



spark | **IGNITE 9**
Reimagine jobs

13 September 2022, Amsterdam

Conference Report



With special thanks to
our partners:



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands



IKEA Foundation






SPARK's 9th annual IGNITE conference on 'Reimagine Jobs' brought together 380 stakeholders that are creating jobs for youth in fragile and conflict-affected regions. The climate crisis, COVID-19 and the digital revolution are dramatically changing the jobs we have and the way we work. The IGNITE conference brought together stakeholders from across the world's most fragile regions to discuss how the most vulnerable people – youth, refugees, women – can stay included in the global economy.

With thanks to our key partners - Islamic Development Bank, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar Fund for Development, IKEA Foundation, International Finance Corporation and DIHAD Foundation - who made the whole event possible and reinforced the need to create new public/private partnerships.

Our host, Femi Oke, brought the conference to life and special thanks to the 40 local partners from across the Middle East, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa who joined to share their expertise.

IGNITE in Numbers

14

Workshops



380

Attendees



35+

Nationalities



2,100

Livestream
Audience



550,000

Social Media
Impressions

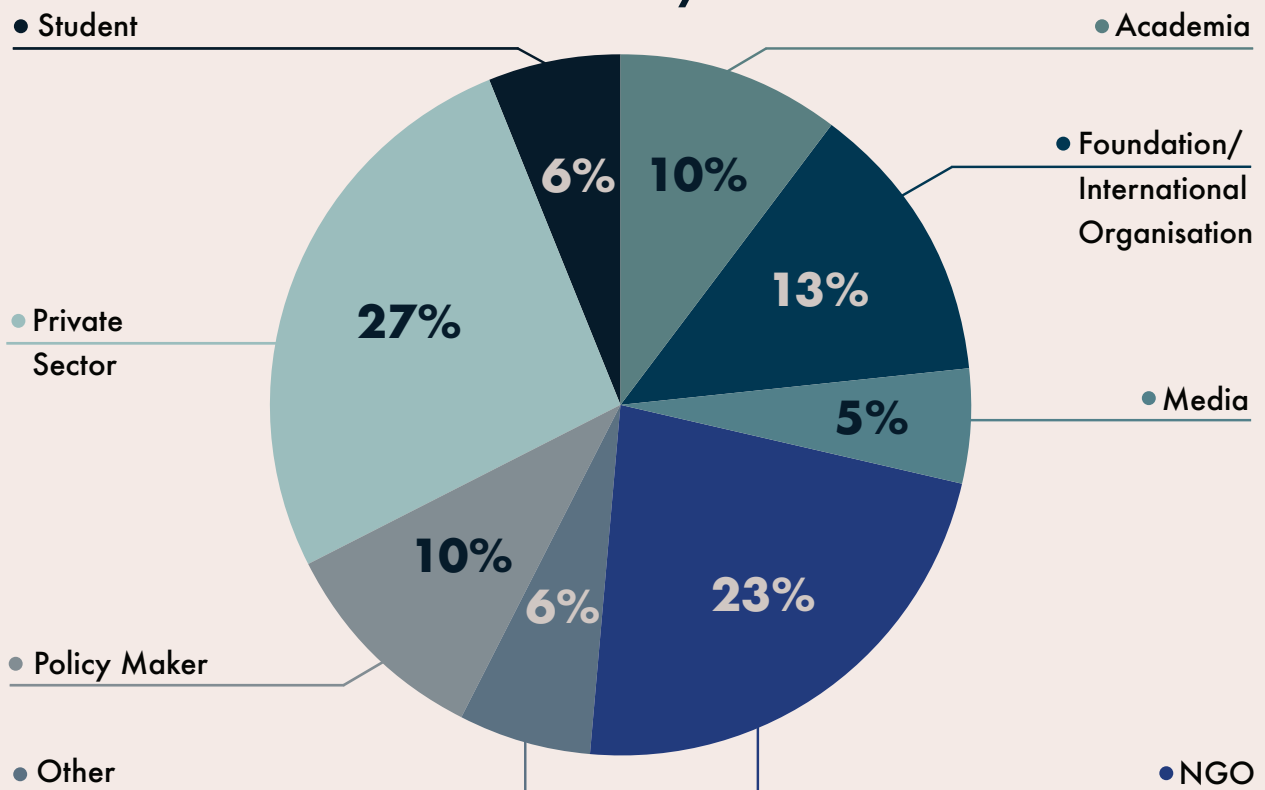


223

Social Media
Posts



Attendees by sector



Opening panel: Reimagine Jobs

Birgitta Tazelaar, Deputy Director-General International Cooperation, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Samar Dani, Executive Director, INJAZ Lebanon

