Lebanon SMEs Internationalization using digital tools and services

A. Brief overview of SME exports in Lebanon

"Lebanon is traditionally an open and trade liberalized economy. Its small local market and largely consumer-based economy has been a major driver for export and import activity. However, the value of exports and imports as a share of GDP has declined gradually over the last five years. Due to a high dependence on imports, the trade deficit had become substantial, although the national foreign currency shortage in 2020 lead to a significant drop in imports and thus a reduction of the trade deficit by 50.7% from 2019 to 2020.[1] The war in Syria and consequential cut-off of overland trade routes to Jordan, Iraq and the Gulf, the drop in demand from countries in the region, as well as the economic and political crisis in the country have all negatively impacted Lebanese exports relative to other countries in the region. The COVID-19 pandemic has added to an already existing economic recession. By December 2020, total exports had declined by 8.4% relative to the registered value in 2019.[2] Rather than expanding and conquering new markets, SMEs in Lebanon are thus mostly concerned with maintaining their export or supplier activities or to just staying in business. Lebanon exports mainly cater to regional markets. In 2019, Arab markets accounted for 41.0% of Lebanon's total exports, the EU market for 10.6%, and the sub-Saharan African market for approximately 11.5% of exports.[3] The main export products are jewelry, electric and electronic equipment, plastics, cosmetics, and agri-food. With regard to the export of services, Lebanon has expanded beyond traditional sectors, such as transport and tourism, into modern ones, such as financial and business services.[4] Lebanese companies participate in regional or global value chains (GVCs) mostly in financial services and the agricultural and food processing sectors. Backward participation in GVCs is relatively high in Lebanon, as a result of more developed industrial bases, a smaller geographical size and limited local availability of primary resources.[5] Value chain suppliers are highly dependent on the import of their inputs, with an estimated 50 % of Lebanese SMEs sourcing their inputs from abroad.[6] Lebanon does not provide official data on SME structural statistics and contribution of the SME sector to the economy. Information on Lebanon's integration into GVCs in general and its SMEs in particular is scarce and their role subsequently difficult to assess. Operationalisation of plans to develop an SME Observatory would enhance data availability, including on the internationalisation activity of Lebanon's SMEs. International indicators, such as the Global Competitiveness Index, show that Lebanon is performing well in terms of business sophistication, technological readiness and innovation. Due to external and internal crises, however, the business climate has declined in recent years. Especially, the time and costs to export have increased significantly, confirming that customs procedures and inspections are main challenges for cross-border trade from and with Lebanon. Due to the obstruction of land routes through Syria, exporters have also had to incur higher costs for alternative modes of transportation, which is especially burdensome for SMEs. The tragic explosion at the Beirut port, the largest shipping and clearing point in the country, further exacerbated this situation".

In 1994, the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL) was established by the government with aim of promoting Lebanon as a key investment destination, its mandate has been widened to be entrusted with the active promotion and marketing of Lebanese exports including agricultural and agro-industrial

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[1] https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/lebanon/, accessed on 27/10/2020

[2] Based on Lebanese Customs Authority data

[3] Lebanese Customs Authority, Annual Trade Statistics 2019

[4] ITC Trade Map; IRC (international Rescue Committee) (2016), "Market Overview: Small & Medium Enterprises in Beirut & Mount Lebanon", p. 9,

[5] http://www.databank.com.lb/docs/SMEs%20in%20Beirut%20&%20Mount%20Lebanon-IRC-2016.pdf/.

[6] OECD (2018), "Making global value chains more inclusive in the MED region", background note for the workshop on "Business Linkages in the MED Region: Policies and Tools", 17-18 April 2018, Beirut, pp. 9-10.

products. Several export services were offered until 2019, after which and due to the economic severe downturn, no more funds were allocated by the government to be able to exercise is promotional efforts. [7]

Some initiatives, such as "Oxygen Fund"[8], with aim to help industrialists in their efforts to face the national currency devaluation would help in rebalancing the decreased export. But this initiative remains micro compared to the magnitude and severeness of the crisis; Agriculture Rural Empowerment (ARE) and Trade Investment Fund (TIF) are two programs funded by USAID with scope to improve local production and increase export.

