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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC) has been continuing its efforts towards enhancing economic and commercial cooperation among the OIC Member Countries since 1984. The main objective of the COMCEC is to address the economic challenges of the Islamic Ummah, to contribute to their development efforts and to enhance trade among the Member Countries. In this regard, COMCEC serves as an important cooperation platform for producing and disseminating knowledge, sharing experiences and best practices, developing a common understanding, approximating policies and implementing concrete projects among the Member Countries.

The Annual Progress Reports are submitted to the COMCEC Ministerial Sessions to present the progress in the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy. This Annual Progress Report 2024 provides an overview of the major achievements in the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy, since the 39th Session of the COMCEC. Accordingly, for each cooperation area, the Report provides the outcomes of the important projects of COMCEC as well as recent meetings of the relevant COMCEC Working Groups. Moreover, the progress in the implementation of the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations is included in this report. The activities of the OIC Institutions serving to the objectives of the Strategy are also highlighted.

Since the 39th Session of the COMCEC, held on 2-5 December 2023, 6 Working Group (WG) Meetings have been held successfully. For these meetings, 6 research reports/policy guides and 6 sectoral outlook documents have been produced by the COMCEC Coordination Office. All publications regarding the working group meetings are available on the COMCEC website: (<http://www.comcec.org>).

The Working Groups have continued to conduct policy debate sessions in their deliberations. The Member Country experts discuss policy recommendations on the theme of the meeting based on intensive research. These policy recommendations are then submitted to the Ministerial Session for consideration and adoption. Accordingly, the recommendations of this year's WG meetings will be submitted to the 40th Session of the COMCEC for consideration and necessary action.

The COMCEC Project Funding, another important implementation instrument of the COMCEC Strategy, enables Member Countries registered to the Working Groups as well as the relevant OIC Institutions, to develop and implement concrete cooperation projects. Moreover, the policy recommendations, which are formulated by the Working Groups and adopted by the Ministerial Sessions, are transformed into concrete projects through this mechanism. In this regard, 24 projects are being implemented by the OIC Member Countries and the relevant OIC Institutions and will be completed by the end of 2024.

Within the framework of COMCEC Al-Quds Programme, in 2021-2022 implementation period, 5 projects were implemented covering the areas of tourism promotion, cultural heritage, community resilience, online reservation and food tourism. The scope of the program has been enriched with the inclusion of new thematic areas namely, entrepreneurship, creating job opportunities and empowerment of youth, e-commerce and SME development. In this respect, 5 projects were implemented under the Al-Quds Program in 2023. Moreover, 8 projects are being implemented this year.

The activities of the OIC institutions aligned with the COMCEC Strategy play a crucial role for the effective and successful implementation of the Strategy. This report also gives information regarding various activities held over the course of last year that are in line with the COMCEC Strategy and organized by the relevant OIC Institutions, namely, COMCEC Coordination Office, SESRIC, ICDT, IDB Group, IOFS, SMIIC, and ICCD.

CHAPTER I: COOPERATION AREAS

1. TRADE

1.1. Trade Working Group

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. QI is required for the effective operation of domestic markets, and its international recognition is important to enable access to foreign markets. It is a critical element in promoting and sustaining economic development, as well as environmental and social well-being.

As an important component of QI, metrology field is the science of measurement, embracing both experimental and theoretical determinations at any level of uncertainty in any field of science and technology. The success of national economies depends upon the ability to manufacture and trade quality manufactured and tested products and components. It plays a crucial role in guaranteeing the precision, reliability, and consistency of measurements which are essential for product development, manufacturing, and quality assurance. OIC Member Countries with different development levels experience various challenges in metrology. Beyond its technical aspects, metrology directly affects commercial activities by enabling fair trade, ensuring regulatory compliance, and promoting innovation through precise and reliable data.

Given the importance of the issue, the COMCEC Trade Working Group (TWG) has devoted its 22nd and 23rd meetings to “Improving Quality Infrastructure in the OIC Member Countries” with a special focus on metrology field as an important component of QI. A policy guidance has been prepared on same theme to support the development of QI in OIC Member Countries, to share information on how to formulate an effective strategy by utilising relevant OIC institutions and international cooperation, and to provide detailed and concrete steps that may be useful for policy makers to consider in their efforts.

The 22nd Meeting of the COMCEC Trade Working Group was held on 6 May 2024 and preliminary policy guide have been discussed. As a sequel of the 22nd Meeting, the 23rd Meeting of the COMCEC TWG was held on 19-20 September 2024 with the same theme. The final draft of the guide has been discussed during the meeting. In both Meetings, the experiences and perspectives of the Member Countries, international organizations with regard to improvement of quality infrastructure by focusing on metrology field were shared with the participants.

In light of the main findings of the report and the deliberations during the meetings, the Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations:

- **Improving intra-OIC collaboration of National Quality Infrastructure (NQI) Institutions particularly specialized on Metrology field with a view to aligning with global standards and benefitting best practices internationally, taking into account the work of relevant OIC Institutions such as SMIC**
- **Encouraging harmonization of standards and regulations in alignment with international standards, such as ISO, IEC, Codex Alimentarius, and relevant SMIC standards, in order to facilitate working towards Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) and Multilateral Recognition Agreements (MLAs)**
- **Strengthening NQI Institutions by investing in capacity building to enhance their technical and operational capabilities, while fostering Public-Private Partnership (PPPs) to leverage private sector expertise and resources**
- **Enhancing the capacity of NQI Institutions through modernization of metrology infrastructure by upgrading laboratories to meet existing international primary standards**

- **Encouraging active participation in international forums on, among others, metrology and standardization to improve knowledge and practices in these areas**
- **Conducting metrological studies such as research projects, joint projects, capacity building activities and feasibility of excellence centers, particularly for trade of Halal products, to meet the diverse needs of all OIC Member Countries and enhance their global competitiveness**
- **Providing technical assistance, training, financial support, and awareness campaigns to encourage SMEs in OIC Member Countries to comply with internationally recognized certification schemes**
- **Integrating quality and safety principles in standards into educational curricula at all levels, strengthening consumer protection legislation, and enhancing consumer awareness of the importance of quality and safety**
- **Initiating and implementing a periodic assessment system to evaluate the alignment of standards, MRAs and MLRAs, and related initiatives, and to give feedback to businesses and stakeholders to report compliance challenges and issues with regional quality infrastructure**
- **Utilizing digitization and artificial intelligence technologies and techniques to raise the efficiency and effectiveness of quality infrastructure activities**

All the documents, including the Policy Recommendations document, and presentations made during the 22nd and 23rd Meetings of the Working Group are available on the COMCEC website. (www.comcec.org)

1.2. Intra-OIC Trade

TPS-OIC

Since the establishment of the COMCEC, trade has been one of the most important cooperation areas. In order to enhance trade among the OIC Member Countries, the COMCEC has initiated many programs and projects towards reaching this objective. The Trade Preferential System among the Member States of the OIC (TPS-OIC) is one of the most important projects of the COMCEC for fostering intra-OIC trade.

The TPS-OIC mainly based on three agreements, namely the Framework Agreement, the Protocol on Preferential Tariff Scheme (PRETAS), and the Rules of Origin. In order to join the System, member states need to fulfill two conditions at the same time, namely the ratification of the three TPS-OIC Agreements and the submission of the list of concessions to the TNC Secretariat.

