

Araştırma Makalesi

SYRIAN ENTREPRENEURS IN TURKEY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES*

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ABSTRACT

The Syrian War has led to a refugee crisis due to which over 4.9 million Syrians have fled the country. Turkey holds over 3.5 million Syrian refugees which demands immediate attention for economic and social integration of these refugees. Economic integration has been very problematic due to a lack of labor market integration. Problems still exist after the legal changes in work permit processing for Syrians made in January 2016. Entrepreneurship provides an alternative for economic integration of Syrians into Turkey. In addition, migrant entrepreneurs are able to provide employment opportunities to other migrants as well as locals, increase investment, and boost economic activity. This study focused on finding the problems faced by Syrian entrepreneurs and the opportunities which are available for them in the Turkish market. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 Syrian entrepreneurs in different districts of Istanbul. The results show that Syrian entrepreneurs face many hurdles including language barrier, high business costs, transparency of market opportunities, access to finance, lack of knowledge about commercial and taxation law, lack of governmental/non-governmental support, and discrimination. Opportunities for Syrian entrepreneurs include large Syrian ethnic communities, ease of registration, social networks, and at times leniency by governmental authorities.

Keywords: *Economic Integration, Migrant Entrepreneurship, Refugees, Syrian Entrepreneurs*

Research Article

TÜRKİYE'DEKİ SURİYELİ GİRİŞİMCİLER: GÜÇLÜKLER VE FIRSATLAR

Öz

Suriye'de başlayan iç savaş 4,9 milyonun üzerinde Suriyeli'nin ülke dışına gitmesine neden olan bir mülteci krizi yaratmıştır. Bu mültecilerin yaklaşık 3,5 milyonu Türkiye'de yer almakta ve ekonomik ve sosyal entegrasyona ilişkin acil önlemlere ihtiyaç duymaktadır. Ekonomik entegrasyon özellikle emek piyasasında yaşanan güçlüklerden ötürü oldukça sorunlu bir durumdur. Ocak 2016'da Türkiye'deki Suriyeli mültecilerin çalışma izni sürecini kolaylaştıran düzenlemeye rağmen halen güçlükler devam etmektedir. Bu noktada girişimcilik Türkiye'deki Suriyelilerin entegrasyon süreci için önemli bir fırsat olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Buna ek olarak göçmen girişimcilerin bulundukları ülkede göçmenler kadar yerli vatandaşlara da iş yaratma becerilerine sahip olmaları, yatırımları arttırmaları ve ekonomik büyümeyi desteklemeleri bu alanı daha önemli kılmaktadır. Bu çalışma Türkiye piyasasında faaliyette bulunan Suriyeli göçmenlerin karşılaştıkları güçlükler ve fırsatları araştırmaya odaklanmıştır. Çalışmada İstanbul'daki 10 Suriyeli girişimci ile yarı-yapılandırılmış mülakat tekniği ile görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Araştırma sonucunda Suriyeli girişimcilerin dil bariyeri, yüksek işletme maliyetleri, pazar fırsatlarına erişim güçlükleri, finansmana erişimi, vergi ve yasal düzenlemelere ilişkin bilgiye erişimi, kamu ve STK desteği eksikliği ve ayrımcılık gibi sorunlarla karşılaştığı görülmektedir. Öte yandan yüksek sayıda Suriyeli mültecinin yarattığı pazar fırsatları, iş kurma kolaylığı, sosyal ağlar ve kamu otoriteleri desteği önemli fırsatlar olarak görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Ekonomik entegrasyon, göçmen girişimciliği, mülteciler, Suriyeli girişimciler*

* Received / Geliş tarihi: 15.01.2019

Accepted / Kabul tarihi: 24.01.2019

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Syrian Crisis, which began in 2011, has escalated over the past five years and does not hint at finishing any time soon. Millions of Syrians have been displaced within Syria and the Syrian refugees in neighboring countries have reached over 4.9 million. According to the Directorate General Migration Management (DGMM, 2018), Turkey has been at the forefront of the Syrian refugee crisis, housing over 3.4 million Syrian refugees. According to UNHCR (2017), Turkey received Syrian refugees amounting to 8, 000 in 2011 from which point onwards the number has been increasing monthly. This has led to an increase in the need for social institutes, funding, and integration of the refugees into the Turkish society. Five years into the Syrian refugee crisis, the main discussion revolves around the integration of these refugees into the society. The integration of these refugees has been the most difficult task when it comes to Turkey although, Syrian refugees have been accepted quite well over the years. There are several factors which go into refugees' integration into the society such as language, culture, education, and employment. Employment of Syrian refugees in Turkey has received much criticism due to illegal workers and wages below the minimum wage level in Turkey. The Turkish Government passed a new regulation in January 2016 to help refugees attain work permit and receive the same benefits as other workers. However, the employment ratio for Syrian refugees has been set at 10% of the overall firm workforce. A step forward by the government in order to help the Syrian refugees get employment and be able to support themselves instead of relying on aid.

Economic integration of the Syrian refugees in Turkey is essential due to the large number of Syrians in Turkey and the costs associated with accommodation of the refugees. Integration of Syrians economically will help in decreasing these costs and also help the refugees become self-sustainable while contributing to the society. Furthermore, positive economic contributions by the Syrians would reinforce a positive image of the Syrians in Turkey. One aspect of this economic contribution is entrepreneurship, a recent surge in the number of new businesses with Syrian partners is discussed in the next section. There exists a very small amount of studies which have focused on refugee entrepreneurship, these studies along with a base of immigrant entrepreneurship are reviewed in the literature section. Further, the obstacles and opportunities for Syrian entrepreneurs in Turkey are studied through a qualitative approach by interviewing different Syrian entrepreneurs in Istanbul and reported in the findings section of the study.