In 2020, Lebanon joined the "Agadir" Agreement, which was originally established among Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia and entered into force in July 2006. The agreement committed all parties to removing all tariffs on trade between one another and to harmonizing their legislation on standards and customs procedures.[9]

B. The digital transition of Lebanese SMEs

a. Digitalization Initiatives

- In February 2019, "Lebanon Digital Transformation strategies to Action" developed by the "Office of the Minister of State for Administrative reform" (OMSAR)[10] with the support of International partners such as UNDP, World bank, OECD, and many other expert parties such as the UK and Estonian Governments obtained the Parliament's vote of confidence which opened the door for a ten year project to digitalize the public sector as a first step and transform Lebanon as one of the most advanced digital countries in the Arab Word. Six month after, a revolution broke, the cabinet of ministries resigned and Lebanon entered into a cycle of consecutive economical, political and health crises which shuffled the national priorities and delayed the kick-start of digitalization project execution. Several other projects under OMSAR's management covers automation of public services (i.e. National Social Security Service, Ministry of Economy and Trade, registry of commerce, etc), e-government (Dawlati project), e-learning portal and ICT training for public servants.

- The Lebanese government has taken a step to modernize its legal system with the introduction of a new e-commerce law (Law No.81/2018), which clearly defines the e-commerce process. However, it does not offer individuals the needed protection when it comes to the collection, processing and use of their personal data. Legal experts believe that the law which was initially passed in 2004 and upgraded in 2018 needs to go a long way to meet the international legal standards that protect customers in their online shopping process.
One core achievement of Law No.81/2018 (the Law) lies in its acknowledgment of contemporary business culture, where electronic communications are common practice. The Law's main input in this respect relates to endeavoring to equate e-signatures and e-documents with paper-based signatures and documents. It is noteworthy that, until the enactment of the Law, electronic communications were only able to be relied upon as preliminary evidence in Lebanon. This meant considerable hindrance for business.[11]
At the level of government, Lebanon ranked 127 out of 193 in the 2020 E-Government Development Index (down from 88 in 2018) highlighting the gap in e-payment systems and the absence of an adequate legislative and regulatory framework that is vital for the transformation.[12]

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[7] https://investinlebanon.gov.lb/en/export

[8] https://cedaroxygen.com/

[9] https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/lebanon/
[10] www.omsar.gov.lb

[11] https://www.dentons.com/en/insights/alerts/2019/january/21/new-lebanese-law-on-etransactions-and-data-protection

[12] https://www.executive-magazine.com/business/where-is-lebanons-trade-in-the-transition-to-a-digital-economy

- Concerned for the tech industry, which is the main enabler for digitalization in general and an accelerator for a digital and knowledge economy encouraged by the high education level and entrepreneurial spirit, the Central Bank in Lebanon issued the Circular 331 on August 22nd 2013, with the purpose to improve the Lebanese digital eco-system along with stimulation for investments in start-ups companies, and raising hope for entrepreneurs. In more details, the circular 331 made the way for entrepreneurs to receive financial support directly from commercial banks or through special venture capital funds. As such, it stipulates that those kinds of investments made by a bank will get a funding and a loss guarantee up to 75% of the investments. At the same time, profits are split between the participating banks and the central bank by 50-50%. Total capital committed by Lebanese banks reached $329.56M by end of December 2020, out of which $281.38M were used by startups companies till that period. In addition, Lebanon's tech sector had received 162 investments between 2013 and 2017.[13]

- Beirut Digital District (BDD) is a built community dedicated to creating a hub for the digital and creative industries in Lebanon. It was officially launched in September 2012 in Beirut as a government facilitated project established between a private real-estate company, Berytech (an incubator accelerator for the development of startups in the ICT field), and The Ministry of Telecommunication who acted as a facilitator and provided broadband internet and telephone infrastructure.[14]

b. Internet penetration and use of E-commerce

In January 2021, there were 5.31 million internet users with **_0.6% decrease_** between 2020 and 2021. Internet penetration stood at 78.2% in same year while the average in MENA region is roughly 72%. On social media, there were 4.37Million users.The total number of social media users remained unchanged between 2020 and 2021 equivalent to 64.3% of the total population. From a mobile connection perspective, there were 4.57 Million mobile connections with an increase of 0.8% compared to January 2020 representing 67.3%$ of the total population.[15]