On the other hand, for the effective implementation of the System, the Member Countries are required to undertake some internal measures, such as; printing the TPS-OIC Certificate of Origin documents, conveying specimen impressions of stamps to the Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) Secretariat and completing the necessary internal legislative and administrative measures.

The legal basis of the TPS-OIC has been completed in 2011 and the required number of the member countries for the operationalization of the System has been reached by the end of 2014. These countries are Bangladesh, Iran, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Türkiye, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman.

In accordance with the relevant decisions of the 37th Ministerial Session of the COMCEC and the Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) Meeting held in June 2021, the System has been effectuated as of July 1st 2022. Accordingly, the 38th COMCEC Ministerial Session and 39th COMCEC Follow-up Committee welcomed the effectuation of the System and requested the Participating States, which have not done so yet, to complete their internal procedures and called upon the Member Countries, which have not yet signed or ratified the TPS-OIC Agreements to do so at their earliest convenience.

Furthermore, after the operationalization of the System, a series of TNC Meetings were conveyed in 2022 and 2023 for considering the status of implementation of the System in their respective countries. 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 39th Session of the COMCEC 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 39th COMCEC Ministerial Session also welcomed the convening of Honorable Ministers and Heads of Delegations on 4 December 2023 on 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 said Session also expressed its appreciation to the Republic of Türkiye for volunteering to host the Third Session of TNC on TPS-OIC at Ministerial level in 2024 and requested all Member Countries to actively participate in this important event.

In line with the relevant resolution of 39th COMCEC Ministerial Session, Third Ministerial Meeting of TPS-OIC TNC was held on 9-10 June 2024 in İstanbul, Türkiye for widening the scope of the System under the chairmanship of Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Türkiye. İstanbul Ministerial Declaration adopted at this Meeting took note the initial discussions on a draft "Negotiation Strategy and Work Plan for Potential Expansion of TPS-OIC" and tasked the relevant authorities to continue the engagement under TNC.

1.3. Enhancing the Role of the Private Sector

OIC Arbitration Centre

Arbitration centers serve as important mechanisms for resolving commercial and investment disputes. Their notable contribution to bolstering trade and investment has led to the establishment of various regional and international arbitration centers.

Within this framework, H.E. Recep Tayyip ERDOĞAN, the President of the Republic of Türkiye and the Chairman of the COMCEC proposed to set-up an arbitration centre in İstanbul for the benefit of the OIC Member Countries in the 13th Islamic Summit held in 10-15 April 2016 in İstanbul, Türkiye.

OIC Arbitration Centre became operational and has started the relevant activities in late 2022. Administrative staff were appointed of the Centre. Arbitration Rules of the Centre have been completed and approved by the Board of Directors. The Centre has engage in promotional activities and signed Memoranda of Understanding with various stakeholders.

The 37th Session of the COMCEC welcomed the operationalization of the OIC Arbitration Centre in Istanbul. Furthermore, acknowledging the important role of the OIC Arbitration Center for the settlement of commercial and investment disputes and commending the efforts resulted in the effectuation of the Center, the 38th and 39th Sessions of the COMCEC and 40th Follow-up Committee of the COMCEC 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.

COMCEC SME Programme

Considering the vital role of SMEs for the OIC economies in terms of production, investment, employment and growth, the 38th Ministerial Session of the COMCEC requested the COMCEC Coordination Office in cooperation with the interested Member States and the relevant OIC Institutions to initiate technical studies on developing a well-designed SME Program and to report the progress thereon to the 39th Follow-up Committee and the 39th COMCEC Session.

In accordance with the aforementioned resolution, a comprehensive research including a detailed survey was conducted with the contribution of the interested Member Countries and the relevant OIC Institutions. Furthermore, a series of technical meetings with the attendance of the interested Member Countries and the relevant OIC Institutions were held with a view to elaborate on the outcomes of the research, current state of the Member Countries on the subject as well as the possible thematic cooperation areas.

Within the scope of the Program, potential thematic areas are identified as institutional capacity building, strengthening Intra-OIC trade and SME Network Mechanism. In this respect, possible implementation tools of the Program are identified as thematic experience sharing, developing use of business to business mechanism (B2Bs) and exploring digital tools.

The Program was welcomed by 39th Ministerial Session of the COMCEC. Additionally, a High-Level Technical Meeting was held on the sidelines of the 39th COMCEC Ministerial Session with the participation of the heads of SME related institutions of the interested Member Countries and the representatives of the relevant OIC Institutions.

The 39th COMCEC Ministerial Session welcomed the recommendations of the High-Level Meeting on the COMCEC SME Program, and the High-Level Meeting on the COMCEC SME Program was hosted by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization (KOSGEB) of the Republic of Türkiye on 3 December 2023, in İstanbul.

Moreover, the 39th COMCEC Ministerial Session and the 40th COMCEC Follow-up Committee invited Member Countries and relevant OIC Institutions to actively participate in the activities to be conducted under the Program.

The Developments in Halal Issues

The Halal field has a great potential in terms of enhancing trade among OIC members. In this regard, the issue of harmonization of halal standards among the OIC Member Countries has been on the agenda of COMCEC Ministerial Meetings since the first Meeting of the COMCEC in 1984. COMCEC Ministerial Meetings commended the efforts of SMIIC for conducting training programs on the OIC/SMIIC Halal Standards in order to facilitate the common use of standards within the OIC. Recently, significant progress has been realized as a result of the work carried out under the umbrella of SMIIC.

Since the 14th Islamic Summit Conference, a significant progress has been achieved as a result of the work conducted under the umbrella of the SMIIC. As the outcome of these efforts, the Islamic Forum for Halal Accreditation Bodies (IFHAB) was established and the Forum is expected to operate entirely in accordance with the SMIIC standards, with the objective of implementing a clear and transparent system for halal products and services in line with global practices.

The First General Assembly Meeting of IFHAB was held on 1 November 2023 in Makkah al-Mukarramah. Furthermore, on the margins of the 39th COMCEC Ministerial Session, a high-level panel discussion on the developments in this field was conducted. The 1st Meeting of the Executive of IFHAB was held in Riyadh on 29 May 2024. At the aforementioned meeting, a Task Force Group was established to finalise the main documents of IFHAB.

Additionally, the SMIIC continued to conduct training programs on the OIC/SMIIC Halal Standards in order to promote the common use of SMIIC standards in the Member Countries. These trainings mainly focused on the understanding of the OIC/SMIIC standards and the requirements for their effective implementation.

On the other hand, within the framework of the COMCEC Project Funding, significant efforts are being made in this field under the umbrella of the SMIIC (Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries). HAK (The Halal Accreditation Agency of the Republic of Türkiye) initiates an international project in collaboration with relevant stakeholders funded by CCO.

“The Project on Raising Awareness for Multilateral/Mutual Recognition According to OIC/SMIIC Halal Standards” has focused on enhancing awareness regarding the mutual recognition of halal standards as outlined by the OIC/SMIIC (Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries) guidelines.

Moreover, the SMIIC organized awareness-raising and promotion activities on halal issues. Within this framework, the SMIIC organizes the World Halal Summit annually, under the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, as one of the most prestigious halal events in the world. This event gathers prominent speakers and important stakeholders of the halal industry. On the sidelines of the World Halal Summit, the OIC Halal Expo is organized by the ICDT in cooperation with the SMIIC. The 10th World Halal Summit and the OIC Halal Expo 2024 will be held on 27-30 November 2024 in Istanbul.

