



Drivers and obstacles on refugee entrepreneurship. The host country perspective *Impulsores y obstáculos de la iniciativa empresarial de los refugiados. La perspectiva del país de acogida*

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ABSTRACT

Refugee entrepreneurship encompasses the enterprising endeavors undertaken by individuals forced to flee their home countries. This research area has gained scholarly traction due to its profound relevance in the socio-economic perspective. To provide a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, a thorough systematic literature review was conducted, drawing upon the Scopus and Web of Science databases. The review scrutinized a corpus of 57 scholarly articles, which were analyzed and categorized into two main themes: the profile of refugees regarding their entrepreneurial intentions, and the contextual factors within the host countries that either facilitate or impede their entrepreneurial pursuits. Refugee entrepreneurship is associated with the necessity-driven perspective, as individuals often embark on entrepreneurial ventures due to the shortage of viable employment opportunities in their host countries. However, there exists a nuanced perspective wherein some refugees leverage their innate entrepreneurial traits, finding resonance between the economic landscapes of their home and host countries. Nevertheless, the inception of entrepreneurial endeavors is invariably accompanied by some obstacles, spanning legal, financial, and socio-economic domains. These obstacles do not deter the entrepreneurial spirit ingrained within many refugees. Instead, they serve as catalysts for resilience and innovation, prompting the formulation of adaptive strategies to surmount barriers and carve out pathways to success, underscoring the economic activity of displaced individuals and exemplifying their capacity to effectuate positive change amidst adversity.

Keywords: Refugee entrepreneurs, Social entrepreneurship, Drivers, Obstacles, Host country, Systematic Literature Review.

R E S U M E N

El espíritu empresarial de los refugiados engloba las iniciativas empresariales emprendidas por personas obligadas a huir de sus países. Esta área de investigación ha ganado terreno en los círculos académicos debido a su profunda relevancia desde el punto de vista socioeconómico. Para comprender este fenómeno, se implementó una revisión sistemática de la literatura utilizando las bases de datos Scopus y Web of Science. Se analizaron y clasificaron 57 artículos en dos temas principales: el perfil de los refugiados en cuanto a sus intenciones empresariales y los factores contextuales de los países de acogida que facilitan o impiden su actividad empresarial. El espíritu empresarial de los refugiados se asocia con la perspectiva de la necesidad de supervivencia, ya que las personas suelen embarcarse en proyectos empresariales debido a la escasez de oportunidades de empleo viables en sus países de acogida. Sin embargo, existe una perspectiva matizada en la que algunos refugiados aprovechan sus rasgos empresariales innatos, encontrando resonancia entre los panoramas económicos de sus países de origen y de acogida. No obstante, la puesta en marcha de iniciativas empresariales siempre va acompañada de obstáculos jurídicos, financieros y socioeconómicos. Estos obstáculos no disuaden el espíritu emprendedor arraigado en muchos refugiados. Por el contrario, sirven como catalizadores de resiliencia e innovación, impulsando la formulación de estrategias de adaptación para superar las barreras y labrar caminos exitosos, subrayando la actividad económica de las personas desplazadas y ejemplificando su capacidad para efectuar cambios positivos en medio de la adversidad.

Palabras clave: Emprendedores refugiados, Emprendimiento social, Dinamizadores, Obstáculos, País de acogida, Revisión sistemática de la literatura.

1. INTRODUCTION

Research on entrepreneurship is not new, with several different strands over time, e.g., entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial intention, entrepreneurship education, rural entrepreneurship, nascent entrepreneurship, technology-based, opportunity-based, necessity-based, social, female entrepreneurship, among many others (Gartner, 2010; Geenen, 2014; Gordo-Molina *et al.*, 2022; Khursheed *et al.*, 2021; Liñán & Fayolle, 2015; Silva & Moreira, 2022). However, in recent years, economic globalization has given rise to global social problems, resulting in the displacement of people due to social and economic effects (Santamaria-Velasco *et al.*, 2021). Poverty has been one of these consequences, leading to an increase in the number of refugees and migrants worldwide, along with their different needs, challenges, and characteristics. As a result, host countries have been challenged to find ways to integrate refugees and migrants into their societies (European Commission, 2016; Meister & Mauer, 2019).

Migrants and refugees have led to the displacement of individuals, which has been growing over time (Santamaria-Velasco *et al.*, 2021; Sinkovics & Reuber, 2021), with social and economic consequences. While migrants and refugees can be considered highly mobile individuals, there is a significant difference between the two. Refugees cannot or do not wish to return to their country of origin due to fear of persecution based on nationality, race, membership, religion, a particular social group, or political opinion (UNHCR, 2010). Refugees exhibit distinct behaviors and face more barriers than traditional migrants (Refai *et al.*, 2018; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). As entrepreneurship can be viewed as a source of empowerment for those facing economic adversity (Edmiston, 2008; Slivinski, 2012), there is a need for more knowledge to understand refugee entrepreneurship (RE) as a stand-alone situation distinct from migrant entrepreneurs or self-initiated expatriates (Refai *et al.*, 2018).

Given the high levels of uncertainty and limited traditional career opportunities characterizing the circumstances of refugees, entrepreneurship emerges as a compelling avenue for their integration into the labor market (Obschonka *et al.*, 2018). Concurrently, it serves as a means of facilitating their assimilation into host societies. The impetus for entrepreneurship among refugees is driven by an array of factors, which encompass a survival-oriented or necessity mindset (Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019) and the distinctive characteristics of the host country (Alexandre *et al.*, 2019). Nonetheless, the establishment of new businesses by refugees is beset by various obstacles, encompassing legal, financial, and sociocultural dimensions, among others (Refai *et al.*, 2018). This predicament not only poses challenges for refugees themselves but also presents formidable challenges to the receiving nation (Refai *et al.*, 2018).

Despite its importance, there are few comprehensive reviews pertaining to RE within the scholarly literature (Abebe, 2023; Heilbrunn & Iannone, 2020; Sinkovics & Reuber, 2021). While previous literature systematically dissected several macro-contextual facets, at times encompassing the broader realm of migrant entrepreneurship, before ultimately zeroing in on the specifics of RE, no previous review has been singularly dedicated to scrutinizing the primary drivers and obstacles encountered by refugee entrepreneurs or delving into the genesis of how their entrepreneurial intentions emerge.

