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Unraveling refugee entrepreneurship and its role in integration: empirical evidence from the hospitality industry

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ABSTRACT

Refugee entrepreneurship has emerged as an economic activity that can potentially help refugees during their settlement and integration processes in the host countries. Only recently have refugee entrepreneurs received some attention in the academic debates. However, despite valuable research endeavors, empirical inquiry addressing the refugee entrepreneurship process remains limited. Specifically, the role of entrepreneurship in facilitating the integration process of refugees is still understudied. The present study draws on qualitative data collected through 29 semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugees venturing in the hospitality industry in Turkey. Using the RQDA package for qualitative data analysis, the findings reveal that refugees' motivations to venture cover a wide range of push and pull factors including survivability, desire for independence, and availability of resources. The findings also confirm that entrepreneurial activities help refugees integrate with the socio-economic fabric of the host country. The study also identified several factors facilitating and derailing refugee entrepreneurs' integration process. Implications and directions for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Since its beginning in 2011, the civil conflict in Syria has resulted in a series of refugee waves that influenced several countries over the globe. The neighboring countries, especially Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey have been the major refugee receiving countries (Shneikat & Ryan, 2018). Since then, the Syrian refugee crisis has fueled a heated debate in the media and received some attention in the academia. As noted by Abid, Manan, and Abdul Rahman (2017), most of the current studies tend to highlight the negative impacts of refugees and overlook the positive ones. However, there have been recently a number of research endeavors highlighting the positive side of the refugees (e.g. Alrawadieh, Karayilan, & Cetin, 2018; Bizri, 2017; Refai, Haloub, & Lever, 2018). These studies have discussed the entrepreneurial spirit and self-employment among Syrian refugees in some host countries and advocated their importance as an economic and social value.

Self-employment is one of the options for newcomers who may have been excluded from the labor market (Feldman, Koberg, & Dean, 1991) due to language barriers, limited chances to promotion, low wages, and difficulty to get a work permit (De Freitas, 1991; Fairlie & Meyer, 1996; Kizil, 2016; Light, 1979). Given that only a small portion of Syrian refugees was granted the work permit in Turkey (Kizil, 2016; Şimşek, 2018), many Syrian refugees have been pushed to start their businesses in Turkey. Since 2011, the number of businesses launched by Syrians has dramatically increased (Şimşek, 2018). The hospitality industry has been one of the most attractive industries for refugees to venture in (Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Pechlaner, Dal Bò, & Volgger, 2012). Being a labor intensive industry that requires low initial capital and know-how, the hospitality industry is more appealing for ethnic entrepreneurs than other industries (Phizacklea & Ram, 1995). As suggested by Portes and Jensen (1989), the access of entrepreneurs to a low-cost co-ethnic labor force is a competitive advantage in the hospitality industry.

Although the refugee integration policies adopted by several countries have been extensively studied (e.g. Berry, 2012), the role of the entrepreneurship in facilitating refugees' integration is still an under-researched issue (Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Şimşek, 2018). Wauters and Lambrecht (2008) suggested entrepreneurship as a mean to help refugees' integration. Similarly, Kloosterman and Van Der Leun (1999) suggested that new comers' engagement in entrepreneurship can be used as a beneficial way to support their integration into society. Previous studies on how entrepreneurship can help refugees to integrate are scarce. The current study is a response to calls by some scholars (e.g. Alrawadieh et al., 2018) to conduct more studies addressing how entrepreneurship can help refugees better integrate into their host communities.

The current study is therefore among the few studies that highlight the role of entrepreneurship in the integration of refugees. Specifically, there is paucity of research addressing how some factors such as source of financial capital, recruitment process of employees, role of entrepreneurship in helping refugees to form their social network, and the role of informal networks in enhancing the growth and success of refugees' ventures (Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Bizri, 2017; Refai et al., 2018; Şimşek, 2018). To fill this gap in the literature, the current investigation endeavors to provide a holistic understanding of refugee entrepreneurship and its role in enhancing refugees' integration process. The study is based on the premise that it is in the best interest of countries hosting significant numbers of refugees to facilitate refugees' integration through entrepreneurship (Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Betts & Collier, 2015).

The paper is structured as follows. The literature review section provides the theoretical background of the study by reviewing the literature related to the refugee entrepreneurship with a focus on the Syrian refugees. Following this, the methodological procedures adopted to conduct the study were discussed. The findings of the study are then presented, followed by a discussion and conclusion.

2. Literature review

Although many studies have been conducted to explain the relationship between immigration and entrepreneurship from different perspectives (e.g. Borjas, 1986; Clark & Drinkwater, 2000, 2010; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Fairlie & Woodruff, 2010; Krichevskiy, Qirjo, & Chrysostome, 2016; Lintner, 2014; Lofstrom, 2002; Singer, 2004; Vesely, Goodman,

Ewaida, and Kearney, 2015; Wang, 2010), much less attention has been paid to the entrepreneurial spirit among refugees to start their businesses in the host countries (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006, 2008). The limited literature on refugee entrepreneurship indicates that this topic has been overlooked for a long time despite the fact that the world has witnessed the flow of refugees several times recently.