Islamic Trade Fairs:

Islamic trade fairs are organized every two years in one of the OIC Member Countries by ICDT in order to promote intra-OIC trade. In addition to the Islamic Trade Fairs, sector-specific exhibitions are also organized by the ICDT in the Member States. The 18th Trade Fair of OIC Members will be organized in Lahore, Pakistan on 29 November-1 December 2024.

The 39th COMCEC Ministerial Session appreciated ICDT’s following activity conducted in 2023 and invites the Member Countries to actively participate in the following fairs, exhibitions, and forums to be organized by the ICDT in 2024.

Moreover, 40th Follow-up Committee requested ICDT to continue organizing sector specific fairs in cooperation with the Member Countries and submit on regular basis, progress reports on trade fairs and other specialized fairs as well as exhibitions to the COMCEC Sessions and to organize investment promotion activities such as high-level forums and capacity building programs at national and regional level in order to enhance intra-OIC Investment.

2. FINANCIAL COOPERATION

2.1. Financial Cooperation Working Group

Financial cooperation is a crucial component in enhancing economic cooperation between countries. It plays a pivotal role in facilitating international trade, investment, and overall economic growth. In this respect, the COMCEC Financial Cooperation Working Group (FCWG) has elaborated on the various aspects of Finance sector in the previous years. This year, the theme of the Financial Cooperation Working Group has been devoted to the “Digital Transformation of Payment Systems in OIC Member Countries.”

Financial systems have undergone a remarkable evolution driven by rapid technological advancements, with payment systems at the forefront of this transformation. The digitalization of financial services, coupled with the ubiquitous presence of smart devices, has revolutionized the expectations of both consumers and merchants. As a result, there has been a pronounced global shift toward digital payments, with traditional cash and check-based methods experiencing a sharp decline. This transition has been further accelerated by the pandemic, which has highlighted the need for contactless and efficient payment solutions.

This ongoing transformation presents a unique blend of challenges and opportunities, particularly in ensuring that these innovations align with Shariah-compliant principles. The move towards digital payment systems offers OIC Member Countries an unprecedented opportunity to develop modern, efficient, and inclusive financial ecosystems, potentially rendering outdated traditional methods obsolete. To fully realize this potential, it is essential to prioritize the sharing of best practices and to foster robust collaboration among Islamic countries. Such efforts will be crucial in strengthening digital payment systems and ensuring that they meet the diverse needs of the global Muslim community while adhering to Islamic financial principles.

Recognizing the significance of this topic, the FCWG dedicated its 2024 meetings to the theme of “Digital Transformation of Payment Systems in OIC Member Countries.” In line with this focus, the 21st Meeting of the FCWG took place virtually on April 30, 2024. A comprehensive research report on the subject has been conducted. During the 21st Meeting, preliminary findings from the report, along with insights and experiences from Member Countries and international organizations, were shared. The final version of the report was submitted at the 22nd Meeting of the Working Group held on 16-17 September 2024.

In light of the main findings of the research report and the intensive discussions held during its meetings, the Working Group has come up with the following, among others, main policy recommendations:

- Developing an Interoperability framework for digital payment systems among the OIC Member Countries to clear and settle financial transactions and payments in real-time to help foster economic cooperation, facilitate smoother cross-border transactions and promote international trade***
- Developing legal framework at the OIC level to oversee the implementation of regional multilateral cooperations on payment systems***
- Setting-up dedicated task forces including digital payment experts to continue to harness the latest technology in payment systems***
- Developing standards and protocols for joining Digital Payment System Platforms to facilitate international transactions***
- Scaling up collaborative efforts towards strengthening cybersecurity among central banks of member countries***
- Collectively investing in digital literacy and technical skills development to build a sustainable future workforce***
- Promoting financial inclusion through expansion of digital payment platforms with simplified technology for unbanked and underbanked***
- Enhancing consumer financial literacy and protection in the risks associated with the use of digital payments***
- Fostering sustained innovation in the fintech sector and providing regulatory support to start-ups in the digital payment space to encourage healthy competition***

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

2.2. Other Efforts under the COMCEC Financial Cooperation

OIC Exchanges Forum

The OIC Member States Stock Exchanges Forum, founded in 2005, seeks to enhance collaboration among the stock exchanges of OIC Member Countries and related institutions, with a focus on aligning the rules and regulations that govern market operations. Since its inception, the Forum has initiated significant projects, including the S&P OIC/COMCEC 50 Shariah Index and Fund.

Additionally, the Forum has been working towards establishing a gold exchange/platform for OIC Member Countries, in accordance with the relevant COMCEC resolutions. The Forum held its 18th meeting virtually on October 1st, 2024. Details regarding the Forum activities are available on the Forum website. (www.oicexchanges.org)

COMCEC Capital Markets Regulators Forum

The COMCEC Capital Markets Regulators Forum was established in 2011 in order to enhance cooperation among capital markets regulatory authorities of COMCEC Member States. The Forum undertakes its work under five Task Forces namely, “Capacity Building Task Force”, “Market Development Task Force”, “Islamic Finance Task Force” “Financial Literacy Task Force” and the newly created ‘Sustainability Task Force’.

The Task Forces Chairs provide updates about workstream pertaining to their agenda at the Annual COMCEC CMR Forum meetings. The 12th Meeting of the Forum was organized virtually on 6-7 November 2023. The upcoming 13th COMCEC CMR Forum will be held virtually on October 16th, 2024.

In addition to the existing efforts to boost cooperation among the capital markets regulatory bodies of the Member States, the Forum has launched the GEFAS Platform (Real Estate based and Developing Financial Instruments Information System) in light of the relevant resolutions of the COMCEC and it has become operational on 16 September 2022. Detailed information regarding the Forum activities are available on the Forum website. (www.comceccmr.org)

OIC-COMCEC Central Banks Forum

In accordance with the resolution of the 24th Session of the COMCEC, the Central Banks and Monetary Authorities of the OIC Countries met on October 3, 2009 in Istanbul, Türkiye and agreed to gather regularly to share experiences and enhance institutional and human capacity.

Since then, Central Banks and Monetary Authorities Meetings have become an important platform providing an interactive and open environment to discuss monetary, banking and financial issues, along with strengthening efforts aimed at deepening the cooperation and coordination among Central Banks and Monetary Authorities of the OIC countries.

The 16th Meeting of the Central Banks and Monetary Authorities of the OIC Member Countries was held on 23-25 September 2018 and hosted by the CBRT. In this meeting, it was decided that the structure of the “Meeting of Central Banks and Monetary Authorities of the OIC Member Countries” would be organized as the “OIC-COMCEC Central Banks Forum” and the secretariat of the Forum would be managed by the CBRT. These decisions have also been recorded in the Ministerial Declaration of the 34th COMCEC Meeting. In this respect, the 6th Meeting of the Forum was organized on September 29th -30th, 2024 in İstanbul.

3. TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

3.1. Transport and Communications Working Group

Transport and communications, as the essential components of the modern economies, are critical for the countries’ development path. Interconnecting cities and people through the facilitation of the movement of goods and people is a remarkable progress in development. In fact, transportation sector constitutes of infrastructure of the most economic and commercial activities. In our contemporary and globalized world, the economic and productivity growth of region is tied closely to its transport infrastructure and transport systems, which enable higher productivity through lower logistics costs, inventory savings, and access to larger supply and labour markets.