What are the specific obstacles that refugee entrepreneurs face in their host countries? What are the drivers that motivate refugees in their entrepreneurial behavior? Where does refugees' entrepreneurial intention originate from? This systematic literature review (SLR) aims to address these three gaps that have not been systematically explored in previous literature. Consequently, the main objective of this paper is to analyze the impact of an individual's profile on the entrepreneurial intention of refugees and the environment in the destination country. This article seeks to contribute to the enhancement of the literature on the specific topic of RE.

The paper is structured into six sections. Following this introduction, section 2 presents the key concepts related to the subject under study. Section 3 outlines the methodology employed in the systematic literature review. Section 4 presents the research results, highlighting the publication dates, journals, and research methods of the articles. Section 5 delves into the discussion of the results, subdivided into two subtopics: the refugee profile and entrepreneurial intention, and the host country's environment, addressing refugee integration and the drivers and obstacles of entrepreneurship. Finally, section 6 summarizes the conclusions drawn from the topic under examination.

2. BACKGROUND

The current high influx of refugees has generated significant social, economic, legal, and political debate worldwide (Desai *et al.*, 2021), generating considerable interest among academics and researchers. Refugees are individuals who flee their country due to persecution (Fuller-Love *et al.*, 2006) arising from wars or other dangers related to ethnicity, racial, religion, faith, or other threats to their lives (Zehra & Usmani, 2023). They normally seek refuge in host countries that offer improved life prospects (Fuller-Love *et al.*, 2006).

A comprehensive definition of a refugee was established during the Geneva Convention in 1951 (Welsh *et al.*, 2022, p. 723), which states that s/he "is an individual who fears persecution 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, afraid, or unwilling to avail her/himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his/her habitual residence, as a result of the above events, is unable or afraid to get back to the home country." Within the refugee population, there is a large heterogeneity of socioeconomic and demographic profiles, namely in age, gender, and education levels. The same is true for home and host countries, with various patterns of refugee flows.

It is important to distinguish between immigrants and refugees for multiple reasons. First, the distinction lies in the different motivations that encourage them to leave their home countries (Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019). While voluntary immigrants seek new opportunities aiming better lives, refugees, also known as involuntary immigrants, have survival and security of their lives as their main focus (Zehra & Usmani, 2023). Sometimes in the literature the terms ethnic, immigrant, and migrant are used interchangeably, but they refer to different fields of research (Johnson & Shaw, 2019).

Joining the terms refugee and entrepreneurship has giving rise to an increasingly explored construct in the literature: refu-

gee entrepreneurship. According to United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), entrepreneurship can be defined as the ability and willingness to undertake, organize and run new enterprises, taking into account the associated risks and aiming for profit as a reward (Kachkar & Djafri, 2022).

Refugees turn to entrepreneurial activities as a way to overcome some external barriers in the host country, including discrimination in the labor market, language barriers, and limited access to capital, among other factors (Kachkar & Djafri, 2022). Entrepreneurship, for refugees, becomes an alternative to employment, as a dignified means of survival, economic self-reliance and self-empowerment, as well as a way to increase their self-esteem (Kachkar & Djafri, 2022). Being their own bosses and the inherent attractiveness they find in entrepreneurship are additional motivating factors for refugees (Fuller-Love et al., 2006). In addition, setting up a business in the host country is seen as an opportunity to feel integrated into that country (Fuller-Love et al., 2006).

Compared to immigrants in general, refugees have fewer social networks in the host country, are less likely to return to their country of origin, and the traumatic events they have experienced may have consequences not only on their well-being, but also for their entrepreneurial activities (Harima et al., 2021). Importantly, entrepreneurial refugees are characterized by high levels of resilience (Welsh et al., 2022), strong determination,

strong ability to build social networks, high qualifications, and sometimes prior experience in entrepreneurial activities (Paksoy et al., 2023; Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019). Based on these characteristics, Christensen et al. (2020) define a refugee entrepreneur as someone who flees a country (home country) under threat and settles in another country (host country) for a period of at least twelve months and establishes a business.

When talking about RE, one can divide it into two types of entrepreneurial activities: entrepreneurship for refugees and entrepreneurship by refugees (Freudenberg & Halberstadt, 2018). This paper focuses mainly on the latter. However, entrepreneurship for refugees will also be addressed, particularly social entrepreneurship, which involves various opportunities to support different segments of society to reduce poverty and unemployment (Jarrar, 2022). This type of entrepreneurship aims to assist refugees in their integration into the host country and in developing entrepreneurial skills (Kong, 2019).

3. PREVIOUS REVIEWS ON REFUGEE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

As there is a paucity of reviews on RE (Abebe, 2023; Heilbrunn & Iannone, 2020; Sinkovics & Reuber, 2021) this section seeks to present previous on that subject, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Previous reviews on refugee entrepreneurship

Study	Focus	Method	Study period	Sample	Database	Contribution
Sinkovics and Reuber (2021)	Migrant entrepreneurs including refugees	Thematic analysis. Systematic review.	—	373	WoS	Push factors in international business literature in the host and home country. Push individual, business, working conditions, and institutional factors in the home country. Provision of personal and institutional support, limited opportunity conceptualization, diaspora networks, and individual assets that tend to constrain migrant entrepreneurship in the host country. Success factors in the international business literature.
Abebe (2023)	Comprehensive review and analysis of RE	Systematic Literature Review	1986-2020	131	Scopus	Determinants of RE: enablers, barriers and opportunities of new ventures creation; and institutions, entrepreneurial ecosystem and institutional voids as part of the institutional environment. Distinctiveness of RE: characteristics, self-employment rate and delineation of refugees; and input of RE in terms of self-reliance, integration, socio-economic development. RE as a career path: self-selection, motivations and occupational path as way of entrepreneurial potential; refugee women, informal refugee and solid refugee as type of refugees.
Heilbrunn and Iannone (2020)	Refugee entrepreneurs	Bibliometric analysis	1986-2018	55 journal articles, 9 book chapters and 4 books	EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, and Scopus	It synthesizes the basic foundations of the field. It separates the field of research of refugee and migrant entrepreneurs. It pinpoints the factors that influence RE: competition; uncertainty; culture; social, human and cultural capital; communication; institutional roles, among others. The impact of RE on the integration, social capital, livelihood, and identity for host counties and labor markets.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Based on a study that analyzed a sample of 373 manuscripts obtained from the Web of Science (WoS), Sinkovics and Reuber (2021) examined migrant entrepreneurs, including refugees, from an international business perspective. This thematic analysis encompassed the primary antecedents, success factors, and moderators of migrant entrepreneurship. It was possible to conclude that there are negative (push) individual, business, working conditions, and institutional factors in the home country, as well as pull factors in the host country, such as the provision of personal and institutional support, limited opportunity conceptualization, diaspora networks, and individual assets that tend to constrain migrant entrepreneurship (Sinkovics & Reuber, 2021).