According to UNCTAD B2C e-commerce index 2020, Lebanon ranked 7th among the top ten developing and transition economies in West Asia, meaning the top ten highest economies in the region. Furthermore, Lebanon ranked 64th in the UNCTAD B2C e-commerce index 2020 compared to 69 in 2019, with an index value of 60.4 compared to 60.3 in 2019[16].Revenue in the e-Commerce market is projected to reach US$869m in 2021 with an expected annual growth rate (CAGR 2021-2025) of 6.99%, resulting in a projected market volume of US$1,139m by 2025.The market's largest segment is Fashion with a projected market volume of US$265m in 2021. In the e-Commerce market, the number of users is expected to amount to 3.2m users by 2025. User penetration will be 45.3% in 2021 and is expected to hit 50.4% by 2025.The average revenue per user (ARPU) is expected to amount to US$283.41.[17]

The importance of e-commerce B2C adoption, resides in the fact that the higher the consumer adoption to the online purchases the more SMEs will follow the e-commerce adoption in their sales approaches at the national level which will facilitate and accelerate the learning curve of SMEs in their digital journey and opens a window towards cross border digital sales playing an important role in trade facilitation.

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[13] www.bdl.gov.lb

[14] https://beirutdigitaldistrict.com/
[15] Digital 2021: Lebanon
[16] UNCTAD B2C e-commerce index 2020
[17] https://www.statista.com/outlook/dmo/ecommerce/lebanon

C. The digitization of the export ecosystem

As per the latest economic plan published by the Ministry of Economy and Trade[18], "shifting from a rent based to a productive economic system requires a deep – and sometimes painful – transformation at all levels." The plan also gives a particular focus to several productive sectors with high potential for export including the industrial and agriculture sectors being sources of national comparative advantages and value creation. As such, Lebanon needs to create an enabling environment for trade, ***leverage digital technologies and tailor them to the digital era*** with particular attention given to upgrading these promising sectors and tapping the country's export potential.

Several initiatives have been taken throughout the past years, at different paces, most of which are conducted by the private sector. The current economic instability added to the negative spillovers generated by Covid-19 pandemic accelerated tackling export from different aspects one of which is digitalization whether up-skilling through delivering trainings to SMEs and in the form of "Training of Trainers" or through developing platforms that could facilitate the reach to international markets.

According to the previous director of investor relations at IDAL[19] , several digitalization initiatives are being conceived or have been already initiated:

- A large consortium among seven UN entities (UNIDO, UNDP to name a few) Ministry of economy, ministry of Industry, Ministry of Agriculture, IDAL and BIEEL (Fair Trade Lebanon) and QOOT Cluster have united to execute an export support project consisting of conceiving an Export platform with aim to provide a digital tool for export services. The project takes into consideration the existing platforms (mentioned below) and will provide a global linkage among all national platforms and complement their services.Also the consortium will be working on generating related policies at the micro, mezo and macro levels.
- IDAL has already been working on an "Export Lebanon"platform delivering similar services as the [Italian export promotion platform](#)such as single export promotion window, market analysis, learning how to export, find foreign partners, intermediary channels, linkages with "economic attaches" etc. The platform is supposed to scale and include additional services to deliver export guarantees, etc. Due to the current country's situation, the platform development has been on hold.
- IDAL has developed a Business Match Making [(BMM)](#) with aim to link investors with business owners searching for investments to develop and expand their business. It is a facilitating platform that SMEs looking to improve their export would be able to benefit from. Also, due to the current situation, the project has been parked till further notice.
- [Berytech](#) will be launching soon the "Export academy" project's execution under the "Productive Sector Development Program" (PSDP) program managed by UNDP. The export academy as its name indicates, will be providing training services to up-skill export expertise which will be utilizing digital toolscustomized for the purpose.