Therefore, the existence of a functional transportation system is highly important for economic growth. Roads need a special focus as the core of transport infrastructure in facilitating the movement of goods and people. On the other hand, developing transport networks and increasing transport connectivity, causing traffic accidents, erosion in transport infrastructure and

environmental degradation, brings the maintenance of road and road safety in question. In other words, with these increasing complexity in transportation networks and urbanization, traditional transportation systems are challenged by rising demands.

As consisting of innovative set of solutions for the shortcomings of traditional way, Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) represent a convergence of advanced technologies, including real-time data analytics, communication systems, and automation. By combining the Information and Communication Technology (ICT), ITS provide increased road-safety, and lead to decreasing carbon emissions and driving time as well as offering driver assistance, traffic management and vehicle control. Within this framework, developing ITS can play an essential role in establishing evidence-based policies to provide innovative solutions to the challenges in the transport sector. Effective implementation of ITS can also be very beneficial for the aim of sustainable transportation.

Considering its importance, the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group (TCWG) devoted its two consecutive meetings in 2024 (22nd and 23rd) to the theme of “Developing Intelligent Transportation Systems in OIC Member Countries”. During both meetings, the representatives of the Member Countries shared their experiences, achievements, and challenges regarding the developing Intelligent Transportation Systems in their respective countries. Furthermore, they have deliberated global practices for the Intelligent Transportation Systems and key success factors and challenges faced in OIC Member Countries.

The meeting has mainly considered the findings of the Policy Guide prepared on the theme of “Developing Intelligent Transportation System in OIC Member Countries”. The said Policy Guide provides a conceptual framework for the ITS, presents global trends and best practices, identifies the key success factors and challenges faced by the OIC Member Countries. The Policy Guide also presents a special part with respect to how to develop ITS and comes up with concrete policy recommendations in this regard. In addition to the desk-based case studies concerning Iraq and Türkiye, the Guide also includes a detailed analysis based on in-depth research in the selected Member Countries namely; Malaysia and The Gambia.

In light of the main findings of the report and the deliberations during the meetings, the Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations:

- **Planning and developing a national Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Strategic Plan for smooth acceleration and coordination of ITS Deployment in the OIC Member Countries**
- **Developing standards for ITS architecture to ensure interoperability, seamless information flow and standardization of equipment within the ITS ecosystem**
- **Developing/Improving monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of ITS implementations**
- **Implementing ITS to promote sustainable smart mobility in transportation to minimize environmental impacts and maximize efficiency**
- **Providing safe, comfortable, affordable and accessible transport systems by taking into consideration disadvantaged groups**
- **Promoting capacity building of OIC Member Countries through exchange programs in developing regulatory policies for ITS and setting up of ITS infrastructure**

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

4. TOURISM

4.1 Tourism Working Group

Tourism has economic, social and environmental benefits in society. Tourism directly contributes not only by increasing employment and incomes, but also by elevating the balance of payments and foreign exchange. As one of the main factors in tourism, gastronomy directly affects destination selection by tourists. Gastronomy tourism also attains high importance as a new tourism market especially by developing and least developed countries to increase income, employment and local development. Many countries started to introduce themselves as an attractive gastronomy destination or a gastronomy route by using local ingredients and recipes.

Developing gastronomy tourism is profitable for destinations as it helps capture what the place has to offer in terms of food and beverages, fosters the exchange of culture, and enhances economic development, and sustainability. Paying attention to local food and beverage, destinations can thus appeal to gourmets, support the local economy, provide innovative entrepreneurial opportunities and jobs for the residents, promote traditional cuisine, and enhance people's identity. As destinations embrace the essence of their culinary legacy and promote gastronomy as a strategic asset, they pave the road for long-term tourism growth and increased satisfaction among tourists.

Given the importance of the issue, the COMCEC Tourism WG, in its meetings this year, elaborated on the developing and branding gastronomy tourism through discussing the trends in the World and OIC, identifying the main challenges, exchanging experiences and good practices, and deliberating on the policy advices for improving gastronomy tourism sector in the member countries. Within the framework of the research report conducted for the meeting, case studies including Türkiye, Maldives, Uganda, and Egypt were examined.

After intense deliberations, the Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations:

- **Combatting climate change through planning and implementing mitigating strategies to reduce potential harmful impacts on food and livestock producers and inherently gastronomy tourism**
- **Improving infrastructure and superstructure to foster the development of gastronomy tourism in OIC Member Countries by facilitating the transportation process and establishing culinary schools.**
- **Moving beyond mass tourism by harnessing the power of gastronomy as a niche tourism market to attract diverse tourist segments through tourism product diversification.**
- **Enhancing gastronomy tourism through boosting agriculture and supporting local farmers/livestock breeders with subsidies, training programs and infrastructure development**
- **Developing and implementing well-defined marketing strategies by branding marketing campaigns such as storytelling, traditional recipes and food production methods.**
- **Facilitating public-private partnerships towards fostering gastronomy tourism for promoting local cuisine as well as increasing visibility of gastronomy assets**
- **Promoting capacity building in the OIC Member Countries especially through the activation of human resources, as a strategic tool to develop gastronomy tourism.**

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

4.2 OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum

OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum provides a regular communication channel for the private sector representatives of the Member Countries. In this regard, Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye, which serves as the Secretariat of the Forum, will organize the 12th Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum in virtual-only format on 10 October 2024, with the theme of “Sustainable Destination Development and Management in OIC Countries.”

5. AGRICULTURE

5.1. Agriculture Working Group

Agriculture is one of the leading sectors in most OIC member countries, providing our people with food, income, and employment. Recently, OIC countries have improved their agricultural production performance compared to other regions. Since 2016, farm production in OIC 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 OIC countries has grown over the past decade, with certain commodities and sectors experiencing more significant increases than others.

Ensuring food security and fostering sustainable agricultural development are critical challenges for the OIC countries, where rapid population growth, urbanization, and economic changes are reshaping food systems. Developing livestock production and fisheries is essential to addressing these challenges, as they play a vital role in providing animal protein, generating income, and supporting rural livelihoods. In many OIC countries, livestock and fisheries are essential for dietary protein, employment, and export earnings. However, these sectors face diverse challenges, including environmental sustainability, resource management, and the need to balance traditional practices with modern techniques.

Given the importance of the issue, the Agriculture Working Group devoted its 22nd and 23rd Meetings to the theme of “Developing Livestock Production and Fishery to Foster Food Security for a Sustainable Agricultural Development in OIC Countries”. A research report on the said theme was prepared and elaborated by the Working Group. The 22nd Meeting of the COMCEC Agriculture Working Group was held on April 30th, 2024, in a virtual-only format and the 23rd Meeting of the COMCEC Agriculture Working Group was held on September 19th -20th 2024, in Ankara, Türkiye. A research report on the said theme was prepared and considered by the Working Group.

The report examines developing livestock production and fishery to foster food security by guaranteeing the continuity of production in the agricultural sector. The report also underlines that challenges include water scarcity, climate change, land degradation, feed resources, high feed costs, animal health, access to vaccines and medicines, infrastructure deficiencies, market volatility, low adoption of modern practices, overfishing, depleting marine resources, pollution, and habitat destruction. It also refers that while the geography of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has 28 per cent of the world's pastures; it accounts for 11 per cent of world meat production, 35 per cent of world sheep production, 14 per cent of world cattle production and 18 per cent of world milk production.