To understand the refugee entrepreneurship, it may be useful to distinguish forced immigrants from other economic immigrants. The fundamental difference between these types of immigrants is closely related to their 'mobility' motivations. While refugee immigrants 'flee' their countries for the basic need of personal safety, economic immigrants usually 'leave' their homes seeking better opportunities in the host country. In other words, economic immigrants are voluntary immigrants driven by the desire for better life conditions whereas refugee immigrants are involuntary immigrants driven by the desire for physical survival and personal safety of their lives and their families' lives (Bizri, 2017; Chiswick, Lee, & Miller, 2005). Moreover, compared to economic migrants who have more mobility freedom and therefore can simply move to another country or go back to their own countries, refugees' freedom of mobility is much more limited. However, refugees may be eligible for special treatments (e.g. welfare rights) in the host countries while economic migrants may not (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Stanley, 1987). Moreover, refugee immigrants are likely to have experienced greater trauma prior to their arrival to the host country (Beiser, 2006; Carlson & Rosser-Hogan, 1991; Shneikat & Ryan, 2018) and are highly susceptible to traumatic experience after their arrival which, eventually, renders their integration more challenging (Bakker, Dagevos, & Engbersen, 2014; Baranik, Hurst, & Eby, 2018). In general, refugee entrepreneurs have limited opportunities to start their businesses in the host countries compared with immigrant entrepreneurs (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008).

Over the last couple of years, some scholars (e.g. Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Bizri, 2017; Harb, Kassem, & Najdi, 2018; Refai et al., 2018; Şimşek, 2018) shifted the attention to the positive impacts of Syrian refugees in the host countries. These studies emphasized the economic and social opportunities emerging from refugee entrepreneurship and advocated that refugee entrepreneurship should be enhanced to facilitate refugee integration with the local society while generating economic benefits for both refugees and local hosts. However, these studies came after some positive news reports that show the entrepreneurial spirit of Syrian refugees and their contribution to the economies of their host countries. For instance, Şimşek (2018), reported that till the end of 2017, there were about 18,000 registered and unregistered Syrian businesses in Turkey. These businesses created thousands of job opportunities for both refugees and locals and fostered trade with Arabic-speaking countries (Atar, 2017). Given the focus of the current study on Syrian refugees, Table 1 provides an overview of past studies that addressed Syrian refugee entrepreneurship.

Studies on Syrian refugee entrepreneurship have been designed mainly to investigate the characteristics, motivations of, and barriers for refugee entrepreneurship (Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Berns, 2017; Bizri, 2017; Bristol-Faulhammer, 2017; Refai et al., 2018). Compared with refugees engaged in the labor market, self-employed refugees are in a better position to construct social bridges with the host society and that eventually facilitates their integration process (Şimşek, 2018).

Table 1. Overview of the studies published on Syrian refugee entrepreneurship.

Author(s)	Purpose	Method	Key findings
Meister and Mauer (2018)	Examining the impact of business incubation on entrepreneurial development and embeddedness of refugee entrepreneurs	A participatory focus group and semi-structured interviews with refugee entrepreneurs and incubator stakeholders were conducted	Limited understanding and knowledge of the host country, hindered interaction in a new socio-economic and legal-institutional environment, and limited local networks and resources in the host country were identified as key barriers to refugee entrepreneurship. The role of business incubators in overcoming these challenges was highlighted
Alrawadieh et al. (2018)	Exploring the characteristics and challenges faced by refugee entrepreneurs in the tourism and hospitality industry	Semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Turkey	Refugees were found to be challenged by legislative, financial, socio-cultural and market-related issues
Harb et al. (2018)	Debunking the reductionist framing of the Syrian refugees as a burden and showing the economic contribution of Syrian refugee entrepreneurs	Semi-structured in- depth Interviews with Syrian refugees in Lebanon	Refugee Syrian businesses were found to be reinforcing spatial practice and were considered complementary to local businesses
Obschonka and Hahn (2018)	Examining the relationship between personality factors, entrepreneurial alertness and career adaptability	Structural equation modeling employed on data from 267 refugees in Germany	Personality factors predicted entrepreneurial alertness and career adaptability. Entrepreneurial alertness predicted entrepreneurial intentions
Refai et al. (2018)	Contextualizing the entrepreneurial identity	Face-to-face interviews with aid agencies and focus groups with Syrian refugees in Jordan.	While Syrian refugees have a variety of entrepreneurial skills that could support them in self-employment, refugee entrepreneurship is challenged by legal, financial and social obstacles.
Şimşek (2018)	How the refugees' economic resources facilitate the integration	Semi-structured interviews with 120 Syrian refugees	Having the necessary economic resources will facilitate the 'class based integration'
Berns (2017)	Exploring whether refugees consider to start their own business instead of finding employment elsewhere, and identifying refugees' motivations for entrepreneurship and the barriers they encounter	Quantitative study using a survey spread among refugees from Syria (50 respondents out of 83), Eritrea, Palestine, Iran, Pakistan and Somalia	Refugee entrepreneurial intent was found positively influenced by attitude to entrepreneurship and the desire to overcome blocked mobility but negatively influenced by institutional challenges, the perceived negative feelings from locals towards refugees, and the time that the refugee has lived in the Netherlands
Bizri (2017)	Exploring the characteristics of refugee entrepreneurs' startups	Qualitative interpretive case-analysis involving a Syrian refugee entrepreneur in Lebanon as a case study and interviews with 12 of his employees	The characteristics are opportunity seizing proliferation, collective bootstrapping, one way ahead attitude, a distinct network structure and pseudo family business perception
Bristol-Faulhammer (2017)	Exploring the challenges and success factors of refugees	Online survey and narrative interviews with refugees (5 of them were Syrians) and service providers	Institutional environment, lack of human capital, and access to resources were identified as the main barriers for refugee entrepreneurship. Success factors included availability of favorable market conditions, and the clarity of startup reasons

Syrian Refugee entrepreneurs are characterized by strong determination, considerable ability to establish social networks, possession of high qualifications and relevant past experience, and desire for integration (Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Bizri, 2017; Meister & Mauer, 2018). Motivations for starting a business include the need for survival, availability of financial capital, and low starting cost (Alrawadieh et al., 2018). Barriers for refugee entrepreneurship include limited local networks and resources, legal, financial, and socio-cultural barriers (Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Meister & Mauer, 2018; Refai et al., 2018). However, the existing literature fails to provide a holistic understanding of the refugee entrepreneurship. Specifically, the role of entrepreneurship in the hospitality industry in facilitating refugees' integration into the social and economic fabric of the host countries remains under-studied.

