

RISING FROM THE RUBBLE

Entrepreneurship in Syria Post-Assad

January 2025

Ahmad Sufian Bayram



RISING FROM THE RUBBLE: ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SYRIA POST-ASSAD

This study summary explores the potential revival of Syria's entrepreneurial ecosystem after the collapse of the Assad regime and illustrate the major role that Syrian startups can play in fostering economic recovery and social cohesion.

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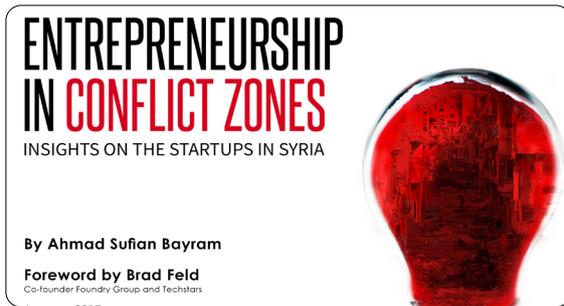


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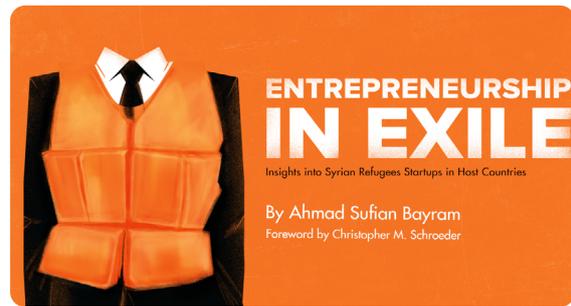
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REPORTS AND ARTICLES: IN-DEPTH INSIGHTS INTO SYRIAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

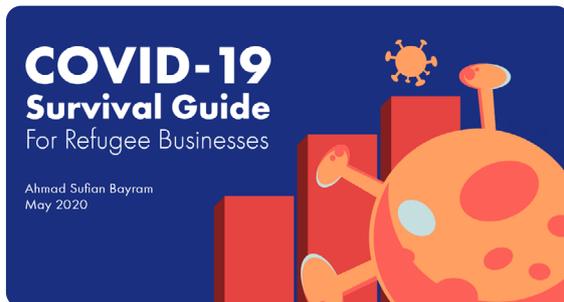
Over the years, we have produced and authorized a series of comprehensive reports that delve into the challenges and opportunities within Syrians entrepreneurship in conflict-affected and displacement settings. Here are some highlights:



Provides insights into the startup landscape in Syria, exploring the resilience of entrepreneurs during challenging times.



Examines the entrepreneurial journeys of Syrian refugees in host countries and highlights their contributions to local economies.



Offers actionable strategies to help refugee businesses adapt and thrive during the COVID-19 crisis. Selected as UNHCR materials and resources.



Explores how Syrian entrepreneurs have built resilient businesses in host countries, offering recommendations for policy and support programs. Prepared on behalf of Jusoor.

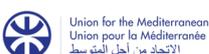


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AUTHOR'S NOTE

As Syria navigates a complex stretch in its long road to recovery and rebuilding, I am full of hope that the entrepreneurial spirit of the Syrian people will shine as a beacon of resilience and innovation at home, just like it did everywhere else. In many ways, it feels as though a decade of hard work, innovative ideas, and relentless dedication by Syrian entrepreneurs in Syria and abroad is now being put to test. I have read numerous pitches and mentored scores of successful founders, and I have no doubt that those are the minds and talents that a country shaking the rubble off its cities and town needs today.

This work examines the many barriers that stand in the way of turning dreams into realities. It is shaped by years of work on the ground with hundreds of Syrian founders hindered in one way or another from establishing their startups, and the interaction with many organizations that work to support entrepreneurs. It seeks to capture the transformative stories of Syrian entrepreneurs who, against all odds, have not only created opportunities for themselves but also paved the way for a brighter future and a more inclusive society. From groundbreaking startups to grassroots initiatives, these efforts greatly illustrate the immense potential of entrepreneurship as a catalyst for economic growth, social cohesion, and global impact.

In compiling this study summary, we have drawn on a diverse range of voices, insights, and data to provide a comprehensive understanding of Syria's evolving startup ecosystem. Our goal is to encapsulate both the challenges and opportunities that the sector has, offering a roadmap for stakeholders to support and scale this dynamic sector.

This is more than just a documentation of Syria's entrepreneurial journey—it is a call to action for investors, policymakers, and organizations to recognize and support the untapped potential within this ecosystem. We hope this report inspires collaborative efforts to empower Syrian founders and foster an environment where innovation thrives, despite adversity. Entrepreneurship must not wait for recovery. Entrepreneurship is recovery.

I hope this work, which puts a decade of work with numerous Syrian founders, will spread some knowledge and inspire a movement where we can all come together and help. No matter where you live or what means you have at hand, if you're reading this, you can do something.

Thank you.

Ahmad Sufian Bayram



BUSTING MYTHS ABOUT ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SYRIA

These are some common myth surrounding entrepreneurship in Syria and the realities that reflect some progress and opportunities made over recent years.

<p>Myth: There Are No Startups Currently Operating in Syria</p>	<p>Reality Despite the immense challenges, there's +200 startups continue to operate within Syria, but only dozen have reached growth stage even in the most difficult circumstances. Companies like Bee Order, Tajir.Store, YalaGo, ElToob, LiBeiroot, Harbuk, Cashi, Quizat, Fathee the Robot. Wareed, Jomlatech and others. <i>See page 23.</i></p>
<p>Myth: The Ecosystem in Syria Is Too Fragmented to Recover</p>	<p>Reality: Although the ecosystem was fragmented by the conflict, over 300 community events and initiatives have helped keep entrepreneurial efforts alive since the last three years. The Syria's entrepreneurial ecosystem had existed before 2011, albeit underdeveloped compared to regional peers. <i>See page 12.</i></p>
<p>Myth: Syria Did Not See Any Startup Investment</p>	<p>Reality: While large-scale investments doesn't exist, there have been small-ticket investments in Syrian startups, ranging from \$5,000 to \$100,000. These investments, though modest, have provided critical early-stage funding for startups to launch and sustain operations in challenging circumstances. <i>See page 20.</i></p>

Myth:

People in Syria Don't See the Importance of Entrepreneurship

Reality: The number of people who consider entrepreneurship to be 'extremely important' soared from 26% in 2015 to 80.5% in 2024. to the Syria context. reflecting a significant cultural change. Entrepreneurship is now widely recognized as a critical driver for economic recovery, job creation, and innovation in rebuilding post-conflict Syria. See page 11.

Myth:

Women Rarely Participated in Entrepreneurship in Syria

Reality: While male founders were predominant, women's participation rose during the conflict. By necessity, women became breadwinners and innovators, leading to a 22.4% participation rate in startups during the conflict years and 35% as of today. Syrian women have been especially active in education, healthcare, creative industries, and home based businesses. See page 21.

Myth:

People in Syria Are Not Open to Using Applications and Online Payments

Reality: While there is cultural hesitancy and limited familiarity with digital platforms, change is happening. In a survey of over 200 people, respondents rated their likelihood of using services like delivery apps, ride-hailing, and e-commerce platforms on a scale of 1-10, with an average score of 4.2. This shows room for improvement for the digital literacy increases and trust in online payment systems develops but also highlights growing curiosity and potential for adoption. See page 18.

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of over a decade of conflict and social and economic collapse, Syria finds itself at the most pivotal crossroads in over half a century. With the fall of the Assad regime, the focus shifts to rebuilding a shattered nation. This study, conducted in the immediate aftermath of the December 2024 events, delves into the critical role that entrepreneurship can play in driving Syria's recovery. It explores how resilient founders and innovative startups need to be involved in laying the groundwork for a new era of economic vitality and social cohesion.

The socio-economic ramifications for the country are equally devastating. The economic black hole, triggered by closure of thousands of businesses, has seen 3 million actual and potential jobs lost between 2010 and 2025¹. Such drastic collapse in a once-productive society has meant that unemployment rates shot up substantially. Unemployment rates surged from 14.9% in 2011 to 57.7% by late 2014², plunging 90% of the population into poverty³.

Entrepreneurship has provided a glimmer of hope in post-conflict settings. Despite years of political instability, economic isolation, and infrastructural collapse, Syrian entrepreneurs have demonstrated remarkable agility and ingenuity, both within the country and in countries they fled to. This report captures the evolving landscape of Syria's startup ecosystem, highlighting the challenges, opportunities, and transformative potential of entrepreneurship in rebuilding the nation and actionable insights aimed at policymakers, international organizations, and investors who share the vision of a rejuvenated Syria.

By documenting this critical moment, we aim to not only shed light on the progress being made but also inspire collective efforts to nurture an inclusive and thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem in Syria—a vital step toward a stable, prosperous future.

THE ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN REBUILDING SYRIA

Entrepreneurship is the process of identifying opportunities, developing innovative solutions, and building ventures to address unmet needs, create value, and drive economic growth. It involves taking calculated risks, mobilizing resources, and navigating uncertainties to bring ideas to life.

As proven time and again, entrepreneurship is a transformative force in post-conflict recovery, addressing critical economic, social, and developmental challenges. It provides a foundation for rebuilding societies, offering economic opportunities, fostering innovation, and creating solutions to local challenges. In fragile and post-conflict settings, entrepreneurship promotes resilience, empowers communities, and builds the framework for long-term stability and growth.

How entrepreneurship can support Syria? It has happened elsewhere.