Within the framework of the research report, Senegal, and Malaysia were analysed in detail as case countries. In line with the main findings of the aforementioned report and the discussions during the Meeting, the Agriculture Working Group put forward the following policy recommendations:

- **Promoting efficient water management practices by enhancing water storage and distribution infrastructure, adopting water-smart agricultural techniques, and supporting climate-resilient livestock breeds to ensure sustainable water use, boost livestock productivity, and enhance resilience to climate change**
- **Developing and implementing sustainable feed strategies by utilizing modern and innovative feed production techniques and advanced technologies for livestock production**
- **Mobilizing resources to essential veterinary services as well as promoting regional cooperation for the development and distribution of vaccines and medicines with a view to ensuring disease control**
- **Developing and implementing mechanisms to stabilize both inputs' and producer prices regarding livestock production and reduce volatility and promoting modern practices for sustainability**
- **Increasing strategic investments in infrastructure, modernization, and regional cooperation with a view to boosting the productivity, profitability, and sustainability of the livestock and fishery sectors**
- **Upgrading fishing ports, processing facilities, and cold storage systems to ensure that fish products are handled efficiently and preserved at optimal quality from catch to market**
- **Promoting financial support tools and mechanisms, capacity-building programs, and modern infrastructure development for small-scale, artisanal fishers and livestock producers with a view to enhancing productivity as well as alleviating poverty**
- **Developing and implementing comprehensive strategies and programs encompassing the development of robust aquaculture regulations, investment in modern aquaculture facilities, supporting for product diversification and innovation, promotion of eco-friendly practices, and rigorous environmental monitoring and compliance**

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

6. POVERTY ALLEVIATION

6.1. Poverty Alleviation Working Group

Poverty alleviation is a permanent agenda item of the COMCEC. It was also defined as one of the cooperation areas of the COMCEC in the COMCEC Strategy. Poverty Alleviation Working Group (PAWG) focuses in each meeting on a specific theme selected considering the expected outcomes of the relevant section of the Strategy and global development agenda as well as the priorities of the Working Group members. This year, the theme of the PAWG has been devoted to the “Alleviating Adverse Effects of Natural Disasters on Poor Segments of Society in the OIC Member Countries”.

The frequency, duration, and impact of natural disasters are on the rise. The Natural Disasters Data indicated that in recent years, an average of 40,000 to 50,000 people have lost their lives annually due to natural disasters, including earthquakes, storms, floods, and droughts. Between 1990 and 2023, approximately 700 million people in OIC countries were affected by 2,656 recorded disasters, including floods, epidemics, earthquakes, and storms. Tragically, around 737,000 people lost their lives, and the estimated cost of damage reached US\$271 billion. These statistics reflect the heightened vulnerability and insufficient capacity of OIC countries to prevent natural hazards from escalating into disasters.

Many people in poor societies earn their living from subsistence farming, informal labor or small businesses. Natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes and earthquakes can destroy crops, wipe out livestock and damage or destroy small businesses. The loss of income-generating activities directly affects their ability to provide for themselves and their families. Such disasters result in people being forced to leave their homes due to damage or destruction, and mass displacement.

Poverty reduces people's ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. Limited resources mean less capacity to invest in disaster-resilient infrastructure, buy insurance or develop contingency plans. Those already living in poverty are particularly vulnerable in these situations, as they lack the resources to find alternative shelter or quickly rebuild their homes following natural disasters. This lack of resilience exacerbates the negative impact of disasters on already vulnerable communities.

Given the importance of the issue, the 22nd and 23rd Meetings of the Poverty Alleviation Working Group (PAWG) were devoted on alleviating adverse effects of natural disasters on poor segments. While the 22nd Meeting was held virtually on May 2nd, 2024, the 23rd Meeting was held on 16-17 September 2024 in Ankara with the same theme "Alleviating Adverse Effects of Natural Disasters on Poor Segments of Society in the OIC Member Countries".

The guide on the subject considered during the above-mentioned meetings reviews the global and the OIC trends through focusing on Indonesia, Egypt, Nigeria and Türkiye as the case countries.

In light of the main findings of the guide and the deliberations during the meetings, the Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations to be submitted to the 40th COMCEC Ministerial Session:

- **Developing a comprehensive and culturally tailored awareness campaign aimed at educating poor segments of populations in OIC Member Countries about Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) during the initial development stage of the DRR strategy**
- **Developing/improving governance framework through identifying the roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes of all stakeholders involved in DRR**
- **Planning and designing robust communication systems, integrated information systems and early warning mechanisms that are inclusive and accessible to all, particularly poor populations, as part of the DRR strategy development stage**
- **Developing/improving international disaster risk reduction standards by taking into consideration international good practices and experiences of global networks during the development stage of the DRR strategy to strengthen the resilience of poor segments of society**
- **Implementing a structured, adaptive, and responsive annual work program, ensuring that all targeted tasks, milestones, and resource allocations are meticulously tracked and adjusted in real-time to effectively address the adverse effects of natural disasters on poor segments of society**
- **Actively engaging and integrating all relevant stakeholders into the operational phases of disaster risk reduction in OIC countries, ensuring their insights are continuously applied and their roles are clearly defined to enhance the effectiveness of DRR activities**
- **Fostering continuous knowledge exchange and capacity-building during the implementation phase ensures that all stakeholders, including local communities and government agencies, are well-equipped to respond effectively to disasters**
- **Developing a framework within the monitoring stage of the DRR strategy that focuses on regularly evaluating specific criteria, metrics, and key performance indicators (KPIs) designed to measure the immediate and long-term impacts of DRR efforts on the poor segments of society**

- *Developing mechanisms for regular evaluations that directly utilize the insights gained during the monitoring process to update strategic plans and optimize resource allocation for DRR in OIC countries, with a focus on reducing weaknesses among poor segments of society*
- *Improving the monitoring stage of the DRR strategy that includes the ongoing collection and processing of high-quality, timely data specific to the needs of poor communities by leveraging advanced technologies to enhance data-driven decision-making*

6.2. Other Efforts under the COMCEC by the OIC Institutions

Other ongoing initiatives under the COMCEC aimed at poverty alleviation include the Special Program for the Development of Africa (SPDA) and the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD), both within the Islamic Development Bank, as well as the OIC Vocational Education and Training Program (OIC-VET) managed by SESRIC.

The Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD) is a dedicated fund established to combat poverty with a focus on human development, agriculture, rural development, and essential infrastructure. It offers concessional financing for programs and projects in Member Countries, particularly the least developed. The Fund aims to reach a budget of US\$10 billion.

The Special Program for the Development of Africa (SPDA) is another initiative designed to reduce poverty in African Member States by promoting economic growth, increasing agricultural productivity, and creating job opportunities. The program's target capital is \$12 billion.

The OIC Vocational Education and Training Program (OIC-VET) is implemented by SESRIC to enhance the capacity of Member Countries in technical and vocational education and training. As part of this effort, SESRIC has prepared a progress report on the implementation of the OIC-TVET Strategic Road Map 2020-2025, which will be presented at the 40th Session of the COMCEC.

Implementation of the SDGs

Given its crucial place in the global development agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) takes place in the agenda of the COMCEC.

In this regard, the COMCEC follows-up the programs, projects and other activities of the relevant OIC Institutions contributing to the implementation of the SDGs in the OIC Member Countries. In this framework, SESRIC conducted a tendency survey on the priorities of the member countries regarding the SDGs and reported the results to the 34th COMCEC Session.

