

# Clean Energy Transition in the Middle East and North Africa and the Role of Small, Medium and Micro Firms

Cairo | 4-5 February 2025

## Context

Access to energy is becoming increasingly challenging, especially for energy-importing countries in the MENA region. This makes the transition to clean energy not just crucial, but urgent. Fortunately, the region holds significant comparative advantages due to its natural endowments: abundant solar radiation throughout much of the year and powerful wind nodes. Additionally, renewable energy has emerged as the most cost-effective power option today, particularly in MENA. With the rapid decline in renewable energy technology prices—highlighted by an 85 percent drop in the cost of electricity from solar power between 2010 and 2020—the region is uniquely positioned to lead in clean energy adoption. Furthermore, affordable electricity from renewable sources could decarbonize up to 90 percent of the power sector by 2050, dramatically reducing carbon emissions and playing a pivotal role in climate change mitigation.

The significance of this energy transition in MENA lies in its potential to meet the region's growing energy demands at affordable prices, drive inclusive and sustainable development, create new job opportunities, and support climate change resilience—all while adhering to crucial climate change mitigation and adaptation policies. In this regional context, where medium, small, and micro enterprises (MSMEs) are economic cornerstones, understanding their potential, challenges, and opportunities in the clean energy transition—as well as their capacity for job creation, climate resilience, and the empowerment of women and youth—is essential.

To address these pressing needs, the Economic Research Forum (ERF), in collaboration with The Middle East Institute and the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies, undertook an IDRC-funded project titled “*The Role of MSMEs in Fostering Inclusive and Equitable Sustainable Economic Growth in the Context of the Clean Energy Transition in MENA.*” Over the past two years, this project spanned six MENA countries—Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Sudan—and engaged various research teams to deepen our understanding of MSMEs' role in the clean energy transition. The project produced seven thematic papers, six national case studies, and thirteen policy briefs, offering a comprehensive foundation of new microdata, insights on cross-cutting issues, and an assessment of the institutional, financial, technical, and regulatory challenges faced by MSMEs in the region. Additionally, the research explored the skills needed and the impact of the energy transition on sustainable employment for youth, women, and marginalized groups, delivering essential policy recommendations to support MSMEs' pivotal role in advancing MENA's clean energy agenda.

## Objective

Over two days, this hybrid conference will bring together experts and key stakeholders to present and discuss research findings. This event provides a platform to share insights and discuss policy recommendations focused on the role of medium, small, and micro enterprises (MSMEs). Given that MSMEs account for the largest share of employment in the MENA economy, we will explore pathways to support their growth, with particular emphasis on green energy, youth employment, and gender inclusion across the region.

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## Day 1: Tuesday, February 4

9:30 – 10:00 | Registration

10:00 – 10:30 | **Welcome and opening remarks**

Welcome remarks: Ibrahim Elbadawi, *Economic Research Forum (ERF)*  
Wessam El Beih, *International Development Research Centre (IDRC)*  
Paul Salem, *Middle East Institute (MEI)*  
Makram Ouais, *Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS)*

Project overview - key highlights and milestones:  
Yasmeen Oraby, *Economic Research Forum (ERF)*

 **Part I: A new energy landscape: MENA's transition and the pivotal role of MSMEs**

10:30 – 11:00 | **Keynote speech: Charting a sustainable energy future for the MENA region: policies, vision, and strategic insights**

Speaker: Radia Sedaoui, *United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)*

11:00 – 12:00 | **Session 1: Transition to renewable energy: the imperatives, drivers, barriers and the role of MSMEs**

Moderator: Khaled Ghozlani, *International Development Research Centre (IDRC)*

Speaker: Atif Kubursi, *McMaster University & ERF*

Panelists: Ragui Assaad, *University of Minnesota & ERF*  
Bipasha Baruah, *Western University*  
Yosra Assaker, *The World Bank*

Open Discussion

 12:00 – 12:30 | **Networking and coffee break**



Access the full conference webpage and related publications

# Clean Energy Transition


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## Conference Agenda

Day 1: Tuesday, February 4

 Part II: Evidence-based solutions: national insights for MENA's energy shift

12:30 – 13:30 | **Session 2: Energy resilience in crises: insights from Sudan and Lebanon**

