



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



# **Business startup support in West Yorkshire**

## **A focus on aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs**

**This report builds on the outcomes of the project ‘Migrant Women in Business’, funded by: West Yorkshire Combined Authority.**

Project duration: November 2023 – August 2024

By:

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# Preface



**Fatima Khan-Shah**

West Yorkshire's 1st ever  
Inclusivity Champion

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**This report is a timely and important exploration of both the challenges and the opportunities for migrant businesses, and more particularly women migrant businesses.**

It provides a comprehensive assessment of the current opportunities, gaps and challenges facing business startup support in West Yorkshire, with valuable insights that are relevant to the wider Yorkshire and Humber region and the broader national context. West Yorkshire is a region which is proud of its heritage which includes the contribution of our migrants and the findings offer insightful foundations that can help researchers, practitioners and policy makers alike in setting future directions that can help shape our future regional socio-economic development.

More importantly, this report promotes more engaged developmental approaches that are inclusive of all communities, an aspect that is at the heart of our British values. West Yorkshire is proud to be one of the first regions of sanctuary and celebrates the contribution of our migrant communities. I hope to see this report widely disseminated and acknowledged, and its recommendations taken on board to improve business startup support and opportunities available for women migrant entrepreneurs regionally and nationally.

**Fatima Khan-Shah**

West Yorkshire Inclusivity Champion



# Acknowledgements

We are very thankful for the support and encouragement offered throughout this project by a number of individuals and organisations. First and foremost, we would like to thank the participating migrant women for their time and thoughtfulness; we could not have done this project without you. We would like to thank the funder – West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) – for approving this funding stream to support aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs in West Yorkshire, and Leeds University Business School (LUBS)/The University of Leeds for sponsoring this report. We would also like to thank the project lead: Migration Yorkshire, as well as the project partners: Leeds University Business School (LUBS), The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network (TERN) and Skylight Ventures, for supporting this project with time and resources. Thank you also to Jane Walton, Director of Yorkshire Mentoring, for investing her valuable time and knowledge on this project. We would like to extend our gratitude to the various policy and practice stakeholders who work in different business startup support organisations across the region for the time and effort they have put into exchanging valuable knowledge. While the details of some of those participants have been anonymised, their insights and experiences have been instrumental for the success of this project. Thank you for contributing your valuable time to talk to us and engage in this project. Last, but not least, we would like to thank the key stakeholders from policy, practice and academia who took part in this project’s closing event on 10 July 2024 at the University of Leeds; most notably our keynote speakers including Fatima Shah-Khan, Prof. Monder Ram, Dr Lorna Treanor, Dr Andrew Mycock, Simon Middleton, Roger Wilde, Jon Brunton, Fred Kastner, Brian Doe, Jane Walton and the lovely migrant women who shared their experiences and businesses on the day.

We hope this report offers some reward through presenting a clearer understanding of business startup support in West Yorkshire and the main challenges it faces, while proposing some solutions for potential ways forward. We recognise that the difficulties facing migrants and migrant women in the region extend beyond this report and still demand further efforts and investigations. We nevertheless hope that this report helps in bringing these difficulties into light and encourages more efforts and funding to be channelled in ways that can promote the integration, prosperity and valuable contributions of migrant entrepreneurs.



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# Executive summary

**The work presented in this report builds on the outcomes of the project ‘Migrant Women in Business’<sup>1</sup>, run between Nov. 2023 – Aug. 2024 – funded by West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA)<sup>2</sup> as part of the Government Call for Start Up Projects across West Yorkshire<sup>3</sup>. The project is led by Migration Yorkshire<sup>4</sup> in partnership with Leeds University Business School<sup>5</sup>, The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network (TERN)<sup>6</sup> and Skylight Ventures<sup>7</sup>.**



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1 Project webpage available at: <https://business.leeds.ac.uk/dir-record/research-projects/2224/migrant-women-in-business-a-focus-on-west-yorkshire>

2 <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/>

3 <https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/5716eedf-4e98-4ac2-8f90-8866ae60635c>

4 <https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/>

5 <https://business.leeds.ac.uk/>

6 [www.wearatern.org](http://www.wearatern.org)

7 <https://www.skylightfund.org/>

The project ‘Migrant Women in Business’ capitalises on the potential of migrant businesses by focusing on migrant women in the West Yorkshire region. Through this focus, the project aims to:

1. Explore the business startup journeys of migrant women.
2. Offer comprehensive business startup support for aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs.
3. Investigate the business support available for migrant women in West Yorkshire, including the main challenges and gaps in provision.
4. Propose potential ways to minimise the challenges facing business startup support.

