



Global SME Ministerial Meeting

22-24 July 2025

Durban, South Africa

Trade Promotion
Organizations
Leadership Dialogue

TPOs make a difference to countries and firms



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Trade Promotion Europe study on economic returns of trade promotion activities, by the University of Geneva and ITC (2024)



Find out more 

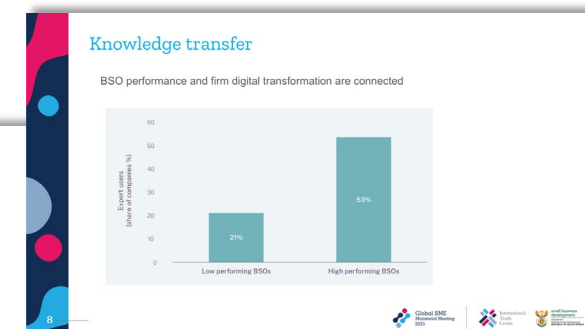
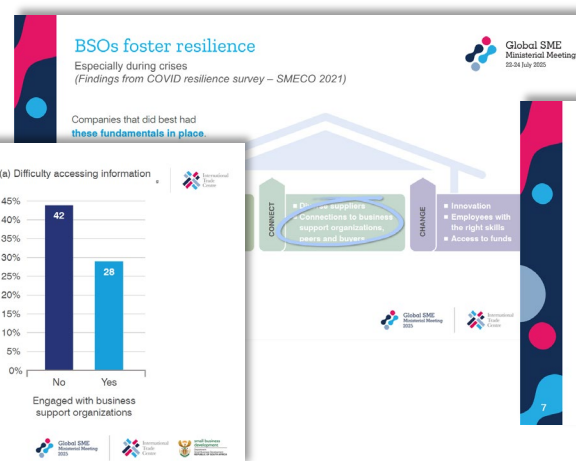
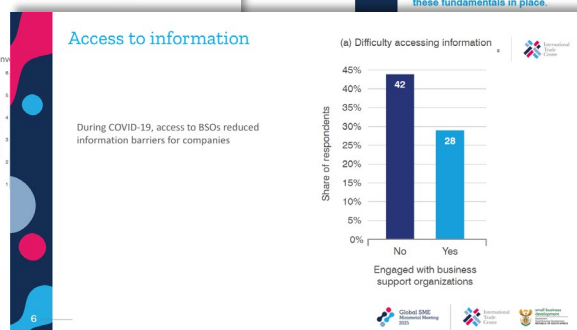


www.tradepromotioneurope.eu
secretariat@tradepromotioneurope.eu



The TPO multiplier: what ITC research tells us

1. TPOs make a difference when they target new exporters - **success rates in entering markets** is improved (SMECO 2018)
2. Connection to a BSO was a fundamental attributes for SMEs survival during COVID 19 in particular in **overcoming information barriers** (SMECO 2021),
3. In a context of fragility, SMEs connected with BSOs were **20% more likely to thrive** (SMECO 2023)
4. High performance by BSOs is **correlated with more digital ready firms** (SMECO 2025)



Aligning trade promotion and SME development



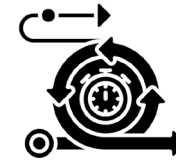
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Technology-led and design-led goods and services are less reliant on capital investments to be export competitive



E-commerce has opened the world of trade for small shipments from small companies



The rapid pace of change means that TPOs must help SMEs grow into future champions fast



Government strategies for market diversification and value addition through innovation and niche products

SME Ministers need to understand global opportunities and threats. The knowledge and networks of **TPOs** are invaluable

Technology change means rapid **growth for SMEs** through internationalization with the **support of the TPO**

Export-led SME **growth via TPOs** relies on **SME Ministers** to foster the right business conditions

For economic diversification and value addition, **SME support** and **trade/investment promotion** activities need to be seamless

Pre-conference survey, confirmed that **TPOs** were generally structurally aligned with SME Ministers, but performance indicators did not always drive collaboration.

ROADMAPS

Navigating new business frontiers



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ROADMAP 1 : FUTURE-PROOFING TPO EXCELLENCE

Based on 3 Technical Sessions with data, cases, panels and roundtable discussions