1.1 Syrian Entrepreneurs in Turkey: A Growing Community

The authors find that many Syrian refugees have been supporting themselves through establishment of businesses. The number of business opened by Syrian entrepreneurs has increased exponentially since the beginning of the Syrian war crisis. According to the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), over 6,000 new businesses with Syrian partners have been formed since 2011. Table 1 shows a

breakdown of the number of new businesses with Syrian partners opened each year since 2011. Entrepreneurship is an alternative for Syrian refugees to become self-sufficient and also provide employment to both Turkish nationals and other Syrians. Entrepreneurship is also a good way for refugees to integrate into the society because they must learn about the local customers, local culture, and adhere to the domestic business law. As a refugee, it is also a sign of commitment to the locality and moving forward as part of the community. According to Wauters and Lambrecht (2008), promoting refugee entrepreneurship can aid in the social integration of refugees.

Table 1: Number of Business Established with Syrian Partners Since 2011

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of Firms	79	158	426	1222	1572	1764	1202

Source: The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB, 2018)

The employment of Syrians in Turkey has been an issue since the beginning of the migration flows in 2011. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (2016, 2017), the number of approved work permits improved from 4,019 in 2015 to 13,290 in 2016 which could be due to the recent work permit regulation passed by the Government of Turkey. Yet, the number is extremely low when compared to the number of Syrians in Turkey. The high number of unemployed Syrians could be one of the reasons why so many of them have opted to open their own businesses whether small or large. A large number of businesses can especially be witnessed within heavily populated districts of Istanbul. Furthermore, many new Syrian businesses have opened in the city of Gaziantep where a large population of Syrians reside. Besides the high population of Syrians, Gaziantep is close to the Syrian border hence the high number of Syrians as well as businesses.

This research is undertaken in order to better understand the Syrian entrepreneurs in Istanbul, Turkey, get better insights into the problems they face, and opportunities they have in their host communities. The need for this type of study is required due to a limited number of studies on refugee entrepreneurship and even a more limited number of studies in developing countries. Furthermore, this research can help in devising a policy framework which can facilitate existing Syrian entrepreneurs in improving their businesses or help further the growth of new Syrian entrepreneurs.

There exist many limitations in researching refugee populations especially when studying the economic side of things. In terms of entrepreneurship, the researchers were only able to find the number of businesses established and the capital invested by migrant entrepreneurs in Turkey as a whole. Country data is used to depict the numbers since the number of migrant entrepreneurs according to city are unavailable.

It was quite difficult to get a representative sample due to an unknown population and a lack of resources. The problem of representativeness was countered to some extent by interviewing entrepreneurs from different districts of Istanbul. Even though the findings of the study are not generalizable since the interviews were only conducted in Istanbul, yet, the results do provide good insights into Syrian entrepreneurs and their livelihoods in Istanbul.

2. LITERATURE

2.1 Refugee Livelihoods

Refugee livelihoods are a topic of interest in migration studies especially given the fact that refugee communities require assistance from state and non-state actors. Understanding the livelihoods of refugees can contribute towards developing better policies to assist them in becoming self-sufficient and improving their lives. In recent times, various studies have been conducted in uncovering refugee livelihoods in Africa (Jacobsen 2002; Omata, 2012; Betts et al., 2014; Petrini, 2014; UNHCR, 2017) and about the recent Syrian refugees' livelihoods in neighboring countries of Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey (Lebanon Support, 2016; Barbelet and Wake, 2017; Charles and Genugten, 2017). As an immediate response to refugee situations, aid for basic needs is provided however, in a prolonged situation there is a threat of decreased funding over time (Jacobsen, 2005). Therefore, refugees turn to diverse economic activities to fulfill their needs. There is evidence of refugees working in the formal and informal sector in their host countries. In addition, self-employment has been an outlet for many refugees to earn their living.

Refugees (who are, in one way or another, migrants) also face the same and many more difficulties in their host countries as do other migrants who have migrated as a personal decision. Andersson and Wadensjö (2004) find that immigrants turn towards self-employment due to difficulties in obtaining other employment. Many face difficulties in entering the labor market and often have to work longer hours and settle for lower compensation as compared to natives. Similarly, Jensen et al. (2003) report that for some immigrant groups in Denmark, self-employment is seen as the last resort in terms of employment. Ethnic entrepreneurs are no different, facing a multitude of difficulties in entering the labor market such as low entry for employment, underemployment, lack of recognition of qualifications, etc. (Rahman & Lian, 2011); they turn towards entrepreneurship as an escape from discrimination in the labor market (Parker, 2004, p. 115 In Rahman & Lian, 2011).

