



Opportunities spotlight panel

New opportunities and capacity-building programmes in specific sectors

19 November 2026

11:00–12:00 | Main Stage

Cross-border collaboration and market expansion

20 November 2026

10:00–11:00 | Main Stage

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Background and regional context

The Arab region is witnessing a growing wave of entrepreneurship, supported by an expanding support ecosystem that helps transform ideas into thriving businesses. This trend is particularly important in a region where small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for more than 96% of businesses and contribute up to 40% of the gross domestic product (GDP).¹ Given the significant role of entrepreneurship in driving innovation, job creation and economic diversification, it is important to provide entrepreneurs with a wider range of opportunities at different stages of their journey, from developing an idea and launching a business to accessing finance, connecting with partners, entering new markets and scaling up.

The support landscape is also becoming more diverse, going beyond traditional training and capacity building to include coaching and mentorship, incubation and acceleration, financing, investment readiness, market access, networking and internationalization. Major regional events such as **LEAP** in Saudi Arabia and **GITEX AFRICA** in Morocco illustrate this shift. They bring together startups, investors, technology companies, policymakers and industry leaders and create opportunities for knowledge exchange, investment, and partnerships. Support programmes are now tailored to the specific needs of businesses, including scale-ups, which represent around 5% of SMEs and have strong potential for growth and expansion when the right support is available.² Given the wide range of support available across the region, a clear overview of the relevant organizations, programmes and opportunities can help entrepreneurs identify those best suited to their needs.

Recent developments across the region point to increasingly diverse entrepreneurship support ecosystems, covering financing, credit guarantees, investment, incubation, acceleration, and capacity building. The Jordan Loan Guarantee Corporation provided guarantees to 1,848 SMEs with a total value of JD 233 million in 2025, including 241 startups that received JD 27.2 million.³ In Oman, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (*Riyada*) approved financing for 521 projects by the end of 2025, with a total value of RO 45.4 million, supporting the creation of 2,002 jobs.⁴ In Iraq, the Central Bank is strengthening the institutional environment for SME finance through initiatives such as the National Strategy for Bank Lending 2024–2029, which aims to improve access to credit, support private-sector enterprises and strengthen financial inclusion.⁵ This progress reflects a broader shift towards more integrated support ecosystems that respond to the different stages of enterprise growth.

With the increasing diversity of organizations, programmes and opportunities across the region, there is a growing need for tools that enable entrepreneurs to efficiently navigate and access these resources. In this context, **DEPAR** platform helps increase the visibility and accessibility of regional support networks. It comprises more than 100 ecosystem maps that cover organizations and initiatives operating across the 22 Arab countries, including government institutions, development organizations, financial institutions, incubators and accelerators, business associations, and other ecosystem actors, along with the types of support they offer to entrepreneurs and businesses. Thematic maps focus on key sectors and areas, namely **Agricultural**

Ecosystem Maps, Renewable Energy Ecosystem Maps, WASH Ecosystem Maps, Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Maps and Women's Empowerment Ecosystem Maps. In addition, the International Opportunities Ecosystem Maps highlight grants, financing, networking, technology transfer, capacity building, and access to investors and international markets.

These opportunities respond to key regional priorities, with programmes focusing on emerging technologies, green and climate solutions, energy, water, agriculture and food security, and creative industries. They can help entrepreneurs build skills and networks, access finance and markets, and turn their ideas into sustainable businesses, while contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 8, 9, 10 and 17.

Regional connections can extend these opportunities, giving SMEs and startups access to new partners, markets and peer learning. In 2023, exports from the Mediterranean region to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries amounted to \$116 billion, while imports reached \$121 billion, highlighting the scale of opportunities beyond national borders.⁶

The panel brings these prospects closer to entrepreneurs, showcasing four or five selected programmes that offer concrete opportunities and different forms of support. Programme representatives share what they offer, who can participate and how entrepreneurs can get involved, moving the conversation from “What is available?” to “What can I access, and how?”

Objectives

- Showcase selected opportunities for SMEs and startups across the Arab region.
- Increase awareness of the range of entrepreneurship support available.
- Help entrepreneurs identify opportunities relevant to their growth stage, sector and business needs.
- Highlight programmes that go beyond one-off activities to support longer-term business development.
- Demonstrate how support can help entrepreneurs build capabilities and networks, access finance, and reach new markets.
- Emphasize the value of regional connections, peer learning and cross-border partnerships.
- Provide participants with practical information on how to access the featured opportunities.

Participants

- SMEs and startups.
- Entrepreneurship and SME support programmes.
- Incubators, accelerators, investors and business support organizations.
- Policymakers and development partners working on entrepreneurship and SME development.

Agenda

Day 2: 19 November 2026

Time	Title	Session description	Speaker/Moderator
10:00–11:00	New opportunities and capacity-building programmes in specific sectors	The session opens with a brief introduction to the regional entrepreneurship support ecosystem, followed by presentations by four or five selected programmes providing concrete opportunities to SMEs and startups. Programme representatives introduce what they offer, who can benefit and how to participate. A moderated discussion then explores how these programmes help businesses build skills and networks, access finance and markets, develop partnerships and expand regionally. The session concludes with practical information on how SMEs and startups can access the featured opportunities.	Sandra Amalang Chief, Regional Office for Arab States, UNDRR Hamam Juraeid Executive Director, AGFUND Catarina Bjorlin Hansen Head of Iraq, West Bank & Gaza, EBRD

Day 2: 20 November 2026

Time	Title	Session description	Speaker/Moderator
10:00–11:00	Cross-border collaboration and market expansion	The session explores how SMEs and startups have expanded beyond their home markets. The discussion focuses on entering regional or international markets through exports, e-commerce, partnerships, networks and value chains, with speakers sharing how they adapted their products or services and navigated regulatory, financial and logistical challenges.	Semiha Abdullah, Partnerships & Technical Cooperation Coordinator, SESRIC Shakir Ayad, Founder & CEO, Orderii Bilal Al-Hamadni, Executive Director, Iraq Development Fund

Endnotes

1. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), [Beyond barriers: how access to finance can unleash SMEs' potential in the Arab States region](#), 28 August 2025.
2. A. Klat and others, [Scaling up MENA SMEs: How a handful of firms can fast-forward economic growth](#) (Endeavor, strategy&, PwC, 2019).
3. Jordan Loan Guarantee Corporation (JLGC), [Jordan Loan Guarantee Corporation: Growing Support for Projects and Exports and Improved Financial Indicators in 2025](#), 11 February 2026.
4. Oman Observer, [RO 45.4 million finances 521 SME projects](#), 18 April 2026.
5. Central Bank of Iraq, [National Strategy for Bank Lending 2024–2029](#), 2024.
6. OECD, [Regional Integration in the Union for the Mediterranean 2025: Progress Report](#), 2025.