In a different context, RE has been systematically addressed through a systematic literature review (SLR) (Abebe, 2023) and a bibliometric study (Heilbrunn & Iannone, 2020). It is clear that RE has been examined from various perspectives, including social sciences, humanities, ethnic studies, and migration studies, with a recent shift in focus away from immigrant, diaspora, and ethnic entrepreneurs (Abebe, 2023). Covering 55 journal articles, nine book chapters, and four books from the EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, and Scopus databases, Heilbrunn and Iannone (2020) propose three main thematic clusters: the contrast between migrant and refugee entrepreneurship, specifically the forced versus unforced nature, based on macro-environmental circumstances, socio-political contexts, and country-specific institutional characteristics; the institutional, human, social, and cultural factors influencing RE; and finally, the impact of RE.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

This paper aims to systematically analyze the literature on RE to assess and organize what is published in the two main academic platforms: Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). The Scopus and WoS databases were used since they are considered to be reliable and relevant, with rigorous selection standards (Yetkin & Tunçalp, 2023). The use of two databases reduced the risk of exclusion of relevant articles pertinent to the paper's objective.

A systematic literature review (SLR) is a scientific research methodology whose goal is to gather, organize, and evaluate the existing literature in a given field (Paul *et al.*, 2021). This method is highly regarded for its explicit and rigorous methods, provided they are properly justified (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006).

In the Scopus database, articles up until June of 2023 were selected, and three searches were conducted. The first search involved the keywords "refugee" and "entrepreneur*," while the second search included "refugee entrepreneur*." To complement the Scopus search, the Web of Science database was also used with the search term "refugee" and "entrepreneur*." The use of the asterisk (*) in the word "entrepreneur" was to encompass various word variations, such as entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. The third search, complementing the previous ones, conducted in both databases, included to the previous terms combined terms such as "enterprising refugee*," "forced migrant entrepreneur*," "refugee self-employment," and "refugee* small business*," aiming to be as exhaustive as possible without overlooking any relevant articles on refugee entrepreneurs or entrepreneurship.

To ensure a more focused and rigorous search, the following inclusion criteria were applied to both databases: document type (Articles and Reviews), source type (Journals, just for Scopus), study area (Business, Management, and Accounting, for Scopus and Business, Management for WoS), and language (English). No time filters or additional keywords were used in the search. The Scopus search yielded 106 articles, while the Web of Science search resulted in 82 articles after applying the filters. Duplicate articles were checked and removed using the Scopus platform.

After compiling the set of selected articles, they were exported to an excel sheet and individually analyzed by the authors. The analysis considered the titles and abstracts of the articles to determine their relevance to the research theme. Articles that referred only to migrants were excluded since refugees have distinct characteristics that set them apart, making this an exclusion criterion.

The selection of articles was facilitated by using a color-coding method: green was used to signify articles for in-depth analysis, yellow for articles requiring further discussion, and red for articles that did not align with the research objectives. Following this process, 52 articles from the Scopus database and 5 articles from the Web of Science database were selected for further analysis, totaling 57 articles. Figure 1 illustrates the article search and selection process.

The approved documents serve as a foundation to understand the themes addressed in the literature. This allows for segmentation and grouping of the topics present in the results discussion. An interpretive perspective, based on an inductive approach as proposed by Jones *et al.* (2011), was used to analyze the different topics covered by all the articles. Consequently, the articles were organized and classified based on the two main topics identified.

The content analysis of the 57 articles included the following aspects:

- Main topics covered (Refugee's profile on entrepreneurial intention; host country environment: integration and drivers and obstacles);
- Methodology (qualitative or quantitative research; mixed research);
- Name of the journal.

Following Weed (2008) and Mota *et al.* (2021), we combined content and thematic analysis to capture the explanatory value and quantitative aspects of the articles. With this process we aimed to systematize a holistic view of the points preceding entrepreneurial activity in the host country by a refugee, based on the profile of the self and the environment in the host country as a driver or obstacle of the existence and success of entrepreneurial activities.

5. RESULTS

The selected articles for analysis predominantly encompass publications from the last four years, indicating that RE is an emerging theme within the academic literature. It is noteworthy that the earliest articles date back to 2006, while 2021 witnessed a notable surge in interest concerning this theme. Table 2 shows a comprehensive overview of the evolution of published articles.