A majority of the studies into ethnic and migrant entrepreneurship have been conducted in more developed countries in Europe and the US. Whereas, migrant entrepreneurship is not a well-studied topic in developing countries. There have been a very limited number of studies trying to understand migrant entrepreneurs in developing and emerging economies. This may be due to the fact that until recently, mostly migrants have wanted to travel out West towards Europe, US, and other

developed countries in hopes of finding a better life and to avail better opportunities. These migrants are usually immigrating for different purposes such as education, work, family, etc. Developed countries have also improved their settlement policies and integration programs that may act as a pull factor for migrants from developing countries. However, in forced migration situations, a majority of the refugees move towards the closest and safest locations. Examining two of the largest refugee situations in recent history, the Syrian War Crisis beginning in 2011 and the Afghanistan refugee crisis that began in the late 1970s, a majority of the Syrian and Afghan refugees fled to their neighboring countries of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Egypt for Syrians and Pakistan and Iran for Afghanis. Given that these forced migrations have occurred in developing or underdeveloped regions, they have led to a majority of the refugees being hosted by developing countries. Hence, while migration has been occurring around the globe, a majority of migrants have traveled to developed countries for better opportunities while a majority of forced migrants have settled in under-developed or developing countries. In either case, entrepreneurship has been very important in becoming self-sufficient, while sometimes with entrepreneurial spirit and other times by the labor market constraints of the host country.

Ethnic entrepreneurship has been studied over the years with two models being commonly utilized, the interactive model (Waldinger et al., 1990) and the mixed embeddedness model (Kloosterman, Van Der Leun, & Rath, 1999). Various studies have identified the positive impact of immigrant entrepreneurship as leading to social cohesion and economic growth (Waldinger et al., 1990; Barrett et al., 2001; Ratcliffe 2001). Immigrant entrepreneurship can help migrants integrate into the societies. It is believed that integration can take place through entrepreneurship because of the high level of social interaction among the migrants and the locals (Eraydin, Tasan-kok, and Vranken, 2010). Social integration into a new society involves many factors such as culture, language, norms, etc. Entrepreneurship may not be a complete answer to social integration, but it can make vital ground towards integrating into a society. The entrepreneurship process and sustaining a business involves many different skills and stakeholders hence the integration process can be facilitated through this path. However, the distinction between migration and forced migration should be clear. Forced migration is generally under different circumstances than migration because people are forced to flee their homes and may not have the resources that one has if the migration was planned. Another difference is in the documentation which forced migrants may lack due to fleeing, they may not have education documents or any other documents which would help them in their study/employment opportunities abroad. Furthermore, forced migrants may not have access to resources which other migrants have therefore the authors study forced migration separately from migration.

In terms of forced migration, a majority of forced migrants flee to their neighboring countries due to many different reasons, close proximity being a major one. Hence, many under-developed and developing countries have been at the forefront of assisting refugees in finding new homes. These countries have failed to create robust policies that would help refugees in integrating and settling into their host countries. As a result, refugees are forced to adopt different means in order to survive many of

which may be in the informal labor market. Many ends up working in the informal labor market due to various difficulties faced such as language problems, transfer of skills, labor laws, etc. In the recent Syrian crisis, researchers find that Syrians have replaced many native workers in the informal labor market in Turkey (Del Caprio & Wagner, 2015; Ceritoglu et al., 2017). The number of Syrians in informal employment in Lebanon and Jordan seems even higher, with 92% economically active Syrians in Lebanon (ILO, 2014) and 99% in Jordan being involved in informal employment (Stave & Hillesund, 2015). Other refugees turn to entrepreneurship as a last resort to become economically self-sufficient.

2.2 Refugee Entrepreneurship

Limited literature exists in the field of refugee/forced migration entrepreneurship. A great deal of studies in the context of migrant/ethnic entrepreneurship have focused on immigrants however, there exists differences between immigrants and refugees as discussed earlier. Therefore, it is key to differentiate between immigrants and refugees when studying entrepreneurship within migration studies. Recently, Betts et al. (2014) studied refugees' economic lives in the case of Uganda. The study uncovered ways in which refugees add to economic activity of Uganda, the type of activities they perform to become self-sustainable, and ways in which refugees are successfully establishing businesses in Uganda. Their report highlights the importance of supporting, recognizing, and utilizing the skills of refugees as they have proven to contribute to economic activity while providing work opportunities for other refugees and locals. A better understanding of economic activities can help reinforce a better image of refugees within their host countries and make an attempt to remove the negative connotation which host communities feel from refugees.

Similarly, Wauters and Lambrecht (2006; 2008) have studied the case of refugee entrepreneurship in Belgium. They used a qualitative approach in order to find the problems faced by refugees while undertaking entrepreneurship in Belgium. They created a framework for obstacles faced by refugee entrepreneurs such as language, education, social network, and motivational barriers. Furthermore, they suggested policy changes which can be made in order to assist the refugees in starting their own businesses in Belgium. Likewise, Fong et al. (2007) conducted a study on refugee entrepreneurship in the United States of America. They identified challenges which refugees face in two categories individual/family (communication, stress, financial literacy, etc.) and community/agency (unfavorable conditions, human and financial capacity, community resources, risk tolerance, etc.). Fong et al. were able to identify many challenges faced by refugees and provide ways in which these can be resolved. Lyon, Sepulveda, and Syrett (2007) have identified the contributions and challenges of refugee enterprises in the case of United Kingdom. They find that many refugees face constraints in areas such as capital, marketing, and information. They also find that many refugees are not aware of business support organizations and ones who are have had negative experiences. They conclude that policies should be created according to the origin of the refugees as they may have different needs and may face

different challenges. Business support organizations can use this information in order to help refugees be successful in forming and maintaining their enterprises. The limited literature in this field shows that refugees around the world face many difficulties when it comes to entrepreneurship and that policy amendments are required in order for refugees to prosper as business owners in their new communities. There is a need to study the economic activities of refugees in different environments and further the literature on economic integration of refugees (Betts et al., 2014).

3. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was used for this study due to a lack of literature in this field and because qualitative research can help learn the perspectives and views of participants, it covers the environmental and social conditions of the participants, and it can help develop concepts (Yin, 2011: 7-9). According to Eisenhardt (1989), a case study approach is useful when studying a phenomenon which has not been a topic of interest in the past. Only a few studies in the field of refugee entrepreneurship were found during the literature review, a case study approach was taken in accordance with the previous study done by Wauters and Lambrecht (2008). Semi-structured interviews were created for this study based on the same study as well. This approach was used in order to allow the participants to explain and give us a better insight into their lives as entrepreneurs in Turkey. The researchers studied the entrepreneurs' past experience, current business practices, obstacles faced while conducting business in Turkey, their social networks, their interaction with their surroundings, and ways in which they can be facilitated by either government or non-government institutions. The surveys were conducted in the summer of 2016.

A total of 13 Syrian entrepreneurs were approached for this study out of which 10 agreed to be interviewed. Purposive Sampling method was used because the focus of the research was Syrian entrepreneurs therefore, various communities across Istanbul were chosen for the study where a heavy concentration of Syrian businesses exist. Within the various districts of Istanbul, there are areas where Syrians are heavily populated, eight Syrian businesses were chosen from within these areas. Two other businesses were chosen from areas where there are a fewer number of Syrian shops. It was decided that it would be convenient and feasible to approach shops in populated Syrian areas to conduct the interviews. It was also decided to conduct interviews with Syrians who are doing different businesses so we could try to get the perspectives of different entrepreneurs. Some of the participants were contacted before the interview to confirm their participation whereas others were contacted at their work place and gave consent when they were approached. All of the participants were made aware of the study and their consent was taken for the interview and its audio recording. The interviews were conducted in either English or Arabic depending on the interviewee's preference. All interviews were transcribed and translated into English for qualitative analysis. Quick notes regarding the answers of the participants were also taken during the interview by the researcher to gain a better understanding of the phenomena.

Table 2: List of interviewed Syrian Entrepreneurs in 2016

No.	Sector	Location in Istanbul	Previously Business Owner	Arrival to Turkey	Business Establish Date	Number of Employees ¹
1 ²	Financial & Law Consultancy Services	Sisli	No	End of 2012	January 2016	0
2	Grocery Store	Fatih	No	2012	2014	1
3	Fast Food	Zeytinburnu	Yes	October 2015	May 2016	9
4	Fast Food	Fatih	Yes	September 2015	October 2015	8
5	Home Décor and Cosmetic Shop, Barber Shop, and Fitness Center.	Esenyurt	Yes	March 2014	December 2014	9
6	Mobile Accessories & Repair Shop	Esenyurt	No	December 2014	October 2015	5
7	Perfume Shop	Esenyurt	Yes	September 2015	December 2015	1
8	Wholesale Shop	Esenyurt	Yes	August 2015	October 2015	0
9	Laptop and Mobile Sales and Repair Shop	Fatih	No	August 2012	June 2016	2
10	Sweets Shop	Fatih	Yes	September 2013	December 2013	8

¹ Businesses with 0 employees have other business partners.

² They have one Turkish business partner along with Syrian business partners.

All of our interviewees were Syrian males who have established and are currently business owners in Istanbul, Turkey. The education level of the participants varied, one entrepreneur had a master's degree, four had a Bachelor's degree, two had a 2-year diploma, two had studied up to 9th grade, and one studied up to 7th grade. All except one of the interviews were conducted at the workplaces of the interviewees in order to make further observations and confirm the information which was provided. Table 2 shows the list of interviewees and the businesses they have established in Istanbul. It was important to highlight the number of employees each of the businesses employ because of the lack of economic integration for people under temporary protection in Turkey.

A second round of interviews conducted with Syrian entrepreneurs in the summer of 2017 has also been used in analyzing some of the aspects that were a part of this study (motivation for establishing a business, access to finance, legal environment, and social networks). In the new survey, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted across various districts of Istanbul (Annex, Table 3). It should be noted that none of the participants of the two surveys overlap from 2016 to 2017, hence the surveys in no way look at the progress of the entrepreneurs but rather try to uncover the

livelihoods of Syrian entrepreneurs in Istanbul. This survey followed the Agar and Strang's framework of integration (Agar & Strang, 2004), hence only some of the questions are taken from this survey since they were the same as the questions asked in the 2016 interviews. However, most of the questions were related to the integration of Syrians as a result of entrepreneurship that are discussed in a separate article.

4. FINDINGS

The findings of the study are summarized into separate headings which include various conclusions made through analyzing the interviews. The authors analyzed various aspects of Syrian entrepreneurs while concluding the obstacles faced and opportunities available for these entrepreneurs in Turkey.

4.1 Previous Work Experience

Previous work experience of the Syrian entrepreneurs can inform us about their readiness, knowledge, and awareness in starting and running a business. Six of the ten entrepreneurs interviewed mentioned that they had previous experience as entrepreneurs in Syria. Five of these six entrepreneurs had the same business in Syria as they have in Turkey. This explains how they are able to set up the business quickly and have knowledge about the business practices. Other entrepreneurs decided to start a business within their field of work as they had worked in Syria. This is also interesting as many of the interviewed entrepreneurs had their own businesses in Syria and understood the business operations and problems they may face, hence it may have been easier for them to not only establish but also sustain the business over time.

4.2 Motivations for Establishing a Business

The choice of sector and motivation for establishing a business vary throughout the interviews. Due to a lack of labor market integration, some Syrians have resorted to opening their own businesses in order to become self-sufficient. In addition, they realize that help from the government in terms of employment opportunities is very slim. Therefore, establishing their own business seems like a viable option and the only option for some.