The chamber of commerce, industry and agriculture of Beirut and Mount Lebanon under Internisa EU funded project (ENI CBCMED) has launched several digital free trainings one of which will be conducted during October 2021 for women in the ICT industry. Other digital free trainings include maritime logistics, customs, and port activities.

Ecomconnect (ITC) is currently executing a training project on e-commerce for women entrepreneurs and MSMEs wishing to promote their products internationally and increase their export sales through virtual

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[18] https://www.economy.gov.lb/en/

[19] Mrs. Amira Mourad, ex director investor relations IDAL, currently MSMEs programs director at Berytech, amira.elmourad@berytech.org.

market platforms. The Project consists of training a pool of e-commerce advisors who in turn will train the MSMEs (TOT methodology). The number of women entrepreneurs targeted is 120.

In April 2021, the Ministry of Economy and trade and Rene Moawad Foundation signed an MOU to establish the platform "Lebtrade", which aims at facilitating agricultural exports. The platform aims at stimulating exports to boost economic development, as well as promoting local products and displaying Lebanese agricultural products in international markets

D. Proposal of reinforcement axes

In the SME Export Country Profile, Lebanon's working group related to SME Internationalization identified four national priorities to boost SME export[20] :

1. Digitalization and Exports, including facilitation of (electronic) payments abroad.
2. Accessing new markets
3. Revision of the current association agreement with the EU to introduce simplified provisions on rules of origin, following the example of Jordan.
4. Development of a quality seal for the Lebanese products.

Taking into consideration the above priorities, we suggest focusing on three axes all within the export digitalization approach: 1) Strategic Level, 2) Application of digitalization to the ecosystem to create an accelerating environment to SMEs toward Export using digital tools and services, and 3) at the SMEs level through programs, awareness, capacity building and up skilling efforts.

● From a strategic perspective, the absence of a National Export Strategy that could act as a roadmap for future development projects is a serious setback towards converging all efforts toward boosting export. Thus a National Export Strategy accounting digital tools and services seems to be imperative to avoid working in silos mode.

● From a business environment perspective, empowering export through digitalization necessitate simplified procedures, several enablers and e-services that would facilitate trade.

● MSME digital inclusion would be the third enforcement axe we suggest focusing on. USAID has been a pioneer in developing programs to help SMEs in their exporting journey. Thus more focus should be exerted on similar initiatives jointly between the public and the private sector, and tailored programs per industry and size of the enterprise or theme (Gender inclusion, Green export, ICT services, etc). E-commerce as a window to international markets should be backed up by a national virtual marketplace that can play a regional role whether at the B2B or B2C level. Digital inclusion necessitates up skilling and capacity building that will generate a spillover effect at the midterm.

Taking into consideration the three axes mentioned above, we suggest four pilot project proposals that might serve the purpose. It remains to the SBA coordinator's evaluation and the working group to decide whether to adopt any or propose differently. Below is an executive summary of the pilot projects:

1. **Export Pact and Blue Print of a digital one stop shop portal offering services to exporting SMEs**

Collaboration between stakeholders of the exporting ecosystem has been highlighted as a challenge. This challenge has been solved by some of the benchmarked countries by creating collaboration frameworks like

[20] MED MSNEs, Policies for inclusive growth, MSME export development in six EU southern neighborhood countries, a regional discussion perspective paper, August 2021, GOPA, page 61

the Italian Pact for Export or French Team France Export Strategy that aligns stakeholders behind a common vision and strategy. This collaboration can be sealed in a MoU or Pact that offers a framework for collaboration. This collaboration should lead to the creation of a digital portal integrating all services targeting exporting SMEs, these services will be organized around the user journey, turning it into a user friendly one stop shop for exporting SMEs and stakeholders of the export ecosystem. MED MSMEs program can facilitate the development of the Pact and the concept and user experience design for the portal. A project owner on the strategic and operational level is to be defined.

