

## Policy Webinar Series

# SMEs and Climate Action

**Output10th Webinar:** SMEs in a ‘Just Transition’ to Net-Zero: What next?

### 🌟 About:

This 10-part webinar series provides a platform for researchers and policy-makers to share experiences and explore new policy approaches to engage Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the path towards climate-neutral economies. The series is jointly hosted by the [Austrian Institute for SME Research](#) and the [Zero Emission Enterprise \(ZEE\) Network](#). The webinar series ran from November 2023 until April 2025.

### 📺 10<sup>th</sup> webinar 30 April 2025

**Speakers:** Afra Gründl, Constructor University (DE); Will Eadson, Sheffield Hallam University (UK)

### Topic: SMEs in a ‘Just Transition’ to Net-Zero: What next?

In this final edition of the webinar series, we reflect on the inequalities and inequities in the net-zero transition among SMEs. Afra Gründl (Constructor University – Bremen) provided reflections from a gender perspective, while Will Eadson (Sheffield Hallam University) considered spatial and regional disparities in the transition to net-zero. Following their keynotes, we invite you to a joint discussion on how ecological and social dimensions can be better aligned in the path to net-zero.

### Output Padlets:

When thinking of a just transition to net-zero: what are the similarities and differences between households and small businesses?

▶ Similarities:

- Role of the individual
- Many smaller businesses are home-based / household businesses – so some overlap between the two
- Even if not home based, they share a vehicle or partially use home/household for work.
- Energy poverty There is a common misconception that businesses can easily just get out of business when fuel issues happen, but most 1-2 person businesses are basically 100% overlapping with households so there is major welfare loss spill.
- Limited resources lead to need for support, e.g. government incentives, subsidies, accessible financing, supporting policies

▶ Differences:

- One is perceived to act rationally
- Decision making (e.g. investment) processes
- Householders move on more frequently (perhaps?)
- Property ownership is higher amongst householders (I think)  
In UK about 50% of businesses rent I think
- Fuel Poverty: If an SME cannot afford to pay its energy bills, it may go out of business. This might be a shame, but it is considered normal. If a household cannot afford to pay (to keep warm e.g.) that is considered a major problem

How can a 'social climate fund' address inequities among SMEs? What policy measures would you propose?

▶ Gender inequities

- Qualification and training of women for green jobs - in collaboration with SMEs
- Transitioning from manufacturing towards care and service sectors – funding initiatives for the reskilling of men
- Promoting local jobs might attract more women workers and reduce carbon footprints
- requirements to include women in investment decisions?
- Promoting inclusive business practice in 'green' sectors '
- Identify and support strongly gendered sectors E.g. floriculture / floristry is overrepresented by women. This sector also faces other forms of exposure, and the intersection of these with women-specific challenges (e.g. caring responsibilities) demands particular kinds of support

▶ Spatial and regional inequities

- Social leasing of electric vehicles for small businesses in remote areas
- Providing vouchers for SMEs to join local energy communities
- Green industrial strategy which takes into account needs of smaller businesses as well as largest emitters
- Prioritise off gas Electrification of heating for SMEs in rural areas (e.g. using heating oil)
- Promoting on line retail allows a wider market access to the goods and services of the SME
- Financing producer communities in rural areas

▶ Other inequities among small businesses

- Access to capital is a problem