

Refugee entrepreneurship: Systematic literature review

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this article is to systematically analyse the current academic research on refugee entrepreneurship in Europe and beyond. Refugee entrepreneurship represents a burgeoning area of study that has become increasingly significant following the European migrant crisis in 2015 and the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. We seek to determine how studies on refugee entrepreneurship differ in their theoretical approaches and methodologies from traditional research on immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship.

Research Design & Methods: The study adopts a systematic literature review method to identify and analyse key articles which discuss refugee entrepreneurship. We analysed the content of 75 academic publications to get a deeper understanding of the research methods, and theoretical approaches, analysed ethnic groups, and destination countries and the key findings. Specifically, we explore how the current literature portrays the latest wave of Ukrainian refugees in the European Union.

Findings: Our study reveals that research on refugee entrepreneurship is still in its early, predominantly exploratory stages. Most of the articles we reviewed were empirical, with a distinct preference for qualitative methods. A significant limitation of existing research is its static analysis; most studies were cross-sectional, which fails to capture the dynamic nature of entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, our review highlights a clear dichotomy in the circumstances of refugees displaced within Europe – primarily Ukrainians and those from the Balkans – compared to those originating from the Middle East or African countries.

Implications & Recommendations: We advocate for a more comprehensive approach to the study of refugee entrepreneurship, particularly through longitudinal analyses that can track changes within refugee-owned firms and the evolving attitudes of refugees towards entrepreneurship. We also recommend further investigation into the interactions between refugees and economic migrants, especially those from the same country or those who speak a similar language and share cultural ties. Such interactions could influence the evolution of opportunity structures in the destination countries, potentially leading to the creation of ethnic enclaves.

Contribution & Value Added: We contribute to the existing literature on refugee entrepreneurship by identifying key researchers and most cited articles, and by discussing the evolution and adaptation of the most popular theoretical approaches used in these studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the massive forced population displacements throughout the twentieth century, only the last two decades have seen a significant rise in academic interest in refugee entrepreneurship. We can attribute this to at least four consecutive, large-scale waves of forced migration worldwide within the last decade. Firstly, the Syrian War, which began in 2011, forced millions of Syrians and other ethnic groups in the region to flee to neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. As of April 2024, 90.4% of the 5 million displaced people from Syria live in these three states (UNHCR, 2024). However, it was the so-called European migration crisis of 2015 that brought widespread public atten-

tion to the plight of refugees: within a year, nearly 1.3 million Syrians, Afghans, and Iraqis travelled through the Mediterranean route northwards to seek asylum in EU member states. Many of these refugees turned out to be highly entrepreneurial, leading to increased academic focus on their business activities. The Syrian crisis was swiftly followed by two other refugee waves occurring on two distinct continents: South America and Asia. Firstly, following the marginal victory of populist and authoritarian leader Nicolas Maduro, the Venezuelan economy has greatly deteriorated: since 2015, approximately 7.7 million Venezuelans have emigrated from their home country, including 6.5 million in Latin America and the Caribbean (Bonilla-Mejía *et al.*, 2023). Although most scholars use the term 'immigrants' and add the adjective 'forced' to emphasize the primarily involuntary nature of Venezuelan displacement, international institutions (including UNHCR) advocate for the use of a 'refugee' definition, as per the Cartagena Declaration (Blouin & Borios, 2023).

Another serious refugee crisis began in 2017. The Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic group who had lived for centuries in Myanmar, were forcibly displaced to Bangladesh. Initially, around 700 000 people crossed the border in August 2017, and now approximately one million refugees live in Bangladesh (Hossain *et al.*, 2023), mostly in the Cox's Bazar region in Southeastern Bangladesh and within the Kutupalong refugee camp, the largest contemporary refugee camp in the world.

Finally, in February 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale invasion of neighbouring Ukraine. As a result of this aggression, 6.47 million Ukrainians are currently displaced worldwide, with 5.93 million in Europe (UNHCR, 2024). Compared to previous waves of refugees, Ukrainians in most EU countries benefit from temporary protection status, which grants them greater economic freedoms from the moment of their arrival, including the right to start business activities (Kohlenberger *et al.*, 2023).

Consequently, the aforementioned four waves of refugee flows have attracted significant interest in the academic world, resulting in an increased number of publications. Among those, one of the emerging topics is refugee entrepreneurship. We can explain the increased attention to business activities of forced migrants at least by two major factors. Firstly, refugees are known to be more entrepreneurial than natives and even economic immigrants (Collins, 2021). They often exhibit previous entrepreneurial experience acquired in their home country, and want to continue their businessman and businesswoman status in a new location: this is particularly visible in the case of Syrians, a highly entrepreneurial nation (Chang, 2023). Secondly, many host countries perceive entrepreneurship as a way to successfully integrate immigrants and refugees, therefore they create special incentives (business incubators, starting grants, tax reductions) to encourage firm creation (Brzozowski, 2017). Of course, we cannot analyse refugees in the same vein as economic immigrants, as displaced people are a highly vulnerable group, traumatized by war and persecution, who often lost most of their financial assets (Santamaria-Velasco *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless, the origins of the research on refugee entrepreneurship are located in immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship studies. This is because until recently, the interest in refugee business activities was marginal, and it has been mostly analyzed 'as an integral part of the immigrant population and not discussed separately' (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008, p. 897).