1. Championing change
2. A just and inclusive transition
3. Animating the ecosystem

ROADMAP 2 : ALIGNING TPOs and SME MINISTRIES

Based on 3 white papers as well as panel and roundtable discussions

1. Affordability
2. Closing the skills gap
3. Supportive regulatory framework
4. Strategic alignment



ROADMAP 1 : **TEN** steps to **FUTURE-PROOF** your TPO

1. Identify **new competencies** to build or borrow, particularly on climate literacy and digital trade.

2. Invest in **foresight and data collection**, including gender disaggregated data, environmental and risk indicators.

3. Nurture a **customer-centric culture** and 2-way communications channels with firms

4. Expand and diversify **ecosystem partners** for today's challenges and opportunities

5. Build and manage **relationship capital** across sectors and borders for long term

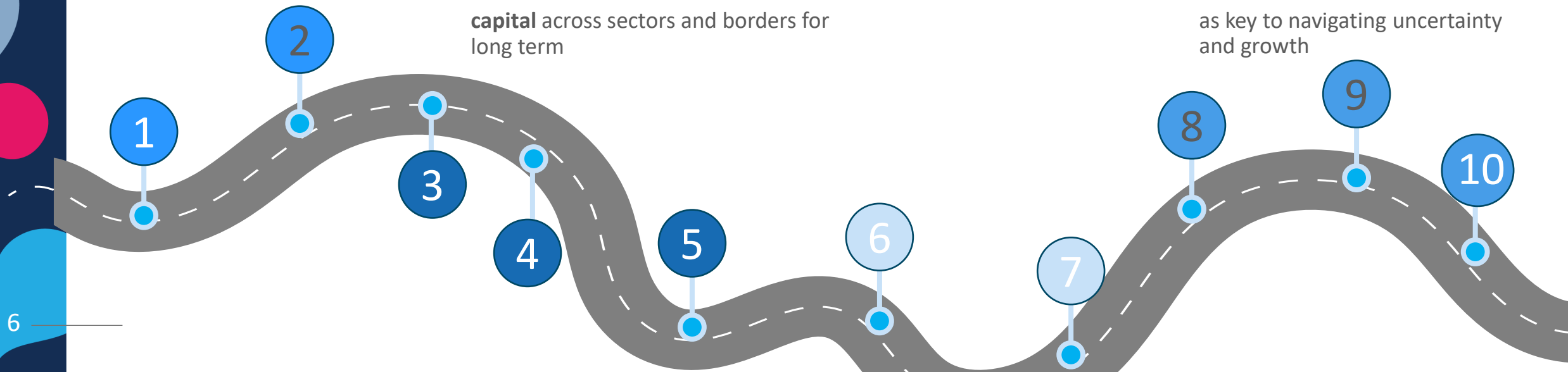
6. Review **alignment of KPIs** with mandate, government objectives and programmes, and inclusion and sustainability priorities.

7. Understand and **focus on what you do well**, and partner for the rest

8. Build **agility and crisis response** into strategies and operations

9. Adapt **service offering** for specific groups or emerging risks and opportunities

10. Reconsider **risk appetite** as key to navigating uncertainty and growth



ROADMAP 2 : **FOUR** opportunities for TPOs and SME Ministers to align



AFFORDABILITY

Improve access to finance, digital affordability and a green transition by together animating a broad ecosystem offering a pathway to SME competitiveness



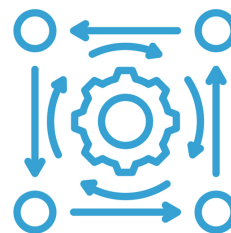
CLOSING THE SKILLS GAP

Help to equip SMEs and BSOs with new competencies, and to benefit from skilled employees.



SUPPORTIVE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Use SME data and market intelligence to advocate for and implement policies to support innovation and export diversification.



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Include SME growth and internationalisation as indicators for both TPOs and SME agencies to incentivise collaboration.



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QUESTIONS

EXTRA SLIDES



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ROADMAP 1 INSIGHTS: Championing Change

TPO actions today to be a better change champion when it matters

1. Embrace digital capability and reduce barriers to digital access for SMEs
2. Build agility, risk and crisis response into organizational strategies and operations
3. Allocate resources to foresight and data collection
4. Be an early adopter and role model for firms
5. Nurture a customer centric culture and 2-way communications channels with firms
6. Build relationship capital with private and public sector

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ROADMAP 2 INSIGHTS: Championing Change

Championing change with SME Ministers

1. Capture and share SME data to better predict risk and measure results
2. Support measures for SMEs to respond to trade related shocks or emerging trends.
3. Collaborate on awareness raising for emerging exporters to support market diversification
4. “Create a unified entry point for SME support – especially in a crisis”



ROADMAP 1 INSIGHTS: Delivering a Just and Inclusive Green Transition

TPO actions today for a just and inclusive green transition

1. Access and deliver relevant technical and actionable knowledge
2. Capture new types of data on firms, including gender, age and climate vulnerability
3. Adapt your service offering for specific groups or green risks and opportunities
4. Amplify the voice of under-served groups
5. Refresh ecosystem partners
6. Model inclusion and sustainability in your own organization
7. Foster regional and cross-border collaboration on green standards

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ROADMAP 2 INSIGHTS: Delivering a Just and Inclusive Green Transition

Working with SME Ministers for a just and inclusive green transition

1. Align mandates and support joint actions for climate related support.
2. Help to convene opportunities for equipping entrepreneurs and BSOs with new competencies
3. Collaborate in dialogues, including cross-border partnerships
4. Help to translate relevant policies from Ministries into SME action
5. “Ministers mobilise resources and political will, TPOs amplify that leadership to firms”



ROADMAP 1 INSIGHTS: Animating the Ecosystem

TPO actions for a more connected ecosystem of business support

1. Manage mandate creep and avoid the ego-system
2. Actively seek new ecosystem partners for today's challenges and opportunities
3. Build shared services, measurement and reporting systems for shared attribution
4. Understand the user perspective
5. Seek opportunities for regional collaboration among TPOs