Jean Van Wetter, Managing Director, ENABEL, the Belgian Development Agency

Mossadeck Bally, Founder and CEO, Azalaï Hotels Group



The panel of experts from both public and private sectors discussed the changing job markets in fragile and conflict-affected regions and what 'reimagined jobs' youth require. Birgitta Tazelaar discussed the importance of reaching the Paris Agreement, which ILO has calculated can create 80 million jobs through this agreement. Living minimum wages were also high on the agenda for Birgitta. Mossadeck Bally, entrepreneur and successful businessman, described the shortage of hard and soft skills, such as entrepreneurship, among youth populations that he works with in West Africa. "The biggest problem on our continent is poor governance," he said, "without good governance we will not be able to create the 15-20 million jobs needed every year". Birgitta agreed with the importance of stronger governance. Jean Van Wetter discussed the need for new partnerships and opportunities for learning from each other through circular labour mobility. Mossadeck agreed, expressing the need for industrialisation within Africa in order to, for example, engage in the transformation of crops within the region rather than only exporting produce. He suggested donors, private sector and NGOs can support in training youth in job-ready skills relevant to labour markets. Samar Dani, who supports youth across Lebanon, described the passion that youth have for purpose-driven jobs where they can develop their skills, as well as receive a decent income. "We need to create jobs with young people in mind", she said.

Panel: 2030 Partnerships

Sonia Ben Jaafar, CEO, Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education

Alessandro Villa, DG INTPA Deputy Head of Unit C.1 Central Asia and Middle East, European Commission

Jean Van Wetter, Managing Director, ENABEL, the Belgian Development Agency

Amer Bukvić, Acting Director General - Global Practice & Partnerships (DG-GPP), Islamic Development Bank



This panel brought together representatives from the Europe Union and Middle East to discuss geo-political partnerships moving to 2030. Amer Bukvić emphasised the urgent need for a multistakeholder collaboration between the two regions to overcome global issues such as inflation, COVID-19 or the war in Ukraine. "The European Commission today has embraced a new perspective in development cooperation. The common challenges at home and abroad need to be addressed together with our global partners", said Alessandro Villa. He described the new partnerships as "joining forces and resources". Sonia Ben Jaafar discussed the shift in the development programmes and said "NGOs and private sector have a knowledge set that we don't have. We believe in their added value." Bukvić suggested that the global issues can be solved based on trust-based and agile cooperation. Villa agreed on the importance of trust in strategic partnerships. "Partnerships should take into account accountability to the stakeholders, most importantly our beneficiaries", Ben Jaafar concluded.

Panel: Global Refugee Crisis: Redoubling Efforts

Raouf Mazou, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Michel Botzung, Manager of IFC's Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (FCS) Africa program, International Finance Corporation (IFC)



Experts from UNHCR and IFC sit together to discuss new ways of engaging stakeholders in the fragile states. "There is a bigger role to be played by the private sector in the forced displacement context", argued Michel Botzung. The vibrant refugee business can thrive if they are given formal services such as access to finance, he added. Raouf Mazou highlighted the challenges in accessing these services which are more expensive for refugees than for host communities. Botzung said "most refugees do not live in camps anymore, they live in emerging large urban settlements which sometimes make one of the largest cities in a country. Integrating refugee businesses into economies offers opportunities for both sides." Mazou emphasised on the role of development partnerships in convincing local authorities of the significant potential that could be unlocked through inclusive development. Speaking on the role that UNHCR will play in this partnership, Michel Botzung stressed out UNHCR's ability to access refugees in camp settings; their understanding of the refugee context; and the protection status they provide to the refugees. On the question of the digital challenges that refugees are facing in fragile settings, Michel Botzung highlighted a geographical divide in terms of access to those services. Raouf Mazou concluded that the development programmes require private investment to be able to provide better support to refugees through local partnerships.

Panel: Entrepreneurs Build for Change

Omar Itani, General Manager, FabricAID

Rawan Al-Zaidi, Administrative Director, Nakhla

Nowar Rahmouni, Founder, Gharna Halabi



The panel of three young entrepreneurs from the Middle East shared their entrepreneurship journey and motivation to create impact for their respective societies. Omar Itani and Nowar had no predetermined idea to become an entrepreneur. Omar sought opportunities in the lack of affordable clothes for people in Lebanon and created his enterprise that sells recycled clothes. Nowar, on the other hand, decided to sell home-made soaps from Syria which she first asked from her family to send her for her skin issues. Rawan Al-Zaidi is the founder of Nakhla, an Iraqi agritech business that employs 50 people. To her, entrepreneurship means ‘taking responsibility for the people who are with you and growing together with them’. On the concept of responsibility, Omar discussed the role of an entrepreneur who should have a positive mindset and decision making skills to sustain and grow the business. The second part of the panel focused on the challenges entrepreneurs face and the change they create in fragile states. “When it comes to money transfers from outside Lebanon, you need to have a bank account which I can’t as a Syrian refugee. Cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin serve as an alternative solution”, said Nowar Rahmouni. Omar Itani argued the role of having a strong purpose to overcome those obstacles. While lack of funding is not an issue in Iraq, lack of stable government institutions is another major challenge, Rawan Al-Zaidi said. “We are trying to spread peace and prosperity through the environmental and job creation impact”, she added. Omar concluded that the need for creating impact funds in the Middle East is significant.

Keynote Speakers

A photograph of Prof. Alexandre Betts, a man with short grey hair, wearing a dark blazer over a white shirt. He is standing at a podium, looking slightly to his right. The background is a dark stage with a large screen displaying the word 'IGNITE' in a repeating pattern of white and blue circles.

Prof. Alexandre Betts

Professor of Forced Migration and International Affairs, and Senior Fellow in Politics at Brasenose College, University of Oxford

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Prof. Alexander Betts' keynote address was based on the topic of his latest book 'The Wealth of Refugees: How displaced people can build economies'. His speech and research explores the economic lives of refugees as entrepreneurs, consumers, borrowers, employees and employers. Alexander argued during his speech that promoting employment for refugees matters because of rights, politics and wellbeing. He provided innovative solutions, based on his work with the University of Oxford and IKEA Foundation, that include positive examples from Dollo Ado and Kalobeyei refugee camps, as well as building borderland economies through infrastructure (roads, infrastructure, water and connectivity). He also discussed the need to understand existing markets when reimagining jobs for refugees, notably by mapping value chains and building upon refugees' and host communities' initiatives, such as cross-border economies. "We can all make a difference in this space," said Alexander.

A photograph of Irvine Floréal Murame, a woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a blue blazer. She is standing at a podium, looking slightly to her left. The background is a bright stage with a large screen displaying the word 'IGNITE' in a repeating pattern of white and blue circles.

Irvine Floréal Murame

Founder and Managing Director, INFINITY Group

"In Africa we are 1 billion, in Burundi we are 12 million", started Irvine Floréal Murame, who works with Burundian youth to build skills and match them to jobs. Irvine described the mismatch in her country, between the skills that youth learn in the education system and the skills that the job market needs. Additionally, she described the fear and risk that employers in Burundi face at the prospect of hiring interns. "Youth need three things," said Irvine, "an enabling environment...economic opportunities...and technical support, skills development". Irvine challenged the audience at IGNITE to use the day to think about how to scale existing support programmes and provide what the youth really need: "the knowhow".

Keynote Speakers

Abdul Salam Al Madani

Chairman of DIHAD Sustainable Humanitarian Foundation;
Chairman of INDEX Holding and its subsidiaries



The keynote address of Amb. Dr. Abdul Salam Al Madani focused on the cooperation between DIHAD and its stakeholders to provide jobs which enable access to basic human needs such as food, healthcare or security. We believe in helping vulnerable populations with higher education and job placement support regardless of their beliefs, backgrounds or skin colours, Al Madani said.

Rowan Barnett

Head of Google.org - Europe, Middle East & Africa



The digital skills training that Google.org funds in fragile countries enables youth to find remote jobs. "These young people earn their own living, but also support their families and friends", Rowan Barnett said. He argued that digital skills are the foundation of resilient businesses and sustainable employment, which are essential to thriving economies. Governments in the Middle East are struggling with inadequate job supply, lack of skilled talent and high unemployment rates. "Google.org brings in its own expertise to support these economies through empowering youth and vulnerable communities with digital skills and providing them prospects to get a job in the digital economy", he said. Rowan Barnett emphasised the holistic aspect of the SPARK programme that delivers digital skills training and links trainees with digital job opportunities while guiding them with mentoring and coaching throughout their journey.

Keynote Speakers

Raed Al Saleh

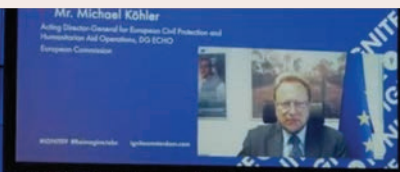
General Manager, The White Helmets



Raed Al Saleh addressed the audience with the importance of continued support for the Syrian people in the protracted conflict. He described some of the challenges faced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and how the White Helmets, a volunteer-led organisation, had responded by providing PPE and medical aid for thousands of people.

Michael Köhler

Acting Director-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, DG ECHO, European Commission



A brief but fruitful discussion between Michael Köhler and host, Femi Oke, via a livestream connection helped to close the event with some key messages on behalf of the European Commission. "As a global donor, ECHO provides funding in 60 countries suffering from humanitarian crises. This number could soon expand to 80 countries", Köhler said. Given the increasing number of humanitarian crises, ECHO has augmented the funding budget by 35%, he added. Köhler argued the need for new approaches including the private sector involvement in global humanitarian efforts.

Startups on the Move Incubation Programme: Final Pitch



SPARK was proud to host the final leg of the Startups on the Move Incubation programme in collaboration with Startups Without Borders and supported by Google.org. The final pitch event took place on stage and marked the end of the programme, where 130 startups from Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq have transformed their ideas into businesses. The 10 finalists pitched their business ideas in front of the live audience and a panel of judges comprised of Rowan Barnett, Head of Google.org EMEA; Fadi Bishara, founder of Blackbox; Wassim Beaineh, SPARK's supervisory board member; Majd Khalifeh, CEO of Flow Accelerator; and Laura di Santolo, CEO of Forward Inc. The winner, who received \$10,000 to kick start their business, was Gaza-based startup, BlueFilter, founded by Salah Elsadi. Congratulations!

New Agreement Signed with Sheikh Abdullah Al Nouri Charity Society



Sheikh Abdullah Al Nouri Charity Society and SPARK joined their forces to provide loan guarantee assistance that will enable access to finance for SMEs owned by refugees and disadvantaged host community members in Türkiye. About 600 SMEs will benefit from 1.1 million Euro funding to grow their businesses and create employment opportunities in southeastern provinces of Türkiye that are largely affected by migration fluxes. SPARK will partner with a Turkish bank to provide the loan guarantees.

Workshops



The 9th version of IGNITE Conference hosted 14 workshops which allowed attendees to discuss in detail some of the technical topics around job creation in fragile regions. Experts from international organisations, governments, NGOs and private sector shared their experiences and provided recommendations for some of the challenges entrepreneurs and job seekers are facing. The workshops were:

- **Going Green: Transformation and Adaptation in Emerging Economies**
- **FinTech: A Game Changer for Financial Inclusion**
- **Digital Skills for the Future of Jobs**
- **Growth Starts with Gender Inclusive Entrepreneurship**
- **Market Systems Development in Fragile States**
- **Youth: Part of the Problem or Agents of Change?**
- **In Conversation with Prof. Alexander Betts**
- **Managing Impact for Driving our Work**
- **Digital Transformation: The Disruptive Opportunity for MSMEs**
- **Jobs and Entrepreneurship for Inclusive Growth in Türkiye**
- **Inclusive Communication: Shifting Narratives**
- **How to Keep a Business Alive During Conflict**
- **How Universities Can Help Close the Employability Skills Gap**
- **Localisation: Turning Theory into Action**



Going Green: Transformation & Adaptation in Emerging Economies

Moderator: Leontine Specker, Regional Programme Director for Middle East and Turkey, SPARK (Turkey)

Panellists:

Aurélien Pastouret, Programme Manager – Regional Programmes Neighbourhood South Economic Development, including Blending, European Commission (Belgium)

Omar Itani, Founder, FabricAID (Lebanon)

Mossadeck Bally, Founder of the Azalai Hotels Group (Mali)

The main objective of the session was to define the Green Entrepreneurship and what needed for existing businesses which are planning to go green. The discussions focused on the EU Green Deal's aims to decrease the negative impact of climate change, changing customer choices, challenges in green investments and the areas of opportunity in the green sector. The key takeaways in this workshop were:

- It would be costly to start aligning the new requirements of the EU Green Deal but it will be very important and provide new opportunities for the businesses in future.
- The challenging environment of Lebanon economically, systematically and socially. Therefore it needs to be very well planned ahead on the interventions. Additionally, this poses a great opportunity for the entrepreneurs to take the risk and act.
- Lack of funding and access to finance are still in place for entrepreneurs in many parts of the Middle East including Palestine.
- There has to be some rules and regulations and an urge to go green but without leaving out the local realities.
- The cooperation is a must between NGOs, Private Sector and TVET centres for providing the tailor-made, practical green skills development.
- Although compliance with the EU Green Deal would be costly, it is going to provide huge competitive advantages and return the high investment at the beginning.
- There is a mismatch between TVET education and needed skills for green businesses. To provide demanded skills in the green sector, curricula need to incorporate the value-chain systems, based on a tailor made perspective with the support from private sector, NGOs and TVET centres.



