



UNION EUROPEENNE DE L'ARTISANAT ET DES PETITES ET MOYENNES ENTREPRISES  
EUROPÄISCHE UNION DES HANDWERKS UND DER KLEIN- UND MITTELBETRIEBE  
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF CRAFT, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES  
UNIONE EUROPEA DELL' ARTIGIANATO E DELLE PICCOLE E MEDIE IMPRESE

## Multistakeholder Forum on CSR 2009

This document gives a short overview of the activities carried out by UEAPME together with its member organisations in the field of CSR in 2007 and 2008. It does not give an overview of the activities carried out at national or regional level by our member organisations, nor it deals with the activities of individual enterprises.

On the occasion of the closing ceremony of the **European Year of Equal Opportunities for All** in Lisbon on 19 November 2007, UEAPME unveiled a 60- page compendium collecting about 50 good practices carried out by its members and individual small businesses all over Europe. The report clearly shows that crafts and SMEs are taking effective actions in the field of diversity and in the fight against all forms of discrimination, be it on gender, age, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation.

Crafts and SMEs are well aware of the importance of promoting diversity and non-discrimination, not only from a pure economic perspective but first and foremost because they are socially responsible actors who are well embedded in the local community.

European crafts and SMEs are conscious that discrimination is simply not acceptable in the workplace and in our society as a whole and they act accordingly on a daily basis. However, their 'silent actions' are often left unnoticed. The compendium is both a testimony of SMEs' involvement and an awareness-raising tool on their activities.

The **"UEAPME Compendium of good practices of diversity and non-discrimination initiatives in European Crafts, SMEs and their organisations"** (see UEAPME web-site: [http://www.ueapme.com/docs/compendium/compendium\\_light.pdf](http://www.ueapme.com/docs/compendium/compendium_light.pdf)) presents a selection of the countless different approaches and initiatives carried out across Europe, the vast majority of which took place at regional and local level. The choice to focus on a specific ground depends very much on the national or regional situation.

However, the general trend in crafts and SMEs is to rather deal with the topic of diversity in a broad sense and by tackling multiple discriminations. The activities of our members had often several objectives, including prevention, dealing with prejudice and stereotypes, exchange of experiences with the most common being awareness raising, integration and employability. A great variety of tools was used, including some very innovative ones such as a work calendar with religious holidays from all beliefs.

The report demonstrates that SMEs and their organisations have various motivations to be active on the issue of diversity and non-discrimination. However, certain elements were highlighted by nearly all respondents as drivers for their involvement, for instance shortages of specific skills and competences, high levels of unemployment for certain groups (young, women, older people) even in areas with a general low unemployment rate, CSR-related reasons and an increasing number of immigrant population, which are potential employees but also potential customers and clients.

The results also showed that UEAPME members, while carrying out many activities by themselves, also use every possible form of cooperation, be it together with other employers' organisations, trade unions and public authorities or by taking part in wider national campaigns or initiatives.

The "European Year of Equal Opportunities for All" has been an excellent opportunity to showcase the involvement and the 'hands on' approach of crafts and SMEs for diversity and non-discrimination. However, there is still a long way to go before the mindset of people will change. This cannot be achieved primarily with new regulations but with more awareness-raising activities towards the society, employers and employees, and with a strong support from public authorities.

Secondly, UEAPME has developed in the course of 2007 and 2008, through a project granted by the European Commission's DG Enterprise, **tools and activities** in order to support intermediary business organisations to help improve the competitiveness of their member SMEs through actions of **responsible entrepreneurship**. In particular it has developed a website in 10 languages: <http://www.csr-for-smes.eu/>; a **handbook** adopted in 8 languages, a VET curriculum, an interactive CSR-game (on-line) and a seminar concept.

37 local seminars with SMEs have been organised in eight countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, and Romania) which have attracted **1186** participants (SMEs directly touched).

The number of SMEs indirectly touched (through newsletter, press-releases, website, press articles, invitations,...) can be estimated at **1.585.500**. In addition not less than 101 intermediaries were involved (Universities, Chambers, Credit institutions, EICs, consultants, welfare institutions, NGOs, CSR specific organisation,...)

The training sessions have improved the partners' capacities on responsible entrepreneurship. The activities and tools are thus developed to raise awareness and improve knowledge on CSR as well as to develop the capacities and competences in SMEs to help mainstream CSR to SMEs and to involve them more in activities that are beneficial for the competitiveness of SMEs.

This campaign has shown that awareness raising and the availability of best practices remain important for SMEs as UEAPME always highlighted. But, on the other hand, we see an increasing demand and need from our SMEs for concrete tools, very concrete instruments and solutions to tackle the challenges of sustainable development. It is not only about best practices any more, it is even more important to try to describe the instruments that are behind them. SMEs need concrete tools to implement the CSR principles. These tools and instruments have to be made at the size of the SMEs as the existing tools in big enterprises are not simply transferable to SMEs.