"I had so much trouble finding a decent job in Turkey. I know Syrian doctors working as architects in Turkey, another example, some friend from Jordan graduated from English literature school but works as a house keeper at night; it's a misplacement of work and a matter of luck." (6, Mobile Accessories & Repair Shop)

Some of the Syrians started their own business because they worked in Turkey in their respective sectors and wanted to have a better life. The entrepreneurial spirit is evident in some of the Syrians as it is found with one of our interviewees who owns a Laptop and Mobile Shop.

“Looking for (something) better, if you can do something more than you do, what is your choice? To stay where you are or to look for (something better)?...The first day I entered Sirkeci (an area where he used to work and is known for electronic shops in Istanbul) for work, my target was to open a shop, 1 year, 2 years, 5 years later...” (9, Laptop/Mobile Shop)

Other entrepreneurs expressed similar remarks, they conveyed their desire to establish a business as soon as they arrived in Turkey. Some of them relied on their social networks ahead of coming to Turkey. Some of them mentioned the fact that they had family members and friends in Istanbul which made it easy for them to come to Istanbul and establish their business.

Whereas, others have chosen to open shops due to residing in heavily populated Syrian areas. It is normal that Syrian products would be preferred in places where there are many Syrians hence the establishment of businesses in different sectors within those Syrian communities.

“I know about perfume and there are a lot of Syrians in this area for this reason I chose this shop (Perfume business).” (6, Perfume Shop)

“It is my specialty, I do knitting and I did it when I was in Syria, so I decided to open a clothing business.” (15, Clothing Shop)

In addition, previous experience seems to be a popular motivation factor in establishing a business in Turkey for Syrian entrepreneurs. Through this research the authors realized that some (6/10 in 2016, 5/10 in 2017) of the Syrians whom were interviewed had extensive entrepreneurial experience in Syria. Some of them have worked in and have had their own businesses in Syria for over 10 years (4/10, this question was only asked in the first round of interviews in 2016). Entrepreneurial experience made it easier for these Syrians to establish and sustain a business in Turkey. Similarly, Syrian entrepreneurs with extensive experience in their field of work stated that they chose to establish business in the same field due to their experience. Furthermore, some of the interviewees came to Turkey with the intention to open a business right away. The realization of this comes from the fact that their arrival and business establishment period is only separated by a few months.

“...I came from Syria prepared to set the business; I had the money and the intention...” (4, Fast Food)

The quoted interviewee established his business in Turkey one month after he arrived in Istanbul. Similarly, others also showed only a small time period between arrival in Turkey and establishment of business, having as little as one, two, three, and four months of difference (Table 2). Among the Syrian entrepreneurs interviewed, it is found that for migrants who came earlier in the Syrian crisis (2011-2013) ended up

establishing businesses in the later years whereas migrants who arrived later were quick to establish businesses.

4.3 Challenges in doing Business as a Syrian

4.3.1 Language Barrier

In both rounds of the interviews (2016 & 2017), language is mentioned as the biggest problem faced by Syrian entrepreneurs in Turkey. Out of the interview participants in 2016, a few (3/10) could speak enough Turkish for their business, whereas, many entrepreneurs (7/10) interviewed in 2017 said they had enough Turkish knowledge to deal with customers. Turkish is widely spoken across Turkey and everything from government to the private sector operates in Turkish. Whereas, Syrian people mostly speak Arabic while a small portion of them also know English. Language barrier poses a restriction not only in communication but also in obtaining information.

“The main problem was with language, and I don’t have a clear idea about the Turkish commercial law. It is important to mention that a big number of my problems was resolved by a Turkish friend, he was cooperative with me.” (3, Fast Food).

Due to the language barrier, Syrian entrepreneurs also face problems in learning the business as well as the taxation law. However, it must be noted that all registered businesses in Turkey must hire a tax professional to do the taxes of the firm therefore the taxation details and payments are handled by a professional making it easier and faster to establish a business. It is found that the business owners were consistent in paying their business taxes.

“This is a problem for us because I registered my business. I don’t know what to do, I don’t know the taxes. I pay taxes but I don’t know... I have an accountant. He is Turkish and he speaks Arabic language.” (6, Perfume Shop).

Many of the Syrian entrepreneurs interviewed also showed the desire to learn the Turkish Business Law because they feel that it would help them in understanding the business practices in Turkey and facilitate in future expansion of their businesses. It may also be useful in conveying the business law to new Syrians who want to become entrepreneurs.

4.3.2 High Costs

Many interviewees also mentioned costs as being very high in conducting their business. They explained how high prices of utilities in Istanbul have had an adverse impact on their profits and business operations. They feel that high taxes, utilities, and rents are a major factor in low profits for their businesses. However, most of them

expressed their satisfaction over having a business and performing well enough to be self-sustainable. When asked about their business performance and their satisfaction level. Most of the interviewees seemed very happy, they had positive expressions on their faces and mentioned that they were able to live off of their own earnings. Their expressions gave a look of satisfaction in the sense that they were able to live on their own and had their own business. They mentioned that doing better would definitely be helpful but did not show any sign of dissatisfaction with their current business performance. A positive attitude is taken by these entrepreneurs because they may feel that they at least have a job and are able to earn their own living.

4.3.3 Transparency of Opportunities in Turkish Market

Another interesting finding was the undesirability of some of the Syrian entrepreneurs to enter or serve the Turkish market. The lack of knowledge about the Turkish market and its workings add to the uncertainty Syrian entrepreneurs feel towards entering this market.