Featuring:



ROADMAP 2 INSIGHTS: Animating the Ecosystem

Working with SME Ministers for a more connected ecosystem of business support

1. Engage with new ecosystem actors in response to SME policies and regulations
2. Design new multi-actor service offerings to implement new policies and overcome barriers
3. Broaden the ecosystem to ensure the smallest businesses have a path to internationalisation





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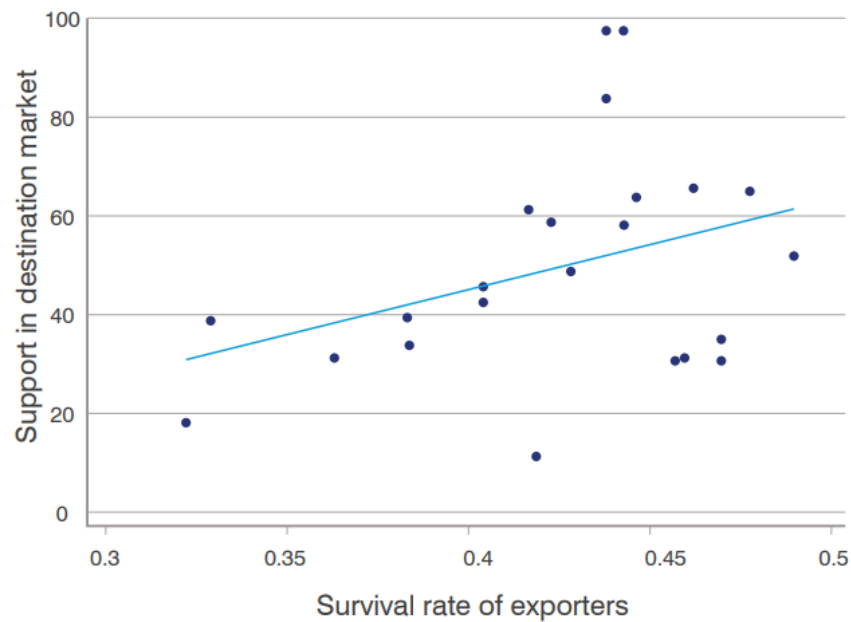
BSO support boosts exports

(Findings from SMECO 2018)

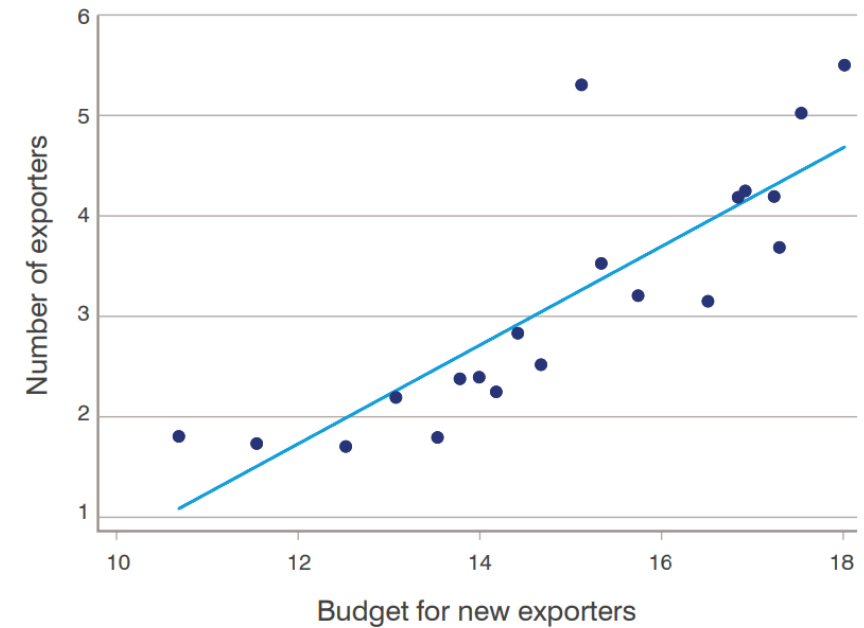


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In-market support contributes to export stability



Investing in new entrants improves export outcomes



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BSOs foster resilience

Especially during crises

(Findings from COVID resilience survey – SMECO 2021)



