



The Marketing Practices of Young Entrepreneurs in Türkiye

**What we learned about refugee
entrepreneurs and their host
community counterparts**

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PREFACE

This report was created by Innovative Solutions for Sustainable Development Association (ISSDA) in partnership with XSIGHTS, through a sub-grant awarded by Building Markets Türkiye.

ISSDA has been operating the Future is Brighter (Gelecek Daha Net/GDN) Youth Platform for over ten years in Türkiye. GDN is the main program of ISSDA to implement youth empowerment projects such as the Embark Project, connecting Syrian youth with the private sector. ISSDA aims to inspire youth with role models, raises awareness of existing social and personal opportunities, and empowers youth through guidance, mentoring, coaching, and employability enhancement services/opportunities.

Founded in 2004 in the UK, with a permanent and legal presence and registration in Türkiye since 2010, XSIGHTS is an independent research consultancy. XSIGHTS' particular strengths are large-scale qualitative and creative quantitative research. XSIGHTS has built a particularly strong reputation in conducting research in Türkiye and the region. Moreover, XSIGHTS' reputation for quality is reflected in some of its significant professional memberships and large array of clients ranging from the EU to the UN. The XSIGHTS' Social Research Institute, responsible for running social and policy research projects, was pleased to ensure the questionnaire design, topic guide formation, analysis, and reporting.

Founded in 2004, Building Markets finds, builds, and connects competitive local small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) to supply chain and investment. Building Markets has been working to bring visibility and opportunity to Syrian-owned SMEs in Türkiye since 2016 as a core component of its work to create jobs, stability, and localize the aid response in the Syrian crisis. The organization also works to strengthen the capacity of local civil society organizations in Türkiye through building organizational management and technical expertise. Building Markets commissioned ISSDA to research and write this report as part of its efforts to engage with local civil society organizations and strengthen their research capabilities.

Building Markets and ISSDA would like to gratefully acknowledge the support of the United States Government, which provided funding for this project.



INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), an estimated 89.3 million people worldwide were forced to leave their homes at the end of 2021.¹ These displaced people often face legal and cultural barriers to joining the workforce and starting businesses in their host communities. Yet, the diverse spectrum of refugees crossing borders brings with them extensive professional experience and expertise, and they represent a remarkable new talent pool and untapped potential for economic growth. In Türkiye alone, there are 3,746,674 million registered Syrian refugees, and Syrian youth aged between 20-35 years old constitute more than 30% of the total Syrian population in Türkiye.²

In 2016, Türkiye issued a policy framework to integrate Syrian refugees into the formal labor market.³ This change in regulation constituted the first concrete step to refugees' integration into the formal labor market, providing Syrians under Temporary Protection (SuTPs) with a regulatory framework to obtain work permits. In recent years, many Syrian refugees have now also become Turkish citizens. Syrians in Türkiye not only integrate themselves into the Turkish labor market as employees but also as employers and business owners. Since 2011, Syrian entrepreneurship has enabled the community to create livelihoods for themselves and the host community. A 2018 study by the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) reports that Syrians had established 9,978 businesses, which, on average, employ 7.3 workers, 60% of whom are Syrians themselves, and provide support for more than 250,000 Syrians in Türkiye by wages earned through formal employment.⁴

While Syrian entrepreneurs of all ages create a significant economic impact for Türkiye, the large cohort of Syrian youth actively engaged in entrepreneurship and innovation hold promise for contributing to economic and social growth. Entrepreneurship is on the rise among the youth globally. While those aged 50 and older have, on average, started 3.5 businesses, this figure doubles to 7.7 businesses for the youth (ages under 35).⁵ According to a study conducted in 2019, approximately 50% of the entrepreneurs in Turkey are within the 20 - 35 age group.⁶

1-UNHCR, 2022. "Figures at a Glance, www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html"

2-Refugee Association, 2022. "Numbers of Syrians in Turkey" www.multeciler.org.tr/eng/number-of-syrians-in-turkey

3-European Parliament Türkiye, 2016. "Labour Market Integration and Social Inclusion of Refugees"

4-TEPAV and EBRD, 2018. "Syrian Entrepreneurship and Refugee Start-ups in Turkey: Leveraging the Turkish Experience"

www.tepav.org.tr/upload/files/1566830992-6.TEPAV_and_EBRD__Syrian_Entrepreneurship_and_Refugee_Start_ups_in_Turkey_Lever....pdf

5-Centre for Entrepreneurs, n.d. "Young people are more entrepreneurial than ever but challenges remain."

www.centreforentrepreneurs.org/young-people-are-more-entrepreneurial-than-ever-but-challenges-remain/

6-Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), 2019. "Entrepreneurship in Turkey and Global Comparison" www.webdosya.kosgeb.gov.tr/Content/Upload/Dosya/Giriřimcilik/GEM_Küresel_Giriřimcilik_Monitörü-2019_Türkiye_Raporu.pdf