For these specific reasons, refugee entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role in public discussions on the reception of forced migrants in host countries. Ventures started and developed by refugees contribute to the growth of the small and medium-sized enterprise sector in major destinations, create job opportunities, introduce new business models and innovative activities, and, importantly, serve as a positive example of the benefits that refugees can bring. This helps to counterbalance the negative narrative towards asylum seekers in developed countries. However, knowledge of how to support refugees who want to establish new firms, and understanding the typical barriers they face in such economic activities, remains very limited.

Consequently, the primary objective of our article is to analyse the recent, dynamic evolution of refugee entrepreneurship research. We seek to understand how this emerging field of study develops its own methodology and theoretical frameworks. To do so, we performed a systematic literature review, a scientific method which enables to map the stock of knowledge in a rigorous, logical and systematic way allowing for further replicability of the scientific exercise. In such a way, the method of systematic literature review enables one to spot the most common research gaps and also propose

further research directions (Czakov *et al.*, 2023). In our case, by reviewing the literature on refugee entrepreneurship, we aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the main theoretical approaches used in the studies on refugee entrepreneurship?

RQ2: What are the most important research gaps in this field of study?

The structure of our article is as follows. In the second section, we will discuss the method of systematic literature review and the criteria imposed on our literature search. The third section will present the results of the literature review, describing the most important publications, authors, journals, trends and theories used. The fourth section will discuss the research gaps, in particular the ones in relation to the most recent inflow of Ukrainian refugees into the EU countries. The final section will conclude the article.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The systematic literature review (SLR) is a method for analysing existing academic work. Unlike traditional literature reviews, SLR allows for a structured and systematic mapping of the knowledge in a specific field of study using transparent criteria (Czakov *et al.*, 2023). These characteristics make it possible to generalize the results and enable other researchers to replicate the SLR.

We start our research exercise by imposing criteria on the literature search. Similarly to previous literature reviews on refugee entrepreneurship (Newman *et al.*, 2023; Abebe, 2019), we restricted our analysis to academic production written in English. However, in contrast to the aforementioned studies, we relied only on the Scopus database. Moreover, we included peer-reviewed articles published in academic journals (also the ones in online first format) and book chapters in edited volumes, as in migration and refugee studies these are the important channels of academic production's dissemination. We fully recognize the importance of alternative databases, particularly the Web of Science. However, we argue that the Scopus database is more comprehensive for studies on refugees, migration, and entrepreneurship, covering more titles than the Web of Science. Furthermore, Web of Science includes a large portion of conference proceedings, which we excluded from our analysis.

Our initial search started with nine combinations of keywords, including: 'refugee entrepreneur,' 'refugee business,' 'refugee firm,' 'displaced person entrepreneur,' 'displaced person business,' 'displaced person firm,' 'forced migrant entrepreneur,' 'forced migrant business,' 'forced migrant firm.' We looked for publications indexed in the Scopus database until 31 December 2023. After excluding overlapping results and articles which were completely irrelevant, the initial sample included 150 publications. The irrelevant articles usually either included the 'refugee effect' – which investigated the linkage between the level of unemployment and self-employment rates (in the same vein these articles were excluded by Newman *et al.* (2023), and the term 'entrepreneur' used in political studies, meaning social activism. Out of these initial 150 articles, after an investigation of the content of abstracts or summaries, we selected 75 publications for more detailed analysis. We selected those articles based on the main research problem – the focus of all studies was refugee entrepreneurship. In many articles, the term 'refugee entrepreneurship' or similar briefly appeared in the article, but was only mentioned marginally. Next, our team read those 75 articles and classified them according to different criteria, namely publication type (empirical, mixed, conceptual or literature review), the method used, the theoretical approach applied, main research problem, and main findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The increased magnitude of forced migration flows worldwide has significantly contributed to the rising academic interest in refugee entrepreneurship. Figure 1 presents the articles included in a detailed analysis by year of publication. We can clearly see a dynamic increase in academic output following the European migration crisis in 2015, and again after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In the following sections, we will discuss the most important publications and findings.