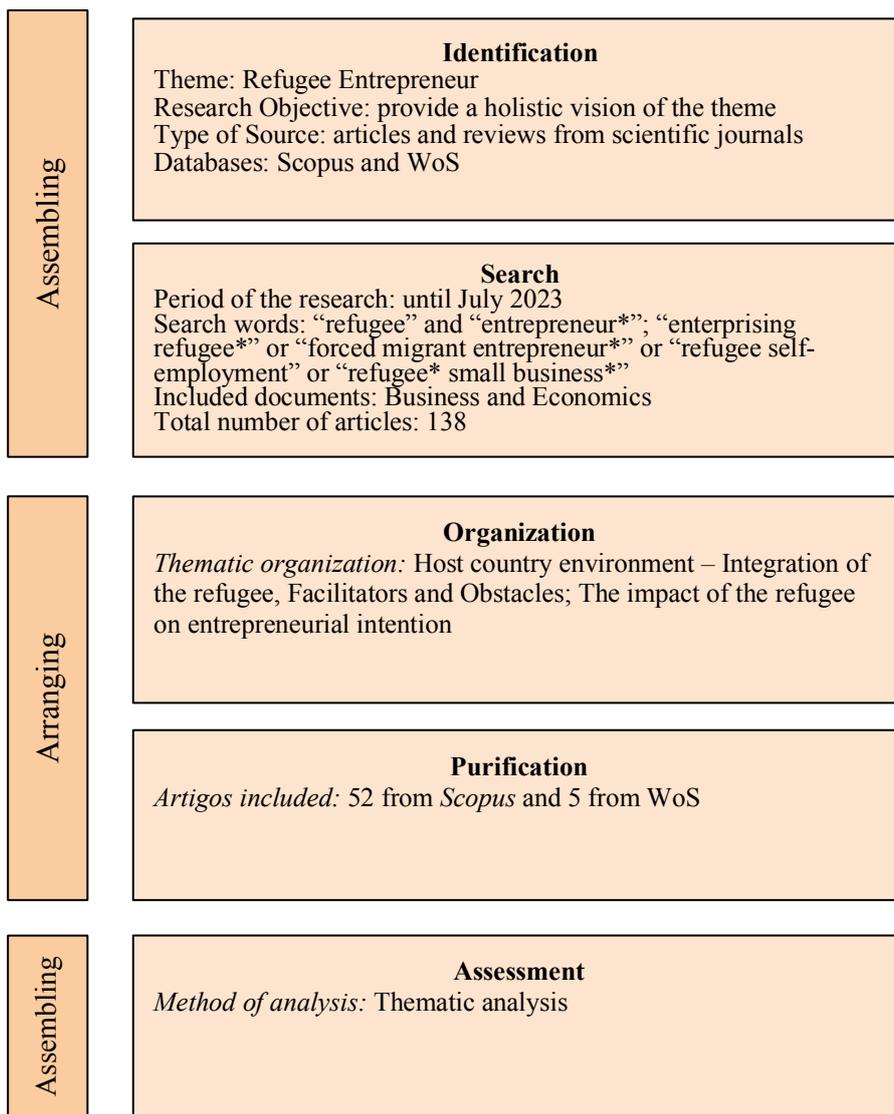


Figure 1
Search and article selection process
 Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Table 2
Number of publications per year

Year	Number of Publications
2006	2
2010	1
2017	1
2018	4
2019	8
2020	8
2021	10
2022	10
2023	13

Note: the search was conducted until June 2023.
 Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The selected articles were found to be distributed across 32 different journals. Among these, the most important outlet features eight articles: *Journal of Enterprising Communities*. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research* is also one of the main outlets with six articles as shown in Table 3, which only highlights journals with two or more publications.

Authors	Entrepreneurship Intention						Host country environment						
	TGC	TLC	Refugee's profile			Drivers			Obstacles				
			Human Capital	Social Capital	Refugee's Characteristic	Need factors	Similarities to home country	Business support for refugees	Government policies	Legislative and administrative	Market-related issues	Financial challenges	Sociocultural challenges
Meister and Mauer (2018)	53	9						X			X		X
Shneikat and Alrawadieh (2019)	48	9							X				
Desai <i>et al.</i> (2021)	45	10	X										
Refai <i>et al.</i> (2018)	44	7								X			X
Fuller-Love <i>et al.</i> (2006)	38	0	X		X								
Mawson and Kasem (2019)	38	11			X		X						X
Sinkovics and Reuber (2021)	38	1						X					
Alexandre <i>et al.</i> (2019)	28	9					X						
Harima <i>et al.</i> (2020)	21	5						X		X			
Backman <i>et al.</i> (2021)	20	4						X	X		X	X	
Harima and Freudenberg (2020)	20	3	X										X
Harima <i>et al.</i> (2021)	19	3			X								X
Alrawadieh <i>et al.</i> (2021)	18	1	X	X				X	X				
Hack-Polay and Igwe (2019)	18	0							X				
Christensen <i>et al.</i> (2020)	17	3	X	X									
Heilbrunn and Iannone (2020)	14	3	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	X
Welsh <i>et al.</i> (2022)	12	2	X										
Adeeko and Treanor (2022)	12	2			X								
Almohammad <i>et al.</i> (2020)	12	1	X				X						X
Senthanar <i>et al.</i> (2021)	12	2			X								
Cetin <i>et al.</i> (2022)	11	0					X						
Zighan (2020)	10	1								X		X	
Freudenberg and Halberstadt (2018)	10	0		X									
Harima (2022)	9	1	X										
Yeröz (2019)	8	2			X								
Jiang <i>et al.</i> (2021)	8	2						X					
Kazlou and Wennberg (2023)	7	2	X	X	X								
Kariv <i>et al.</i> (2010)	6	0	X										
Zehra and Usmani (2023)	6	0		X			X			X			X
Johnson and Shaw (2019)	5	1											X
Kachkar and Djafri (2022)	5	0					X				X		X
Santamaria-Velasco <i>et al.</i> (2021)	4	1	X	X			X				X		
Kong (2019)	4	0						X					X
Abebe (2023)	3	0			X						X		X
Luseno and Kolade (2023)	2	0		X					X				
Nijhoff (2021)	2	0	X					X		X		X	
Abuhussein (2023)	1	0					X						
Lazarczyk-Bilal and Glinka (2021)	1	1	X		X				X				
Klyver <i>et al.</i> (2022)	1	0	X	X						X			
Cifci and Cetin (2023)	0	0	X	X			X		X				
Christensen and Newman (2023)	0	0					X						
Gama <i>et al.</i> (2023)	0	0						X					
Jarrar (2022)	0	0						X					
Kassab <i>et al.</i> (2022)	0	0					X		X				
McSweeney (2023)	0	0						X					
Noorbakhsh and Teixeira (2023)	0	0	X	X						X		X	X
Paksoy <i>et al.</i> (2023)	0	0					X						
Qin (2023)	0	0						X					
Richey <i>et al.</i> (2022)	0	0								X			X
Schmich and Mitra (2023)	0	0										X	X
Yeshi <i>et al.</i> (2022)	0	0								X			X

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

6.1. Refugee's profile of entrepreneurial intention

Refugees who are economically active, irrespective of their home or host country, exhibit similar characteristics and backgrounds. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that intentions determine behavior, although accurately predicting the latter is challenging (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006), as it depends mainly on the stability of entrepreneurial intentions and external factors beyond individual control. The resilience of individuals is pertinent in the face of adversity (Obschonka *et al.*, 2018; Shepherd *et al.*, 2020), whether driven by self-interest or a desire to help others (Shepherd *et al.*, 2020). Thus, entrepreneurial intention can be defined as the intention to start a business arising from a conscious decision-making process that combines market and external environment issues with personal capabilities (Krueger *et al.*, 2000; Mawson & Kasem, 2019).

In the subsequent subsections, the factors influencing the entrepreneurial intention of refugees will be addressed, contributing to the delineation of a possible profile of the refugee entrepreneur in the host country.

6.1.1. HUMAN CAPITAL: EDUCATION AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Personal characteristics, particularly human capital, play a crucial role in all entrepreneurial activities (Nijhoff, 2021). Human capital, encompassing refugees' education, work experience, and prior entrepreneurial ventures, determines their access to the labor market and the potential to establish businesses in the host country (Nijhoff, 2021; Santamaria-Velasco *et al.*, 2021). The human capital among refugees is notably diverse (Kazlou & Wennberg, 2023).