As noted by some scholars (e.g. Bizri, 2017; İçduygu & Millet, 2016), the return option is usually out of Syrian refugees' consideration because they are likely to have lost their houses and even if the war does come to an end, conflicts and safety issues remain salient. Syrian refugees in Turkey face several critical issues including ill-defined legal status. According to Turkish law, asylum rights are only granted to Europeans (İçduygu & Millet, 2016) and Syrian refugees in the country are identified as individuals with temporary protection status (Şimşek, 2018).

The absence of refugee status and the presence of barriers to access the labor market make the lives of Syrians difficult (Şimşek, 2018). In this vein, the theory of disadvantaged worker opines that newcomers such as refugees are discriminated in their host countries either because they are 'outsiders' or are considered uncompetitive due to poor language skills or unrecognized qualifications and limited understanding of the local labor market (Levie, 2007). These circumstances push Syrian refugees who have the required capital to engage in entrepreneurship. By venturing, refugees can move upward while integrating into the socio-economic fabric of the hosting country (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008; Şimşek, 2018). Moreover, capitalizing on their skills, qualifications, experience and knowledge in hopes of ensuring greater income, refugees rely on entrepreneurship as a way to overcome several challenges including discrimination in the labor market and lack of recognition of academic and professional qualifications (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, & Wilkinson, 2000; Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002).

The term 'integration' is defined in different ways depending on which perspective it departs from (i.e. scholar or policymakers) and which type of migrants it describes (Şimşek, 2018). For instance, the integration process of forced migrants may substantially differ from economic migrants. However, the literature highlights the economic and social dimensions as key components in the integration process (Bakker et al., 2014; Kuhlman, 1991; Morrice, 2007; Valenta & Bunar, 2010). The economic dimension of the integration involves facilitating refugees' access to the labor market, housing, education and health care (Ager & Strang, 2008; Şimşek, 2018; Valenta & Bunar, 2010). The social dimension involves facilitating access to the sources of knowledge, skills and social networks in the host country. It is worth mentioning here that economic and social dimensions are inter-related because each one facilitates the other. For instance, having economic resources to start a business helps refugees to construct social bridges with locals (Şimşek, 2018) and having social networks can facilitate access to the labor market (Cheung & Phillimore, 2014).

Several studies addressed the social integration of refugees from a social capital perspective (Bizri, 2017; Gericke, Burmeister, Löwe, Deller, & Pundt, 2017; Morrice, 2007). The social capital is used to describe a set of social resources such as social networks that individuals can rely on to pursue social and economic goals in the host country (Li, 2004). For instance, Gericke et al. (2017) noted that refugees had access to different types of social capital and proposed that social capital may facilitate the integration of refugees into the labor markets. However, Lewis (2010) suggested that social network may increase the feeling of belonging for refugees and this will hinder their integration. Similarly, Alrawadieh et al. (2018) suggested that refugee entrepreneurs may be inclined to rely more on their co-ethnics as a result of their unfamiliarity with the new environment which may eventually lead to an ethnic enclave. When enclaved, refugee entrepreneurs' chances to be integrated decrease and so do their chances to grow and success (Altinay, 2008; Altinay & Wang, 2011; Gursoy, Altinay, & Kenebayeva, 2017). As suggested by the social network theory (Samers, 2010), initial refugee entrepreneurs bear the greatest costs and risks while latecomers can rely on already established networks to lower these costs and risks.

In general, offering the opportunity for refugees to engage in entrepreneurship supports their integration into the host community (Kloosterman & Van Der Leun, 1999). As noted by Wauters and Lambrecht (2006), refugee entrepreneurship can kill two birds with one stone by fostering entrepreneurship in general and facilitating the integration of refugees. Therefore, providing a holistic understanding of the refugee entrepreneurship process and how refugee entrepreneurs navigate the new socio-economic environment of their host countries is of significant relevance to both policymakers and academics involved in refugee studies and minority entrepreneurship research.

3. Research method

3.1. Design

Qualitative research methods are recommended in entrepreneurship research (Drakopoulou-Dodd, McDonald, McElwee, & Smith, 2014) as well as research involving refugees (Rodgers, 2004). Thus, the data collection for this study was accomplished through the use of a standard set of semi-structured interview questions. A series of open-ended questions were identified through an extensive literature review (e.g. Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990; Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Berns, 2017; Bizri, 2017; Bristol-Faulhammer, 2017; Carmon, 1981; Harb et al., 2018; Levie, 2007; Refai et al., 2018; Samers, 2010). These questions aimed to understand the experiences of refugee entrepreneurs on the personal level and business level. For instance, informants were asked to describe their entrepreneurship journey and their motivations for entrepreneurship. The questions about initial capital to start and how they hired their employees aimed to know if the informants depend on their social networks to get capital and hire employees or they depend on formal channels to do so. Other questions aimed to gain insights into the integration of refugees and the role of their business in facilitating their integration process. Following this stage, two university colleagues with solid background in entrepreneurship and considerable expertise in refugee studies reviewed the questions and based on their feedback few changes were made. Pilot study with five refugee entrepreneurs was conducted to ensure the clarity

of the questions. Except for some minor wording modifications, no significant changes were made. For instance, findings from the pilot study suggested that the word 'refugee' was negatively perceived by the informants and was likely to enhance a defensive attitude which could eventually influence the quality of the data. Therefore, interviewers avoided using the word 'refugee' in the questions unless informants identified themselves as refugees.

