AZHAB FORUM

AZERBAIJAN
HALAL BUSINESS FORUM

OCTOBER 7-8, 2025
BAKU, AZERBAIJAN

AGENDA

Theme: "Halal Industry as a Source of Resilience in the Rapidly Changing World"

BACKGROUND

The Azerbaijan Halal Business Forum (AZHAB Forum) aims to foster collaboration, share knowledge, showcase products and promote ethical and sustainable practices in the Halal industry while also encouraging business growth and international cooperation across the globe.

By bringing together diverse stakeholders, including government representatives, industry experts, entrepreneurs, and scholars, AZHAB Forum seeks to chart a path toward a more vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous halal business landscape in the broader region. The first edition of the AZHAB Forum was organized in October 2024 and gathered together around 100 international participants representing all corners of the world including Australia and Americas, Eurasia and Africa.

The next 2025 edition of the AZHAB Forum will try to approach the concept of the Halal Industry both from theoretical and practical aspects. "Halal industry as a source of resilience in the rapidly changing world" is selected as an overarching theme reflecting current global political, economic and social trends.

As the world is undergoing dramatic political, economic, and social changes, the halal industry can help to weather economic challenges more effectively than many other sectors through its diversified global markets, ethical practices, financial resilience, and stable consumer demand. Its emphasis on sustainability, risk-sharing, and community-based business models further strengthens its ability to adapt to and thrive in a rapidly changing global economy.

The halal industry could offer a trade-resilient model by leveraging global demand, digital transformation, local production, and strong certification systems. In a world facing new trade barriers, halal businesses can diversify markets, enhance self-sufficiency, and use halal standards as a competitive edge to thrive despite restrictions.

By supporting innovation, fostering ethical consumption, promoting financial stability, and enhancing global cooperation, the halal industry can significantly contribute to economic stability and long-term growth. Its ability to adapt to new trends, coupled with its focus on social responsibility and sustainability, positions it as a critical component of the global economy's resilience.

The concept of halal extends well beyond dietary laws to encompass ethical behavior in financial transactions, and overall lifestyle choices. In times of geopolitical turmoil, the halal framework can serve as a source of psychological resilience by providing individuals and communities with moral clarity, stability, and a sense of purpose.

SESSIONS

1. Enabling a competitive landscape for Islamic Finance in the emerging markets: evidences from different geographies and lessons learnt

Islamic finance presents a powerful tool for inclusive, ethical, and sustainable economic development – especially in emerging countries where large populations may be underserved by conventional finance. However, unlocking its full potential requires a multi-layered development strategy. To enable a competitive landscape for Islamic finance in emerging markets, a strategic combination of regulatory reforms, financial infrastructure development, talent cultivation, and public awareness is needed.

The major challenges faced in this process include inter alia establishing dedicated Islamic finance laws, creating/strengthening Shariah supervisory boards at national and institutional levels, ensuring legal recognition of Islamic contracts costs, integrating Islamic finance into national financial strategies, enabling SME access to Islamic Finance. Supporting growth of Takaful (Islamic insurance) and Islamic fintech, using Islamic finance for infrastructure and green projects, establishing Islamic finance degree programs, diplomas, and certifications are among the priorities.

This panel is expected to boost discussions enriching audience with the practical experience from different geographies and help practitioners and respective authorities to better chart their navigation route in the developing Islamic Finance.

2. Halal business management: harmony of success or success of harmony

The purpose of this panel is to discuss the major differences between Islamic business management psychology and the conventional one. From the Islamic Business Management point of view, business is not viewed as a purely economic activity, but as a form of worship if conducted ethically and within divine guidelines. The ultimate objective is to achieve comprehensive success. In contrast, Conventional Business Management is grounded in secular ideologies such as capitalism, utilitarianism, and individualism. The primary aim is often the maximization of shareholder wealth, with ethical concerns taking a secondary role, typically shaped by legal compliance and market dynamics.

Halal management psychology focuses on understanding consumer behavior, team management principles, business ethics, and psychological factors influencing the halal industry. It integrates Islamic principles with psychological insights to enhance business strategies, staff management, consumer trust, and ethical decision-making.

While conventional models focus on maximizing material gain, Islamic business management seeks a holistic, value-based system that harmonizes profit with ethics, spirituality, and social justice.

In a world increasingly conscious of sustainability and ethics, the Islamic business model offers timeless principles with modern relevance — emphasizing that business is not just a transaction, but a trust, a responsibility, and a path to greater good. Importantly, and what is specifically topical these days, Halal business management can create a powerful synergy with the Green Transition where ethical, sustainable and responsible economic practices could be established as the core guiding principles to run the business.

Thus, this panel topic discussions are expected to unveil the fundamental differences in search harmony, both within the individual personality and the professional team, as well as help to identify the strategically competitive approaches in business management from the sustainably point of view.

3. Rasing SME visibility in the global green transition discourse: Joint Declaration on Baku Climate Coalition for SMEs green transition

The green transition is not an easy process for all businesses, specifically so for SMEs. Typically, common challenges include a lack of knowledge, insufficient capacity, and limited access to financial resources. Addressing these global challenges requires the global efforts of all SME stakeholders across whole ecosystem where SMEs are to navigate.

While private sector climate initiatives have been historically concentrated on large corporations, SMEs – representing about 90% of all businesses worldwide – have often been overlooked due to their individual smaller size. Yet, given their factual collective emissions reaching 50% at the global level, SMEs clearly play a critical role in reaching global sustainability goals. Furthermore, SMEs account for 70% of global employment. This means that, in addition to adopting resource-efficient and environmentally friendly practices, SMEs can also contribute to environmental protection by fostering a culture of responsible consumption among individuals.

Based on the above considerations, the Small and Medium Business Development Agency (KOBİA) of the Republic of Azerbaijan has initiated. The “Joint Declaration on the Baku Climate Coalition for the Green Transition of SMEs”. It has been presented as one of the priorities of Azerbaijan's COP29 Presidency. The Declaration was officially launched in November 13, 2024 during the COP29 in Baku. As of now, ten national institutions from various foreign countries and eight highly respected international organizations have joined and supported the Declaration (full information is available at greensme.org)

The Declaration calls on both all institutional actors and individuals to join forces in helping SMEs both to cope with the challenges brought by the climate change and their green transformation. It offers both soft and institutional solutions. The aim of the session is to bring all the existing and potential partners together to start discussion on the implementation of the Declaration`s provisions.

4. The role of women in promoting halal industry

There is huge potential for women improvement through the opportunities offered by the halal industry which on its own turn will help further expand and deepen the halal industry itself. Women can play a transformative role in the development of the halal industry, contributing their leadership, creativity, and diverse perspectives to drive growth, innovation, and sustainability across various sectors.

By launching halal-certified food brands, fashion lines, cosmetics, or wellness products, women can create innovative solutions that align with both Islamic values and modern consumer trends. Women's leadership in halal businesses can inspire others, promoting greater diversity and inclusivity in the sector.

Women in the halal industry can play an influential role in advocating for ethical, sustainable, and socially responsible practices. As educators and advocates, women can raise awareness about the ethical standards of the halal industry and its contributions to the global economy. By empowering women to engage in community outreach, education, and public policy discussions, the industry can address key issues such as social justice, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability.

Women understanding of family needs, consumer preferences, and lifestyle trends positions them well to develop products and services that resonate with a wider audience. Women's participation in global trade networks and export businesses can help halal products reach international markets, particularly where there is demand for ethically produced and quality-certified goods.

Furthermore, women can play a key role in building networks and alliances within the halal industry. They can create platforms for collaboration and knowledge-sharing among businesses, suppliers, and other stakeholders, helping to foster a sense of community and mutual growth. These networks also provide mentorship opportunities, allowing women to share their experiences and inspire others to enter and succeed in the halal industry. Through entrepreneurship, leadership, innovation, and advocacy, women can shape the future of the sector, making it more inclusive, ethical, and globally competitive.

This session will explore how to facilitate women's involvement in all aspects of the halal industry, from business ownership to product development to community engagement for the sector to thrive and contribute meaningfully to economic development and social progress.

5. Role of the historical heritage in developing the Halal tourism in the Caucasus and the Central Asia

Historical heritage is cornerstone of halal tourism development across the globe. By preserving and promoting them, destinations not only attract Muslim travelers but also create a respectful, culturally enriching tourism model rooted in Islamic values.

Historical heritage possesses significant untapped potential to boost halal tourism in the Caucasus and Central Asia by offering a rich tapestry of Islamic and pre-Islamic cultural and architectural sites that appeal to Muslim travelers seeking to connect with their faith and history. At the same time, the Halal tourism could play a critical role in preserving and showcasing Islamic Heritage, historical monuments such as mosques, madrasahs, palaces, and caravanserais etc. They attract Muslim tourists who seek spiritual connection, historical knowledge, and pride in their heritage.

Importantly, historical heritage telling the story of Islamic coexistence with other cultures help build interfaith understanding and positive perceptions about Islamic culture. It appeals to both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists interested in the history. In this regard, notable Christian, Judaic and other religions heritage of the region, when respectfully integrated into halal tourism strategies, could play a meaningful role in promoting interfaith understanding, historical education, and cultural harmony. It enriches the travel experience for both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists and opens new paths for cooperation, especially in multicultural regions with shared histories.

Visits to historical sites offer learning experiences about the past civilizations, countries and empires, their dynasties, scholars, cuisine, life style, taste and preference, and definitely about architecture. The tourism encourages and even could finance preservation and promotion of such heritage and stimulate employment, local crafts, and halal service sectors (food, hospitality, transport). They encourage investment in sustainable, Shariah-compliant tourism infrastructure, boosting overall economic development. Engaging local communities in the development and promotion of halal tourism is essential for ensuring its long-term success.

By leveraging their rich historical heritage, the Caucasus and Central Asia can establish themselves as attractive destinations for halal tourism, contributing to both cultural preservation and economic growth.

This panel is expected to facilitate elaborate discussions on how the region's regional historical heritage could be mobilized to serve the development of the tourism and what the regional synergies can be created through cooperation in this field.

6. Facilitating SME support organizations' cooperation within the OIC: Inaugural Session of the OIC SME Network

According to the "OIC Economic Outlook 2024" report prepared by SESRIC, the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises constitute 99.9% of all firms in OIC countries, contribute 93.4% to employment, and 84.9% to value-added, surpassing global averages which indicate their substantial role in socio-economic development in the region.

The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), a subsidiary organ of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), is mandated to foster socio-economic growth and enhance intra-OIC collaboration in the areas of statistics, economic and social research, and training and technical cooperation.

Establishing an intra-OIC Network among SME agencies offers a valuable opportunity to connect institutions that share the common objective of fostering SME growth and ensuring economic prosperity. This initiative embodies the essence of South-South Cooperation, which SESRIC actively promotes to assist member countries in their development endeavours.

In this regard, the OIC-SMENET will serve to coordinate SME development efforts, foster a culture of shared experiences, and facilitate collaborative problem-solving in the face of rapid technological evolution and diverse developmental priorities.

The purpose of the session is to open the discussions between interested SME support organization from the OIC countries on specific cooperation opportunities and to launch OIC Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Network (OIC-SMENET) which is initiated by the SESRIC in collaboration with KOBİA.

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