Human capital can be categorized into three distinct yet interconnected areas (Christensen *et al.*, 2020): general human capital, referring to basic activities like writing, reading, and basic calculations, which are not considered highly differentiating factors; specific human capital, related to specific and localized skills and knowledge that create substantial added value due to their rarity; and hidden human capital, encompassing individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs when confronted with various contexts, such as how they interact with people from diverse backgrounds or social classes.

Education, as a general measure of human capital (Kazlou & Wennberg, 2023; Noorbakhsh & Teixeira, 2023), significantly shapes the career paths of refugees (Lazarczyk-Bilal & Glinka, 2021) and plays a key role in the success of entrepreneurship (Kazlou & Wennberg, 2023). Some refugees encounter difficulties in having their professions recognized in the host country, whether due to lack of national-level requirements, discrimination, or a lack of local network. Therefore, RE becomes an avenue for highly educated refugees, possessing language skills, for example (Bagwell, 2018), to integrate into the labor market, particularly in light of the previously described situations (Welsh *et al.*, 2021) (Almohammad *et al.*, 2020). Refugees with higher education tend to be opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, while those with less education are more inclined toward necessity-driven entrepreneurship (Kariv *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, refugees with higher qualifications may find it easier to secure

conventional job opportunities if their entrepreneurial ventures do not yield the desired results (Kazlou & Wennberg, 2023).

Human capital can also be influenced by the skills developed by refugees (Desai *et al.*, 2021). Managerial skills and competencies can enhance business performance (Fuller-Love *et al.*, 2006; Kariv *et al.*, 2010), and individuals need to familiarize themselves with the market conditions and structure of the host country when embarking on an entrepreneurial path, as starting a business involved different responsibilities and processes across countries (Desai *et al.*, 2021). Skills and knowledge with global applicability, such as in information technology and engineering, can become valuable assets in entrepreneurial endeavors (Harima *et al.*, 2020).

However, certain know-how possessed by refugees may not be viable in a given country due to cultural and institutional differences or different consumer habits (Harima, 2022; Harima *et al.*, 2020). Entrepreneurs relying on skills and qualifications from their home country must assess whether they can be effectively applied and transferred in the host country (Harima *et al.*, 2020). It is essential to recognize that stocks of human capital are not immediately transferable to the host economy (Noorbakhsh & Teixeira, 2023). Furthermore, higher levels of education, skills, and experience aid in better assimilating the host country's culture (Kariv *et al.*, 2010).

Moreover, having prior experience as self-employed increases the likelihood of entrepreneurial intention in the host country (Lazarczyk-Bilal & Glinka, 2021). Work experience in industries or sectors where refugees aspire to establish their entrepreneurial ventures, whether acquired in their home country or the host country, is also significant (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, previous entrepreneurship experience strongly influences the success of entrepreneurial ventures in the host country (Cifci & Cetin, 2023; Kariv *et al.*, 2010). Complementarily, risk-taking propensity and a strong need for achievement are crucial success factors for refugees becoming entrepreneurs (Paksoy *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, Klyver *et al.* (2022) emphasize that crisis self-efficacy, the ability to perform well in stressful life events and persist in the face of adversity, are among the most significant factors for refugee entrepreneurs.

6.1.2. SOCIAL CAPITAL: NETWORKING ACTIVITIES

Social capital refers to the accumulation of real and virtual resources by individuals or groups through enduring networks of more or less institutionalized relationships involving knowledge and mutual recognition (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Luseno & Kolade, 2023). Within social capital, the structures and patterns of connections, norms of reciprocity and trust, and personal relationships among stakeholders influence their behaviors, including entrepreneurial behavior (Christensen *et al.*, 2020).

In the field of entrepreneurship, social capital has been recognized for its impact on individuals' career decisions, particularly in their choice to become entrepreneurs (Santamaria-Velasco *et al.*, 2021). It is especially relevant for refugees seeking business opportunities in unfamiliar environments (Santamaria-Velasco *et al.*, 2021) and can be considered a competitive advantage (Bagwell, 2018).

Networking activities are crucial for the establishment and exploration of new entrepreneurial ventures. However, refugees often face limitations in resources when starting businesses in the host country, with few nearby friends and family members to rely on for support and limited capital to build new networks (Christensen *et al.*, 2020; Cifci & Cetin, 2023). Nonetheless, successful networking, particularly through family members or individuals from the same ethnic background, greatly benefits refugees, both at the business level and emotionally (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2021). Such networking enhances resilience and enables the creation of new entrepreneurial environments and markets (Klyver *et al.* 2022), facilitating the exchange and co-production of knowledge among entrepreneurial refugees and adding value to their ventures (Luseno & Kolade, 2023).

Family plays a significant role in promoting or hindering entrepreneurial behaviors among refugees (Zehra & Usmani, 2023). Families provide important intangible resources such as values, information, stories, and social skills, along with tangible assets like financial capital and unpaid labor (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2021). Access to financial capital from families becomes vital for refugees, who often lack established relationships with financial institutions in the host country (Bagwell, 2018; Kazlou & Wennberg, 2023). Therefore, social capital can compensate for the lack of certain human capital in various contexts (Luseno & Kolade, 2023). However, due to the negative circumstances under which refugees flee their home countries, they may sometimes experience low social capital as family networks become fragmented (Noorbakhsh & Teixeira, 2023).

6.1.3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REFUGEE AS MODERATING VARIABLES: GENDER

A subtopic that has emerged in the literature on RE is refugee women entrepreneurship (Abebe, 2023). Women, in general, face more challenges than men when it comes to entrepreneurship (Lazarczyk-Bilal & Glinka, 2021). Refugee women often choose entrepreneurship for its flexible schedules, enabling them to work from home and balance household chores and childcare responsibilities (Senthanaar *et al.*, 2021). Language barriers and discomfort working in male-dominated environments are additional factors contributing to their preference for entrepreneurship (Senthanaar *et al.*, 2021).

Education (human capital), as discussed earlier, is a crucial factor enabling women to embark on entrepreneurial activities (Yeröz, 2019). While women may excel at social contacts (social capital), male entrepreneurs tend to exhibit more confidence and possess better business networks (Fuller-Love *et al.*, 2006). As a result, women are underrepresented in entrepreneurship and often earn less than male entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship provides women with a sense of independence, income generation, and improved social standing (Adeeko & Treanor, 2022). They are also more likely to focus on activities related to their culture and serve the broader refugee community (Senthanaar *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, in certain contexts, women engage in entrepreneurial activities in collaboration with their husbands.

