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## Exploring the entrepreneurial intentions of Syrian refugees in the UK

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**Exploring the entrepreneurial intentions of Syrian refugees in the UK**

## **Abstract**

### Purpose

Few studies have sought to explore the issue of entrepreneurial intention within refugees, despite wide recognition of refugee entrepreneurial potential. This paper explores entrepreneurial intention amongst recently arrived Syrian refugees in the UK, including the role that the migration experience plays in shaping these intentions.

### Design/methodology/approach

This paper follows an interpretive phenomenological research approach, contextualised within the entrepreneurial intention literature. It draws on data collected from in-depth interviews with 9 Syrian refugees, five of whom arrived independently and four of whom arrived via the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement (VPR) Programme.

### Findings

All participants were found to have strong perceptions of desirability towards entrepreneurship. Individuals who arrived independently demonstrated more confidence in their abilities, and in turn somewhat stronger start-up intentions. The findings indicate that the personal development of independent refugee arrivals linked to their migration experiences may help shape the intention to engage in entrepreneurship.

### Research limitations

As this paper draws on a small sample in a single geographic location, the findings presented are phenomenological, context specific and not necessarily applicable to other spatial locations or to other (refugee) groups.

### Social implications

A number of practical and social implications are provided. Support interventions focused on strengthening the perceived abilities and capabilities of refugees would be of considerable benefit.

### Originality/value

This paper provides new and important insight into the nature of entrepreneurial intention within a novel focal group. It makes a valuable contribution to the literature by considering issues of context and process, specifically the relationship between personal forced migration experience and the perceived capability to start a business.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, refugees, latent entrepreneurs, start-ups, UK

**Article classification:** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, human migration has become an increasingly important and debated topic. Many countries have seen a steady increase in the number of asylum applications by individuals who have involuntarily fled their homes due to war, persecution or other dangers, and who seek formal status and protection as *refugees*. The UK in particular has experienced a surge in applications from Syrians fleeing the ongoing civil war (Home Office, 2018). It is important to note that a distinction exists between *asylum applicants* and individuals granted *refugee status*. In the UK, formal refugee status gives individuals and their dependents permission to stay in the UK for 5 years ('leave to remain'). After 5 years, individuals can apply to settle in the UK permanently ('indefinite leave to remain'). Formal refugee status gives individuals the right to work and entitlement to the same benefits and government assistance schemes as all UK residents. Asylum applicants, on the other hand, are not allowed to work or claim most government assistance until their asylum claim is processed.<sup>1</sup> The focus of this paper will be on *refugees* rather than asylum applicants.

As in other countries (Roth *et al.*, 2012), these individuals can arrive independently (un-sponsored) via air, sea or land, or through government-organised programmes such as the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement (VPR) Programme. The VPR Programme aims to resettle 20,000 Syrians in the UK by 2020 and as of February 2018 had resettled 10,538 (Home Office, 2018). Given the sustained numbers of Syrian asylum applications, as well as the UK government's policy focus on facilitating asylum for persecuted Syrians, it is increasingly important to understand how these individuals can best be integrated into UK social and economic life (Garnham, 2006; Ager and Strang, 2008).

The historic body of work exploring the economic lives of refugees (e.g. Gold 1988; 1992) has recently seen new contributions that shed new light on refugee economic activities in a range of geographies and institutional contexts (Beehner, 2015; Alloush *et al.*, 2017; Bizri, 2017). A common observation remains the difficulty that refugees face when seeking employment in their new 'host' country (Garnham, 2006; Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008; Roth *et al.*, 2012). In this regard, refugees are recognised to differ from other voluntary migrants and immigrants and are noted to face critical barriers to employment such as discrimination, language barriers, unrecognised (or downgraded) qualifications and skills gaps, resulting in both unemployment and underemployment (Vinokurov *et al.*, 2017). As a result, refugees are often considered 'pushed' into entrepreneurial activity in order to financially support themselves and their families, increase their financial security and minimise their dependence on the welfare system (Garnham, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-visas-and-immigration>.

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3 The decision to engage in entrepreneurial activity is inherently personal (Garnham, 2006), yet  
4 studies have largely overlooked why refugees specifically may self-select into entrepreneurial  
5 activity. Entrepreneurial intention (EI), or the intention to start a business, has been a fixture in the  
6 Entrepreneurship literature for decades (e.g. Shapero and Sokol, 1982; Bird, 1988; Katz and  
7 Gartner, 1988; Shaver and Scott, 1992). Shaped by contributions from social psychology, two  
8 models - Shapero and Sokol's (1982) theory of the entrepreneurial event (EEM) and Ajzen's (1991)  
9 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) - have come to dominate the current work on EI (Liñán and  
10 Fayolle, 2015), whereby intentions are considered to be shaped by attitudes, which are in turn  
11 shaped by personal or situational 'background factors'. Whilst both these models are widely  
12 accepted, scholars have called for further research to not only better reflect the complexity of the  
13 personal factors underpinning intention, but also how these differ between groups and how they  
14 may evolve and change over time (Liñán and Fayolle, 2015). This latter point is of particular  
15 importance when considering the entrepreneurial intentions of refugees. The process of forced  
16 migration from home to host country (often via 'countries of first asylum') can take months or even  
17 years (Bhugra, 2004) and the experiences encountered during this time have an influence on  
18 individuals' motivations, attitudes and (economic) outlooks. This relationship between migration  
19 experience and entrepreneurial intention is recognised to be an important issue (Kuchnirovich *et al.*,  
20 2017), yet work exploring the relationship between forced migration experiences and EI remains  
21 largely absent.

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24 This paper addresses this gap by exploring the dimensions of entrepreneurial intention within a  
25 group of nine recently arrived Syrian refugees in the UK using interpretive phenomenological  
26 analysis. Drawing on data collected as part of a wider longitudinal study on refugee economic  
27 activities, this paper specifically focuses on the following research questions: (i) *what are the*  
28 *entrepreneurial intentions of recently arrived Syrian refugees in the UK* and (ii) *how do personal*  
29 *migration experiences relate to these intentions?* The focus is on Syrian refugees not currently  
30 involved in formal entrepreneurial activity (latent entrepreneurs). Not only are studies of Syrians  
31 limited, which makes this ethnic focus quite novel in its own right, latent entrepreneurs remain an  
32 important group for furthering EI research and understanding the role of EI in different groups and  
33 contexts (Fayolle and Liñán, 2014).

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36 This paper makes a number of empirical and theoretical contributions to the literature. First, it  
37 makes an important empirical contribution to the refugee entrepreneurship literature by exploring  
38 why refugees choose to self-select into entrepreneurship. Second, it makes an important theoretical  
39 contribution by identifying the link between the lived experience of forced migration and the personal  
40 factors underpinning the nature and strength of entrepreneurial intention. It finds that an individual's  
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perceived capabilities play a strong role in shaping intentions, and that these are very much influenced by lived experience, particularly refugees' personal migration experiences.

