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# Humans at the center:

How social entrepreneurs with a migrant  
background are making a difference

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Do Good. Do Better.

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# Humans at the center:

How social entrepreneurs with a migrant background are making a difference

# Table of Contents

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Preface	07
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---

Executive Summary	09
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Part 1	
Introduction and overview	14
1   01. Background	15
1   02. Defining social entrepreneurs with a migrant background	16
1   03. Methodology	17

---

Part 2	
What can we learn from social entrepreneurs with a migrant background?	20
2   Navigating multiple systems	21
3   Including the excluded	24
4   Empowering their community	27

---

Part 3	
How can we build an eco-system for impact?	32
5   01. Recommendations to support the social entrepreneurs	34
5   02. Recommendations to amplify the impact	35
6   Conclusion	36

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7   About the authors	36
-----------------------	----

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8   About the organizations	37
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# Preface

In the current global state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic it is difficult to think and act beyond the sphere of daily news updates. However, we believe that it is now more important than ever to reflect on how we want to (re) build a more just and inclusive society that is resilient when faced with future crises. This study aims to provide concrete recommendations for institutional actors on how to include the voices and actions of social entrepreneurs with a migrant background when addressing issues related to migration.

People with a migrant background often lack a seat at the table when migration issues concerning their communities are discussed and debated. At the same time, there is evidence that these social entrepreneurs are both creative and resilient, and often develop highly innovative solutions to address these issues. Why are their voices not included and how can we overcome this apparent gap?

Current narratives place migrants as passive agents in need of help or compassion as opposed to active changemakers who are eager and able to contribute. There is a need to remove the stigma associated with migrants, and as entrepreneurs they are uniquely positioned to develop solutions that are tailored to their communities' needs in particular, and to the development of countries and regions in general. If we are able to lower and remove the barriers that keep this change from happening, the results can be astounding.

This paper begins to scratch the surface of this huge potential of people with a migrant background for the sector of social innovation. We hope that it will inspire future research and more inclusive actions by policymakers and other key stakeholders interested in addressing migration issues.

We are proud to present this collaborative research project between Ashoka and Esade, and thank the social entrepreneurs with a migrant background, as well as experts and informants who have contributed their experience and knowledge.



**Kenny Clewett**  
Executive Director –  
Ashoka Hello Europe



**Lisa Hehenberger,**  
Ph.D.  
Director – Esade  
Entrepreneurship  
Institute



**Abdoulaye Fall**  
Winkomun / Association  
of self-funded communities



**Who leads the initiative?**

Abdoulaye Fall is the project manager for Winkomun. With a Master degree in Immigration Management from the University of Pompeo Fabra and a Doctorate in Demography at the UAB Centre for Demographic Studies, he combines his responsibility at Winkomun, creating savings groups, training and assessing them, with tracking and organizing training activities in the field of microfinance and community organization.



**How does it work?**

Winkomun is a cooperative organization with the goal of fighting financial and social exclusion by creating and supporting self-funded communities. Winkomun works with self-sustaining financial groups led by immigrants in order to promote networking and support their basic financial needs. These communities are small groups in which the partners – normally between 10 and 30 people – can participate with small contributions. The money collected is used to provide the members with small loans with which they can cover their day-to-day expenses and even finance small business. In the process, deep relationships are formed that contribute to building much needed personal and professional networks.



**The numbers impact**

Winkomun is expanding their proven and efficient methodology throughout Spain and to other European countries with low income and migrant populations. Winkomun has expanded to 8 different cities in Spain and to Senegal, Portugal, Italy, Holland, Hungary, Germany, and Belgium, and has built a free online platform allowing anyone around the world to access their methodology and has created a worldwide network of self-funded communities.



**The human impact**

Refugees and new migrants are often excluded from the financial structures that allow them to fully integrate into their new community. Self-funded communities provide newcomers with an opportunity to quickly become a resource to others and form part of a community that helps them navigate their new context more effectively. Poorer people – equipped with the right tools – can solve almost all their everyday problems in spite of their harsh life circumstances.

# Executive Summary

As experienced professionals, social entrepreneurs with a migrant background implement effective solutions that put humans at the center and lead to long-term benefits for migrants and their host communities. In this report, we shine a light on their unique approach by taking the perspective of migrants as an opportunity instead of a threat, in order to see what we can learn from them. Based on our research findings, we make recommendations to build an eco-system for impact, highlighting the role each institutional actor can play to drive change.

## The study

These social entrepreneurs with a migrant background are founders or leaders of initiatives that aim to solve migration issues. We concentrate on social entrepreneurs with both forced (such as refugees) and voluntary migration background who moved from less to more stable and economically developed countries. They have either migrated themselves (first generation), or they are the descendants of migrants (second or third generation). From January to September 2019, we studied 28 social entrepreneurs and interviewed 36 individuals in total, including migration experts. We also collected data during events on migration and (social) entrepreneurship, and archival data on the social entrepreneurs and their initiatives. We analyzed this data and reviewed the academic and grey literature to corroborate our findings with the existing knowledge on social entrepreneurship and migration. Our study reveals the importance of changing perspectives on the role of migrants in society.

## What can we learn from social entrepreneurs with a migrant background?

Societal challenges related to migration are complex and consist of multiple interrelated issues that affect migrants themselves as well as their host and home countries. Migrants face adversities, they are excluded from the development of solutions, and there is a stigma related to the label "migrant". Social entrepreneurs with a migrant background deal with these problems head-on and provide effective solutions by navigating multiple systems - including the excluded - and empowering their community. The expertise of these social entrepreneurs is grounded in their experience with migration and their unique capabilities developed over time from dealing with these complex issues. As experienced professionals, they are leading by example and there are important lessons we can learn from their approach.

### Navigating multiple systems

Migrants face numerous adversities upon arrival in host countries. The capability to navigate multiple systems by persevering and adapting, while having an interconnected view, distinguishes social entrepreneurs with a migrant background from other actors in the migration field. It makes them particularly equipped to tackle these adversities.

#### Perseverance and adaptability

The social entrepreneurs are able to access resources in difficult circumstances by being perseverant in their pursuit of social change while being adaptable in the way to get there.

#### Interconnected view

Due to their migrant background, the social entrepreneurs are in a unique position to regard migration issues, that inherently span borders and nations, in an interconnected way.

### Including the excluded

Migrants are excluded from solutions. There is a gap between the institutional level where policies and solutions are developed, and the grassroots level where migration issues are most prevalent. By building bridges and by adopting an empathic approach, social entrepreneurs with a migrant background work towards getting a seat at the table in the development of policies and solutions, including the excluded.

#### Building bridges

The social entrepreneurs build bridges with an insider understanding by being ingrained in the migrant community, while also knowing how to navigate the institutional environment.

#### Empathic approach

The social entrepreneurs adopt an empathic approach towards solving migration issues that puts human beings at the center. As a result of their migrant background, these social entrepreneurs have a more comprehensive understanding of migration issues. Their own journey or that of their (grand) parents are a key motivator for their work.

### Empowering their community

There is a stigma associated with the label "migrant". Fighting this stigma is very difficult, because it is intangible and incessant. However, the social entrepreneurs work on freeing themselves from their marginalized position in host countries and are empowering their community by pro-actively elevating their status and reclaiming their identity.

#### Elevating status

The social entrepreneurs elevate the status of their own community by pushing back against preconceived ideas and biases, and by positively influencing perceptions towards migrants.