Job Creation and Income Generation: Entrepreneurship stimulates local economies by creating employment opportunities and enabling individuals to generate sustainable incomes. This reduces dependency on aid and accelerates recovery efforts.

- **In Rwanda,** startup small and medium enterprises (SMEs) played a pivotal role in reducing unemployment after the 1994 genocide. SMEs now contribute more than 41% of Rwanda's GDP and employ over 80% of the workforce.⁴

Economic Growth and Stability: Entrepreneurs drive economic growth by starting new businesses, increasing production, and contributing to GDP.

- **In Bosnia and Herzegovina,** entrepreneurship contributes nearly 60% of GDP and 67% of employment post-conflict, aiding economic stabilization.⁵

Promoting Social Cohesion: Entrepreneurship encourages collaboration across diverse communities, reducing tensions and fostering peace. It empowers marginalized groups, such as women and youth, to participate in rebuilding efforts.

- **In Liberia,** women-led businesses increased by 25% between 2008 and 2016, fostering economic independence and contributing to peacebuilding efforts in communities.⁶

Building Resilience in Crisis: Entrepreneurship enables communities to adapt to ongoing challenges, building economic and social resilience even in unstable conditions.

- **In Afghanistan,** entrepreneurship initiatives helped rural communities create local markets and sustain livelihoods despite ongoing instability, employing over 50,000 individuals in agriculture-related startups by 2020.⁷

Leveraging Diaspora Contributions: Diaspora communities contribute capital, mentorship, and expertise to post-conflict entrepreneurship, bridging resource gaps and fostering innovation.

- **In Kosovo,** the diaspora community invested over \$500 million into local businesses between 2000 and 2010, spurring economic recovery and innovation.⁸

UNDERSTANDING SYRIA'S STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

The startup ecosystem in Syria remains largely underdeveloped, under-researched and without sufficient support. Like many other countries that have emerged from wars, Syria's economy is weighed down by unprecedented unemployment rate, soaring inflation and decimated or completely absent technological infrastructure.

The past decade has seen virtually no action taken toward mitigating the impact of sanctions or introducing any economic reforms. Therefore, the startup ecosystem was to be shaped by individual attempts to create a stream of income as a way to survive the economic hardship, or by aid-funded small businesses.

Syria's startup ecosystem is a hub of untapped potential, with most ventures under three years old, showcasing a dynamic, early-stage market. Despite challenges, Syrians are tech-savvy and innovative, driving growth in app-based platform. Beyond startups, SMEs span diverse sectors like food and beverage, handicrafts, mobile repairs, and solar panel installation, reflecting the resilience and adaptability of Syrian entrepreneurs.

Syrian entrepreneurs can promote positive change and address the social, economic and commercial challenges that will exist in the new Syria era. Economic recovery is a complex process that involves ventures of different, and all, sizes. Entrepreneurship plays a key role in introducing new ideas, generating new jobs, and helping local populations make the journey back to recovery.

Despite years of conflict and immense challenges, Syria's startup ecosystem is demonstrating resilience and innovation. The number of people who consider entrepreneurship to be 'extremely important' soared from 26% in 2015 to 80.5% in 2024.

Today, over 200 startups operate within the country but only a dozen have reached growth stage. Creativity is demonstrable in sectors such as food delivery, fintech, e-commerce, and digital health.⁹

However, significant challenges persist. Businesses face barriers such as limited access to venture capital, a lack of robust digital and physical infrastructure, and complex regulatory hurdles that impede business growth. Yet, these obstacles have not dampened the entrepreneurial spirit.

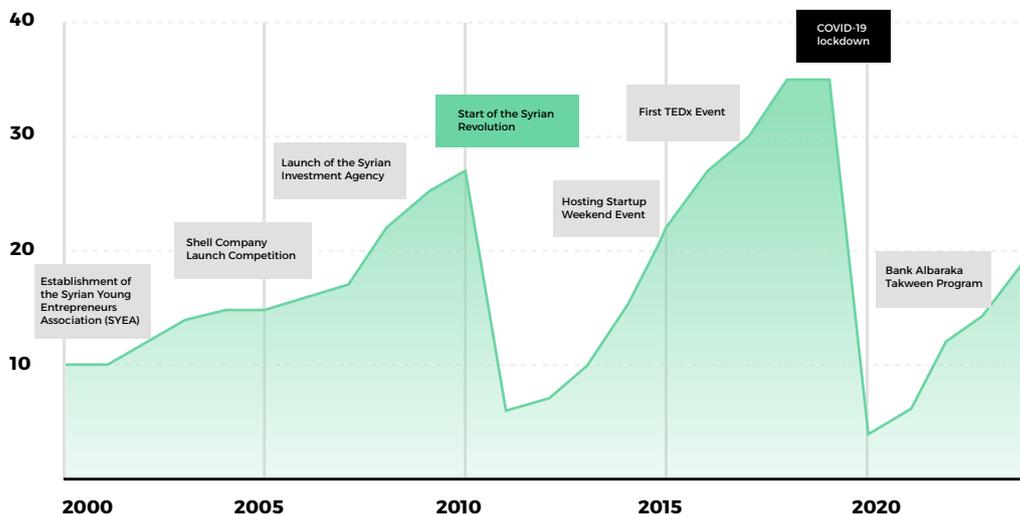
This certainly needs to happen in the right regulatory environment and technical support. Syrian entrepreneurs, whether those already embedded in the market or recent and future returnees, can together form a knowledge sharing community and learn from each others' experience of the last decade. This collective knowledge will drive learning and improve market performance in the longer term.

TIMELINE OF THE MAIN ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITIES

Syria's entrepreneurial ecosystem has experienced a turbulent journey marked by periods of growth, stagnation, and resilience. Before the conflict erupted in 2011, the ecosystem was beginning to take shape with significant milestones such as the establishment of the Syrian Young Entrepreneurs Association (SYEA) in 2001, one of the first NGOs dedicated to building entrepreneurial capacity, and the launch of the Syrian Investment Agency in 2007. These were followed by the Competition Law and Antitrust Act in 2008 and the creation of the Syrian Market Stocks in 2009, signaling a budding environment for innovation and startup growth. However, this momentum was abruptly halted as the conflict led to a decline in business activity, the displacement of entrepreneurial talent, and the collapse of key infrastructure.

A slow recovery began in 2014 with grassroots initiatives like Startup Weekend Damascus, TEDx events, and workshops aimed at reigniting entrepreneurial activity. Cross-border support, such as Jusoor's Startup Bootcamps in Beirut, further energized local founders and provided them with critical resources. Post-2016, programs like Albarka Startup Program, Aga Khan Foundation initiatives, and UNDP-led projects have played a role in supporting Syria's startup ecosystem. A number of co-working spaces and innovation hubs have opened after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Number of Entrepreneurial Support Organizations and Communities in Syria (2000 - 2025).



Source: Data Collected for Startup Syria Report, 2025

Syrian startup support extends beyond the country's borders through the efforts of community-driven initiatives and diaspora organizations. Programs such as Jusoor, Atta, and SPARK address the needs of Syrian entrepreneurs by offering training programs and, in some cases, providing small grants to help startups develop prototypes and launch ventures. Regional events and networking platforms have further connected Syrian entrepreneurs to the global startup ecosystem. For example, the Syrian International Business Association (SIBA) brings together Syrian business leaders worldwide to foster collaboration and mobilize investments. Additionally, grassroots initiatives empower women entrepreneurs and provide tailored mentorship for young founders.

ECOSYSTEM MAPPING: KEY INSIGHTS INTO THE SYRIAN STARTUP LANDSCAPE

A comprehensive desk analysis of the Syrian startup ecosystem reveals an ecosystem characterized by vibrant activity in early-stage entrepreneurial support but notable gaps in scaling resources and collaborative opportunities.

1. Idea Stage Support Dominance: Local organizations primarily focus on supporting ideation to pre-seed stage entrepreneurs through training programs, competitions and startup-centric services.

2. Skills Development as a Core Component: A significant portion of the ecosystem’s efforts is devoted to learning activities, equipping individuals with entrepreneurial and technical skills.

3. Limited Support for Scaling Startups: While the ecosystem is active in nurturing very early-stage ventures, almost no resources are available for startups looking to scale beyond the growth stage.