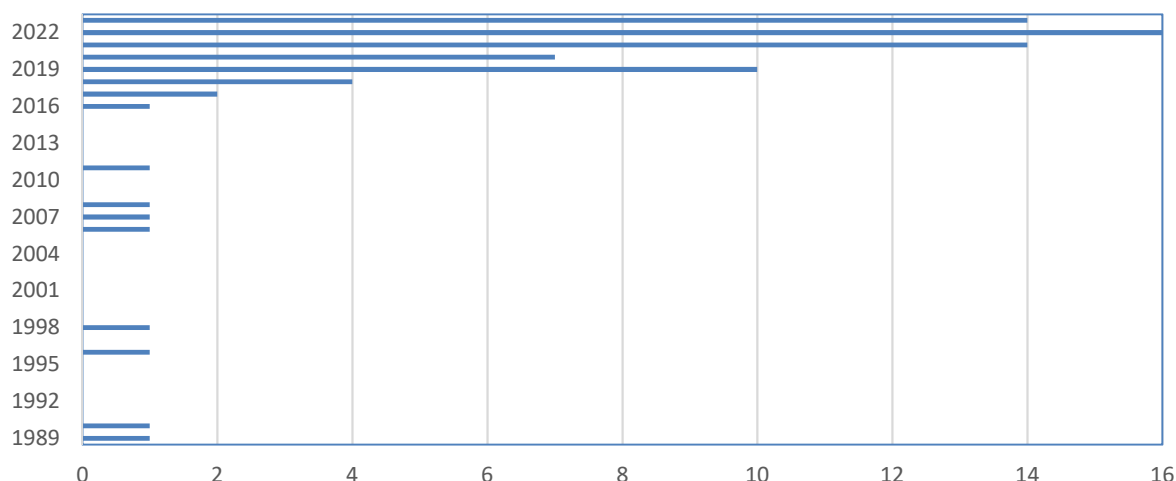


Figure 1. Analysed publications by year of publication

Source: own elaboration.

Our analysis of the publication outlets has shown that refugee entrepreneurship research is mostly published in migration studies and entrepreneurship studies journals. The most popular journal in terms of the number of articles is *Journal of Refugee Studies*, followed by *Journal of Enterprising Communities*, *International Migration*, and *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research* (Table 1). However, academic production in this area is very much dispersed: the most popular journals hosted less than 50% of the articles included in our review (26).

Table 1. Most important journals with publications on refugee entrepreneurship

Journal	Journal's Impact Factor (2023)	Publications	Number of publications
<i>Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies</i>	2.8	Wauters & Lambrecht (2008), Thompson (2016)	2
<i>International Migration</i>	1.6	de Lange <i>et al.</i> (2021), Chang (2022), Ranabahu <i>et al.</i> (2023)	3
<i>International Migration Review</i>	2.3	Andersson (2021), Newman <i>et al.</i> (2023)	2
<i>Journal of Refugee Studies</i>	2.2	Harb <i>et al.</i> (2019), Skran & Easton-Calabria (2020), Skran (2020), Embiricos (2020), Halilovich & Efendic (2021), Akçali & Görmüş (2021)	6
<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research</i>	4.5	Bagwell (2018), Heilbrunn (2019), Yeröz (2019)	3
<i>Entrepreneurship and Regional Development</i>	3.3	Bizri (2017), Harima (2022)	2
<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business</i>	not listed	Sandberg <i>et al.</i> (2019), Rashid (2023)	2
<i>Journal of Business Venturing</i>	7.7	Shepherd <i>et al.</i> (2020), Jiang <i>et al.</i> (2021)	2
<i>Journal of Enterprising Communities</i>	2.4	Zighan (2020), Abuhusseini (2023), Kazlou & Wennberg (2023), Zehra & Usmani (2023)	4

Source: own study.

The same pattern applies when we investigated the most influential authors in refugee entrepreneurship research. In this case, we combined two criteria: the number of articles and the total number of citations (Table 2). The most productive authors were Ching-An Chang, Aki Harima, and

Alexander Newmann. However, since their articles have been published quite recently, their citation records are still modest. Please note that the articles listed in Table 2 include only those we selected for our analysis. For instance, Aki Harima has also published several articles on the role of incubators in supporting refugee entrepreneurship.

When it comes to the most influential authors based on the number of citations received, Bram Wauters, Johan Lambrecht, and Rima Bizri clearly take the lead. For Wauters and Lambrecht, the high number of citations can also be explained by the earlier publication dates. Notably, only two articles in this field have been cited more than 100 times: Bizri (2017) and Wauters and Lambrecht (2008), highlighting how young this research area is.

Table 2. Most important authors by number of publications and/or citations (as of May 2024)

Author	Publications	Total number of citations
Bram Wauters & Johan Lambrecht	Wauters & Lambrecht (2006), Wauters & Lambrecht (2008)	182
Rima M. Bizri	Bizri (2017)	133
Dean A. Shepherd, Fouad Philippe Saade & Joakim Wincent	Shepherd <i>et al.</i> (2020)	80
Susan Bagwell	Bagwell (2018)	71
Zaid Alrawadieh, Eyup Karayilan & Gurel Cetin	Alrawadieh <i>et al.</i> (2018)	71
Claudena Skran	Skran (2020), Skran & Easton-Calabria (2020)	45
Sibylle Heilbrunn	Heilbrunn (2019), Heilbrunn (2021)	39
Ching-An Chang	Chang (2022(a)), Chang (2022 (b)), Chang (2022c), Chang (2023)	34
Aki Harima	Harima <i>et al.</i> (2021), Yeshe <i>et al.</i> (2022), Harima (2023)	33
Alexander Newman	Christensen & Newman (2023), Newman <i>et al.</i> (2023), Christensen <i>et al.</i> (2020)	18
Nadeera Ranabahu	Ranabahu <i>et al.</i> (2021), Ranabahu <i>et al.</i> (2023)	1

Source: own study.