“The most difficult (thing) is to enter the Turkish market. I know I didn’t enter the Turkish market, I think I will not enter also. That will not make sustainability for the work.” (1, Consultancy Services)

Through some of the interviews, most Syrian businesses are serving other Syrians and are established Syrian populated communities. Throughout all of the interviews (2016 & 2017), it is found that Syrian shops on average have an 80% Syrian customer base. Some of the interviewees did not show any desire to serve Turkish people or to enter the Turkish market. They felt that they would not be able to serve that market properly and would not be successful in long-term sustainability of their businesses. Others mentioned that they had an unpleasant experience with Turkish customers in the past which had led them to no longer serve these customers. Some of the customers wanted extra discounts from the Syrian shops and would highlight problems in the products or service provided by the shops. The two mobile shops mentioned similar problems regarding Turkish customers purchasing/servicing their mobile phones and after some weeks coming back for discounts due to some sort of fault in the device. Several events such as these led one of the shopkeepers to stop serving Turkish customers. The findings show that from one aspect that Syrian businesses possibly lack knowledge of the Turkish market but on the other hand, they avoid the Turkish market due to advantage taken by Turkish customers.

4.3.4 Access to Finance

Financing a business is one of the most important parts of entrepreneurship and at times difficult to fulfill. There is no financial support from the government or non-governmental organizations which was confirmed by all of the Syrian entrepreneurs whom were interviewed.

“Getting no help from the Turkish government, I counted on my personal network to choose and invest my money in this field of work (Fast Food Industry).” (3, Fast Food)

“I got the starting money from my family who are still in Aleppo and it was easier for them to give the money to me as I am the first to settle down and start off my business in Turkey.” (18, Eyeglasses Shop)

All of the interviewees either self-funded their own business or gathered funds from their friends, relatives, or someone within their social network. Even with self-finance/gathering funds from their own social networks, Syrians have managed to establish over 1,000 businesses per year since 2013. The fast pace of business establishment by Syrians shows their desirability to become self-sufficient and establish their lives in Turkey. Furthermore, the amount of investment by Syrians in Turkey has reached over \$360 million through 2017 (TOBB, 2017). Through this investment Syrian businesses are supporting other Syrians and Turkish citizens with employment opportunities and stimulating economic activity.

4.3.5 “I don’t want to be a refugee.”

The word refugee, in many parts of the word has a negative connotation and Turkey is no different. Being of Syrian origin, the interviewees as business owners also feel discernment directed towards them.

“...Some incidents I had where Turkish clients would come into my shop but once they realized that the owner is Arabic they would be put off.” (5, Home Décor & Cosmetic Shop, Barber Shop, and Fitness Center)

Some of the interviewees mentioned discrimination towards them because of their origin. Since there has been a surge of Syrians to Turkey after the Syrian crisis, the Turkish people treat all of them as refugees and at times discriminate against them due to this condition. Business owners feel the same way as some customers treat them in a different way due to their origin.

“...They always have superiority over us, they look down to us more like refugees or beggars for money.” (2, Grocery Store)

“...They feel superior and they call us refugee in negative connotation.” (6, Mobile Accessories and Repair Shop)

Being an entrepreneur and having looked down upon because of the origin has a negative impact on the business owners as they fail to target Turkish market and find it difficult to deal with the Turkish customers. This type of discrimination could also be one of the factors as to why the Syrians have so far avoided Turkish markets. There

exists a need for not only the Syrians to understand the Turkish culture but also for Turkish people to understand and tolerate the Syrian culture.

“...I don't want to be like refugees. I don't want to depend on others... I want to stay here legal. I have (a) company, I am like any person, foreigner person. Ignore my citizenship, I am like anyone.” (1, Financial & Law Consultancy Services)

They also voiced strong opinions against being referred to as refugees, stating that they did not want to be called or looked at as refugees and rather as normal foreigners who are conducting business in Turkey. Being a part of the host community and contributing to the economy through their businesses was also voiced by a few of the interviewees. In this respect, the Syrian entrepreneurs want to contribute and become a part of the solution rather than being dependent on the Government of Turkey. They seek to be accepted by the society as foreigners and avoid being stereotyped because of their origin.

4.4 Legal Environment

Most of our interviewees mentioned the ease of registration and the short time span required to register a business in Turkey. Most of them mentioned between one to two weeks to register the business. In order to register a business in Turkey, one must have a residence permit which is different than the Temporary Protection Status given to Syrians who have arrived in Turkey as refugees. Therefore, Syrians who have opened businesses here have applied and received residence permits before registering their business. All of the businesses approached were registered, although one of the shops (Grocery store, 2) was registered under their relative's name because the owner did not have a residence permit. During the second round of interviews (2017), nine of the ten businesses were registered whereas one business was not registered. The unregistered business was hidden from plain sight; it was a small money transfer service in a small office in the basement of a building. The owner seemed to not care at all about the fact that the business was unregistered, he had been operational for a few months.

“For registering my business I didn't have much trouble, I just went to the municipality (and) told them that I wanted to rent a place and start my business, and they provided me later with the permit.” (4, Fast Food)

The ease of establishing a business can be one of the major reasons as to why new businesses by Syrians are surging. The registration process seems to be quick and easy, even Syrians who are not aware of the process generally gain help from someone within their social network and register their business. However, most of the entrepreneurs who were interviewed did not have any ideas about the Turkish Business or tax law. This specific problem is arising from language differences as are many other problems which Syrians face as entrepreneurs in Turkey. Besides, not

knowing the law, the interviewees seemed content with the legal environment. One of the interviewee discussed experience and satisfaction of the legal system in Turkey since everything is completed with a specific process.

“Here it is more organized. In Syria it is not like that. It’s good. When you know this is the step, so if you follow this step you’re fine. You don’t need to go up down and make something illegal. In Syria, you have to pay to get everything done. Even in the tax office, he will come and create problems for you. Here, the tax officer will come and see if everything is legal, he will say yea everything is legal.” (1, Consultancy Services)

Creating a good legal environment and providing a strong platform to entrepreneurs is key so they can easily establish and perform their business operations. In terms of foreign entrepreneurs, it is even more important as they expect security and good legal practices in the host country in which they decide to invest. Good legal business environment is a promotional tool for migrant entrepreneurs and foreign investors.

“...During the business registration process the law requires to have some Turkish employees in any opened business but they were lenient with me regarding such rules. I still have one Turkish employee in another branch and one lady here whose husband is a Turkish citizen.” (5, Home Décor & Cosmetic Shop, Barber Shop, and Fitness Center)

A few other interviewees also expressed similar views as to the leniency of the law towards Syrian entrepreneurs. Especially, leniency in the hiring of Syrians for their work because as most of the employees working at Syrian businesses are other Syrians. The interviewees reported saying they want to help other Syrians at this time of need hence they prefer hiring Syrians. Creating job opportunities for Syrians is an important aspect due to the large number of Syrians in Turkey and the fact that most of them do not have work permits.

4.5 Social Networks

Social network is one of the most important aspects when moving to a new country. One’s social network can help in learning the norms, social rules, learn about opportunities, and settle in their new communities. The importance of a social network increases even more when examining a refugee situation since people are abandoning their home countries in an emergency situation and require urgent help when they arrive to their host countries. Wauters and Lambrecht (2008) state that the social network of refugees is less extensive than that of immigrants. However, this mass movement of Syrian refugees over the last few years appears to be different in terms of social networks. Mass forced migration should be treated differently in terms of social networks than the situation it is found for refugees who are not part of a mass forced migration. In the case of Syrian refugees coming to Turkey, the number of refugees are very high in some cities for example over 530,000 in Istanbul, 460,000

in Şanlıurfa, 450,000 in Hatay, and 350,000 in Gaziantep (DGMM, 2017). The availability of a social network within these populated cities is evidenced from this research. Many of the interviewees (6/10 in 2016, 8/10 in 2017) mentioned having chosen Istanbul due to friends or relatives living in the city. Masurel et al. (2002) mention that embeddedness in a social network is a helpful asset for an entrepreneur. It is evidenced that social network is an important aspect when it comes to establishing business in Istanbul for Syrian entrepreneurs that were interviewed in both rounds of the interviews. The social networks were utilized by Syrian entrepreneurs for different purposes such as gathering financial capital, finding shop location, registering the business, finding accommodation, and social support.

One of the interviewees mentioned that their business was registered by their relative since they didn't have a residence permit (residence permit is required to establish a business in Turkey as a foreigner). Also, the short time period between arrival and establishment of business in Turkey may be due to availability of information and awareness of the market ahead of arrival in Istanbul. This may be true especially for those Syrians who arrived to Turkey later in the crisis, from 2013 onwards. Their access to information would be much higher due to a higher number of Syrians in Turkey as the time passed and information availability increased due to the extent of the crisis. As more people came to Turkey, and created Syrian communities in different cities, these social networks were established through which better information could be communicated to Syrians making their way to Turkey in the later years.

4.6 Social Environment

Social environment is a key component in the integration of migrants into their host communities. Social relationships, cultural values, and the physical surroundings are some of the components of social environment. The attitudes of Turkish people towards Syrians through asking our interviewees about their social environment and what they felt were the perceptions of Turkish people.

“Stereotyping...when if you want to rent a house, if you want to work, if you want...But, in the street there is no one to talk to, even police. No one say anything to you.” (9, Laptop and Mobile Shop)

Some of the interviewees mentioned that they felt discriminated when it came to house rents, finding jobs, and salaries. They have to pay higher rents, find it difficult to find jobs, and receive lower salaries. The issue of low salaries is also related to the difficulties faced by Syrians in attaining a work permit. While working without a work permit, business owners take advantage of the Syrians by having them work for lower pays. Syrians on the other hand are forced to work under any conditions in order to earn their own living.

“Yes, it happens. Turkish people depend on the situation. They will look to you in a very nice way but they will see something in the media and they will change their mind directly. When you make negotiation with them. They will say not all the Syrian people are good like you. I am not good, there’s a lot of Syrian better than me...” (1, Consultancy Services)

This perspective shows the role media can play in shaping perceptions of the people. In this respect, events around the country can have a negative impact on the overall Syrian community and lead to discrimination. However, culturally many of the interviewees felt that Syria and Turkey were similar especially in terms of religious values.

“...When it comes to cultural values, however, we share the same traditions and customs.” (5, Home Décor & Cosmetic Shop, Barber Shop, and Gym).

Other interviewees expressed similar views about the cultures of Turkey and Syria being closer. This could also be one of the reasons as to why they have chosen to stay in Turkey as well as establishing their businesses here. Excluding the language barrier, culturally the interviewees felt closer to home due to cultural similarities.