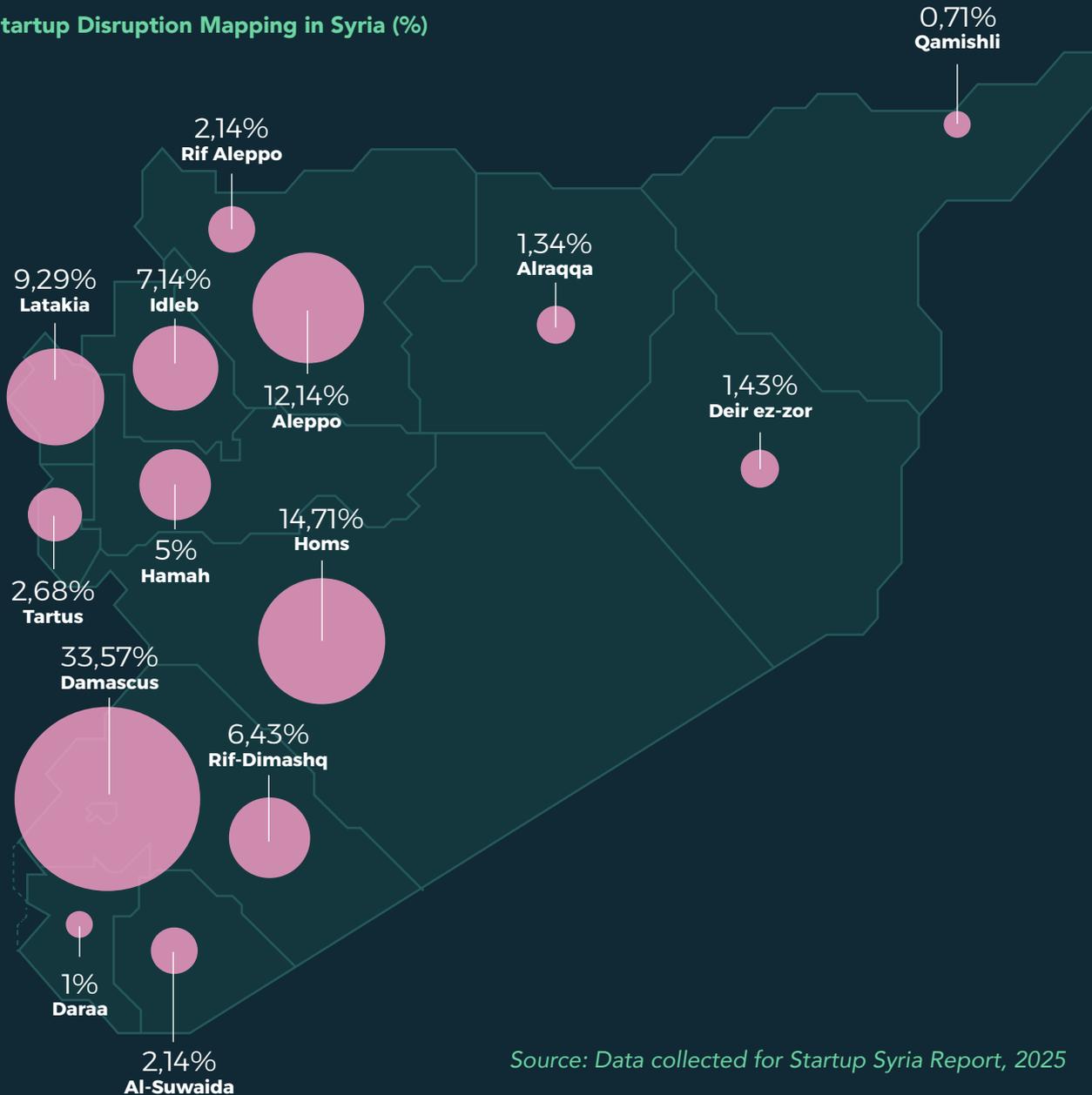
4. NGO and Charity-Driven Support: Over 90% of the organizations counted in the ecosystem operate as NGOs or charity-driven initiatives. These organizations primarily focus only occasional on entrepreneurship programs. There is a significant lack of private-sector-driven startup support organizations, limiting the potential for market-driven innovation and long-term sustainability in the ecosystem.

Category	Key Focus Areas	Examples of Organizations	Gaps Identified
Training and Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beginner knowledge sharing events. - Mentorship for early-stage startups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jusoor - Atta - UNDP Startup Bootcamps - Sanad Lunch Up Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited training for scaling startups - Few advanced technical programs
Competitions and Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizing hackathons - Pitch competitions - Networking events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Takween - Startup Marathon - Foursa - Tamyoz - Syrian Forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited follow-up support for participants
Micro Funding and Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offering small grants - Supporting prototype development and early-stage ventures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scale Up Program by Sanad and Aga Khan Foundation - Albarka Startup Program (Takwin) - Siraj Financial Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide grants no investment - Lack of private sector engagement
Community Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empowering marginalized groups and fostering inclusivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TEDx - Startup Weekend - Syrian Women on Tech - Syria Entrepreneurs Union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficient inclusivity in terms of geographic coverage; rural areas are largely underserved
Networking Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building networks of Syrian businessmen and women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Syrian Youth Entrepreneurship Associate - Syrian International Business Association (SIBA) - Digital Syria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - focus on fostering collaborations within traditional sectors - Few opportunities exist for early-stage entrepreneurs

Damascus remains the main hub for startups, with a third based in the capital, followed by Homs and Aleppo. The distribution of Syrian startups shows a healthy level of geographical diversity. While more startups are centered in the capital than elsewhere, there is potential to tailor new ideas according to the needs of local communities.

The majority of entrepreneurial activities are concentrated in urban centers like Damascus, Aleppo and Latakia. Rural areas remain underserved, highlighting the need for more inclusive programs that reach diverse geographic regions.

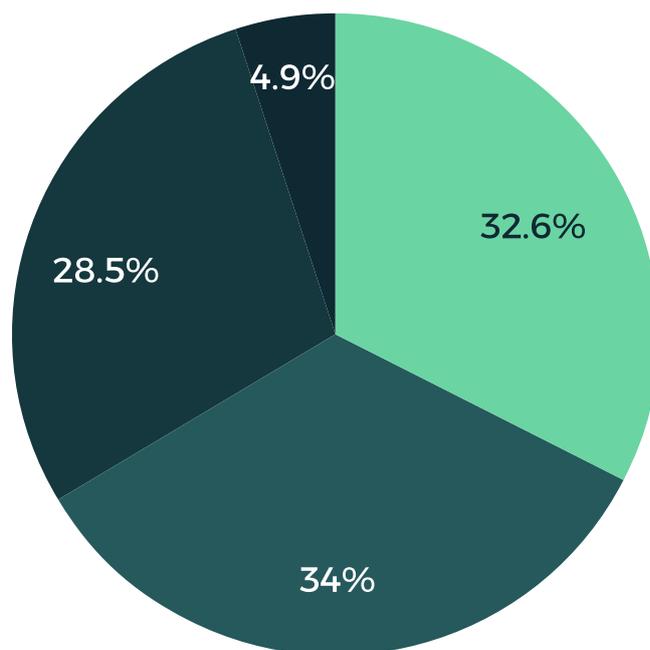
Startup Disruption Mapping in Syria (%)



Source: Data collected for Startup Syria Report, 2025

The Distribution of Syrian Business by The Business Type

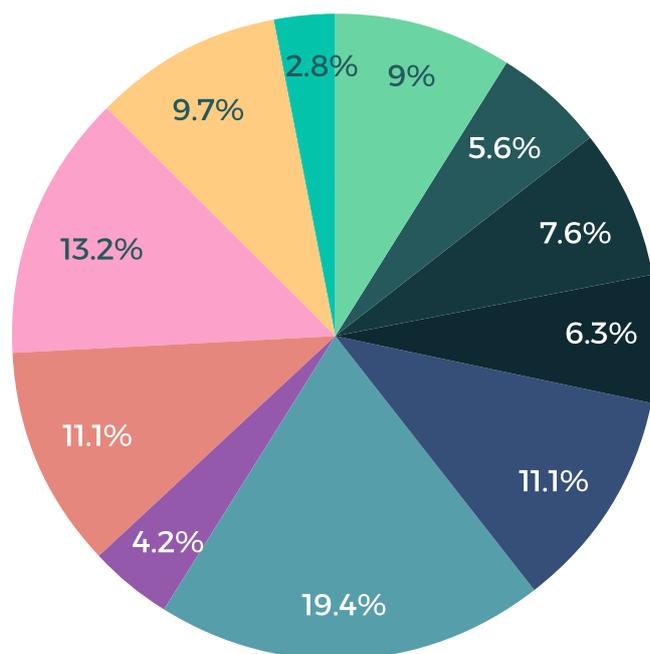
- Startup
- Small and Medium Size Business
- Home-Based Business
- Large Enterprises



Source: Data Collected for The Report, 2025

The Distribution of Syrian Business by Industries

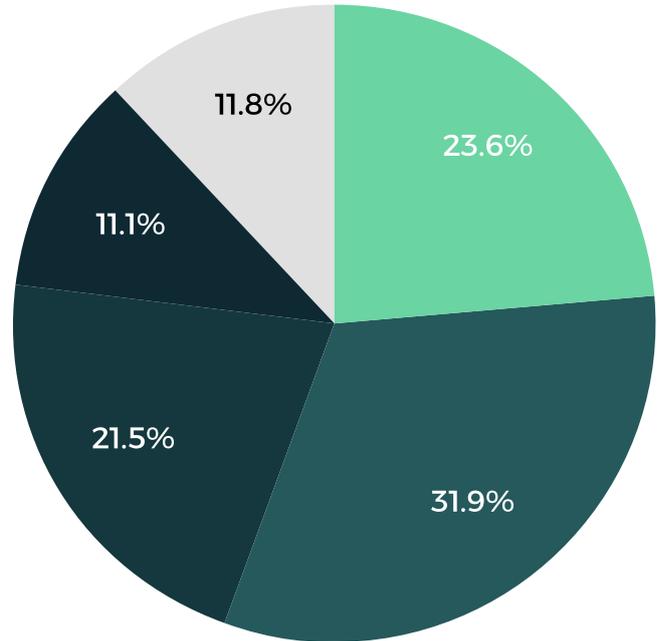
- E-marketing
- Health Tech
- Creative Industries
- Commerce and Trade
- Services
- Tech
- Agretech
- Others
- Ed-tech
- Industrial and Manufacturing
- Social Impact Organization



