



# From recovery to economic resilience: strategies for the private sector

## AGENDA

**29-30 June 2022**

**OECD Istanbul Centre**

İstiklal Caddesi No. 142, Beyoğlu

Istanbul, Türkiye

## Context

The private sector has a central role in achieving resilient, sustainable and inclusive economies in the MENA region, particularly in a context of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the major economic and social implications of the war in Ukraine. Businesses will be key to regain economic growth after the 4% GDP contraction in MENA in 2020, during the depth of the pandemic. They will also be essential in addressing the economic and social challenges brought about by the war in Ukraine, including in terms of energy and food price increases and disruptions to supply chains. Furthermore, businesses will be central in facilitating the digital transition (accelerated by the pandemic) and the green transformation (which has acquired greater urgency in the context of the war in Ukraine and given the challenges brought about by climate change). And they will also be vital in addressing long term challenges, including the need for economic diversification, reducing unemployment levels, particularly among youth, and increasing women's economic empowerment through jobs and entrepreneurship.

### The MENA-OECD Business Advisory Board (BAB)

Founded in 2017, the MENA-OECD Business Advisory Board (BAB) provides a structured and well-informed platform for private sector mobilisation in the MENA region. Co-chaired by the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisation (CEOE) and the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), the BAB creates reform coalitions between governments and the business community, fostering Public-Private Dialogue.

## Objectives of the meeting

The MENA-OECD Business Advisory Board (BAB) stands ready to continue to delve into the role of business associations and their dialogue with the public sector to develop a crisis response and support growth. As a follow-up to the 2021 MENA-OECD Ministerial Conference and Government-Business Summit, the 2022 Annual Meeting of the BAB will allow its members to develop a roadmap to continue enhancing economic integration and development in the MENA region. Discussions will aim at designing inclusive approaches to improve empowerment of youth and women in society, leaving no one behind. The BAB will explore a number of priority actions to seize opportunities for business transformation, namely:

- ❖ An umbrella session on challenges and opportunities for advancing economic resilience in the MENA region.
- ❖ Accelerating the digital transformation.
- ❖ Facilitating job creation and entrepreneurship.
- ❖ Fostering trade and investment.
- ❖ Promoting the green transition.

### The 2021 MENA-OECD Ministerial Conference

Gathering representatives from MENA and OECD economies, the 2021 [MENA-OECD Ministerial Conference](#) "*Designing a Roadmap to Recovery in MENA*" aimed at identifying key strategies to ensure an inclusive and resilient post-COVID-19 recovery in the MENA region.

The Conference was informed by the [MENA-OECD Government-Business Summit](#), a high-level public-private dialogue which contributed to explore pivotal issues for economic recovery.

Fruitful discussions led Ministers to adopt the [Ministerial Declaration on Governance and Competitiveness](#), setting guiding principles for co-operation between MENA and OECD governments during the 2021-2025 mandate.

# Agenda

29 June 2022

08:30 – 09:00 Registration

09:00 – 09:30 Opening remarks

## AUDITORIUM (MECLIS SALONU). Interpretation EN FR AR

### Welcoming Remarks and Host:

- ❖ Mr. Achraf BOUALI, Head of the Istanbul Centre, OECD

### Speakers:

- ❖ Ms. Marta BLANCO, President CEOE International, Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisation (CEOE)
- ❖ Mr. Hichem ELLOUMI, Vice President, Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA)
- ❖ Mr. Carlos CONDE, Head of Middle East and Africa Division and Executive Advisor to the Istanbul Centre, OECD

### Master of Ceremony:

- ❖ Ms. Fianna JURDANT, Senior Advisor, Middle East and Africa Division, OECD

09:30 – 10:30 Session 1: Economic resilience in MENA

## AUDITORIUM (MECLIS SALONU) Interpretation EN FR AR

The COVID-19 crisis impacted businesses in the MENA region. For instance, between 2019 and 2020, sales declined by 43% in the Palestinian Authority, 47% in Morocco and 52% in Jordan.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the fallout of the war in Ukraine and consequent rising inflation are further threatening firms and risk to disproportionately affect youth and women-led businesses. By calling for the creation of a stronger and more inclusive economy, these crises are increasing the urgency to address longstanding challenges in the MENA region. They also provide key avenues to accelerate business transformation in MENA economies. Opportunities include promoting digitalisation for economic growth, supporting job creation and entrepreneurship for all, enhancing intra-regional trade and investment, as well as transitioning to a greener economy.