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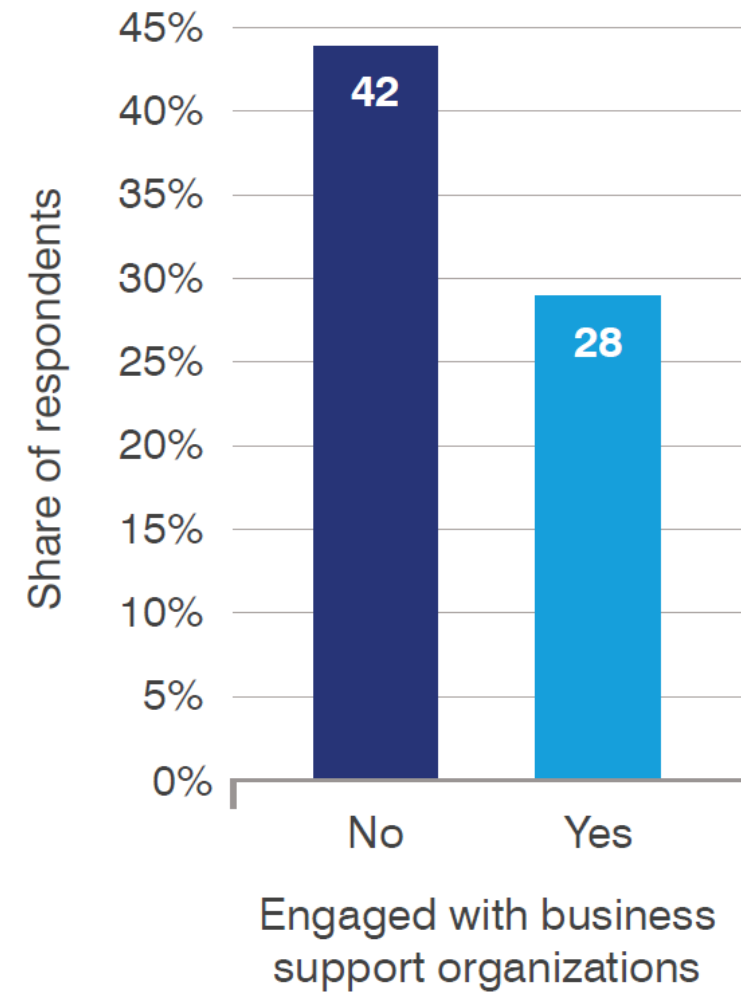
Companies that did best had
these fundamentals in place.



Access to information

During COVID-19, access to BSOs reduced information barriers for companies

(a) Difficulty accessing information ^g



BSOs facilitate growth

Even in fragile and post conflict settings

(Findings from SMEs in fragility survey – SMECO 2023)

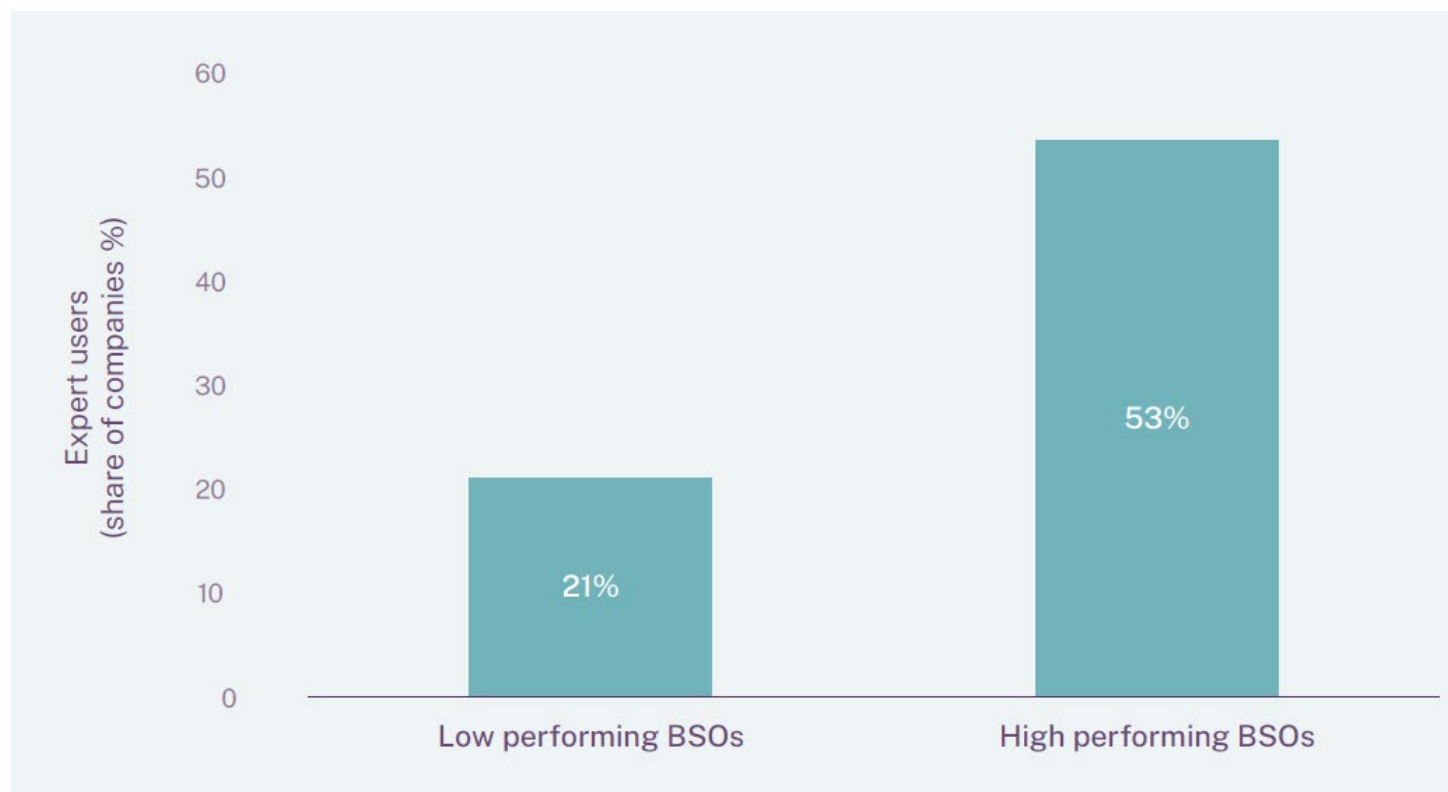
Engaged with business support organizations