The paper is structured as follows. It begins with a concise review of the literature on both refugee entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intention, highlighting the limited qualitative work at the 'person level'. It then details the methodology adopted. Findings are then presented and discussed, before implications, limitations and conclusions are identified.

## 2. Relevant literature

### Refugee entrepreneurship

As noted, there is a long history of research considering the economic lives of refugees, largely stemming from Gold's (1988; 1992) seminal work in the United States. Such studies have flourished recently, with scholars looking at this issue from different perspectives such as livelihoods (e.g. Jacobsen, 2006; Amirthalingam and Lakshman, 2009), development (e.g. Beehner, 2015; Alloush *et al.*, 2017), policy (e.g. Mulvey, 2015) and economic geography (e.g. Lyon *et al.*, 2007). A small but growing body of work has also emerged in the small business and entrepreneurship literature. Scholars now recognise that refugees (forced migrants) differ substantially from other voluntary economic migrants/immigrants in many ways, particularly in terms of their motivations, skills and forms of capital (Roth *et al.*, 2012) as well as the 'forced' nature of their migration (see Wauters and Lambrecht, 2006; 2008; Bizri, 2017 for a more detailed discussion). This can render a mismatch between refugees' skills and abilities and the opportunities and requirements of their new host economy (Roth *et al.*, 2012).

A common observation is that refugees face significant difficulties in entering a new labour market (Garnham, 2006; Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008; Yakushko *et al.* 2008; Roth *et al.*, 2012), as access to work opportunities can be limited by factors including discrimination (Kupferberg, 2003), language barriers (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008), limited knowledge of the host country's culture and business environment, and a lack of recognition (or downgrading) of formal qualifications (Strang and Ager, 2010; Gericke *et al.*, 2018). Highly qualified individuals, unable to find employment in their field of speciality, must decide whether to upgrade their qualifications/retrain (Mulvey, 2015), be underemployed (Vinokurov *et al.*, 2017) in low value sectors (Shneikat and Ryan, 2018), face unemployment, or start their own business. All these options can lower individuals' self-esteem (Bhugra, 2004) and threaten their professional identities (Wehrle *et al.*, 2018).

Labour market disadvantage theory (Light, 1979) and the related blocked mobility hypothesis (Raijman and Tienda, 2003) posit that individuals facing such job market barriers are likely to turn to

1 self-employment. This is considered to be the situation for many refugees (Lyon *et al.*, 2007), who  
2 are thought to be 'pushed' into entrepreneurial activity by external forces (e.g. unemployment),  
3 rather than 'pulled' by personal motivations and desirable perceived outcomes (Gilad and Levine,  
4 1986). Although push factors may be at play, pull factors also appear to be relevant to refugees.  
5 Recent studies have found that refugees were primarily motivated to start a business in order to  
6 facilitate or expedite integration in their host economy (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2006) and ensure  
7 economic self-sufficiency (Garnham, 2006). This demonstrates that push and pull factors are not  
8 necessarily mutually exclusive and can operate in tandem. These factors may also vary according  
9 to the location/context of refugees. Refugees in countries of first asylum may not have the same  
10 rights as the local population such as freedom of movement and the right to work (Refai *et al.*,  
11 2018). In such locations, refugees may be driven more by the need to survive (Berner *et al.* 2012)  
12 rather than opportunity or other pull factors. Such divers are likely to differ from other contexts (e.g.  
13 settled refugees in the UK), where individuals with refugee status do not face restrictions on their  
14 ability to work.

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Despite recognition of the important link between refugees and entrepreneurial activity, studies have largely overlooked why refugees self-select into entrepreneurship (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2006; Obschonka *et al.*, 2018). Some studies have suggested that refugees may be driven by prior entrepreneurial experience, as many refugee entrepreneurs have been found to originate from countries with higher rates of self-employment (Fong *et al.* 2007) and to have been self-employed in their home countries (Kirk, 2004; Wauters and Lambrecht, 2006). Some scholars note that social norms play an important role in encouraging entrepreneurship (Elfving *et al.*, 2009) particularly in uncertain conditions (Engle *et al.*, 2010). Yet others emphasise an individual's outlook, personality and experiences over cultural considerations (Obschonka *et al.*, 2018). Ultimately, there is a need to better understand the drivers of entrepreneurial *intention* amongst refugees (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2006; Obschonka *et al.*, 2018).

#### Entrepreneurial intention

As Shaver and Scott (1992) noted, "people simply do not exert themselves by accident" (p. 35). Thus, the intention to start a business is the result of a conscious process of decision-making whereby external market cues combine with personal capabilities (Krueger *et al.* 2000). Intention can be considered an individual's 'state of mind', with a direct influence on their behaviours and actions (Bird, 1988). Two seminal models linking intention and behaviour were developed by Shapero and Sokol (1982) and Ajzen (1991). Shapero and Sokol's theory of the entrepreneurial event (EEM) posited that the decision to start a new venture depended on perceived desirability, perceived feasibility, as well as a 'propensity to act' related to the issues of autonomy and perceived control (Krueger, 1993). A number of these constructs were also reflected in Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), in the form of attitude (how favourable an individual is towards a



behaviour – reflecting EEM's perceived desirability), and perceived behavioural control (PBC) (how easy or difficult performing the behaviour is perceived to be – reflecting EEM's perceived feasibility). PBC is considered to link to the concept of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982), but also contains an additional element of perceived 'control' (Ajzen, 2002). The TPB also considers subjective norms (how favourable peer or referent groups are toward the behaviour). In these linear models, behaviours are predicted by intentions, which derive from 'attitudes' that are in turn influenced by exogenous factors (Krueger and Carsrud, 1993) or 'background factors' such as demographics, knowledge, experience and personal values (Ajzen, 2005). The TPB remains the dominant model in use for EI research today (Liñán and Fayolle, 2015).

These EI models, particularly the TPB, are not without their criticisms. Scholars have noted that they may not fully reflect the complexity of cognitive processes, motivations and other personal divers of intention (Krueger, 2009). This is in part due to the fact that most of the extant empirical work on EI has followed a positivist methodology drawing on large-scale quantitative data, with little attention paid to individuals and their unique stories. Researchers have called for more 'humanistic' approaches to "attain a better understanding of complex psychological mechanisms leading to intention formation" (Liñán and Fayolle, 2015, p. 925), including phenomenological studies such as the work reported in this paper. A further criticism is that these models are inherently linear and unidirectional (Carsrud and Brännback, 2011), which contradicts emerging observations of "feedback loops" whereby intention has been found to influence its antecedents (Elfving *et al.*, 2009). This observation is yet to be empirically explored, yet it reflects observations in the wider entrepreneurship literature that personal experiences have the potential to impact intentions as individuals learn and change their behaviour accordingly (Welter *et al.*, 2016). This observation is of significant importance when exploring entrepreneurial intention in the context of refugees.