4.7 Government/Non-governmental Support

In the scope of this research and the information available, there is no support from the government for Syrian entrepreneurs. They all expressed this view when asked about if they were aware of any government or non-governmental support organizations. All of the interviewees stated that they did not receive any sort of financial or other support from any organizations and were not aware of any such organizations working in Istanbul. There is the Syrian Economic Forum (SEF) which works in Gaziantep and provides support services to Syrian entrepreneurs in the region. Furthermore, there is the International Middle East Research Center which provides information on how to start a business in Turkey. They have support centers in many cities across Turkey and a center in Istanbul which helps with work permits and starting up a business. However, with the growing number of Syrian entrepreneurs across Turkey, there exists a need for extensive support services for this community.

4.8 Observations throughout the Research

Language was the first problem every entrepreneur mentioned when they were asked about the problems they faced while doing business in Turkey. However, they were all keen on learning the language as it would help them communicate better with their suppliers and customers. Many of the interviewees knew basic Turkish, enough to be able to communicate with a customer. There were a few who did not know any Turkish at all and only spoke Arabic. The authors spoke Turkish with entrepreneurs who claimed that they knew Turkish, some of them had basic Turkish language skills whereas, and three of the 10 interviewees had good grip on the language. One had

been here since 2012, he worked with various NGOs, took Turkish language courses, and had social relations with Turkish people which explained his Turkish level. Another interviewee came here in 2014 and worked at a mobile repair shop for around one year which helped him learn Turkish. Lastly, there were two young entrepreneurs (22 years old and opened a wholesale shop in Esenyurt) who had good spoken Turkish skills and were able to communicate well in Turkish. It was surprising to see because they came in the middle of 2015 and were speaking Turkish within this time period without having taken any language courses.

All entrepreneurs stated that most of their customers were non-Turkish and, in many cases, mostly only Syrians. Similar things were observed while the interviews were realized, it was only spotted two Turkish customers, one at a Fast Food shop and another at a grocery store. No other Turkish customers were spotted during any of the interviews. Even when going through neighborhoods with a high concentration of Syrians, we rarely notice Turkish people going to Syrian shops. This could be due to many factors including the language barrier and a lack of adaptation among the two communities.

5. CONCLUSION

Refugee entrepreneurship is a growing phenomenon in Turkey as new established businesses with Syrian partners have surged since the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2011. Every year since the Syrian crisis, newly established firms by Syrians have increased in Turkey. The data shows that Syrian are looking to invest and create new businesses in Turkey. The establishment of businesses shows the willingness of Syrians to integrate into the society and make Turkey their home. This study shows that many opportunities exist for Syrian entrepreneurs in Turkey due to the lack of red tape towards the Syrians from the Government of Turkey. Syrian entrepreneurs have been given a sort of green light on various issues within the framework of conducting business for foreigners. An important aspect discovered within this research is the employment of Syrians by the Syrian businesses. Some businesses only had Syrian employees while others employed one or two Turkish nationals. While on the other hand, Turkish firms can only have 10% of their workforce as refugees who are under temporary protection status. It is believed that the ease of regulations by the Government of Turkey towards the Syrian entrepreneurs is one of the reasons for high number of new Syrian businesses in Turkey. This has provided an opportunity for Syrian entrepreneurs to not only become self-sufficient but also employ other Syrians leading to a lower burden for the Government of Turkey.

Although forced to leave their homes in Syria, the situation of refugee entrepreneurs varies in Turkey. Syrians who had businesses in Syria have managed to build similar businesses in Turkey very quickly. They have used their expertise and experience from Syria to establish their business in Turkey. The satisfaction level among the Syrian entrepreneurs is high due to the ease of registering their business and ease of regulations. Various reasons can be given for the surge in new startups by Syrians.

Social network proves to be key as Syrians outside of Turkey (Syrians who fled to Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, etc.) are able to gather information from their friends and family members who are in Turkey and have understood the business environment.

It is important to realize that a diversity of Syrians have entered Turkey as a result of the recent mass migration of Syrians. Over 3.5 million are registered as refugees, however, it would be unfair to characterize all of them in the same category. In terms of a mass forced migration, Syrians of different financial and educational status have entered Turkey since 2011. Essentially when studying migrant and in specific refugee entrepreneurship, one must be careful in distinguishing these Syrian entrepreneurs in Turkey based on their motivations, financial statuses, and previous entrepreneurial experience. In future studies, different type of Syrian entrepreneurs should be of focus i.e. according to their access to finance, their motivation for entrepreneurial activity, etc. Furthermore, a mass forced migration such as the Syrian refugee crisis has also led to large number of refugees in some specific countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. Therefore, it is important to distinguish the mass forced migration from a normal forced migration situation. The author postulates from the mass forced migration, many ethnic communities have been formed in different cities across Turkey which gives way to the social and ethnic capital that holds an important position in migrant entrepreneurship literature.

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Annex

Table 3: List of interviewed Syrian Entrepreneurs in 2017

No.	Sector	No of Employees	Existence (Months/Years)	Education Level	Age	Business Partner
11	Clothing	0	7 Months	High School Graduate	27	No
12	Cosmetics	0	3 Months	2 years college	34	Yes
13	Gaming Arcade	0	2 Years 4 Months	9th Grade	24	Yes
14	Money Transfer	0	1.5 years	1 years college	26	Yes
15	Clothing	0	1 year 8 months	High School Graduate	37	No
16	Grocery	1	1 Year 4 Months	High School Graduate	31	No
17	Mobile Retail and Repair	0	1 Year 3 Months	9th Grade	29	Yes
18	Grocery	0	2 Months	Bachelor Degree	26	No
19	Grocery	0	4 Years 7 Months	Bachelor Degree	24	No
20	Eyeglasses	0	1 Year	Bachelor Degree	27	Yes