# Programme for the craft industry and small enterprises (SME)

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OBJECTIVE: The Commission communication concerns an integrated programme for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the craft sector. Its aim is to update and develop the 1994 Integrated Programme to encompass the new Community priorities for SME policy. SUBSTANCE: The programme is in line with the conclusions of the Florence European Council and is a direct follow-up to the European Confidence Pact for Employment. It calls for an integrated approach and lists the numerous measures taken with the assistance of the Community and which, coupled with concerted action taken by Member States, will contribute to the development of SMEs, the principal source of job creation. The aim of the Integrated Programme is to ensure a closer partnership between all parties concerned with the development of SMEs at Community, national and regional levels with a view to enhancing the convergence and effectiveness of measures. The priorities and objectives of the Integrated Programme for SMEs are as follows: - simplifying and improving the administrative and regulatory business environment; - improving the financial and fiscal business environment; - helping SMEs to Europeanize and internationalize their strategies, in particular through better information services; - enhancing SME competitiveness and improving their access to research, innovation, information technologies and training; - promoting entrepreneurship and promoting special target groups (women, young entrepreneurs, craft and small enterprises). To achieve these objectives, the Integrated Programme proposes three types of measures: - concerted actions with Member States (exchange of best practice); - contributions from the European Union within the framework of the Community's SME policy (the Commission proposal for a Council Decision on a third multiannual programme for SMEs in the European Union (1997-2000) is an important component of the Integrated Programme); - measures developed under other Community policies: simplification of internal market legislation (SLIM); introduction of the Euro; aid from the Structural Funds; EIB loans; EIF loan guarantees for employment at reduced rates; access to R&DT Community programmes, access of SMEs to the Information Society; innovation in SMEs; access to training; support for international cooperation.