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# **Navigating change: - SMEs in evolving policy landscapes**

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Green logistics for a just net zero carbon  
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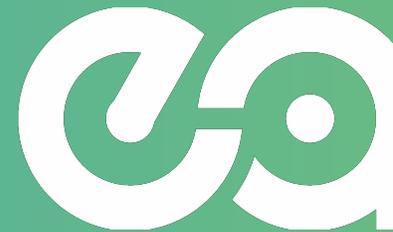
# Agenda

**1** Setting the scene

**2** Opportunities for change

**3** Conclusion





# 1

## Setting the scene

Why municipalities should pay attention to SMEs.



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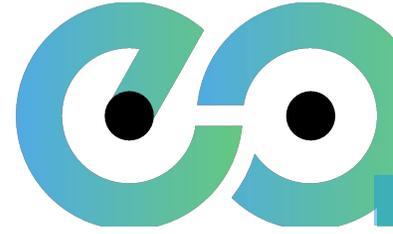
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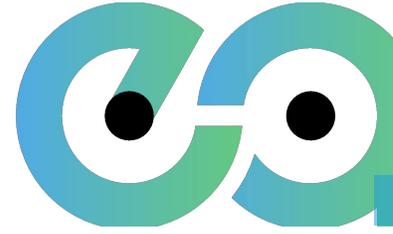
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# Setting the scene



- Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) play a **key role** in the local community and are responsible for a **considerable share** of the local economy.
- SMEs depend on reliable, flexible, and affordable logistics, yet are more **vulnerable** to disruptions, delays, and regulatory changes than larger firms.
- Municipal sustainability and mobility **policies** are growing more ambitious, but often **lack alignment with SME realities**, risking unintended burdens.
- Cities **struggle to reach and engage SMEs** effectively, meaning policies fail to resonate or translate into feasible actions.
- Without **tailored support**, SMEs risk being left behind in the transition to sustainable logistics, weakening both policy outcomes and local economic vitality.

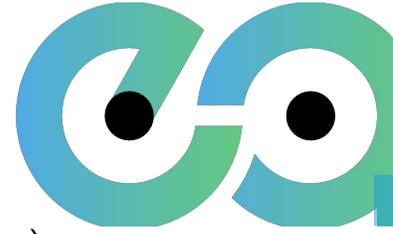




# Aim and methodology

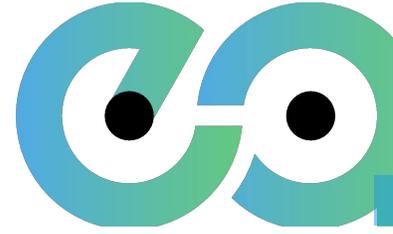
- Aim to present strategies that help municipalities **empower SMEs** engage with, and execute, a transition to sustainable logistics.
- The focus of the presentation is on **innovative municipal policies** affecting urban logistics and those policies are linked to **capacities** that SMEs need to transition.
- **Comparative cross-city analysis** covering Aarhus, Le Havre Seine Métropole, Leuven, Mechelen, and Rotterdam.
- **Interviews and interactions** with municipal staff and SME representatives as well as site visits and city-hosted seminars.
- **Document analysis** covering policy documents and outputs from stakeholder engagement activities.

# Understanding SMEs



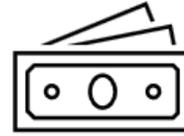
- SMEs (<250 employees, ≤ €50 million turnover ) and micro-SME (<10, ≤ €2 million).
- Micro-SMEs make up **93.6% of all enterprises** and account for 30 % of employment in EU-27 (Katsinis et al., 2024).
- Micro-SMEs have particularly **limited capacity** to interpret, plan for, and respond to new policies.
- All SMEs face **operational, organisational, financial, and informational** constraints which shape how they experience and respond to sustainable logistics policy.
- Business and logistics research focus on larger organization. SME logistics thus represents an **underexplored** topic.

# Constraints to SME participation



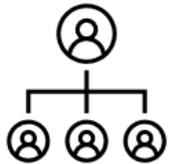
## Operational (daily operations )

- Sensitive to access, parking, and delivery rules.
- Dependent on flexible access to urban space.
- Vehicles for transport, storage, and workspace.



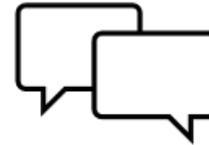
## Financial

- Limited access to financing.
- Low buffer.
- Sensitive to indirect costs, delayed payments, supplier delays, fines etc.



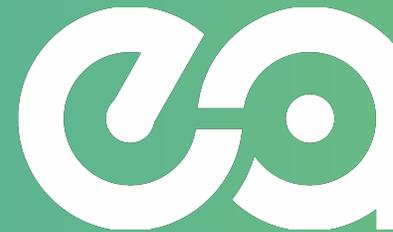
## Organisational (medium to long-term)

- Administration and planning fall on the owner or a very small team.
- Limited strategic engagement and participation in policy processes.



## Informational

- Struggle to find and interpret complex regulations.
- Lack municipal interface.
- Slow to adopt digital tools.



# 2 Opportunities for change



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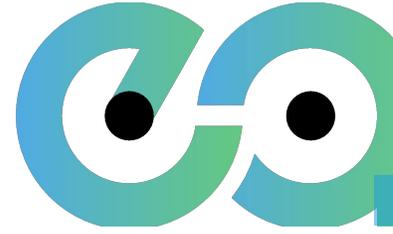
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# Opportunities for change



## Operational

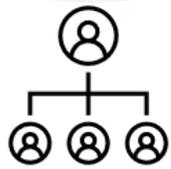
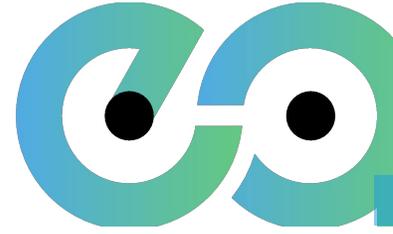
SMEs can adopt greener logistics practices **when policies reduce day-to-day friction** and provide **simple, intuitive operational solutions**.

### Examples:

- Flexible parking arrangements
- Retro-active permitting
- Bookable, well-located vehicle pools
- Access to micro-hubs or consolidation points

These measures **reduce risk** and allow SMEs to **maintain productivity** while testing or transitioning to new, sustainable logistics solutions.

# Opportunities for change



## Organisational

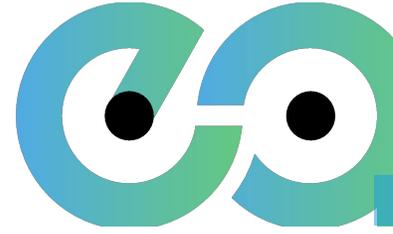
SMEs can engage more effectively when processes **align with their limited time and staffing resources**.

Opportunities include:

- Meeting SMEs in their own environments
- Providing tailored advisory support
- Allowing SMEs to participate in pilots and experiments

These opportunities **build on SMEs' strengths**: flexibility, fast decision-making, and strong local ties.

# Opportunities for change



## Financial



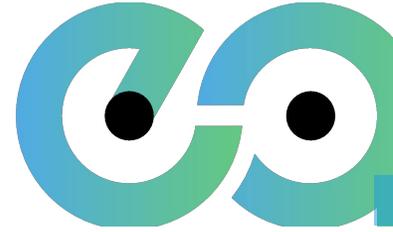
SMEs can make the transition to greener logistics financially feasible when cities and partners help **reduce upfront costs** and support **shared or modular** adoption models.

### Examples:

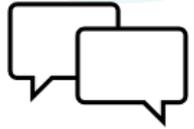
- Shared micro-hubs, parcel lockers, or shared zero-emission vehicles
- Participation in publicly funded or EU-funded initiatives
- Gradual cost absorption

These financial opportunities **make the adoption of green logistics achievable** without threatening business survival.

# Opportunities for change



## Informational



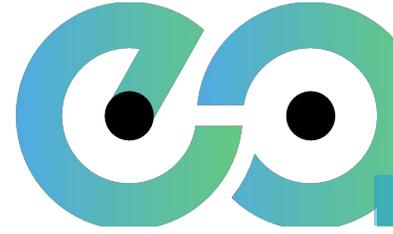
SMEs benefit when information is **easy to understand, repeated often**, and shared through **channels they already use**.

Helpful opportunities include:

- Clear, simple, non-technical communication provided well before new rules take effect.
- Integrating information into everyday tools.
- Structured, long-term communication strategies.
- Better coordination within the municipality.

These informational improvements help **reduce uncertainty**, which is one of the main barriers

# Opportunities for change



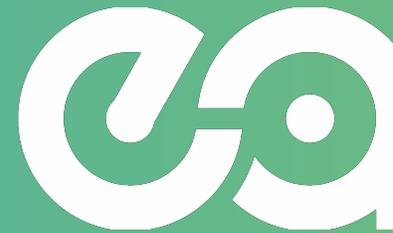
## Key Take-away

SMEs take part in green logistics when policy **lowers risk** — not when change is forced too quickly.

Opportunities for SMEs grow when municipalities:

- Reduce the perceived risk of trying new approaches.
- Provide stable and predictable timelines for upcoming changes.
- Offer support that fits SME limitations, such as time, staff, and resources.
- Ensure new rules do not disrupt daily operations or harm competitiveness.

This focus on risk reduction is the **core principle** behind meaningful **SME empowerment**.



# 3 Conclusion

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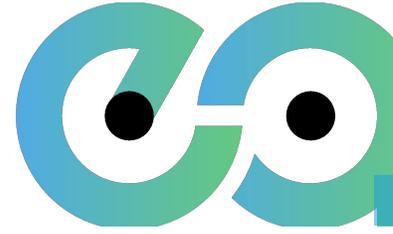
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# Conclusion



- Empowerment comes from **interaction**
- Supportive **governance** + SME **capabilities** = **effective transition**
- SMEs face **structural barriers**
- SMEs experience **policy through implementation**
- Clear goals need **practical support**
- **Uncertainty** is the biggest obstacle

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**Thank you!**

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