Types of Publications, Methods Used, and Most Important Theoretical Approaches

In this section, we will analyse the publications on refugee entrepreneurship by type of article. We distinguished a few basic categories, namely: a) empirical research articles, which focus is mostly empirical, b) conceptual & theoretical articles, which usually propose and develop a new theoretical approach to studying refugee business, c) mixed articles, which combine to aforementioned types – *i.e.* include both theoretical propositions complemented by empirical approach, and finally d) literature reviews (see Table 3).

Not surprisingly, the most numerous category consisted of empirical research articles (64 publications). The most typical research approach was qualitative, with the most common method being in-depth, semi-structured interviews (43), followed by case study analyses and biographical narratives. These research methods are also quite typical for immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship studies. However, it is widely known that using snowball sampling and relatively small sample sizes leads to results that cannot be generalized to entire populations of refugees in a given country.

Moreover, a vast majority of studies (29 articles) focused on the Middle East and North Africa, followed by Western and Northern Europe (27). There were only a few studies on the Balkans (Williams & Krasniqi, 2018; Halilovich & Efendic, 2021), which has been both a significant sending and, more recently, hosting region for forced population movements. However, what is particularly striking is the dominance of studies on Western and Northern Europe over the ‘classical’ destinations for economic migration, *i.e.* Northern America. This outcome is surprising, as both the United States and Canada still accept considerable flows of refugees and have even separate entry programs for such categories of foreigners (the US – Refugee Admissions Program, USRAP and Canada – Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program). Moreover, the new destinations for refugees – Southern and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean are also underrepresented (Table 4). This short geographical overview of destination regions clearly shows the necessity to further investigate refugee entrepreneurship in such areas.

Table 3. Publications by article type

Type of publication	Publications	Number of publications
Empirical re- search articles	Chang (2022a), Thafer & Nor (2022), Collins (2021), Klyver <i>et al.</i> (2022), Nijhoff (2021), Jianget <i>et al.</i> (2021), Halilovich & Efendic (2021), Hartmann & Philipp (2022), Rashid (2023), Paksoy <i>et al.</i> (2023), Adeeko & Treanor (2022), Brown <i>et al.</i> (2022), Kassab <i>et al.</i> (2022), Barth & Zalkat (2021), Schmich & Mitra (2023), Kazlou & Wennberg (2023), Au <i>et al.</i> (2022), Yeshe <i>et al.</i> (2024), Mousa & Abdelgaffar (2023), Aricioğlu (2023), Shepherd <i>et al.</i> (2020), Chang (2023), Kachkar & Djafri (2022), de Lange <i>et al.</i> (2022), Ranabahu <i>et al.</i> (2021), Cetin <i>et al.</i> (2022), Almohammad <i>et al.</i> (2021), Ram <i>et al.</i> (2022), Dagnelie <i>et al.</i> (2019), Wauters & Lambrecht (2006), Wauters & Lambrecht (2008), Atasü-Topcuoğlu (2019), Yeröz (2019), Shneikat & Alrawadieh (2019), Heilbrunn (2019), Bizri (2017), Embiricos (2020), Johnson & Shaw (2020), Bagwell (2018), Alrawadieh <i>et al.</i> (2019), Skran (2020), Sandberg <i>et al.</i> (2019), Eimermann & Karlsson (2018), Mehtap & Al-Saidi (2018), Fong <i>et al.</i> (2007), Zighan (2020), Harb <i>et al.</i> (2019), Moore (1990), Basok (1989), Miyares (1998), Ranabahu <i>et al.</i> (2023), Islam <i>et al.</i> (2022), Chang (2022b), Andersson (2021), Akçali & Görmüş (2021), Thompson (2016), Badalič (2023), Abu-Eljedian & Panayiotopoulos (1996), Holian (2017), Riaño (2023), Nyame-Asiamah <i>et al.</i> (2020), Williams & Krasniqi (2018), Klaesson & Öner (2021), Chang (2022c)	64
Conceptual & theoretical	Christensen & Newman (2023), Skran & Easton-Calabria (2020), Christensen <i>et al.</i> (2020)	3
Mixed (research & conceptual)	Zehra & Usmani (2023), Heilbrunn (2021), Harima (2022), Santamaria-Velasco <i>et al.</i> (2021), Abuhusseini (2023), Harima <i>et al.</i> (2021)	6
Literature re- view	Newman <i>et al.</i> (2023), Abebe (2019)	2

Source: own study.