2. **Streamlining export procedures trough digitalization**

Digitalizing a system that is not efficient makes it even worse. Export procedures are currently complex and sometimes unclear. Mapping these processes in collaboration with the working group will give all stakeholders the same understanding of the current situation but also dependencies and overlaps. The exercise of rethinking the process by leveraging design thinking (which is a methodology from the digital/ innovation space) will make it more efficient and user centered. Enabling it by a digital portal will accelerate it even more. This exercise is collaborative and will include all stakeholders of the export ecosystem to succeed. MED MSME can support with identifying a mapping methodology and facilitating the mapping exercise and rethinking the current procedures towards a more streamlined, efficient, user friendly process. Digitalizing it could be a subsequent step of the pilot. A project owner on the strategic and operational level is to be defined.

3. **Personalized access to relevant information**

Lots of information is available but stays fragmented and inefficiently used unless it's aggregated and organized in a way that allows end beneficiaries to find relevant information fast, timely and personalized way to their current needs and stage in the export process. A framework for aggregation and presentation of this information needs to be designed. Inspired by the Irish or Danish export portals, a similar experience can be designed to capture information about exporting SMEs in a smart and user friendly way. The design of a dynamic portal can be facilitated by MED MSMEs with a data collection framework to allow the sustainability of this initiative. Project owners on the strategic and operational level are to be defined.

4. **Design a digital transformation program for exporting SMEs**

One of the main challenges of digitalization of export promotion is the level of digital readiness of the exporting SMEs themselves. Countries who came out strong out of the COVID crisis have supported their SMEs with their digital transformation. Inspired by Malaysian and Chinese bold initiatives, MED MSMEs suggests to design a digital transformation framework that allows the industrialization of the advisory support to exporting SMEs. A self digital maturity assessment can be conducted to evaluate the current readiness state and articulate a desired state. MED MSMEs program can support with a concept how to get there.

E. Features of the pilot support project

- The project should be targeting exporting SMEs and have direct impact on the export ecosystem (procedures, export support policies / instruments, exporting SMEs agencies and representations)
- It has to be aligned with the national priorities.
- Potential for duplication, scaling, bilateral collaboration.
- Pilot budget 50K Euros: duration 2 to 4 months.
- Should be validated by the SBA coordinator and the TA.
- Ideally pilots build on projects that have already started and where the digital component can be an accelerator of impact
- Learning expeditions could be considered where relevant if the project working group estimates that it will accelerate expected outcomes.

F. Assessment of pilot support action and recommendations

On the fourth of November 2021, a round table was organized by the SBA coordinator to discuss with the members of the SME internationalization working group and the experts potential pilot projects that could be beneficial taking into consideration the current country's uncertainties.

Several of the invitees have revealed projects under execution, all sponsored through international programmes, aligned with the MED MSMEs efforts in regard to the SME internationalization pillar.

Some of the projects that were mentioned and features overlapping functions or converges toward the same export objective:

- Lebtrade platform executed in collaboration between Renee Mouawad Foundation and the ministry of Economy and trade to facilitate agriculture exports.

- Export Platform executed through UNDP aiming to promote export services.

- Berytech is developing an export academy in collaboration with several international bodies such as CBI and locally with Qoot Cluster.

- The chamber of commerce, Industry and agriculture in Zahleh developed an application to help promote organic fruits and fresh vegetables that can access international markets.

It was obvious during the discussions, highlighted by several of the invitees, the need to map the current projects under execution or that will be executed at the short term and to develop a strategy or at least a plan on how to link all projects having similar export objectives using digital tools and services.

In this regard, the highlighted need intersects with the first pilot project proposed "**Export Pact and Blue Print of a digital one stop shop portal offering services to exporting SMEs".** MED MSME programme will be able to intervene in this area through facilitating linkages among overlapping projects such as "Lebtrade" and the "Export Platform" from one side, and those with complementary projects such as "Export Academy" and ICT training.