Moderator: Makram Ouaiss, *Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS)*


Speakers: **Resilient growth in Sudan: MSMEs and the future of clean energy**  
Muez Ali

**Lebanon case study**  
Marc Ayoub and Ahmad Diab

**Energy transition in the context of crises: comparative analysis of Sudan and Lebanon**  
Muez Ali and Rasha Akel

Panelists: Yaser Saied, *Ministry of Energy and Mining, Sudan*  
Jessica Obeid, *New Energy Consult*  
Amna Mahmood, *IGC State Fragility Initiative*

Open Discussion

 13:30 – 14:45 | **Lunch break**

14:45 – 16:00 | **Session 3: Unlocking employment opportunities in MENA in the context of energy transition**

Moderator: Bipasha Baruah, *Western University*

Speakers: **Potential employment generation capacity of renewable energy in MENA**  
Atif Kubursi and Hala Abou-Ali

**Gender equality and clean energy in MENA**  
Nada Ali and Racha Ramadan

Panelists: Michael Renner, *IRENA*  
Samantha Constant, *The World Bank*  
Kawther Lihidheb, *ECONOLER*

Open Discussion

# Clean Energy Transition in the Middle East and North Africa and the Role of Small, Medium and Micro Firms

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## Day 2: Wednesday, February 5

9:30 – 10:00 | Registration

10:00 – 10:15 | **Welcome and recap of day one**

Speaker: Yasmine Fahim, *Economic Research Forum (ERF)*

 **Part II: Evidence-based solutions: national insights for MENA's energy shift**

10:15 – 11:15 | **Session 4: National pathways to clean energy & sustainable growth  
Jordan and Egypt**

Moderator: Jorge Mario Arango Diaz, *GIZ*

Speakers: **Jordan case study**  
Ahmed Awad and Ibrahim Saif

**Egypt case study**  
Abeer ElShennawy and Mohamed Bouaddi

Panelists: Rasmi Hamzeh, *Jordan Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency Fund (JREEF)*  
Gihan Bayoumi Attia, *United Nation Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)*  
Omar Abu-Eid, *EU Jordan*

Open Discussion

11:15 – 12:15 | **Tunisia and Morocco**

Moderator: Ashraf Elsayed Elaraby, *Institute of National Planning (INP)*

Speakers: **Tunisia case study**  
Adel Ben Youssef

**Morocco case study**  
Michael Tanchum

Panelists: Sonia Mhamdi, *United Nation Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)*  
Moongyung Lee, *Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD)*  
Khaled Ghozlani, *International Development Research Centre (IDRC)*

Open Discussion

 12:15 – 12:45 | **Networking and coffee break**



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## Day 2: Wednesday, February 5

### 12:45 – 14:15 | **Session 5: The energy equation: supply, demand, and regulation in MENA's renewable landscape**

Moderator: Moongyung Lee, *Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD)*

Speakers: **The renewable energy supply and demand in MENA**  
Michael Tanchum and Colby Connelly

**How renewable power innovators meet regulatory hurdles:  
cases of solar power in the Gulf**  
Karen Young and Li-Chen

**The political economy of energy transition in MENA**  
Adeel Malik and Abeer ElShennawy

Panelists: Radia Sedaoui, *United Nations Economic and Social Commission  
for Western Asia (ESCWA)*  
Marcello Contestabile, *Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute (QEERI)*  
Héla Miniaoui, *Lusail University & ERF*

Open Discussion

### 14:15 – 15:15 | **Lunch break**

### 15:15 – 16:15 | **Session 6: Shaping a sustainable future: policy strategies for MENA's energy transition**

Moderator: Wessam El Beih, *International Development Research Centre (IDRC)*

Panelists: Ahmed ElBeltagui, *EU Egypt*  
Atif Kubursi, *McMaster University & ERF*  
Ibrahim Saif, *Jordan Strategy Forum & ERF*  
Maged Mahmoud, *RCREEE*

Open Discussion

### 16:15 – 16:30 | **Closing Remarks**

Speakers: Ibrahim Elbadawi, *Economic Research Forum (ERF)*  
Atif Kubursi, *McMaster University & ERF*