3.2. Sampling and participants

Two inclusion criteria were needed to qualify participants in the current investigation. First, participants should be of Syrian origin who left Syria due to the civil war and resided in Turkey. Second, participants should be over the age of 18 and operate and/or own a business in the hospitality industry. Participation was voluntary and interviewees were given the option to participate in the study and discontinue the interview at any point. An overview of the research purpose was presented verbally prior to the interview and participants were asked to confirm their approval before any questions were asked. The descriptive profile of informants recruited in the study is presented [Table 2](#).

The interviews were tape-recorded upon informants' consent and no one else was present to overhear the shared dialog. To reduce the potential bias caused by the status of the interviewer (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), almost half of the interviews (16) were conducted by an outsider (non-refugee) interviewer while the rest were conducted

Table 2. Descriptive profile of refugee entrepreneurs.

	Age	Marital status	Education	Type of business	Relevant past experience
P1	52	Married	BA	Restaurant	Yes
P2	39	Married	College degree	Restaurant/Wedding venue	No
P3	44	Married	BA	Pastry shop	No
P4	26	Single	High school	Restaurant	No
P5	38	Married	High school	Restaurant/Wedding venue	Yes
P6	33	Married	High school	Restaurant	Yes
P7	35	Married	High school	Restaurant	Yes
P8	26	Married	High school	Restaurant	Yes
P9	29	Single	High school	Restaurant	Yes
P10	30	Married	High school	Restaurant	No
P11	40	Married	MA	Restaurant	No
P12	39	Married	BA	Restaurant/Wedding venue	Yes
P13	45	Married	BA	Coffee shop	Yes
P14	47	Married	BA	Coffee shop	Yes
P15	49	Married	BA	Hotel	Yes
P16	33	Married	High school	Coffee shop	No
P17	34	Single	Primary school	Coffee shop	No
P18	34	Single	PhD	Coffee shop	No
P19	40	Married	Secondary school	Restaurant	Yes
P20	42	Divorced	BA	Restaurant	Yes
P21	46	Married	BA	Restaurant	No
P22	39	Married	BA	Restaurant	No
P23	24	Single	High school	Restaurant	No
P24	42	Married	College degree	Restaurant	No
P25	31	Married	College degree	Coffee shop	No
P26	36	Single	Secondary school	Restaurant	No
P27	30	Married	BA	Restaurant	Yes
P28	50	Married	Primary school	Restaurant	Yes
P29	41	Married	Primary school	Restaurant	Yes

by an insider interviewer (Syrian refugee). Informants were also guaranteed complete confidentiality. Snowball sampling technique was used to collect data. An extensive online search was conducted to identify Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in major Turkish cities. Social media accounts were used to reach out to potential informants. Following this stage, a total of 11 entrepreneurs responded and showed a willingness to participate in the project. These informants arranged the rest of the interviews with other Syrian entrepreneurs. This technique was widely used in previous studies on refugee entrepreneurship (Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Berns, 2017; Harb et al., 2018; Şimşek, 2018; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). Participants were 29 Syrian refugee entrepreneurs living in major Turkish cities (Istanbul, Mersin, Bursa, and Gaziantep) with an average age of around 38. All informants were male entrepreneurs. This can be attributed to the culture in the Middle East where women are less involved in entrepreneurial activities compared with men (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2018; Leicht, Leiß, & Hermes, 2006). Portes and Jensen (1989) proposed that women are less likely to be entrepreneurs within the ethnic entrepreneurship context.

4. Data analysis and results

The authors transcribed each recording verbatim replacing any referenced names with pseudonyms. The transcripts were back-translated from Arabic to English and vice versa following the suggestions of prior scholars (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As a next step, short categories were created with the aid of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (RQDA) a popular R package, to indicate similarities or diversion between participants' responses. The use of a qualitative data analysis software enhances reliability and validity. The outcomes from RQDA program are presented in Figure 1.

4.1. Motivations for starting business

Motivational factors for entrepreneurship have been classified into pull and push factors (Kirkwood, 2009; McClelland, Swail, Bell, & Ibbotson, 2005; Schjoedt & Shaver, 2007; Segal, Borgia, & Schoenfeld, 2005). Push factors are related to the personal or external factors (Kirkwood, 2009) such as difficulty to find jobs in the market, while pull factors such as recognizing an opportunity are those that attract people to start a business (Hakim, 1989; Kirkwood, 2009).

Informants were asked about their motivations to start a business and the reasons for choosing the hospitality industry as a field for their ventures. As shown in Table 3, five motivational factors for starting a business and six reasons to choose the hospitality industry emerged from the data. Motivational factors for starting a venture were labeled as Survivability, Desire for independence, Availability of resources, Limited access to labor market, and Reasonable starting costs.

As forced migrants, refugees leave their homes for the sake of personal safety. Refugees' often unplanned decisions to leave their homes involve leaving behind their properties, source of income, and even family members. Their struggle for survivability does not end by their arrival to the host country. Their needs to settle and ensure a source of income become challenging and often traumatic. In this vein, informants mentioned that the need to survive in an unfamiliar environment had been a key motivational

