

## **negotiating entrepreneurship in refugee context**

multi-level analysis of Syrian entrepreneurial activities in urban areas in Lebanon

### abstract

In this thesis, I examine the experience of Syrian refugees in Lebanon in setting up businesses amid precarious and adverse environment. Considering the growing interest in refugee entrepreneurs, this thesis seeks to reveal the empirical realities of refugee entrepreneurship and illustrates the various challenges that arise from navigating complex social, political, and economic barriers to the labor market. Using a qualitative approach in the volatile context of Lebanon, the thesis specifically examines the individual and structural influences on the scope and modality of refugee entrepreneurship. It also highlights the role of intangible resources such as social networks in unlocking opportunities for entrepreneurs in their economic endeavours. Lebanon hosts the largest refugee population per capita in the world. It is also known for its opaque and restrictive environment towards refugees' access to labor market and maintaining legal resident status. Even though the hurdles seem similar for all Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the way they can navigate or overcome these hurdles vary. It all depends on the advantages and/or resources available to them in terms of skills, networks, social backgrounds, and capital. Therefore, I distinguish between different types of Syrian entrepreneurs. With a focus on activities in the informal economy, three categories of entrepreneurs were identified: striving, artisan and established entrepreneurs. I investigate the variables that influence their economic growth and the various strategies followed by the entrepreneurs to maneuver constraints. These three groups have different levels of informality, which affects entrepreneurs unevenly and results in experiencing varied levels of precarity. This thesis challenges the self-reliance discourse and demonstrates that development-oriented approaches aimed at making refugee self-reliance get entangled with local politics towards refugees, and the economic and political systems of the host country.