Regarding male entrepreneurship, past experience in self-employment or exposure to family members as entrepre-

neurs increases the likelihood of men starting their own businesses (Fuller-Love *et al.*, 2006). Age is also identified as a factor affecting self-employment (Kazlou & Wennberg, 2023). In general, refugee entrepreneurs are characterized as highly educated, young, male, and experienced in similar types of businesses in their home country (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019).

6.2. The host-country context

6.2.1. INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN THE HOST COUNTRY

The profile of refugees significantly impacts their entrepreneurial activity, but the environment in the host country also plays a crucial role in shaping their path. Understanding the factors that influence refugees' integration and subsequently affect their entrepreneurial endeavors is important.

When refugees find themselves in a new country, they face a set of factors that influence their integration, which can be grouped into three major groups (Abebe, 2023; Nijhoff, 2021): the individual level; the social level; and the institutional level.

More specifically, the individual level focuses on lack of language proficiency (Abebe, 2023; Kong, 2019; Zehra & Usmani, 2023), cultural understanding (Harima & Freudenberg, 2020; Johnson & Shaw, 2019), educational and qualification recognition (Mawson & Kasem, 2019; Nijhoff, 2021; Zehra & Usmani, 2023), limited market knowledge and opportunities (Abebe, 2023), and psychological trauma (Nijhoff, 2021; Yeshe *et al.*, 2022; Zehra & Usmani, 2023).

At the community level, the social aspects encompass the network of contacts and connections, limited access to finance, and lack of formal support (Backman *et al.*, 2021; Nijhoff, 2021). Xenophobia and social exclusion can also be highlighted here (Abebe, 2023; Yeshe *et al.*, 2022), which may accentuate barriers already present.

At institutional level, the legal status of refugees stands out, which is a lengthy process that translates into an uncertain residency status (Nijhoff, 2021), bureaucratic obstacles (Meister & Maurer, 2018; Yeshe *et al.*, 2022), restrictions on employability (Santamaria-Velasco *et al.*, 2021) and regulatory regimes that impose limitations on entrepreneurship. In addition to these barriers, existing problems in the destination country, such as economic crises and high unemployment rates, can exacerbate limitations faced by refugees (Zighan, 2020).

As a consequence of the legal issues presented, many refugees are forced to work in industries that exploit them, enduring manipulations and precarious payments (Refai *et al.*, 2018). Even when refugees obtain legal work permits, they are still struggling with low-wage issues (Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019) and working extended hours (Zighan, 2020), and also in jobs that local citizens do not want to perform, often considered dead-end jobs (dirty, difficult, and dangerous) (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019). It is also common for refugees without legal status to work on the black market as informal labor (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019). However, the presence of the legal status may allow them to work legally and therefore based on their qualifications and educational level (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019).

It is also important to highlight that refugees may have high skills in several areas, being able to produce high-quality prod-

ucts (Refai *et al.*, 2018). However, working for lower wages, compared to the local community, triggers social tensions, since they produce high-quality products at lower cost compared to local citizens (Refai *et al.*, 2018). Cifci and Cetin (2023) provide insights into additional characteristics and success factors related to RE, which is relevant to complement the aforementioned organizational factors, including the type of business, marketing, and employees.

Refugees face yet another problem, “deprofessionalization” (Lazarczyk-Bilal & Glinka, 2021; Richey *et al.*, 2022), where they lose the recognition of their credentials from their country of origin. This loss can be especially shocking for refugees who held high-skilled positions, such as doctors or professors, and it often leads to unemployment or unsatisfactory employment. Consequently, it can have detrimental effects on their mental health, leading to a decline in self-esteem (Mawson & Kasem, 2019) and feelings of isolation, which may cause them to withdraw from social situations, making it difficult for them to establish new social connections (Richey *et al.*, 2022).

Another significant issue that contributes to the discrimination of refugees in the mainstream labor market is the lack of language skills (Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019), particularly in terms of vocalization and comprehension. Furthermore, their qualifications may not be recognized in the host country, and they may face prejudice simply because they are perceived as outsiders (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019). While RE can play a crucial role in economic and social integration, it is essential to address the barriers that refugees face in the host country to prevent them from becoming vulnerable again (Schmich & Mitra, 2023).

6.2.2. DRIVERS

Refugees may embark on the entrepreneurial process due to both negative antecedents, known as push factors, and positive antecedents, known as pull factors (Sinkovics & Reuber, 2021). Pull factors are associated with motivations and facilitators that drive refugees to become entrepreneurs.

The existing literature highlights that refugees engage in entrepreneurship due to a combination of individual and contextual factors (Abuhussein, 2023; Cetin *et al.*, 2022). Individual factors pertain to the refugee’s own entrepreneurial ambitions and personal desire for integration (Berns, 2017; Cetin *et al.*, 2022), as discussed earlier. On the other hand, contextual factors relate to constraints that hinder refugees from accessing the conventional labor market, leading them towards self-employment (Cetin *et al.*, 2022; Fong *et al.*, 2007). Thus, RE is often driven by necessity. Refugees initiate entrepreneurial activities to gain more independence and autonomy or because they face unfavorable employment conditions and cannot find suitable opportunities under others’ supervision (Almohammad *et al.*, 2020; Kassab *et al.*, 2022). These endeavors aim to improve their quality of life and economic situation (Santamaria-Velasco *et al.*, 2021).

Christensen and Newman (2023) propose that the RE process can be categorized into two strategies: reinvention and reinforcement. Reinvention occurs when refugees distance themselves from their home country identity and seek a new identity, while reinforcement happens when they want to maintain a strong connection with their home country identity.

Alexandre *et al.* (2019) suggest that refugees may be more motivated to become entrepreneurs in countries where they find common cultural aspects with their country of origin. The relationships between the home and host country also influence refugees’ entrepreneurial pursuits (Bagwell, 2018). For instance, Syrian refugees may be more inclined to start businesses in Lebanon due to shared socio-cultural characteristics, such as food and language, which facilitate their integration. Additionally, they are attracted to countries where their financial assets, family, and personal savings hold significant value, and where establishing a business is feasible (Paksoy *et al.*, 2023).

