

# Beating the odds: Supporting youth on the move to become successful entrepreneurs

## Executive Summary



# Introduction

More youth are on the move than ever before. As 2020 began, there were 79.5 million people forcibly displaced from their homes around the world, and more than half of these were below the age of 35. These youth on the move are resilient, ambitious and bursting with potential, both to better their own prospects and those of their host countries. Entrepreneurship has the power to unleash this potential, but youth on the move face a series of barriers to starting and growing businesses.

This study explores how entrepreneurship support organisations (ESOs) and other stakeholders can help youth on the move fulfil their entrepreneurial dreams and ambitions — creating decent work, driving inclusive economic growth, strengthening communities, and transforming prospects and livelihoods.

Youth Business International members are working with youth on the move to support them to beat the odds and become successful entrepreneurs.

This report draws on their experiences through surveys and interviews. It combines their insights with global evidence and literature, as well as interviews with other entrepreneurship experts, to identify effective approaches and practices.



Youth on the move are refugees, and other migrants, aged 18-35, including the internally displaced and stateless. They may be vulnerable or marginalised in their host country.

## Entrepreneurship is a powerful path for youth on the move

Entrepreneurship can promote self-reliance and help youth on the move overcome barriers to integrating into society. It offers them an opportunity for meaningful work, helping them lead their lives with dignity and give back to their communities.

Youth on the move are tenacious, and may be particularly entrepreneurial. Our research suggests that, on average, they are more likely to start businesses than their native-born peers, and many pursue entrepreneurship as an opportunity, rather than out of necessity. Their entrepreneurial success brings several economic and social benefits to their host countries.



## An engine of economic and social well-being

Entrepreneurship creates alternative routes to employment for youth on the move, especially where legal restrictions prevent them from working. They can invigorate stagnating sectors in their host country with new skills and energy, and develop new markets based on ethnic niches and networks. They strengthen trade links within and between their home and host countries, and further contribute to their home economies through remittances, investment, or starting new businesses via circular and return migration.

For youth on the move, the benefits of entrepreneurship go far beyond economic gains. Starting or running a business can give them a greater sense of autonomy and well-being and improve their social status within their host communities. Entrepreneurship training programmes can be important socialising mechanisms

for both personal recovery and integration, while mentorship, networking and skills development can help overcome soft barriers to integration and starting a business, such as fear and low self-confidence.

Entrepreneurship also offers a route for young people to contribute to a better world. Many youth on the move are socially conscious of the challenges facing the world and their communities and are motivated to make an impact as social entrepreneurs.



# Global trends affecting youth on the move

Three key global trends are driving the challenges and opportunities faced by youth on the move.



## The rise of displacement

More people than ever before, and especially young people, are becoming forcibly displaced from their homes, or using migration as a key livelihood strategy to search out economic opportunities.<sup>i</sup> Youth on the move are experiencing longer periods of displacement, including lengthier stays in host countries. With high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment around the world, displaced populations can add additional pressure on already strained governments.



## Insufficient legal and policy support frameworks

In 2018, the United Nations General Assembly affirmed the Global Compact of Refugees, unambiguously stating the need to increase the economic self-reliance of refugees. Yet refugees and other migrants still face a series of legal barriers to employment and entrepreneurship, and these are often felt more strongly by young people.

Policy and legal frameworks can deny displaced people the right to work, including self-employment, while drawn out asylum processes and the legal uncertainties of refugee status can prolong economic inactivity and limit opportunities. In addition, the administrative and legal processes involved in setting up and growing a business can be difficult to navigate and can be prohibitive for youth on the move.



## Technological empowerment

Youth on the move are increasingly digitally connected, and large numbers have access to a mobile device.<sup>ii,iii</sup> They use digital technology to connect to their friends and families, learn, seek out new economic opportunities, and to access social protection. It can fill key support gaps for youth on the move by connecting them to resources, information and international networks in real time. It can open up new markets beyond their locality and offers possibilities for creativity and innovation –both for youth on the move and those supporting them.

<sup>i</sup> UNHCR. (2020). Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019. UNHCR, Switzerland.

<sup>ii</sup> UNHCR. (2016). Connecting refugees. How internet and mobile connectivity can improve refugee well-being and transform humanitarian action. Geneva, Switzerland, September 2016.

<sup>iii</sup> GSMA. (2017). The Importance of Mobile for Refugees: A Landscape of New Services and Approaches. Report co-funded by GSMA and UKAID.

## A call to action to support entrepreneurship for youth on the move

Our review of practical experiences, challenges and opportunities helped us identify several ways entrepreneurship support organisations (ESOs) and other stakeholders can help youth on the move overcome barriers to entrepreneurship, realise their dreams and ambitions, and deliver lasting benefits for their communities.

### 1. Expand and adapt entrepreneurial support services to youth on the move

The unique experiences and challenges faced by youth on the move can limit or exclude their participation in entrepreneurship programmes. ESOs should ensure their needs are properly assessed and catered for. This requires acknowledging the emotional toll of their journeys, being attentive to cultural sensitivities, addressing the challenges for women in particular, and understanding the extent of their access to resources and technology. Youth on the move need help to (re)build their self-determination and foster soft skill characteristics, such as trust, self-confidence, resilience, and innovation thinking.



