

Press release

Market-based approaches preferred in environmental policy

IfM Bonn: Mittelstand companies are aware of the climate change risks

Bonn, 18.02.2022. The majority of companies in the manufacturing sector are aware of the risks emanating from climate change. Accordingly, they consider aspects of climate protection in their business decisions: in a survey conducted by IfM Bonn in 2021, more than half of the company representatives stated that they had already implemented environmentally relevant innovations in the previous three years.

"Due to their better human and financial resources, it is easier for large companies than for small and medium-sized ones to initiate environmental product innovations," explains study director Hans-Jürgen Wolter. "In contrast, by comparing Mittelstand and non-Mittelstand companies of the same size and with the same resource endowment, more family businesses report having implemented environmental process innovations." According to the IfM Bonn definition, Mittelstand companies include owner-managed small and medium-sized enterprises and large family businesses, as long as the owners are active participants in the company's management.

Flexibility and easy implementation of environmental policy measures desired

However, Mittelstand and non-Mittelstand companies prefer flexible climate policy instruments, such as a carbon tax or emissions trading. Such economic measures give them individual scope for action. According to family businesses, informal solutions such as binding voluntary commitments and cooperation agreements at the local level should also be considered to promote the businesses' environmental commitment.

"At first glance, we were surprised that more than a quarter of the companies surveyed also approve of regulatory laws and bans. However, such regulations,

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which tend to be inefficient, offer companies a high degree of planning security because plants that have already been approved usually enjoy grandfather status," says Hans-Jürgen Wolter. Representatives of both Mittelstand companies and manager-led companies are sceptical about informational solutions, such as labels or publication obligations. Politicians should also generally make sure that environmental policy measures are simple enough to manage for smaller companies without highly specialised personnel.

The study "Attitudes and behaviour of Mittelstand companies concerning climate change" is available on the Institute for Mittelstand Research website (www.ifm-bonn.org).

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