



القمة العربية لريادة
الأعمال والمشروعات
الصغيرة والمتوسطة

ARAB SMEs SUMMIT

من الصمود للازدهار From resilience to prosperity

Marrakesh, 12-14 December 2023

مراكش، 12-14 كانون الأول/ديسمبر

Preliminary Concept Note of

The Arab SMEs Summit 2023

Marrakesh 12 – 14 December

From Resilience to Prosperity



Arab SMEs Summit 2023: From Resilience to Prosperity

Preliminary Concept Note

Overview

The Arab SMEs Summit is a regional platform to empower small and medium enterprises in the Arab region, improve their performance, and expand their potential beyond borders.

In Amman, October 2022, the Summit brought together more than 650 participants from around the world, including a select of entrepreneurs and stakeholders. It also featured an SMEs exhibition and a zone for opportunities. The Summit was widely received, especially as it witnessed several commitments from leading regional and international agencies to contribute to supporting Arab SMEs in a more coordinated and coherent approach.

The Arab SMEs Summit 2023 builds on this momentum and aims at further establishment of such a regional enabling event, within the larger framework of supporting the regional sustainable development goals.

This document presents a detailed overview of the Arab SMEs Summit concept, approach, objectives, and aspirations; with specific reference to the upcoming edition: Arab SMEs Summit 2023.

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1. Introduction

As many Arab economies struggle, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) increasingly emerge as a potential space for more resilient and modern economic realizations. The potential benefits for SMEs go way beyond the direct financial aspects, mentioning the aspects of equality, diversity, innovation, and creativity. However, such potential can only be realized with an enabling environment and collaboration of governments, the private sector, and different stakeholders at national and regional levels.

In this context, ESCWA launched its program to improve the performance of small and medium enterprises in the Arab region. The program aims to build the capacities of SMEs to achieve regional SDGs and empower government agencies and the business-enabling ecosystem to support local SMEs to achieve higher growth and sustainability. The program includes different components for assessing and addressing issues facing SMEs and a series of national and regional activities to increase opportunities, networking, collaboration, and knowledge transfer.

The [Arab SMEs Summit 2022](#) was the first regional Summit in the project. Under the theme “Opportunities beyond borders,” the Summit was held in October 2022 in Amman in partnership with the Jordan Enterprise Development Corporation (JEDCO) and under the auspice of HRH Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II of Jordan.

The 2022 Summit brought together more than 650 participants worldwide, including some entrepreneurs and stakeholders. It also featured an SME exhibition and a zone of opportunities.

The Summit was widely received, especially as it witnessed several commitments from leading regional and international agencies to support SMEs in a more coordinated and coherent approach.

As part of the Summit’s activities, ESCWA and its partners mobilized 130 million USD in funds and financial services for Arab SMEs in addition to the announcement of some commitments they have included digitizing 100 enterprises and facilitating their e-commerce transition, providing training for 40,000 young men and women to develop their entrepreneurial skills; providing technical assistance to over 400 SMEs in the areas of quality compliance, digital transformation, energy efficiency, and environment; supporting the upscaling of more than 50 SMEs to access external markets; and launching two centers of entrepreneurship (CoE) in Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

The Arab SMEs Summit 2023 builds on this momentum. It aims to establish further such a regional enabling environment and an annual platform for empowering SMEs in the Arab region and beyond within the larger framework of supporting the regional SDGs and sustaining human development, especially among youth and women.

The 2023 Summit will be held in [Rotana Palmeraie Palace](#), Marrakech, in partnership with the Moroccan Ministry of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills, in December 2023. ESCWA is currently finalizing arrangements and seeking regional collaborations to make this event one of its kind at all levels (organization, partnerships, attendance, exhibition, award, coverage, and impact), in addition to mobilizing commitments of international, regional, and national entities to support Arab SMEs in terms of financing, capacity building, and business services.

2. Objectives

The Summit aims to enhance partnerships and expand SME opportunities across the Arab region and internationally by achieving the following objectives:

- ◆ Inspire Arab entrepreneurs with regional and global business models and success stories.
- ◆ Enhance SME access to opportunities and strategic partnerships to drive their growth at the regional and international levels.
- ◆ Provide networking and clustering opportunities to foster strategic alliances.
- ◆ Facilitate targeted capacity-building for Entrepreneurs, SMEs, and government entities.
- ◆ Exchange of knowledge and experiences between Arab policymakers to strengthen the business-enabling environment for SMEs.

3. Approach

The theme of the Arab SMEs Summit 2023 is “From Resilience to Prosperity.” It will focus on supporting Arab SMEs who survived the COVID pandemic and economic challenges by investing in the qualities of resilience in SMEs to drive development and prosperity.

The Summit will be held in Marrakech on 12 – 14 December 2023, over three days, with the support of the Moroccan government and the auspices of its Leadership.