A detailed benchmark on international practices and projects within the same scope could be developed to help stakeholders identify requirements of successful initiatives and the measures that were taken to secure ultimate objectives. This benchmark would help projects in unifying the services offered and identify the most important features exporting SMEs would need.

On a different note, developing a pact between public and private sector seems to be essential. According to international practices, one important factor in the success of internationalization in general and export more specifically, is the collaboration between public and private sector. Taking into consideration the absence of a national export strategy that orchestrates the efforts exerted in both. MED MSME programme can support in developing a draft collaboration pact based on the international best practices, among related ministries and the active actors in the private sector.

G. Annex: Pilot Projects mechanisms

1. Export Pact and Blue Print of a digital one stop shop portal offering services to exporting SMEs

Action	Cooperation pact between the actors of the ecosystem for the digitalization of services dedicated to exporting SMEs. Design of the digital user experience and interactions with the actors involved.
Relevance of the action: Why?	The actors of the export ecosystem are aware of the importance of coordination but need to set up a framework for this coordination for it to become systematic.
Inspiration	Italian Export Pact Team France export Italian export portal Industry-specific portals (France)
General objective	Increased coordination among ecosystem actors and harmonization of initiatives for providing digital services to exporters to increase the efficiency and quality of the digital service offering. Provide the exporting SME with an integrated, efficient, easy-to-understand and easy-to-follow experience.
Specific objectives	Enable ecosystem players to join forces to develop a digital service offering in the form of a single platform. Create a forum for the discussion and future development of digital export services (export procedures, export promotion, export development) that are well coordinated and adequately take into account the target group perspective. Create a design for a digital portal integrating the steps of the exporter's journey and connecting the actors involved in each step.
Expected results	A cooperation pact signed by all the actors of the ecosystem A roadmap of coordinated activities to develop digital export services, including an export platform A committee has been created to steer the implementation of the pact. A user experience defined (Users being the exporting SME but also the actors of the export ecosystem).
Project owner (to be discussed with country WG)	Lebanon: TBD (Strategic), TBD (Operational)

Target group	Exporting SMEs
Activities suggested as part of the MED MSMEs program	Creation of a working group for the implementation of the Pact, with input from experts on international best practices, including the Italian Export Pact. Expert support on how to set up an export platform harmonizing current initiatives into a single portal.
Implementation timeline	November 2021 – April 2022
Deliverables	Draft pact, established Export pact, signed Roadmap for an export platform, developed Mock Ups and user stories developed A collaborative concept around the platform

2. **Streamlining export procedures, mapping of steps and procedures for exporting SMEs**

Action	Build a comprehensive map for steps and players involved in the journey of exporting SMEs Identify bottlenecks and possibilities to rethink the process prior to digitalizing it.
Relevance of the action: Why?	Export Ecosystem players have identified the need to have a common view of the current procedures with touch points and players involved at every step. This mapping will also help identify possible data entry points and identify data collection strategies. This mapping will help assess the gaps in the current export ecosystem and rethink it partially or completely.
Inspiration	Exporter Portal (Italy) - https://export.gov.it/ PortNet (Morocco) - https://www.portnet.ma/
General objective	Simplifying export procedures first by building a common view of the current procedures map and ideas for simplification. Once simplified the procedures can be digitalized.
Specific objectives	Allow stakeholders of the export ecosystem to have a common view of the procedures by building a services map including for every step the owner, touch points, inputs and outputs, dependencies, challenges, etc. This exercise is the basic first step to start a series of design thinking workshops to, collaboratively, design the ideal process, and adjust it considering the constraints of your country.