Globally, entrepreneurs face similar barriers, such as a lack of skills, experience, networks, and problems accessing capital and financing solutions.⁷ Syrian entrepreneurs in Türkiye also face barriers to integrating into the Turkish economy, including language barriers, lack of mentorship and partnership, limited access to banking and finance, and lack of familiarity with complex tax and business regulations.⁴

Syrian entrepreneurs often lack a professional and social network, referred to as 'social capital' in Türkiye. Given these barriers, Syrian entrepreneurs have limited capacity to expand their business to local supply chains and markets, increasing their reliance on marketing techniques to grow their businesses. However, a lack of Turkish language mastery and lack of formal marketing training limit Syrian business growth. More often than not, these businesses conduct marketing in Arabic, which limits their client base only to other Syrians and their reach to the larger Turkish customer base. Despite these challenges, digital marketing, in specific, offers a window of opportunity for Syrian entrepreneurs, especially youth.

Businesses in Türkiye are eager and quick to adapt to digital transformation, including digital marketing. The Digital Transformation Index 2021, prepared by Türkiye Informatics Industry Association (TÜBİSAD), underlines the importance of developing infrastructure, capacities, and skills to boost growth.⁸ COVID-19 had a tremendous impact on accelerating digitalization. It raised awareness about the importance of adopting digital strategies in key business areas, including marketing, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) worldwide, including Türkiye.⁴ Similarly, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) underlines the importance of digital technologies to support SMEs in increasing market intelligence and access to different markets and networks at a relatively low cost.⁹ The findings of this assessment also highlight the importance of raising entrepreneurs' awareness of the need for structured marketing approaches and decision-makers' awareness of providing more inclusive and tailored training and mentoring support to enhance SMEs' performances and thus their financial growth.

Due to its promise for business growth, digital marketing was chosen as a research topic among youth entrepreneurs. This research seeks to capture the marketing practices of Syrian youth entrepreneurs in Türkiye, offers an understanding of the barriers they face, and provides suggestions for improving their marketing capacity, a critical business capability for any business worldwide, thereby increasing their positive economic contributions to the Turkish economy.

Despite the significant presence of Syrian youth in Türkiye and its untapped potential, most studies focused on different aspects of entrepreneurship without targeting specific age groups. When age has been considered, Syrian youth have been the focus of studies mostly related to access to the labor market and education opportunities. Overall, this study aims to shed light on the differences among youth entrepreneurs in terms of their marketing practices, their needs, and perceptions to be considered for the future design of support programs by international and local organizations as well as to raise awareness of the need for further research to be carried out targeting youth entrepreneurs.

7-Building Markets, 2017. "Another Side to the Story a Market Assessment of Syrian SMEs in Türkiye"
www.buildingmarkets.org/sites/default/files/pdm_reports/another_side_to_the_story_a_market_assessment_of_syrian_smes_in_turkey.pdf

8-TUBISIAD, 2021. "Türkiye'nin Dijital Dönüşüm Endeksi 2021"

9-OECD, 2017. "Enhancing the Contributions of SMEs in a Global and Digitalised Economy".

METHODOLOGY

This market research study was designed to acquire insights into the marketing practices of Syrian and Turkish youth entrepreneurs operating businesses in Türkiye. Following a literature review, the study was conducted in two phases in April and May 2022. In phase one, four focus group discussions were conducted with Syrian and Turkish youth entrepreneurs (two for each target group). In phase two, a thorough survey was conducted with 100 Syrian (52) and Turkish (48) youth entrepreneurs to collect demographic and quantitative data on the marketing practices of the target groups.¹⁰ After quality controls and consistency checks were carried out, the data were analyzed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0. Individuals and firms were identified for participation in the study through GDN and Embark Project networks, Building Markets' Business Directory, and XSIGHTS' database.

Both phase one and phase two participants were required to be between the ages of 20 to 35 years old and either the owner or a partner of a business that operates in Adana, Ankara, Gaziantep, Hatay, İstanbul, İzmir, Mersin, and/or Şanlıurfa, Türkiye. Participants were selected irrespective of sectors of operation, and Syrian participants were selected regardless of their citizenship status (e.g., SuTP, Turkish citizenship, dual citizenship).

PROFILE OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS:

- All (100%) of the Syrian and Turkish youth entrepreneurs had at least a university degree.
- The sectors of operation for Syrian youth entrepreneurs are professional, scientific and technical activities (36%), information and communication (18%), and five other sectors (9% each).
- The sectors of operation for Turkish youth entrepreneurs are manufacturing (50%), Agriculture, forestry and fishing (20%), professional, scientific and technical activities (20%), and Information and communication (10%).
- All (100%) of the Syrian and 80% of the Turkish participants have previous work experience.
- 18% of the Syrian participants have between 10 and 49 employees, and 82% have between 0-9 employees. All (100)% of the Turkish participants have between 0-9 employees.
- 36% of the Syrian youth entrepreneurs and 50% of the Turkish youth entrepreneurs were women.

