

ISSUES PAPERS FOR THE BUSINESS SYMPOSIUM ROUND TABLES

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Italian Ministry of Industry have jointly organised a Conference for Ministers responsible for SMEs and Ministers of Industry, entitled "Enhancing the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Enterprises in the Global Economy: Strategies and Policies". Prior to this high level international Conference, which is being held in Bologna, Italy on 14-15 June 2000, the organisers have scheduled a one-day Business Symposium on 13 June for business association representatives and senior executives.

The objectives of both the Conference and the Business Symposium are to increase the understanding of issues and policies related to SME competitiveness in the global economy and to propose concrete and feasible initiatives through which globalisation of SMEs might be facilitated. In particular, the following themes will be addressed during the four parallel Roundtables of the Business Symposium:

1. Enhancing the Competitiveness of SMEs through Innovation.
2. Local Partnership, Clusters and SME Globalisation.
3. Realising the Potential of Electronic Commerce for SMEs in the Global Economy.
4. Enhancing the Competitiveness of SMEs in Transition Economies and Developing Countries in the Global Economy and their Partnership with SMEs of OECD countries.

An issues paper provides background information for each Business Symposium Roundtable. These papers have been prepared by three independent experts – Rob van der Horst, EIM Small Business Research & Consultancy (Netherlands); Steven Bate, Consultant (United States); Chris Hall, Macquarie University (Australia) – in co-operation with the OECD Secretariat, partly building on a survey carried out among national and international business associations. Through this survey, business representatives were asked to assess the major impediments for SMEs related to the four themes of the Conference and to provide suggestions for policy actions. Around 130 questionnaires were sent out to organisations in more than 40 countries. About 40 questionnaires were returned. The organisers would like to thank the associations which took the time to respond and supported this initiative.

The *issue papers* summarise the results of the survey and draw policy implications and conclusions for discussion by business representatives from 29 OECD Member countries and 22 non-member countries who will be participating in the Symposium.