Share of firms with employee growth (%)

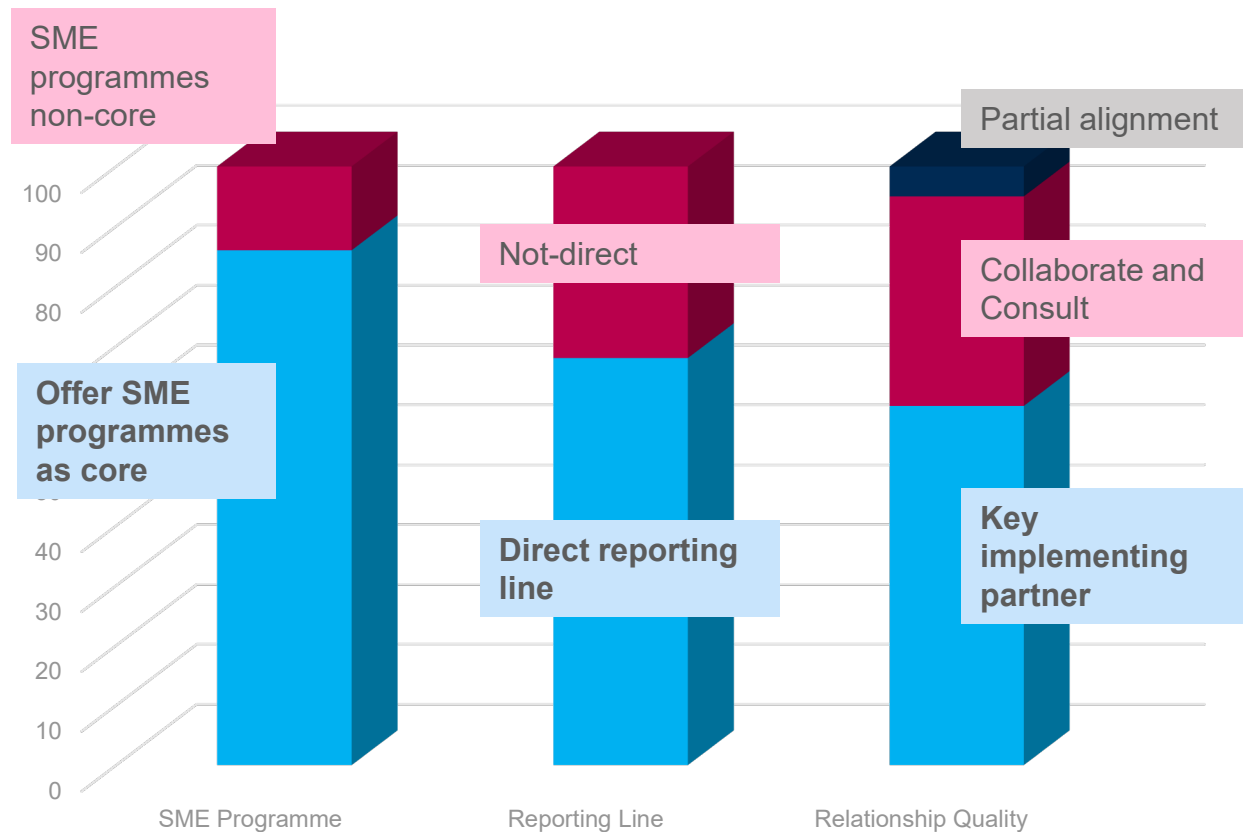
Knowledge transfer

BSO performance and firm digital transformation are connected



TPOs recognise the importance of alignment with SME Ministers. But...