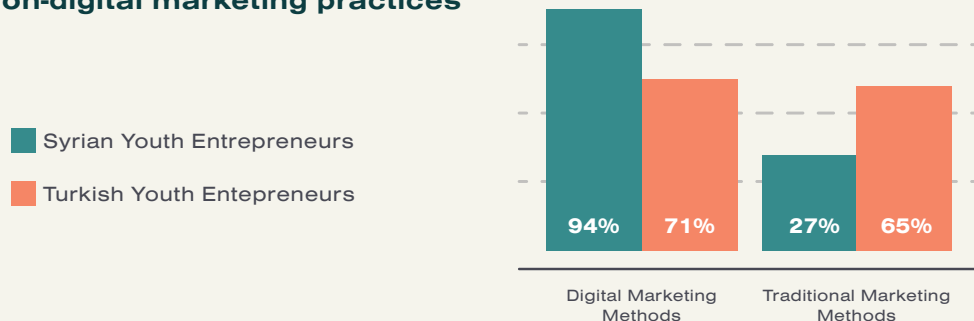
¹⁰-It is important to note that this is not a representative survey. The findings discussed in this report reflect in total 100 survey responses of Syrian and Turkish youth entrepreneurs in Türkiye and are supported by insights obtained from the focus group discussions in phase one. Due to the limited sample size, it is crucial to refrain from making generalizations while making use of this data to develop further research on the topic.

PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS:

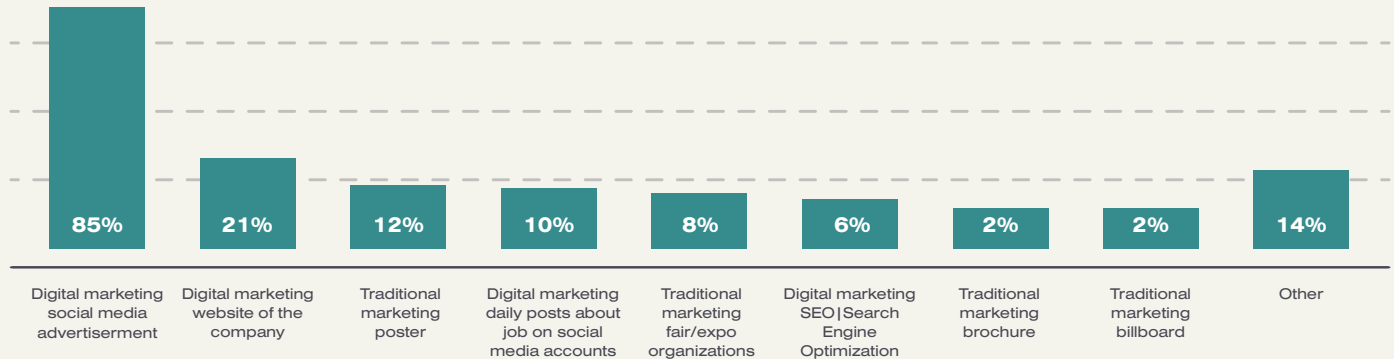
- 69% of the Syrian respondents are SuTP, and 31% have a residence permit/dual citizenship/Turkish citizenship.
- While 50% of the Syrian participants have a university degree, 23% have graduated secondary school, 17% have finished high school, 6% attended primary school, and 4% obtained a postgraduate degree.
- 63% of the Turkish participants have a university degree, 31% have graduated high school, 2% have finished primary school, 2% obtained a postgraduate degree, and 2% have no school history.
- The top three sectors of operation for Syrian youth entrepreneurs are retail/trade (23%), accommodation and food service (15%), manufacturing of textiles (10%), and other service activities (men's hairdressers) (10%).
- The top three sectors for Turkish youth entrepreneurs are food service (31%), technology (17%), and manufacturing and textile (15%).
- 71% of the Syrian and 75% of the Turkish participants have previous work experience.
- 38% of the Syrian participants and 77% of the Turkish participants received a grant on behalf of their business.
- 35% of the Syrian and 48% of the Turkish participants have a business website.
- 15% of the Syrian participants have between 10 and 49 employees, and 85% have between 0-9 employees. 58% of the Turkish participants have between 0-9 employees, 33% have 10-49 employees, and 8% of them have 50 and more employees.
- 69% of the Syrian participants are business owners without any partner; 21% have a Syrian partner, 8% have a Turkish partner, and 2% have a partner from a nationality other than Syrian or Turkish. 67% of the Turkish participants are business owners, and 33% have a Turkish partner.
- 10% of these Syrian entrepreneurs and 15% of Turkish entrepreneurs were women.