#### Reclaiming identity

The social entrepreneurs purposively choose a dignified path by lifting themselves up based on merit and by always presenting themselves as equal. They refuse to accept the labels in host countries like "migrant", "refugee", or "victim". Instead, they assert the complexity of who they are.

## How can we build an eco-system for impact?

Our research shows that social entrepreneurs with a migrant background play a key role in tackling societal challenges related to migration by providing effective solutions that are making a difference in host and home countries. We make ten recommendations to build an eco-system for impact where these social entrepreneurs are supported and their impact is amplified. In each area we highlight the special role that every institutional actor can play to create the change that is needed.

### Recommendations to support the social entrepreneurs

- 01** Social entrepreneurs with a migrant background need to have a seat at the table when policies and solutions are developed to ensure their effectiveness.
- 02** Institutional actors need to overcome their own preconceptions and biases towards people with a migrant background and commit to a trust-based relationship with the social entrepreneurs.
- 03** Access to financial capital and services needs to be improved via specialized programs at commercial banks, microfinance institutions, and impact investment funds. *Special role: European Commission*
- 04** Access to legal expertise and favorable tax policies/subsidies need to be improved while minimizing bureaucracy. Knowledge hubs can be created to make expertise affordable and accessible. *Special role: National governments*
- 05** Large institutional actors need to engage more with inclusive communities at the grassroots level to co-create opportunities for diversity within their organizations and the local environment. *Special role: Local governments*

### Recommendations to amplify the impact

- 06** Adopting an empowering and empathic approach towards asylum seekers and other migrants by speeding up procedures and loosening work restrictions and language requirements.
- 07** Creating more opportunities for migrants in the formal labor market by recognizing their knowledge, skills, and work experience. *Special role: Private sector*
- 08** Promoting collaboration and alignment by changing incentives within as well as outside existing organization to pave the way for people with a migrant background to work on issues related to migration. *Special role: Civil society sector*
- 09** Changing the narrative by shining a light on positive stories about migration that focus on our shared humanity. *Special role: Media industry*
- 10** Creating fruitful grounds for the development of innovative solutions through partnerships between experienced professionals (1st, 2nd or 3rd generation) with an interconnected view and field experts. *Special role: Think tanks and academic institutions*



**Khuloud Kalthoum**  
SPEAK Braga



#### Who leads the initiative?

Khuloud Kalthoum is a social entrepreneur and TEDx speaker with a Masters in Sustainable Energies from ISEP Instituto Superior Técnico do Porto. In addition to her work as an electrical engineer at the leading energy company EDP Energias de Portugal, Khuloud is the founder of SPEAK in the city of Braga. Being from Syria, she has a deep sense of duty to give back to those less fortunate. Portuguese newspaper Público named Khuloud as a finalist for 'Personality of the Year,' and she has also been included in a list of 100 young people under 35 to join public debates in Portugal to help shape the future of the community.



#### How does it work?

SPEAK is a social tech startup that connects newcomers and locals through crowdsourced language and culture exchange programs and events with an innovative methodology that creates support networks between participants. By having leaders who are able to help facilitate and manage the conversation between strangers, true friendship and bonds are formed that can have a positive impact on generations to come. Conflict stems from a lack of understanding of someone else, and SPEAK's value is in providing fora for people around the world to turn from strangers to friends, from uncomfortable to comfortable. To stimulate a 'pay it forward' culture.



#### The numbers impact

Speak is in 24 cities in more than 15 countries, and their vision is to change the world, one person at a time, through mutual kindness, care, and understanding. SPEAK Braga community consists of more than 800 people from 57 nationalities (between participants, buddies, and ambassadors.) Over the past two years, they organized 41 language groups and 70 language and culture exchange events.



#### The human impact

Through local outreach and organic connection, SPEAK helps refugees, immigrants, and expats around the world acquire all the resources they need to become meaningful contributors to their local communities. This will lead to more peace and harmony, while enabling people to thrive in their new homes as they support one another and develop empathy for their journey. At the same time, they're able to share their own.

# Part 1

# Introduction and overview

Mass migration is considered one of the defining challenges of our time: thousands of people are escaping war, persecution, hunger, and poverty in their home countries with the hope of finding a better and safer future elsewhere. Between 2010 and 2017 the number of refugees and asylum seekers increased by about 13 million, mostly hosted in Northern Africa and Western Asia<sup>1</sup>. At the peak of the so-called “migration crisis” in 2015, an estimate of 1,005,504 migrants and refugees arrived in Europe<sup>2</sup>. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, there’s an increased risk of these vulnerable people being further marginalized and the problems they face compounded. Upon arrival in host countries, migrants encounter numerous adversities due to political, economic, cultural, and legal issues. In addition, there is a stigma towards migrants that exacerbates the disadvantages these communities face.

However, the solutions to these difficulties that are proposed rarely include migrant voices, causing failures in the design and implementation of programs. Social entrepreneurs with a migrant background have shown to overcome these challenges and implement solutions based on their own experience. This makes them more effective and humane. They are at the center of the issues they aim to address and, therefore, driven by a strong intrinsic motivation to elevate the status of the migrant community, in turn increasing participation and impact. In the process, these social entrepreneurs also reclaim their own identity, that might have been affected due to discrimination or because they are seen as “migrants” rather than professionals. They become role models for the younger generation.

In this report, we shine a light on the unique approach of these experienced professionals by taking the perspective of migrants as an opportunity instead of a threat to see what we can learn from them. Based on our research findings, we make recommendations to build an eco-system for impact, highlighting the role each institutional actor can play to drive change. This report is the result of a collaboration between Esade Business School and Ashoka Hello Europe with the goal to generate new knowledge and build solutions for the most pressing societal challenges we face in our world today.

## 1 | 01. Background

Migration has long taken place within regions as well as within countries and is not unique to Europe and the United States. It is a complex phenomenon, linked to the increasing levels of inequality and the effects of climate change we face in the world today. With increasing technological advancements, more people have been able to flee from harmful circumstances and build a life elsewhere, generally becoming an asset to the host countries. In 2015, the so-called “migration crisis” in Europe was at its peak. So far, the political debate has been polarized, and public policies have been mostly reactionary.

Several actors have risen to the challenge to promote the benefits of migrants to local economies and international workforces. This economic argument is rooted in long-standing research on entrepreneurship and labor-markets that shows migrants are more entrepreneurial than their host country counterparts<sup>3</sup>. However, to reap the benefits of migration, host countries need structural changes to develop a more entrepreneurial environment for newcomers<sup>4</sup> and promote labor-market integration based on the talents of migrants<sup>5</sup>. The recommendations for policy and practice that have been developed are based on research and proven solutions from other contexts, such as North America<sup>6</sup> and the Middle East<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Population Facts, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> IOM, Irregular Migrant, Refugee Arrivals in Europe Top One Million in 2015: IOM, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Rath J and Kloosterman R, Outsiders’ business: a critical review of research on immigrant entrepreneurship, International Migration Review, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> World Refugee Council, “Call Me a Business Owner, Not a Refugee!” Challenges of and Perspectives on Newcomer Entrepreneurship, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Migration Ventures, Refugee and labor market integration in Germany, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Hire Immigrants, Investing in refugee talent: Lessons learned in labor market integration, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Strøm-Olsen N and Amelie M, Startup Migrants, 2019.

