authors on the basis of Statistics Databank of Moldova (NBS, 2012)

Despite the fact that the average number of employees per one SMEs in BSEC countries accounts for 4 people, meaning that this indicator is lower than in Moldova, the decrease in number of employees per one SME is assessed as a negative trend, given the limited technical, technological and financial resources

of SMEs. According to data from 2011, the average value of assets of 1 SME in Moldova is only 1833.7 thousand MDL (116 thousand EUR). In such a situation, especially given the difficult access of entrepreneurs to finance, human resources could be a key factor in the development of businesses in the country. However, entrepreneurs face serious problems with the staff, the significance of which in recent years has increased.

4. Problems of SMEs regarding the employees

Taking into consideration the importance of the increasing employment in the modern economy, understanding the problems of entrepreneurs related to the staff is essential for the policy development. According to a study carried out by the BERD and the World Bank in 2009 (BERD and World Bank, 2009), the lack of qualifications is one of the major obstacles to the Moldovan SMEs, as about 15% of respondents indicated this problem; the most important one was the access to funding (19.5% of the respondents).

These barriers are preserved in 2012: they were pointed out by entrepreneurs - owners and hired managers of SMEs – in the IEFS survey (IEFS, 2012). High and unsatisfied need of funding remains the main problem of Moldovan SMEs related to resources. In all studies conducted in the past 15 years, this problem consistently is ranked the first. In the survey conducted in 2012, its importance was indicated by 86.1% of the entrepreneurs. The problem related to the staff, is the second by its importance, as its relevancy was revealed by 45.9% of the respondents. A list of the main problems of the Moldovan SMEs related to the access to resources, is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Problems of Moldovan enterprises related to the access to resources, 2012

Problems	The share of respondents who pointed out these problems, %
Financial resources	73.3
Staff	45.9
Equipment, technologies	33.3
Raw material, materials	19.3
Immovable property	11.1
Information	6.7

Note: Respondents had the opportunity to point out any number of problems.

Source: Results of the survey of entrepreneurs, made by IEFS with the participation of authors (IEFS, 2012).

The importance of the issues related to human resources is due, above all, to the lack/insufficiency of professional qualification. It was mentioned by more than a half of the surveyed entrepreneurs (57.8%). Insufficient level of professional qualification largely determines the complexity of searching for the necessary staff (37.8%). The mentioned barriers are determined by several reasons. First of all, one should note a mismatch between supply and demand in the labour market. Professional training is carried out without taking into account the needs of the business. The dialogue between various institutions involved in or responsible for professional and entrepreneurial skills is very limited (OECD, 2011). Another reason for the lack of proper labour qualification and the complexity of search of staff is the migration of skilled workers and professionals, outside the country including the most active young people. In recent years, the problem of finding and hiring qualified personnel has been escalated. Not only hiring people with specific skills is complicated nowadays, but also it is difficult to find people with certain occupations. But whereas the refresher training of the employees can be provided by the enterprise by its own means, the vocational education of the staff is outside the capacity of SMEs. The list of the main problems of SMEs related to staff is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Problems of Moldovan enterprises related to staff, 2012

Problems	The share of respondents who pointed out these problems, %
Lack/insufficiency of professional qualification	57.8
Complexity of searching for necessary staff	37.8
High costs for staff's wages	34.8
Low motivation of employees	28.1
Low discipline	22.2
Lack/insufficiency of management knowledge and experience of managers	13.3
Psychological climate	9.6
Inappropriate work conditions	4.4
<i>There are no problems</i>	6.7

Note: Respondents had the opportunity to point out any number of problems.

Source: Results of survey of entrepreneurs, made by IEFS with the participation of authors (IEFS, 2012).

The quality of the jobs created in the SMEs sector represents a controversial issue. This problem is important not only for economies in transition, but also for the developed countries. For example, in the 90's some of the organizations in

Western Europe, involved in the entrepreneurship regulation considered the jobs, created by SMEs, to be qualitatively worse than those created by large businesses. In this regard, further arguments for public support to SMEs and the stimulation of the growth of employment in the sector were necessary (Smallbone, 1997).

Quality of jobs is linked to the labour productivity of SME employees. The study of J. Kok and others confirmed that job in small enterprises are less productive, less paid and less belong to trade unions than job places in large companies (Kok, 2011).

This situation is fully characteristic of the Republic of Moldova, where labour productivity (net sales per one employee) in the SMEs sector is on average 244.4 thousand MDL, while the same indicator for the national economy is 1.7 times higher (407.1 thousand MDL).

At the same time the quality of jobs in the SMEs sector has many positive characteristics, since in the course of employment in SMEs, the individual needs of employees can be covered in a more flexible manner. SMEs are able to provide for both employers and employees, including persons with disabilities, the elderly persons, women and other vulnerable groups, work at home and more flexible hours of work. Quite often, this gives them the only chance for employment and allows them to balance professional and private life.

Conclusion

SMEs play a significant role in the national economy of the Republic of Moldova, participating in job creation, value added creation, affecting the structure of the economy, providing the growth of the citizens' and region's income. SMEs play a special role in job creation.

The global crisis had a negative impact on employment in the SMEs sector. After a long and steady growth of this indicator, which took place for almost the entire period of the economic reforms, the employment in SMEs started to decline since 2008. The reduction in the number of employees in the SMEs sector corresponds to the overall trend of decreasing number of employees in the economy of Moldova.

The changes in employment in enterprises of different sizes - micro, small and medium - has opposite tendencies. The decrease in employment in the SMEs sector is largely determined by the sustained decline in jobs in the group of

medium-sized enterprises. The growth in the number of employees was higher in micro and small enterprises for 2006 to 2011.

The decrease in the number of workers in one SME can be assessed as a negative trend in the present conditions in Moldova, taking into consideration the limited resources of the business and the difficult access to funding. In this situation, staff is the key factor of the development of enterprises.

The problems with the staff are important for the Moldovan entrepreneurs, being ranked by them the second after the need for funding. More than a half of entrepreneurs indicate the absence or lack of professional qualification of the staff.

Jobs in Moldovan SMEs have a relatively low labour productivity. At the same time, they are characterized by more flexible coverage of the needs of individual workers, which allows for the involvement of socially vulnerable groups in labour activity.

In the public policy regulating SMEs, the differentiated support for individual groups of enterprises, including the new job creation, is not sufficiently developed. Policymakers should pay attention to the smallest-sized companies; special support to individual enterprises, family businesses, women in business and self-employed. Public administration bodies do not consider nowadays these groups of entrepreneurs and enterprises as an important part of business. However, they perform serious socio-economic functions in society: create jobs, providing employees with flexible working time and involving the socially vulnerable groups in the public labour activity.

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