To facilitate this entrepreneurial process, providing support for refugees is essential. Entrepreneurial support refers to business services that help refugee entrepreneurs overcome obstacles and structural disadvantages (Qin, 2023). Social enterprises play a role in formulating social capital, promoting greater social interaction and knowledge exchange in diversified societies (Kong, 2019). Moreover, social entrepreneurship fosters self-reliance among refugees and can contribute to gender empowerment (McSweeney, 2023), specially when social entrepreneurship disrupts the institutional conditions of poverty and improve the lives of refugees (McSweeney, 2023).

Within this framework, business incubators with a focus on supporting refugees emerge, playing a crucial role in the development of social networks and the exploration of opportunities. Given the uncertain circumstances faced by refugee entrepreneurs in the host country, the need for a tailored incubation model is evident (Meister & Mauer, 2018). For these incubators to be effective, it is imperative that they support refugee entrepreneurs across five domains: providing structured business knowledge; alleviating concerns regarding institutional disparities; motivating participants; leveraging the host country’s social capital; and addressing personal matters (Harima *et al.*, 2020). Crowdfunded microfinance institutions offer another avenue to assist refugees, serving as intermediaries between lenders and refugee entrepreneurs, thereby expanding the avenues for financing (Gama *et al.*, 2023).

Training programs exemplify a valuable tool that assumes great significance (Almohammad *et al.*, 2020; Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019, 2021; Meister & Mauer, 2018) for refugees who were unable to acquire specific skills in their home country due to the absence of quality educational institutions (Sinkovics & Reuber, 2021). These programs not only aid entrepreneurial refugees in improving their language proficiency but also equip them with a more comprehensive understanding of existing regulations (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019). For instance, training in social skills, network development, and dynamic strategies can help refugee entrepreneurs familiarize themselves with host country resource channels, thus facilitating the acquisition of valuable information for their business ideas (Jiang *et al.*, 2021).

Government policies, when designed to facilitate entrepreneurship, encourage refugees to establish their businesses, as they are subject to fewer restrictions related to work permits (Kassab *et al.*, 2022; Bagwell, 2018). Host country policies create opportunities for refugees to contribute to the host nation while aiding in their financial and social recovery (Cifci & Cetin, 2023; Luseno & Kolade, 2023). In other words, it is not only refugees who stand to benefit but also the host country. To promote the

integration of refugee entrepreneurs, policies should focus on enhancing their language skills, strengthening their family and co-ethnic networks, and improving their relations with the host country's society (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2021). However, political and economic changes have weakened governments, rendering them sometimes incapable of meeting all the needs of refugees. To complement government efforts, other institutions such as voluntary agencies play an increasingly vital role. Hack-Polay and Agu Igwe (2019) advocate the importance of establishing strategic partnerships between the public and voluntary sectors.

Significantly, policies may exhibit greater efficacy when implemented within a decentralized context (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019). This stems from the fact that local governments and municipalities, possessing a deeper understanding of regional nuances, are better positioned to cater to the diverse needs of refugees residing in disparate regions (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019).

From the perspective of the host country, the integration of refugees into society can be facilitated through the promotion of RE (Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006). Furthermore, fostering entrepreneurship in general can assume a more prominent role (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006). As elucidated by Alrawadieh *et al.* (2021), entrepreneurship within the tourism sector enhances the social standing of refugee entrepreneurs, as it immerses them in aspects related to the host country's culture on a daily basis. According to Cifci & Cetin (2023), the tourism and hospitality sector holds advantages for refugees, as it does not demand language proficiency and enables them to initiate ventures with limited capital.

The perception that refugees receive greater support in the host country than in their country of origin encourages them to embrace entrepreneurship. For instance, Lazarczyk-Bilal and Glinka (2021) illustrate that in Syria, refugee women experienced a lack of support from their homeland and encountered daily struggles for their rights, whereas in Sweden, they perceive their rights as readily available and equitable, affording them the opportunity to engage in work of their choosing. Additionally, they consider the availability of day care centers pivotal, as it enables them to pursue careers rather than solely tending to their children, as was the case in their home country.

In addition to these factors, one of the motivations for refugees to pursue entrepreneurship is the potential to generate job opportunities, not only for the broader society but also for their own refugee community (Almohammad *et al.*, 2020; Cifci & Cetin, 2023).

6.2.3. OBSTACLES

Refugees often encounter obstacles and barriers when establishing and developing their entrepreneurial activities. Due to their integration in the host country, many refugees are driven to become entrepreneurs as a means to bridge the gap in precarious work and overcome discrimination (Refai *et al.*, 2018). They also seek better wages that align with their skills, qualifications, and experience (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019).

Racism can serve as a driving force for entrepreneurial activity among refugees, leading them to form interconnected networks with other refugees to generate and exchange ideas (Bizri, 2017). Entrepreneurship thus emerges as an alternative way for

refugees to leverage their personal resources (Almohammad *et al.*, 2020) and achieve better socioeconomic integration within society (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019).

Within context of entrepreneurial activity, refugees encounter challenges that can be aggregated into four major groups (Almohammad *et al.*, 2020; Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019): legislative and administrative challenges; market-related problems; financial challenges; and sociocultural challenges.

Legislative and administrative challenges refer to issues related to the refugee-state relationship, including bureaucratic processes, unclear legislation, and a lack of government support (Yeshe *et al.*, 2022). Such complex administrative procedures related with starting a business could discourage potential entrepreneurs from starting their own firm (Noorbakhsh & Teixeira, 2023). All of this is exacerbated when refugees themselves have an uncertain legal status, since without legal status they cannot officially start businesses (Zighan, 2020).

Market challenges encompass issues such as a lack of qualified human resources, the influence of the black market, stakeholder discrimination, market ambiguity and instability, limited revenues, and unfamiliarity with the local market environment (Meister & Mauer, 2018). Financial challenges (Noorbakhsh & Teixeira, 2023) affect business growth due to limited access to financial resources such as credit, rigid bank processes, high fees, restrictions on capital movements, and limited payment facilities. Few banks are willing to assist refugees (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019), partly due to the instability of residence permits and temporary status (Nijhoff, 2021; Schmich & Mitra, 2023) and the lack of collaterals required for loans (Zighan, 2020).

Sociocultural challenges (Noorbakhsh & Teixeira, 2023) include difficulties in adapting to the local culture, language barriers, racism, discrimination, and social insecurity (Meister & Mauer, 2018; Yeshe *et al.*, 2022). Language barriers are particularly significant obstacles for refugee entrepreneurs, especially in the bureaucratic process of starting a new business (Schmich & Mitra, 2023).

