

Refugees are Australia's most entrepreneurial migrants — here are seven steps to help this spirit for creating businesses to flourish

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New research from the Centre for Policy Development (CPD) and the Open Political Economy Network (OPEN) shows that refugees are Australia's most entrepreneurial migrants and are nearly twice as likely to start a business as Australian taxpayers as a whole. It outlines how a modest investment and strategically targeted support could deliver big economic, fiscal and social benefits for local communities, refugees and their families, and Australia.

The report, *Seven Steps to SUCCESS: Enabling Refugee Entrepreneurs to Flourish*, estimates that creating an additional 1,000 refugee-run businesses a year could deliver an annual economic and fiscal boost of \$98 million – and \$1 billion a year after ten years. The report also finds female refugees are more likely to report business income than their male counterparts.

“Delivering substantial change across Australia requires a strategic approach that makes entrepreneurship a viable option for all suitable refugees” said Annabel Brown, CPD Program Director, “This would include addressing common challenges including capital and connections, creating a more enabling environment and providing more upskilling opportunities.”

Seven Steps to SUCCESS was written by Philippe Legrain, founder of OPEN, and Dr Andrew Burridge, CPD Research Coordinator. It draws on Australian and international best practices to present policy recommendations to government, business and civil society on how to better support refugee entrepreneurs.

“We need to shift popular misperceptions of refugees,” said Philippe Legrain. “Refugees are remarkably resilient and resolute people who make a great contribution to Australia's economy, and have huge potential to do more. With a hand up and their own hard work, they can and will flourish.”

The report argues that the top priority is to raise awareness of the contribution and potential of refugee entrepreneurs, including by expanding opportunities for entrepreneurs within employment services like *jobactive*, and by launching Refugee Entrepreneur of the Year awards.

“Awards would be a great way to celebrate the contribution refugee entrepreneurs make to our communities and raise the awareness of the public and policy makers,” said Andrew Kaldor AM.

“Some refugees start a business out of necessity, for lack of better alternatives,” said Dr Burridge, “others spot opportunities that locals miss. Above all, the resilience, risk-taking and resolve of refugees are also key strengths for would-be entrepreneurs, as is, for some, their previous business experience.”

Innovative non-governmental initiatives are increasing, primarily in Sydney and Melbourne. Kinan Al Halabi, profiled in the report, arrived in Australia in 2016 after fleeing civil war in Syria. Kinan accessed support from Thrive Refugee Enterprise and the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) and now runs a successful business as a driving instructor: “I don't like to take anything for nothing. I am always trying to improve my business. I use everything I learned in my studies.”

Huy Truong also arrived in Australia as a refugee and went on to start Wishlist Holdings, Yarra Capital Partners, A.L.I Group and Thrive Refugee Enterprise. Through his ventures, Huy has been involved in creating over 1,000 jobs. He is now CEO of ALL Group and Executive Director of Thrive Refugee Enterprise. “Whilst there is a natural tendency to discuss refugees through the lens of human rights and welfare, that actually misses a key aspect of refugees being an economic force in the global economy” Mr Truong said. “I would encourage more public policy design and investment to unlock and enable refugees to greater economic participation and therefore a return to Australia. This would include more effective translation of home country qualifications to local qualifications, guaranteed or subsidised small-business loans, as well as better connecting and coordinating the ecosystem of supporting service providers.”

Seven Steps to SUCCESS will be launched in Canberra on Thursday 11 April as part of the third meeting of the Council on Economic Participation of Refugees, run by CPD with support from volunteers from the Boston Consulting Group.

The report is available in full here: <https://cpd.org.au/2019/04/seven-steps-to-success-report/>

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