

REFUGEE ENTREPRENEURS - SYRIAN CASE STUDY

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Notable Syrian Startups

Many of companies go on to build incredible businesses, having raised money and received recognitions.



Raised Seed round from
Fla6lab Cairo, and Expert DOJO
2.4 Million visits per month



Raised pre-seed round from
Oasis500, Shamal start, & Mercy
Corp
Received Europe Youth Award



Raised +350K EUR in equity
crowdfunding in 5M EUR
pre-money valuation



raised over \$130k in a pre-seed
round
Maintains \$1M ARR



Raised 6 figure investment in a
seed round at \$1M valuation



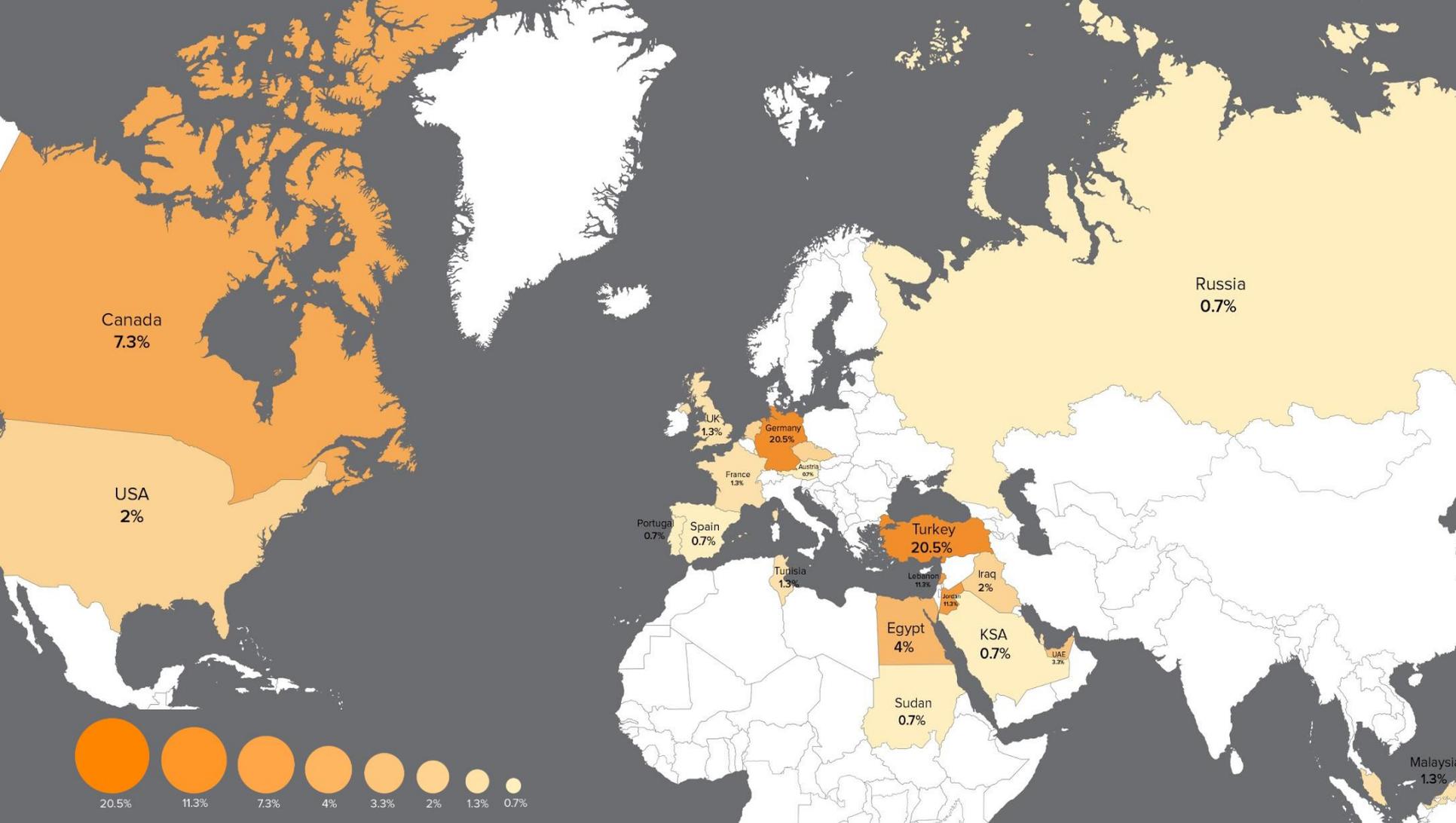
Incubated by Forward Incubator
5 figure monthly sales



Top 100 Arab Startup by World
Economic Forum



Total funding of 1.6M EUR in
Seed round from angels and
Fast Forward VC



Case Study: Jellyfish - Plastic Bags Crossing the World

Jellyfish is a small community-based business in Lebanon that collects plastic bags and turns them into various products and items.