Source: Data Collected for The Report, 2025

The Distribution of Syrian Business by The Business Stage

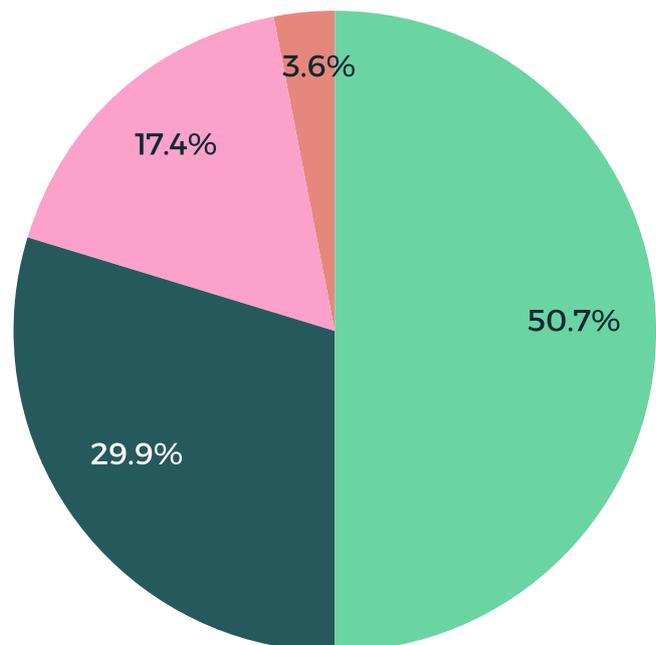
- Pre-Seed Stage
- Idea Stage
- Seed Stage
- Growth and Establishment Stage
- Expansion Stage



Source: Data Collected for The Report, 2025

The Distribution of Syrian Business by Age of Business Owner

- 25 - 35
- 19 - 24
- 36 - 65
- 14 - 18



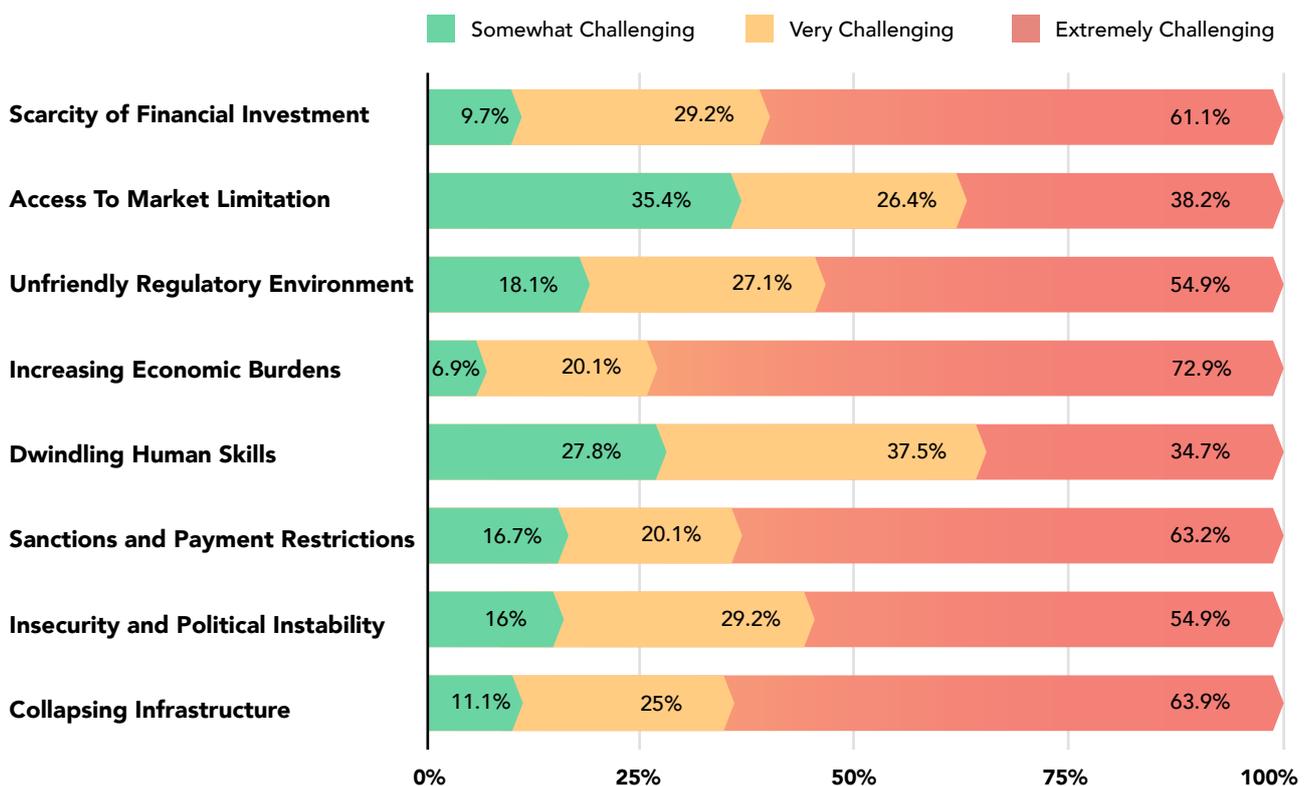
Source: Data Collected for The Report, 2025

CHALLENGES FACING SYRIAN FOUNDERS

Identifying the key challenges faced by Syrian startups is crucial for understanding the underlying dynamics of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. This process can help shed light on both the strengths that can be leveraged and the weaknesses that need to be addressed. Overcoming these barriers is not just about enabling business success but also about contributing to Syria's broader economic recovery and long-term stability.

- **Scarcity of Financial Investment:** Access to funding remains limited, with scarce venture capital and reliance on small grants.
- **Increasing Economic Burdens:** Low purchasing power among consumers restricts market demand for products and services.
- **Access to Market Limitations:** Barriers such as market access restriction preventing expanding operations and reaching broader markets.
- **Unfriendly Regulatory Environment:** Complex and unclear regulations hinder business registration and operations.
- **Dwindling Human Skills:** Gaps in advanced entrepreneurial and technical skills limit startup capacity and innovation.
- **Sanctions and Payment Restrictions:** International sanctions create barriers to importing technology, goods, and accessing global markets.
- **Insecurity and Political Instability:** Persistent instability discourages investment and creates operational risks for startups.
- **Collapsing Infrastructure:** Limited access to reliable electricity, internet, and other essential infrastructure impedes business growth.

The Average Distribution of Top Business Challenges Faced by Syrian Entrepreneurs



Source: Data Collected for Startup Syria Report, 2025

INCREASING ECONOMIC BURDENS: THE TOP CHALLENGE FOR SYRIAN FOUNDERS

Economic instability stands as the most pressing challenge for Syrian startups, with 73% of founders identifying it as extremely challenging in 2025, compared to only 15.2% in 2015. This dramatic rise reflects the deteriorating financial conditions within the country, exacerbated by prolonged conflict and systemic economic decline.

Prolonged Economic Downfall

While some challenges, such as lifting sanctions or increasing startup investments, may be sought to address the crisis in the short- to mid-term, improving the economic situation for the broader customer base will likely take significantly longer. Without stronger purchasing power among consumers, businesses face difficulties in scaling and sustaining operations.

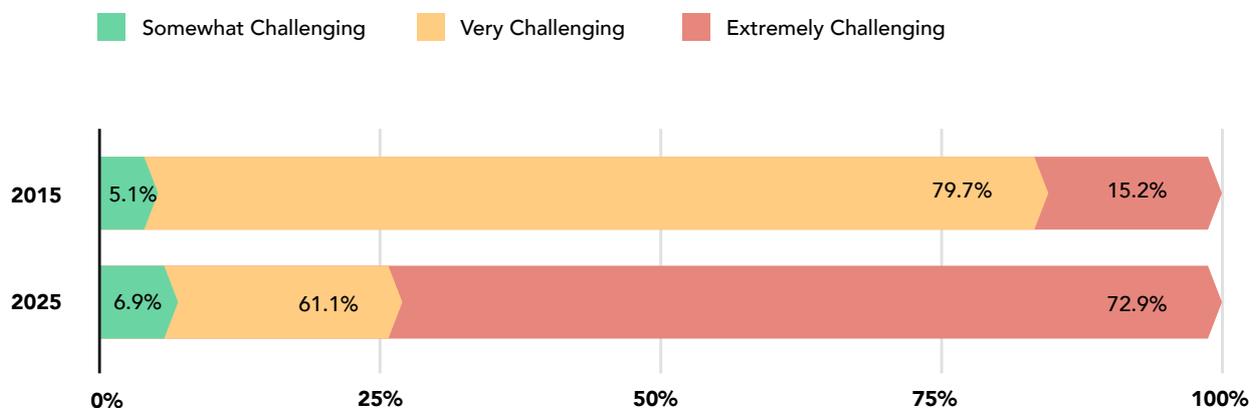
In Syria, many businesses struggle to establish profitable revenue models. A large portion of businesses face hurdles in building user bases and effectively marketing their brands to targeted customers. This challenge is compounded by limited consumer trust and financial capacity, making it difficult for business to convert users into paying customers.

Consumer Behavior and Market Realities

The typical tech startup customer in Syria represents a significant challenge for businesses. Limited internet penetration, cultural hesitancy toward digital adoption, and unfamiliarity with app-based services like delivery, e-commerce, or online payments restrict market expansion. Moreover, there is widespread skepticism about adopting new technologies for everyday transactions.