Table 4. Refugee entrepreneurs by destination country and ethnicity of migrants

Destination re- gions	Publications	Number of publications
Middle East and North Africa	Chang (2022a), Chang (2022b), Chang (2022c), Chang (2023), Zehra & Usmani (2023), Thafer & Nor (2022), Heilbrunn (2021), Paksoy <i>et al.</i> (2023), Kassab <i>et al.</i> (2022), Mousa & Abdelgaffar (2023), Abuhusseini (2023), Aricioğlu (2023), Shepherd <i>et al.</i> (2020), Cetin <i>et al.</i> (2022), Almohammad <i>et al.</i> (2021), Atasü-Topcuoğlu (2019), Shneikat & Alrawadieh (2019), Heilbrunn (2019), Bizri (2017), Alrawadieh <i>et al.</i> (2019), Mehtap & Al-Saidi (2018), Zighan (2020), Harb <i>et al.</i> (2019), Akgündüz <i>et al.</i> (2018), Akçali & Görmüş (2021), Badalič (2023), Abu-Eljedian & Panayiotopoulos (1996), Joseph <i>et al.</i> (2021)	29
Western and Northern Europe	Klyver <i>et al.</i> (2022), Harima (2022), Nijhoff (2021), Jiang <i>et al.</i> (2021), Hartmann & Philipp (2022), Rashid (2023), Adeeko & Treanor (2022), Barth & Zalkat (2021), Schmich & Mitra (2023), Kazlou & Wennberg (2023), Yeshe <i>et al.</i> (2022), Kachkar & Djafri (2022), de Lange <i>et al.</i> (2021), Harima <i>et al.</i> (2021), Cetin <i>et al.</i> (2022), Ram <i>et al.</i> (2022), Wauters & Lambrecht (2008), Yeröz (2019), Wauters & Lambrecht (2006), Embiricos (2020), Johnson & Shaw (2019), Sandberg <i>et al.</i> (2019), Eimermann & Karlsson (2018), Moore (1990), Andersson (2021), Holian (2017), Klaesson & Öner (2021)	27
Northern America	Dagnelie <i>et al.</i> (2021), Fong <i>et al.</i> (2007), Miyares (1998)	3
Australia & Oceania	Collins (2021), Ranabahu <i>et al.</i> (2021), Ranabahu <i>et al.</i> (2023)	3
Subsaharan Africa	Brown <i>et al.</i> (2022), Skran (2020), Thompson (2016), Nyame-Asiamah <i>et al.</i> (2023)	4
South & South-East Asia	Au <i>et al.</i> (2022), Islam <i>et al.</i> (2022)	2
Latin America & Caribbean	Santamaria-Velasco <i>et al.</i> (2021), Basok (1989), Riaño (2023)	3

Source: own study.

The most popular ethnic group surveyed were Syrians (28 studies, see Table 6). However, most analyses focused on Syrian business activities in only one country, with only a few studies offering a comparative analysis of more than one destination for Syrian refugees. In this aspect, the study of Ching-An Chang calls for specific attention. Ching-An Chang has conducted 213 in-depth, semi-structured interviews among Syrian entrepreneurs between mid-2014 and the end of 2015 (first round) and then between mid-January and mid-February 2020 (second round). Thus, the study is at least partially longitudinal, as some of the interviewees had been approached more than once. Moreover, Ching-An Chang conducted the study in eight locations in three host countries: Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt. Consequently, this approach enabled Chang to investigate the dynamism of business ventures started by Syrians, and in particular – the role of transnational networks in this aspect. The major contribution to the literature is in our opinion the findings on the role of transnational social capital of refugee entrepreneurs. In former studies, the authors demonstrate that often refugees are cut off from their home countries, thus unable to leverage the transnational ties which are often a key asset for economic/voluntary immigrant businesspeople. In turn, Chang shows that the role of such ties is heterogenous. On the one hand, diasporic ties constituted a factor that constrained the business behaviours of Syrians in host countries. They were afraid to criticize the Assad regime, fearing the persecution of the loved ones who stayed in Syria. They were also afraid that the Syrian's Mukhabarat (state intelligence agency) was monitoring their activities in host countries. On the other hand, Chang stresses the importance of pre-war business ties that acted as 'bridges taking people out of Syria' during the conflict (Chang, 2022a, p. 224). In this way, many Syrian entrepreneurs have relocated to Turkey or Egypt, locations in which they had either friends and relatives before the war, or simply their trusted business partners. Moreover, diasporic business ties constituted a vital asset in establishing new businesses and investments: for instance, the Syrian entrepreneurs were able to get access to capital through non-interest loans from their former business friends. Finally, diasporic ties were useful in settling business conflicts or disputes among entrepreneurs through the use of traditional informal arbitration practices based on Islamic law (Sharia cf. Chang, 2022b).

Table 5. Refugee entrepreneurs by ethnicity

Ethnicity of refugees	Publications	Number of publications
Syrians	Chang (2022a), Chang (2022b), Chang (2022c), Chang (2023), Nijhoff (2021), Taher & Nor (2022), Jiang <i>et al.</i> (2021), Rashid (2023), Paksoy <i>et al.</i> (2023), Kassab <i>et al.</i> (2022), Barth & Zalkat (2022), Mousa & Abdelgaffar (2023), Abuhusein (2023), Aricioğlu (2023), Kachkar & Djafri (2022), de Lange <i>et al.</i> (2021), Almohammad <i>et al.</i> (2021), Atasü-Topcuoğlu (2019), Shneikat & Alrawadieh (2019), Johnson & Shaw (2019), Alrawadieh <i>et al.</i> (2019), Mehtap & Al-Saidi (2019), Zighan (2020), Harb <i>et al.</i> (2019), Akgündüz <i>et al.</i> (2018), Akçali & Görmüş (2021), Badalič (2023), Bizri (2017)	28
Palestinians	Shepherd <i>et al.</i> (2020), Sandberg <i>et al.</i> (2019)	2
Colombians	Riaño (2023), Ranabahu <i>et al.</i> (2023)	2
Ukrainians	Klyver <i>et al.</i> (2022)	1
Somalis	Thompson (2016)	1
Salvadorans	Barth & Zalkat (2021), Basok (1989)	2
Afghanis	Zehra & Usmani (2023)	1
Rohingyas	Islam <i>et al.</i> (2022)	1

Source: own study.