*ITC pre-conference survey
of invited TPOs, 2025*



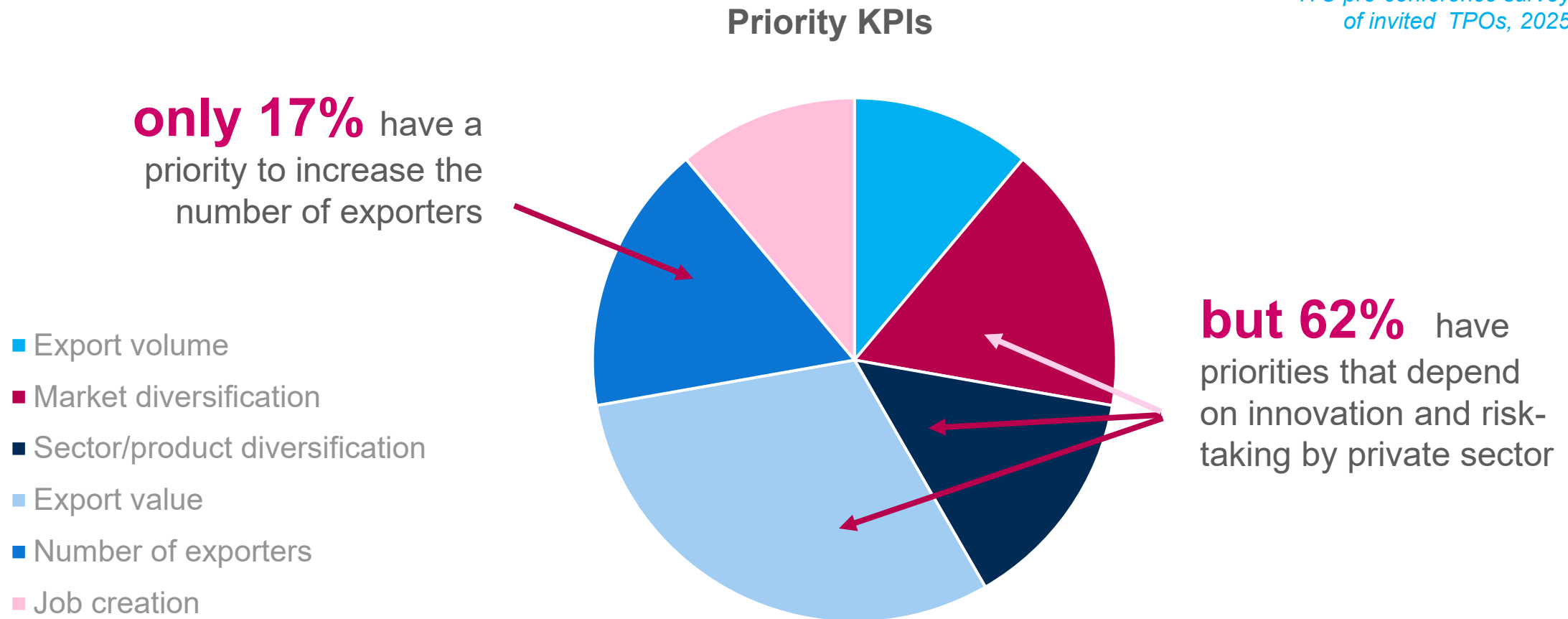
100% offer support to SMEs and
this is core for **86%**

95% see themselves as either a
key agency for SME policies or are
consulting and collaborating with
SME Ministries

68% report directly to the SME
Minister

...current drivers of performance don't prioritise new exporters. Export focused support for SME innovation and risk-taking could make the difference.

*Top 2 KPIs.
ITC pre-conference survey
of invited TPOs, 2025*





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Tools of the Trade for TPOs



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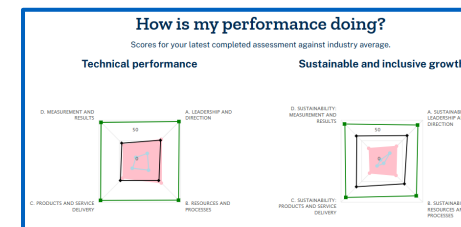
The problem: TPOs lack tools to objectively assess their performance and access global best practice.

How TPOs can benchmark, improve, and thrive

The ITC Benchmarking for Trade platform empowers TPOs to drive institutional excellence. It provides a structured assessment of governance, strategy, operations, digital maturity, organizational culture, and sustainability. Through peer comparisons, tailored improvement roadmaps, and hands-on support, TPOs can enhance their performance and better serve their business communities.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Assess performance
- Benchmark against global peers and best practices
- Get a tailored performance improvement roadmaps
- Strengthen capacity with hands-on guidance and coaching
- Understand client needs and competitiveness through targeted SME assessments



Self assessment Start date 17 Dec 2024 Analyst Ms. Miyoba Lubemba Progress 100%

Scores Technical performance 46.99 Sustainability performance 32.89 VIEW SCORES

Details Profile Technical Sustainability Recommendations Final report

What would you like to preview?
Technical scores

SEE SCORES BY AREA A. LEADER... THEME -Select- MEASURE -Select- Apply filters Reset

A.1. Mandate, common purpose and recognition
A.2. Governance
A.3. Strategy development and implementation
A.4. Accountability and risk management
A.5. Interaction with stakeholders and strategic partners