Expected results	A comprehensive map of the current export and internationalization procedures.
	A conversation is initiated between stakeholders
	Empathy for exporting SMEs and acknowledgement of the complexity of the current procedures if applicable.
	Ideation for streamlined and enhanced procedures for exporting companies.
Project owner (to be discussed with Country)	Lebanon : TBD (Strategic), TBD (Operational)
Target group	Export support ecosystem
	Final beneficiaries: exporting SMEs
Activities suggested as part of the MED MSMEs program	Working group maps procedures according to a services mapping framework suggested by experts. Map is developed in a collaborative way with the working group.
	Workshops facilitated by experts help working group identify challenges and potential solutions through simplification and or digitalization
	Design thinking workshops to design optimized procedures.
	Develop a concept for digitalization of the streamlined processes
Implementation timeline	November 2021 – April 2022
Deliverables	Map of current export procedures including for every step the owner, touch points, inputs and outputs, dependencies, challenges, etc.
	Concept for a streamlined process
	Concept for digitalization of the process or parts of it

3. Personalized access to relevant information

Action	Aggregate relevant information and provide personalized information to exporting SME through a digital platform

Relevance of the action: Why?	Export Ecosystem players have identified the need to have a common view of the current procedures with touch points and players involved at every step. This mapping will also help identify possible data entry points and identify data collection strategies. This mapping will help assess the gaps in the current export ecosystem and rethink it partially or completely.
Inspiration	Denmark export portal - https://thetradecouncil.dk/en/services Enterprise Ireland - https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/
General objective	Simplify access to relevant information (related to country processes, market information, target market information, relevant programs on the national and regional level) Aggregate information and make them available in a digital and personalized way for exporting SMEs.
Specific objectives	Allow exporting SMEs to access relevant information. This information is probably available today but fragmented. Information needs to be identified, aggregated and personalized access facilitated.
Expected results	Information aggregated and is simple to use User experience is personalized to the profile and needs of the exporting SME Information curated and added systematically Concept for personalization of information fine tuned (could be a set of questions to narrow down the selection of information)
Project owner (to be discussed by country)	Lebanon: TBD (Strategic), TBD (Operational)
Target group	Export support ecosystem Final beneficiaries: exporting SMEs
Activities suggested as part of the MED MSMEs program	Design of the digital platform experience Design a data collection framework Identify potential sources of data Learning expedition to inspiration countries

Implementation timeline	November 2021 – April 2022
Deliverables	Concept for the data collection (data sources identified)
	Concept for the information portal (owner, stakeholders, roles, budget, etc)
	User experience for the portal (user journey, mock ups, user stories)

4. Design a digital transformation program for exporting SMEs

Action	Design a digital transformation program for exporting SMEs
Relevance of the action: Why?	One of the main challenges of digitalization of export promotion is the level of digital readiness of the exporting SMEs themselves.
Inspiration	Malaysia, China have run massive programs to support SMEs with their digital transformation for more resilience.
	EBRD Tunisia is also running a new support program for exporting SMEs "Insadder" with a digital transformation advisory component.
General objective	Elevating the capabilities of exporting SMEs to adopt digital tools and models.
	These SMEs will then integrate easier and better in a transformation of the export promotion landscape and will make better use of any new offerings and opportunities.
	Ideally export promotion agencies would have developed libraries, SMEs could tap into.
Specific objectives	Have a clear view of the current digital maturity level of identified exporting SMEs pool.
	Establish strategic and tactical roadmaps to get them from the current state to the desired state.
	Reach a stronger maturity of exporting SMEs in all pillars of digital transformation by supporting them in the implementation of these strategies
	Create a systematic approach to delivering advisory to selected SMEs and a model that allows this concept to scale and serve a bigger number of SMEs.
	Build communities and fora where these SMEs can exchange and create a dialogue with export promotion organizations

Expected results	A clear map of the digital maturity level of a selected pool of SMEs Supported SMEs progressed from current state, reaching stronger maturity levels. Collaboration between exporting SMEs and export promotion agencies reinforced. Data collection in the export ecosystem improved.
Project owner	Lebanon :TBD(Strategic), TBD (Operational)
Target group	Exporting SMEs
Activities suggested as part of the MED MSMEs program	Build a digital transformation advisory support concept Self digital maturity assessment to be filled in by exporting SMEs in country Comprehensive roadmap about how to take identified SME pool from the current maturity state to the desired state.
Implementation timeline	November 2021 – April 2022
Deliverables by MED MSMEs	A concept and roadmap of the project (budget and delivery partner identified) Self assessment developed and delivered, Analysis of collected data