Jellyfish was founded by Alaa and Muzna Alzohori, two Syrian sisters who made it their mission to protect the environment and empower and help women to use their handicraft-making skills to generate an income.

Alaa and Muzna say: “The idea for this project came during the first ever business training we attended. It was an inspiration from the environment and context we lived in, hence the name ‘Jellyfish’ which refers to how plastic bags appear in the deep oceans, like a jellyfish. But we also wanted to find a way to protect refugee women from exploitation and find them a job to do.

We started in 2016. We wanted to bring together Syrian women who have sewing or handicraft-making skills. The idea was for something that links those skills with the simple idea of making a useful thing out of nothing. We tried to mix plastics with crochet works which needed commitment and effort. It was not easy; the application of the idea was a challenge. But we managed to create that kind of product eventually.

At first, we were ridiculed for collecting plastic bags. There was always a ‘refugee women’ label on what we did. It was hard to cope with for a period of time.

We now have 12 ladies working for Jellyfish and others who work part-time. Those women are generating an income, increasing their experience and boosting their confidence. They are active in the market, and their products now go to Europe and the USA. Beach bags, wallets, baskets in various sizes and designs, toys and rugs. In 2020, we sold 1,500 items, mostly abroad. We had more products sold in 2019 but with the different crises in Lebanon, our business was obviously impacted. We have the determination that keeps us going.

Case Study: Workiom Providing One-Size-Fits-All Solutions

Workiom is a collaboration workspace for companies and teams to manage their data and tasks using automation and advanced collaboration features. Founded by Homam Al-Rabbat in 2018, the company is now working with more than 260 customers around the world.

Workiom's founders believe the startup is on the right path to grow in the MENA region and dominate the cloud collaboration business before expanding globally. Currently, Workiom mainly works in four markets: Saudi Arabia, Turkey, USA and India.

HOMAM SAYS: "It was not an easy decision to leave a stable job I was happy with. I turned down a significant opportunity because I decided I was ready for adventure. I thought "what's the worst that can happen?"

The idea for the business was sparked when I needed a certain data solutions tool to solve a programmatic problem at the company I worked for. It was frustrating because I couldn't find the tool that I needed. What we had couldn't do the job.

I looked outside the company for a suitable tool and eventually found one, although that was not the best fit either. When I exhausted all of my options, I decided to build the tool myself, from scratch.

I started reading about startups. I started to learn the concepts; idea validation, presentations, etc. I tested the tool I created in the market, pitching and asking people if they would buy such a tool.

People thought it was useful. I decided I would start my own business with a decision to close it within six months if we did not get the first customer. Luckily, we got our first customer deal in the fifth month. I hired a junior developer to help in the programming of our prototype. I also relied on freelancers while looking for a co-founder who could compliment my technical background.

**5 LESSONS I LEARNED
WORKING WITH
REFUGEES
ENTREPRENEURS**

1. REFUGEES ARE SURVIVAL ENTREPRENEURS

Focus on making income as an act of surviving and securing payment. They are hungry to succeed, which has more to do with playing to win and less with playing with percentages. It is a survival game.

2. REFUGEES ENTREPRENEURS ARE NOT ONE PROFILE

Some clear challenges and features divide entrepreneurs into three main categories: Entrepreneurs in urban settings (82.5%), Entrepreneurs based in camps (10.8%), and Portfolio entrepreneurs (6.7%)

3. MORE REFUGEES FEMALE ARE BECOMING ENTREPRENEURS

Syrian Female business owners make up 35.7% (2021), an increase from a previous sample that investigated the situation of Syrian entrepreneurs at 4.4% in 2009, and 17.22% by 2016.

4. ACCESS FUNDING IS #1 CHALLENGE FOR REFUGEES FOUNDERS

As a case study, out of 270 Syrian refugee-led businesses in neighboring countries, only 6.1% of them considered it as 'somewhat challenging.' Only six founders managed to raise any funding from investors.

5. REFUGEES RESPONSES ARE LACKING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

Blockchain has the potential to disrupt many industries and change the lives of many. Its technology could help millions of refugees by solving some of the most critical problems they face: e.g., Documentation, Aid Distribution, Jobs, and more.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN?

- Prioritize inclusiveness over effectiveness
- Actively invest in refugees-led businesses - More investment not training
- Implementing a positive impact policies fits all Refugees founder profiles
- Create refugees friendly tools and processes using new technologies

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN CONFLICT ZONES

INSIGHTS ON THE STARTUPS IN SYRIA



By Ahmad Sufian Bayram
Foreword by Brad Feld
Co-founder Foundry Group and Techstars
January 2017

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN EXILE

Insights into Syrian Refugees Startups in Host Countries

By Ahmad Sufian Bayram

Foreword by Christopher M. Schroeder



RELENTLESS

SYRIAN REFUGEE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN HOST COUNTRIES

The Challenges that Syrian Founders Face and the Impact of
COVID-19 on Businesses in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq

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Thank you