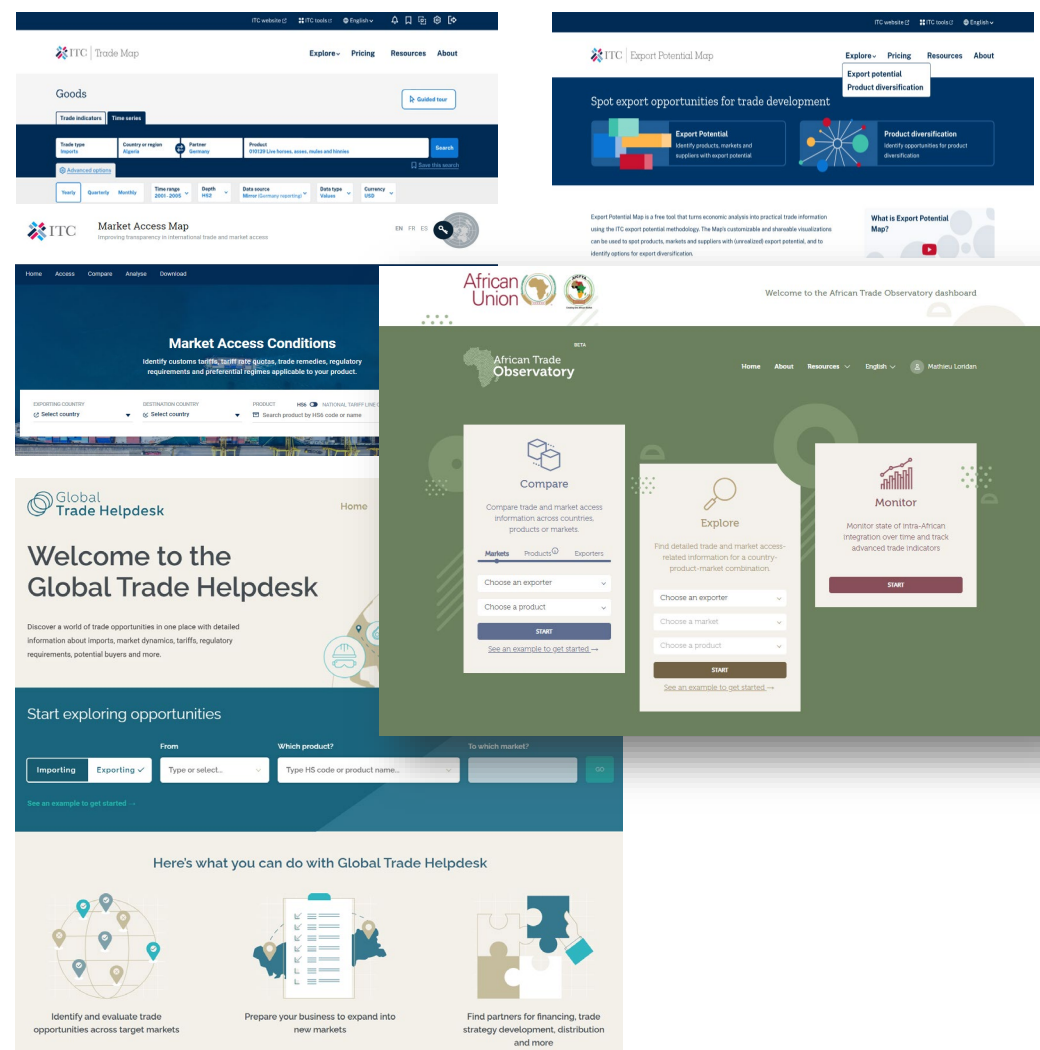
	BSO Score	Minimum	Average	Maximum
A. LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION	53.25	18.84	50.98	96.57
A.1. Mandate, common purpose and recognition	48.75	18.00	56.67	97.00
A.2. Governance	52.50	3.75	48.82	98.13
A.3. Strategy development and implementation	45.00	6.25	45.87	100.00
A.4. Accountability and risk management	42.50	4.25	46.77	93.38
A.5. Interaction with stakeholders and strategic partners	75.00	24.25	56.21	100.00

The problem: Empowering decision-making through trade and market intelligence

Insufficient market intelligence limits the ability of developing countries to compete and thrive in global trade.

ITC's global suite of Market Analysis Tools – and specialized platforms like the **Global Trade Helpdesk (GTH)** and **African Trade Observatory (ATO)** –

empower countries to diversify and transition toward higher-value production, while encouraging greater SME participation in global trade.



The problem: Trade support often overlooks gender-specific barriers.

Capacity Building for TPOs on Gender Mainstreaming

- ◆ **Assess** level of gender responsiveness in TPOs
- ◆ **Enhance understanding** of gender and trade dynamics
- ◆ **Build practical skills** for gender mainstreaming in TPO's policies, programs, and services.
- ◆ **Develop Action-Oriented Gender Plans** that align with each TPO's goals and realities.



Scan
to access
the full guide!

The problem: Climate risks are disrupting agrifood exports — and BSOs must be ready to respond

Agrifood Exports and Climate Change – A Guide for Business Support Organizations

Extreme weather events, rising temperatures, and shifting climate patterns disrupt supply chains and reduce productivity — placing exporters at growing risk.

This practical guide equips BSOs to **identify and address** these risks, and to **work proactively** with agrifood companies through:

- Effective engagement and dialogue
- Use of new climate-related data and tools
- Policy influence to strengthen resilience
- Tailored support for affected businesses

Agrifood Exports and Climate Change

A GUIDE FOR BUSINESS SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS



The problem: Helping firms understand intellectual property.