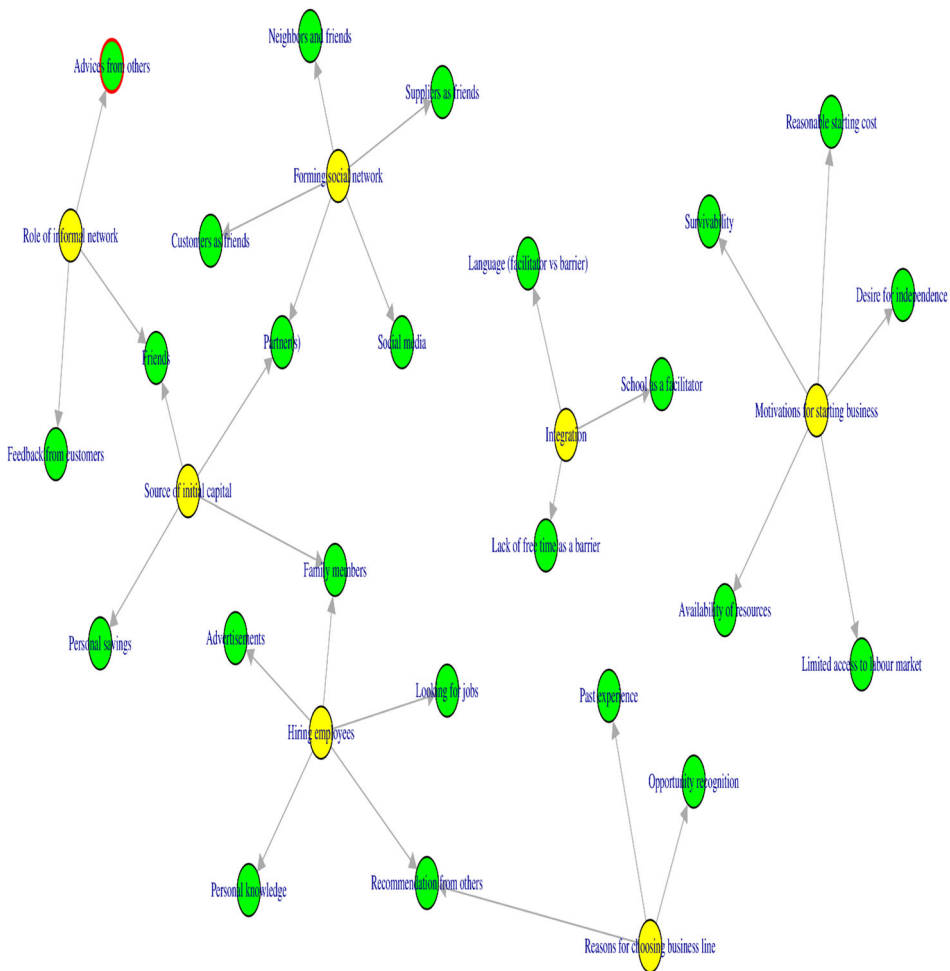


Figure 1. Outcome of the RQDA.

factor to start a business. For instance, P21 stated ‘I started my business to be able to make living. We fled from our country because of the war. If we do not work how can I live? Therefore, when I came to Mersin, I opened a restaurant’.

The survivability also involves refugees’ need to look after their family members in their home countries. P20 mentioned:

I escaped the war and left behind me my two children with my old mother. They do not have any source of income rather than me. Thus, I should work and send them money every month. Therefore, my business is important for me.

In the push–pull theory of entrepreneurship, the desire for independence is a key motivational factor for starting a venture (Kirkwood, 2009). In our study, refugees’ desire for independence emerges as a key motivation for entrepreneurship. P18 suggested: ‘I like to be independent. [...] I know 5 languages: Arabic, English, Turkish and Persian. My friends offered me to work with them but I preferred to work on my own instead of working for somebody’.

Table 3. Text Breakdown.

Construct	# of coding for each theme	# of interviews associated with each theme
<i>Motivations for starting business</i>		
Survivability	22	18
Desire for independence	19	17
Availability of resources	10	9
Limited access to labor market	10	9
Reasonable starting cost	2	2
<i>Reasons for choosing business line</i>		
Opportunity recognition	24	21
Recommendation from others	17	14
Past experience	15	13
<i>Source of initial capital</i>		
Personal savings	24	19
Family members	53	9
Friends	42	5
Partner(s)	3	3
<i>Hiring employees</i>		
Recommendations from others	14	10
Advertisements	14	9
Personal knowledge	9	9
Looking for jobs	11	8
Family members	53	5
<i>Forming social network</i>		
Customers as friends	22	19
Social media	18	16
Neighbors and friends	53	24
Partner(s)	3	3
Suppliers as friends	1	1
<i>Role of informal network</i>		
Friends	42	19
Advices from others	20	17
Feedback from customers	15	11
<i>Integration</i>		
Language (facilitator vs barrier)	50	16
School as a facilitator	10	9
Lack of free time as a barrier	3	3

The availability of resources emerges as a factor encouraging refugee entrepreneurship. Informants stated that having the experience, knowledge and financial capital played an important role to their decision to start a business. For instance, P15 stated

I have more than 20 year-experience [as a hotel owner in Syria] [...]. In addition, when you have good money, you should think on how to invest this money in a profitable business. In my case, venturing in hospitality industry has been the right decision.

There is a wide agreement that refugees are likely to suffer labor market disadvantages (Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Bizri, 2017; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). Having limited language proficiency and ill-defined legal status, refugees are less likely to find a job in the mainstream labor market. Even if they secure a job, they are likely to suffer exploitation and unfavorable working conditions. Thus, starting a business becomes a key option. P14 suggested: 'I started my job in Turkey because I couldn't find a job. Nobody will hire you if you don't speak Turkish'. P13 mentioned:

When I came to Mersin, I worked for a coffee shop [...]. I used to get paid just around \$5 per day. I realized that I should start my own business because I have 14-year experience in this field and I shouldn't accept to work for somebody else for 12 h to get \$5 per day.

The reasonable cost to start a business was also mentioned by some informants. P21 stated: 'Although I had no past experience in this field I decided to open a restaurant because venturing in textile [in which he had experience] would have required greater capital'.

4.2. Reasons for choosing business line

Informants were asked about their reasons to venture in their perspective business lines within the hospitality industry. The analysis revealed that opportunity recognition, recommendation from others, and past experience were the key reasons mentioned by informants.