FinTech: A Game Changer for Financial Inclusion

Moderator: Geraldine O’Keeffe, Chief Innovation Officer & Co-founder, Software Group (Kenya)

Panellists:

Okan Altasli, Private Sector Expert, SPARK (Turkey)

Jean Paul Mushumba, Country Manager, MoneyPhone (Rwanda)

Anouk Verheijen, Senior Capacity Development Officer, FMO

Bdour Hyari, Director, Microfund for Women (Jordan)

The main objective of this workshop was to explore if fintech and other financial technologies can bring a solution to the unbanked populations in fragile states. Panellists discussed the restrictions and challenges of refugees in terms of access to financial services and highlighted some of the best practices. The key takeaways were:

- Financial regulations are quite complicated in MENA and SSA regions. They restrict refugees from opening bank accounts.
 - Refugee entrepreneurs are in lack of collateral to present to banks to get loans.
 - Regulations restrict banks to loan money to farmers/entrepreneurs with low scores.
 - Target people are not educated enough to work around the regulations.
 - Farmers in Rwanda who applied through MoneyPhone benefited from a reduced interest rate (30% to 14%).
 - Loan guarantee funds enable the banks to be more flexible with low scores entrepreneurs.
 - An awareness raising campaign is needed to overcome lack of information about iNGOs programs and fintech solutions.
 - Fintech alone will not solve their access to finance problems. Regulatory support is crucial to accelerate the implementation and increase the impact.
- SPARK’s partnership with MoneyPhone (Rwanda) and Microfund for Women (Jordan) helped the refugees to be trained and funded with low interest rates.



Digital Skills for the Future of Jobs

Moderator: Fatima Mousa, Senior Consultant and Head of Program, Arabnet (Netherlands)

Panellists:

Nosra Ayari, Co-founder, LEED Initiative (Tunisia)

Mustapha Sagezli, Director, BINA Incubator (Libya)

Fadi Bizri, Co-founder, SE Factory (Lebanon)

Margie Jackson, Senior Specialist, Al Fakhoora, Education Above All (Qatar)

The main objective of this session was to discover the job creation opportunities that digital skills may offer and the integrating them into higher education and training programmes to prepare young people in fragile states for the job market. Discussions focused on the recent mindset shift that came with COVID-19 and the increasing popularity of remote work which can bring new opportunities for the youth in the Middle East. The key takeaways in this workshop were:

- Digital technologies are changing extremely fast so it's challenging to equip job seekers with the skills needed today. Hence the digital sector significantly lacks the required skills.
- COVID-19 has shown that many jobs can go online which means more job opportunities for youth in fragile states.
- Lack of infrastructure is a significant problem in fragile countries, especially in Lebanon. Problems with Internet access or electricity.
- Digital jobs require language skills, which is still relevant in some countries in the Middle East.
- Remote jobs solve problems related to increasing travel costs and security issues in the Middle East. Most businesses saw benefit in hybrid work and switched their way of work.
- The SME or startup itself does not necessarily need to have a digital skillset. They can be supported with an expert or a freelancer who can help them transform to the digital world. For example, the expert can build a platform or mobile app for them to expand their businesses.
- Companies should invest not only on basic job training but also digital skills development.
- Some companies are still reluctant to hire people remotely. It is important to convince them about remote work which has proven benefits and it's a win-win relationship.



Growth Starts with Gender Inclusive Entrepreneurship

Moderator: Sara Cantillon, Professor, Glasgow Caledonian University (Scotland)

Panellists:

Tatiana Dormenco, Programme Associate, UN Women (Moldova)

Rawan Al-Zaidi, Co-founder, Nakhla (Iraq)

Irvine Floréale Murame, Founder, INFINITI Group (Burundi)

Doa Wadi, Programme Manager, Business Women Forum (Palestine)

The objective of this workshop was to highlight the vital role women play in the fragile business environments and to draw attention to the innovation, expansion and growth that women entrepreneurs can bring to the growing economies. Discussions revolved around the challenging market conditions, access to finance for women entrepreneurs, opportunities that digitalisation offers for them. Some of the takeaways were:

- Experience sharing among women is crucial to encourage others to launch their businesses.
- Women easily adapt themselves to challenging market conditions in fragile economies.
- Women entrepreneurs mainly struggle to create a balance between work and life. Marital status of women can affect their success.
- Building a private platform for women entrepreneurs to exchange, invest and share experiences worked well in Moldova and Palestine. Also it helped the process of digitisation of their businesses.
- Women tend to approach a job as a hobby or a passion. They should be told that their products can be sellable in the market. Through mentorship, we should create a sense for them to understand the difference between hobby and product.



Market Systems Development in Fragile States

Moderator: Peter de Ruiter, Supervisory Board Member, SPARK (Netherlands)

Panellists:

Rachel Shah, Senior Advisor - Youth Employment and Markets, Mercy Corps (UK)

Fernando Martinez Cure, Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Specialist, ILO (Switzerland)

Mirwais Momand, Founder & CEO, Mido Dairy (Afghanistan)

Ben Taylor, Consultant, Agora Global (UK)

Market System Development (MSD) approach that provides a mechanism to analyse the root causes of market failure and economic exclusion. The aim of this workshop was to discuss how we can identify the market actors, monitor and adapt SPARK's development programmes to provide responsive solutions at a systemic level. Some of the key takeaways included:

- MSD approach requires to start design with impact, diagnose what's wrong, develop interventions accordingly, and then measure, report and adapt.
- Sometimes development cooperation focuses only on supply. Need to look at push and pull interventions. Push aims to develop skills and capacities. Pull aims to develop sectors and value chains with potential to expand and diversify market opportunities.
- We must avoid creating false sectors / industries propped up by aid. Emphasis should be given to providing resilient markets.
- We need a clear segmentation of market actors / beneficiaries to identify their needs and provide responsive solutions at a systemic level.
- We need to continuously monitor and adapt programming.
- Fragility is not binary, it's a continuum. Similarly, MSD is not binary. It's a plan for how you do things.
- MSD can accept direct interventions where required, but it's necessary to plan for longer-term sustainability when doing so.



Youth: Part of the Problem or Agents of Change?

Moderator: Brandon Oelofse, Founder, Media Development Collective (Netherlands)

Panellists:

Huda Hassan, Entrepreneur and Campaigner (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)

Yasmine Wartani, Youth Activist (Tunisia)

Simon van Melick, Programme Manager, SPARK (Netherlands)

Ramy Lakkis, Director, Lebanese Organisation of Studies and Training (Lebanon)

Fulco van Deventer, Human Security Collective (Netherlands)

In this session, youth from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Tunisia spoke about their daily challenges, progress and how they find solutions and ways to take and develop leadership. Together with other panellists, the session focused on how to create the desired opportunities for youth and how to give space for them to lead and determine their own future - in order to prevent them turning to migration, protest or even violence. Key takeaways were:

- It became clear that there's no one solution for youth or at least no simple solution.
- Instead of a youth revolution, a holistic approach is needed on economic, social and political levels.
- 'Empowerment' and 'opportunities' are frequently used to describe what young leaders need but these are buzzwords and fail to address the underlying issues of social norm change, financing and better education and skills.
- The session ended with a strong plea: civil society needs to engage more practically with young leaders, since the government often seems to be reluctant to do so.
- Civil society needs to support youth better in influencing, shaping, designing and contributing to policy and development of services and programmes on local and national levels. In other words: encouraging youth engagement with the government and other decision makers is needed to achieve mutual collaboration.



In Conversation with Prof. Alexander Betts

Moderator: Julian Morgan, SPARK (Netherlands)

Panellist: Prof. Alexander Betts, Professor of Forced Migration and International Affairs, University of Oxford (UK)

This session was based on Professor Alexander Betts' research conducted in a refugee camp in Kenya. Refugees face major challenges in access to job opportunities. Kenyan government doesn't provide them the right to work. Prof. Betts's study has shown that;

- Unblocking local and political restrictions on the refugee businesses provide significant benefits to the entire economy.
- Fragile economies can be rebuilt upon refugee and host community initiatives.
- Local markets can be better understood through mapping value chains and cultural traits.
- Investing in existing initiatives should be coupled with lessons learnt from innovative practices.



Managing Impact for Driving Our Work

Moderator: Rojan Bolling, Knowledge Broker, Netherlands Food Partnership

Panellists:

Tilman Brück, Founder, ISDC (Germany)

Fred de Vries, Supervisory Board Member, SPARK (Netherlands)

This workshop sought answers to questions related to effective impact management on an international scale. Experts argued how organisations can learn and change towards creating the most positive impact and discussed context-relevant impact measurement tools for fragile and conflict-affected regions. Key takeaways can be listed as below:

- Impact management starts with generating knowledge on local needs and context.
- Impact management is a long term work. There are major problems related to lack of data. Donors are unwilling to pay for impact management.
- Impact evaluation is a slow process but when used as a tool it helps an organisation think about what they are doing and why they are doing.
- Partnership with other NGOs and local partners can serve as a solution to the limitations of SPARK not being able to do it alone.
- Adaptive management approach should be embraced when the desired impact doesn't seem likely to be achieved along the way. We should work with the donor to redefine desired outcomes.
- Despite the time and effort the impact management takes, if we do not get started we will not get done.
- Sometimes impact evaluation does not give you what you need now but gives you tools for the future.
- Process is not only for generating knowledge for fundraising but to think critically about what we are doing and why.



Digital Transformation: The Disruptive Opportunity for MSMEs

Moderator: Samar Dani, Executive Director, INJAZ (Lebanon)

Panellists:

Fadi Amroush, Co-founder, Niuversity (Spain)

Mehemed Bougsea, Co-founder, Think-it (Tunisia)

Samer Haffar, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Specialist, SPARK (Turkey)

Salam Al-Nukta, Startup Enthusiast and Social Impact Creator (Netherlands)

This workshop had an objective to understand the challenges and benefits of digital transformation of SMEs in the fragile states. Panellists argued the recent trends in the digital sector and the solutions that they can bring to refugee businesses. Some of the main takeaways from this session were:

- The opportunity behind digital transformation is that it opens doors for people through using new tools where they can automate the workflow in a way that enables scalability.
- Many refugee businesses are not aware of the tech tools that can serve their work. They need consultancy on choosing the right digital platforms for their businesses.
- They lack resources and skills to use digital tools.
- NGOs can help SMEs through paying for subscription fees to digital services.
- A shift in mindset can help SMEs to face their own fears to use tech tools. Developing a learning mindset on digitalisation contributes significantly to benefiting from the digital solutions.



Jobs and Entrepreneurship for Inclusive Growth in Türkiye

Moderator: Leontine Specker, Regional Programme Director for Middle East and Türkiye, SPARK (Türkiye)

Panellists:

Ruud van Enk, Head of FRIT, EU Commission (Belgium)

Sadettin Akyıl, Director General for International Labour Force, Republic of Türkiye

Mustapha Sagezli, Director, BINA Incubator (Libya)

The aim of this workshop was to bring government and NGO stakeholders together to discuss the efforts of the Turkish government and international aid programmes to facilitate refugee employment in Türkiye. Panellists argued the socio-economic implications of the massive refugee population in Türkiye and the benefits of economic inclusion of the Syrian refugees. Key takeaways were:

- Total number of the refugees in Türkiye reached five million including Syrians, Ukrainians and Afghans and others.
- Turkish government is working to build a new system that keeps track of international aid delivered to refugees.
- For the upcoming period, the Turkish government agreed with the EU to launch the Sustainable Development Program.
- Moving forward, FRIT (Facility for Refugees in Türkiye) will be replaced by a new programme that will help Türkiye employ refugees by providing them with language and vocational training (Sustainable Development Program).
- EU recognises that the refugees in Türkiye will not leave the country in the near future.
- EU contracted for the first one billion EUR and finalised the agreements for the 2nd billion. And now the 3rd is coming but there is a potential money available to help refugees if a brilliant idea or good suggestions will come as a need to mobilise this money for refugees in Türkiye.



Inclusive Communication: Shifting Narratives

Moderator: Raf Njotea, Screenwriter/columnist/presenter (Belgium)

Panellists:

Suha Nabhan, Co-founder, MigrationJam (Turkey)

Kiza Magendane, Writer and Policy Entrepreneur (Netherlands/Congo)

Kate Warren, Executive Vice President, Devex (USA)

Paolo Ganino, Policy Communications, Twitter (Belgium)

Emiel Martens, Co-director, Expertise Centre for Humanitarian Communication (Netherlands)

The session was opened by Emiel Martens who introduced the historical problems that have plagued humanitarian communication, sharing examples of 'poverty porn' and white saviourism from LiveAid and George Michael's 'Do They Know It's Christmas' song. The panellists, each from different sectors, discussed some of the major issues surrounding inclusivity within communication, including unconscious bias, stereotypes, colonial language and racist algorithms. Moderator, Raf Njotea, guided the panellists towards solution-oriented discussions to allow the audience to learn best practices from media, social media and other creative industries. Some of the main takeaways from each panellists included:

- Kate Warren from Devex discussed the role of media in depicting communities and global development. Devex makes a conscious effort to hire and work with journalists from the communities that are being reported in order to combat unconscious bias.
- Suha Nabhan outlined an example of how narratives and vocabulary used to discuss the Syrian refugee crisis have led to increased hostility towards migrants and refugees. She shared examples of how MigrationJam seeks to combat this by working with communities to help them tell their own stories.
- Kiza Magendane also emphasised the importance of a shift in language and terminology within the development community. However, argued that every term becomes problematic eventually unless the power relations truly shift.
- Paolo Ganino shared examples of how Twitter works to provide an inclusive space for all, for example by working with feminine forms of Arabic and ensuring a gender balance among staff (around 45% women). Paolo also touched on the importance of an Open Internet for inclusivity.
- Emiel Martens criticised the use of hope-based communication principles that are widely adopted by humanitarian and development organisations for being overly positive and expressed the need for more nuanced storytelling.



How to Keep a Business Alive During Conflict

Moderator: Beatrice Maneschi, Founder, Catalystas Consultants (France)

Panellists:

Mirwais Momand, Founder & CEO, Mido Dairy (Afghanistan)

Hind Albashri (Libya)

Abdo Seif, Deputy Team Leader at UNDP (Yemen)

The session brought together private sector and development as well as educational expert all working in active conflict zones to discuss the stark realities and challenges SMEs face operating under various conflict or vulnerability affected settings. The speakers as well as the audience discuss the steps the private sector itself as well as development actors can take to support resilience. Key takeaways included:

- Conflict zones are challenging environments to work in but they also offer opportunities.
- International development organisations such as SPARK and Expertise France introduced the notion of 'entrepreneurship' after the war in Libya. There's an ongoing issue with sufficient funding to make development programmes in Libya sustainable.
- There's a need for rebuilding the infrastructure of Libya. Security issues still exist in the south.
- Afghanistan is facing a significant systemic change. There's significant issues in access to banking services.
- Fuel crisis in Yemen led to a major inflation. Entrepreneurs started investing in alternative solutions such as solar-powered transportation or renewable energy solutions.
- Afghan entrepreneurs sought opportunities in digital businesses in which the limited government control provides them relative freedom.
- Due to a monetary crisis in Libya which makes it hard to find cash in the country, a private bank initiated a mobile payment system which turned out to be very successful.
- Due to a weak private sector heritage, Afghan entrepreneurs need mentorship and coaching on how to survive the challenging market conditions. There's a significant need for access to finance in the country.



How Universities Can Help Close the Employability Skills Gap

Moderator: Ayselin Yıldız, Asst. Prof. and UNESCO Chair on International Migration, Yasar University (Türkiye)

Panellists:

Dr. Rawaa Qasha, Asst. Prof. and the Director of Scholarships and Cultural Relations, University of Mosul (KRI)

Dr. Abdallah Abdallah, Asst. President for Industry Partnership, Al Hussein Technical University (Jordan)

Marilize Pretorius, Lecturer at the Department of Linguistics, University of Antwerp (Belgium)

Roos Hogenkamp, Global Manager and Member of the Board, NUFFIC (Netherlands)

This workshop aimed at understanding the skills gap between the higher education and job market. SPARK's cooperation with higher education institutions was discussed with participation of academics from the Middle East. Some of the key takeaways were:

- Young people study a lot of things that is not practical and applicable on the ground
- Training of trainers is key to adapt curricula to skills needed in the market. They need to embrace new approaches and techniques that match with better job market preparation.
- The education program should include an internship assignment for each student who should make a presentation on the learning outcomes from the internship. This should be part of the grading and graduation process.
- Most universities don't have soft skills teaching for students, which need to be included.
- Each student should have a complete skills portfolio after graduation.
- The teaching methodology should be more modern and follow the pace of advancement in technology.



Localisation: Turning Theory into Action

Moderator: Vince Chadwick, Brussels Correspondent, Devex (Belgium)

Panellists:

Chéma Gargouri, Founder and CEO, TAMSS (Tunisia)

Smruti Patel, Founder and Co-Director, Global Mentoring Initiative (Switzerland)

Yvanne Micha Ingabire, Project Officer, SPARK (Burundi)

Ziena Abu-Dalbouh, Entrepreneurship Programme Manager, Jusoor (Jordan)

The main objective of this workshop was to understand the recent dynamics and questions in the localisation agenda and explore how best SPARK can apply its localisation strategy. Panelists discussed best practices and challenging issues in international-local NGO partnerships. Key takeaways from this workshop were:

- INGOs play a crucial role in brokering between donors and local organisations.
- Only a small share of donor funding eventually reaches the local partners.
- The goals of the donor, the intermediary organisation and the local partners do not always line up.
- Donors prefer engaging with INGOs and larger organisations rather than local NGOs.
- It is important to let local partners sit at the table when designing policies and include them at higher level conversations.
- Rather than only providing funds, it is important to build the capacity of local NGOs. Local NGOs should make it clear about their demands from INGOs.
- INGOs should create programs with local partners and include them throughout the whole process.
- To improve the culture of the longstanding NGO industry, it is important to decolonize the mindset ('we come to save you'), by reflecting and changing the amount of value placed on compliance to putting more value on knowledge of local partners.

Conclusions



The IGNITE conference is the only event worldwide discussing job creation for youth in fragile states. Aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 8 that promotes sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, this year's event pushed the discussion topic higher on the public and political agenda. Huge thanks go to all the IGNITE partners, supporters and guests who made IGNITE 9 a fantastic conference. The IGNITE team are pleased with the overwhelmingly positive feedback this year and will continue to listen to your feedback and suggestions for future events.

NEXT IGNITE

Join the 10th anniversary of the
IGNITE Conference in Spring 2024