Business Support Organizations and Intellectual Property

Trusted partners to SMEs, BSOs are uniquely positioned to bridge the IP knowledge gap. By offering accessible IP information and first-level guidance, BSOs can empower businesses to make informed decisions critical to their international growth and competitiveness.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- WIPO IP Diagnostic tool and step-by-step guidance
- Providing accessible, first-level IP guidance
- Helping firms make informed IP decisions
- Building internal BSO capacity on IP



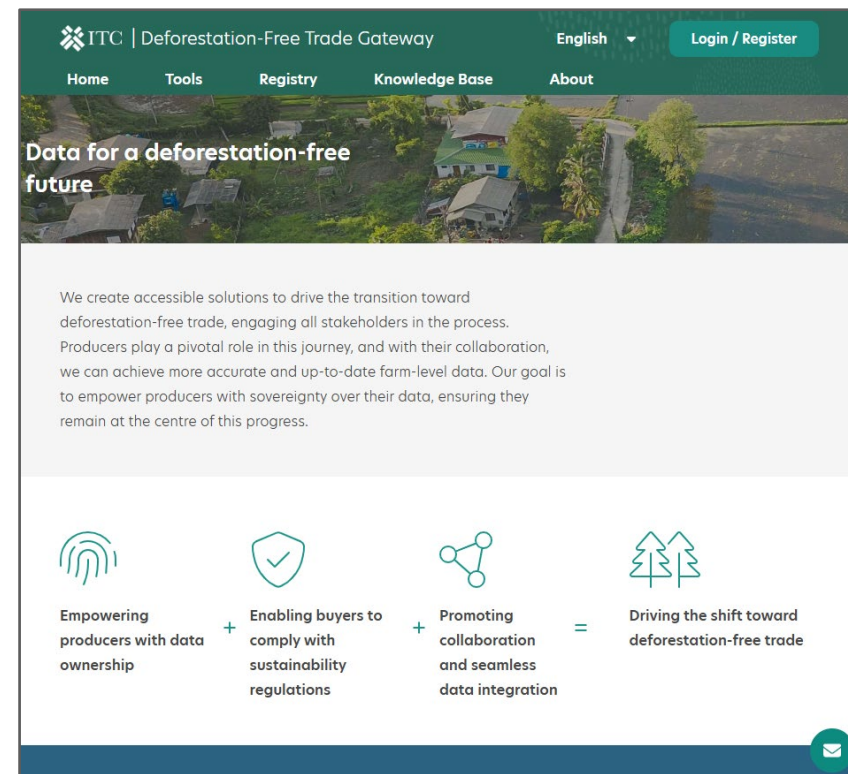
The problem: Collecting and sharing supply chain data required for compliance with deforestation regulations

ITC's Deforestation-free Trade Gateway

As a neutral platform, the DFTG bridges public and private systems, fosters transparency and efficiency, and empowers smallholders and local enterprises to be recognized and rewarded for sustainable practices, ensuring no one is left behind in the shift toward deforestation-free value chains.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Interoperability
- Empowering SMEs
- Neutral and trusted “clearinghouse”
- Collaboration-driven



<https://dftg.intracen.org/>

The problem: Uncertainty and disruption are the new normal for TPOs

How to react fast when crisis hits, and how to build resilience and agility into organizational DNA. We have a checklist to help.

From HEAD WINDS to TRADE WINS: A 90-Day Checklist for Trade Promotion Organizations facing global disruption

The checklist addresses four core dimensions:

- Business needs
- Stakeholder and ecosystem coordination
- Internal TPO operations

Delivering on this plan requires bold leadership, trusted relationships, agile resource reallocation, and a culture of customer-centricity and smart risk-taking.

An effective TPO response in times of disruption strengthens exporter competitiveness and lays the groundwork for long-term economic resilience.

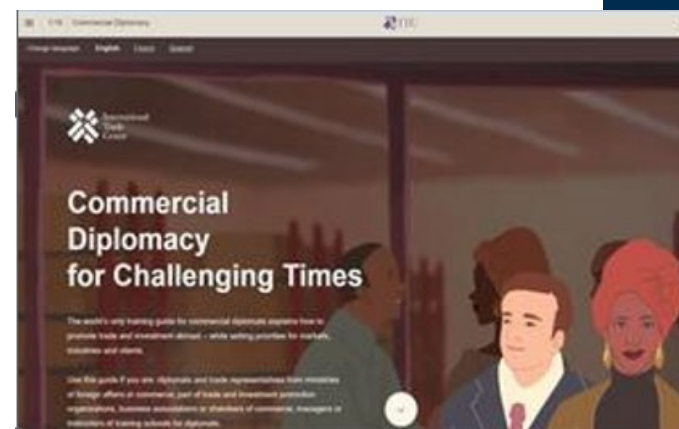


The problem: New competencies for commercial diplomacy

Increasingly diplomats are asked to offer customised support to exporting firms

An e-publication and detailed guide provide practical checklists and engaging stories to guide the work of commercial diplomats.

Combined with a library of relevant e-learning modules, diplomatic staff new to trade support for firms and sectors can gain confidence and build new skills



[Commercial Diplomacy in Changing Times – e-publication | ITC](#)

[A Guide to Commercial Diplomacy | ITC](#)