### Entrepreneurial intention and refugees

The refugee entrepreneurship literature observes that there is a need to understand how entrepreneurial cognitions in this group develop and change over time (Obschonka *et al.*, 2018). Importantly, few studies have explored entrepreneurial intention in the context of lived experience, where attitudes, intentions and behaviours are being shaped by challenging life events. Welter *et al.* (2016) argue that motivations for entrepreneurial activity may change over time, whilst others observe that entrepreneurial events usually stem from a change in an individual's 'life path' (Elfving *et al.*, 2009). This issue of temporality is of particular relevance for refugees, as these individuals are often in a greater state of social, emotional and economic flux - or *liminality* - than other groups. Not only are they beginning new lives in new spatial, cultural and institutional contexts, many will have recently endured challenging or traumatic experiences. Research on migration generally observes that migration is not a single phase, but rather a series of highly personal events that occur before, during and after the 'physical' migration experience (Bhugra, 2004). During this

1 process, individuals can face vulnerabilities such as bereavement and culture shock (Oberg, 1960),  
2 as well as positive developments such as new or strengthened social support networks, cultural  
3 identity or relationships with co-ethnic groups (Bhugra, 2004; Bizri, 2017). It is thus important to take  
4 these elements into consideration when discussing the development of – or changes to – the  
5 entrepreneurial intentions of newly-arrived refugees (Obschonka *et al.*, 2018). If “refugeeness” is  
6 “understood as an ongoing, constitutive process of becoming a refugee, with each ‘refugee  
7 experience’ building on the previous and shaping the next” (Jackson and Bauder, 2014), it is thus  
8 important to understand how intentions develop and redevelop within this context.  
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16 This paper attempts to fill this gap by exploring the entrepreneurial intentions of recent Syrian  
17 refugees and the role that personal migration experiences play in shaping intentions. It does not  
18 seek to empirically test the EI models mentioned above, but rather to provide phenomenological  
19 accounts of the refugee migration experience contextualised within the ‘orienting’ conceptual  
20 framework of EI (Lopez and Willis, 2004).  
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### 26 **3. Methodology**

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28 This paper reports on data collected as part of a wider longitudinal study on refugee economic  
29 activities, including self-employment. Early data collected identified the need to more closely explore  
30 the issue of entrepreneurial intention and thus this specific study was devised. An interpretive  
31 phenomenological research design was adopted to fully explore the complex interplay of factors  
32 shaping these activities within the context of individuals and their lived experiences. This approach  
33 is recognised to be particularly powerful when exploring how individuals experience particular  
34 phenomena, and has been used in other studies of refugees and their migration experiences (e.g.  
35 Shakespeare-Finch *et al.*, 2014; Gangamma, 2017) and entrepreneurship more widely (e.g. Cope,  
36 2011)  
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#### 44 Sampling and data collection

45 In line with the principles of interpretive phenomenological analysis, participants were identified  
46 through purposive sampling (Smith and Osborn, 2008). Individuals were required to meet four  
47 conditions: (i) they had to have been resident in the UK for no more than five years; (ii) they had to  
48 be legally documented refugees (no asylum seekers or undocumented arrivals) with right to work in  
49 the UK; (iii) they had to be Syrian nationals who migrated from Syria; and (iv) they could not be self-  
50 employed or running their own business (latent entrepreneurs). Given these very specific  
51 requirements the ‘hard to reach’ nature of the targeted sample (Ram *et al.*, 2007), three refugee  
52 support organisations in the UK were approached in 2017 to identify participants. With their  
53 assistance six individuals were identified. Further snowball sampling identified three more. It was  
54 extremely difficult to identify and contact individuals, although the final sample was within the  
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1 generally recommended size of 6-8 participants (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). Each individual was  
2 fully briefed on the nature and focus of the research before verbal and written consents for  
3 participation were obtained. All nine agreed to participate. These individuals represented a variety of  
4 migration experiences, but fit broadly into two groups – those that arrived in the UK independently  
5 and those that arrived via the Government VPR programme. Whilst they were all from middle class  
6 backgrounds and all fled Syria at the very start of the war, there was some heterogeneity in terms of  
7 socio-economic background and length of time in the UK, which allowed for exploration of  
8 similarities and differences across the sample. Table 1 provides an anonymised overview of the  
9 participants.

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17 <Table 1. Overview of participants>

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21 Data collection comprised in-depth qualitative interviews with participants. The interviews sought to  
22 elicit detailed rich accounts of the participants' backgrounds (personal and economic), the nature of  
23 their migration to the UK (including time spent in 'countries of first asylum'), their experiences since  
24 arriving in the UK and their current and prior (self) employment aspirations and intentions. Given the  
25 focus on phenomenology and lived experience, the interviews had very few *a priori* questions (e.g.  
26 "*Tell me about your journey to the UK*") and instead encouraged personal narratives so that  
27 participants could fully articulate their own thoughts, feelings and experiences in their own way and  
28 their own time (Ghorashi, 2007). Such narratives have been used often in entrepreneurship  
29 research, particularly when individuals are explaining their place in a context or community, and  
30 when it is important to draw on – and make sense of – both memory and current lived experience  
31 (Terjesen and Elam, 2009). Interviews were conducted from mid-2017 to mid-2018 in Arabic (the  
32 participants' native tongue) by the Arabic-speaking researcher (native Arabic, fluent English) and  
33 were on average well over one hour in length. All interviews were recorded with participant  
34 permission and immediately translated and transcribed by the interviewer into English. The  
35 language used is the participants' own. Where words or phrases did not translate easily, an English  
36 equivalent is noted for clarity.

#### 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 Data analysis

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49 Whilst it follows a set of guidelines (Cope, 2011), interpretive phenomenological analysis is not  
50 prescriptive and offers flexibility in terms of data analysis procedures (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012).  
51 After each interview, both authors independently read and re-read the transcripts for familiarisation  
52 and sense-making, identifying and annotating key words, texts and larger themes/concepts  
53 (Creswell, 2013). This process echoed the levels of coding emphasised in Grounded Theory  
54 research (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The authors then came together for discussion of these  
55 observations, working through transcripts individually and as a group in an iterative process of  
56 interpretation (Kempster and Cope, 2010). The authors then looked back to the literature on EI as

1 an 'orienting framework' (Lopez and Willis, 2004) in which data were contextualised (see Table 2 for  
2 a small extract of the coding process).