The Arab SMEs Summit 2023 will be the largest gathering of SMEs in the Arab region; it will bring together some 1,300 selected participants, including entrepreneurs, investors, business influencers, political leaders, economists, journalists, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and donors, to discuss regional and international business opportunities for Arab SMEs.

The Arab SMEs Summit is organized along seven main work streams: Inspirational Talks, Interactive Workshops, Policy Dialogue, SMEs Exhibition, Opportunities Zone, Side Events, and Pitching Sessions. In addition to the cross-cutting work streams such as networking and business matchmaking.

Work Stream 1. Inspirational Talks

Each day will start with a panel discussion that showcases inspiring businesses from the Arab region and globally, followed by a high-level panel discussion to elaborate on the practical interventions needed to strengthen SME access to opportunities and provide an overview of best practices in the region on strategies, policies, and support programs.

Work Stream 2. Interactive Workshops

Subsequently, daily parallel capacity-building workshops and interactive discussions will provide hands-on tools and methodologies to empower Arab SMEs. The workshops will be delivered under seven main tracks: 1) Green Technologies and Business Models; 2) Empowering Creative Industries; 3) eCommerce Acceleration; 4) Export Readiness for SMEs; 5) Business Finance for SMEs; 6) How to Start a Business; and 7) Regional Business Advisors Development Program. Each track will host several intensive workshops. Participants who attend the workshops on a specific track will get an official e-certificate after the Summit.

Work Stream 3. Policy Dialogue

The Summit will invite **80 policymakers** from all over the 22 Arab States for a 3-day intensive discussion and road mapping exercise for enhancing the national entrepreneurial enabling environments. The Policy Dialogue will act as a regional platform for leaders from the public and private sectors to advocate inclusive policies and strategies required to support Arab SMEs. The policy dialogue will facilitate an interactive two-day workshop to discuss the significant challenges facing the Arab States in supporting resilience and actionable solutions for prosperity.

Work Stream 4. SMEs Exhibition

The Exhibition seeks to create synergies and foster collaboration among Arab SMEs. In addition, it will provide an interactive platform for SMEs to increase networking, exposure, and outreach. The SMEs Exhibition in 2023 will host **150 exhibitors** under five main specializations: 1) Green Businesses, 2) eCommerce, 3) Edu-Tech, 4) Frontier Technologies, and 5) Creative Industries.

Work Stream 5. Opportunities Zone

The Opportunities Zone will exhibit financing, capacity building, and networking opportunities provided by **30 regional business enablers**, funding organizations, intergovernmental organizations, international NGOs, VCs, and SME supporting institutions. Additionally, the Summit will invite **100 regional and international investors** to meet with the attending SMEs and facilitate their business matchmaking through one-to-one meetings.

Work Stream 6. Side Events

The Summit will host **6 side events** facilitated by regional and international organizations to promote regional initiatives, programs, and partnerships. The side events will be managed with different setups and organizations based on the purposes of these events and the target audience.

Work Stream 7. Pitching Sessions

On day one, **20 innovative SMEs** will present their ventures and creative ideas to a wide-ranging audience, including potential investors, to boost their business profile and spotlight their unique innovations. On the second day, **10 regional investors** will be interviewed, offering valuable insights on critical subjects like market analysis, strategic investment approaches, and emerging trends.

Cross-Cutting Work Streams

B2B Matchmaking Zones: Three distinct meeting areas with varied seating arrangements to connect businesses, foster collaborations and partnerships among SMEs and potential investors across the region.

Commitments: Building on the 2022 Summit's commitments of **130 million USD** of funds for Arab SMEs, the 2023 Summit aims to reach **200 million USD** of funds and support Arab SMEs through ESCWA and its partners.

Outreach: The Summit 2023 activities will be live-streamed, and virtual formats will be provided for most activities and events where applicable. The Summit will target 50 regional and international media outlets (e.g., Forbes, CNBC, Bloomberg, ...etc.) and reach more than 750,000 users via social media channels.

4. Preliminary Agenda

Day 1 (12 December 2023): Scaling Up and Internationalization.

