



**REPORT
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
COMCEC STRATEGY**

**40TH MEETING OF THE FOLLOW-UP
COMMITTEE OF THE COMCEC**

May 2024
COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE

PROGRESS REPORT

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1. Introduction:

COMCEC (The Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) has been continuing its efforts to enhance economic and commercial cooperation among the member countries of the OIC since 1984. The main objective of COMCEC is to address the economic challenges of the Islamic Ummah and contribute to its development efforts. In this regard, COMCEC serves as a policy forum for generating and disseminating knowledge, exchanging experiences and best practices, developing common understanding and approximating policies among the member countries.

COMCEC continues its activities in the light of the COMCEC Strategy. The Working Groups (WG), as part of the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy, provide a regular platform for member countries' experts to discuss policies and practices in each area of cooperation in order to create a common understanding and approximate policies. Research studies conducted for the Working Group Meetings reveal the state of affairs in the member countries related to the specific topics. Some of the member countries are studied in detail in these guides and research reports through field visits, surveys and interviews.

COMCEC Working Groups are held in the six areas of cooperation defined in the COMCEC Strategy, namely trade, transport and communications, tourism, agriculture, financial cooperation and poverty alleviation. Since the 39th session of the COMCEC, six Working Group meetings have been held. The detailed information on the Working Groups is available on the COMCEC website (<http://www.comcec.org/>).

The COMCEC Project Funding, another important implementation tool of the COMCEC Strategy, enables the member countries registered in the Working Groups as well as the relevant OIC institutions to develop and implement concrete cooperation projects. Moreover, the policy recommendations formulated by the Working Groups and adopted by the Ministerial Meetings are translated into concrete projects through this important mechanism.

The Member States and the relevant OIC Institutions have shown great interest to the COMCEC Project Support Instruments. In 2023, 17 projects were implemented under the COMCEC Project Funding. Moreover, 25 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2024.

Under the Al-Quds Program, 5 projects were implemented in 2023. For the year 2024, 8 new projects have been final listed and will be implemented by the Ministry of National Economy of the State of Palestine.

This report summarizes the progress achieved since the 39th Session of the COMCEC towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy.

2. Resolutions of the 39th Session of the COMCEC on the Implementation of the Strategy

The 39th Session of the COMCEC was held on 2-5 December 2023 in İstanbul. The Session was informed by the COMCEC Coordination Office (CCO) on the progress achieved towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy. After fruitful exchange of views and deliberations among the Member Countries, the 39th Session of the COMCEC adopted the following resolutions, among others, for ensuring the effective implementation of the

COMCEC Strategy.

- Commending the endeavors towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy and the Ministerial Policy Recommendations by the Member Countries and the relevant OIC Institutions, the 39th Session of the COMCEC invited the Member Countries to exert every effort, to the extent possible, to implement the Policy Recommendations and to harness the benefits of the current facilities and mechanisms, in particular the COMCEC Working Groups and COMCEC Project Support Programs, and requested the OIC Institutions to support the Member Countries to this end.
- The Session called upon the Member Countries to utilize the COMCEC Policy Follow-up System to submit necessary information and data on the implementation of the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations in their respective countries and requested the CCO to regularly report the progress in the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy to the COMCEC Sessions, the Follow-Up Committee Meetings and other relevant OIC fora.
- The Session expressed its appreciation to the efforts of the OIC General Secretariat, CCO, SESRIC, ICDT, IsDB, ITFC, ICIEC, ICD, IOFS, ISFD, SMIIC, and ICCD towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy and the Ministerial Policy Recommendations.
- Underlining the importance of the realization of the objectives set by OIC 2025: Programme of Action and active follow-up of the economic and commercial section of the Programme by the COMCEC, the Session requested the OIC General Secretariat to regularly submit comprehensive progress reports on the implementation of the Programme to the COMCEC Sessions and the Follow-up Committee Meetings.
- Underlining the significant role of the TNC in considering the issues experienced in the implementation of the TPS-OIC as well as discussing the road-map for the period ahead, the Session commended the convening of the TNC Meetings on 6-7 June 2023 and 20 November 2023, respectively, and called upon the TPS-OIC Participating States to actively participate in the meetings of the TNC in the upcoming period and report the status of implementation in their respective countries to the TNC Secretariat regularly.
- The Session welcomed the convening of Honorable Ministers and Heads of Delegations on 4th of December 2023 in the margin of 39th COMCEC Ministerial Session where Honorable Ministers and Heads of Delegations deliberated on issues regarding the OIC trade agenda, particularly TPS-OIC.
- The Session expressed its appreciation to the Republic of Türkiye for volunteering to host the Third Session of the Trade Negotiation Committee at ministerial level in an open ended format in the third quarter of 2024 and requests all Member Countries to actively participate in this important event.
- Taking note of the important role of the OIC Arbitration Centre for the settlement of disputes, the Session called upon the Member Countries to encourage their relevant institutions to actively participate in the activities of the OIC Arbitration Centre with a view to making use of services provided by the Centre.
- Recalling the relevant resolution of the 38th COMCEC Ministerial Session and the decision of the 39th COMCEC Follow-Up Meeting on developing a well-designed SME Program, the Session commended the efforts exerted by the interested Member Countries and the relevant OIC Institutions through conducting the research including Surveys and technical meetings towards designing COMCEC SME Program. The Session also welcomed that the High-Level Meeting on COMCEC SME Program was hosted by Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization (KOSGEB) of the Republic of Türkiye on 3 December 2023, in İstanbul.

- Taking note with appreciation the recommendations of the High-Level Meeting on COMCEC SME Program was hosted by KOSGEB of the Republic of Türkiye on December 3, 2023 in İstanbul on the sidelines of the 39th COMCEC Session, the Session invited interested Member Countries and relevant OIC Institutions to actively participate in the activities to be conducted under the Program.
- The Session called upon the Member Countries to support the promotion of the S&P OIC/COMCEC Shariah International Fund, which includes shares from the OIC COMCEC 50 Shariah Index, developed under the coordination of OIC Exchanges Forum, to the investors and the finance community in their respective countries.
- Reiterating the importance of the Dakar-Port Sudan Railway project as one of the most significant development projects aimed at enhancing the movement of people and goods among the African OIC Member Countries, the Session requested the General Secretariat, in cooperation with the IsDB Group, to expedite their communications with Member Countries wishing to hold the 2nd OIC Transport Ministerial Meeting as soon as possible with a specific agenda on the project mentioned above.
- Recalling the relevant resolutions of the COMCEC Ministerial Sessions, the Session called upon the Member Countries to continue supporting their relevant institutions, tourism companies and tour operators etc. to further their efforts through, among others, organizing promotion campaigns and additional tours to Quds al-Sharif for supporting Palestinian residents of Al-Quds and to demonstrate solidarity with them.
- Welcoming the organization of the Ninth OIC Ministerial Conference on Food Security and Agricultural Development held in Doha/State of Qatar on 1-2 October 2023, and the 5th Islamic Conference of Labor Ministers (ICLM) held on 21-23 November 2023, in Baku, Azerbaijan, respectively, the Session called upon the Member Countries to further their efforts towards the realization of the resolutions adopted by these Conferences.
- The Session welcomed the policy recommendations of the 21st Meeting of the Trade Working Group, which served as the preparatory meeting for the Ministerial Exchange of Views Session, on “Improving E-Commerce Capacities of the OIC Member Countries” held on 16-17 October 2023, and called upon the Member Countries to implement these recommendations and report the progress through COMCEC Policy Follow-up System.
- The Session decided on “Digital Transformation in Payment Systems in the OIC Member Countries” as the theme for the Exchange of Views Session at the 40th Session of the COMCEC and requested the COMCEC Financial Cooperation Working Group in its 22nd Meeting, in cooperation with the relevant OIC Institutions, to come up with concrete policy recommendations on this topic and report it to the 40th COMCEC Session.