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6 <Table 2. Extraction from coding>

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9 Given the nature of the methodology adopted, the volume of data collected and space constraints  
10 for this paper, it has not been possible to provide full details on the development and evolution of  
11 codes and categories, or to include all empirical material. However, a representative selection of  
12 data and direct quotations are presented.

#### 13 14 15 16 17 18 **4. Findings**

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20 As noted, the EI literature was used as an 'orienting framework' for data analysis. Data will now be  
21 discussed based on five key themes that underpin both the EEM and TPB models of intention: (i)  
22 perceived desirability/attitude (how favourable an individual is towards a behaviour); (ii) subjective  
23 norms (how favourable peer or referent groups are toward the behaviour); (iii) perceived feasibility /  
24 perceived behavioural control (how easy or difficult performing the behaviour is perceived to be); (iv)  
25 propensity to act (how likely someone is to take initiative and action); and (v) the nature and  
26 strength of intention.

##### 27 28 29 30 31 32 Perceived desirability/attitude

33 Every single participant exhibited a favourable attitude towards entrepreneurial activity, regardless  
34 of personal experience, demographics, or migration experience. This is not to say that they all  
35 explicitly preferred to be entrepreneurs and start their own businesses instead of entering formal  
36 employment, but rather that they were generally positive about self-employment and new business  
37 creation. Part of this strong positive attitude towards entrepreneurship may be attributed to  
38 background and cultural factors. The Syrian economy traditionally had high-levels of self-  
39 employment (Haddad *et al.*, 2011) and many participants grew up with experience of  
40 entrepreneurship in their families.

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49 *"I used to join my father at [his business] from 2002. My father is an entrepreneur. He used  
50 to own a trade business (engines) and a restaurant, and I joined in to run the restaurant  
51 business... the restaurant became like my own business." [Saeed, Independent arrival]*

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53 Many of the participants (Abdul, Wafaa, Omar and Hani) also had prior self-employment experience  
54 in Syria.

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60 *"I started bringing make up and accessories [to my home] and selling to friends and  
relatives. I used to bring clothes as well. That was my business. It was a small business that  
gave me a modest income." [Wafaa, VPR arrival]*

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2 *"I had my own company for 25 years importing papers/cartoons and distributing them locally.*  
3 *I started small, then the company grew to a medium size and ended with 15 employees."*  
4 *[Omar, Independent arrival]*  
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6 Participants noted a range of perceived benefits arising from entrepreneurship including, *inter alia*,  
7 independence, higher rates of pay, ability to support their family, and personal satisfaction.  
8 Flexibility of working hours and locations was a key issue for participants, with many noting the link  
9 to their own health and wellbeing:  
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14 *"You are the business owner so you are not obliged to work certain hours."* [Jamal, VPR  
15 arrival]  
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17 *"Having a job is tiring and I am not capable of that - I have back pain. If I have to walk or*  
18 *keep going for a long time, I cannot. But doing something like cooking is normal. I like*  
19 *cooking at home and I like making deserts, I mean in my own home."* [Wafaa, VPR arrival]  
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21 *"If I want to travel with friends or family I do not need to apply for leave or possibly accept a*  
22 *pay cut. Also, the financial income will definitely be much better for a business owner*  
23 *compared to an employee."* [Saeed, Independent arrival]  
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26 Interestingly, there was also recognition amongst participants that entrepreneurship and self-  
27 employment would provide them with a source of independent livelihood, thus enabling them to limit  
28 their reliance on benefits and make a positive economic contribution to their 'host' country.  
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32 *"We came here and we were given residency for 5 years, so it is not acceptable that we stay*  
33 *here and be dependent on the society. So, we must have our private business."* [Abdul, VPR  
34 arrival]  
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37 Whilst all participants were positive about entrepreneurship and acknowledged the benefits of  
38 starting a business, as previously noted there was no universal preference for entrepreneurship  
39 over other employment options. Some participants acknowledged that mainstream employment was  
40 'unattainable' at present given language skills, qualifications, work experience and references, and  
41 thus entrepreneurship was a logical and desirable alternative given their present circumstances.  
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46 *"[Setting up a business] is better than waiting to find a job opportunity. I will start my own*  
47 *business; if I got a job, I will continue with them both. If I could not find a job within a specific*  
48 *period of time, I will take the business on a full-time basis."* Fadi, Independent arrival]  
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### 50 51 52 Subjective norms

53 As with perceived desirability/attitude, subjective norms about entrepreneurial activity were also  
54 widely favourable. Participants were all encouraged by family and peer groups to pursue self-  
55 employment and business creation if they so desired. In the case of other Syrians, this is likely  
56 linked to the positive cultural attitudes towards entrepreneurship noted above.  
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2 *"People who come to visit me encouraged me... [Name] you must have a restaurant here to*  
3 *offer your food'. That is what encouraged me to think of food."* [Wafaa, VPR arrival]

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5 In some cases, such support came from outwith family and close peer groups, be it through wider  
6 UK friend groups, community support agencies and business start-up services.  
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#### 10 11 Perceived feasibility / perceived behavioural control

12 Important differences began to emerge amongst participants with regard to their perceived personal  
13 ability to start their own business. In this regard, a difference started to emerge between those  
14 participants who arrived in the UK independently and those who arrived via the VPR programme on  
15 a number of fronts, but particularly in terms of individuals' proactiveness, determination and self-  
16 efficacy.  
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22 *"When I first came to the UK, I volunteered with a charity... I started with them just to*  
23 *understand how things work in the UK... When the [ties that bind] you to a place have been*  
24 *cut, you get the courage to try. Simply, I shall try and keep trying until I prove myself to*  
25 *myself, to know what my limits are and what can I do."* [Fadi, Independent arrival]

26  
27 *"In this country, anybody who gives will not lose. You need to give to get a big win. You will*  
28 *need to work hard to get what you want. I am giving it a lot, I am giving a lot of my time and*  
29 *my efforts so that it pays off in the future."* [Ahmad, Independent arrival]

30  
31 *"At Zaatari [refugee camp in Jordan], I volunteered working with children. I saw a lot on my*  
32 *journey to the UK, I went through places where people got killed, but all the time I kept*  
33 *thinking of the children who were always laughing despite everything. They gave me hope.*  
34 *My main objective is not the business, is not the money. It is just a means to help those kids.*  
35 *I feel responsible, I should do something for these kids."* [Sami, Independent arrival]