Migration Yorkshire supports people and organisations to achieve the most positive outcomes of migration for everyone in the Yorkshire and Humber region. They provide leadership and coordination, evidence, and practical assistance to organisations from all sectors at local, regional and national level. Migration Yorkshire is a partnership of councils working across the whole of the Yorkshire and Humber region and is based in Leeds. Migration Yorkshire’s leading role has been paramount for the success of this project, alongside the established expertise of its partners, particularly with regards to research on Refugee Entrepreneurship in West Yorkshire<sup>8</sup>.

Through the developmental work presented in this report, the importance of migrant businesses to the UK economy, alongside the need to further support and enhance it is highlighted. The entrepreneurial capacity of Ethnic minority businesses in the UK as a whole is represented through 250,000 Ethnic minority businesses contributing to around £25 billion per annum to the UK economy – as indicated in a recent report by the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship ‘Time to Change’ (2022)<sup>9</sup>. With regards to the Total entrepreneurial activity of immigrants in comparison to the UK’s life-long resident population, migrants also present with high entrepreneurial potential and are three times more likely to start their own business.

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8 Project webpage available at: <https://business.leeds.ac.uk/dir-record/research-projects/1778/in-quest-for-a-better-future-future-engagement-opportunities-of-syrian-refugees-in-the-uk>

9 Report available to download at: <https://www.aston.ac.uk/research/bss/abs/centres-hubs/creme/time-to-change>

This report is sponsored by Leeds University Business School (LUBS), stemming from its continued commitment to transform lives and shape better futures for our communities, our region and the world through collaboration, research and knowledge exchange. This follows from the school's support to the wider university values, and its recognition of inclusive and equal business practices and opportunities as huge forces for good that bring together a diversity of people and perspectives.

Insights and rationales in this report are evidenced by the research conducted on the project reported herein, and backed up by the voices of a wide range of experts in the field from policy, practice and academic, all of whom are acknowledged as report contributors.





# A highlight on the key partners of the project 'Migrant Women in Business'



## **Ewa Lelontko – Project lead**

Ewa is an Economic Integration Manager at Migration Yorkshire. In her role, she drives initiatives to promote and enhance the economic inclusion of migrant and refugee communities across the Yorkshire and Humber region. Passionate about supporting refugee and migrant women, Ewa is currently focused on developing sustainable entrepreneurship pathways that foster economic independence and opportunity for these groups.



## **Dr Deema Refai – Project partner**

Deema is an Associate Professor in Enterprise and Entrepreneurship at the University of Leeds, and is Joint EiC of The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation. Deema's research focus is developed around constrained contexts, with main interest in refugee and rural entrepreneurship. She has led/co-led a number of research projects funded by the British Academy, AHRC, West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and others. Building on her work, Deema has strong international collaborations, and has been involved in various activities, panels and discussions around issues relevant to refugees. Her work is published in international peer-reviewed journals and presented in a number of national and international conferences.



## **TERN (The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network) – Project partner**

TERN (The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network) is a social enterprise and nonprofit that supports refugees to start their own business. TERN's Mission is "To enable refugees to thrive through the power of their own ideas".



## **Skylight Ventures – Project partner**

Skylight Ventures is a community-led fund set-up specifically to meet the significant financing gaps for refugee entrepreneurs looking to develop their business ideas. Skylight Ventures currently offers interest-free micro-credit up to £1,000 to successful applicants via a quick, community-led and accessible online process. Skylight Ventures aims to promote an inclusive finance ecosystem for refugee founders.

# Project delivery

The project aims to deliver a ‘pre-start-up support’ programme targeted at aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs, including women in early-stage business startup who come from an ethnic minority group, have experience of displacement and identify as refugees, including:

- People who arrived in the UK through one of the resettlement programmes (UNHCR programme, UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) Afghani Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)).
- People from Ukraine who arrived through the Family Scheme, Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme or received Visa Extension Scheme.
- Hong Kong nationals who arrived through the BN(O) route.
- Anyone who has applied to asylum at any point and now has the right to work.
- Those on family reunion and spousal visas who self-identify as refugees.



