99% of all European businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises, providing some 75 million jobs and accounting for more than 80% of employment in some sectors. SMEs are thus vital for Europe.

This is why the European Commission puts the needs of small businesses at the centre of its action for more growth and jobs. It has now created a new website dedicated to SMEs: A guide to SME policy.

Want to start your own business? On this website, you will find information on all aspects of the EU's SME policy that concern you: in the section "Improving access to finance", you will find out what the EU is doing to improve the financial environment for SMEs, and how you can gain access to finance for your business. The section "Making life simpler for SMEs" contains information on the regulatory framework and the EU's efforts to cut red tape.

Are you the director of a small business? Check out the section "Protecting your ideas" and learn how the EU helps you protect your intellectual property rights. If you would like to operate in another European country, pay a visit to the section "Helping SMEs go international" to find out how you can take full advantage of business opportunities abroad.

In addition to this more specialised information, the site offers a wealth of information on SMEs in general: it provides facts and figures on SMEs and shows how the EU promotes responsible entrepreneurship.

A news section gives an overview of the latest development in SME policy. It shows how active the EU has been in this field: one of the latest initiatives was the introduction of internships in SMEs for all administrators from the Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry of the Commission. They will be sent out to work for one week in an SME in order to gain hands-on business experience. The aim of this 'Enterprise Experience' programme is to raise the awareness among Commission officials of SME needs and to address these more effectively.

More: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/smes/index_en.htm