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38 The proactiveness exhibited by independent arrivals may well have been driven by the lack of a  
39 'safety net'. These individuals did not have access to public support programmes (e.g. benefits) until  
40 their asylum applications were granted, leaving them with few sources of financial support in the  
41 intervening period (often six months). Many also came alone and thus also lacked social support  
42 networks. Additionally these individuals faced particularly challenging physical migration journeys  
43 involving extreme risks to life, which had an important role in shaping individuals' attitudes,  
44 perceptions and mindsets.  
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51 *I went through Syria, Turkey, Greece, then all the way to Europe. I saw a lot on the way. I*  
52 *saw dead people. People told us about an area where people are getting killed for their*  
53 *organs, but we had to pass through it and we did. In every moment, I was thinking of the*  
54 *Syrian children, what happened to them, and how they are able to laugh and play while*  
55 *rockets were falling around them. What kept me going is the children [in Zaatari] who gave*  
56 *me lots of strength in that I can get to London, do something, and then get back to them and*  
57 *help out."* [Sami, Independent arrival]

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2 As a result, the independent arrivals also exhibited a particularly strong sense of self-belief and self-  
3 efficacy. As Fadi articulated:

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5  
6 *“From when I was in Russia and until I got here, I had to ‘pull the bite from the mouth of the*  
7 *beast’ [Arabic proverb equivalent to ‘face things head-on’]. It was not easy and there was no*  
8 *cushion underneath you to fall upon in case something went wrong. You become goal*  
9 *oriented, but you lose a lot of your soul.” [Fadi, Independent arrival]*

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12 Due to this ‘forced independence’, the independent arrivals also needed to be flexible and  
13 adaptable, finding new ways to overcome challenges and problems.

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17 *“I first thought of starting a restaurant, but that needs a lot of capital and [the UK] system is*  
18 *different [from Syria]. [Here] they rely on take-away. In our culture, that does not exist, so I*  
19 *still need to study their lifestyle to know how things work. I need to be financially ready and I*  
20 *like cars, so I decided to go to college to get the qualifications and skills [required to obtain*  
21 *work in a garage].” [Saeed, Independent arrival]*

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24 These individuals were also better able to understand themselves, their differences (good and bad),  
25 and their ‘place’ in a new environment. Not only were they better able to identify their own strengths  
26 and abilities in the context of starting a business (self-awareness), but they also demonstrated more  
27 ‘absorptive capacity’ in terms of understanding the realities of the business environment in the UK  
28 and the need for innovation.  
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34 *“Although I am capped by certain skills due to my experiences, at the same time I can see*  
35 *things from a different perspective. The travel experience is a liberating experience and it*  
36 *also widens your perspective. I can understand the Arabic mentality as well as other*  
37 *mentalities. That gives you something to differentiate yourself from others.” [Fadi,*  
38 *Independent arrival]*

39  
40 *“In the Middle East, you can rely on your family name. Here that does not matter. It changed*  
41 *how I think completely. Here it is your knowledge and skills [that matter].” [Ahmad,*  
42 *Independent arrival]*

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45 In contrast, those individuals that arrived via the VPR programme did not exhibit the same level of  
46 proactiveness, determination and self-awareness as the independent arrivals. They instead  
47 demonstrated a significant dependence on the government support (and support organisations) that  
48 underpin the VPR programme. Of particular importance was the twelve-month ‘adjustment period’,  
49 during which time refugees were given support to learn English in preparation for entering the job  
50 market. They were less positive in terms of their self-belief and self-efficacy to start a business,  
51 reflecting on the problems they would face rather than the opportunities. Language was perceived  
52 to be a critical barrier by the VPR arrivals, who generally had much more limited language abilities  
53 than other participants. Two individuals spoke very little English at all, even after months of tuition.  
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*"The main reason [I am not working] is that we haven't been in the UK for long, so we need to learn English first so we can get used to life here. I found going to the Job Centre extremely difficult. They do not even take into account that I am not ready with language or knowledge of legal system. Even with a translator things may not be expressed clearly."*  
[Abdul, VPR arrival]

*"To be a painter, you need to complete a Health, Safety and Environment test. I tried but I did not pass the test because of the language. Also, it is important to drive if I want to be a painter. I am trying the study for the theoretical driving test, but I am finding it really hard because of the English."* [Hani, VPR arrival]

Rival explanations to this finding of perceived feasibility / perceived behavioural control were also considered. Additional analysis was attempted to take into account the differences between independent and VPR arrivals with regards to time spent in the UK, as well as other demographic and socioeconomic factors. To do this, three individuals were identified (Abdul, Omar and Hani) who shared similar demographic and socio-economic backgrounds, two VPR arrivals and one independent arrival. Amongst this albeit very small group, the method of arrival appeared to be a key differentiator in terms of perceptions of feasibility and personal control to start a business. This appeared to be because independent arrivals had made the specific choice to migrate to the UK and had taken significant risk to get there. They therefore had some background knowledge about life in the UK from their personal networks and felt incentivised to engage with UK life and culture. The VPR arrivals, however, were informed by the UN that they had the opportunity to be resettled in the UK (or not at all). From the acceptance of this offer (approximately 8 months in advance), individuals were offered resettlement support through government and non-government organisations, which resulted in a stronger sense of dependency than self-reliance as well as a more circumscribed outlook on their 'role' in the UK. Interestingly, all the VPR arrivals emphasised how they felt "settled" upon arrival in the UK, whilst independent arrivals generally spoke about feeling "uncertain", "unsure" and "less settled" than they had previously.

Given this very small sub-sample, and this study's focus on personal experiences rather than broader generalisations, it is not possible to discount the influence of demographic and socioeconomic factors. The data suggests, however, that these may be less relevant in this context than issues of personal experience. This warrants further research.

#### Propensity to act

Linked to perceived feasibility / perceived behavioural control, an individual's propensity to take initiative and action is considered an important part of intention. As the focus was on 'latent entrepreneurs', it is not possible to discuss specific entrepreneurial 'outcomes'. Yet, all the participants had taken some form of 'formative entrepreneurial action', largely driven by the need and desire for income generation. In some cases, individuals also faced pressure from external agencies and support providers to find paid employment.



