



Partner-led side event

Building risk-informed and resilient SMEs in the Arab region

18–19 November 2026

13:00–16:00 | Room TBC

Background and rationale context

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) represent the backbone of Arab economies. Across the region, they account for more than 90% of registered businesses, generate between 50% and 70% of private sector employment, and contribute significantly to national economic growth, innovation and local livelihoods. Their role is particularly important in supporting youth employment, women entrepreneurs, local value chains and post-crisis economic recovery.

At the same time, MSMEs are operating in an environment exposed to frequent disasters and external shocks. Over the past decade, the Arab region has experienced an increasing frequency and intensity of disasters, including earthquakes in Türkiye, the Syrian Arab Republic and Morocco, Storm Daniel in Libya, prolonged droughts across Iraq and the Levant, extreme heat, flash floods, wildfires, sand and dust storms, water scarcity, and the growing impacts of climate change, alongside conflict, economic instability, supply chain disruptions and displacement. These challenges are placing significant pressure on businesses and local economies.

Studies show that enterprises with limited financial reserves, insufficient business continuity planning, risk management capacities and access to resilience financing are more exposed to disaster-related losses. Business interruptions can also result in prolonged closures, job losses and disruptions to local supply chains, slowing economic recovery and increasing vulnerability.

Given their central role in economic development, building resilience should be fully integrated into SME support programmes, financing mechanisms and enterprise development policies across the Arab region. Enhancing SME resilience requires moving beyond traditional business development approaches towards risk-informed enterprise development by integrating disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, business continuity planning, resilient supply chains and sustainable finance.

Recognizing this need, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) has developed practical tools, including the Resilience Maturity Assessment (ReMA) and the Business Continuity Planning (BCP) methodology. Enterprises can benefit from these internationally recognized tools to assess their resilience, identify priority investments and enhance preparedness for future shocks.

The Arab SMEs Summit provides a unique regional platform to introduce these approaches, promote dialogue between Governments, financial institutions and the private sector, and identify opportunities for strengthening SME resilience across the Arab region.

Objectives

- Introduce the concept of SME resilience and its importance for sustainable economic growth and disaster risk reduction.
- Present internationally recognized SME resilience tools developed by UNDRR, including the Resilience Maturity Assessment (ReMA) and Business Continuity Planning (BCP).
- Showcase regional experiences and emerging practices in building resilient enterprises.
- Promote dialogue on integrating resilience into SME development policies, financing mechanisms and business support services.
- Identify opportunities for regional collaboration among Governments, chambers of commerce, financial institutions and the private sector.

Expected outcomes

- Increased awareness of disaster and climate risks affecting SMEs across the Arab region.
- Improved understanding of practical resilience assessment and business continuity tools.
- Stronger collaboration among Governments, development partners and the private sector on strengthening SME resilience.
- Identification of opportunities for future national and regional SME resilience initiatives.
- Expanded partnerships through ARISE and other regional private sector networks.

Participants

- Ministries responsible for SMEs, economy, industry and planning.
- Chambers of commerce and industry.
- SME development agencies.
- Commercial banks and financial institutions.
- Development partners.
- Private sector associations.

- ARISE national networks.
- SMEs and entrepreneurs.
- United Nations agencies.
- Academia and research institutions.

Suggested speakers

- UNDRR Regional Office for the Arab States.
- ESCWA.
- IOM.
- ARISE Global and ARISE Arab States.
- Commercial banks.
- Chambers of commerce.
- Selected SME representatives.
- Development partners.

Agenda

Day 1: Understanding SME resilience in the Arab region

Time	Title	Speakers
13:00–13:15	Opening remarks	
13:15–13:45	Session 1 SMEs and economic resilience in the Arab region: trends, challenges and opportunities	
13:45–14:15	Session 2 Disaster and climate risks affecting SMEs	
14:15–14:45	Session 3 Introduction to the UNDRR's SME Resilience Framework	
14:45–15:00	Break	

Time	Title	Speakers
15:00–15:30	Session 4 Introduction to the Resilience Maturity Assessment (ReMA)	
15:30–16:30	Session 5 Business continuity planning for SMEs Questions and discussion	

Day 2: From resilience assessment to action

Time	Title	Speakers
13:00–13:10	Recap of day 1	
13:10–13:45	Session 1 Regional experiences on SME resilience	
13:45–14:30	Session 2 Interactive demonstration of the ReMA tool	
14:30–14:50	Break	
14:50–15:25	Session 3 Financing SME resilience: banks, chambers of commerce and development partners	
15:25–15:50	Session 4 Panel discussion: scaling SME resilience in the Arab region	
15:50–16:00	Closing remarks and next steps	