Informants highlighted the lucrativeness of the hospitality industry as a key reason for their business choice. In particular, informants were driven by the market opportunity enhanced by the increasing demand from co-ethnic migrants and co-citizen refugees. P1 mentioned:

There were a lot of Syrians there [in Gaziantep] and I recognized the opportunity there since I felt that they were not satisfied with the Turkish food. I also realized that it was difficult for them to convey their orders to Turkish employees at Turkish restaurants.

Informants also recognized the opportunity emerging from the particular needs of Arab customers in general and Syrian customers in particular. P2, who runs two restaurants, a pastry, and a wedding venue mentioned:

According to our traditions, our weddings cannot be mixed [women and men in the same place] and therefore, to serve Syrians in Bursa, I established this wedding venue, and believe me, I have earned much more profits from this hall than my two restaurants.

Recommendation from friends and family members seems to have played a central role in choosing the hospitality industry as a field of business. P18 stated: 'I decided to start my business in this field [café restaurant] based on the recommendations of my elder brother who had past experience in business'. Not less important than recommendation and advices from others, relevant past experience is also regarded as a significant capital in refugee entrepreneurship (Alrawadieh et al., 2018). Our qualitative data supports this notion and highlights the role of past experience in the business type selection process. P28 proposed: 'I chose to open the restaurant because it is the business of my father and grandfather. I also have been involved in this business since I was a child'.

4.3. Source of initial capital

Informants were enquired about the source of capital they used to start their ventures. Analysis revealed four key sources of initial capital namely, personal savings, financial support from family members, financial support from friends, and partnership. In particular, informants relied in on their personal savings from their previous jobs or businesses in their home country. P17 mentioned 'my savings from my past job back in Syria were the main capital that I used to open café restaurant here [in Mersin]'. Refugee entrepreneurs may rely on more than one source of capital. For instance, P27 mentioned: 'I obtained the capital for my restaurant through my previous business in Syria. [...]. Besides, my Turkish partner contributed by 50% of the capital'.

4.4. Hiring employees

How refugee entrepreneurs hire their employees is an important issue in ethnic entrepreneurship. Some scholars such as Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) suggested that entrepreneurs tend to hire co-ethnic workers. While our findings confirm this notion, informants provided insightful information on how they managed to find and hire their employees. In this vein, recommendations from others emerge as a key factor in the hiring process. For instance, P2 suggested 'my employees are all Syrians. I hired them based on recommendations from some friends'.

Refugee entrepreneurs also relied on advertisements to recruit employees. In particular, informants underscored the importance of social media platforms as a mean to announce job opportunities. Refugee entrepreneurs' social networks are also of significant importance. In particular, informants mentioned that they hired employees they knew personally or those who were family members. In this respect, informants highlighted some advantages for hiring such employees including enhanced trust and reduced cost. Finally, some informants mentioned that they hired employees who formally applied for a job.

4.5. Forming social networks

Greve and Salaff (2003) suggested that establishing social network is important for entrepreneurs because it grants them the opportunity to acquire resources (e.g. knowledge, support, access to distribution channels). Our analysis reveals that refugee entrepreneurs build their social networks through customers, social media, friends and neighbors, partner(s), and suppliers. In particular, informants highlighted the importance of their customers who, by patronizing their businesses, turned into friends. P5 mentioned:

Most of my friends are customers who usually come to rent the wedding venue or to eat in my restaurant. These friends [...] also invite their friends to eat in my restaurant or to rent the wedding venue. In addition, they post on Facebook to let their friends know about my restaurant and wedding venue.

Refugee entrepreneurs also appreciate the role of social media in creating their social networks. P7 commented:

Facebook played a central role in helping establish my social network. As you know, because of the civil war in Syria, we couldn't know where our neighbors, cousins, relatives went. Facebook allowed me for example [...] I find some of them in Turkey and even in Bursa [where I reside]. So, I reestablished my social network.

Friends and neighbors were also frequently mentioned by informants as a key component in their social networks. P13 noted 'I have many [Syrian] friends here, [...]. I also have many Turkish friends who are originally friends for my cousin. This network is important for me because it enables me to have more customers'. Moreover, refugee entrepreneurs' social networks is enhanced by their partner(s) and suppliers either from locals or their co-citizens. Over time, the professional relationship with partners and suppliers transform into a more personal relationship where friendship, mutual trust and social ties become stronger.

4.6. Role of informal network

Informants were asked on how their informal networks helped them to enhance the growth of their businesses. The informants' responses are important because they show the level of interaction between refugee entrepreneurs and their informal network. Our analysis revealed that encouragement from friends, advice from family members and neighbors, and feedback from customers were of significant importance in the growth of refugees' businesses.

In particular, informants underscored the importance of the positive word of mouth by their friends in attracting new customers. For instance, P17 mentioned 'my Syrian friends in Mersin have played a central role in the growth of my business because they promote my café and recommend my place to their friends'. Informants also relied on the advice and recommendations of their relatives, friends, and neighbors through different stages of their entrepreneurship. P7 suggested:

I'm open to advice from all people especially friends. [...]. These advices allowed me to enhance the growth of my restaurant. For instance, one of my friends advised me to offer Arabian Shawarma [thinly sliced cuts of meat rolled into a piece of flatbread] to sell it for people who are in a hurry and can't wait. Indeed, I made good money because of his advice.

Feedback from customers was also an important source of information for refugees to grow their businesses. P10 noted: 'I always try to ask the customers to give me a feedback on the provided service'.

4.7. Integration

A key objective of the current investigation was to explore how refugees' involvement in entrepreneurship helps them integrate into the host country. Şimşek (2018) suggested that when refugees have economic resources, they are likely to feel economically integrated. The economic outcomes of their businesses can provide them and their family members with more opportunities to integrate into the local society (e.g. ability to join private language courses). Our findings indicate that the local language, school, and lack of free time emerged as key factors influencing the integration process of refugees.

Informants highlighted the importance of the language in their integration and their family members' integration within the host community. For those who mastered, or at least, had some command of the local language, integration was facilitated, whereas integration was hampered for those who did not have command of the local language. P5 elaborated as follows:

[...] the best way to integrate into the Turkish society is to learn their language [...]. I'm focusing on the language because all the problems I faced here were related to the language. [...]. For my wife, I sent her to an institute to learn Turkish and now she has good level of the Turkish language and she has Turkish friends. Because of the language, we now have many Turkish friends.

Informants appreciated the role of local schools in facilitating the integration of their children into the local society. P12 suggested 'my children at schools have many Turkish friends and they speak Turkish fluently'.

Yet, given their immerse involvement in their businesses, some refugees mentioned the lack of free time as a key barrier for their integration. This includes limited interaction with locals and inability of enrolling to language courses. P21 mentioned:

Although I am an engineer, I feel like an illiterate in Turkey! My 13-year old son is better than me because he leant the Turkish language. I cannot learn the Turkish language because I do not have time and I have to work 24 hours to look after myself and my family.

5. Discussions

By focusing on Syrian refugee entrepreneurs venturing in the hospitality industry in a major refugee receiving country (Turkey), this paper aims to provide a holistic understanding of refugee entrepreneurship by examining refugee entrepreneurs' motives, the role of their social networks in navigating the often challenging entrepreneurship journey, and their integration process. The study also sheds light on the role of entrepreneurship in integrating refugees into the host society. The study departs from the premise that the power of entrepreneurship can be harnessed to help refugees integrate into the social and economic fabric of their host countries (Kloosterman & Van Der Leun, 1999; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006, 2008).

The findings show that refugee entrepreneurship in the hospitality industry is driven by several factors including survivability, desire for independence, availability of resources, limited access to labor market, and reasonable starting costs. The current study extends the findings of a recent study by Alrawadieh et al. (2018). Their study explored the motivational factors of Syrian refugees in general without considering the push and pull factors (e.g. Kirkwood, 2009; McClelland et al., 2005). Moreover, the study was conducted in only one Turkish city (Istanbul) thus limiting the generalizability of the findings. The present study identified three push factors (survivability, desire for independence, and limited access to labor market) and two pull factors (availability of resources and reasonable starting cost). Our findings confirm that refugees have limited options and thus the need for survival emerges as a key theme in refugee entrepreneurship (Bizri, 2017). The findings also confirm the results of Alrawadieh et al. (2018) indicating that refugee entrepreneurship is driven by necessity rather than an opportunity. The results of the current study regarding the desire for independence confirm what was reported by Kirkwood (2009) that desire for independence is one of the motivational factors for entrepreneurship. Limited access to labor market represents a push factor for entrepreneurship (Gold, 1988). This usually stems from refugees' inability to get a work permit (Sak, Kaymaz, Kadkoy, & Kenanoglu, 2018) or because of their limited language proficiency (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). Overall, our findings support the observations reported in previous studies that refugees engage in self-employment to escape labor market disadvantage (Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Refai et al., 2018).

The hospitality industry is favored by newcomers (Pechlaner et al., 2012). The entrepreneurs in this industry get a competitive advantage due to the access to the low-cost co-ethnic labor force (Portes & Jensen, 1989). Recognizing the opportunity in the market (i.e. ubiquity of many Arab and Syrian customers) was frequently mentioned by informants as a key factor to choosing the hospitality industry as a business domain. Informants also underscored the role of their past experience and the recommendations from friends and family members in their decision to venture in the hospitality industry.

Informants mentioned that they got the capital to start their ventures from different sources including personal savings, family members, friends, and partners. Gold (1988) highlighted the role of informal social circles (e.g. friends and family members) in ensuring financial support to the refugee entrepreneurs. Similarly Lyon, Sepulveda, and Syrett (2007) suggested that refugees depended on their personal savings and support from friends and family members to start their businesses. The lack of financial capital is acknowledged as a barrier for refugee entrepreneurship (Lyon et al., 2007; Refai et al., 2018). Getting financial capital can be considered as a sign of strong social networks for refugees (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008) since people are likely to help others whom they trust. Some informants stated that they ensured their initial capital from family members who live outside Turkey.

The study endeavored to understand how refugee entrepreneurs navigate the business-related issues such as hiring employees. Refugee entrepreneurs in our study hired their employees based on recommendations from others, advertisements, personal knowledge. Family members were also acknowledged as potential employees. The lack of social support in the host countries may push refugees to seek to establish strong relationships with their co-ethnics who serve as employees and customers (Alrawadieh et al., 2018). Such employees usually do not ask for much job benefits that would burden the refugee businesses (Bizri, 2017). Previous research shows that entrepreneurs tend to hire employees who are from their own nationality (Bizri, 2017) or from family members and relatives (Gold, 1988). Indeed, many informants in the current study stated that the overwhelming majority of their employees were Syrians. Only a few informants mentioned that they had hired Turkish employees in order to deal with Turkish customers. Past research shows that entrepreneurs prefer to hire co-ethnics in order to cut employment costs (Waldinger, Aldrich, & Ward, 1990). Moreover, entrepreneurs who do not have a good command of the host country's local language tend to rely on their co-ethnic labor force (Altinay, 2008).