Time	Room and modality	Subtheme: Scaling Up and Internationalization																																																
8:00 – 9:00 a.m.	Registration																																																	
9:00 – 9:30 a.m.	<u>The Atlas Auditorium</u> <i>Opening Ceremony</i>	<p><i>Opening note:</i> H.E. Aziz Akhannouch, Prime Minister of Morocco</p> <p><i>Keynote Speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> H.E. Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia H.R.H. Prince Abdullaziz Bin Talal Bin Abdullaziz Al Saud, President of Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND) H.E. Younes Sekkouri, Minister of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills, Morocco 																																																
9:30 – 10:30 a.m.	<u>The Atlas Auditorium</u> <i>Inspirational showcases of successful businesses</i>	<p>Inspirational panel: businesses beyond borders.</p> <p>Showcases of inspirational businesses from the Arab region that crossed borders and scaled up regionally and internationally.</p> <p>Moderator: Hala Mahfouz, CEO of Rafeeq organisation, Jordan</p> <p><i>Tentative speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hamad Al Hajri, CEO of Snoonu, Qatar Nabila Bouhlal, CEO of Pure Heritage Essaouira, Morocco Azzam Ibrahim, CEO of Craft Store, Sudan 																																																
10:30 – 11:30 a.m.	Coffee Break and Networking																																																	
		<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th colspan="3">Tracks over two days</th> <th colspan="4">Tracks that start and finish in one day</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Parallel workshops, sessions, and side events</td> <td>Policy Dialogue (Tichka Hall)</td> <td>Green Technologies and Business Models (Oliveraie Hall)</td> <td>ToT Regional eCommerce & Business Advisors Development Program (Palmeraie Hall)</td> <td>SMEs Pitching (Siroua Theatre)</td> <td>Export Readiness for SMEs (Orangerie Hall)</td> <td>eCommerce Acceleration (Roseiraie Hall)</td> <td>Technology & Innovation Enablement (Diamant Hall)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>11:30 – 12:30 p.m.</td> <td>Session 1</td> <td>Session 1</td> <td>Session 1</td> <td>Group 1</td> <td>Session 1</td> <td>Session 1</td> <td>Session 1 AIDSMO</td> </tr> <tr> <td>12:30 – 1:30 p.m.</td> <td>Session 2</td> <td>Session 2</td> <td>Session 2</td> <td>Group 2</td> <td>Session 2</td> <td>Session 2</td> <td>Session 2 AIDSMO</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1:30 – 2:30 p.m.</td> <td colspan="7">Light Lunch and Snacks</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2:30 – 4:00 p.m.</td> <td>Session 3</td> <td>Session 3</td> <td>Session 3 & Session 4 (until 6:30)</td> <td>Ana Moukawil Trophy</td> <td>Session 3</td> <td>Session 3</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Tracks over two days			Tracks that start and finish in one day				Parallel workshops, sessions, and side events	Policy Dialogue (Tichka Hall)	Green Technologies and Business Models (Oliveraie Hall)	ToT Regional eCommerce & Business Advisors Development Program (Palmeraie Hall)	SMEs Pitching (Siroua Theatre)	Export Readiness for SMEs (Orangerie Hall)	eCommerce Acceleration (Roseiraie Hall)	Technology & Innovation Enablement (Diamant Hall)	11:30 – 12:30 p.m.	Session 1	Session 1	Session 1	Group 1	Session 1	Session 1	Session 1 AIDSMO	12:30 – 1:30 p.m.	Session 2	Session 2	Session 2	Group 2	Session 2	Session 2	Session 2 AIDSMO	1:30 – 2:30 p.m.	Light Lunch and Snacks							2:30 – 4:00 p.m.	Session 3	Session 3	Session 3 & Session 4 (until 6:30)	Ana Moukawil Trophy	Session 3	Session 3	
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Day 2 (13 December 2023): Promoting Arab Technologies.

Time	Room and modality	Subtheme: Promoting Arab Technologies
8:00 – 9:00 a.m.	Registration	
9:00 – 9:45 a.m.	<u>The Atlas Auditorium</u> <i>Inspirational showcases of successful businesses</i>	<p>Inspirational panel: transformative technologies and disruptive business models.</p> <p>Showcases of passionate technology leaders from the Arab region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderator: Leila Hadrami, Managing Director of Communities Connect Cities, Oman <p><i>Tentative speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yasmine Abdel Karim, CEO of Yalla Fel Sekka, Egypt Noor Boresly, CEO of Medesign Company, Kuwait Ziad Abi Chaker, Founder of Cedar Environmental LLC, Lebanon Fatima ElKhalifa, Director of Cluster ENR/Climate Innovation Centre, Morocco
9:45 – 10:30 a.m.	<u>The Atlas Auditorium</u> <i>Thought leadership discussion and ways forward</i>	<p>High-level panel: Leveraging Technology for SMEs Growth and Empowerment.</p> <p>Discussion on how technology can drive growth for Arab SMEs and pave the way for economic empowerment and prosperity in the region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderator: Ibrahim Al-Jubari, Entrepreneurship Professor at Brunel University London, Yemen. <p><i>Tentative speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Executive Director of the International Trade Centre (ITC) Winslow Sargeant, CEO of Purple Technologies and S&T Investment Firm, USA Lamia Benmakhlouf, Director-General of Technopark, Morocco