Therefore, since 2018, SESRIC has submitted annual reports to the COMCEC Ministerial Sessions, detailing progress at the OIC level towards achieving these prioritized SDGs. Unlike previous years SESRIC's recent annual progress reports cover all the SDGs. Additionally, in line with the decisions made during the COMCEC Ministerial Sessions, the COMCEC Coordination Office compiles and reports on the activities of relevant OIC institutions related to implementing the SDGs at each COMCEC Session.

7. PRIVATE SECTOR COOPERATION

The private sector is an important driver of economic growth and sustainable development. It is the major source of income generation, job opportunities and poverty eradication. As the OIC Member Countries have a wide range of development levels, some member countries have a dynamic and resilient private sector, whereas others do not fully benefit from the opportunities generated by the private sector. Therefore, there is a primary need for developing private sector in the Member Countries to enable them to be incorporated into the development endeavours. Considering the importance of the private sector for the economies of the Member Countries, some important events, fairs and exhibitions are organized by the ICDT and ICCD in order to strengthen the private sector cooperation under the OIC. These activities are reviewed during the COMCEC annual Meetings.

Private Sector Meetings

The strong involvement of the private sector to the COMCEC and other relevant fora under the OIC is very crucial for enhancing intra-OIC trade and investments. In this respect, Private Sector Meetings, organized by the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Development (ICCD), serves as a platform for the private sector of the 57 OIC Member Countries to communicate with each other, explore new markets and learn about best practices. Apart from private sector meetings, the ICCD also organizes various sector specific Forums in the areas of Sustainable Agriculture, Sustainable Tourism, Islamic Economy, Investment, Digital Economy, and Entrepreneurship to support the sustainable development of the OIC private sector for the resilient economic growth of the Member Countries.

The 39th COMCEC Ministerial Session appreciated ICDT's activities conducted in 2023 and invites the Member Countries to actively participate in the following fairs, exhibitions, and forums to be organized by the ICDT in 2024.

Moreover, the 40th Follow-up Committee requested ICDT to continue organizing sector specific fairs in cooperation with the Member Countries and submit on regular basis, progress reports on trade fairs and other specialized fairs as well as exhibitions to the COMCEC Sessions and to organize investment promotion activities such as high-level forums and capacity building programs at national and regional level in order to enhance intra-OIC Investment.

The 39th COMCEC Ministerial Session emphasized the role of ICCD, as an engine of mobilizing investment, contributing to policy-making related to the private sector development, and undertaking different initiatives for the capacity building of the chambers of commerce of the OIC region, and the Committee also welcomed the continuous efforts of ICCD towards initiating a wide range of workshops for the member chambers with a view to enhance the capacity and quality of their institutions through ICCD Academy and invited the OIC Member Countries to encourage their public - private sector organizations to take part in ICCD's mega sector specific forums and events organized for the development of the private sector in OIC Member Countries.

The 40th Follow-up Committee appreciated the efforts and activities of the ICCD in organizing relevant Forums in the areas of sustainable agriculture, sustainable tourism, Islamic economy, investment, digital economy, and entrepreneurship to support sustainable development of the OIC Private Sector for the resilient economic growth of the Member Countries and called upon the Member Countries and their relevant private sector entities to actively participate in the sector-specific Forums organized by ICCD.

8. HIGH LEVEL INITIATIVE PROGRAMME ON DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Underlining the emerging trends with respect to digital technologies in all government services in particular amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic, the 37th Session of the COMCEC decided the inclusion of digital transformation as an additional cooperation area in the COMCEC Agenda. Furthermore, during the margins of the 38th Ministerial Session of the COMCEC, “High Level Digital Transformation Forum” was established with the aim of enhancing technical cooperation and collaboration among the relevant authorities responsible for digital transformation in the Member Countries as well as exchange of experiences, design of joint programs and projects under the aforementioned thematic areas.

Within the framework of the Forum activities, a training program was held in 2023 by the Digital Transformation Office of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye. Moreover, Digital Transformation has been added to the sectoral areas to be supported under the COMCEC Project Funding (CPF), which is a grant program enhancing human and institutional capacities of the Member Countries.

In this context, two projects have been selected to be supported under the CPF in 2024. Within this framework, the project, titled “Legal and Regulatory Framework for E-Government” is being implemented by Sierra Leone. The project aims to develop a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework for e-government in Sierra Leone.



Moreover, the project, titled “HackMasters Cyber Security Challenge (Capture The Flag, CTF)” was implemented by Türkiye with 32 beneficiary countries. As part of the project, the Digital Transformation Office of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, the secretariat of the Forum, organized a training titled “HackMasters Cyber Security Challenge (Capture The Flag, CTF).” The training was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved an online preliminary training session on September 17, 2024. In the second phase, held on September 19, 2024, the team members from the top three countries in the online cybersecurity competition will be awarded with advanced cyber security training and certificates on the sidelines of the 40th Ministerial Meeting of COMCEC.

CHAPTER II: COMCEC POLICY FOLLOW-UP SYSTEM AND MEMBER COUNTRIES' EFFORTS FOR THE REALIZATION OF THE MINISTERIAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Continued efforts to pursue the state of implementation of the COMCEC policy recommendations and to identify the progress and performance at the national level necessitate a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism under COMCEC. For this purpose, COMCEC Coordination Office (CCO) launched the COMCEC Policy Follow-up System (PFS) in July 2019, during the 7th Annual Coordination Meeting of the COMCEC Focal Points, to ensure the effective implementation of the Policy Recommendations (PRs).

Subsequently, the System was brought to the attention of the Ministers in the 35th Session of the COMCEC. Welcoming the launching of the System and underlining its importance as a user-friendly tool for the ultimate objective of approximating policies among the Member Countries, the 35th Session of the COMCEC called upon the Member Countries to utilize COMCEC PFS for the effective follow-up of the implementation of PRs. Since the 35th Session of the COMCEC, each subsequent COMCEC Ministerial Sessions and Follow-up Committees have reiterated their call for the Member Countries to make use of the PFS to report their respective progress concerning the implementation of the PRs in each cooperation areas of the COMCEC.

As an electronic-based platform, COMCEC PFS facilitates the effective follow-up of the implementation of the PRs in the Member Countries and provides a convenient tool for better assessment of the results of the implementation. COMCEC PFS is designed based on the result-based monitoring and evaluation approach, focusing on the outcomes and impacts more than the process. Through COMCEC PFS, it is also to enable the CCO to collect, manage, analyse, and report synchronized data and information to the relevant COMCEC for as well as to monitor these policies and to assist CCO to extract relevant information for future planning. Furthermore, COMCEC PFS facilitates effective, regular and reliable reporting on the state of implementation of the PRs.



The feedback from the Member Countries through data entry into the System is also crucial for the CCO while identifying the subjects to be funded by COMCEC Support Programs and developing new initiatives as needed for the interest of the Member Countries in addition to the having insights about the implementation status of the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations in the Member Countries as well.

COMCEC Focal Points in respective Member Countries are kindly requested to enter data regarding the implementation of PRs for the last three years. In this respect, relevant data entry by the COMCEC Focal Points' logging into the System is kindly expected within two submission terms each year by the COMCEC Coordination Office and to complete by two months before COMCEC Follow-up Committee Meetings and the COMCEC Ministerial Sessions. After the relevant data and information provided by the Member Countries are incorporated into the PFS, a reporting process is undertaken, and it is presented at the Ministerial Session by the CCO.