## The project delivery covered:

- 12 weeks of business support and mentoring, both online and face to face. This included an induction session, 6 group workshops, up to 4 hours of 1:1 mentoring per participant, and several optional online drop-in sessions.
- Childcare and travel costs.
- A female business coach with prior experience of working with migrant communities.
- Access to peer support and business networks, including The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network (TERN).
- Several networking events, including sessions with various business support providers and already established entrepreneurs (including refugee entrepreneurs) – to promote opportunities for participants to learn about the available support, and be inspired by success stories of role models.
- Opportunity to apply for interest free loans, through Skylight Ventures.
- Engagement with various policy and practice stakeholders in Yorkshire and Humber. Examples include Startup West Yorkshire–PeoplePlus<sup>10</sup>, Ad:Venture<sup>11</sup>, Business and IP Center Leeds (BIPC)<sup>12</sup>, alongside other. As such, all insights gained throughout this project are based on thorough interactions

with multiple stakeholders over the duration of the project, thus, offering the project’s team in-depth understanding of the scope and challenges of business startup support in the region.

- Collation of a wide range of primary data to support further future research.

Overall, the project recruited 25 aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs, selected from 97 applicants. These joined the project in two cohorts (Cohort 1 x 12 & Cohort 2 x 13). Each cohort ran for a duration of 12 weeks. All participants came from an ethnic minority background, with 9 out of 25 from Ukraine. There were no dropouts on the project, and a 100% programme completion rate was achieved.

# 25

Participants

# 100%

Programme completion rate

<sup>10</sup> Start Up West Yorkshire is a fully funded programme providing business support for people living or starting a business in West Yorkshire (<https://peopleplus.co.uk/start-up-west-yorkshire#:~:text=Start%20Up%20West%20Yorkshire%20is%20a%20fully%20funded%20programme%20providing>)

<sup>11</sup> AD:VENTURE provides fully funded business support to new businesses in West Yorkshire who are under 3 years old (<https://www.ad-venture.org.uk/about/>).

<sup>12</sup> BIPC offers free support to new and existing businesses, or anyone with a business idea in Leeds and West Yorkshire (<https://libraries.leeds.gov.uk/what-you-can-do/bipc-leeds#:~:text=What%20you%20can%20do.%20Business%20and%20IP%20Centre%20Leeds.%20Free>).

# The project's building blocks – insights and rationales

The project builds on several insights that recognise the socioeconomic value of migrant and ethnic minority businesses in the UK economy, and considers these insights with regards to expert views, alongside regional challenges within West Yorkshire and the wider Yorkshire and Humber region.



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## Insight 1

### The need to raise West Yorkshire's living standards.

- While West Yorkshire presents with a resilient and diversified economy, its growth and productivity fall below the national growth and productivity in ways that could negatively impact on the region's living standards.
- According to WYCA (2022)<sup>13</sup> WY's poor productivity is due to low investments and workforce skills in the region.
- According to WYCA's evidence for economic strategy (2024)<sup>14</sup>, WY's growth and productivity gap has been widening since the 2008 economic crisis, and is rated at £9.6 billion in 2021 alone (nearly £4,100/ resident), with projections to increase up to £14.9bn (nearly £5,900/ resident) in 2042 – signalling the need for urgent action in this region.

The importance of, and need for, promoting WY's economy through business startup activities are stressed by **Peter Glover, Economic Evidence Manger, WYCA.**



“A large and diverse business base is an essential ingredient for a strong local economy. In particular, business start-ups play a key role in economic dynamism, job creation, innovation and attracting investment. They also play an important part in economic inclusion – providing a pathway for people who may face discrimination in mainstream employment. One of the key things that holds back West Yorkshire's economy is the small size of its business base. In 2024 there were around 80,000 enterprises in the region, according to official Office for National Statistics figures for registered businesses. This equates to 33 businesses per 1,000 population in the region, well short of the England average of 41 and much lower than the more prosperous parts of London and the South East of England, where the figure is often over 100. It is notable that if West Yorkshire had the same business density as the UK average, it would have an additional 20,000 businesses.

Business-start up activity occurs on a large scale in West Yorkshire. Data relating to business bank accounts collected by BankSearch indicates that, on average, there were more than 1,100 business-startups per month in West Yorkshire in the first eight months of 2024. But the ratio of startups to population in West Yorkshire is below national average and also lower than key comparator areas such as Greater Manchester and West Midlands. The picture across West Yorkshire is not uniform, however, and Bradford's start-up rate outperforms the West Yorkshire and national averages. Improving our understanding of West Yorkshire's gap in start-up activity is crucial to developing the region's strategy for business support, building on existing initiatives, such as Enterprise West Yorkshire”.

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13 <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/media/7885/local-skills-report-2022-final-pdf.pdf>

14 <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/media/12098/240314-v2-economic-strategy-evidence-pack.pdf>

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## Insight 2

### **Aspiring entrepreneurs from ethnic minority communities struggle to access mainstream business support.**

- Yorkshire and Humber is one of the three regions in the UK with below average Total entrepreneurial activity rate for ethnic minority groups.
- There is inadequate bridging between ethnic minority communities and business support agencies, as well as financial institutions:
  - More than 90% of all discouraged borrowers are creditworthy, but have never approached a bank.
  - There is lack of trust in financial institutions.