Another key actor are social entrepreneurs who implement solutions to the systemic problems we are facing by adopting an entrepreneurial approach. They play an important part in the full participation of newcomers in their host communities, and are increasingly being recognized for their efforts with the support of membership and network organizations, research institutes, accelerators, and other actors in the migration field. For example, Hello Europe was initiated by Ashoka to scale the most effective solutions of social entrepreneurs that build on the potential of migrants<sup>8</sup>. The intersection of social entrepreneurship and migration is rapidly developing and provides a valid counterforce to the harmful and counterproductive responses to migration in Europe.

Social entrepreneurs with a migrant background are very active in the migration field and implement effective solutions at the grassroots level. Nevertheless, migrant voices are rarely represented at the level where policies and solutions are developed. The European Migrant Advisory Board, comprised of a diverse group of experts with a migrant background, recognizes this problem. They published a report with recommendations to tackle migration issues in key areas – such as housing, integration, and employment – based on a consultation with migrants and refugees<sup>9</sup>. This shows the necessity to include migrants and refugees in the decision-making process on a structural basis. Herein, the experience of these social entrepreneurs is invaluable, as they show successful approaches to solve issues underlying migration.

## 1 | 02. Defining social entrepreneurs with a migrant background

In the public debate, the words “refugee” and “migrant” are used interchangeably. However, there is an important legal distinction. Refugees are forcibly displaced persons who cannot return home safely – also referred to as forced migration – and are therefore protected by international laws, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention. Conversely, migrants are not under immediate threat in their home country and move to improve their lives elsewhere<sup>10</sup>. In reality, it is difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between both groups, for example in the case of famine or natural disasters. In our study, we focus on social entrepreneurs with both a forced (i.e. refugees) and voluntary migration background who moved from less to more stable and economically developed countries – using the “advanced economy” classification made by the International Monetary Fund<sup>11</sup>. They have either migrated themselves (first generation) or they are the descendants of migrants (second or third generation). Social entrepreneurs with a migrant background are founders or leaders of initiatives that aim to solve migration issues. These initiatives – in the form of for-profit social businesses or non-profit organizations – address migration issues from different angles including financing, capacity building, economic opportunities, education, housing, legal support, art, consultancy, human rights, community work, and advocacy. Just like migration is inherently a phenomenon that spans borders, these initiatives focus on (multiple) regions within and outside host and home countries.

<sup>8</sup> Ashoka, Hello Europe Portfolio of Solutions: Citizen Sector Innovation for Migration, Integration and Refugee Movements, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> European Migrant Advisory Board, Ask the people: A consultation of migrants and refugees, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> UNHCR, UNHCR viewpoint: ‘Refugee’ or ‘migrant’ – Which is right?, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> IMF, World Economic Outlook Database, 2019. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2019/02/weodata/index.aspx>

## 1 | 03. Methodology

To understand how these social entrepreneurs address migration issues, we performed qualitative research using a snowball sampling technique to collect data. Participating social entrepreneurs were asked to refer us to other social entrepreneurs fitting the scope of our study. Initially, Ashoka connected us with social entrepreneurs, but our sample group did not always grow through referrals. We needed to perform additional searches using our own network, by attending events and meetings on the topic of migration and (social) entrepreneurship, and via internet searches. From January to September 2019, we studied 28 social entrepreneurs and interviewed a total of 36 individuals. We predominantly interviewed first generation migrants, followed by second generation and third generation descendants of migrants, with our sample consisting of slightly more females than males. Our interviewees were almost equally based in Europe and the United States with backgrounds from different countries in Asia, Africa, and South America. We created a semi-structured interview guide that focused on how the social entrepreneurs (1) develop ideas, (2) take action, and (3) make their voices heard within the institutional setting where they implement their solutions. To validate the information provided by the social entrepreneurs, we also interviewed experts on the topic of migration who are familiar with their work and/or knowledgeable about the different institutional settings. In addition, we collected data during events on migration and (social) entrepreneurship, and archival data about the social entrepreneurs and their initiatives, including publicly available information via websites and press articles.

From September to November 2019, we transcribed our interviews and analyzed our data in a systematic way to be able to recognize emerging patterns and themes. We presented our preliminary findings and recommendations during Ashoka’s European Changemaker Summit in Barcelona in November 2019. During this event, we organized workshops around the main themes and gathered feedback from various actors in the field, such as social entrepreneurs with or without a migrant background, researchers and other scholars on the topic of entrepreneurship and migration, and leaders and change actors in the non-profit, business, and government sectors. From December 2019 to January 2020, we processed this feedback and reviewed the academic and grey literature to corroborate our findings with the existing knowledge on social entrepreneurship and migration. In February 2020, we finalized the report on social entrepreneurs with a migrant background.

Figure 1 Timeline





**Anas Ragheb**  
Mpowerment



**Who leads the initiative?**

Anas Ragheb is a cross cultural trainer and coach who feels fulfilled when people around him feel satisfied. Anas studied English literature back in Syria and has 18 years of work experience in Syria and Dubai. He arrived in the Netherlands in September 2015 as a refugee. Anas tried to find a job as a teacher, but due to certification difficulties he was not able to. Many refugees face the same problem, especially craftsmen. This motivated him to start Mpowerment in 2018 to help fellow newcomers get certified and access the job market.



**How does it work?**

Mpowerment is a social enterprise that helps truck drivers with a refugee background to get certified with a Dutch driver's license and connects them with paid jobs. Besides the technical part of the certification process, Mpowerment provides intercultural workshops to address the differences between the culture of the candidate and the Dutch culture. In addition, candidates are coached during the 1 year they are employed to facilitate their work integration.



**The numbers impact**

The transport sector in the Netherlands faces a huge shortage of qualified drivers, with an estimated 70,000 vacancies in the next three years. At the same time, there is a huge number of experienced truck drivers in the newcomers community. However, it is almost impossible for these people to have a driver's license for two reasons: the theoretical exam is very difficult and the costs are very high. Mpowerment is a one-point solution. It provides the job market with talented and motivated personnel. In addition, it helps the unemployed and unintegrated newcomers participate better in their new society, saving 20,000 euro in social welfare costs per year per person starting a paid job.



**The human impact**

Often newcomers face cultural shock as they come to a society with different values, habits, and ways of communication. As a result, those people become isolated and integration becomes harder, especially for lower educated people who can't properly speak the language. Mpowerment helps these highly skilled craftsmen to become financially independent, make their work integration easier, and get their self-esteem back.



**Aytakin (Ika) Aliyeva**  
Femigrants



**Who leads the initiative?**

Aytakin (Ika) Aliyeva is the founder of Femigrants. She graduated in Social Media Marketing from Middle Tennessee State University. Previously, she has worked at NVIDIA, AR/VR - a technology company acquired by Facebook - Inc., and Instagram. Facing many challenges and obstacles as an immigrant woman, she launched Femigrants, a global community of diverse female immigrants. Her company aims to help immigrant women to unlock their full potential and advance their businesses and careers through education, inspiration, opportunity and community support. Aytakin's inspirational story has been published on several media sites, including Forbes, Business Women, Times of India, and BBC Azerbaijan.



**How does it work?**

Femigrants is a professional community of diverse immigrant women, connecting immigrant leaders in different industries, including finance, education, marketing, science, and technology. Through the Femigrants' platform, community members can get direct access to industry experts, arrange exchanges, requests for coffee chats and lead conversations to gain insights from experts and share their experience. Femigrants also provides additional resources such as spotlights, success stories and blogs to keep community members active and motivated.



**The numbers impact**

Femigrants started its online community in the Bay Area, and rapidly expanded with 6000+ community members from different parts of the world, including immigrant entrepreneurs, small and medium-sized business owners, and professional leaders in STEM fields. Since its launch, Femigrants organized 15+ networking events and professional trainings, such as forums, fireside chats, panel discussions and more.



**The human impact**

By providing the space and the instruments, immigrant women from diverse backgrounds feel empowered and inspired to realize their full potential and become successful and powerful leaders. Femigrants organizes various activities to offer support and bring the members of its community together.

## Part 2

# What can we learn from social entrepreneurs with a migrant background?

Societal challenges related to migration are complex and consist of multiple interrelated issues that affect migrants themselves as well as their host and home countries. Migrants face adversities, they are excluded from the development of solutions, and there is a stigma related to the label "migrant". Social entrepreneurs with a migrant background deal with these problems head-on and provide effective solutions by navigating multiple systems, including the excluded, and empowering their community. The expertise of the social entrepreneurs is grounded in their experience with migration, either as being migrants themselves or descendants of migrants, and their unique capabilities developed over time from dealing with these complex issues. As experienced professionals, they are leading by example and there are important lessons we can learn their approach.

## Navigating multiple systems

### 2 | 01.

#### The problem

##### Migrants face adversities

Migrants face numerous adversities upon arrival in host countries. Migrants need to rebuild their lives from scratch in an unfamiliar environment and with limited financial means and social capital, while dealing with language and cultural barriers. In addition, the asylum process is creating barriers for migrants to participate in host countries, for example due to status restrictions, which can become a source of psychological stress. Migrants also experience exclusion in other subtle and less subtle ways (e.g. discrimination in hiring processes), making it difficult for them to integrate into the labor market.

“Nothing came easy. Nothing comes easy for most migrants, because you are new. You do not have connections. You do not have a community. You do not have an ecosystem.”

### 2 | 02.

#### The solution

##### Perseverance and adaptability

Social entrepreneurs with a migrant background are able to access resources in difficult circumstances by being perseverant in their pursuit of social change while being adaptable in the way to get there. The social entrepreneurs challenge the status quo by overcoming adversities themselves to be able to do their work. Their perseverance is also reflected by the tremendous personal investment they make and the long-term commitment they show towards tackling the adversities migrants face. At the same time, the social entrepreneurs constantly learn and adapt to the difficult circumstances through creative and organic approaches. They are pro-active and resourceful, doing a lot with little, for example by implementing successful solutions that are cost effective.

“What is really clear is that they put in place very clever programs that don't cost a lot of money. For example, one of the organizations maintains at the community level a list of employers who are safe and a black list of employers who don't pay people. And they give the information to everyone right away.”

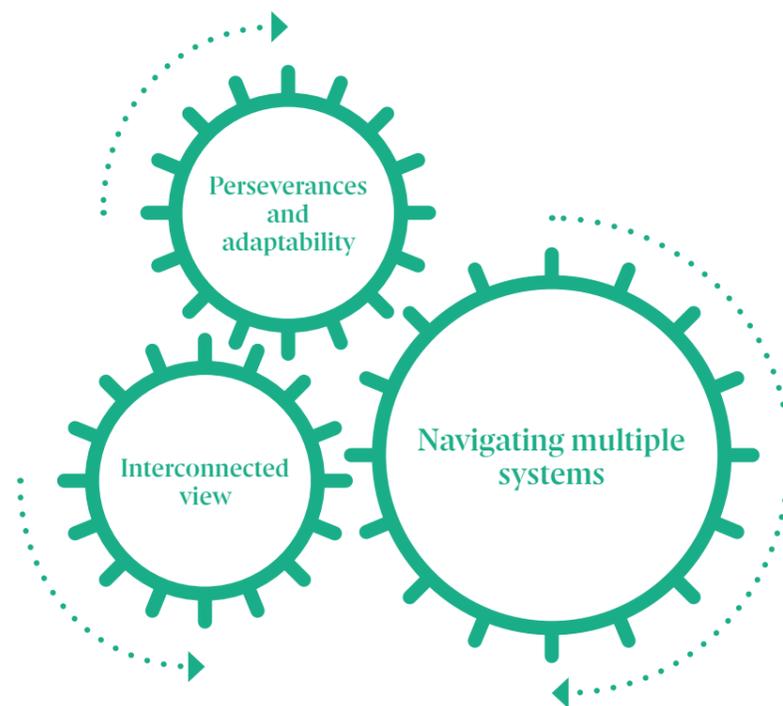
### Interconnected view

As a result of their migrant background, the social entrepreneurs are in a unique position to regard migration issues that inherently span borders and nations in an interconnected way. They see connections and bridge the gap between different contexts and different stakeholders. Understanding multiple institutions, cultures, and intersections allows the social entrepreneurs to approach societal challenges in a more systemic fashion that goes beyond one-sided and superficial solutions, instead focusing on more comprehensive and structural changes.

“It’s important to design a global program where everything is connected. Where a solution from Germany can be exported to Spain. If there is a good solution in Kenya, that solution could be shared with people from Senegal. Taking this perspective and proposing a more comprehensive solution.”

The capability to navigate multiple systems by being perseverant and adaptable while having this interconnected view distinguishes them from other actors in the migration field, and makes them particularly equipped to tackle migration issues.

Figure 2 Navigating multiples systems



**Liza Rivera**  
SBCC Thrive LA



#### Who leads the initiative?

Liza Rivera is the director of Innovative Economic Initiatives (IEI) at SBCC. For more than 40 years, SBCC has empowered communities across Los Angeles to discover and develop tools for individual and collective well-being. She started the IEI program in 2018 to challenge misconceptions that the poor need saving with cash and in-kind transfers by tapping into the resiliency of women, men and families who seek opportunity rather than handouts.



#### How does it work?

Innovative Economic Initiatives create pathways to financial security by providing low-income families, regardless of legal status, access to financial and social capital. One of their many strategies is the YOUUnique Collective. The collective is a home craft program that empowers immigrant women in low-income communities to increase their income through selling handmade products. The initiative provides these entrepreneurs the necessary capital goods, education, and mentorship to enter the marketplace, successfully maintain a business, and contribute to the local economy.



#### The numbers impact

The YOUUnique Collective is extremely cost-effective, because it builds on the gifts and talents that participants already have. So far, 18 artisans have been able to create social networks where there is mutual support, which has shown to increase success and enhance well-being. The power of the collective as an organically built social network ensures that participants will use their connections to continually expand the business that they have built together.



#### The human impact

They see people who are labeled as “poor” rather as individuals with lived experience who will create social networks and work together to participate in and contribute to the local economy. They do not see people from a deficit-based perspective, but as individuals who are assets and who can contribute their gifts and talents to their community and local economy. When barriers are removed and dollars are directly invested into families, it can change the trajectory of their life and change the narrative on how people perceive low-income families.

# Including the excluded

## 3 | 01.

### The problem

#### Migrants excluded from solutions

There is a gap between the institutional level where policies and solutions are developed, and the grassroots level where migration issues are most prevalent. Large institutional actors are often disconnected from what is happening within and around migrant communities, leading to a host country-centric point of view in their approach. Policies and solutions that do not include the voice of migrants are less effective, for example due to cultural differences or by only addressing symptoms instead of causes. This can have negative consequences as it does not fully account for the complexity of the situation.

“There is a communication disconnect. When you are building a business, you talk to your customer. When you are solving a problem, you talk to the person who has that problem before solving it. They are disconnected from the real issues. There needs to be a channel of communication where the person who is facing the problem also has a say and is not powerless.”

## 3 | 02.

### The solution

#### Building bridges

Social entrepreneurs with a migrant background build bridges with an insider understanding by being ingrained in the migrant community while also knowing how to navigate the institutional environment. Acknowledging that it takes a village, they create opportunities through a collaborative approach, proactively engaging in partnerships with other actors in the migration field. The work of the social entrepreneurs is geared towards building inclusive societies, for example by purposively connecting people from various backgrounds to promote the value of diversity and to highlight our shared humanity.

“It’s part of my identity, part of my background, to coach people and train people. So I thought: why not? And I sensed the need for someone who comes from the same culture to help. Especially the young people, the less educated people, the craftsmen, the artisans. Those people have less education, but are professional workers. They are very skilled with their hands, but not good at speaking the local language. So they are ignored by the society, by the municipalities, by the community, by the initiatives. I decided to start a training and certification social enterprise to create better opportunities for those people to find jobs that are suitable for them and match their experience.”

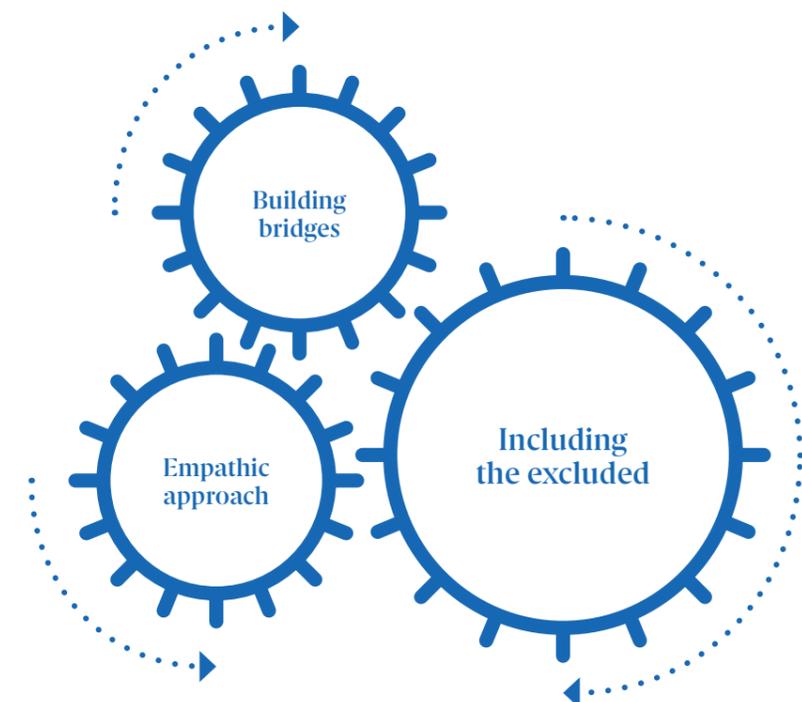
### Empathic approach

The social entrepreneurs adopt an empathic approach towards solving migration issues that puts the human being at the center. As a result of their migrant background, they have a more comprehensive understanding of migration issues. Their own journey or that of their (grand)parents is a key motivator for their work. Because of their professional background, which shapes their solutions, they understand the importance of building on migrants’ existing skills and knowledge. As a result, they are able to provide more humane solutions, for example by not prioritizing language requirements before the well-being of migrants, which allows them to participate in the labor market. In addition, they develop more effective solutions from and for the migrant communities that provide the necessary social capital and trust-based relationships needed to succeed. The social entrepreneurs are driven to pay it forward, creating opportunities for others with similar experiences.

“Now I want to do my part. I want to help others overcome what I have been through. I know there are so many migrants and they need to feel at home in a new city. And now I feel at home and I want to help others to also feel at home.”

By building bridges and by adopting an empathic approach, social entrepreneurs with a migrant background work towards getting a seat at the table in the development of policies and solutions, including the excluded.

Figure 3 Including the excluded





## Yasin Abdi Jama

Réseau des Exilés  
en France



### Who leads the initiative?

Yasin Abdi Jama was born in Somalia two years before the civil war and grew up in times of chaos. Thanks to his parents, he was educated at home and obtained his high school diploma to then go to medical school in China on a scholarship. After his studies, Yasin went back to Somalia and worked as a doctor. The situation there was deteriorating and he had to leave, arriving in France in December 2016 as an asylum seeker. He went through an extremely difficult time, as he didn't know anyone, was not allowed to work as a doctor, had no financial means, and for one month was sleeping in the streets of Paris. Yasin used what he learned from this experience to create the Network of Exiles in France in March 2017. At the moment, Yasin is also founding a social enterprise to train professional translators from a refugee background and provide them with paying jobs.



### The numbers impact

REF is officially recognized for their translation services that for 90% are provided by and to asylum seekers and refugees. So far, they have facilitated 1642+ translations for large asylum shelters, supported and regained the confidence of 1937+ people, and worked 1500+ volunteer hours



### How does it work?

Réseau des Exilés en France (REF) is founded and managed by 'exiled' people. The organization's goal is to support the integration of newly arrived immigrants into French society and to give them the opportunity to become active participants in French society. The language exchange program connects refugees and asylum seekers with locals and immigrants, so they learn new languages from each other. Their team of dedicated refugee volunteers facilitate different types of solidarity translations every day with the aim of helping fellow asylum seekers. REF says NO to the current system of 'refugeeism'. They are a group of people with diverse skills and knowledge, and each have something to offer to society.



### The human impact

REF works with vulnerable people due to their refugee background. It is important to get them out of the isolating shelters and make sure they stay active during their asylum procedure. Instead of wasting their time, they are building experience and feeling useful and hopeful. REF creates a sense of community where people feel at home and supported.

# Empowering their community

## 4 | 01.

### The problem

#### Stigma associated with the label "migrant"

The language about migrants disregards their dignity and negatively labels or victimizes them. It often puts people into a position of dependency instead of being treated as citizens. In addition, the political narrative, further amplified by the media, generally reinforces that stigma by negatively portraying the intentions of migrants and their effect on host countries, which does not match reality. This stigma has a detrimental effect on migrants' sense of self and can become debilitating for people who already face numerous problems due to their marginalized position in society.

“That is not who I am, I am not broken. I studied and have been doing my work. I traveled to a lot of countries and have experience. I am not that. That is really why I was furious.”

## 4 | 02.

### The solution

#### Elevating status

Social entrepreneurs with a migrant background elevate the status of their own community by pushing back against preconceived ideas and biases, and by positively influencing perceptions towards migrants. They share information about their background to create awareness and they share personal stories about migrants to create empathy. In addition, the social entrepreneurs focus on influencing migrants' self-perception and building their confidence, inspiring them to go beyond societies' expectations, for example through ensuring an equal position within their solutions. The social entrepreneurs empower migrants by providing access to information, various forms of social/financial capital, and tools that strengthen their capacity to navigate and create opportunities within the host countries. That way, the social entrepreneurs create an empowering community that supports migrants in their own efforts to build a dignified life.

“We have a storytelling event to share narratives of people with a negative label within the host country. To connect beyond each other's labels and to see each other as human beings again.”

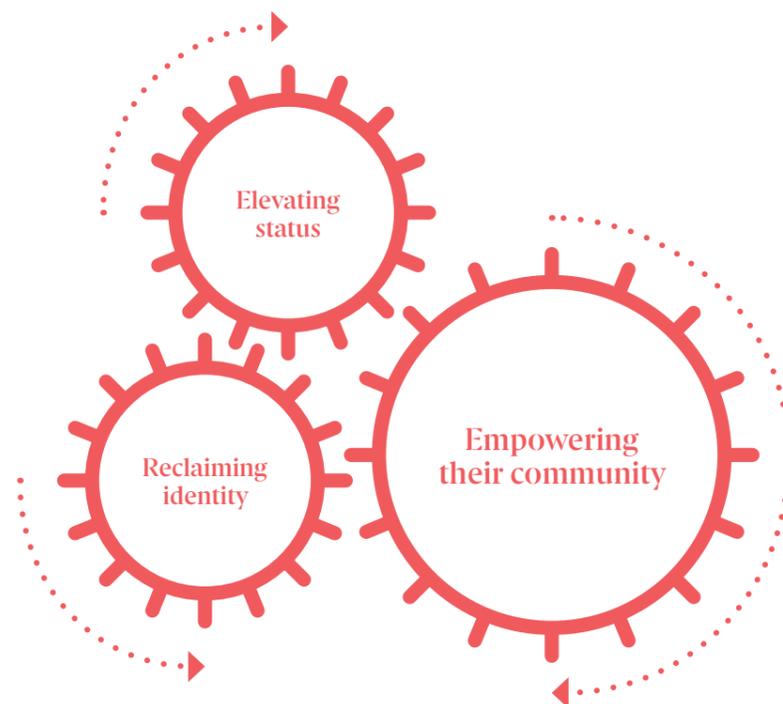
## Reclaiming identity

The social entrepreneurs' professional and personal aims are tied together. By being successful they serve their community vicariously, and become a role model for people with a migrant background. Vice versa, by implementing their own solutions to migration issues, they gain independence and power over their lives. The social entrepreneurs purposively choose a dignified path by lifting themselves up based on merit, and by always presenting themselves as equal. They refuse to accept the host countries labels "migrant", "refugee", or "victim" as defining. Instead, they assert the complexity of who they are. As a result, the social entrepreneurs reclaim their own identity as experienced professionals who have multiple characteristics that contribute to society.

“People think that all migrants are the same, but they are not. People think that all women are the same, but they are not. It's kind of role modeling to showcase what is possible. Role modeling to showcase that everybody is different and that we should not be stereotyped or categorized into a specific category.”

Fighting the stigma towards migrants is very difficult, because it is intangible and incessant. However, the social entrepreneurs show how they are empowering their community by pro-actively elevating their status and reclaiming their identity to free themselves from their marginalized position in host countries.

Figure 4 Empowering their community





**Kwiri Yang**  
Second Time Founders



**Who leads the initiative?**

Kwiri Yang was born in South Korea and raised in Port Vila, Vanuatu, until the age of 13. She then immigrated to the United States where she built a multimillion-dollar company at age 16. Her first venture helped over 2,000 immigrant owners of small businesses in California and she went on to building and selling four more companies focused on education technology and social impact. Recognized as a 40 Under 40 Emerging Civic Leader, Kwiri represented the voice of the next generation at the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum, Women Leaders Forum, and Education World Forum. She overcame severe health conditions that led to learning the importance of emotional intelligence and conscious leadership in the context of company culture and product creation. She then went on to building Second Time Founders.



**How does it work?**

Second Time Founders is an invitation- and nomination-only community of seasoned founders committed to improving the state of the world through conscious leadership. They are an intimate, small and curated community for seasoned founders who have built a minimum of one company in the past. They bring together founders in a very specific stage of the company and leadership in the form of a cohort where the founders go through peer coaching, providing them with Social Emotional Learning/ Emotional Intelligence Content and curriculum to elevate conscious leadership.



**The numbers impact**

They are a membership organization to impact 1% of the influential leaders. As they grow the number of the founders they serve, they will be impacting thousands to million people in the workforce, through the employees that they impact in the companies they run.



**The human impact**

The impact of their community amplifies from the top as they directly work with the influential founders who are able to bring their emotional intelligence training and mindfulness concept back to their employees, impacting the culture and company wellness. Leaders leading from the abundance and healthy mindset elevate humanity through their business.



**Arjitha Sethi**  
Equally PBC



**Who leads the initiative?**

Arjitha Sethi is a passionate social entrepreneur who completed her Master degree in Social Entrepreneurship from Hult International Business School. She started her entrepreneurial journey at 16 in India where she cofounded a vocational school and Startupindia.in. She sits on the advisory board of the Nasdaq Entrepreneurial Center. She teaches entrepreneurship and innovation at Hult International Business School and San Francisco State University. She speaks and consults actively on Inclusion, Edtech, Consumer startups, Product-Market fit and Growth hacking. Arjitha is the co-founder of Equally with Anshul Dhawan.



**How does it work?**

Equally is a public benefit corporation with a mission to give equal education and opportunities to everyone. Their first commercial product is called Da Vinci Club, which is an augmented reality experience powered by AI. This platform is like a smart camera. A kid can click on anything in their surrounding and is able to learn about it. The reason they created this platform is to be relevant to each child, no matter the location. Their second product is called Da Vinci learning labs, a virtual learning experience with live classes, which they launched in response to the coronavirus shutdown. They realized that multiple kids around the world would be out of school, and wanted to give them a healthy learning environment.



**The numbers impact**

They have reached over 20,000 kids in 12 countries. And their research on pedagogy and learning is being conducted in Finland. They have created a pipeline of about 40,000 users and hope to roll out the solution out to them by the end of 2020. Kids have walked about a million steps on their platform already.



**The human impact**

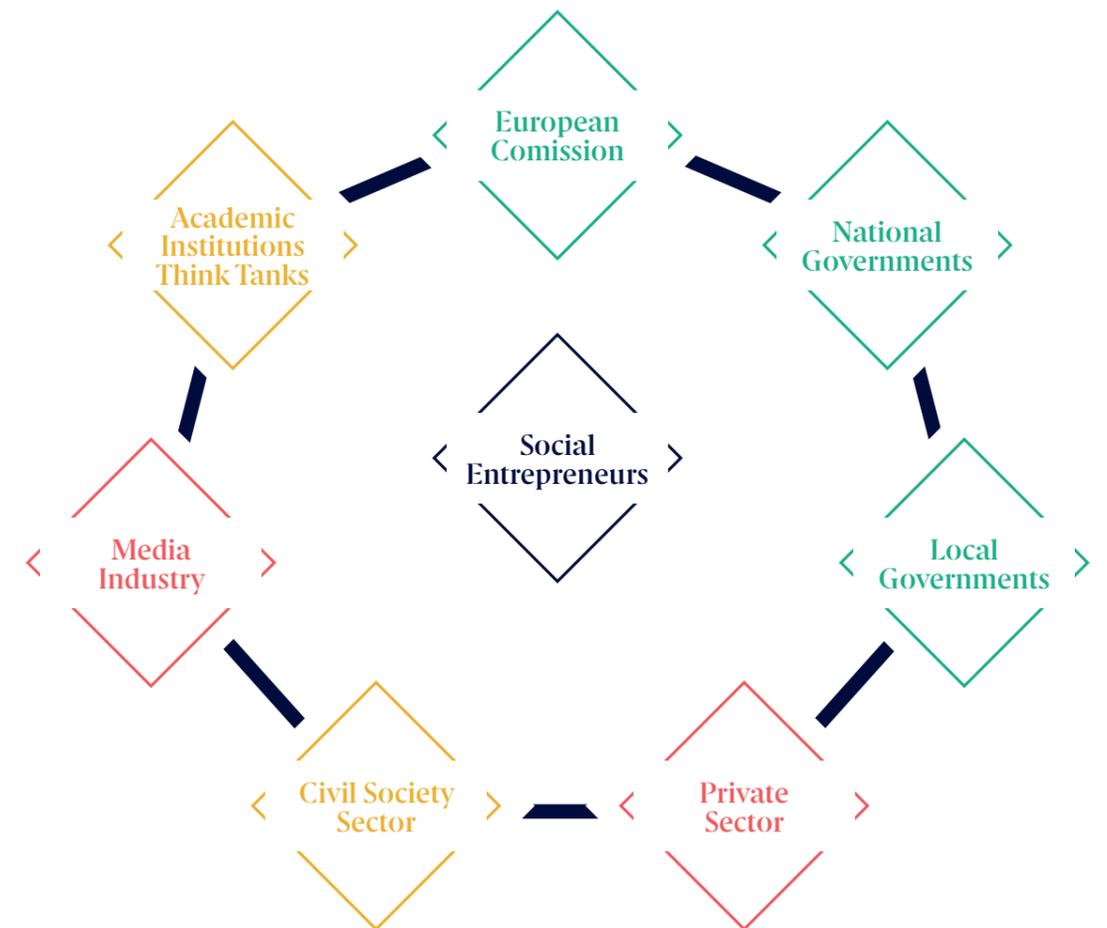
Da Vinci Club is an exploration tool that helps kids use intellectual autonomy and constructivism to unlock their passions and dig deeper into them. They don't believe in standard subject reports. Inspired by Leonardo da Vinci, they want kids to find connections in the real world, learn from the real world and get the skills for the future of work, whatever it might be. With Equally, they aim to make kids self-reliant and give them the joy of the exploration.

## Part 3

# How can we build an eco-system for impact?

Our research shows that social entrepreneurs with a migrant background play a key role in tackling societal challenges related to migration by providing effective solutions that are making a difference in host and home countries. These social entrepreneurs do not operate in a vacuum. Rather, they are embedded in an institutional environment that can support as well as challenge their work. The actions taken by major institutional actors – such as different levels of government, private and civil society sector, media industry, academic institutions and think tanks – are decisive for all actors in the migration field. How can we build an eco-system that supports the social entrepreneurs to do their work and benefit society as a whole? How can institutional actors change their own practices to amplify their impact? We make ten recommendations to build an eco-system for impact, in each area highlighting the special role each institutional actor can play to create the change needed.

Figure 5 Ecosystem for impact



## 5 | 01.

## Recommendations to support the social entrepreneurs

## Getting a seat at the table on a structural basis

**Recommendation 1:** Social entrepreneurs with a migrant background need to have a seat at the table when policies and solutions are developed to ensure their effectiveness. For the first time, people with a migrant background have been consulted at the EU-level and during the Global Refugee Forum. However, this is not enough. Changes need to be made in the decision-making structures to improve accessibility and ensure the representation of migrants as a key stakeholder.

## Overcoming preconceptions and biases towards experienced professionals

**Recommendation 2:** Institutional actors need to overcome their own preconceptions and biases towards people with a migrant background and commit to a trust-based relationship with the social entrepreneurs that will ensure supportive actions are taken on the basis of their recommendations as experienced professionals.

## Access to financial services via specialized programs

**Recommendation 3:** The current institutional environment is resource scarce, making it difficult for the social entrepreneurs to continue their work over time. Access to financial capital and services needs to be improved through specialized programs at commercial banks, microfinance institutions, and impact investment funds. *Special role: European Commission.*

## Access to legal expertise and favorable tax policies/subsidies while minimizing bureaucracy

**Recommendation 4:** Although programs and networks exist that help the social entrepreneurs to develop their initiatives, more support is needed to better navigate the regulatory environment and deal with the bureaucratic processes. Knowledge hubs can be created that make expertise affordable and accessible where the social entrepreneurs get advice on their specific cases that operate on various intersections (e.g. legal status, migrant background, gender, or a particular social issue). In addition, favorable tax policies and subsidies can be put in place while simplifying the bureaucratic processes to apply for them. *Special role: National governments.*

## Engaging with inclusive communities at grassroots level to co-create opportunities

**Recommendation 5:** The biggest opportunity to create social change exists on the grassroots level where the social entrepreneurs are building inclusive communities that foster social cohesion between people with diverse backgrounds. Large institutional actors need to engage more with these communities to co-create opportunities for diversity within their organizations and the local environment. *Special role: Local governments.*

## 5 | 02.

## Recommendations to amplify the impact

## Adopting an empowering and empathic approach

**Recommendation 6:** Adopting an empowering and empathic approach towards asylum seekers and other migrants by speeding up procedures and loosening work restrictions and language requirements. In a few settings, improvements have been made that allow people to graduate and do internships while waiting for their status outcome. This is helpful, but more must be done. People need to be given back ownership, while being supported with various forms of capital and tools, so they can rebuild their lives in host countries in a way that minimizes psychological stress and dependency on welfare in the long run.

## Promoting a diverse workforce based on migrants' existing capabilities

**Recommendation 7:** Creating more opportunities for migrants in the formal labor market by recognizing their knowledge, skills, and work experience. A relatively small investment to get accustomed to the way of working in host countries can unleash important untapped potential of migrants with different skill levels. In addition, the interconnected view of people with a migrant background can add value to organizations in an increasingly globalized world. Businesses are making the case for migration using economic arguments and can become one of the biggest advocates for a diverse workforce at all large employers. *Special role: Private sector.*

## Promoting collaboration and alignment by changing incentives

**Recommendation 8:** Civil society actors can pave the way for people with a migrant background to work on issues related to migration within as well as outside of their organization, instead of competing for resources and power. In a few settings, governments are now requiring active refugee participation to provide funding. However, more incentives are needed to promote collaboration and alignment. Civil society actors are making the case for migration using humanitarian arguments and can become one of the biggest advocates for social entrepreneurs with a migrant background. *Special role: Civil society sector.*

## Changing the narrative through positive stories that focus on our shared humanity

**Recommendation 9:** People with a migrant background experience positive and negative attitudes towards them, but the current political climate and the role of the media has made it especially difficult to overcome preconceptions and biases. Herein lies the opportunity to change the narrative by shining a light on positive stories around migration that focus on our shared humanity and inspire. *Special role: Media industry.*

## Developing innovative solutions through partnerships between experts

**Recommendation 10:** Creating fruitful grounds for the development of innovative solutions through partnerships between experienced professionals (1st, 2nd or 3rd generation) that have an interconnected view and field experts (can be think tanks or academic institutions). This encourages policy development that takes a more systemic and long-term view on issues related to migration - instead of being reactionary or managing crises. *Special role: Think tanks and academic institutions.*



## Adel AlBaghdadi & Razan Damlakhi

[WEorganization.nl](http://WEorganization.nl)



### Who leads the initiative?

Adel AlBaghdadi is born and raised in Damascus, Syria. Adel went to law school to pursue his dream of becoming a diplomat or working for an international humanitarian organization and contributing to world peace building. After a long, risky, physically and emotionally tough journey, he arrived in 2015 in the Netherlands. Being a “social changemaker” as Adel calls himself, he consciously makes the daily decision to be a part of the solution and not the problem. He believes in a better future and is determined to create it. That’s why he founded WE organization. Razan Damlakhi is from Aleppo, Syria, and based in the Netherlands since 2011. Razan is committed to promoting dialogue and advancing social innovation for a more inclusive, resilient and thriving society. She is actively involved in exploring perceptions, practices, and policies that empower the refugees (newcomers) to lead a life of dignity, community, and opportunity.



### The numbers impact

Within the last 3 years, WE organization has done around 55 presentations/talks, and offered 20 trainings and workshops, reaching +2300 people from all walks of life. Besides progressing on local and national levels, WE organization is actively present on the European level as well, positively contributing to various events in Poland, Belgium, Sweden and France.



### How does it work?

WE organization is a young socially-driven refugee-led initiative that actively develops various projects aiming at tackling xenophobia and promoting social inclusion. WE organization is committed to breaking barriers and building bridges through the power of dialogue and ‘understanding via interaction’. WE organization fulfills its purpose through education, training and consulting work focusing on Migration, Integration and Emancipation; Diversity and Intercultural Communication; Youth Participation; Entrepreneurship and Social Incubation; and Storytelling. This comes in the form of public talks/presentations, workshops/co-creation sessions, and tailor-made programs.



### The human impact

Differences can lead us to designate certain groups as “OTHER” and less than fully human. WE organization envisions an inclusive society that embraces, celebrates and values diversity in every aspect. Serving as a catalyst in enabling society to understand that inclusion of all is a value for all, WE organization has implemented several projects and programs with schools, universities, companies, NGO’s, and governmental agencies. Together with partners who share their vision and values, they strive to influence systemic social change through an open, participatory and cross-sectorial approach.

## 6 | Conclusion

Migration is now managed as a crisis and this may cause negative ripple effects in the unforeseen future. People with a migrant background are often still viewed as beneficiaries and not as problem solvers. Our study reveals the importance of changing perspectives on the role of migrants in society. Social entrepreneurs with a migrant background implement effective solutions that put humans at the center, leading to long-term benefits for migrants and their host communities. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, there’s an increased risk of migrants and refugees being marginalized as countries heavily restrict the flow of people. Asylum seekers are extremely vulnerable and may end up in hazardous situations, because they often reside in places with a lack of access to healthcare and social security. There is an urgent need for inclusive solutions that recognize our interconnectedness. Solutions that empower people and unleash their untapped potential will make the difference we need to move forward. Our recommendations are aimed at building an eco-system where these social entrepreneurs are supported and their impact is amplified. As experienced professionals, social entrepreneurs with a migrant background are leading the way by showing how we can build societies where migrants are an opportunity instead of a threat.

## 7 | About the authors

**Asma Naimi** is a PhD Candidate at Esade Business School, Ramon Lull University. Her research focuses on the role of social entrepreneurship in tackling large scale societal challenges that span borders, such as migration, poverty, inequality, and injustice. She studies the direct actions of social entrepreneurs to create impact, and their communication practices to create awareness and mobilize support. She was a visiting scholar at Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California, where she taught social entrepreneurship. In her work she collaborates with Ashoka, a leading international organization that promotes changemakers. Previously, she worked as a senior consultant for PwC in the field of international development, social entrepreneurship, and corporate social responsibility. She served on the board of The National Foundation for the Promotion of Happiness, a multicultural, not-for-profit network of creatives and volunteers who work with children and teenagers in asylum-seeking centers to develop their self-confidence and talent. Asma holds a Master of Research from Esade Business School, Ramon Lull University, and a Master of Science, with honor (cum laude) in Global Business and Stakeholder Management from the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, during which she also studied at the University of Otago, New Zealand. Combining an eager, energetic, and entrepreneurial approach, she aims to create knowledge that makes a positive impact on society, building a bridge between academia and practice.

**Dr. Lisa Hehenberger** is an Assistant Professor in the department of Strategy and General Management at Esade, and Director of the Entrepreneurship Institute. She is a renowned expert on social entrepreneurship, venture philanthropy and impact investment. Lisa is a member of the European Commission's Expert Group on Social Business (GECES) and of the OECD's Social Impact Investment Expert group. She served on the French National Advisory Board and the Impact Measurement Working Group of the Social Impact Investment Task Force established by the G8. Until recently, she was the Research and Policy Director of the European Venture Philanthropy Association (EVPA), the pan-European association for venture philanthropy and social impact investment. She set up and ran EVPA's Knowledge Centre, conducting and publishing research, and collecting and disseminating data and knowledge. She also coordinated EVPA's policy initiatives, facilitating the transfer of knowledge between policy makers and practitioners. Lisa's academic research focuses on applying organizational theory to study the evolution of venture philanthropy, social impact investment and social entrepreneurship. She has published in prestigious academic journals such as the Academy of Management Journal, and practitioner-oriented publications such as Stanford Social Innovation Review, as well as in numerous publications for the EVPA Knowledge Centre. Lisa has a PhD in management from IESE Business School and a Master degree in Business and Economics from Stockholm School of Economics and HEC (CEMS).

**Kenny Clewett** is the executive director of Hello Europe, Ashoka's Global Migration Initiative. His work is focused in particular on identifying and helping to scale innovative solutions that address underlying challenges in migration, integration and refugee movements in Europe. Before leading Hello Europe, Kenny led search, selection, and youth initiatives within Ashoka both in Spain and the US. Recently, he has also led a number of research partnerships on different subjects within the social sector, from migration to social entrepreneurship as a key factor to solve the SDGs. In between roles at Ashoka, Kenny has also worked in a number of faith-based organizations throughout the world, focusing on cross-cultural initiatives. He has a degree in Humanities from the University of Alcalá de Henares and Durham University (UK), has completed INSEAD's Social Entrepreneurship program (ISEP) and has obtained a Master degree in Divinity from Trinity International University in Chicago.

## 8 | About the organizations

**Esade** is a global institution structured as a Business School, a Law School, and an Executive Education area. Esade is a global academic institution known for the quality of its education, its international outlook, and its focus on holistic personal development. It has strong ties to the business world. Its academic activity encompasses three main areas: (1) Education – Esade applies a unique and innovative learning model based on the internalization of values and the development of professional and executive competences; (2) Research – it generates new knowledge that helps to improve the dynamics of organizations, businesses and the practice of law; and (3) Social Debate – Esade is a platform where people can gather and discuss important issues with the aim of improving society. 'Do Good Do Better' encompasses their reason to exist and their purpose. It is their pledge to bring meaningful change by focusing on innovation and social commitment.

**Ashoka**, for more than thirty years has identified and supported the world's best social entrepreneurs – leaders with innovative new ideas which can transform broken systems for the better, in fields from health to human rights, education to civic engagement, economic development to the environment. During this time, they've elected nearly 4,000 Ashoka Fellows in 90 countries across the world. Through a collaboration between Ashoka Germany and Zalando, Hello Europe was created in 2016 to identify the most powerful and proven solutions to challenges around migration, integration and refugee movements with the aim of bringing them to scale in regions most in need. Over time a European, cross-border network of solutions began to emerge, and they started to identify a new paradigm around migration and integration. Now 3 years on, Hello Europe aims to become the collective voice of innovative, empowering citizen solutions in the field of migration. They strive to provide a vision of the kind of work happening in Europe and around the globe, which is creating a better society for people on the move as well as for those who meet them. To achieve this, they focus on scaling world class solutions, building bridges between social innovation and migration policy decision makers, and contributing to change narratives in the field of migration.

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EUROPE**



Do Good. Do Better.