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3 *“What made me think of [starting a business] is that they [Job Centre] are demanding that I*  
4 *go and work.” [Wafaa, VPR arrival]*  
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6 *“1.5 or 2 months ago, I made a decision that it is enough, I must start up a business. [What*  
7 *triggered the decision] is frustration with the job market. It impacted a lot on my decision. I*  
8 *did not want to wait [for jobs] anymore.” [Fadi, Independent arrival]*  
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11 Both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors were widely discussed by participants, indicating a blurred line  
12 between ‘necessity’ and ‘opportunity’. In no instance was a business deemed necessary for  
13 economic ‘survival’, but rather it was seen as a means by which individuals could minimise their  
14 reliance on Government benefits or provide a better level of income to maintain planned lifestyle  
15 spending. Syrians are noted to be resistant to government assistance or ‘handouts’ (Beehner,  
16 2015), as they are unused to receiving free public goods and this discomfort quickly became  
17 apparent during interviews.  
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24 Whilst all participants had taken some formative entrepreneurial actions, the intensity and depth of  
25 these varied. Interestingly those individuals that arrived via the VPR programme were more focused  
26 on replicating businesses and business models that they had run – or seen run – in Syria, usually  
27 focused on providing authentic Syrian food.  
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32 *“In Syria, many people used to cook at home and [other] people [come to] collect the food.*  
33 *That is the kind of business I am thinking of.” [Wafaa, VPR arrival]*  
34

35 *“I noticed that [British people] like Arabic food. It is unique and healthy. Here, there is a*  
36 *welcome group that supports refugees. During their visits to us we serve food, and we*  
37 *noticed that they like the food... I asked Syrian people who have lived here for advice and*  
38 *they also told me that our food is liked here.” [Jamal, VPR arrival]*  
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40  
41 They were also very focused on potential barriers and difficulties (e.g. lack of finance, issues with  
42 regulation etc.), which curtailed their willingness to take more concrete steps to start a new  
43 business.  
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47 Whilst a number of independent arrivals were also looking into the possibility of starting a food-  
48 based business, their approach was generally more innovative: they were looking beyond familiar  
49 business models and exploring models with more relevance to British consumers. These individuals  
50 had also taken the most advanced steps towards starting a business (particularly Ahmad and Fadi),  
51 in terms of starting a business plan, exploring options for start-up capital, and working with mentors  
52 and members of the business support community to further develop their ideas.  
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58 *“I started [developing] the business model, where I will be based, what is the target market,*  
59 *what type of services I can offer. I have an appointment with a mentor at [University]. I have*  
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1  
2 *started to develop a contact list. I talked to someone to build a website and discussed prices.*  
3 *I am still at the beginning, but the idea is crystallising.” [Fadi, Independent arrival]*  
4

5 Again, none of the VPR arrivals were working at the time of interview. This may have had an effect  
6 on their willingness to take action. On the other hand, the independent arrivals had all had the right  
7 to work in the UK for two years at the time of interview and were all working or volunteering. They  
8 may therefore have been in a better position to engage in business creation.  
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### 11 12 13 Nature and strength of intention

14 With regard to previous entrepreneurial intention and activity, four individuals (Abdul, Wafaa, Omar  
15 and Hani) ran their own businesses until they were forced to flee due to the civil war, and two  
16 considered starting a business in Syria (Jamal and Sami). Participants noted that they started to  
17 consider entrepreneurship quite soon upon arrival in the UK. As discussed above, the rationale to  
18 engage in business creation differed across individuals and stemmed from a complex interplay of  
19 both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. Those driven more by pull factors such as perceived opportunity or  
20 perceived benefits largely expressed ‘stronger’ entrepreneurial interest and intention than  
21 individuals being largely ‘pushed’ into entrepreneurship due to unemployment/underemployment.  
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28 Also linked to this strength of intention were the previously discussed issues of self-belief and  
29 perceived capability. These remained a point of distinction between independent and VPR arrivals.  
30 Generally, individuals who arrived independently had a higher strength of intention to start a  
31 business, perhaps due to building personal drive, ambition and resilience (Sherwood and Liebling-  
32 Kalifani, 2012) and perceived ability as a result of their challenging experiences. These individuals  
33 also articulated that their experiences had shaped their outlook on life. As they perceived they had  
34 “*nothing left to lose*”, they risked very little in starting up a business.  
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42 *“I am lost. I know people but I do not have friends. I may think backward [on the past], but*  
43 *now I am trying to just look forward.” [Sami, Independent arrival]*  
44

45 VPR participants also expressed a sense of loss, although this was not as acute as the independent  
46 arrivals. This perhaps stemmed from the fact that they had built new friendships and support  
47 networks with other VPR arrivals, which strengthened their own cultural identity and sense of  
48 belonging (Bizri, 2017).  
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53 Interestingly, all participants also observed that starting a business could be a way to regain their  
54 former social status and past professional identities, whilst helping to build a new independent life in  
55 the UK.  
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## 5. Discussion

The data presented provides important insights into the nature of entrepreneurial intention amongst recently arrived Syrian refugees in the UK. They demonstrate the complex interplay of factors shaping intentions and highlight the important role of personal experiences in developing strength of intention, thus making an important contribution to the EI literature.

As discussed, all participants displayed positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship and considered it to be quite desirable. This was due in part to both previous self-employment/entrepreneurship experience (Kirk, 2004; Wauters and Lambrecht, 2006) as well as wider experience of entrepreneurship through their families and personal lives, given to the nature of Syrian culture. This issue of culture had an important impact on subjective norms as well, which were also widely favourable towards entrepreneurial activity. Syria has a long history of entrepreneurial activity and traditionally had very high levels of self-employment (Haddad *et al.*, 2011), which indicated that a culture of entrepreneurship was quite entrenched amongst Syrians. This certainly seemed to be the case across participants. It is also important, however, to consider the nature of family and friend support networks in Syrian culture, where social support systems (e.g. family, friends, neighbours) are very strong (Bizri, 2017). It is therefore possible that the strong social support articulated by participants was in fact a reflection on support at a personal level, rather than support for entrepreneurship activity *per se*. This observation would benefit from further empirical research to tease out such distinctions.

Despite the fact that all participants had positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship and that their families/friends were supportive of engaging in entrepreneurial activity, there was no universal preference for entrepreneurship over other employment options. Whilst one participant noted that he would never consider working for anyone other than himself, the other participants noted that they would engage in entrepreneurship depending on the other opportunities for work available (or unavailable) to them. In line with this range of preferences, respondents discussed a range of push and pull factors including autonomy, flexibility, personal satisfaction and economic self-sufficiency (Garnham, 2006; Kolvereid and Isaksen, 2006; Jones *et al.*, 2014), as well as perceived underemployment and lower wages (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2017). These findings do reiterate the continuing relevance of labour market disadvantage theory (Light, 1979) and the blocked mobility hypothesis (Raijman and Tienda, 2003) in 'pushing' refugees towards self-employment (Lyon *et al.*, 2007), yet they also demonstrate the importance of person-specific 'pull' factors. This is of significance as it emphasises the importance of self-will and personal agency amongst refugees (Obschonka *et al.*, 2018), particularly in the context of self-employment decisions. This is an important area of future research for refugee populations.