10:30 – 11:30 a.m. Coffee Break and Networking

Parallel workshops, sessions, and side events	<u>Policy Dialogue (Tichka Hall)</u>	<u>Green Technologies and Business Models (Oliveraie Hall)</u>	<u>ToT Regional eCommerce & Business Advisors Development Program (Palmeraie Hall)</u>	<u>Investor Insights (Siroua Theatre)</u>	<u>How to start a Business? (Orangerie Hall)</u>	<u>Empowering Creative Industries (Roseaie Hall)</u>	<u>Women Empowerment in Entrepreneurship (Diamant Hall)</u>
11:30 – 12:30 p.m.	Session 4	Session 4	Session 5	Group 1	Session 1	Session 1	Session 1 ECA & GIZ
12:30 – 1:30 p.m.	Session 5	Session 5	Session 6	Group 2	Session 2	Session 2	Session 2 AIDSMO
1:30 – 2:30 p.m.	Light Lunch and Snacks						
2:30 – 4:00 p.m.	Session 6	Session 6	Session 7 & Session 8 (until 6:30)	Group 3	Session 3	Medwaves Side event	SAAVI ITC

Day 3 (14 December 2023): Access to finance and supporting services.

Time	Room and modality	Subtheme: Access to finance and supporting services
8:00 – 9:00 a.m.	Registration	
9:00 – 9:40 a.m.	<u>The Atlas Auditorium</u> <i>Inspirational showcases of successful businesses</i>	<p>Inspirational panel: impact investment and support initiatives.</p> <p>Inspirational showcases of impact investment, innovative financial models, and supporting initiatives that empowered SMEs across the Arab region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderator: Wafa Makhoulf, Executive Director of the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Executive Development (CEED), Tunisia <p><i>Tentative speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mehdi Alaoui, CEO of LaStartupStation, Morocco • Rania Ayman, CEO of Entreprenelle, Egypt • Mustafa Elsayezli, General Director of BINA Program, Libya • Mohammed Hijazi, CEO of the Palestinian Young Businessmen Council, Palestine
9:40 – 10:30 a.m.	<u>The Atlas Auditorium</u> <i>Thought leadership discussion and ways forward</i>	<p>High-level panel: Regional opportunities for accessing finance and support services.</p> <p>Discussion on how regional and international finance and support services can bolster the growth and expansion of Arab SMEs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderator: Hala Barakat, Director of the AUC Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Egypt <p><i>Tentative speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nasser Alkahtani, Executive Director of the Arab Gulf Program for Development (AGFUND) • Hani Salem Sonbol, CEO of the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC) and the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD) • Abdulrahman Hesham Al Sowaidi, CEO of Qatar Development Bank, Qatar • Hicham Zanati Serghini, Director-General of Tamwilcom, Morocco
10:30 – 11:30 a.m.	Coffee Break and Networking	
11:30 – 1:00 p.m.	<u>The Atlas Auditorium</u> Closing Ceremony	<p>Entrepreneurship Awards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announcement of Winners in ESCWA's SME Competitions. • Announcement of Winners in Partners' SME Competitions. <p>Regional and National Commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESCWA's commitments to supporting Arab SMEs. • Partners' commitments to supporting Arab SMEs. <p>Announcement of the Arab SMEs Summit 2024</p>

5. Partnerships for the Summit

ESCWA is dedicated to building strong partnerships to support the growth and success of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Arab region and beyond. Building on the success of the 2022 Summit in Amman, the 2023 event aims to establish a regional platform for coordinating efforts and networks, bringing together stakeholders from across the Arab world to share knowledge, exchange best practices, and explore new opportunities for collaboration.

Working closely with the Moroccan Ministry of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment, and Skills, ESCWA is finalizing arrangements and seeking regional collaborations to make the 2023 Summit a truly unique and impactful event. Through partnerships with regional and international organizations, the Summit will promote entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic growth while addressing key challenges facing SMEs in the Arab world.

At every level, ESCWA and its partners are committed to making the 2023 Arab SMEs Summit a success. From organizing the event to building partnerships, promoting attendance and exhibition, recognizing outstanding achievements through awards, and ensuring broad media coverage, the Summit will showcase the region's vibrant and dynamic SME sector.

By working side by side with its partners, ESCWA will be able to coordinate the region's movement towards expanding the potential of Arab SMEs both regionally and beyond, fostering more significant economic growth and prosperity for all.

6. Expected Outcomes

The 2023 Summit aims at:

- ◆ Mobilize funding opportunities and supporting services worth 200 million USD to support SMEs in the Arab region.
- ◆ Facilitate 100+ investment opportunities for Arab SMEs.
- ◆ Enhance SMEs' access to opportunities and strategic partnerships to drive their growth at the regional and international levels.
- ◆ Support government institutions and the private sector to expand SMEs' potential.
- ◆ Influence policymakers to strengthen the business-enabling environment for Arab SMEs.

Contact information:

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