We surveyed over 200 people randomly on the street on Damascus and Aleppo to assess people's willingness to adopt startup solutions, asking them to rate their likelihood of using various startup services (e.g., delivery apps, ride-hailing, and e-commerce platforms) on a scale of 1-10. The results showed an average score of 4.2, indicating a need for significant behavioral shifts to support broader market adoption.¹¹

The Average Distribution of Economic Burdens Challenge Faced by Entrepreneurs in Syria: A Comparative Analysis (2015 vs. 2025)



Source: Data Collected for Startup Syria Report, 2025

To address these economic burdens, targeted interventions are needed:

- 1. Consumer Education and Trust Building:** Initiatives to familiarize consumers with digital platforms and demonstrate their benefits could help drive adoption.
- 2. Subsidies and Incentives:** Providing subsidies for startups targeting underserved markets could bridge the gap in purchasing power and spur consumer engagement.
- 3. Local Partnerships:** Collaborations with established businesses and community organizations can help startups reach wider audiences and build trust.
- 4. Gradual Digital Transformation:** Introducing hybrid models that combine cash transactions with digital systems could ease the transition to a more digitized economy.

SCARCITY OF FINANCIAL INVESTMENT: A BARRIER TO GROWTH

The scarcity of financial investment remains one of the most significant challenges facing Syrian entrepreneurs. Startups and small businesses alike struggle to secure the funding necessary for development, scaling, and sustainability. This financial gap is particularly critical in a post-conflict context, where traditional sources of investment are limited, and economic instability continues to discourage risk-taking.

Syrian entrepreneurs primarily rely on personal savings, family contributions, and small grants to launch their ventures. However, these funding mechanisms are often insufficient to support growth beyond the early stages. Access to venture capital, angel investment, and other private-sector funding streams is almost nonexistent due to:

Lack of Angel Investors and Investment Education: Many local high-net-worth individuals and family offices lack the knowledge and understanding of startup investment dynamics including risk tolerance, long-term returns, and the value of supporting early-stage businesses.

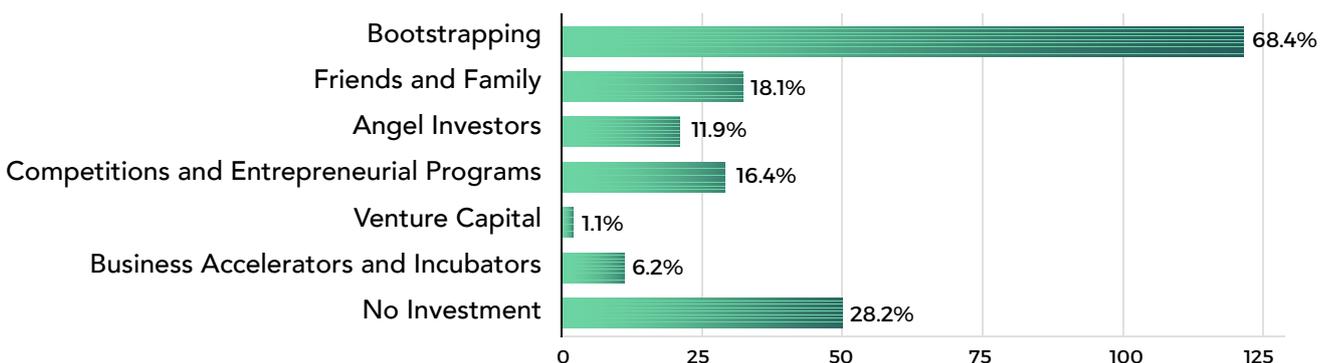
Sanctions: International sanctions severely limit foreign investment and restrict access to global financial markets, cutting off a vital source of funding for Syrian entrepreneurs.

Economic Uncertainty: The unstable economic environment deters local and regional investors from engaging in high-risk startup opportunities, further reducing the available capital for entrepreneurs.

Underdeveloped Banking and Financial Systems: The local financial system fails to provide accessible credit lines or business loans, making it challenging for startups to secure the working capital needed to grow.

The Syrian diaspora represents a significant yet underutilized resource for startups. Diaspora members can provide essential capital, mentorship, and market connections to bridge gaps in the local ecosystem. Many Syrian professionals abroad have gained valuable experience in competitive international markets, offering a wealth of knowledge and best practices that have the potential to transform local startups. Developing a robust strategy to engage the diaspora can help address funding gaps, facilitate knowledge transfer, and establish pathways for scalable growth. Building trust and aligning incentives with diaspora members are critical steps toward fostering meaningful collaboration and maximizing their impact on Syria's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The Distribution of Syrian Business by Source of Funding



Source: Data Collected for Startup Syria Report, 2025

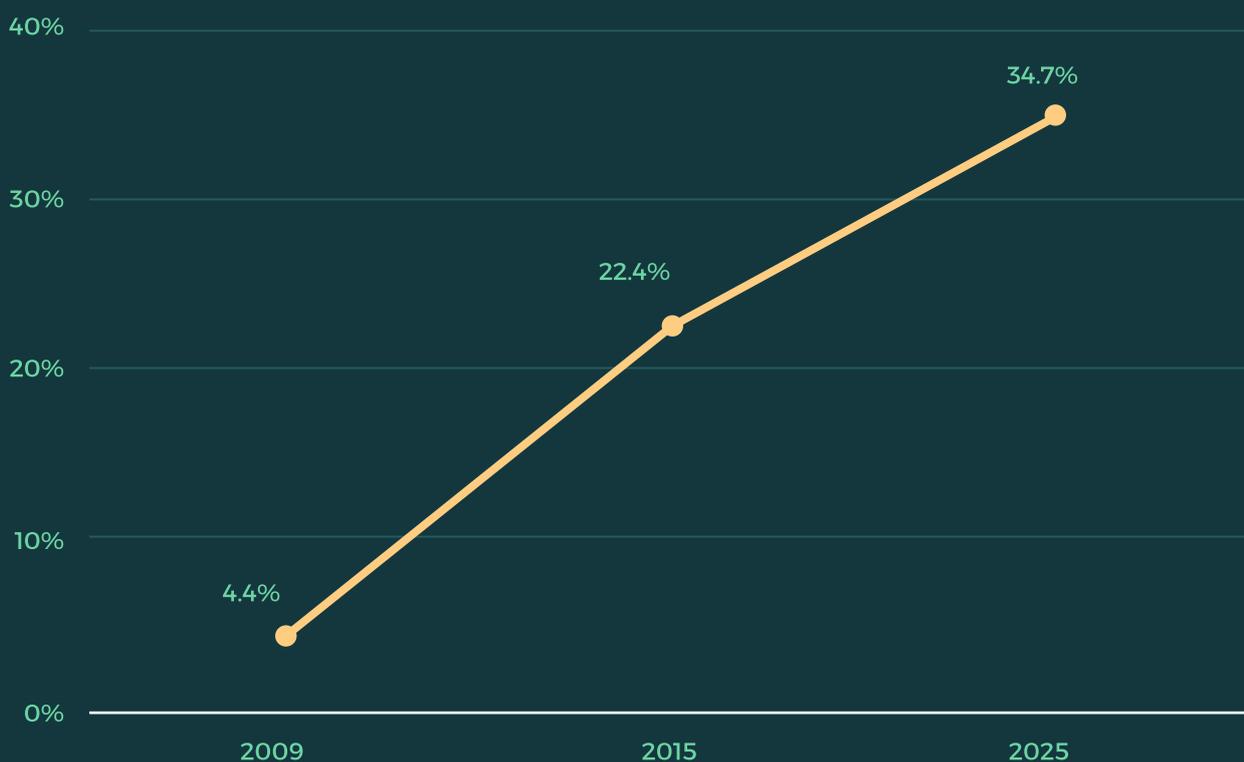
WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SYRIA'S STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

Female participation in Syria's startup ecosystem has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past two decades. In 2025, women represent 34.7% of entrepreneurs—a significant rise from 22.4% in 2015¹⁰ and a dramatic increase from just 4.4% in 2009, as reported by the Syrian National Report for Entrepreneurship.¹² Regions in Syria have different participation rate; in North West Syria for example, only 11% of ventures are led by female founders, while in Homs its 39%.

This growth reflects the shifting dynamics of Syrian society, where the conflict has pushed women into roles traditionally dominated by men. With many men forced to flee, join armed groups, or face injury and death, women have stepped up as primary providers, using entrepreneurship as a means to support their families and communities.

Female entrepreneurs have made notable strides in sectors like handicrafts, online retail, and food production, often using platforms like Facebook to sell goods. However, societal norms and structural barriers limit many women to small-scale ventures with little growth potential. Challenges such as limited access to funding, mentorship, and networks, combined with the dual burden of managing households and businesses, further constrain their progress. Safety and mobility concerns, especially in rural areas, add to these difficulties, hindering women's full participation in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

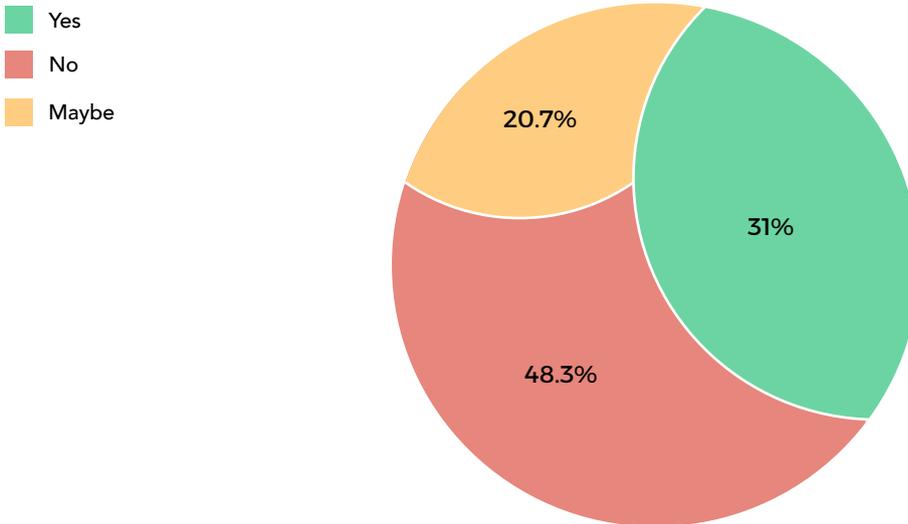
Timeline of Syrian Female-Owned Businesses In The Country



Source: Data Collected for Startup Syria Report, 2025

Despite these challenges, the economic participation of women is essential for Syria's recovery. Post-conflict economy studies emphasize the critical role of women, especially as they are often the sole survivors responsible for supporting their families and rebuilding communities. Women's incomes are more likely to be reinvested in their households, covering essential expenses such as tuition fees and healthcare, which benefits the broader social fabric. Women's trusted roles in communities, due to their lack of involvement in violent acts during conflict, further position them as key agents of social cohesion and stability.

