

## MED MSMEs PROGRAMME CAPITALISATION AND CLOSING EVENT KEY TAKEWAYS

@UfM, Barcelona, September 14, 2023

The MED MSMEs Programme (2018-2023) organized its capitalization and closing event under the auspices of DG NEAR on September 14, 2023. The event, held at the Union for the Mediterranean in Barcelona, was attended by delegations from the South Med partner countries including national SBA Coordinators and representatives of the public and private sector who took an active



part in the implementation. This was the opportunity to take stock of the Programme's achievements and discuss recommendations for future initiatives aimed at improving further the business environment for MSMEs in the EU Southern Neighbourhood.

### ➤ Taking stock of achievements

The event was opened by Ms Ingrid SCHWAIGER, Deputy Head of Unit, DG NEAR who stated that the event was conceived as a forward-looking dialogue aimed at issuing recommendations for future initiatives.

She reminded that, throughout the 4 years, challenges encountered were boldly taken by the Programme thanks to a swift switch to digital, the dissemination of COVID responses and the continuous dynamic articulating the regional and national levels.



Ingrid SCHWAIGER, Deputy Head of Unit, DG NEAR

Ms SCHWAIGER reminded that the Programme's objective was to contribute to the improvement of policies and regulations affecting MSMEs in 10 South Med partner countries in the fields of Internationalisation and Access to Finance. The Programme started by developing a mapping of national priorities based on which common areas of interest were identified and discussed with the relevant working groups organized at national level by the SBA Coordinators. Activities were

selected based on the value added of the regional lens, i.e. the usefulness of peer-to-peer regional dialogue nurtured by the exchange of EU and South Med good practices and tools. As a result, innovative policy and regulatory subjects were addressed. They encompassed digitalisation and innovative finance, fintech in gender lens, regional digital single window for external trade and integrated support platforms for exporters.

In that spirit, Ms SCHWAIGER encouraged participants to take advantage of the gathering, at the UfM in Barcelona, of professionals who have been particularly active over the last years and who form *de facto* the core of a Community of Practice that could become sustainable.



Said CHARNA, Senior Economic Advisor, UfM

Mr. Said CHARNA recalled that the Programme was contributing to the Work Programme (2021-2024) of the UfM Regional Platform for Industrial Cooperation (RPIC), in the areas of SMEs access to finance and internationalisation.

He stressed the importance of knowledge and experience sharing among peers to inform the ministerial level in the area of MSME policy and regulatory reform. As regards the Programme's activities in the field of SME digitalisation, he reminded the active support of the UfM to the innovation in the region and announced the UfM/ UNIDO Women in

Business Forum 2023, that will take place in October 2023 in Tunis dedicated to the thematic of empowering women in Industry and Innovation.

The Team Leader of MED MSMEs (Christophe MALHERBE) recalled that the Programme applied the Small Business Act (SBA) principles to contribute its share to the implementation of the UfM RPIC work Programmes. This methodology translated into a vision, an ambition, a bottom-up approach as well as workplans developed in a collaborative way with stakeholders.

Among activities aligned with national priorities, the programme selected those interesting a majority of partner countries and those likely to be additional to what is done or planned at national level. Emerging or frontier topics selected gave systematically raise to knowledge creation, peer-to-peer dialogue and the sharing of tools brought in by champions or agents of change in the EU, in the South Med and beyond. He also reminded that the 120+ good practice shared and 2,000 participations illustrated that the Tabadool community of practice became a reality.

Mr Paolo CASTRATARO, MED MSMEs' key expert, briefly outlined the Programme's intervention in the fields of SME exports, digitalisation of SMEs and their ecosystem, involving the main institutional and private export stakeholders in the Southern Neighbourhood, in addition to the SBA coordinators.



MED MSMEs - C. MALHERBE - P. CASTRATARO

Following an analysis of policies and instruments supporting SME exports and digitalisation, pilot projects and regional events were undertaken to raise awareness among policymakers and SME support organisations in the areas of digitalisation of exporting SMEs, the simplification and digitalisation of international trade procedures (e.g. digital Single Windows), cross-border e-commerce, virtual marketplaces and digital support service platforms for exporting SMEs.

In this last area, the meeting between peers with the Italian counterparts involved in managing the "export.gov.it" platform (CdP, SIMEST, ITA, SACE and Union Camere) in Rome in June 2023 proved a success.