1 An area of differentiation amongst participants emerged with regard to their perceived ability to start  
2 their own business. The literature notes the importance of an individual's outlook and personality  
3 when starting a business (Obschonka *et al.*, 2018) and the data collected emphasised differences  
4 amongst participants in terms of their proactiveness, determination, self-efficacy, flexibility,  
5 adaptability and self-awareness. These factors have all been found to affect entrepreneurial  
6 intention (see Liñán and Fayolle, 2015). Interestingly, individuals who arrived via the VPR  
7 programme did not exhibit the same degree of these characteristics and instead demonstrated  
8 much more circumscribed capabilities. These included language, widely recognised to be a major  
9 barrier for refugees and their economic integration (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008), and a focus on  
10 perceived barriers to start-up rather than opportunity. This perceived ability, or perceived control,  
11 was also reflected in the propensity of individuals to take action. The intensity and depth of  
12 formative entrepreneurial actions varied, but again independent arrivals demonstrated greater  
13 proactivity and commitment to taking concrete action.

14 Looking at these elements together, it was possible to comment on the overall entrepreneurial  
15 intention of participants. Every participant was interested in - and considering - starting a business,  
16 regardless of background or migration experience, with intention shaped by a range of perceived  
17 push and pull factors. Whilst the nature of an individual's migration experience did not directly  
18 influence entrepreneurial intention (e.g. the act of walking across Europe does not make an  
19 individual suddenly think "I'm going to start a business"), this subjective and uniquely constructed  
20 migration experience has a critical influence on an individual's perceived abilities and capability  
21 (both personal and with regard to economic opportunities such as starting a business). These  
22 perceived capabilities in turn shape the nature and strength of an individual's intention. Given their  
23 challenging migration experiences, participants who arrived in the UK independently appeared to  
24 build their personal capabilities such as autonomy, independence and resilience (Sherwood and  
25 Liebling-Kalifani, 2012) in a way not evidenced by participants on the VPR programme. This  
26 resulted in generally stronger entrepreneurial intentions amongst independent arrivals. That is not  
27 to say, however that VPR arrivals would not be able to develop similar capabilities (resulting in  
28 stronger intentions) given sufficient time in the UK and exposure to relevant individuals,  
29 communities and networks. Indeed, such personal 'capacity building' appears to be of significant  
30 relevance.

31 These findings are of significant importance to the nascent refugee literature, as they call into  
32 question pervasive assumptions that refugees are 'pushed' into entrepreneurial activity and highlight  
33 the importance of individual perceptions, motivations and ambitions. There is significant scope for  
34 further research to explore these issues in greater detail and amongst different groups of refugees  
35 in different contexts. Within the EI literature, the data indicates that dominant EI models would  
36 benefit from greater nuance, recognising that in cases such as those presented some of the

1 underpinning constructs (e.g. perceived behavioural control) are more important in intention  
2 formation than others. Again, further qualitative research is needed to better explore this issue.  
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## 6. Conclusions

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9 This paper has provided insights into the nature of entrepreneurial intention amongst recently  
10 arrived Syrian refugees in the UK, including the role that the migration experience plays in shaping  
11 these intentions. It has highlighted that individual migration experiences shape perceived  
12 capabilities, which in turn shape an individual's perceived ability to start a business (and  
13 subsequently intention). It makes an important empirical contribution to the still-developing refugee  
14 entrepreneurship literature and to the EI literature by identifying the important link between lived  
15 experience and those personal factors underpinning entrepreneurial intention.  
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21 The findings presented have a number of practical implications for institutions and individuals  
22 supporting refugees in the UK. Fundamentally, the data demonstrates the strong entrepreneurial  
23 intention prevalent amongst newly arrived Syrian refugees in the UK. This intent should be nurtured  
24 by institutions and individuals supporting refugees in the UK, harnessing the positive attitudes these  
25 refugees have towards entrepreneurship to allow them the opportunity to build a new independent  
26 life in the UK and, in many cases, regain their lost social status.  
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32 The observed variation between the independent arrivals and VPR arrivals with regards to  
33 perceived behavioural control suggests that support organisations might need to be vigilant in their  
34 approach with refugees to avoid developing learned dependence. Interventions should thus also  
35 focus on strengthening the perceived abilities and capabilities of refugees. Provision of certain  
36 assessments necessary to work in manual jobs (e.g. health and safety assessments) in the Arabic  
37 language could help to expedite the entry of some refugees into employment.  
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43 VPR arrivals generally felt intimidated attending the Jobcentre Plus at the end of their twelve-month  
44 'adjustment period', particularly as they were subject to the same expectations and requirements as  
45 any other UK resident or citizen. Whilst this is in many ways a good thing, given the language  
46 weaknesses and issues of confidence identified in this paper it is worth considering the possibility of  
47 'bridging support' between the VPR programme employability support and the Jobcentre Plus  
48 service. Refugees could receive employment/employability counselling from other refugees /  
49 immigrants / migrants who understand the pressures they face, linked to the requirement of  
50 Jobcentre Plus. Such counselling could enable individuals to better understand the realities of the  
51 business environment in the UK and the need for innovation in what is a sophisticated market  
52 economy.  
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1 This issue of wider peer-based business support appears to be relevant for refugees more  
2 generally. Although the independent arrivals in this study were able to develop a better knowledge  
3 of the UK landscape given their need to integrate quickly upon arrival (and on average longer time  
4 in the UK), they faced as many limits in their knowledge of where to go for different types of  
5 business support as the VPR arrivals. Syrian refugees generally would benefit from access to  
6 networks of other immigrant / migrant / refugee entrepreneurs for business mentoring and advice,  
7 particularly those who have faced similar difficulties such as language, limited credit track record,  
8 networks etc. Whilst such networks would be of assistance in starting a business, they would also  
9 help in terms of social integration, enabling individuals to move beyond their own bounded local or  
10 ethnic network (e.g. family, other VPR arrival) and providing opportunities for exposure to the wider  
11 diversity of life in the UK.  
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20 This paper is not without its limitations. Drawing on a small sample in a single geographic location  
21 means that the findings presented are context specific and not necessarily applicable to other  
22 spatial locations or to other (refugee) groups. Further work looking at larger groups of refugees  
23 would be extremely useful, particularly taking a longitudinal approach to track actions, behaviours  
24 and changes over time. The diversity of the sample also had implications for the interpretation of  
25 findings, as it was not possible to fully consider the impact of demographic and socio-economic  
26 factors, particularly gender. Despite these limitations, this paper hopes to have provided a starting-  
27 point for further research and discussion on the important realm of refugee entrepreneurship and  
28 the role of entrepreneurial intention.  
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## Exploring the entrepreneurial intentions of Syrian refugees in the UK