3. Implementation of the COMCEC Strategy

3.1. Meetings of the COMCEC Working Groups

Since the 39th Session of the COMCEC, the 22nd round of COMCEC Working Group Meetings was held in April - May 2024 (21st Meeting for the Financial Cooperation Working Group). In addition to the relevant public institutions, representatives from the private sector and NGOs, as well as relevant international organizations, participated in the working group meetings to enable the reflection of a wide range of stakeholders’ perspectives during the discussions.

All the documents and presentations made during the WG Meetings are available on the COMCEC website. (www.comcec.org)

3.1.1. COMCEC Trade Working Group

International trade is an important catalyst for economic and social development, and enhancing international trade contributes to the enhancement of living standards, investments, and employment. According to SESRIC in 2023, the total trade volume worldwide is approximately 50 trillion USD. OIC Member Countries constitute a significant portion of global trade, accounting for 11.2% of production and 9.7% of consumption. Quality Infrastructure (QI) system serves as a key driver for enhancing the standards of products and services at a national level. It generally encompasses the legal and institutional framework within a country that fosters the quality assurance of goods and services. A robust national QI relies on effective collaboration between the public and private sectors across various facets of quality, including standards, conformity assessment, accreditation, and metrology. Metrology, an important component of QI, is the science of measurement, embracing both experimental and theoretical determinations at any level of uncertainty in any field of science and technology. OIC Member Countries with different development levels experience various challenges in metrology. This area, which is the fundamental element of the QI, directly affects the commercial activities.

Considering the importance of the subject, the COMCEC Trade Working Group (TWG) has devoted its 22nd and 23rd Meetings to “Improving E-Commerce Capacities of the OIC Member Countries” by focusing on the metrology field. During its 22nd Meeting, the Working Group has focused on the first draft of the Guide being prepared on this subject. Moreover, the experiences and perspectives of the Member Countries, international organizations and the private sector with regard to improving QI capacities have been shared with the participants. The final version of the Guide will be submitted to the 23rd TWG meeting.

3.1.2. COMCEC Financial Cooperation Working Group

Financial systems have rapidly evolved with technological advancements, particularly in payment systems. In particular, digitalization and the widespread use of smart devices have transformed customer and seller expectations, leading to a significant shift towards digital payments globally. Traditional cash and check-based methods have declined sharply in favour of digital alternatives, a trend further accelerated by the pandemic.

Accordingly, this transformation presents both challenges and opportunities, especially when aligning with Shariah-compliant principles. The digitalization of payment systems offers enormous potential for OIC Member Countries to build modern, efficient and inclusive financial ecosystems, leaving traditional methods behind. Therefore, to strengthen digital payment systems, sharing best practices and fostering collaboration among Islamic countries is crucial.

Given the importance of the subject, the Financial Cooperation Working Group (FCWG) has devoted its Meetings in 2024 to the theme of “Digital Transformation of Payment Systems in OIC Member Countries”. In this respect, the 21st Meeting of the FCWG was held on 30 April 2024 in a virtual-only format with the aforementioned theme. A specific research report is being prepared on this crucial topic. The preliminary findings of the report, as well as the experiences and perspectives of the Member Countries and international organizations, were presented during the 21st Meeting of the Working Group. The final version of the Report will be submitted to the 22nd Meeting of the Working Group, which will be held in September 2024.

3.1.3. COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group

The transportation sector stands out as one of the fundamental elements of social and economic development. A well-functioning transport system facilitates commercial and economic activities and thereby significantly contributes their smooth operation.

Within this framework, developing intelligent transportation systems is one of the important aspects of having a well-functioning transport system. Intelligent transportation systems, which radically change traditional transportation habits, not only promise people that the negative environmental effects of the transportation sector will decrease but also prioritize road safety and minimize accidents.

Considering the importance of the issue, the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group (TCWG) has devoted its 22nd and 23rd Meetings to "Developing Intelligent Transportation Systems in OIC Member Countries". A Policy Guide on the subject is being prepared for two consecutive COMCEC TCWG meetings (22nd and 23rd). The guide will identify best practices, innovative approaches and successful initiatives in developing intelligent transportation systems in the OIC Member Countries. The preliminary findings of the Guide, the experiences and perspectives of the Member Countries and private sector as well as international organizations were elaborated during the 22nd TCWG Meeting. The final version of the guide will be submitted to the 23rd Meeting of the TCWG to be held in September 2024.

3.1.4. COMCEC Tourism Working Group

Tourism sector contributes to national economies by increasing foreign exchange income and providing employment, and has a great share in the development of countries. Recent economic and social changes in the world resulted in different consumption habits in tourism sector including different tourism choices like, gastronomy, eco-tourism, cultural tourism, medical tourism, adventure and sports. In this respect, tourism has gained a new depth with these alternatives and gastronomy has become one of the vital complementary options in tourism sector.

Gastronomy is increasingly used in the marketing of destinations as a tourism product. While gastronomy makes the tourism destination more visible, it also adds value to the destination.

Considering the importance of the subject, Tourism Working Group (TWG) has devoted its Meetings in 2024 to the issue of branding and developing gastronomy in tourism sector. In this respect, 22nd Meeting of the TWG was held on May 2nd, 2024, in a virtual-only format, with the theme of "Developing and Branding Gastronomy Tourism Destinations within OIC". A research report is being prepared on this important topic for two consecutive COMCEC TWG Meetings. The preliminary findings of the Report, the experiences and perspectives of the Member Countries, International Organizations and Private Sector were presented during the 22nd TWG Meeting. The final version of the report will be submitted to the 23rd TWG meeting to be held in September 2024.

3.1.5. COMCEC Agriculture Working Group

Agriculture is one of the leading sectors in most OIC Member Countries, providing food, income, and employment. Since 2016, agricultural production in the OIC Member Countries has witnessed an increase of 13.2%, surpassing that of non-OIC developing countries (10.8%), developed countries (0.1%), and the global average (9.9%). Overall, the production of primary crops, livestock products, and fishery in the OIC Member Countries has displayed growth over the past decade, with certain commodities and sectors experiencing more significant increases than others.

Despite the considerable progress, the level of agricultural productivity in the OIC Member Countries remains insufficient to feed the growing population. This situation is particularly serious in animal production and calls for the development of livestock production. Due to the importance of the subject, the Agriculture Working Group (AWG) has devoted its Meetings in 2024 to discuss the topic of “Developing Livestock Production and Fishery to Foster Food Security for a Sustainable Agricultural Development in OIC Countries”. In this respect, 22nd Meeting of the AWG was held on April 30th, 2024, in a virtual-only format, with the aforementioned theme. A Guide on the subject is being prepared for two consecutive COMCEC AWG meetings (22nd and 23rd). The guide will identify best practices, innovative approaches and successful strategies to develop livestock production and fishery in the OIC Member Countries. The preliminary findings of the Guide, the experiences and perspectives of the Member Countries as well as international organizations were elaborated during the 22nd AWG Meeting. The final version of the Guide will be submitted to the 23rd Meeting of the Working Group to be held in September 2024.

3.1.6. COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group

The frequency and intensity of natural disasters globally have increased in recent decades, largely due to various factors, including climate change, population growth, urbanization, and environmental degradation. The climate crisis exacerbates the frequency and severity of natural disasters, comprising heatwaves, droughts, storms, floods, and wildfires with each passing year.

Limited access to resources, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of social support systems render the poor even more vulnerable in times of crisis. Efforts to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of natural disasters should, therefore, prioritize building resilience of the poor segments of the societies. This includes investments in early warning systems, infrastructure upgrades, disaster preparedness and response mechanisms, and strategies for sustainable development that take into account the increasing risks posed by climate change.

Considering the vital importance of the subject, Poverty Alleviation Working Group (PAWG) has dedicated its Meetings in 2024 to the issue of mitigating the negative effects of disasters on the poor. In this respect, the 22nd Meeting of the PAWG was held on May 2nd, 2024, in a virtual-only format, with the theme of “Alleviating Adverse Effects of Natural Disasters on Poor Segments of Society in the OIC Member Countries.”

A specific research is being prepared on this topic. The first draft of the said report was presented at the 22nd Meeting of the PAWG. The draft report includes background and key concepts of the topic as well as a case country analysis. The final version of the said research report will be submitted to the 23rd Meeting of the Working Group To be held in September 2024.

3.2. COMCEC Project Support Instruments

3.2.1. The COMCEC Project Funding

The COMCEC Project Funding is one of the two implementation instruments of the COMCEC Strategy, which aims at providing funding to the COMCEC Projects in the form of grants. The Strategy introduces a well-defined project cycle management with a clearly identified financial mechanism. The projects submitted by the Member States and the OIC institutions under the COMCEC Project Funding serve to the realization of the objectives of the Strategy and of the

policy recommendations adopted by COMCEC Sessions as well as to the mobilization of human and institutional resources of the Member States.

COMCEC Project Funding is a valuable tool to assist member countries in their policy-making endeavours. It turns COMCEC policy recommendations into practice while improving the institutional and human capacity of the Member Countries. The mechanism provides the project owners with the opportunity to implement projects in cooperation with other OIC Member Countries. In doing so, it facilitates sharing knowledge and experience in a specific theme among the member countries.

In 2023, 17 projects were implemented under the COMCEC Project Funding. Moreover, under the 11th Call for Project Proposals made in October 2023, 25 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2024 as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Projects to be financed through the COMCEC Project Funding in 2024 Implementation Year

No	Beneficiary Countries	Cooperation Area	Project Title
1	Azerbaijan, Türkiye	Agriculture	Experience Sharing on Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA)
2	Benin, Egypt	Agriculture	Capacity Building in Enriched Organic Fertilizer Production
3	Gambia, Türkiye	Agriculture	Improving Human and Institutional Capacity for the Development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in the Agriculture Sector of The Gambia and OIC Member Countries
4	Niger, Benin, Uganda, Egypt	Agriculture	Sedentary the Ruminant Herds to Ensure Food and Nutritional Security in Niger
5	Nigeria, Egypt, Sudan	Agriculture	Capacity Building on Organomineral Fertilizers
6	Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman	Agriculture	Capacity Building on Inclusion of Seasonal Workers into Agricultural Knowledge and Information System, in Qatar and (GCC) Countries
7	Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Morocco	Agriculture	Common Steps Towards Climate Change: Adaptation, Mitigation and Resistance Strategies in Stone Fruits
8	Pakistan, Mauritania, Senegal COMSTECH's Project	Agriculture	Promoting Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems (AKIS) and Precision Agriculture
9	15 Member Countries SESRIC's Project	Agriculture	Promoting Food Security in OIC Member Countries through Sustainable Agricultural Inputs
10	Sierra Leone, Türkiye	Digital Transformation	Legal and Regulatory Framework for E-Government
11	Türkiye and 32 other Member Countries	Digital Transformation	HackMasters (Capture The Flag, CTF) Cyber Security Challenge
12	Nigeria	Financial Cooperation	Digital Finance and Payment Systems Training for SME Value Chain Strengthening
13	Türkiye, Indonesia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Tunisia,	Poverty Alleviation	Developing Policy Framework Capacity in the Field of Social Security After Natural Disasters
14	14 Member Countries SESRIC's Project	Poverty Alleviation	Empowering Youth through Enhancing Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET): A Pathway to Employment and Success
15	Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger	Tourism	Capacity Building of Tourism Guides in Selected OIC Member Countries