As regards access to finance, the Team Leader recalled that the themes selected contributed to the national financial inclusion strategies from an innovation perspective. Topics tackled included notably the principles of the EU Payment Services Directive N2 paving the way to Banking 4.0, the regulatory sandbox, the design of a regional counter-guaranty mechanisms, mainstreaming gender in fintech as well as enhancing the impact of Non-Banking Financial Institutions through digitalisation.

Mr. Ali BERRADA, MED MSMEs' expert, presented the Programme's contribution to the creation and sharing of knowledge on access to finance and SMEs internationalisation through the community of practice. This resulted in the production of 13 monthly pages (from July 2022 to July 2023) including 99 good practices and tools, 185 links and 80 news items. He stressed the importance to exploit collective intelligence by a sustained collaborative work and interaction that could be formalized into a Charter of members.

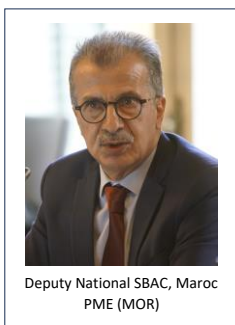
Ms. Maria DOBBI, expert in charge of the MED MSMEs monitoring presented the key outcomes indicators of the logical framework of the Programme (EU OPSYS system). She also presented the results of the surveys administered among the Programme stakeholders highlighting that 93% of participants were satisfied with the 10 regional events organized by the Programme.

Ms. Catherine MINGUELLA, capitalization expert, highlighted some practices put in action by the Programme and that could inspire the design of future initiatives. Particularly, the strategic anchor into the UfM RPIC, the intervention strategy and positioning (SBA Coordinators and working groups), the dialogue infrastructure and the emergence of a new community of practice.

## ➤ Key discussion points

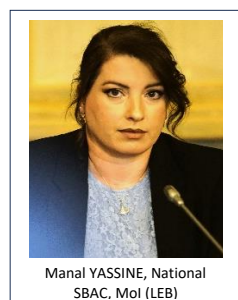
### **SBA Coordinators session**

- Owing to the weakness of the economic integration in the South Med region, the regional approach should keep on being promoted, widened and deepened. Specific KPIs should be adopted and monitored (EGY, JOR, LEB).



- Beyond the policies supporting access to finance, internationalization and digitalization, the green transition should be prioritized as illustrated the recent events that have impacted the region (EGY, MOR).

- Regional initiatives should also support mobilizing technical and financial resources at national / local level allowing the operationalisation of identified support initiatives (e.g. TA or budget support) (MOR, JOR).







Mira HUSSEIN, National SBAC,  
JEDCO (JOR)

- There is a need to further operationalize the SBA platform by formalizing a medium-term EU-SBAC common vision and organizing regular meetings to discuss plans and achievements (LEB).

- Regional initiatives could also focus on social and circular economy and dedicate resources to develop national competencies through training and study tours (MOR, TUN)

- Specific training could be extended to SBACs to further strengthen their capacity to deal with regulatory evolutions, best practices and emerging trends in the field of SME support (TUN).



Ali GOMRI - National SBAC,  
APII (TUN)

- There is a dire need to further support the digitalization of public services supporting MSMEs, as well as to provide training in relation to MSME digitalization (ISR).

- Endowing SBACs with budget resources allowing them to better co-implement regional recommendations at national level (TUN, JOR).



Nir BEN AHARON, National  
SBAC, MoEI (ISR)

### Stakeholders session

- MSMEDA (EGY) reminded that they chaired one of the 3 working groups (Governance), that is considered a cross-cutting activity for Access to finance & internationalization. They praised the contribution of the Programme to the exchange of experiences among stakeholders, the production of reference knowledge documents (country outlooks and road map), Infosheet on SME policies that were shared with all stakeholders. Going forward, MSMEDA representative stressed the importance of enabling an inclusive fintech industry as it is significantly growing in Egypt as well as green approach for Microfinance & SMEs.



Marwa ABDELTAWAB,  
MSMEDA Senior Manager



Mounir FERRAM, ASMEX ED  
(MOR)

- ASMEX (Morocco) greatly appreciated the intervention approach and the type of actions promoted in the field of exports aimed at disseminating information and promoting exchanges between operators in the Southern Neighbourhood and EU. The representative of the association stressed that they learned from the experience of their peers in the region and that such peer-to-peer dialogue should be sustained.