This session will serve as an introduction to the meeting. It will assess how the COVID-19 and Ukraine crises are affecting businesses in MENA countries and will explore opportunities for the private sector to advance economic resilience in the region.

**Keynote address:** Ms. Fatma MARRAKCHI CHARFI, Head of the Laboratory of International Economic Integration, University of Tunis El Manar, Tunisia

### Discussants:

- ❖ H.E. Mr. Zaher AL QATARNEH, Secretary General, Ministry of Investment, Jordan (TBC)
- ❖ Prof. Dr. Emre ALKIN, Chancellor, Istanbul Topkapi University Türkiye
- ❖ Mr. Mehdi TAZI, General Vice President, General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises (CGEM), Morocco

### Q&A

10:30 – 11:00 Networking coffee break

11:00 – 12:30 Session 2: The digital transformation

## AUDITORIUM (MECLIS SALONU) Interpretation EN FR AR

Crises can open up opportunities for reforms for more sustainable economic growth. Digitalisation has a particular role to play to make the private sector more resilient, mitigate economic volatility and support economic transformation. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the uptake of digital technologies in the MENA region, with around 35% of all firms in the Middle East and Central Asia region having increased or started their online activity as a result of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> A greater use of digital technologies by the private sector has the potential to boost productivity, growth and competitiveness, as well as attract investment. The digital transformation can also create job opportunities, offering key avenues to foster youth and women's employment. However, challenges persist for firms to fully harness digital technologies in MENA, including limited infrastructure, restricted digital skills, a gender digital divide, uneven connectivity and limited access to digital tools.

This session will allow participants to find ways for digitalisation in the private sector to build more resilient societies and pave the way towards new forms of doing businesses. Discussions will explore how business associations and private sector actors can harness the benefits of digital technologies for growth and innovation for all.

**Session Leader:** Mr. Babak YEKTA FAR, Senior Programme Officer, Centre for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), USA

**Panellists:**

- ❖ H.E. Mr. Osama AL SAADAWI, Minister of State for Entrepreneurship and Empowerment, Palestinian Authority
- ❖ Dr. Yomna EL SHERIDY, President, Businesswomen of Egypt21, Egypt
- ❖ Mr. Eduardo SALIDO CORNEJO, Global Senior Manager of Industry Affairs, Amadeus, Spain

**OPEN DISCUSSION**

12:30 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 15:45 | Session 3: Ideas factory

**Group A: Job creation and entrepreneurship**  
**U-Shaped Room (Taksim Hall)**

**Group B: Trade and investment**  
**U-Shaped Room (Tunel Hall)**

Stimulating job creation and entrepreneurship is crucial to support growth and private sector development while alleviating the effects of crises on labour markets. The effects of the war in Ukraine risk to exacerbate negative trends left by the COVID-19 pandemic in MENA economies, which caused youth unemployment to reach 27% in 2020 - and up to 47% for young women.<sup>2</sup> Business associations are well-positioned to encourage the creation of quality jobs. They can foster business opportunities for their members, advocate for improvements in the business climate, nurture local entrepreneurship and help to facilitate skills matching by collaborating with educational institutions and supporting Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs.<sup>3</sup>

This breakout session will explore how the private sector can support job creation and entrepreneurship, while addressing the obstacles facing those entering the job market. Participants will be invited to an activity to share their good practices and identify key priority actions.

**Facilitators:**

- ❖ Dr. Fouad ZMOKHOL, President, MIDEL, Lebanon
- ❖ Dr. El Sayed TORKY, Senior Advisor, Federation of Egyptian Industries, Egypt

**Discussant:**

- ❖ Ms. Thanaa AL KHASAWNEH, Executive Director & Founding Member, Business & Professional Women Association, Jordan

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused investment flows to decrease in the MENA region.<sup>4</sup> As MENA and the world started to recover from the pandemic, the war in Ukraine has brought new challenges, including disruptions to the supply of essential food products for which MENA countries rely on Russia and Ukraine, and disruptions to supply chains in general due to the closure of ports and factories, among others. Advancing economic resilience in the face of those challenges thus requires an ambitious trade and investment agenda, including removing barriers to trade and investment and boosting regional integration.<sup>5</sup> Business associations have a role in increasing resilience and integration by facilitating inter-firm linkages and engaging with the public sector to promote trade and investment, including through agreements,<sup>6</sup> standards and regulations.<sup>7</sup>

This breakout session will focus on the role of the private sector in advancing regional trade and investment, while promoting responsible business conduct and ensuring an inclusive repartition of trade benefits. Participants will be invited to an activity to share their good practices and identify key priority actions.