No	Beneficiary Countries	Cooperation Area	Project Title
16	Nigeria, Gambia, Mali, Uganda	Tourism	Enhancing Capacities of Tourism Stakeholders for Adapting to Customers Changing Needs
17	Togo, Türkiye	Tourism	Improving Entrepreneurial Capacities of Selected Tourism Stakeholders for Ensuring Competitiveness in Tourism
18	Uganda, Cameroon, Malaysia, Senegal	Tourism	Empowering Entrepreneurship Skills of Community-Based Tourism Enterprises to Enhance Competitiveness of Tourism Industry
19	17 Member Countries SESRIC's Project	Tourism	Strengthening the Capacities of African Tourism Boards through Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices
20	Bangladesh, Malaysia	Trade	Strengthening Cross-Border E-Commerce Sector in Bangladesh through Enhancing Capacity of SMEs and Professionals
21	Indonesia, Malaysia, Türkiye, Brunei Darussalam, UAE	Trade	Developing Product Information and Determining Halal Critical Points
22	Suriname, Guyana, Türkiye	Trade	Increasing Internationalization of SMEs in Suriname and Guyana
23	Türkiye, Indonesia, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Malaysia	Trade	Free Zone Training Program for Internationalization of SMEs
24	Uganda, Türkiye, Guyana	Trade	Enhancing Good Governance and Technical Capacity in SME to Eliminate Informalities in The Sector
25	Gambia, Qatar	Transport and Communications	Improving Human and Institutional Capacity for the Development of an Institutional Framework for Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) in The Gambia.

Moreover, an online training program on the implementation process of the projects under the COMCEC Project Funding was held on April 3rd, 2024. Within the scope of the program, project staff were informed about the actors and their responsibilities in the implementation period, monitoring and reporting processes, and critical issues in the implementation period as well as basic working principles of the project management information system.

Furthermore, the 12th Call for Project Proposals will be open October 1st, 2024 under the COMCEC Project Funding.

3.2.2. COMCEC Al-Quds Program

The COMCEC Al-Quds Program has been developed as a sign of solidarity with Palestine considering the current situation and special conditions there, especially in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, in accordance with the resolutions of the Extraordinary Islamic Summits on Al-Quds as well as the COMCEC Sessions.

The scope of the program was enriched and new thematic priority areas including entrepreneurship, creating job opportunities and empowerment of youth, e-commerce and SME development, were added to the themes to be supported under the COMCEC Al-Quds Program. In this regard, 5 projects were implemented under the Al-Quds Program in 2023 as demonstrated the Table 2 below:

Table 2: Al-Quds Program: Projects implemented in 2023

No	Project Title
1.	Empowering the Palestinian Economy in Al Quds by means of Innovation & Entrepreneurship in the Tourism Sector

2.	Empowering the Al-Quds Human Capital by means of SMEs revitalization
3.	Increasing the tourism recovery opportunities in Al-Quds by promoting organized tours, and supporting entrepreneurs in handicraft industries
4.	Old City Butcheries: Economic and Social Support
5.	Supporting Traditional Handicrafts and Industries

Furthermore, this year, 8 new projects have been final listed and will be implemented by the Ministry of National Economy of the State of Palestine. This list of the projects to be implemented in 2024 is demonstrated below:

Table 3: Al-Quds Program: Projects to be implemented in 2024

No	Project Title
1.	Implementing a Tech Career Acceleration Program
2.	Strengthening Al Quds Economy by Increasing the Technical and Vocational Capacity of Youth in Handicrafts Sector
3.	Strengthening Small and Medium Enterprises in Al Quds: A Sustainable and Resilient Empowerment Approach Through Youth and Business Development
4.	Empowering Qudsi Youth and Women through Ceramic Arts and Tourism Development
5.	Economic Empowerment for Palestinian Women in Al Quds Governorate
6.	Jerusalemites Because We Are the Place and Time
7.	AI: Connecting Al Quds
8.	Rehabilitating Palestinian Youth for Electronic Trade

The projects aim to bolster economic empowerment and skill development in Al Quds. They encompass initiatives such as fostering technical and vocational capacity in handicrafts, supporting small and medium enterprises through youth and business development, empowering youth and women in various sectors, promoting economic empowerment for Palestinian women, leveraging AI, and rehabilitating Palestinian youth for participation in electronic trade. These efforts collectively seek to enhance the economy of people living in Al-Quds Al-Sharif.