Building on his vast experience in small business & ethnic minority entrepreneurship, Prof. Monder Ram, OBE, Director of the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME) at Aston University, elaborates on the nature, value of, and challenges facing ethnic minority businesses in his contribution to this report.

According to a regional survey by Migration Yorkshire (2023) targeting ethnic minority communities in West Yorkshire<sup>15</sup>:

- 60% of respondents with lived experience of migration did not find suitable start-up support.
- 50% of respondents were unsure about their eligibility to access business start-up support.
- Key barriers and challenges reported include:
  - Lack of understanding of eligibility criteria to business start-up support (50%).
  - Childcare challenges (50%).
  - Low level of English language skills (40%).
  - Travel time (30%).
  - Travel cost (25%).
  - Lack of confidence (25%).
- 80% of respondents could not start a business or become self-employed due to their lack of access to startup programmes that would offer:
  - Access to financial support (65%).
  - Learning with people experiencing similar situations (60%).
  - A mix of online & offline learning (50%).
  - Individual one-to-one support (50%).

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<sup>15</sup> Support for business start-ups and self-employment in Yorkshire & Humber. An online survey by Migration Yorkshire

- Flexible programme hours that accommodate participants' existing schedules (45%).
- Support with travel cost (45%).
- Mentoring by other businesses (45%).
- Communication support, specifically: enhancing English communication skills (30%), learning materials developed in participants' own language (15%), and access to a translator (15%).



**Prof. Monder Ram, OBE, Director of the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME), & a leading authority on small business & ethnic minority entrepreneurship research.**

“Migrant entrepreneurs make a vital yet often overlooked contribution to the UK economy. Recent studies indicate that one in seven UK businesses are founded by migrants, who are nearly twice as likely as UK-born individuals to start a business. These enterprises span a spectrum from humble corner shops to fast-growing tech firms. However, the full potential of migrant businesses remains unrealised due to structural barriers and gaps in support provision.

Many migrant entrepreneurs display remarkable resilience and creativity in the face of adversity. Research shows that refugee business owners deploy varied strategies to survive and even thrive in competitive low-value sectors. Some engage in ‘patch-working’ - combining multiple income streams to boost revenue. Others use community networks or diversify their product offerings to cater to changing consumer tastes. The most successful migrant firms combine proactive strategising with access to financial capital and formal business support networks.

Yet the voices and experiences of migrant entrepreneurs are rarely heard in policy debates. Support providers often lack cultural awareness to engage effectively with diverse communities. Language barriers and unfamiliarity with local business regulations pose additional hurdles. There is a pressing need for tailored, culturally sensitive enterprise support that recognises the unique challenges and opportunities facing migrant business owners.

Unlocking the full potential of migrant entrepreneurship requires a more nuanced policy approach. This should combine targeted financial assistance with mentoring, skills development and help navigating regulatory frameworks. By harnessing the dynamism and global connections of migrant entrepreneurs, we can promote a more inclusive and innovative UK economy.”

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### Insight 3:

**Despite their potential for high socio-economic contributions, there remains a lack of reliable data on Ethnic minority businesses, pointing towards a need for increased efforts to improve data collection and monitoring on these businesses according to ‘Time to Change’ report (2022) by the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME).**

- Immigrants are more likely to start their own business than people born and brought up in the UK (Total entrepreneurial activity rate 3x higher compared to the life-long resident population).
- Migrants face difficulty in finding meaningful employment – an aspect that often ‘pushes’ migrants into self-employment.
- Engaged research scholarship should be promoted in ways that are inclusive and mindful about the different contexts in which entrepreneurship takes place, and highlight the distinctiveness and value of each.

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### Insight 4:

**Only 1 in 3 UK entrepreneurs is female.**

- On average, women have limited financial resources. This is further amplified if you add their experience of migration.
- There is a general lack of access to affordable childcare.
- There is little access to business mentors or role model support.

Insights on the gaps and challenges facing women entrepreneurs are further highlighted by Dr Lorna Treanor, Associate Professor in Entrepreneurship & Innovation at Nottingham University, and President of the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE).





**Dr Lorna Treanor, Associate Professor in Entrepreneurship & Innovation, Nottingham University. President of Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE).**

“Despite women comprising approximately 50% of the world’s population, they are under-represented among the cohort of self-employed, with experts in 37 of 48 global economies evaluating the social support for women entrepreneurs as unsatisfactory (GEM, 2024). In the UK, the number of female entrepreneurs has fallen markedly since 2019 (Francis-Devine and Hutton, 2024). Stereotypes, assumptions about, and expectations of, women and their roles create barriers to women’s enterprise and business growth.