Other authors have also raised an interesting aspect of the negative role of social capital in refugee entrepreneurship. Firstly, Newman and associates (2023, p. 20) suggest that 'strong ties with more powerful members of the same ethnic group might constrain entrepreneurship,' as the already established businesspeople might not be interested in assisting their co-ethnics, but rather to exploit them as cheap labour. Alternatively, Nijhoff indicates the potential 'burden of solidarity,' as 'solidarity can also be a burden when the new entrepreneur may have to support a large network of dependents' (Nijhoff, 2021, p. 1061).

Turning to a smaller group of quantitative studies, it is worth mentioning the contribution of Kazlou and Wennberg (2023). They investigated the survival of immigrant (2.5 thousand) and refugee entrepreneurs (10.5 thousand), relying on longitudinal, register-based data provided by Statistics Sweden (LISA). They found that entrepreneurial experience within the family and higher family financial capital both decrease the risk of exiting self-employment, both among refugees and immigrants. Surprisingly, the ethnic capital (measured by the proportion of co-ethnic individuals living in the same area) does not play a role in this aspect. The complementary picture to this study comes from the article of Andersson (2021), who investigated the impact of co-ethnic geographical concentration on the probability of starting a business by refugees in Sweden. Moreover, Anderson used the administrative registers, taking advantage of the longitudinal dimension of the data set. His results indicate that actually ethnic enclave supports entrepreneurship only if critical resources in the form of already-existent entrepreneurial skills are available. Consequently, the share of self-employed co-ethnics is positively related to the propensity to start a business by a refugee, but not the sample size of the ethnic market (measured by the share of all co-ethnic population, including also non-entrepreneurs, cf. Andersson, 2021). We may find similar results in Williams and Krasniqi (2018): relying on survey data on the Kosovo diaspora, the individuals who relied on co-ethnic networks were less likely to enter entrepreneurship.

Our analysis of the theoretical model, concepts and approaches used in the refugee entrepreneurship research shows a great heterogeneity, typical for new and emerging fields of study (see Table 6). The most popular concepts were the ones already applied in immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship. The first one was the concept of opportunity structure developed originally by Waldinger (1989). In this view, immigrant business activities occur within a specific framework, which consists mostly of local markets left by native entrepreneurs and dominated by co-ethnic clients, where the entry to business activity is relatively easy, but the risk hazard is high. This model is then subsequently developed within the mixed embeddedness theory, which offers three layers of analysis for immigrant entrepreneurship (Kloosterman, 2010). The macro level consists of the economic, socio-cultural, and legal factors originating in the host country, with the main focus on the regulations regarding entrepreneurship. The meso level is the markets, resembling the opportunity structure from Waldinger model. Access to the co-ethnic market is relatively easy but offers fewer chances for business development, whereas the mainstream market is difficult to access, yet provides better development prospects. Finally, the microstructures are the individual resources of an entrepreneur, including human, social, and financial capital endowments.

As mentioned earlier, both the concept of opportunity structure and mixed embeddedness theory have been already extensively used in immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship. However, many authors are fully aware that simple copy-paste of such theoretical approaches into the refugee entrepreneurship field is not appropriate, thus they seek to adapt and develop these concepts to the forced migration framework. For instance, Harima (2022) extends the mixed embeddedness model, adding the process of disembedding from the home country and re-embedding into the host country. This embeddedness transformation both deprives some of the refugee entrepreneurs of key resources, while at the same time enables access to new ones. The model of disembedding and re-embedding offers a very useful explanatory approach to refugees' transnationalism: whereas most of the forcibly displaced persons are unable to access the resources left in their home country, other refugees still can exploit at least some of them (for instance suppliers or business partners).

Another popular theoretical approach is Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour, applied in entrepreneurship studies to understand the motivations to start a business. In this aspect, the concept serves to understand the main driving forces leading refugees to become businesspeople, like in the case of Syrians in Turkey (Kachkar & Djafri, 2022). The transnational paradigm¹ is also quite popular in refugee entrepreneurship: not only in a positive way, where linkages to a home country are beneficial for a current business activity. This is visible not only in Chang's (2022a, 2022b) study on Syrians in Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt, where transnational networks serve both as a key resource and also as a potential

¹ For the sake of simplicity, we considered jointly studies on transnational refugee entrepreneurship and diaspora refugee entrepreneurship, although we are fully aware of the existent academic debate within these two strands of literature.

channel of oppression from secret police in the home country. In her study on Colombian doubly displaced persons, Riaño (2023) found transmobility and illegal circulation through the Venezuelan-Colombian border not as an asset, but as an only way to survive. Most of the refugee entrepreneurs in her study would prefer actually to stay in one location than risk daily crossing of the border controlled by criminal organizations.