- The representative of BANK AL MAGHRIB highlighted the EU case in PSD2 and the mainstreaming of gender to unlock financial inclusion for women well complemented national efforts by drawing the attention to good practices. Peer-learning (communication tools, platforms: newsletter, Tabadool & periodic meetings) should be sustained, but dialogue should be supported by regional data that could be harnessed through ad



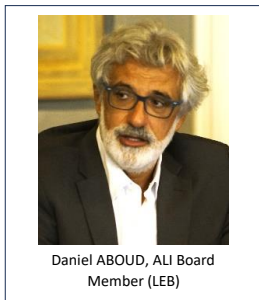
HE Abdelfattah AL KAYED,  
JEDCO CEO (JOR)



Ibtissam EL ANZAOUI, Financial  
Inclusion BAM (MOR)

hoc questionnaires. Cross-border projects could also be valuable supported in the fields of innovative financial services, FinTech, women & youth financial inclusion.

- JEDCO's CEO (Jordan) highlighted the inputs developed within the framework of the actions carried out by MED MSMEs which have inspired the preparation of new support programmes for SMEs and their operating environment in Jordan, including the new bilateral cooperation programme funded by the EU.
- The CEO of Jordan Loan Guaranty Corporation (JLGC) reminded that 24 employees of the corporation participated in the Programme's activities, activities that were subsequently discussed internally to rip the benefits of them. The MED MSMEs initiatives in relation to innovative finance (fintech and gender, regulatory sandbox and counter-guaranty) have been invaluable, but the efforts should be sustained over time.



- The representative of the Association of Lebanese Industrialists highlighted the role of the national SBA Coordinator and the fact that the Programme was a good example of public-private dialogue. The Programme was very informative as regards innovative practices implemented in other parts of the world. He insisted, though, on the necessary engagement of the ministerial level to ensure that actions are taken at national level.

- The Head of the Regulation Unit at the Ministry of Industry (Israel) confirmed the interest in the sharing of international practices by the Programme and presented some ongoing initiatives aimed at involving the private sector in the regulatory reform (e.g. licensing).



- UTICA's representative (Tunisia) drew participants' attention to the need to adapt the EU's cooperation with the countries of the region to take account of the latest global upheavals, with greater emphasis on relations with the African continent.



## ➤ Conclusions

- There was a consensus that the Programme generated high value added as regards the elaboration of innovative policies, regulations, and tools pertaining MSME financing and SME internationalization.
- The quality of the expertise provided by the Programme was particularly appreciated, and notably the provision of state-of-the-art EU and international practices in areas and sectors that are rapidly transforming.
- The innovative approach of the Programme, with the creation of specific flexible working groups at national level, allowed to articulate the regional and national levels, disseminate knowledge and tools towards the ecosystem and inspire national policies and regulations.

- The regional events allowing peer-to-peer matchmaking and exchanges proved to be particularly effective.
- Pilot projects proved to be very efficient to mobilize the national ecosystem around emerging topics. They deserve to be consolidated by the mobilization of resources to ensure scaling up (budget or international cooperation).

## ➤ The way forward

- The regional lens applied to innovative policies, regulations and instruments proved to be valuable, notably on themes that are undergoing high pace transformation, and can be usefully applied to other themes (e.g. green transition, digitalisation).
- Participants suggested that the UfM Regional Platform for Industrial Cooperation, could be further supported, notably by: 1) the definition of indicators of impact, 2) the collection and processing of relevant data at regional level, 3) the organization of regular experts and peer meetings (formal calendar), and 4) the reinforcement of the involvement of technical expertise in the Ministerial level platform (i.e. decisions, resources mobilization).
- Partner countries could take advantage of the national dialogue infrastructure developed (SBA coordinators, institutions and working group members) to take an active part in the dialogue with international cooperation partners, notably the EU Delegations, and participate in the implementation of upcoming targeted projects.

## ➤ Presentations / Special thanks

Access all presentations [HERE](#), or by scanning the QR Code below:



***And special thanks to the two pillars of the Programme who made this event a success!***



*Sameh FREI, Programme Assistant*



*Slim ELLOUZE, Programme Event Manager*

A project implemented by: