



7<sup>TH</sup> IGNITE CONFERENCE

jobs  
now!

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spark



IGNITE report 2019

27<sup>th</sup> November | Amsterdam

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our partners:

IKEA Foundation



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**SPARK's 7th annual IGNITE conference on Jobs Now! brought together over 300 participants who are creating jobs for young people in fragile states. The event also celebrated SPARK's 25 year history of working in some of the world's most challenging conflict-affected regions.**

Our key partners - IKEA Foundation, International Finance Corporation and the City of Amsterdam - made IGNITE 2019 possible and reinforced the need for closer collaboration between governments, private sector and non-state actors. The PIE Media, Jusoor, Architects of the Future and the African Tech Roundup brought the conference to life by partnering with us on media outreach, the Startup Roadshow competition, exclusive podcast episodes and illustrations to visualise key workshops.

# IGNITE in numbers

**12**

Workshops

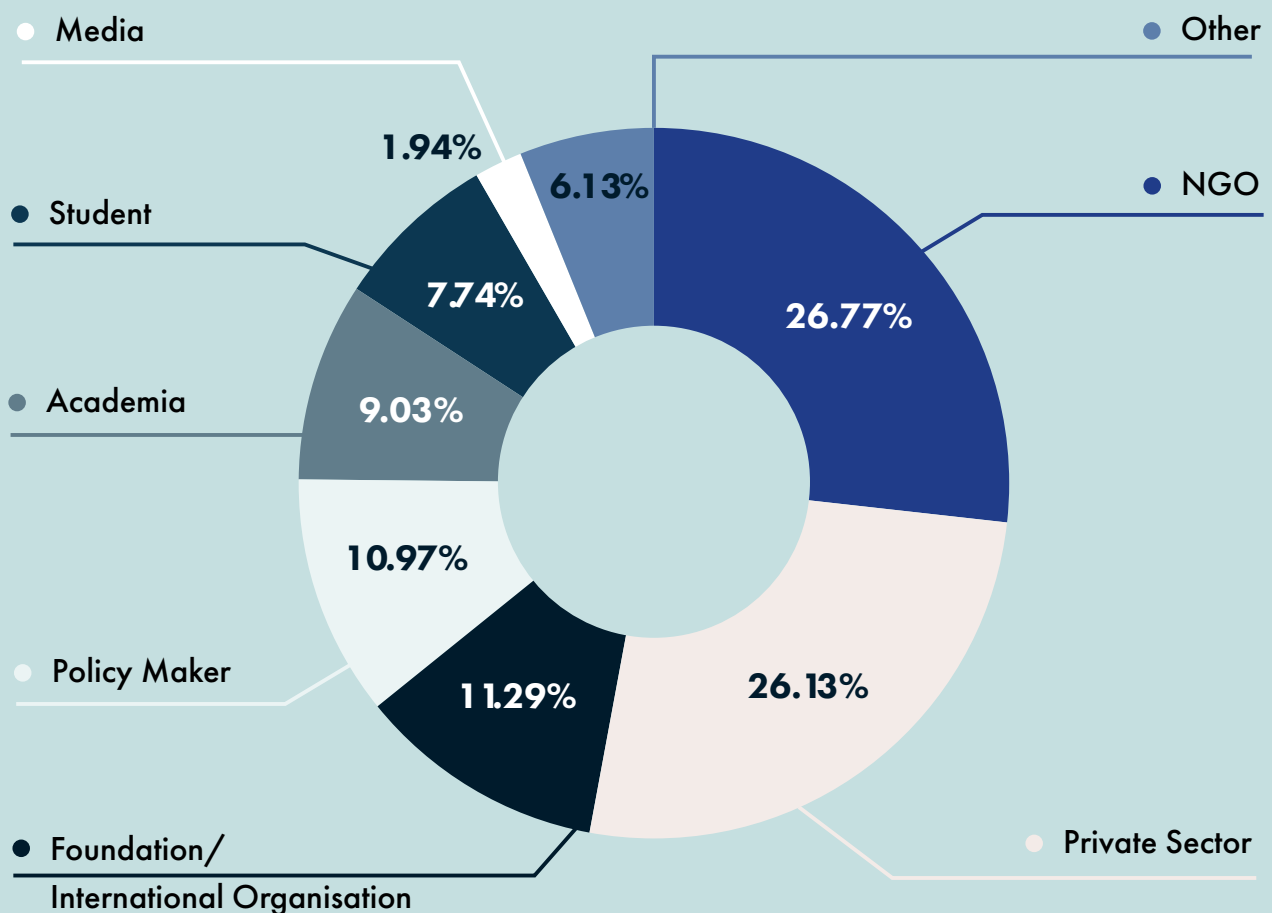
**300**

Attendees

**25+**

Nationalities

Attendees by sector:





# Pathways to Employment

## Types of Partnerships

## Mahmud Johnson: Young Future Leader

SPARK and Branson Scholarships supported Mahmud Johnson in growing his business, J-Palm Liberia. His company creates beauty products from palm oil kernels, a rest product of the palm oil industry. Today, J-Palm has been



### Refugees Supporting Refugees in Europe

David Pearce, the UK chair of Equipping a Changing Workforce Institute, says the Institute has set the ball rolling by government and general organisations and by equipping the UK to cope with the big numbers at stake in a world that is facing a 20% to 30% drop in the high-skilled workforce in advanced economies by 2020. He notes that the Institute has been set up to help the UK to manage the challenges of the 21st century by equipping the workforce to meet the challenges of the future.

# Keynote speakers

A photograph of Per Heggnes, CEO of IKEA Foundation, speaking on a stage. He is wearing a light blue shirt and a dark vest, gesturing with his hands. The background features blue horizontal slats.

## Per Heggnes

CEO of IKEA Foundation

### How to turn employment challenges into opportunities in a changing world?

Per outlined how IKEA Foundation is preparing future generations for employment, enabling collaboration between governments, private sector and non-state actors and how they are connecting youth to jobs and providing access to finance. Per stressed that often pressing issues can be turned into opportunities when different sectors of society work in a coordinated way and share the same long-term vision.

A photograph of Josephine Goube, CEO of Techfugees, speaking on a stage. She is wearing a dark sleeveless top and has long brown hair. The background is a dark curtain with vertical lines.

## Josephine Goube

CEO of Techfugees

### Hire talented people, not refugees

Josephine spoke passionately of the changes technology is already making to the future careers of refugees. From online remote work opportunities to coding programmes, refugees are upskilling and creating their own job opportunities in hosting environments that are restrictive upon work permissions. "We don't see people with a refugee status as victims to save or heroes to glorify - even though their courage and their resilience inspires us everyday. We see them as people with talents and skills to bring to this world", she explained the approach which is necessary to overcome restriction and hurdles of refugee employment.






## Ousseynou Nakoulima

Director of Western Europe Department at IFC

### Creating Jobs in Africa's Fragile Markets

Ousseynou focused on the dramatic demographic changes that are underway in our populations, particularly in Africa. He stressed that to meet the needs of the growing population, Africa needs to create 1.7 million new jobs every month. Ousseynou stressed that the private sector plays a pivotal role in creating jobs and outlined some of the innovative solutions that IFC is delivering in Africa.



## Oudai Tozan

Founder of International Syrian Association for Education Development

### Students Support Networks. Are we losing opportunities?

Oudai, a young Syrian, established a wide-reaching alumni support network for Syrian students that provides tailored content, advice, mentoring, and networking services. He outlined the need educated professionals to channel back their knowledge, skills and connections to support other students and graduates. Alumni networks, he argued, can be a valuable solution to help bridge the gap between graduation and employment.



## Abdulrazak Kattan

Founder and CEO of BALADNA

### My story: from war to successful Syrian business owner

The theme of Abdulrazak's keynote: Syrians don't need charity, just the opportunity to work and rebuild. A successful Syrian businessman, Abdulrazak, is no stranger to hard work. He arrived in Turkey with just \$400 in his pocket, but went on to establish a successful, international food company. He informed the IGNITE audience that the barriers he faced in entrepreneurship were logistical, bureaucratic obstacles, such as opening a commercial bank account with a Syrian passport. He urged public and private bodies to change their practices to allow Syrians better access to the labour market.

# Talks of the Day

## Shift the Power

Samar Dani, Executive Director of INJAZ Lebanon, was joined by Evelijne Bruning, Country Director of The Hunger Project and Tijmen Rooseboom, Dutch Ambassador for Youth, Education and Work. The three gave their thoughts and experiences on how to “shift the power” from a Western, global North method of development, to a model that empowers local organisations.

They unanimously agreed on the importance of giving a greater degree of decision-making power to local organisations on how to spend funding and what programmes are needed. They followed up with short insights into the challenges shifting the power faces: from taxpayer’s scepticism over how their money is spent, to the lack of flexibility in the NGO space, to organisations not listening to the people they are trying to support to better understand their needs.



Joining the host on stage was Lamia Tarabia, a young entrepreneur just starting out in Jordan, Hala Bughaigis, Co-founder of Jusoor Centre for Studies and Development in Libya and Jumana Salous, Programme Manager at Business Women Forum - (local NGO and incubator in Palestine). The three women shared their different perspectives on “women building businesses” in some of the world’s most challenging environments. The keywords they coined were creating networks of support, building trust and depoliticizing women entrepreneurship while focusing on long term success, and understanding the sensitivity of the issue. All three are great examples of women accepting the challenges of entrepreneurship heads on under trying circumstances to even the paths for more women to come after them.

## Women Building Businesses



# Startup Roadshow



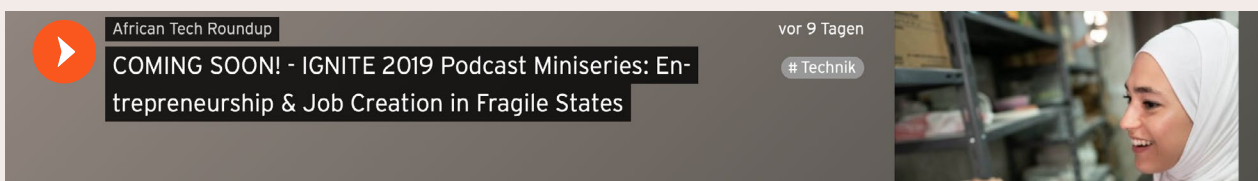
For the second year running, SPARK was proud to host the final leg of the Startup Roadshow's journey. The Startup Roadshow by Jusoor and SPARK is the world's only startup competition for Syrian entrepreneurs in the Middle East.

The three finalists of the competition were invited to pitch their business ideas on stage at IGNITE to compete for the audience's winning vote.

- **Spermly**, based in Gaziantep, is a Computer-Aided Semen Analysis (CASA) software that tests sperm quality using parameters set by the World Health Organization. The aim is to provide reliable accurate results to diagnose fertility problems. Spermly won \$15.000 in the final Startup Roadshow demo day in Amman on 4th November.
- **Medicine Box**, based in Amman, improves the lives of vulnerable people through better access to medication. In Jordan, many people cannot afford medication, but need it. At the same time, medications with less than 6 months until their expiry date available are not dispatched to the market. Medicine Box makes these medications available at a lower price. Medicine Box won \$10.000 in the final Startup Roadshow demo day in Amman on 4th November.
- **Jellyfish**, based in Beirut and inspired by similar initiatives in plastic-yarn weaving initiatives in African countries, Jellyfish is a creative social enterprise that employs refugee women to turn used plastic bags into beautiful, useful products. Jellyfish won \$10.000 in the final Startup Roadshow demo day in Amman on 4th November and received the final audience prize during the IGNITE conference.

# Podcasts

Host of IGNITE, Andile Masuku, was busy creating a mini-series of podcast episodes for his show, the African Tech Roundup. He interviewed several IGNITE speakers and attendees on various subjects and will soon be releasing his conversations to this Soundcloud playlist.



If you'd like to be the first to know when podcasts in this series are published, subscribe to African Tech Roundup in [Google Podcasts](#) | [Spotify](#) | [Apple Podcasts](#) | [Soundcloud](#) or wherever else you get your podcasts.

# Workshops



During the IGNITE conference, 12 interactive workshops were on offer which allowed participants to delve deeper into certain topics around job creation in fragile states.

Implementing experts who were present during the sessions shared personal experiences, exchanged lessons learned and discussed future recommendations on current issues. Topics ranged from agribusiness creation, public-private partnerships, to countering violent extremism. Read more about recommendations and outcomes of each session on the following pages.



## Access to Finance: Creating Jobs in Africa

Implementers in the field joined this session to discuss how access to finance can create youth employment, especially in the context of rural, sub-saharan african communities.

Yengi Lokule, an entrepreneur from sub-saharan African himself, and CEO of the Rural Finance Initiative in South Sudan, provides rural entrepreneurs from South Sudan and Uganda with financial services, most of them women and youth. Drawing from his own experience, he explained “financial service provision, [especially] in post-conflict environments, is vital to efforts that support youth and job creation”. He also stressed the overall importance of the private sector to sustainably uplift livelihoods and well-being of low-income people in sub-saharan african regions.

The necessity of increasing the private sector role was supported by Jean Bosco Iyacu from Access to Finance in Rwanda. As Director of Programmes, he facilitates financial inclusion and has been instrumental in the design and implementation of a diverse range of financial inclusion projects including the digitisation of agricultural value chains and the Rwanda Long Term Saving Scheme providing micro pension products to people working in the informal sector. From his expertise in removing barriers to access to finance, he adds that “it is important to build a transparent system to bring trust between farmers, youth, and investors”.

While it was generally shared that access to finance is essential for job creation, the speakers and participants were expressing criticism and concerns as well. Access to finance alone is not the golden ticket to growing businesses, rather it has to be seen as one element of the whole formula and additional approaches also need to be given attention. Job creation efforts have to be designed individually in order to respond specifically to the unique challenges of each post conflict area. Of particular importance here is to put the beneficiaries in the focus of all efforts. Women, youth, or people with disabilities have different needs and possibilities. Floriane Kaneza from SPARK Burundi explained this by pointing out that for example “traditionally, women don’t inherit (own) assets that they can use as collateral for loans. Therefore intermediaries need to come up with other ways of financing them.” To properly fit the specific needs of marginalised groups and overcome the challenges that hinder successful access to finance for youth job creation, goods and services need to be adapted in the future.





## Women entrepreneurs in conflict

Five prominent women who are living and working in some of the world's most conflict-affected regions - Libya and Palestine - joined a panel discussion on the importance of boosting women-owned businesses and how to do it.

Jumana Salous, Programme Manager of Business Women Forum in Palestine, provides women entrepreneurs with business development services. Since 2006, they have trained over 6000 women across Gaza and the West Bank, with 450 SMEs now formally registered. Jumana described how many women-owned businesses are in the informal sector, so the incubator works hard to formalise their contribution to the country's GDP.

Hala Bughaighis, co-founder of Jusoor Centre for Studies and Development in Libya, took the participants back to 1959, when oil was first discovered in the country. Since that time, the country's biggest industry has supplied jobs mainly for men. After the revolution, the public sector grew but the private sector was forced into exile by the government. During the second economic crisis in 2011, women replaced men in the workforce, who were away fighting in the battlefield. Hala set up Jusoor to support these women with capacity building, advocacy campaigns and partnerships with the Ministry of Labour, which has led to the creation of around 3000 jobs for young, female jobseekers.

Mayaz Alhashmi, an IT student, is one of the young entrepreneurs supported by Jusoor and SPARK. She informed the participants how she had long dreamed to launch her business, Tech Girls Club, which empowers women through IT services, education and training in programming and computer maintenance. Fellow entrepreneur, Faten El Houni, established a safe kindergarten for children in Tripoli to support working mothers. Both entrepreneurs agreed that gaining cultural acceptance to enter male-dominated fields and reliable and safe transportation to and from work were issues facing working women in Libya.

Despite this, Abir Sarras, North Africa Regional Manager at RNW Media specialised in media platforms for social change, described how attitudes towards women in work are changing. RNW digitally surveyed 6000 people in Libya (80% women) to understand their attitudes. Only 8% of women had a husband or family that did not allow them to work. 58% of men stated they would be comfortable working for a woman and 94% of women value women's financial independence for the Libyan economy. However, both men and women considered women incapable of working within policy making, the army, mechanics or engineering.

Hala Bughaighis learnt first hand the price of importing a perceived Western cultural practice into Libya after receiving multiple death threats for her work empowering women. However, main outcomes of the workshop showed the resilience of women, the importance of them to a country's economic recovery and the need to provide tailored support to women business-owners and employees.



## Partnerships for Jobs (Pt. 1)

Creating public-private partnerships in fragile situations are challenging. This workshop learned from the challenges the ING Bank and SPARK have experienced themselves while setting up such a partnership, presented by Roy Budjawan (ING Bank) and Mohammed Skaik (SPARK). Joined by the Perrine Puget from the European Investment Fund and Prajna Khanna, the session was rounded up to dive deep into improving public-private collaborations.

Together with EU-Madad and the Turkish government, ING and SPARK are setting up an access to finance programme for Syrian entrepreneurs in Turkey. This programme should result in 2000+ jobs in the next 2 years. What makes a collaboration like this such a challenge, was the main question of this session?

- First of all, the political reality concerning refugees in Turkey is constantly changing, which means you need to be able to adjust, even willing to change your target group.
- Second, when we design and implement new PPP's, we need to recognize that they take place in existing ecosystems. Hence there is an existing network of connections, capacity and access that we should identify and leverage.
- Third, government buy-in is a prerequisite for any project, and a hygiene factor for setting up PPP's. Government co-creation is relatively new, but is the next level to aspire to within PPP's.
- Fourth, we should leverage each party's strength better: a commercial partner brings an efficiency and agility that can move and scale innovations faster than others.
- And last, PPP's often address social issues. An often overlooked, but critical element is understanding and fact-checking the local perceptions (e.g. hostility towards refugee projects, where the host community feels underserved and neglected). These need to be addressed by the consortium of partners, as they can significantly influence project outcomes (both positive and negative).





## In Pursuit of Evidence on Jobs for Stability and Peace

Employment programmes are considered to reduce the likelihood of violence and tackling inequality and grievances. But evidence on the actual impact is still lacking. Researchers, implementers and donors came together in this workshop to jointly find the solutions that are so much needed to close current knowledge gaps.

Wolfgang Stojetz, senior researcher at the International Security and Development Center (ISDC) introduced the session with a presentation of current research on impact assessment of employment programmes in fragile environments. He stated that it is "often simply assumed that employment programmes achieve the wider goal of increasing livelihoods and contributing to more stability", usually without systematic evidence.

Marcel Smits from the Institute of Economics and Peace explained to this that there are a couple of steps between jobs and stability. This was elaborated by Wolfgang Stojetz and Laila Al Amine (Mercy Corps) who highlighted the main challenges: A common understanding of the definition of stability is difficult, especially in conflict areas. What is missing is a shared, straightforward methodology that also includes donors in the dialogue. Yannick du Pont, Director of SPARK added to this that not only donors should be included in the effort, but also other NGOs. He pointed out the importance of creating synergies between multiple actors to learn what works best.

Furthermore, the importance of context was highlighted by the panelists. It was agreed that type of interventions, timing, and people's identities affect the effectiveness of programmes. Moreover, Nieves Thomet from the ILO put the focus on the quality of the jobs: "We must not simply promote any jobs, but decent ones."

The main recommendation of the session was made by Fia van der Klugt, Senior Policy Officer at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She stressed the necessity of pursuing a holistic approach. Programming and research needs to include all stakeholders. Donors who may need to relinquish their idealised ambitions, implementers need to gain a better understanding of what they are actually trying to change and researchers can only provide relevant outcomes if they include realistic and tangible recommendations for policy and practice.

In general, the participants agreed that there is a need for more investment in situation analysis. Outcomes need to be defined more clearly, which is why finding the right indicators and creating a general understanding of their types and levels is key.



# Digital Skills for Refugee Jobs



## The Business Support Centre Revisited

Using Jordan as a case study, this workshop focused on Business Support Centres by identifying factors that allowed business incubators and accelerators to succeed or fail.

Ibrahim Faza from Shamal Start supports host communities and refugees by creating 300 jobs for Syrians and Jordanians through the acceleration of 100 start-ups. He points out that by “bringing them to work together, start a business together, host communities are being strengthened and refugees supported”.

Bibi Deema is CEO of INJAZ, a Jordanian non-profit organisation focused on developing skills for youth in the areas of education, entrepreneurship and employment. She explained the need of focusing on two pillars for successfully supporting businesses in the long run.

The first is creating a real culture of entrepreneurship. Especially in Jordan, this is already happening: from an early stage on, the culture of taking risks and creating businesses is being fostered with different educational programmes. Entrepreneurship curricula have been included in schools and so far, they serve as a great success story with 90% of graduates finding jobs after their education. To build on this successful approach in the future, Bibi Deema appealed to her fellows to now work on scaling up and the importance of training teachers so they acquire the necessary capacities.

The second pillar for successful Business Support Centres is more private sector participation. Shadi Gammoh from Manafeth, who first presented his research to explain the Jordanian Business Support Centre and Incubation landscape, supported this by stating “SMEs of private sector should be at the center of the start-up ecosystem”.

It was recognised that, even though there are some successful examples of Business Support Centres, the Jordanian ecosystem still faces challenges that prevent it from creating enough jobs and supporting young entrepreneurs in fragile environments. Recommendations of the workshops were to start looking into the specific ecosystems and taking into account local conditions. In this sense, a multi-stakeholder approach is relevant, where public, private sector and NGOs need to start working together to fill the remaining gaps. With joined forces, they need to start working on improving the education systems in general, but also to educate investors, providing access to finance and markets, and further improving the entrepreneurship culture in the country.





## The Power of Mentoring

The interactive workshop explored how mentoring can support the growth and resilience of entrepreneurs in fragile environments.

Mowgli Mentoring is an organisation supporting the Middle East and North Africa to reach its goal of 80-100m jobs by 2020 by providing entrepreneurs with effective mentoring. Maia Gedde and Richard Bellars, from Mowgli Mentoring hosted participants through a series of interactive discussion sessions to assess what mentoring really means and how it can be most effective.

"You can be a great mentor and mentee at the same time", introduced one of the workshop's participants, Amir Saab, an entrepreneurship consultant in the Middle East. Indeed, Maia outlined the 360 degree mentoring approach, which focuses on both the entrepreneur and their business. The process, used by Mowgli, helps create positive mentoring environments and help mentors improve their skills.

When the group was asked 'what do you need for mentoring?', Saskia Harkema from Business Leaders International highlighted the need for chemistry between mentor and mentee. And working with refugees, there is always trauma involved. She advised to define a code of conduct with a mentee, which sets boundaries. A code of conduct is particularly important when delivering group mentoring.

A big issue that all the mentors had previously faced was entrepreneur's fear that their business idea would be stolen. For Samir Dani, Executive Director of Injaz Lebanon, "trust is key". She advised the participants that talking too much can muddy a mentor's role. It is better to start with listening. Astara Maiure from Five One Labs (Iraq) agreed: "Mentoring is about building relationships. Start with listening. Mentors tend to want to help too soon, while listening to the person will help you in finding out what the person needs".

Cultural and linguistic differences between mentor and mentees were also highlighted as potential barriers. Mowgli Mentoring tries to have local and international facilitators to cowork on mentoring to tackle any potential challenges.

The conclusion of the session was that creating trust and a sense of safety is paramount to effective mentoring.





## Millennials Doing Agribusiness in Africa

In sub-Saharan Africa, a region that faces strong climate crisis effects, food insecurity and rapidly expanding population growth, the need to innovate and boost agricultural sectors is paramount. However, younger generations are increasingly turning away from rural, farming careers in favour of aspirations in overpopulated cities. The workshop was designed to highlight methods of re-engaging youth in agricultural futures by bringing together examples of successful youth agribusinesses and different NGO projects supporting agri-entrepreneurs.

Regis Umugiraneza, co-founder of CARL Group in Rwanda, is “the man behind Vitabread”, which is a vitamin-rich bread made from sweet potatoes. His company is tackling vitamin-deficiency among children using locally grown produce (9/10 households in Rwanda grow sweet potato). Regis explained that the population of Rwanda will double by 2050 and explained the Rwandan government’s 2016 initiative to tackle food insecurity by ensuring that all new projects must have a youth focus to provide jobs for the expanding population.

Isabelle Roger, International Cotton Programme Coordinator at Solidaridad, is focused on sustainability. Farmers are often at the start of long, global value chains with multiple middle-men, meaning their return on investment is low, which is what makes farming work unattractive to youth. Isabelle explained how Solidaridad works with a farmer-centred approach.

In South Sudan, Budyang Emmanuel Bugga, a former vegetable oil entrepreneur now works with the Rural Finance Initiative on pooling resources and boosting social entrepreneurship. No stranger to failure, Budyang’s enterprise failed partly because of a lack of access to finance. By encouraging communities to create micro loans for small businesses, Budyang is helping to ensure that businesses remain sustainable.

Florianne Favie Kaneza, Programme Manager from SPARK Burundi, is tackling youth disinterest in agribusiness by breaking down the components of value chains where investment opportunities lie, such as production, transport and packaging. Florianne is also predicting the trend for healthy and organic products to open up new opportunities in the agribusiness sector.

The main outcome of the workshop was the need to innovate, across the agribusiness sector. Young entrepreneurs that find innovative solutions to their changing environments will have more success; innovative, new financing models, such as micro loans and agricultural cooperatives, are needed; and innovative trainings and internships can help to introduce youth to the benefits of agriculture. Trainings include business management skills, financial management, and changing the mindset of youth to see farming as a business.



## Creating Jobs in Syria

There are more than six million Syrian refugees outside Syria and more than six million internally displaced. And with the people, businesses left the country, leaving the economy not ready to create sustainable jobs and foster employment. Yet, attempts are being made to create an early economic recovery. This workshop learned from policy makers, journalists, academics and local NGOs what roles these different sectors play in this process and how to navigate the efforts in the complex political and economic situation.

According to Ruba Mimi from RNW Media, not only the country is divided into several zones, but so is the population, resulting in the exclusion of important topics for youth between the ages of 18 and 30. Ruba Mimi presented an initiative by RNW media in response, where an online digital platform for young people has been created to enable matchmaking between young Syrians and local experts in three main areas of focus: education, entrepreneurship, and jobs.

Mouhammad Hasno of the ACU meanwhile provides stakeholders with various types of informative and interactive reports covering a variety of areas, from humanitarian issues to population statistics, health, and education.

During the session, the following challenges to the development of a stable economy have been identified:

- Political instability and a lack of safety
- Sanctions hampering investments in key sectors
- Domination by the informal sector and “the war crime economy” (Ibrahim Olabi, SLDP), like smuggling and black markets
- No economic infrastructure

As stated by more than one panelist, prior to dealing with the aforementioned challenges, a democratic framework is needed first, where support programmes can be designed.

A main recommendation was to involve all stakeholders in the process, most importantly Syrians themselves. Civil society must become the change leader and in order to achieve this, self-sustaining solutions which decrease dependencies must be created. Direct cooperation with the communities is essential.

The discussions identified another positive impact from working with small local businesses: they are less likely to be involved in the “war crime economy” because in many cases, large businesses are somehow complicit in crimes, either through funding the military or by having own militias. In general, all supportive action needs to be assessed by costs and benefits first, to minimise the damage being done by support organisations.





## Partnerships for Jobs (Pt. 2)

Policy makers, NGOs and private sector representatives joined this panel to share their own experiences and best practices on how to support refugees, create jobs and integrate refugees in our societies. The interactive session discussed strategies to increase refugee employment from the private sector. A special focus was put on concrete call to actions for the public sector to take a more active role in refugee employment and the transition from a donor role towards becoming an employer.

Fred Kastner, Co-founder and of Social Innovation introduced TERNs work as a leading example of how refugee employment can be supported. The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network helps refugees releasing their full potential through the power of entrepreneurship. He also mentioned already existing successful partnerships with the private sector, like Ben & Jerry's and Unilever in their entrepreneurship pathway programme.

Aline Sara, CEO of NaTakallam added to this: "We just start with the market-based opportunities. We came across with highly educated Syrian refugees who speak English but simply do not have the chance to work or generate income." NaTakallam, as TERN already serves as a positive example on how to support refugees in entering the workforce. She also put the focus on additional services, next to simply bringing refugees into employment. As one of these, Aline Sara presented an initiative by NaTakallam: Amplify Refugee Voices which creates a platform for displaced persons to share their story and to contribute to changing the whole narrative around the refugee crisis.

These presentations and recommendations were supported by Chris Gale. As Head of Social Mission Strategy at Ben & Jerry's, Chris could draw from his own experience in creating private-public partnerships. In cooperation with TERN and NaTakallam, Ben & Jerry's could already prove a successful engagement in employing refugees.

Sabina Kekic from the Municipality of Amsterdam and Zahraa Attar supplemented the group. The City of Amsterdam is not only currently the largest refugee employer in the Netherlands, Sabina and Zahraa especially shared experiences from the Young Professionals Programme for Statusholders. Building on previous achievements and serving as a model for the private sector, Sabina further explained that they are starting to scale up their efforts by adapting their programme in other cities and new contexts. Zahraa who participated in the Young Professionals Programme shed light on remaining bureaucracy hurdles and the necessary initiatives to overcome these when it comes to actually taking upon opportunities.

Despite some controversies in the actual strategies to pursue, all participants unanimously agreed that it is time for the private sector to further engage in refugee employment. Businesses have the resources and power to indicate a real change and transform policies from hampering towards increasing refugee employment.





## Matching Youth to Jobs

With the Middle East and North Africa suffering some of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the world, this panel discussion focused on different methods of providing youth with pathways to sustainable employment.

Rahaf Alashouri, a 22 year old Syrian, recently graduated from the University of Gaziantep where she received a scholarship from SPARK to complete her Bachelor's degree. As a speaker of the session, she described how the extra-curricular training offered as part of the scholarship enabled her to learn where her strengths lay, discover new life skills and try new things before entering the labour market. However, Rahaf outlined that she and other young people need even more support on their way to jobs, such as IT and soft skills.

Marije Bedaux, Career Coach at the University of Leiden, believes it is the responsibility of universities to better prepare youth for the world of work. Marije shared that most of the students she coaches are not aware of how to sell their skills to potential employers. "Employers are now looking for resilience", explained Marije, "and employability should be in the curriculum". She explained how Leiden University provides tools to students and alumni through a job portal and network.

In Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, one university is supporting its Kurdish, IDP and refugee students through the Career Development Center (CDC). Dr Botan Majeed Asinger, Dean of the Erbil Technology Institute at Erbil Polytechnic University, explained the CDC's role in helping students get better connected to employment, funding and post-graduation opportunities, such as internships and work experience.

Muhammad El-Sharebeni, Program Development and Partnerships Coordinator, Masaraat Project at RNW Media, outlined how the Masaraat Project in Egypt aims to bridge the gap between graduation and employment. The online, Arabic digital platform provides career guidance, mentorship and skills training, such as negotiation, work ethics and workplace etiquette. "We are also working to change the mindset by encouraging young people to volunteer, which builds their capacities and helps them get to know the labour market", Muhammad explained.

Amir Saab, an entrepreneurship trainer, explained that: "nowadays, we are in an entrepreneurial generation. Youth should start thinking of different ways they can grow their ideas". While the public sector has traditionally provided more stability, job security and prestige, particularly in the Middle East, more and more youth are turning to the private sector and entrepreneurship as a viable career option. Amir noted the importance of networking for these future business leaders to learn and grow.



## Do jobs prevent violent extremism?

The pathways to violent extremism differ per context and per person, and consist of many drivers, root causes and triggers at the same time.

It did not take long to state and agree in this workshop that there is no clear relationship between employment and violent extremism. Daniel McCormick (SPARK) and Ahmed Sameh (Hivos) both illustrated this by sharing their experiences and results of their entrepreneurship and employment programmes in Northern Africa. There may be a more complex relationship in which employment, or rather the absence of it, plays a role in the radicalisation of youth in fragile regions such as Tunisia, Egypt or Somalia. However, themes of identity, social exclusion (the lack of belonging) and perceptions of injustice play a much more direct role in this process.

Studies, by Mercy Corps for example, show that there likely is a relationship between deradicalisation and good governance (particularly at the local level). If aspects such as job creation and livelihood are introduced within this relationship, a positive link can be demonstrated between employment/income and the prevention of violent extremism, but in this respect improving the state is the overarching factor. Or as Ahmed Sameh puts it: "What we witness, and believe can contribute efficiently to this challenge is the creation of interactions between different members of society (low-higher income, variety of religious affiliations, gender, etc.). We work with youth hubs and we see a change of attitude – and hostility – between youth among each other and different factions just due to these interactions."

Concerning conflict sensitivity, it is important to take a close look at economic programmes implemented in a context where violent extremism has an influence. To analyse the sensitivities and the specific risks involved goes beyond the well-known analysis of conflict sensitivity and do-no-harm.

The theme of violent extremism arouses many negative feelings because, after 9/11, the world has become familiar with the negative consequences of counter-terrorism measures and the double-standards that are used in geo-politics with regard to the use of terrorist lists and subordinating people's rights, humanitarian action and development to international and national security agendas. Labelling certain groups and people as terrorists is highly arbitrary and based on political motivation. This makes it difficult to take a positive approach to the PVE (prevention of violent extremism) agenda.