The Responses from Women Regarding Special Challenges Encountered in the Syrian Labor Market:



Source: Data Collected for Startup Syria Report, 2025

A Resilient, Future-Focused Youth Base

We engaged with young Syrian and aspiring entrepreneurs, both within the country and abroad, to understand their vision for rebuilding their future and their nation. Their responses were inspiring: a strong sense of resilience, a determination to innovate, and a deep commitment to creating opportunities despite the challenges of conflict. Syria's young population, with its growing digital literacy and entrepreneurial mindset, sees immense potential in leveraging technology and creative solutions to drive recovery. With a youthful population eager to contribute and a collective desire to rebuild, Syria holds the key ingredients for a revitalized startup ecosystem and a brighter future.

NOTABLE STARTUPS IN SYRIA'S ECOSYSTEM

These startups showcase the resilience and innovation of Syrian entrepreneurs, addressing diverse needs across technology, e-commerce, transportation, and financial services:

Startup Name	Sector	Description
 BeeOrder	Food Delivery	A leading food ordering platform connecting users with local restaurants for seamless delivery.
 Tajir.Store	E-Commerce Automation	A platform automating operations for online stores, tailored to meet the needs of Syrian businesses.
 YallaGo	Ride-Hailing	A ride-hailing app providing convenient and efficient transportation services in urban areas.
 EIToob	E-Commerce	An online store offering a wide range of products with reliable delivery services.
 LiBeirut	Transportation	A travel app allowing users to book taxi rides between Damascus and Beirut, simplifying cross-border travel.
 Harbuk	E-Commerce	An online shopping platform delivering products directly to customers' homes across Syria.
 Cashii	Fintech	An electronic wallet consolidating financial needs, making digital payments and transactions simple.
 Quizat	EdTech	A gamified learning platform with automated quizzes to help users study and compete with peers.
 Fathee the Robot	EdTech / Hardware	An ed-tech robot enhancing interactive learning experiences for students.
 Wareed	HealthTech	A healthcare app connecting users with the best doctors, streamlining their healthcare journeys.
 JumlaTech	B2B Fintech	Syria's first eB2B platform integrating FMCG and fintech solutions for traditional grocery retailers.
 Etbaa'li	Logistics	A platform where you can place printing orders online and have them delivered straight to your doorstep.
 Rocheta	HealthTech	A service that connects you to nearby pharmacies, delivering your medication straight to your door.

FORECASTING THE FUTURE OF SYRIA'S STARTUPS

While Syria goes through its long rebirth in all aspects of life, the future of the startup ecosystem is poised for almost instant transformation, with several key trends likely to shape the industry:

- 1. The return of experienced founders**, particularly from the diaspora, is expected to inject global expertise and networks into the ecosystem. Many of these entrepreneurs will aim to establish new ventures or relocate parts of their operations back to Syria, leveraging both local opportunities and cost advantages.
- 2. Startups will increasingly focus on digital transformation**, driven by the rising demand for IT services, fintech solutions, and e-commerce platforms tailored to local challenges. Social impact startups are also anticipated to grow, addressing critical gaps in sectors like healthcare, education, and renewable energy, while creating sustainable business models that contribute to community rebuilding.
- 3. Rising global-minded startups**. The current startups are very much locally-focused. The ecosystem will likely see greater integration with regional markets, as startups collaborate with neighboring countries to expand their reach and the market expects to see many more startups that have a MENA wide focus from the beginning, with bold global ambitions in their future.
- 4. The growth of green and renewable energy startups** is another promising possibility, with ventures focusing on solar energy and sustainable agriculture to address pressing environmental and energy needs.
- 5. Support structures such as accelerators, incubators, and bootcamps** are expected to expand, driven by international and local partnerships. This will enable increased access to early-stage funding and resources. Meanwhile, hybrid business models that combine traditional operations with digital platforms will gain traction, offering scalable solutions adapted to Syria's unique challenges.
- 6. Development of local supply chains**, given the disruption to imports and reliance on external goods, Syria will likely see a rise in startups focused on local manufacturing and supply chain solutions. Entrepreneurs will target industries such as food production, construction materials, and consumer goods, building localized ecosystems that reduce dependency on imports and create new job opportunities.
- 7. As Syria rebuilds, the demand for e-government solutions will grow significantly**. Startups will develop platforms for streamlining government services, such as e-payment gateways, and public sector management tools. Business-to-Government (B2G) startups will also emerge, offering tailored solutions to address inefficiencies in areas like infrastructure management, public health, and digital transformation of government services.

THE ROLE OF SYRIA IN THE REGIONAL STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

Despite the challenges posed by years of conflict, Syria's startup ecosystem continues to influence and contribute to the regional entrepreneurial landscape. Syrian entrepreneurs, both within the country and in exile, have emerged as key players in driving innovation and fostering economic connectivity across the Middle East and beyond. Below is an analysis of Syria's role, divided into categories:

1. Tech Skilled Talent

Syria's higher education system includes several public and private universities offering programs in engineering, computer science, and related fields. For instance, Damascus University, the country's oldest and largest university, had over 5,000 students enrolled in 2024 in technical sectors.¹³

This growing pool of technically skilled graduates and self-taught professionals has become a key asset to the regional and global startup ecosystems. Many Syrian engineers, developers, and designers are contributing to startups in the Gulf, Europe, East Asia and North America, working remotely or relocating to these regions.

A region with a steady supply of educated professionals, particularly in technology, engineering, and business, becomes a natural magnet for companies seeking high-quality yet cost-effective labor. When combined with programs that upskill the workforce—such as coding bootcamps, tech accelerators, or specialized training initiatives—this talent pool becomes even more attractive to startups aiming to build operational hubs.

2. Supportive Operation Hub

Startups, often operating on tight budgets, can benefit significantly from regions where salaries are competitive but allow employees to maintain a good quality of life. Lower costs for housing, utilities, and transportation mean startups can recruit and retain talent. This affordability extends to operational expenses, including office spaces, utilities, and internet infrastructure, reducing the overall burn rate for early-stage ventures.

For startups, the combination of available talent and reduced operational costs enables strategic advantages. It allows companies to centralize back-office functions such as customer support, operations, and tech development, streamlining processes and improving efficiency. A cost-effective ecosystem also provides startups with the flexibility to focus resources on innovation and growth, extending their financial runway and accelerating scalability.

THE RETURN OF REFUGEE FOUNDERS: A CATALYST FOR SYRIA'S REBUILDING

The potential return of refugee founders marks a pivotal opportunity in Syria's journey toward recovery, offering both immediate and long-term benefits for the country's entrepreneurial ecosystem. These founders, having gained invaluable experience abroad, bring not only skills and networks but also the resilience and resourcefulness honed by navigating startup environments under challenging circumstances.

Refugees in unfriendly startup environments are likely to return to Syria, where better opportunities, supported by incentives and regional potential, may exist. Meanwhile, those in stronger ecosystems may establish back offices or branches, leveraging global resources and Syria's cost advantages to drive economic recovery and integrate into global markets.

During their time abroad, Syrian refugee founders have overcome significant barriers, often launching successful startups in diverse industries such as technology, healthcare, and education. These founders have honed their skills in competitive global markets, gained exposure to cutting-edge innovations, and cultivated relationships with international investors and partners. Their return introduces a wealth of knowledge and expertise that can boost Syria's nascent post-conflict startup ecosystem.

