SMEs, start-ups, scale-ups and entrepreneurship
Facts from Flash Eurobarometer 486

Regulatory obstacles or administrative burden and payment delays come out on top when SMEs report the biggest problems they face:

- Regulatory obstacles or administrative burden: 55%
- Payment delays: 35%
- Access to finance: 21%
- Skills, including managerial skills: 17%
- Difficulties with digitalisation: 13%

Among SMEs that have no plans to grow in coming years, significant shares say this is also down to:

- Additional regulatory or administrative burdens and requirements would be too high for the enterprise to grow: 34%
- Lack of the employees with the skills or expertise needed for it to grow: 13%

Improving market access, within and beyond the EU, remains a critical factor in the resilience of SMEs

- Only 26% of SMEs in 2019 exported goods or services
- 23% export to EU countries
- 3% exclusively to non-EU countries

Among those that plan to grow, many intend to do so in other EU countries:

- 17% of SMEs
- 28% of start-ups
- 24% of scale-ups

58% of SMEs have introduced some kind of innovation in the past 12 months, including also:

- 21% Innovation with environmental benefit
- 17% Social innovation

... but 71% report at least one barrier to innovation, such as:

- Difficulties in predicting the market response: 35%
- Legal or administrative environment: 31%
- Lack of financial resources: 31%
- Lack of skills: 22%

The survey was conducted before the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis was fully felt by businesses in the EU. However, the issues highlighted by the survey only become more important as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 486
Most SMEs are aware of the need to digitalise:

76% of SMEs recognise the need to introduce digital technologies or have already started introducing them.

...but 62% of SMEs report at least one barrier to digitalisation, with the most mentioned being:

- Uncertainty about future digital standards (24%)
- Lack of financial resources (23%)
- Regulatory obstacles (23%)
- Lack of skills (20%)
- IT security issues (20%)

21% of SMEs have a strategy or action plan to digitalise, which compares to:

- Start-ups: 30%
- Scale-ups: 28%
- Large companies: 43%

Nearly all SMEs are taking actions to become environmentally or socially sustainable:

- 91% Developing sustainable products or services
- 30% Evaluating impact of enterprise on society

34% of SMEs have a strategy or action plan to become a sustainable enterprise, which compares to:

- Start-ups: 44%
- Scale-ups: 44%
- Large companies: 53%

The most mentioned barriers to sustainability that SMEs face are:

- Lack of consumer or customer demand (30%)
- Lack of financial resources (27%)
- The view that becoming sustainable is not compatible with their current business model (24%)
- Lack of awareness of how to integrate sustainability into their business model (23%)
- Lack of skills to become sustainable (15%)

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Source: Flash Eurobarometer 486