**Table 1. Overview of participants**

<p>Ahmad is a 26-year-old single man from the Damascus area. He was a manager in his father's business in Syria before the war, during which time he also studied IT at University until he was forced to drop out due to the war. He left Syria in 2013 and fled to Lebanon as his country of first asylum. He sought to get to the UK as his family had already managed to resettle there as refugees. From Lebanon he made his way independently to the UK, flying using forged documents, and was granted refugee status and the right to work in May 2014. Since arriving in the UK he has obtained a University Diploma in IT and is currently employed full-time in a business owned by a family member. He has a high interest in starting his own business.</p>
<p>Abdul is a 60-year-old man from the Damascus area. He is married, with one adult son in the UK and two adult children abroad. In Syria, he was a serial entrepreneur for over thirty years, building on his Bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. He left Syria in 2012 and fled to Egypt. Whilst in Egypt, he set up a business which was doing well, but his son was diagnosed with cancer and required specialist treatment abroad. As a result, the family was offered resettlement in the UK via the VPR programme. He arrived in the UK with refugee status and the right to work in July 2016. Since arriving in the UK he has been unemployed and has not looked for jobs, working instead on building his English-language abilities. He has a very high interest in starting his own business.</p>
<p>Wafaa is a 47-year old woman from the countryside of Homs. She is widowed, with two adult sons in the UK. She had to leave one adult daughter behind in Lebanon when she came to the UK. In Syria she was a housewife and did not acquire education beyond primary level. When her husband died, she started a microenterprise to generate additional income to support herself and her family. She left Syria in 2013 and fled to Lebanon, mainly to protect her son from going to military service. Life in Lebanon was tough as her sons did not have the legal documents to stay and work. She was offered resettlement in the UK via the VPR programme and arrived in the UK with refugee status and the right to work in September 2016. Since arriving in the UK, she has been unemployed and has not looked for jobs, working instead on building her English-language abilities. She has a moderate interest in starting her own business.</p>
<p>Fadi is a 26-year-old single man from the Damascus area. After obtaining his Bachelor's degree in Syria in Business, he worked in a start-up as their marketing specialist for a short time until the war broke out. He left Syria in 2013 and fled first to Egypt before going on to Russia. He got 'stuck' in Russia for 6 months as he was unable to return to Egypt (due to his documents). He managed to obtain a student visa to the UK and arrived in December 2014, at which time he put in an application for asylum. He was granted refugee status and the right to work in August 2015. Since arriving in the UK he has obtained a Master's degree in Marketing and currently works part-time in a refugee charity. He has a high interest in starting his own business.</p>
<p>Saeed is a 32 year-old man from Homs. He is married with one child. After obtaining his University Diploma in Syria in dental technology, he worked as the manager of his father's business. He left Syria in 2013 after being freed from (forced) detention and fled first to Lebanon and then to Turkey. In Lebanon, Saeed tried hard to get work with no luck and experienced discrimination. He then decided to get to the UK independently, taking a dangerous journey through Turkey then walking through Europe and finally crossing through Calais. He was granted refugee status and the right to work in June 2015. He currently works part-time in a refugee charity and has a high interest in starting his own business.</p>
<p>Jamal is a 37-year-old man from the Latakia area. He is married with one child. He dropped out of University in Syria before completing his degree and became a Quality Inspector in a factory. He was considering starting his own business before the war started, but was put off by the cost. He left Syria in 2014 and fled to Turkey. He found work in Turkey but felt unsettled due to being a refugee</p>

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3 employee with no legal rights. He was accepted on the VPR programme and came to the UK in  
4 August 2016 with refugee status and the right to work. Since arriving in the UK he has been  
5 unemployed and has not looked for jobs. He has a moderate interest in starting his own business.  
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7 Omar is a 50-year old man from Homs. He is married with four children. He finished his University  
8 Diploma in Electrical Engineering before starting his own business, which he ran for 25 years. He left  
9 Syria in 2012 and fled to Jordan and then to the UAE where he set up businesses that did not  
10 experience much success. He made his way independently to the UK, flying with forged documents,  
11 and received refugee status and the right to work in March 2016. Since arriving in the UK he has been  
12 unemployed and has been looking for jobs (so far unsuccessfully). He has a high interest in starting  
13 his own business.  
14

15 Sami is a 31-year old single man from Damascus. He has a Bachelor's degree in English-Arabic  
16 translation and worked as a supply chain manager in Syria until the war broke out. He was in the  
17 process of starting his own business just before the war broke out. He left Syria in 2013 and fled to  
18 Jordan. He worked there until his passport was confiscated and he could no longer stay legally. He  
19 then made his way independently to the UK, taking a dangerous journey through Syria and Turkey  
20 then walking through Europe and finally crossing through Calais. He received refugee status and the  
21 right to work in July 2016. Since arriving in the UK he has been working part-time in a high-street  
22 coffee chain and studying for a Master's degree in Business. He has a high interest in starting his own  
23 business.  
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25 Hani is a 56 year-old man from Aleppo. He is married with three children. He did not finish his  
26 University degree in French Literature, but instead dropped out and became self-employed working  
27 as a house painter. He grew his business through employment (allowing for more decoration projects)  
28 as well as importing foreign paints and selling them in his own shop. He left Syria in 2012 and fled to  
29 Lebanon where he also worked as a painter. He was offered resettlement in the UK via the VPR  
30 programme and arrived in the UK with refugee status and the right to work in July 2016. He is  
31 currently unemployed, but looking for jobs in his trade. He has a moderate interest in starting his own  
32 business.  
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**Table 2. Extraction from data analysis**

Indicative quotations	Initial coding	Concept	Relevant concepts from literature
<i>"Things are different here. We need to find out what are the conditions and laws in place here."</i>	Ease of start-up	Perceived ability to start a business (high vs. low)	Perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991)
<i>"I do not think I have the capacity to start up a restaurant, I mean do not have the money"</i>	(Lack of) Start-up resources		
<i>"[Supermarket] Falafel is [soggy] and cannot be eaten. Here there is so much demand for Falafel and many people know what it is."</i>	Perceived market opportunity		
<i>"I must start my own business [now]."</i>	Timing		
<i>"In this country, anybody who gives will not lose"</i>	(Lack of) Self belief	Personal entrepreneurial capability (high vs. low)	Perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982)
<i>"I recently arrived, have poor English, do not have qualifications or expertise in the UK."</i>	(Lack of) Skills / qualifications		
<i>"Before I arrived here, my English was very good. When I came here, I noticed that there is still a weakness in my language."</i>	(Lack of) English language ability		
<i>"During my studies [in Syria] I had a business to make clothing and used to export to Russia."</i>	(Lack of) Entrepreneurial experience		
<i>"In Syria, we had a specific approach. If we come from a particular area we have a particular approach to dealing with things. It is not always the case that the same approach will be what we need [in the UK]."</i>	(Lack of) Cultural understanding		