



STARTUP SYRIA

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN EXILE, INSIGHTS INTO SYRIAN REFUGEE STARTUPS IN HOST COUNTRIES

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In a time when refugees are frequently debated in the news as a problem, it is easy to forget the hardship they had been through. Having escaped destruction, traumas, and even death, they arrive at their host countries with determination to make the most of their new home, and many have gone on to achieve their ambition in becoming entrepreneurs.

This book, *Entrepreneurship in Exile*, is built on data a study examining hundred Syrian refugees entrepreneur's views and experiences to spot the light on them, the challenges it faces, the potential it has and the uncertain future that lies ahead. It provides a stark reminder that, given the right circumstances, refugees can contribute to the local society and economy of the host country.

The principal message of this report is that in spite of the hardships experienced by Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in host countries, many have taken the initiative to start their own businesses. Governments and international organizations should consider assisting entrepreneurs in their endeavors to better secure their future. Given sufficient up-front support and smart governmental

policies, entrepreneurs' efforts can yield substantial social and economic dividends.

Syrian entrepreneurs, like the wider population of Syria, have fled the country to seek sanctuary around the world. Having taken their ideas and ambitions with them, they have met with mixed success in their new homes. Some have managed to create new start-ups and thrive in innovation-friendly environments, while others have grappled with a range of challenges that make it harder for small and medium-sized enterprises to get off the ground.

Despite the severe conditions in which refugees and immigrants live, they have shown incredible strength and resilience. Many have worked hard to achieve their ambitions, becoming refugee and immigrant entrepreneurs.

The report also offers insight into what can be divided into three main categories of entrepreneurs in exile: entrepreneurs based in refugee camps, entrepreneurs in urban areas, and portfolio entrepreneur. Participants in each of these categories have faced circumstances that either facilitated or

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obstructed the establishment of new businesses.

The efforts of Syrian entrepreneurs have turned the neighborhoods of 6th October City, Egypt, into bustling corridors of Syrian restaurants and grocery stores (the area is now called “Little Damascus”). In Turkey, a total of 8,367 new Syrian companies were founded in 2017, up from a mere 157 in 2012, and 800 Syrian industrial establishments have relocated to operate in Jordan.

Syrian entrepreneurs in host countries contribute to a wide range of sectors. The most common industry for the self-employed among those surveyed was general services, with 28.5 percent of participants having opened businesses such as restaurants, grocery stores, barber shops, etc. The second most common sector, with 27.8% of start-ups surveyed, was information technology (IT) — the sector that includes main technological applications— along with administrative services.

Syrian women are gradually embracing entrepreneurship and establishing small businesses to earn a living. Across all host countries, 17.22 percent of displaced Syrian women participate in entrepreneurship, a significant improvement over female participation in Syria before the crisis. However, this figure changes from country to country. For example, in Turkey, that number stands at 16.1 percent, while in Lebanon it is up to 29.4 percent.

Refugees have an entrepreneurship rate that outpaces their economic contributions. The Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan is home to more than 4,500 refugee entrepreneurs. This means that

12.5 percent of refugees there are entrepreneurs, while only 4.5 percent of the Jordan-born population is. The entrepreneurship rate among Syrians living in Turkey is meager at 1.26 percent, compared with Turkey’s overall entrepreneurship rate of 9.40 percent in 2016.

Identifying the critical challenges faced by Syrian refugee start-ups is essential to gain a better understanding and insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the social and economic entrepreneurial environment. Additionally, it can aid in developing ways to overcome obstacles and thus help foster entrepreneurship.

Based on the study, ten main challenges were identified: travel restrictions, complex regulatory policies, banking and financial services limitations, the struggle for living stability, limited funding and investing options, language and cultural barriers, psychosocial background and trauma, social exclusion, unfamiliar business environments, and an uncertain future.

To address those challenges, the report offers a list of recommendations based on both the experience of entrepreneurs and the expertise of business people, NGO leaders, financial experts, and others who have either worked with refugee entrepreneurs or were part of efforts to help them create businesses include; providing entrepreneurs with supportive regulatory policies, supporting Syrian entrepreneurs to get access to fund and banking services, introducing entrepreneurs to local business environments and key players in startup ecosystems, and building refugees supportive environments.

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This report, *Entrepreneurship in Exile*, demonstrates why any debate about refugees should be conducted with an eye on what refugees can contribute to the local society and economy of the host country. It provides a stark reminder that, given the right circumstances, Syrian refugees are ready to integrate and start a new life. Given sufficient up-front support and smart governmental policies, entrepreneurs' efforts can yield substantial social and economic dividends.

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Biography of Author

Ahmad Sufian Bayram

Founder, Startup Syria, Author of 'Entrepreneurship in Exile'

Ahmad Sufian Bayram is a social entrepreneur, author, and strategy and creative leader in technology. Since 2012, Ahmad has been supporting hundreds of Syrians to gain access to entrepreneurship opportunities and build a supportive environment.

Ahmed is the Middle East and Africa Regional Manager at Techstars; a worldwide network that helps entrepreneurs succeed with a portfolio of over 1,500 companies, Techstars operates in 150 countries. He is also Jusoor's entrepreneurship program manager, an adviser in the Techfugees Board, and Entrepreneur in Residence at Aliqtsadi. He also co-chairs several programs with the aim to support startup founders in the Middle East and has an advising role at several startups and non-profit organizations. Ahmad has published "Entrepreneurship In Conflict Zones" book, highlighting the experiences and needs of Syrian entrepreneurs inside the country during the conflict and second book "Entrepreneurship in Exile" insights into Syria refugees startups in host countries. He has also appeared in top-tier tech publications such as the World Economic Forum, Forbes, The Guardian, Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Huffington Post, and many others. Also, presented in top stages including EU Parliament, World Bank, Wilton Park, Goethe Institut, Google, SPARK Ignite, Techfugees summit, Startup Istanbul, and many more.

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