Table 6. Publications by theoretical concept used

Theoretical approaches	Publications	Number of Publications
Kloosterman's Mixed embeddedness model	Collins (2021), Harima (2022), Newman <i>et al.</i> (2023), Hartmann & Philipp (2022), Schmich & Mitra (2023), Kazlou & Wennberg (2023), Yeshe <i>et al.</i> (2024), Harima <i>et al.</i> (2021), Ranabahu <i>et al.</i> (2021), Ram <i>et al.</i> (2022), Abebe (2019), Bagwell (2018), Embiricos (2020)	13
Waldinger's Opportunity structure model	Collins (2021), Wauters & Lambrecht (2006), Wauters & Lambrecht (2008), Adebbe (2019), Johnson & Shaw (2019), Cetin <i>et al.</i> (2022), Heilbrunn (2019), Alrawadieh <i>et al.</i> (2019), Zighan (2020), Chang (2022a)	10
Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior	Newman <i>et al.</i> (2023), Kassab <i>et al.</i> (2022), Kachkar & Djafri (2022), Almohammad <i>et al.</i> (2021), Christensen <i>et al.</i> (2020)	5
Ethnic enclave	Shneikat & Alrawadieh (2019), Alrawadieh (2019), Andersson (2021), Thompson (2016), Klaesson & Öner (2021)	5
Transnationalism	Chang (2022b), Riaño (2023), Thompson (2016), Akçali & Görmüş (2021), Chang (2022a)	5
Resilience	Klyver <i>et al.</i> (2022), Shepherd <i>et al.</i> (2020), Fong <i>et al.</i> (2007)	3
Berry's framework (integration model)	Zehra & Usmani (2023), Shneikat & Alrawadieh (2019)	2
Bourdieu capital theory	Atasü-Topcuoğlu (2019), Yeröz (2019)	2
Institutional voids	Au <i>et al.</i> (2022), Heilbrunn (2019)	2

Source: own study.

The studies on refugee entrepreneurship also consider the concept of the ethnic enclave (economy), *i.e.* the sector of the economy in the host country with a clear dominance of co-ethnic population. However, the most problematic issue is the unanimous definition of the ethnic enclave. For instance, we have already mentioned the study of Kazlou and Wennberg (2023) who found ethnic enclave support insignificant for supporting refugee self-employment in Sweden. However, the literature on ethnic enclaves does not provide a clear answer to how big the enclave should be. However, we should expect that some level of 'critical mass' should be reached, to reap benefits from the development of a co-ethnic market, institutions (such as informal credit associations) or cooperations of ethnic suppliers, like Cubans in Miami, Turks in Berlin or Pakistanis in Bradford.

Finally, we should stress original and quite promising attempts to use less popular (so far) theoretical approaches in refugee entrepreneurship research. The most interesting approach in our review is the application of challenge-based entrepreneurship by Heilbrunn (2021). Originally, Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2017) were the ones who proposed a challenge-based entrepreneurship model. They argued that entrepreneurship can result from enduring the life hardships of an individual. Such persons are usually 'forced to do things differently during an important part of [their] life ... [and] may encourage regular attempts to invent new ways, be creative, and discover unfamiliar niches' (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017, p. 12). In her study on African refugees in Israel, Heilbrunn shows how former challenges have encouraged these underdog entrepreneurs to pursue business activity and which adaptive mechanisms they have applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of our literature review indicate that refugee entrepreneurship is still in its nascent (or early) development state. For instance, scholars diverge much in the understanding who the refugee is. In a narrow sense, the individuals who fit 'perfectly' into the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) refugees should in fact not be entitled to any entrepreneurial activities. Such persons are expected to file asylum claims in the first secure country to which they arrive and wait for the administrative decision in a refugee camp or centre. In fact, many scholars indicate a highly heterogeneous institutional framework and economic ecosystem in which many refugee entrepreneurs operate. The most dramatic situation is the one of the refugees living in the refugee camps in developing countries of the global South, where the institutional support and living conditions are poor. One of such recent and most important due to the movement scale is Venezuelans. In their case, the involuntary nature of the displacement is obvious: they are fleeing from a collapsing Venezuelan state, which fails to deliver the minimal standards of public goods including security and political freedoms. Nevertheless, most Venezuelans would not receive asylum, as the exact factors expressed in the Geneva Convention are not met, in particular: 'fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country' (Geneva Convention, 1995: Chapter 1, Article 1, point A). Some authors call for using the term refugee towards Venezuelans (Blouin & Borios, 2023), as their case can meet the criteria of the Cartagena Declaration (1984) which is much broader: 'persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order' (Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, 1984, p. 36). However, most Venezuelans do not even file asylum claims, therefore most of the receiving countries treat them as economic migrants.