Marketing Practices of Syrian Youth Entrepreneurs

Digital and non-digital marketing practices



MARKETING METHOD OF SYRIAN YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS



- Together with social media advertisements and daily posts about jobs on social media, usage of social media as a digital marketing method is the most preferred method among Syrian participants (95%). This percentage drops to 75% among Turkish participants.
- Among traditional marketing methods, while Syrian participants mostly use posters (12%), Turkish participants prefer fair/expo organizations (35%).
- The top three preferred channels for the use of social media are Facebook (93%), WhatsApp groups (78%), and Instagram (42%). On the other hand, the top three channels for Turkish participants are Instagram (92%), Facebook (73%), and Twitter (42%).
- While Arabic is the most preferred language in marketing activities among Syrian entrepreneurs (98%), 41% use Turkish, and 29% use English. The usage of English is significantly higher in Turkish (50%) and Syrian (42%) participants with a university degree.

Syrian youth entrepreneurs primarily prefer digital marketing tools to market their products on social media. Using WhatsApp groups (78%) and TikTok (16%) in this regard differentiates Syrian youth entrepreneurs from participating Turkish youth entrepreneurs (0%) as these media are not among the preferred social media channels of the latter.

Syrian youth entrepreneurs also use non-digital marketing activities such as posters (12%) and attending offline business events (8%) to find customers and market their products/services. Additionally, marketing through daily social media posts was significantly higher in the Syrian participants with a university degree (19%), while using posters for marketing was considerably higher in participants with a primary school degree (67%).

Data showed that Syrian youth entrepreneurs market their products/services through their personal networks more than Turkish youth entrepreneurs. This may have risen from difficulties in trust-building due to both being a Syrian-owned and a new business and the lack of inclusive information and support to access a foreign market.

"We, as small businesses with small budgets, need to put lots of effort into building trust. We don't have enough budget to ask professional companies to market our products like the big businesses."

A Syrian 30-year-old male entrepreneur who has two years of experience leading his own business

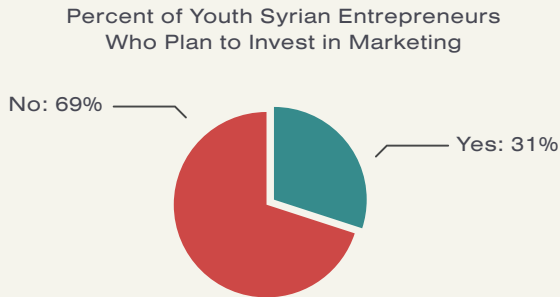
The sector, product/service, and production/service provision capacity are the main determinants for which platforms are chosen to reach customers. Syrian and Turkish businesses that have been in the market for less than three years prefer avoiding larger e-commerce platforms due to the lack of production/service provision capacity to satisfy customer demands.

It is also perceived that niche products can be effectively marketed through social media, while agricultural products and consulting services are thought to require both digital and non-digital approaches. This suggests that entrepreneurs must customize their marketing approaches according to their operating sector. Another notable outcome of this study is regarding social media advertisements. Even though the Syrian and Turkish youth entrepreneurs commonly use social media for advertising, there may be a tendency to use these advertisements for visibility rather than to increase sales.

This research showed that this approach might be adopted due to limited capacity for production/service provision or the novelty of the product/service, which is subjected to less competition, especially for businesses that have been in the market for less than three years.

MARKETING STRATEGIES AND PLANS

69% of the Syrian participants do not have plans to make marketing investments as compared to 45% among the Turkish entrepreneurs. The percentage of having a marketing investment plan is significantly higher for Syrian entrepreneurs with prior work experience (42%) and for Turkish entrepreneurs whose business has been operating for three years or longer (100%).



Most Syrian and Turkish youth entrepreneurs who contributed to this study do not have specific, long-term marketing strategies. It is seen that youth entrepreneurs react to the market conditions on an ad-hoc basis.

"We have to be patient and understand that digital marketing is more than promoting the posts on Facebook. It takes time and effort to build a strategy."

A 29-year-old Syrian male entrepreneur who has two years of experience in leading his own manufacturing business in Gaziantep

Among the participants, marketing strategies vary according to the sector, customer profile (Business-to-Business/B2B, Business-to-Consumer/B2C), and the number of years in the market. The number of years in the market especially plays an important role in marketing strategies since businesses that have been active for less than three years focus more on development and fiscal survival than marketing. Businesses that have been active in the market for longer need to focus more on marketing since they grow in volume, aim to access different markets, and are subjected to stronger competition.

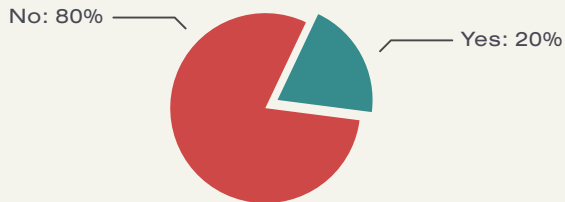
Competition is seen as a prominent threat even when the product/service is innovative and/or niche since competitors can replicate it over time. Such products can also require creating demand in the market since the need for the product/service might not be readily recognized at the outset.