**Facilitators:**

- ❖ Dr. Abir LEHETA, CEO, Egytrans, Egypt
- ❖ Mr. Yakup GÜNEŞ, Associate Partner, EY Türkiye; Member, TÜSİAD Foreign Trade Working Group, Türkiye

**Discussant:**

- ❖ Mr. Giovanni MARESCA, Specialist International Affairs Department, Confindustria, Italy

15:45 – 16:00 Networking coffee break

16:00 – 16:30 Joint wrap-up session

**AUDITORIUM (MECLIS SALONU) Interpretation EN FR AR**

Participants of the two working sessions will reconvene and share the outcomes of discussions.

17:00 – 19:00 Cocktail offered by the OECD Istanbul Centre

**360 Istanbul, rooftop, 10 min walking distance. Address: Tomtom Mah. İstiklal Cad. No:163 K: 8, 34433 Beyoğlu/İstanbul.**

**AUDITORIUM (MECLIS SALONU) Translation EN FR AR**

The implications of the war in Ukraine on energy and the mounting challenges derived from climate change and environmental degradation highlight the need for a faster and stronger green transition. The MENA region has a great potential to benefit and contribute to that, including through renewable and greener energy sources.<sup>8</sup> For businesses, the green transition can open a vast range of economic opportunities, including the diffusion of new business models and innovations. Some promising sectors include electricity production, distribution and storage; agriculture and forestry; natural resource exploitation; transportation; water supply and treatment; waste management, among others.<sup>9</sup> The greening of business processes can also increase firms' resilience in the face of supply chain disruptions. In this domain, business associations can inform and guide firms on the benefits to be gained from green transitions and advise them to embed environmental considerations in business decision-making.

This session will explore the opportunities and challenges of the green transition for the MENA private sector and analyse how the business community can support energy diversification in the region – in order to increase economies' resilience. Participants will be invited to share their experiences on how firms can integrate environmental considerations into their business processes.

**Session Leader:** Mr. Marco MARCHESE, Policy Analyst, Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities, OECD

**Panellists:**

- ❖ Mr. Rasmi HAMZEH, CEO, Jordan Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Fund, Jordan
- ❖ Ms. Basima ABDULRAHMAN, CEO, KESK, Iraq
- ❖ Mr. Jeni GUNES, Commercial Department Turkey Area Manager, CAF, Spain
- ❖ Mr. Ahmed Samir ELBERMBALI, Managing Director, MENA Clean Energy Business Council, United Arab Emirates

**OPEN DISCUSSION**

- ❖ Ms. Marta BLANCO, President CEOE International, Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisation (CEOE)
- ❖ Mr. Hichem ELLOUMI, Vice President, Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA)
- ❖ Mr. Carlos CONDE, Head of Middle East and Africa Division and Executive Advisor to the Istanbul Centre, OECD

**References**

- <sup>1</sup> Nordine A., M. El Herradi and S. Sakha (2022), "Digitalization and Resilience: Firm-level Evidence During the COVID-19 Pandemic", *IMF Working Papers*, International Monetary Fund, Washington DC.
- <sup>2</sup> Nordine A., M. El Herradi and S. Sakha (2022), "Digitalization and Resilience: Firm-level Evidence During the COVID-19 Pandemic", *IMF Working Papers*, International Monetary Fund, Washington DC.
- <sup>3</sup> *Barriers for Women's Economic Empowerment in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia*, Competitiveness and Private Sector Development, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ac780735-en>.
- <sup>4</sup> OECD (2020), "Investment in the MENA region in the time of COVID-19", OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19).
- <sup>5</sup> OECD (2022), *The geography of global value chains, COVID-19, and the MENA region*.
- <sup>6</sup> OECD (2021), *Regional Integration in the Union for the Mediterranean: Progress Report*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/325884b3-en>.
- <sup>7</sup> OECD (2019), *Innovation and Business/Market Opportunities associated with Energy Transitions and a Cleaner Global Environment*, [OECD-G20-Paper-Innovation-and-Green-Transition.pdf](https://doi.org/10.1787/4181d61b-en)
- <sup>8</sup> OECD (2022), *OECD Economic Outlook, Interim Report March 2022: Economic and Social Impacts and Policy Implications of the War in Ukraine*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4181d61b-en>.
- <sup>9</sup> OECD (2019), *Innovation and Business/Market Opportunities associated with Energy Transitions and a Cleaner Global Environment*, [OECD-G20-Paper-Innovation-and-Green-Transition.pdf](https://doi.org/10.1787/4181d61b-en)