The macro level of the mixed embeddedness model drives the attention of researchers to the regulations regarding entrepreneurship. These regulations differ a lot between various groups of entrepreneurs in different countries, just to compare the aforementioned Venezuelans with Rohingyas or Palestinians residing in different destinations in Latin America, South-East Asia, or the Middle East. However, even in cases of the same ethnic groups of displaced persons coming from the same country into a relatively homogenous institutional surrounding, there are important differences. This is the case of the most recent inflows of Ukrainian refugees who entered the European Union. Already on 4 March 2022, the Council of the European Union activated the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), granting temporary protection to all Ukrainians leaving the country after February 24. In principle, this implied full access to the labour market in all member states. However, while for instance in two major destination countries – Germany and Poland – Ukrainians are both fully entitled to work (with restrictions to certain professions which require official recognition of diplomas, such as medical staff) and to do business, in the Netherlands, the self-employment of Ukrainians is possible only after applying successfully for special work permit (TWV- *tewerkstellingsvergunning*). Such flexibility and economic freedom are crucial for the business creation, as refugees often are disincentivised to pursue entrepreneurial paths if the bureaucratic constraints are too difficult to overcome. In Poland, the amendment of regulations allowing Ukrainians to open single proprietorship enterprises has led to the creation of 44.5 thousand such entities in 2022 and 2023, compared to 24 thousand existing at the end of 2021 (ZUS, 2023). Therefore, Ukrainians created 9.4% of the new firms in Poland in 2023 (Świder, 2024). Research on the legal factors affecting business activity shows clearly that not only formal rules, but also their enforcement is crucial for the development of refugee entrepreneurship. For instance, Badalič (2023) shows that the change of the legal framework in Turkey, allowing Syrian refugees to work and do business from 2016 under Temporary Protection status, did not result in positive changes as Syrian entrepreneurs were still in difficulty coping with bureaucratic obstacles, including numerous controls from public administration. Consequently, despite the theoretically favourable legal framework, many of the entrepreneurs decided to keep their businesses unregistered.

This finding just demonstrates that refugees function in highly heterogenous ecosystems and socio-economic circumstances. To better understand the motives of their entrepreneurial activity, strategies applied in their businesses, sustainability and development perspective of their firms, researchers should recur to a set of different theories developed both in the field of immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship as in entrepreneurship studies. Currently, there exists no single most popular theory that would enable to provide the theoretical framework for the analysis of such a heterogenous population of business individuals.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we have systematically analysed the literature on refugee entrepreneurship. Our review clearly shows that refugee entrepreneurship is a relatively novel, yet rapidly developing field of study. Regarding the theoretical foundations for studying the origins, occurrence, and development of businesses started by forced migrants, the existing studies do not differ much from immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship research. Most authors rely on well-known theoretical concepts such as the mixed embeddedness model, the model of opportunity structure, the transnational paradigm, or the theory of planned behaviour from entrepreneurship studies.

As for the methods used, a vast majority of studies rely on qualitative approaches based on sociological and ethnographic methods such as in-depth interviews. Such studies usually provide very interesting insights into the micro-level of refugee entrepreneurial activity. However, their main limitation is the relative difficulty in generalising the results due to a method of reaching the respondent, which is usually the snowballing approach. Surveys on refugee populations are extremely rare: the few studies which apply a quantitative approach take advantage of administrative registers. The administrative datasets are of course extremely valuable information sources and usually include the entire population of interest. However, they have also serious limitations. The most obvious one is the operationalization of key variables: in most surveys the researchers can precisely frame their questions directed to respondents, whereas in registers we have to rely on pre-defined administrative categories, some of which are of limited use. Therefore, there is a clear need for more surveys on refugee populations, and on refugee entrepreneurs in particular. In this aspect, it is particularly interesting why the aforementioned studies do not take advantage of the sampling method, which is widely used for surveying hidden populations, including migrants – namely respondent-driven sampling (RDS) (Gorny & Napierata, 2016). Adopting RDS is rather an obvious choice to recruit respondents for surveys on refugees and this sampling method should be exploited in forthcoming studies.

Another important issue is the selection of ethnic groups to be analysed. In our literature review, we have clearly identified the dominance of research on Syrian refugees. However, there is a surprisingly low number of analyses of other ethnic groups. This is true not only for 'old' forced migrants such as Palestinians, Salvadorans, Afghans, and Colombians, but also for more recent ones such as Rohingyas and Ukrainians. This represents a significant research gap that awaits attention in future studies.

Most research on refugee entrepreneurship is currently static, meaning refugees are typically studied at just one point in time, whether in qualitative or quantitative research. Such a strategy has clear limitations. We do not know how the refugee enterprises evolve and which role they play in refugee adaptation or even integration in a host country. Consequently, there is an obvious need to plan research projects which would adopt a dynamic framework. This can be done both in the case of qualitative panel surveys (interviewing the same respondents within regular time intervals using in-depth semi-structured interviews) or traditional, although more ambitious longitudinal surveys (surveying larger samples of refugees in two or more waves).

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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