Reiterating the crucial role of COMCEC Focal Points in the follow-up of implementation of PRs through PFS, it also needs to be underlined that data entrance on PRs to the PFS would reach the desired level. In this regard, for the active follow-up of the implementation of PRs and effective use of PFS, national coordination bears great importance. Initiation of the necessary actions by COMCEC Focal Points for the implementation of policy recommendations by informing relevant institutions/departments about the adopted policy recommendations in the relevant area is highly important issue.

Regarding the number activities conducted by the Member Countries so far to implement the policy recommendations, Trade, Poverty Alleviation, and Transport and Communications are three areas of cooperation with relatively high number of activities carried out. In detail, the highest number of activities is 87 for the cooperation area of Poverty Alleviation.

Nevertheless, low implementation rate exists in the area of Financial Cooperation with eight. In terms of the cooperation area of agriculture, the number of activities is also relatively low with 12 while there is no reported activity for the implementation of relevant policy recommendations for Tourism sector.

These figures indicate that the efforts at the national level related to the implementation of the policy recommendations via PFS need to be increased in certain cooperation areas or reporting of the developments through data entry need to be done regularly.

This System can be accessed through "pfs.comcec.org" with the username and password provided for COMCEC Project Funding Mechanism. Moreover, COMCEC National Focal Points has been able to enter the System as of August 2024 with the usernames and passwords provided by COMCEC Coordination Office. The Guideline for utilizing the PFS is also available in the System.

To follow-up the implementation of PRs in each sectoral areas of cooperation, COMCEC Focal Points have a pertinent and important role for coordination in data entry process, that is, active use of the PFS. Besides the cruciality of COMCEC Focal Points, national coordination among relevant ministries and institutions in Member Countries is also important for the active follow-up of the implementation of policy recommendations and the effective use of PFS. Given the importance of this issue, some Member Countries, such as The Gambia, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Türkiye have already established high-level coordination committees/bodies in their respective countries as part of national coordination efforts.

CHAPTER III: KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION EFFORTS: COMCEC PUBLICATIONS

The COMCEC aims to produce and disseminate knowledge, share experiences and best practices, develop a common understanding and approximate policies in cooperation areas in order to find solutions to the challenges faced by the Member Countries. To this end, the COMCEC Working Group was designed as an instrument for realizing this mission of the COMCEC. In this regard, research reports are prepared for each WG meeting, to form a basis for the discussions made during the Meetings.



The COMCEC Coordination Office conducts the reports in close cooperation with the consultants to ensure high-quality research studies. The studies begin with a conceptual framework and an overview of the specific theme in the world and the member countries, followed by an in-depth analysis of a few member countries based on field visits, surveys and interviews.

At the end of each report, several policy recommendations are presented for the Member Countries as well as international cooperation efforts under the umbrella of the COMCEC. The active involvement of Member States is vital in the preparation of each research report. In this regard, the research topics are identified with the COMCEC Focal Points of the Member Countries. In light of the views of the COMCEC Focal Points, the themes of each working group as well as research report are determined for the next three years.

Moreover, during the preparation of the research reports, surveys are conveyed to the focal points for enriching the empirical data presented in the reports and ensuring their analytical soundness. The observations of the Member Countries are also benefited through receiving their views/comments on the draft case studies (if they are subject to case analysis) and draft report before its finalization. Furthermore, the observations made during the Working Group Meetings, where each research report is presented, the Member Countries and relevant international organizations are benefited for improving the research reports. The final versions of the research reports are published through the COMCEC e-book website (ebook.comcec.org).

In addition, the COMCEC Coordination Office produces annual sectoral outlooks for each area of cooperation. These documents analyse global trends and the current state of affairs in the OIC Member Countries, offering up-to-date data to enhance discussions during the Working Group Meetings.

Furthermore, Proceedings documents are produced after each Working Group Meeting to reflect the discussions including the summaries of the presentations made during the Meetings. All these publications are available on the COMCEC website accessible in e-book format at COMCEC E-Book Website: <http://ebook.comcec.org/>

CHAPTER IV: COMCEC PROJECT SUPPORT INSTRUMENTS

1. COMCEC PROJECT FUNDING

The COMCEC Project Funding is one of the implementation instruments of the COMCEC Strategy, which aims at providing funding member countries' projects in the form of grants. The Strategy introduces a well-defined project cycle management with a clearly identified financial mechanism. The projects implemented by the Member States and relevant 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 enhance human and institutional capacities of the Member States.

This instrument enables the Member Countries and OIC Institutions to get involved in cooperation efforts to overcome the common challenges of the Member States in cooperation areas. It provides an opportunity to the Member Countries to propose projects in priority areas identified by the COMCEC Strategy, the working groups and the policy recommendations.

COMCEC Project Funding is a valuable tool to assist member countries in their policy-making endeavours. It serves to the realization of COMCEC policy recommendations into practice while improving the institutional and human capacity of the Member Countries. It not only enables sharing knowledge and experience in a specific theme, but also improves the ability of the Member Countries to work together in addressing the common problems through the implementation of capacity-building projects.

Under the 11th Call for Project Proposals made in October 2023, 24 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2024 as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Projects being implemented under the COMCEC Project Funding in 2024

No	Beneficiary Countries	Cooperation Area	Project Title
1	Azerbaijan, Türkiye	Agriculture	Experience Sharing on Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA)
2	Benin, Egypt	Agriculture	Capacity Building on Enriched Organic Fertilizers 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, Sudan, Egypt	Agriculture	Capacity Building on Organomineral Fertilizers

No	Beneficiary Countries	Cooperation Area	Project Title
6	Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Morocco	Agriculture	Common Steps towards Climate Change: Adaptation, Mitigation and Resistance Strategies in Stone Fruits
7	15 Member Countries SESRIC' s Project	Agriculture	Promoting Food Security in OIC Member Countries through Sustainable Agricultural Inputs
8	Pakistan, Mauritania, Senegal COMSTECH' s Project	Agriculture	Promoting Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems (AKIS) and Precision Agriculture
9	Nigeria	Financial Cooperation	Digital Finance and Payment Systems Training for SME Value Chain Strengthening
10	Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Malaysia, Tunisia	Poverty Alleviation	Developing Policy Framework Capacity in the Field of Social Security After Natural Disasters
11	15 Member Countries SESRIC' s Project	Poverty Alleviation	Empowering Youth through Enhancing Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)
12	Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria	Tourism	Capacity Building of Tourism Guides in Selected OIC Member Countries
13	Uganda, Cameroon, Malaysia, Senegal	Tourism	Empowering Entrepreneurship Skills of Community-Based Tourism Enterprises to Enhance Competitiveness of Tourism Industry
14	Nigeria, Gambia, Uganda, Mali	Tourism	Enhancing Capacities of Tourism Stakeholders for Adapting to Customers Changing Needs
15	Togo, Türkiye	Tourism	Improving Entrepreneurial Capacities of Selected Tourism Stakeholders for Ensuring Competitiveness in Tourism
16	17 Member Countries SESRIC' s Project	Tourism	Strengthening the Capacities of African Tourism Boards through Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices
17	Suriname, Guyana, Türkiye	Trade	Increasing Internationalization of SMEs in Suriname and Guyana
18	Türkiye, Indonesia, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Malaysia	Trade	Free Zone Training Program for Internationalization of SMEs
19	Bangladesh, Malaysia	Trade	Strengthening Cross-Border E-Commerce Sector in Bangladesh through Enhancing Capacity of SMEs and Professionals
20	Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Türkiye, UAE	Trade	Developing Product Information and Determining Halal Critical Points
21	Uganda	Trade	Enhancing Good Governance and Technical Capacity of SMEs to Eliminate Informalities in the Sector
22	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
23	Sierra Leone, Türkiye	Digital Transformation	Legal and Regulatory Framework for E-Government
24	Türkiye and 32 Member Countries	Digital Transformation	HackMasters Cyber Security Challenge (Capture The Flag, CTF)

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. During the annual focal points meeting held on July 10th, 2024, focal points were briefed about the objectives and main characteristics of the COMCEC Project Funding (CPF) as well as the key issues in designing project proposals, and the timeline of call for project proposals. Furthermore, the CCO has made the 12th Call for Project Proposals and the COMCEC Project Funding on October 1st, 2024.