Specific ways in which entrepreneurship services can be adapted to meet the particular needs of youth on the move include:

- ✓ Integrating psycho-social wellbeing support with entrepreneurship training
- ✓ Incorporating soft skills training into the curriculum of all entrepreneurship services
- ✓ Building mentoring programs that connect youth on the move to mentors familiar with their particular challenges and experiences
- ✓ Applying a gender and inclusivity lens to all aspects of programming
- ✓ Shortening timeframes for services, so youth on the move can resolve income needs more quickly
- ✓ Providing front line staff training in inclusivity and cultural sensitivity
- ✓ Utilising digital delivery of services and social media to address support gaps
- ✓ Training in digital skills, including both hard skills like coding, and soft digital skills like problem-solving and systems thinking



“Integrating psycho-social support with entrepreneurial support is key. It humanises the process of entrepreneurship and leads to greater commitment by the young entrepreneur.”

**Patricia Yopasa**

Director for Entrepreneurship, Corporación Minuto de Dios (Colombia)

## 2. Support integration and connections within host communities

Integration within a host community, including the development of strong social and professional networks, is important for youth on the move to thrive personally and to grow their businesses. Engaging host communities in entrepreneurship services and activities can help tackle social stigmas towards refugees and other migrants and strengthen social cohesion. Strategies include:

- **involving members of the host community** in entrepreneurship support activities, such as training programmes, networking events, or hackathons
- promoting and **nurturing social entrepreneurship** ambitions with youth on the move, many of whom see entrepreneurship as a way of creating positive impact in their host and native countries
- investing in strengthening the **professional networks** of youth on the move by connecting them with events and opportunities for collaboration such as shared work spaces
- helping youth on the move to **connect with migrants already established** and successful in the host country
- creating social and cultural events that **bring communities together**.

“Social cohesion comes from making personal connections. Our entrepreneurship program includes an online hackathon that provides host community members and refugees a free environment to come up with solutions to common problems. We also have a music camp where Turkish and Syrian musicians come together and compose a song that is performed at one of the biggest hubs in Istanbul.”

**Hilal Gerçek**  
Entrepreneurship Director, Habitat Turkey



### 3. Develop strong and effective stakeholder relationships

The needs of youth on the move are varied and complex and require an ecosystem of solutions and support. One organisation will rarely have all the answers. ESOs should explore new connections with a range of public, private, and civic organisations to widen the support base for youth and increase their participation and success.

Creating spaces for stakeholders to come together and shine a spotlight on the particular challenges and opportunities of youth on the move can improve their participation in support services, build trust, and help them overcome the unique barriers they face to entrepreneurship, including their ability to secure housing and access finance. Strategies include:

- reaching out to **organisations that can support the welfare and well-being** of youth on the move, provide counselling, and bridge cultural divides
- **connecting with government** and local authorities to build collaborative and holistic solutions
- **engaging with the corporate sector** to provide role models, openly challenge discrimination, and close key gaps in support.
- **partnering with financial institutions** to develop innovative solutions to break down barriers to financial inclusion, improve bankability, and access to credit

“Entrepreneurship support organisations should not underestimate the impact or value of simply listening to a young person. Youth can arrive in a country with little or no social network, and the entrepreneurship support organisation might be a young person’s first contact with someone who listens to their dreams and ambitions.”

**Anita Tiessen**  
CEO, Youth Business International



## 4. Improve the policy environment and ease legal restrictions

Broad-based coalitions are needed to advance public policies in line with the Global Compact for Refugees, which unambiguously calls for enhancing refugee self-reliance. Entrepreneurship policy and programming is often targeted according to either age (youth) or another personal status (such as refugee or other migrant), and rarely both. This approach risks overlooking the unique contexts and experiences that can determine entrepreneurial intentions and success for youth on the move.

Youth on the move should have a voice in policy discussions. Stopping to listen and learn about their particular support needs can allow policy makers and practitioners to better leverage their talents and opportunities. Raising the positive profile of youth on the move is intrinsically connected to fostering the right policy environment. Showcasing their businesses and contributions to communities can help directly tackle negative community experiences of refugees and other migrants. Organisations need to continue to work to address social stigma and discrimination attached to being young and on the move.

Specific areas of policy work should include:

- recognising youth on the move as a **standalone policy issue**
- **expediting asylum** claims processes
- removing restrictions to the **right to work**
- providing a reliable **safety net**
- **expanding data collection** to build a reliable evidence base to inform policy
- implementing measures **tackling racism and xenophobia**
- promoting positive support and backing for **fair and equitable treatment of youth on the move.**

“We know coalitions are key for affecting policy change and so the M-Up Network came together with 40 expert organisations to release the Barcelona Declaration to Support Migrant Entrepreneurship, which outlines a number of calls to action, targeted at making it easier for migrants to grow their businesses.”

**Sara Simon**

Executive Director, Youth Business Spain

YBI is committed to sharing our learnings, successes and failures as we continue to support youth on the move. We welcome the opportunity to connect and collaborate with others working on this important agenda.



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