Moreover, even when a business provides digital services (e.g., e-commerce consulting), traditional marketing activities (e.g., telephone marketing) can be considered valuable for trust building, especially for businesses who have been operating for less than three years.

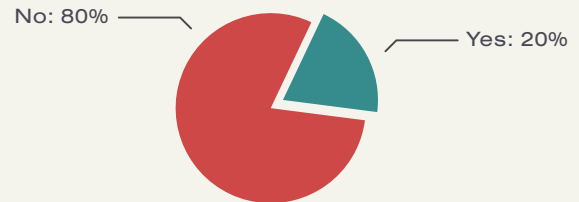
SKILLED EMPLOYEES: TRAINING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Only 20% of the Syrian participants have an employee engaged in marketing activities, and this ratio is significantly higher in Syrian businesses with 10 to 49 employees (63%). 98% of the Syrian participants who do not employ a marketing specialist conduct marketing activities themselves. On the other hand, 81% of the Turkish participants employ a marketing specialist. For Turkish (90%) and Syrian (31%) participants, the ratio of hiring a marketing specialist is significantly higher for entrepreneurs with a university degree. Only 20% of Syrian participants who do not have a marketing specialist in their firm stated that they have a plan to hire a marketing specialist. This percentage is 33% among Turkish participants.

Have an Employee Engaged in Marketing Activities (Syrian Youth Entrepreneurs)



Have a Plan to Hire a Marketing Specialist (Syrian Youth Entrepreneurs)



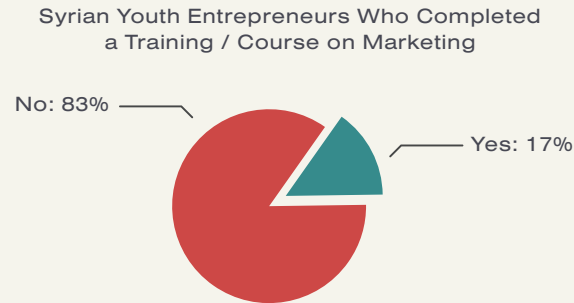
According to the Syrian and Turkish youth entrepreneurs in this study, marketing is thought to be the founder's responsibility in the early stages of an SME. The need for staff specialized in marketing is positively correlated with a business' duration in the market.

"We don't have anyone in the team who is specialized in financial management, we know that we will need a budget for marketing, yet we don't have time now to plan it."

A Turkish 25-year-old female entrepreneur who works in sports technologies in Şanlıurfa.

MARKETING TRAINING

This research also found that startups that function within the structure of universities (e.g., techno parks, incubation centers) have more opportunities to access expertise and mentoring, such as training courses on marketing. These businesses additionally have an advantage of organic growth of customers through university networks and can conduct customer research within the ecosystem in their early phases.

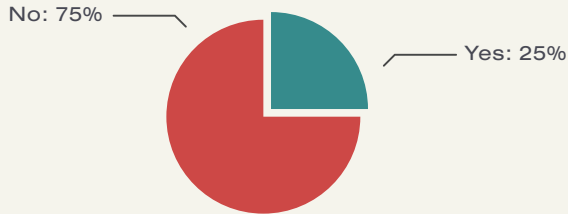


Only 17% of all Syrian participants mentioned taking a training/course on marketing. The percentage of taking a training/course on marketing is significantly higher in those Syrian participants having a university degree (31%).

78% of nine Syrian participants who completed a marketing training or course took the course from a non-governmental organization, and 44% took marketing training from paid courses of an academy or educational institution. The latter ratio was 46% for the participating Turkish entrepreneurs. 15% of these Turkish entrepreneurs said that they attended a course given by a non-governmental organization.

Of the Syrian youth entrepreneurs who took a training or course on marketing, 56% said that the most valuable segment of the training was learning how to use social media effectively.

Being interested in Specific Marketing Training Topics (Syrian Youth Entrepreneurs)



ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC MARKETING TRAINING TOPICS THAT YOU WOULD BE INTERESTED IN?

Marketing in General	31%
Digital Marketing	23%
Web Design/Website Marketing	15%
Global Marketing	8%
Content Writing	8%
Finding for Funding	8%
Media	8%

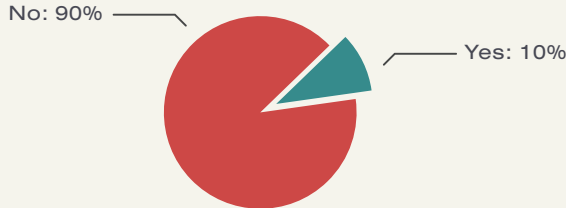
One out of every four Syrian youths stated they had a marketing training topic they were interested in learning more about. The top three preferred topics were: marketing in general (31%), digital marketing (23%), and web design/website marketing (15%). 93% of the Syrian participants who did not attend any marketing training/course before stated that they plan to take a course on marketing. This ratio was 31% among the Turkish youth entrepreneurs.