There is a huge need to give technical solutions in the different industrial sectors. SMEs need also an adapted way of communication on CSR.

Conclusions / recommendations from organisations:

- Partners consider CSR of high interest for their members
- Knowledge of and uptake of CSR has increased in the organisations
- Project was not a « one day » activity: it is part of a general CSR-policy or start of take-up in most of the organisations (mainstreaming – sustainability)

- It has increased the counselling of and awareness-raising among SMEs on existing legislation/ obligations
- Recognition as « CSR-intermediaries/ expertise »
- Need to work more decentralised
- Finding and using synergies, better use of existing know-how and resources
- CSR as such is not a known concept
- The term CSR is difficult to communicate
- Many enterprises don't seem to act on the basis of a clear concept or vision
- Most of the SMEs seem to have understood the CSR concept and the related non-economic opportunities (image, better human resources management,...) but have difficulties with the long term financial benefits

#### Conclusions SME-side:

- SMEs are very interested in CSR, even if they are struggling for survival (financial problems, increased competition, economic situation,...)
- Finding good practices in SMEs in one thing, convince them to participate in a project is another thing (due to their difficult economic situation)
- It is important to have good role-models
- Most SMEs are doing “some” CSR, often linked with personal values of the entrepreneur
- The CSR concept has been understood thanks to the SME good practices
- Awareness among SMEs has increased during the project period (due to variety of projects and initiatives)
- Implementation of specific CSR policies is a long-term process in SMEs
- Broad subject approach of CSR helps SMEs to be aware of other issues/legislation/topics and to develop a strategy
- Main problem: there are a lot of good practices but they are not part of a strategy
- Most of the entrepreneurs need the support of an expert: to make an assessment of their activities and/or to formulate a strategy
- SME owners do not have time to implement CSR practices: experts can help
- Strong need for consultancy on CSR issues and their implementation (offer + provision)
- Strong need for individual advise and coaching of SME at company level
- Cost related to the support of an expert
- Dissemination of CSR-practices has to be continued – Focused: environment, social, HR, economy,...)
- SMEs still don't communicate enough on their best practices and their achievements – although they see the importance of it
- No need for any standardisation in the field of CSR
- The approach in SMEs is an individual one, different from the big industry one. (eg.communication) but the themes are the same
- Link with local situation and legislation

#### Recommendations towards Commission and Member States:

- More attention for the specific role of SMEs in the supply chain
- Stimulate the growing market of CSR counselling in SMEs
- Help SMEs to cope with “green” public procurement

Finally, in 2008 UEAPME and its member organisations have also contributed to the study on the “**Business Case for Diversity in SMEs**”.

See: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=778&langId=en>

It is a substantial report which clearly shows that diversity is as relevant to SMEs as it is to the largest companies. As UEAPME we strongly support diversity. A diverse and qualified workforce is a key asset for the competitiveness and productivity of SMEs.

The study shows that 79% of the SME interviewed recognise the benefits of diversity. It may not be representative for all SMEs, but the business case for diversity matters to SMEs:

One of the major problems facing SMEs today is to attract and retain talented employees. This is reflected in the study as the No. 1 priority of the SMEs.

But SMEs cannot afford to discriminate in their recruitment, as there is a lack of workforce and in addition, a lack of adequate skills. They have to recruit competence based and take the best qualified person,

Evidently, a certain leadership on diversity by the manager or company owner is vital. However, the main obstacle mentioned is the reluctance of the other workers to accept colleagues with a “different profile”. Wider sensitisation and public awareness rising is essential. Here challenges still remain despite the existing legislation!

**As mentioned in the report, the important role of intermediary bodies, such as SME employers’ organisations, in promoting diversity has to be underlined.**

SMEs are silent diversity stakeholders and they are socially responsible actors deeply embedded in the local community. Unlike big companies, SMEs have no formal CSR department to convey the message by means of media and PR to the public.

Intermediary bodies can help to overcome specific problems and needs, by offering tailor made support and advice in a business language. Even if most SMEs do not have a formal HR policy with a special focus on diversity, they are already doing a lot unsolicited, because of:

1. a shrinking workforce
2. the lack of skills available
3. an increasingly diverse population in the EU
4. the fact that SMEs are locally embedded
5. and that there is a strong push for the creation of businesses by ethnic minorities and migrants businesses.

BUT it is more difficult for them make it visible and known! Silent diversity practice is one of the main characteristics of SMEs.

These are in our view the challenges for the coming years. UEAPME and its member organisations are willing to work further on this and we hope we can do it with the support of the European Commission.

