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Answer given by Executive Vice-President Séjourné
on behalf of the European Commission
(9.7.2025)

As acknowledged by the Honourable Member, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of the EU economy. There are 26.1 million SMEs in the EU, providing jobs to more than 89.8 million citizens.

The Commission is paying particular attention to SMEs' access to EU funding. The scale of SMEs' involvement can be illustrated by their participation in EU programmes. Between 2021 and 2024, Horizon Europe¹ funded around 10,077 SMEs, of which approximately 1,450 (14%) funded under the European Innovation Council², with a total of EUR 7.4 billion in grants (of which EUR 3.9 billion for SMEs only). InvestEU³ has supported over 55,000 SMEs in its first two years. The SME Pillar of the Single Market Programme⁴ has provided assistance to 292,000 SMEs through the European Enterprise Network⁵ alone. In the 2023 calls under the European Defence Fund⁶ (EDF), SMEs represented around 50% of the total number of entities, requesting approximately 30% of the total grant amount. For the period 2023–2027, the EDF is expected to fund SMEs with up to EUR 840 million.

The Commission sees SMEs as a priority target of its policies. The recently published Single Market Strategy⁷ sets out a number of actions, including to address SMEs' difficulties in accessing sustainable finance. Finally, the recently published EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy⁸ contains a comprehensive set of measures to improve framework conditions, including access to finance for startups and scaleups, many of whom are the most promising SMEs. Furthermore, the Commission pays particular attention to the specific needs of SMEs with international ambitions and deploys several tools to support them trade internationally, such as the Access2Markets platform⁹ or dedicated SME chapters in trade agreements.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32021R0695>.

² https://eic.ec.europa.eu/about-european-innovation-council_en.

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:02021R0523-20240301&qid=1749143262375>.

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32021R0690>.

⁵ <https://een.ec.europa.eu/>.

⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:02021R0697-20240301>.

⁷ European Commission: The Single Market: our European home market in an uncertain world A Strategy for making the Single Market simple, seamless and strong - 21.5.2025 COM(2025) 500 final.

⁸ European Commission: The EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy Choose Europe to start and scale - 28.5.2025 COM(2025) 270 final.

⁹ <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/home>.