The social network for immigrants in the new environment is likely to be more extensive than that of refugees (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006) and this can be attributed to the sudden and forced nature of refugees' mobility (Williams & Krasniqi, 2018). Nevertheless, refugees invest in network ties (Alrawadieh et al., 2018) because they are less likely to consider returning to their homelands (Bizri, 2017). Masurel, Nijkamp, Tastan, and Vindigni (2002) suggested that social networks help entrepreneurs recruit employees and acquire capital. Jack and Anderson (2002) opined that entrepreneurship is associated with its social context (including social networks). Social network is a way of finding new customers. It seems that the success of new ventures depend on social networks because they offer access to products, service and information (Rauch, 2001) and maybe to suppliers and customers (Berns, 2017). Strang and Ager (2010) suggested that refugees' informal networks are effective in creating bonds, these networks grant safety, emotional stability and independence for refugees. Lyon et al. (2007) maintained that entrepreneurship helped refugees to have wider social networks in the local society and to break themselves out of refugee or co-ethnic circles. The findings of the current study grant support for Berns (2017), Bizri (2017) and Lyon et al. (2007). Unlike previous studies, the current study shifted attention to how refugee entrepreneurs form their social networks. The findings emphasize the role of customers as friends, social media, friends, neighbors, and suppliers as friends. Şimşek (2018) suggested that establishing a

business helped refugee entrepreneurs to be better connected with locals. The findings reveal that refugee entrepreneurs who have good command of the local language cater more for local customers while those with limited language proficiency targeted co-citizens and co-ethnics. Moreover, it was observed that refugee entrepreneurs who had limited language knowledge tended to recruit local employees to serve local customers.

In order to explore the mutual interaction between Syrian refugee entrepreneurs and their informal networks, refugee entrepreneurs were asked to clarify how they benefitted from their informal networks to grow the new ventures. This helps to understand the level of interaction between refugee entrepreneurs and their social networks. Exchanging opinions and knowledge and accepting advice from informal networks show to some extent the level of interaction trust between both parties and therefore integration. In addition, it helps refugee entrepreneurs enhance their social well-being (Alrawadieh et al., 2018). Refugees who are not integrated tend to isolate themselves and tend to depend more on their co-ethnics (Alrawadieh et al., 2018) to make survival for their businesses. Previous studies failed to clarify the interaction process between Syrian refugee entrepreneurs and their informal networks and how this interaction contributes to the growth of refugees' ventures. The current study reveals that Syrian refugee entrepreneurs have got help and advice from their friends, ex-colleagues, partners, customers, and others. This has contributed to the growth of their ventures.

A key objective of the present study was to understand the role of entrepreneurship in facilitating refugees' integration. Previous research suggests entrepreneurship as an economic process that can help refugees integrate into the local social and economic fabric of the host country (Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Şimşek, 2018; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). The findings of the current study underscore the importance of language proficiency in the integration process of refugee entrepreneurs and their families. In other words, refugees described the language as a facilitator and barrier depending on the level of proficiency. Entrepreneurship grants some advantages to the entrepreneur's family (Dyer Jr & Handler, 1994; Şimşek, 2018) including social power (i.e. being recognized in the local community). However, without having sufficient command of the local language, the ability of refugee entrepreneurs and their family members to harness this power remains limited. Having good command in the local language enables refugee entrepreneurs and their families to have a stronger involvement in the local community and therefore, attract more customers (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). Lack of free time emerged as a significant constraint in the integration process. Being busy in managing their ventures, refugee entrepreneurs were unable to join courses to learn the local language or socialize with locals. However, the role of local schools in integrating the entrepreneurs' children was acknowledged.

6. Conclusion

Research on refugee entrepreneurship seems to be as recent as about one decade ago. Only recently has the topic gained momentum in the entrepreneurship literature. Drawing on qualitative data from Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Turkey, the current investigation endeavored to provide deeper understanding of the refugee entrepreneurship by examining refugee entrepreneurs' motivations, their social networks, and their integration process. By doing so, the present study adds to a nascent research stream

that views refugee entrepreneurship as a tool that can enhance refugees' integration (e.g. Alrawadieh et al., 2018; Bizri, 2017).

This paper identified the motivational factors for refugee entrepreneurship, reasons for choosing a specific line of business within the hospitality industry, source of initial capital, refugee entrepreneurs' mechanisms to hire employees, the role of refugee entrepreneurs' families in business, forming social network, integration and the role of informal networks in enhancing the growth of refugees' ventures. A key objective of the study was to explore the role of entrepreneurship in facilitating the integration process of the refugees. While many host countries have focused on integrating refugees into their labor markets (e.g. Ortensi, 2015), the potential role of entrepreneurship in achieving integration has been often overlooked (Berns, 2017). The study adds to a quite limited yet thriving body of knowledge on refugee entrepreneurship. The findings will hopefully encourage further research highlighting the bright side of the refugee crisis and will help policymakers as well as NGOs on national and regional levels place more focus on the power of entrepreneurship as a tool for integration and inclusion of refugees. Therefore, this study makes a call for policymakers in the host countries to pay more attention to the role of entrepreneurship in integrating refugees.

The current study is not without limitations. First, the data were collected from Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings should be approached with caution. Specifically, exploring the perceptions of refugees from other cultural backgrounds and refugees venturing in other sectors can provide significant and richer insights. Second, the study focused on Syrian refugees in Turkey and thus the results should be considered as context-bound until further research is undertaken. In particular, Turkish locals and Syrian refugees share some cultural values (e.g. religion) that can potentially influence refugees' settlement and integration process as well as hosts' willingness to accept refugees.

More research is needed to understand different aspects of refugee entrepreneurship. The role of entrepreneurship in the subjective and objective well-being of refugees and their families is one area that is worth investigating. Future studies should also pay attention to the role of family, past experience, social and informal networks in engaging in entrepreneurship and growing refugees' ventures. Researchers may also investigate the impact of entrepreneurship as an economic integration process on social or cultural integration. The role of social networks in refugee entrepreneurial success or failure is another interesting area of research. Specifically, researchers may look at what would constitute an enabling environment for refugee entrepreneurship. Future research may also examine the factors that complement entrepreneurship towards partial or full refugee social integration in the host community.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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