Among the participants, it has been observed that both Syrian and Turkish youth entrepreneurs did not have prior marketing knowledge before founding their businesses. Some still have not acquired knowledge of marketing other than their hands-on experience. The participants also shared that entrepreneurship and accelerator programs are valuable sources of learning as they provide structured training in access to the market.

FINANCIAL CAPACITY FOR MARKETING

Only 10% of the Syrian participants have an allocated budget for marketing. This percentage increases to 72% among Turkish participants.

Have a Allocated Budget for Marketing Activities (Syrian Youth Entrepreneurs)



Most of the businesses which participated in the focus groups, especially those in their early stages, did not have an allocated marketing budget. It is stated that initial budgets acquired from project funding, competitions, and alike are invested in fundamental needs such as equipment and materials; thus, marketing activities are not prioritized. It is observed that new businesses, especially the ones that have been in the market for less than three years, are in the process of ensuring their financial sustainability and attaining a place in the market and allocating marketing resources is not seen as a prerequisite to achieving these goals.

FINANCIAL NEEDS FOR DIGITAL AND NON-DIGITAL MARKETING

Syrian and Turkish entrepreneurs share that the financial need for marketing becomes more prominent after the stage when businesses build their know-how and fully develop their products/services. It is suggested that support mechanisms should consider that small businesses need mentoring in building their know-how and require financial support while developing their product/service.

Target customers are seen as a prominent factor regarding marketing investments. It is considered that businesses need to invest more in both digital and non-digital marketing activities if they prioritize B2C commerce when compared with B2B commerce, as B2C commerce requires them to appeal to a broader customer range. Businesses prioritizing B2B sales need to invest more in non-digital marketing activities such as attending fairs due to their customer profile.

It is also critical to note that Syrian youth entrepreneurs consider themselves disadvantaged regarding receiving governmental or organizational support to improve their financial capacities. Their access to such support is seen as limited due to non-inclusive outreach methods (i.e., single-language announcements), their limited access to relevant networks and/or difficulties in fulfilling the selection criteria and official document requirements.

RETURN ON MARKETING INVESTMENTS (DIGITAL AND NON-DIGITAL) - REALITIES AND PERCEPTIONS

All Syrian participants and 88% of Turkish participants who participated in this study and have an allocated budget for marketing believe in the return of marketing investment in terms of sales.

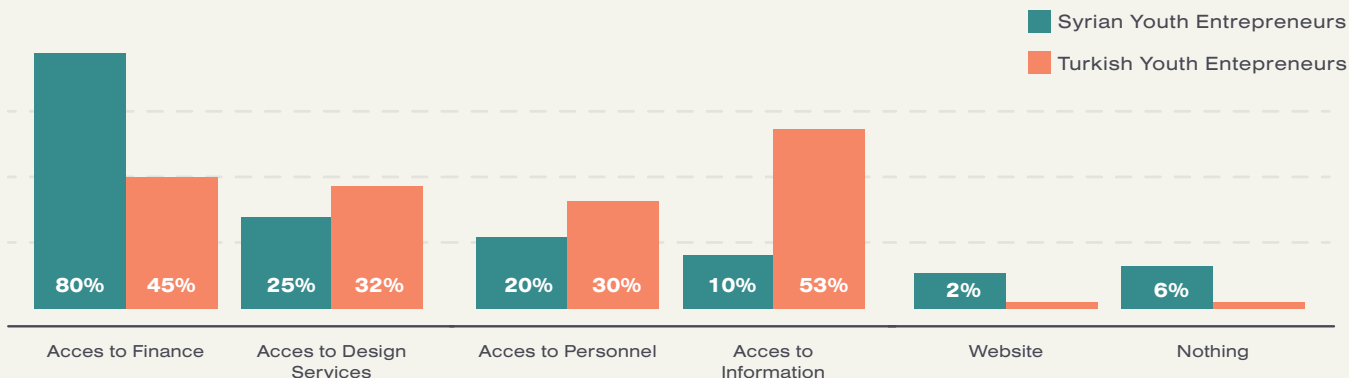
There is also a tendency among Syrian youth entrepreneurs to avoid investing in non-digital marketing such as brochures or outdoor advertising due to their costs and required time for execution. Moreover, some Syrian businesses consider digital marketing activities ineffective for reaching customers and use social media primarily to enhance their visibility. This approach was also observed among some Turkish youth entrepreneurs who perceive digital marketing investments as ineffective unless specialized digital marketing specialists manage the process.

In addition, innovative/novel products and services are perceived as not requiring marketing investment as much as the existing ones. However, businesses need to invest more in their marketing activities once the product/service is replicated and the competition is increased in a market.

BARRIERS & OPPORTUNITIES

The top three challenges that the Syrian participants faced in initiating marketing practices are access to finance (80%), access to design services (25%), and access to personnel (20%). Among Syrian youth entrepreneurs, the percentage of having a problem accessing finance is significantly higher in those participants with 0-9 employees (86%) than others. On the other hand, access to information is the most common challenge among Turkish participants (53%).

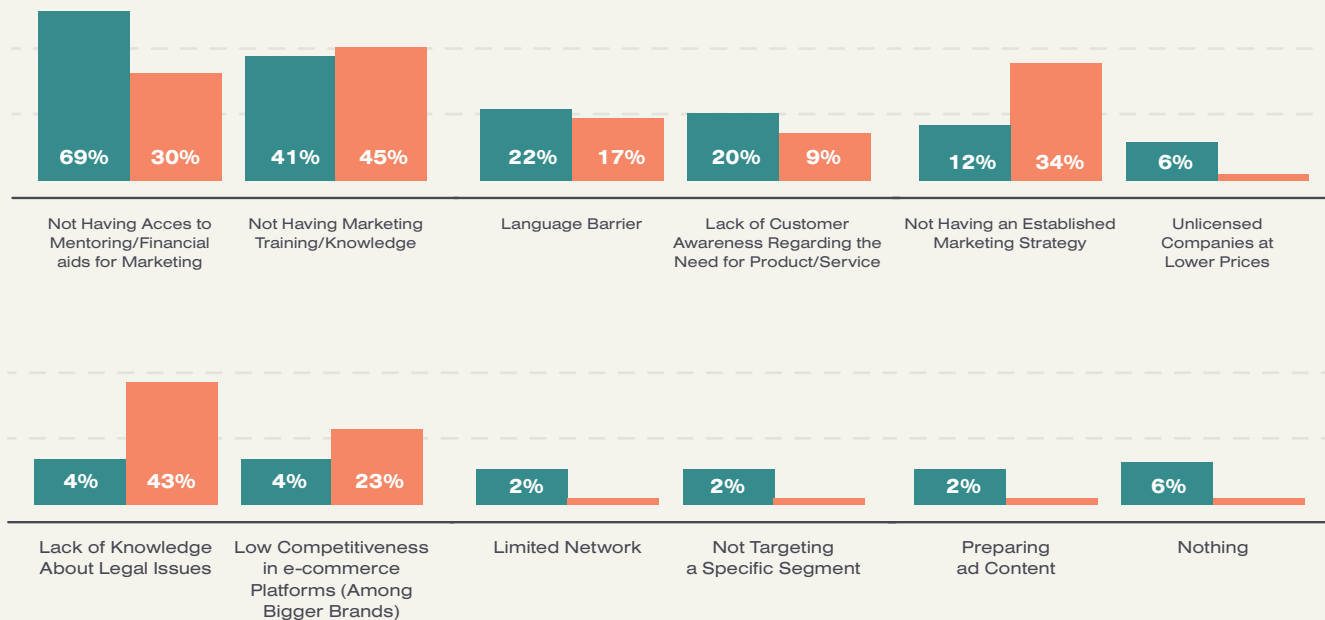
CHALLENGES TO INITIATE MARKETING PRACTICES



The top three challenges of Syrian participants in marketing activities are not having access to mentoring/financial aids for marketing (69%), not having marketing training/knowledge (41%), and language barrier (22%). On the other hand, the top three challenges of Turkish participants in marketing activities are not having marketing training/knowledge (45%), lack of knowledge about legal issues (43%), and not having an established marketing strategy (34%). The percentage of not having an established marketing strategy is higher in Syrian and Turkish participants who stated they took a training/course on marketing (44%). This ratio appears to be lower among the participants who did not take a training/course on marketing.

CHALLENGES IN MARKETING ACTIVITIES

■ Syrian Youth Entrepreneurs
 ■ Turkish Youth Entrepreneurs



Survey results suggest that Syrian youth entrepreneurs (69%) may have a greater need for mentoring and/or financial aids for marketing when compared to Turkish youth entrepreneurs (30%), even though it appears to be a significant barrier for both groups.

Syrian youth entrepreneurs consider the language barrier between Arabic and Turkish a prominent factor affecting expanding marketing activities, especially for businesses that primarily focus on the Turkish market. The language barrier was also confirmed as an important factor by participating Turkish entrepreneurs as proficiency in the Turkish language is required both in the domestic market and in internal communications.

Moreover, Syrian and Turkish youth entrepreneurs with prior marketing training ranked 'not having an established marketing strategy' as the second most significant barrier to expanding marketing activities. Interestingly, among the participants who did not have prior marketing training, the percentage who considered 'not having an established marketing strategy' is much lower both in the Syrian and Turkish entrepreneur groups. This perception difference may suggest a lack of awareness among youth entrepreneurs in Türkiye of the need for a structured marketing strategy for expanding marketing activities if they did not have a structured course/training in marketing.

Finally, it is observed that Turkish youth entrepreneurs generally lack awareness regarding the benefits of having a Syrian partner or a partner of different nationality. However, some perceive Syrian partners as valuable for reaching other communities, using Arabic, bringing a different cultural perspective, and accessing internationally funded projects.

CONCLUSIONS

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to transform the world for the better by ending poverty in all its forms by 2030.¹¹ Small businesses have a crucial role in achieving the 2030 Agenda through creating employment opportunities, contributing to economic growth, and addressing the needs of their communities and society.¹² Their access to digital technologies and adapting digital practices, including marketing practices, present an untapped potential. Yet, it is only realized by informed decision-making, increasing internal capabilities, and access to finance.

11- United Nations - Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015. "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, www.sdg.un.org/2030agenda

12- ILO, 2021, Small Goes Digital: How Digitalization Can Bring About Productive Growth for Micro and Small Enterprises, p.4 www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—ed_emp/—emp_ent/—ifp_seed/documents/publication/wcms_808632.pdf

The reasons for becoming entrepreneurs among refugee and migrant youths are also due to a lack of access to employment opportunities. Starting up a business is considered a way of self-employment. The priority to generate an income for livelihood creates further pressure to focus on daily operations, ad hoc decision making, reliance on the existing network, and risk aversion.

Syrian youth who are business owners generally have more limited access to specialized training, personnel, finance, and support programs for their marketing practices. Their willingness to adapt more digital strategies in marketing varies when it comes to planning and implementing specific strategies, allocating budget or personnel depending on the sector, education level, establishment year of the business, and customer profile.

Independent of these factors, adopting digital marketing tools and strategies presents an important opportunity for higher financial performance and growth. The youth participating in this study showed a low awareness of the need for a structured marketing approach on the benefits of using digital marketing, reaching a broader customer base, and potential return on investment. The survey points out a need to raise awareness among Syrian entrepreneurs that having marketing incorporated into their business plan from the very beginning is crucial for their success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This market research study captured the marketing practices of Syrian and Turkish youth entrepreneurs whose businesses operate in Türkiye. The research findings presented here can be of use to the public and private sector actors who are invested in promoting youth entrepreneurship and international NGOs, local NGOs, and incubation centers that aim to provide tools, mentorship, and training to Syrian SMEs.

- **Increase Access to Employment:** Access to employment opportunities is a major obstacle and pushes youth to become self-employed entrepreneurs. This results with an immediate pressure on income generation, preventing youth from carrying out in-depth research before deciding to become an entrepreneur. Increased access to employment could be facilitated in partnership with the private sector and the government. Private sector can also be supported through partnerships with international and national civil society organizations to tap into refugee talent pools and can implement more inclusive recruitment policies to offer equitable opportunities..

- **Offer Entrepreneurship Incentives:** Syrian youth entrepreneurs rely more on their individual capacity and show low tendency to build up a team. Lack of social networks as well as financial stability especially in the first years of the enterprise, mostly prevents them from allocating necessary resources for expanding their team. Employment incentive schemes as well as financial support could be provided and/or expanded by the government for the Syrian youth entrepreneurs to enhance their capacities.
- **Increase Access to Finance:** While accessing finance proves difficult for all refugee and migrant entrepreneurs, youth entrepreneurs face significant obstacles due to their lower level of savings, bias, expertise, and years of experience. Non-inclusive support mechanisms can limit the access of Syrian entrepreneurs to financial aid as well as mentoring opportunities. Special financial support schemes and mentoring opportunities can be provided to refugee youth-owned businesses.
- **Provide Marketing Training:** Providing tailored training modules to refugee and migrant entrepreneurs could entail capability assessments for the entrepreneur to define the exact need to enhance professional skills and increase capacity for especially digital marketing. This approach could also reposition them from being passive learners to self-empowerment. Mentoring and coaching programs offered by international and local organizations on marketing shall be provided at different levels of the growth of a business, and youth especially lack guidance on the growth stage of their businesses to access expertise on digital transformation.
- **Prioritize Equity:** The local incubation centers shall equitably offer their services and programs to refugees and migrants through offering programs in different languages and carrying out outreach in different languages.
- **Raise Awareness of Economic Potential:** Awareness-raising activities could be provided through universities, incubation centers, and international and local organizations on the potential of economic growth and scaling through adapting digital strategies in marketing. Its link to customer diversity should be strengthened.

While it is essential for various stakeholders to implement more inclusive strategies and programs, this research reveals that youth entrepreneurs could invest more time on the business development phase and market research rather than making decisions and plans on an ad hoc basis. They tend to rely on their close personal network for subjective feedback which limits room for improvement. Long term plans with objective assessments could be beneficial from the start for the success of the enterprises.

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