2. COMCEC AL-QUDS PROGRAM

COMCEC Coordination Office initiated the COMCEC Al-Quds Program in 2019 as a sign of solidarity with Palestine considering the current situation and special conditions there, especially in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and the resolutions of the recent Extraordinary Islamic Summits on Al-Quds.

In the first two pilot projects, completed in 2020, analysis of the tourism infrastructure of Al-Quds was made and institutional capacity of Al-Quds Tourism and Heritage Council was developed. Moreover, during 2021-2022 implementation period, five projects were implemented covering the areas of trainings, capacity building, procurement of machinery/equipment/service, online platform development, renovations, research, audio-visual material production etc.

The scope of the program was extended in 2022 and new thematic priority areas including entrepreneurship, creating job opportunities and empowerment of youth, e-commerce and SME development, have been 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.

Moreover, 8 projects are being implemented under the Al-Quds Program in 2024. The list of projects to be implemented in 2024 period are demonstrated in the Table 2 below:

Table 2: Al-Quds Program: Projects being implemented in 2024

Project Title
1. <i>Implementing a Tech Career Acceleration Program</i>
2. <i>Strengthening Al Quds Economy by Increasing the Technical and Vocational Capacity of Youth in Handicrafts Sector</i>
3. <i>Strengthening Small and Medium Enterprises in Al Quds: A Sustainable and Resilient Empowerment Approach Through Youth and Business Development</i>
4. <i>Empowering Qudsi Youth and Women through Ceramic Arts and Tourism Development</i>
5. <i>Economic Empowerment for Palestinian Women in Al Quds Governorate</i>
6. <i>Al-Qudsi: Because We Are the Place and Time</i>
7. <i>Al: Connecting Al Quds</i>
8. <i>Rehabilitating Palestinian Youth for Electronic Trade</i>

CHAPTER V: THE 40th MEETING OF THE COMCEC FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE

The Follow-up Committee is one of the organs of the COMCEC to review the progress in the implementation of the programmes and projects approved by the COMCEC Ministerial Sessions. The Committee also prepares the draft agenda of the COMCEC Sessions. The Follow-up Committee of the COMCEC convenes annually in the Republic of Türkiye.

The 40th Meeting of the COMCEC Follow-up Committee was held on 23 -24 May 2024 in Ankara with the participation of current Members of the COMCEC Follow-up Committee under the chairmanship of the Deputy President of Strategy and Budget of the Presidency of Republic of Türkiye, H.E. Abdullah Rıdvan Ağaoğlu.

The Committee reviewed the progress implementation in the COMCEC Strategy and its mechanisms, namely the Working Groups and COMCEC Project Funding. Moreover, the Committee elaborated on the programs, projects and activities in the COMCEC agenda. The Committee has prepared a set of recommendations to be submitted to the 40th COMCEC Session. Accordingly, the Committee welcomed, among others, the Progress Report submitted by the COMCEC Coordination Office particularly highlighting the progress achieved in the implementation of the Strategy, and commended the Member States and OIC Institutions for their valuable contributions to the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy. The Committee also requested the Member States and OIC Institutions to further their full support to the implementation of the Strategy.

All reports and documents submitted to the 40th Meeting of the COMCEC Follow-up Committee are available at the COMCEC website (www.comcec.org).

CHAPTER VI: COMCEC SESSIONAL COMMITTEE

The Sessional Committee, which consists of the OIC Institutions working in the economic domain, meets on the sidelines of each COMCEC Ministerial Session and Follow-up Committee meeting to review and coordinate the activities and programs of the relevant OIC institutions. Along with the OIC General Secretariat and the COMCEC Coordination Office, the Sessional Committee Meetings are attended by the relevant OIC Institutions, namely SESRIC, ICDT, IDB Group, ICIEC, ITFC, ICD, IOFS, SMIIC, and ICCD. In this regard, the 44th Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the COMCEC was held on May 16th, 2024, in a virtual only-format, on the sidelines of the 40th Follow-up Meeting of the COMCEC.

During the Meeting, the Committee was briefed by the CCO in terms of the activities of OIC Institutions related to the implementation of the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations and the objectives of the COMCEC Strategy and also was informed about the projects implemented under the COMCEC Project Support Programs.

Moreover, the OIC Institutions discussed their planned activities aligned with the COMCEC Strategy and the COMCEC policy recommendations. Moreover, the contributions of the OIC institutions to the implementation of the COMCEC ministerial policy recommendations were also discussed during the 44th Sessional Committee Meeting.

The Committee was informed by the OIC Institutions about their activities aligned with the COMCEC Strategy and the COMCEC Ministerial Recommendations. The Committee was informed by the SESRIC regarding the preparations of the annual report on progress and the implementation of the SDGs in the OIC Member Countries to be submitted to the 40th Ministerial Session of the COMCEC.

The Committee was informed by the ICIEC (IsDB Group) on the work being undertaken towards launching the OIC Business Intelligence Programme. Within this framework, the Committee commended the efforts of ICIEC in collaboration with SESRIC, ICDT, and ICCD in conducting capacity-building programs for the ‘users of OBIC’ and requested the ICIEC, in collaboration with the SESRIC, ICDT, and ICCD to continue their efforts to complete the technical preparations for launching the OIC Business Intelligence Programme as soon as possible.

The Committee was briefed by the OIC Institutions regarding their activities, projects and existing and newly launched programs for the benefit of Palestinian people and Al-Quds Sharif and geographically distant OIC member countries such as Guyana and Suriname, and Observer Countries. The Committee expressed its appreciation to the relevant OIC Institutions for their efforts and contributions to the Palestinian People in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The 45th Sessional Committee Meeting will be held on 23 October 2024.

CHAPTER VII: EXCHANGE OF VIEWS SESSION

Exchange of views sessions are held regularly at the COMCEC Ministerial Sessions. The Ministers of the OIC Member Countries discuss their country experiences as well as the ways and means for enhancing cooperation among the Member Countries on a specific theme, which was determined by the previous COMCEC Ministerial Session.

In this regard, the 39th Session of the COMCEC determined the theme “Digital Transformation of Payment Systems in OIC Member Countries” as the theme of the Ministerial Exchange of Views Session of the 40th COMCEC Session. The 39th Session also requested the COMCEC Financial Cooperation Working Group (FCWG), 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. In this regard, the 22nd Meeting of the COMCEC FCWG held on October 16-17, 2024 in Ankara, served as a preparatory meeting towards the said session.

Accordingly, the FCWG in its 22nd Meeting deliberated on the preparations regarding the Exchange of Views Session and will come up with a set of policy recommendations, which will be submitted to the 40th COMCEC Session. The details of the policy recommendations to be submitted to 40th COMCEC Session will be available on the COMCEC website (www.comcec.org).