Key Drivers for Return or Engagement

The decision for refugee founders to return or engage with Syria's ecosystem depends on several critical factors, including:

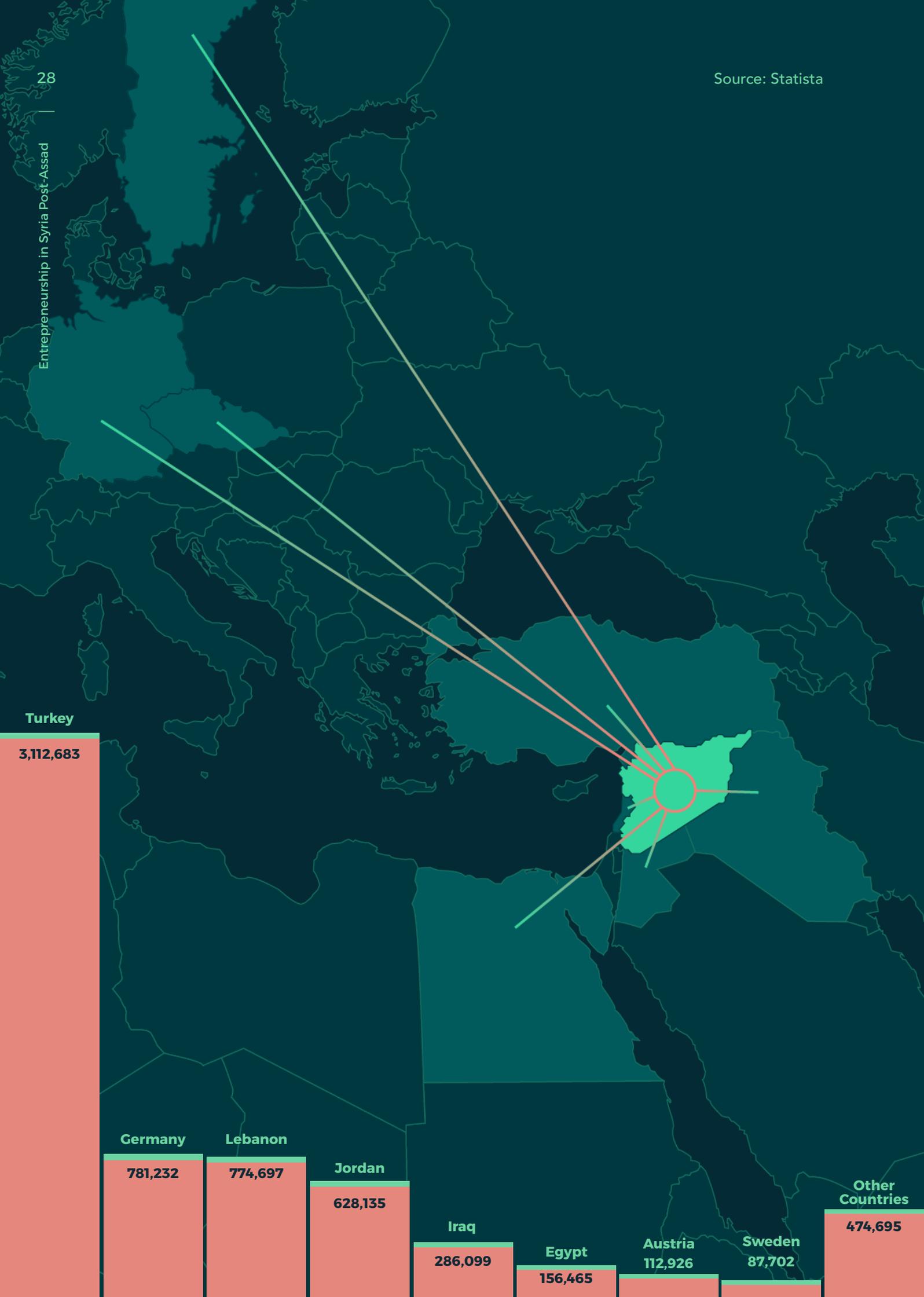
- **Stability and Security:** A stable environment with predictable political and economic conditions is essential for luring entrepreneurs back.
- **State Policy:** Measures that incentivize business relocation, such as tax breaks, streamlined registration processes, and overhauled infrastructure, will be conducive to businesses considering returning.
- **Market Opportunities:** Syria's recovering market offers significant potential for startups addressing local challenges in healthcare, education, renewable energy, and agriculture.

Barriers to Overcome

While the potential is immense, there are challenges that must be addressed to facilitate the return of refugee founders:

- **Unfavorable Regulatory Environment:** Bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of transparent processes remain deterrents for founders looking to operate in Syria.
- **Limited Ecosystem Support:** Access to venture capital, accelerators, and mentorship has yet to develop in the local market.
- **Fragile Infrastructure:** Basic infrastructure, including reliable internet, electricity, and logistics, must be strengthened to support business operations.

Entrepreneurship in Syria Post-Assad



Turkey

3,112,683

Germany

781,232

Lebanon

774,697

Jordan

628,135

Iraq

286,099

Egypt

156,465

Austria

112,926

Sweden

87,702

Other Countries

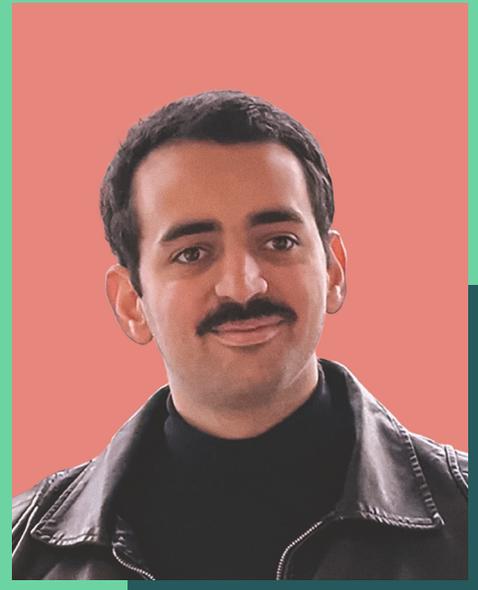
474,695

DEFYING ODDS: SYRIAN FOUNDERS WHO MADE IT GLOBALLY

Syrian founders have consistently proven their ability to achieve remarkable success when given access to supportive ecosystems and opportunities abroad. Their resilience, creativity, and determination have led to the establishment of thriving businesses across various industries, ranging from technology to healthcare and beyond. These ventures serve as a testament to the potential of Syrian entrepreneurs, emphasizing that with the right resources and environment, they can make a significant impact on regional and global markets. Their success stories underline the critical importance of fostering a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem for Syrian founders.

Hasan Sukkar 11x AI

Hasan founded 11x in the UK in 2022 to transform sales processes through AI-powered automation. The company's flagship product, Alice, is an AI sales development representative that handles lead generation, outreach, and other repetitive tasks. Within two years, the company secured around \$75 in funding. With nearly \$10 million in annual recurring revenue, 11x boasts Brex, DataStax, and Otter among its clients. Hassan's vision for the future is clear: "In two years, we believe that digital workers will be a regular part of how companies around the world operate." Headquartered in San Francisco, 11x is paving the way for widespread adoption of AI-powered sales automation.¹⁴



Amer Baroudi Nsave

Amer was inspired to create Nsave after witnessing his family lose their savings due to hyperinflation. The platform offers offshore accounts in major currencies, helping individuals protect their savings from inflation. In March 2024, Nsave took a significant step forward by raising \$18 million in funding from leading names like Sequoia Capital, TQ Ventures, and Y Combinator. "Our mission is simple," says Amer Baroudi. "Everyone deserves the right to protect their hard-earned money in a safe place, no matter where they are."¹⁵

Noor Shaker Glamorous AI

Noor, a Syrian-born British entrepreneur and computer scientist, co-founded Glamorous AI in 2020 to revolutionize drug discovery using artificial intelligence. The company's AI platform, RosalindAI, addresses challenges in drug development by working effectively with sparse and noisy datasets, offering innovative solutions to accelerate research. In April 2021, Glamorous AI received a £440,000 grant from Innovate UK to fund a groundbreaking project in collaboration with King's College London, focused on developing treatments for Glioblastoma Multiforme. Shaker was named one of the BBC 100 Women in 2019. In November 2021, Glamorous AI was acquired by X-Chem, a leader in DNA-encoded library technology.¹⁶



Omar Shaya MultiOn

Omar founded MultiOn, an AI-powered personal assistant that automates everyday tasks such as managing calendars, emails, and personal finances. Omar leveraged his technical expertise to create a tool that enhances productivity for users around the globe. He has managed to scale MultiOn into a globally recognized platform, attracting users worldwide and securing funding to expand both its team and technology.¹⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REBUILDING SYRIA'S STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

This proposed vision has been prepared with the participation of a large number of Syrian experts, as well as successful startup founders inside and outside the country. The report recommends solutions that can be emphasized to build a robust ecosystem and to solve the current challenges and to foster sustainable growth and inclusivity, Syria's entrepreneurial ecosystem must adopt a comprehensive and strategic approach that addresses systemic challenges while empowering marginalized groups, fostering innovation, and encouraging collaboration. Below are targeted recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SYRIAN POLICYMAKERS

1. Enact Pro-Entrepreneurship Policies

Introduce laws to remove barriers for startups and SMEs, lower registration and operational costs, and tax incentives for early-stage ventures, to create a conducive environment for innovation and investment.

2. Simplify Regulatory Processes

Develop clear, transparent regulatory frameworks to encourage business creation and reduce bureaucratic obstacles, enabling entrepreneurs to focus on innovation and growth.

3. Enhance Ecosystem Infrastructure

Invest in digital and physical infrastructure, including reliable internet access, consistent electricity supply, and affordable coworking spaces. Establish innovation hubs in both urban and rural areas to facilitate resource sharing and collaboration.

4. Invest in Workforce Development

Support initiatives that build technical and entrepreneurial skills, ensuring the local workforce is equipped to meet the demands of a modern startup ecosystem. Promote entrepreneurship within schools and universities by integrating entrepreneurship education into curricula.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS

1. Support Long-Term Programs

Invest in multi-year initiatives rather than short-term projects to ensure lasting impacts on the ecosystem and sustainable development.

2. Encourage Transparency and Accountability

Tie funding to clear metrics, and business progress and regular reporting to guarantee efficient use of resources and equitable outcomes for all stakeholders.

3. Promote Collaboration

Incentivize partnerships between local organizations and international stakeholders to maximize knowledge exchange and broaden impact.

4. Focus on Capacity Building

Invest in training programs for local organizations to strengthen their ability to support entrepreneurs effectively, enhancing their operational capacity and service delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

1. Place Founders at the Center of Ecosystem Development

Organizations should prioritize empowering founders to take a leading role in shaping Syria's startup ecosystem. Supporting founders in creating a roadmap for the ecosystem and implementing it.

2. Promote Socially Inclusive Development

Integrate inclusive strategies into their models and policies, actively engaging under-represented groups such as women, youth, and rural populations. Inclusion plays a vital role in fostering economic participation, preventing violence, and supporting peacebuilding efforts.

3. Encourage Collaboration Among Startup Support Organizations

Organizations should prioritize partnerships over competition, creating networks for shared knowledge, resources, and joint initiatives. A centralized platform for ecosystem mapping can align goals, reduce duplication, and enhance impact.

4. Deepen Understanding of Local Contexts

Prioritize understanding and gaining a clearer picture of the current startup landscape and its unique challenges, these organizations can align their support strategies with the specific needs and realities of local founders. This context-driven approach ensures that resources and interventions are relevant, effective, and impactful.

CONCLUSION

The principal message carried by Syrian entrepreneurs in this report is that, after years of suffering and hardship, they believe in the power of entrepreneurship as the vehicle to transfer Syria into a more prosperous future.

We have to seize the moment and assist entrepreneurs in their endeavors to create businesses that take into consideration the public benefit. With proper upfront support and policies that are fair and available to everyone, entrepreneurs can yield substantial social and economic dividends.

The future of Syria's entrepreneurial ecosystem depends on collective action. We call on investors, policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders to step forward with targeted support and resources to drive meaningful change. Investors can play a pivotal role by allocating funds to early-stage startups, creating dedicated investment vehicles for Syrian entrepreneurs, and mentoring emerging founders. Policymakers must prioritize reducing regulatory barriers, fostering a business-friendly environment, and introducing incentives to attract both local and foreign investments. NGOs and ecosystem enablers should focus on creating mentorship programs, facilitating training initiatives, and offering grants to support startups in their formative stages.

By aligning efforts, we can transform Syria's entrepreneurial landscape into a beacon of resilience and innovation. A thriving startup ecosystem will not only generate economic growth but also serve as a vital pillar for rebuilding the nation's future. Together, we have the opportunity to turn challenges into opportunities and foster a culture of innovation that empowers Syrian entrepreneurs to lead the way toward a brighter tomorrow.

This study provides insights into entrepreneurship in Syria, the challenges it faces, the potential it has and the uncertain future that lies ahead. But there is an urgent need for more research into this, as well as for better policies to encourage contributions. Syrian entrepreneurs have struggled immensely to build their businesses, and it is in everyone's best interests to support them to shape the best future for Syria.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies to analyze the challenges faced by Syrian businesses across different stages of their operations. The study begins with extensive desk research to contextualize the current social and political landscape. This foundation is supplemented by focus group discussions with 20 Syrian entrepreneurs operating within the country and a series of one-on-one interviews were also conducted with Syrian entrepreneurship experts, including representatives from local support organizations, international agencies, policymakers, and researchers.

Additionally, a dedicated online meetup was conducted, gathering over 45 innovation support organizations and local founders from inside and outside the country (via internet conference). This session focused on discussing the role of the entrepreneurial community in building Syria's future, outlining a collective framework to plan stakeholder involvement, and agreeing on a national "Entrepreneurship Rebuilds" agenda for Syria's society and economy.

A structured questionnaire was distributed, gathering 180 responses to establish baseline data on participants' educational backgrounds, ages, geographic distribution, and genders. Data collection occurred between December 15th, 2024 and January 10th, 2025.

The study incorporates detailed interviews with independent experts, business owners, startup founders, venture capitalists, angel investors, academics, and community leaders. These interviews aimed to capture perspectives on the past, present, and future of Syrian entrepreneurship and included recommendations for addressing challenges identified through the survey. Insights from these discussions are integrated into the report. Additional indicators and contextual data enrich the analysis.

This report recognizes certain limitations and does not claim to be exhaustive or statistically representative. The findings are influenced by evolving socio-economic conditions and the fluid realities on the ground in the regions studied. These dynamic factors inherently restrict the ability to offer a definitive analysis of the economic impact of Syrian businesses in both host countries and conflict-affected areas.

Startup Syria does not guarantee the accuracy, completeness, or currency of the data included in this work and does not assume responsibility for any errors, omissions, or discrepancies in the information, or liability with respect to the use of or failure to use the information, methods, processes, or conclusions set forth.

GLOSSARY

Angel Investor: An individual who provides financial backing to startups, typically in exchange for equity ownership.

Early-Stage Funding: Initial capital provided to startups to develop their business models, build prototypes, or launch products.

Ecosystem: A network of interconnected organizations, individuals, and resources that support startups.

Growth Stage: A stage of business development when a startup has established a product-market fit and focuses on scaling operations, increasing revenue, and expanding its market presence.

NGO (Non-Governmental Organization): An organization operating independently of the government, often focused on social or humanitarian initiatives, including startup support programs.

Pre-Seed Stage: The earliest stage of a startup, often involving concept development and initial validation before significant funding is raised.

Seed Funding: Initial investment used to help a startup develop its product, build a team, and validate its business model.

SME (Small and Medium Enterprise): Businesses that maintain revenue, assets, or workforce below a specific threshold, varying by country.

Social Impact Startup: A business focused on addressing social, cultural, or environmental challenges while maintaining profitability.

Startup: A newly established business with high growth potential, focused on innovative products, services, or business models.

Startup Ecosystem Mapping: A visual or analytical representation of the stakeholders, resources, and connections within a specific startup ecosystem.

Venture Capital (VC): A form of private equity financing provided to startups and early-stage companies with high growth potential, typically in exchange for equity.

ABOUT STARTUP SYRIA



Startup Syria is a community-powered initiative founded in 2013 dedicated to supporting founders, startups, and entrepreneurship support organizations working in and for Syria.

We actively engage with both the local Syrian entrepreneurship community and the Syrian diaspora to foster the exchange of knowledge, resources, and expertise. Our mission is to empower Syrian entrepreneurs, nurture the next wave of startups in Syria, and ensure entrepreneurship becomes a cornerstone of the country's economic and policy priorities.

Through our platform, we provide Syrian founders with the tools and networks they need to grow and scale their ventures. We create spaces for dialogue, connect entrepreneurs with mentors and experts, and engage with emerging founders seeking to launch their entrepreneurial journeys. By collaborating with stakeholders across sectors, we aim to integrate entrepreneurship into Syria's broader economic development strategy, recognizing its critical role in shaping resilient and thriving economies.

Over the past few years, Startup Syria has united Syrian founders globally, with meetups in over 10 cities, including Berlin, Cairo, San Francisco, Dubai, Beirut, and Kuala Lumpur. These gatherings have fostered collaboration, inspired innovation, and strengthened ties within the community.

Startup Syria is more than an initiative—it's a movement to empower a generation of Syrian entrepreneurs who are ready to lead the way in rebuilding and redefining their future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ahmad Sufian Bayram

Is an entrepreneur, investor and author. He's General Partner at Blackbox; a Silicon Valley-based platform working to elevate entrepreneurs in fragile places.

Since 2012, he has mentored and guided numerous founders towards success. With a notable tenure at Techstars as EMEA Regional Manager and advisory roles with global entities like SPARK, Jusoor, The Human Safety Net, UNHCR, his influence in the tech ecosystem is significant. Ahmad published "Entrepreneurship In Conflict Zones" and "Entrepreneurship in Exile" to spotlight the transformative might of entrepreneurship amidst challenges.

His outstanding contribution to social entrepreneurship has been acknowledged on several prestigious platforms. He received the 2019 Arab Social Entrepreneurs Award from Her Majesty Queen Silvia of Sweden, a recognition that attests to his impactful work and selected as an Arab Pioneer for the year 2024 by the Arab Center under the patronage of Sheikh Theyab bin Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Sultan Al Neyadi, Minister of Youth in the United Arab Emirates, among others.

Furthermore, his insights and efforts have been featured in esteemed international publications, including The World Economic Forum, Forbes, and The Wall Street Journal. As a compelling speaker, Ahmad has taken center stage at globally recognized venues such as the Palais des Nations (UN), the EU Parliament, Google, and World Bank, inspiring countless individuals with his vision of a more equitable, resilient, and inclusive tech world.

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT SYRIAN STARTUPS

Every individual has the power to contribute to the growth and success of Syrian startups. No matter where you live or the resources you have, your support can make a meaningful difference in helping these businesses thrive and create lasting change.

Join the Startup Syria's Network

Become part of a growing network dedicated to supporting Syrian entrepreneurs. Whether you're an investor, a mentor, or a professional with expertise to share, your participation can help connect startups with opportunities, resources, and partnerships. Together, we can strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem and provide startups with the support they need to succeed.

[CLICK TO JOIN](#)

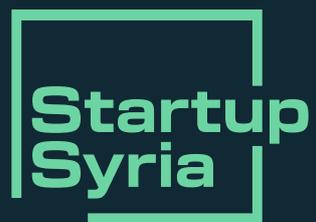
Share the Report

Help spread awareness about Syria's entrepreneurial ecosystem by sharing this report with your network. Sharing this report with colleagues, organizations, or anyone interested in supporting post-conflict economic recovery is a simple yet powerful way to amplify its impact. Let's inspire more people to take action and support Syrian startups.

Every effort counts, and together we can support Syria's entrepreneurial community in rebuilding a brighter future.

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