The lack of business management skills, knowledge of the local market and business nature, and the absence of innovation and technology adoption also pose challenges for refugee entrepreneurs (Noorbakhsh & Teixeira, 2023; Zighan, 2020).

Among these barriers, legal issues are particularly critical. Regulations that prohibit full employment for refugees without legal status hinder the development of businesses and opportunities for refugees (Refai *et al.*, 2018). As a result, some refugees turn to informal entrepreneurial activities, which occur without formal government recognition (Zehra & Usmani, 2023). Examples of such entrepreneurship include small stores, clothing stores, and hairdressers (Zehra & Usmani, 2023). Informal activities can serve as a foundation for later formalizing economic integration in the host country through small businesses (Zehra & Usmani, 2023). The challenges of entrepreneurial activity can lead some refugees to give up and seek employment instead, resulting in feelings of frustration, anger, and a lack of opportunities (Refai *et al.*, 2018).

To address these initial difficulties, business incubators have emerged to assist refugees in overcoming challenges associated with establishing new businesses. However, the obstacles faced by refugees differ from those experienced by local entrepreneurs,

particularly concerning the lack of resources and institutional constraints. Therefore, it is crucial to adapt the support and environment to effectively assist refugees in their entrepreneurial activities (Harima *et al.*, 2020; Klyver *et al.*, 2022).

In addition to business incubators, social institutions play an essential role in providing refugees financial and psychological support. However, refugee entrepreneurs face other complications in accessing support, particularly concerning financial assistance for starting new projects. Difficulties may arise from technical issues in completing forms such as economic feasibility studies, which refugees may lack the knowledge to develop (Zighan, 2020).

7. CONCLUSIONS

This paper aimed to comprehensively investigate the state of the art in the field of RE by examining the various factors that encompass a wide range of drivers and barriers within host countries. Regarding the impact of refugee characteristics on entrepreneurial activities, our findings suggest that younger men exhibit a higher propensity to initiate entrepreneurial ventures in their host country. Furthermore, it is crucial to underscore the substantial influence of human capital, encompassing aspects like education and work experience, as well as social capital, which pertains to the refugee's social network and the role played by their family. The emergence of refugee women entrepreneurship is a relatively novel area in the literature, poised for growth, driven primarily by social gender disparities and cultural distinctions between host and home countries.

One of the key theoretical implications of this article pertains to the significance of several variables for host countries. These include the entrepreneurial intentions of refugees and their socio-economic implications, the importance of human capital (education) and prior work experience for business success, especially in the context of opportunity-driven entrepreneurship, and their adaptability to the local culture. At the socio-economic level, it is imperative to emphasize the pivotal role of the refugee's social capital and family ties in fostering opportunity-seeking behaviors, securing financing, and enhancing the competitive advantage of newly established ventures. Gender issues are particularly important, since women face unique challenges in accessing business opportunities compared to their male counterparts due to familial, social, and cultural factors inherent in refugee communities. Given the importance of aligning refugees' internal capabilities with decision-making processes and their inherent self-interest, we recommend that future studies investigate variations among different groups of refugees, accounting for differing levels of human capital (education), social capital, age cohorts, previous technical work experience, and the use of gender as a moderating variable to validate these concerns.

RE is often associated with necessity-driven entrepreneurship, stemming from refugees' perceptions of unfavorable job conditions, compelling them to pursue entrepreneurship as a means of achieving greater independence and improving their quality of life. However, other contextual factors also motivate refugees to engage in entrepreneurship, including the discovery of familiar aspects, such as culinary or linguistic elements, in the

host country reminiscent of their home country. Additionally, government policies and business support for refugees can significantly bolster their motivation and willingness to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. While the absence of institutional and financial support can hinder socio-economic integration, exacerbating integration challenges, the presence of financial and institutional support can help leverage relational capital, thereby preventing the accumulation of factors that exacerbate the divide between refugees and the market.

On the other hand, entering a new country presents numerous obstacles, particularly for forcibly displaced individuals like refugees. These individuals grapple with an array of socio-economic challenges that drive them toward necessity-driven entrepreneurship but do not necessarily foster the development of their entrepreneurial activities. These barriers encompass legal issues, as well as factors related to the refugees themselves, such as inadequate cultural integration skills, project management deficiencies, and limited access to economic and financial support, among others.

While this paper contributes significantly to the existing literature by aggregating information on the antecedents of RE in host countries, certain limitations were identified. Firstly, there exists a gap concerning the influence of the home country and its consequences on refugees' entrepreneurial activities. It should be acknowledged that certain characteristics of the home country are inherently linked to the refugee, shaping their background when they arrive in the host country. Additionally, the authors of the reviewed articles did not distinctly differentiate between drivers and obstacles, possibly due to an oversight regarding the contextual importance in RE.

If push and pull factors differentially impact refugees' entrepreneurial aspirations, it is advisable to scrutinize how the social and business ecosystem supports or constrains refugee entrepreneurs, as most refugees require comprehensive institutional support (including training, financial aid, social integration, language support, and business incubation) to thrive. This has profound implications for both theory and future research, necessitating quantitative approaches that consider context-specific research projects, accounting for the cultural disparity between home and host countries. This demands a broader perspective on the business ecosystem and a more structured research focus.

Furthermore, it would be valuable to examine whether entrepreneurship represents a viable option for refugees or merely serves as a means to overcome xenophobia, discrimination, or precarious employment. While it is evident that refugees face various administrative, financial, sociocultural, and market-related challenges, more comprehensive theoretical frameworks are required to not only assess the significance of each obstacle but also understand their interrelatedness. Consequently, future studies should delve deeper into these obstacles to facilitate refugee integration and contribute positively to the host economy.

Finally, an integrative perspective is also necessary to address RE from both the resources and market perspectives. This is the result of the need refugees have of their limited resource base to overcome their entrepreneurial challenges but, at the same time, it is mandatory to be market oriented to succeed with their new ventures.

The article possesses several limitations. Firstly, it exclusively adopts an interpretivist perspective in analyzing the reviewed articles, aligning with the entrepreneurial orientation and the drivers and obstacles from the host country's viewpoint. Consequently, future studies should consider how the home country perspective influences the host country perspective among refugees. Another avenue for exploration lies in addressing survival bias, as the analysis has been based solely on refugees who successfully navigate the complexities of living in foreign countries. Additionally, this study focuses on RE from an individual standpoint, overlooking institutional and business-form perspectives, and how these businesses thrive in the market while considering how institutions perceive refugees vis-à-vis other migrants.

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