Assumptions that women will ‘naturally’, as a consequence of their biological sex, prioritise home and family or be less capable to start a business, manage staff, assume risk or adequately manage finances create additional challenges. We know too, from an intersectional perspective, that intersecting categories of social belonging will differently position women, often compounding disadvantage and bias. Research shows, for example, that non-white women entrepreneurs will face increased barriers to entrepreneurship (British Business Bank, 2020). Refugee women face barriers in employment and self-employment related to gender, nationality and potentially ethnicity, which when combined can constrain business growth and financial returns (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021<sup>16</sup>).

While all would-be entrepreneurs would benefit from appropriate advice and guidance surrounding relevant regulations and potential sources of support when starting a business, this is understandably more important for foreign nationals unfamiliar with the intricacies and customs of our country but who are still willing to assume risk and contribute to social and economic development. This is why programmes, such as this, supporting refugee women entrepreneurs are so important. They not only provide appropriate information, skill building and support, but they accelerate the process of community building and belonging that supports the creation of a more inclusive ecosystem”.

16 Adeeko, N. and Treanor, L. (2021) “Negotiating stigmatised identities: Enterprising refugee women in the United Kingdom”, *International Small Business Journal*, 40(1): 23-46. DOI: 10.1177/0266242621997033.

British Business Bank (2020) *Alone Together: Entrepreneurship and Diversity in the UK*. London: British Business Bank.

Francis-Devine, B and Hutton, G. (2024) *Women and the UK Economy: Research Briefing*. London: House of Commons Library.

GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Research Monitor), (2024) *GEM 2023/24 Global Report: 25 Years and Growing*. London: GEM.

# Addressing the principal insights on this project

The project is designed to address the various insights that serve as a backbone for this project. The project team's reflective experience indicates the importance of embedding an understanding of the various dynamics of business owners, women, migrants and ethnic minorities, within the context of West Yorkshire, in the design and development of any similar projects. Our design principles include:

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## **A focus on a collaborative approach to ensure that migrant women on the project are coached and mentored, and not merely trained:**

- Offer up to 4hrs of one-to-one mentoring support (total of 61 hours of 1:1 mentoring on the project) to each participant with an experienced business coach to support the development of personalised business advice and plans that align to the needs and stage at which participants present.
- Offer one one-to-one session to each participant with an academic collaborator (total 20 hours on the project) to reflect on their experiences, challenges, motivations and ways forward.
- Facilitate two focus groups to create spaces for group discussions and sharing of common experiences.
- Introduce a closed WhatsApp group and Padlet (administered by the project collaborators) to enable informal communications across participants.

- Arrange a number of optional online drop-in sessions for advice on any potentially relevant matters.

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## **A focus on building migrant women capacity in ways that accommodate their various needs:**

- Run an initial assessment process to assess the specific needs of migrant women joining the programme (stressing the need to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach).
- Deliver 6 x 2hr workshops – through an experienced business coach – building on the specific needs of participants, as identified in the assessment process.
- Cover a wide range of topics in workshops including personal and reflective tasks, capability assessment, communication skills, confidence and leadership building, legal information, business planning, pitching, and possible routes to financial support and how the chances of that can be promoted.

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### A focus on accommodating travel, finance and childcare needs within the design of the project:

- Employ a hybrid approach to learning (a mix of online and offline sessions).
- Organise sessions at times that consider women's commitments around work, study, travel time, family, school pick-up/drop-off...
- Use locations that are easily accessible via public transport.
- Use facilities with Crèche (childcare) on site, when meeting in person.
- Cover participants' cost of travel for those who cannot afford it.



**Picture:** a number of informal workshop gatherings were organised with migrant women to cover various aspects of business support.

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### A focus on promoting participants' accessibility to business startup networks and finance providers in the region:

- Organise webinars and in-person events with various business startup stakeholders, including TERN, Enterprise West Yorkshire, People-Plus, and Skylight Ventures, to allow those stakeholders to introduce their services to aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs and raise the awareness of available support.
- Connect aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs with existing business and financial support providers at the start of their journey to offer them better chances of creating financially sustainable businesses with extended longevity.

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### A focus on boosting confidence:

- Provide opportunities for migrant women to pitch their businesses in front of a panel of business experts from academia and practice.
- Organize a graduation ceremony to acknowledge the accomplishments of migrant women at the end of the project.
- Build content within a private Padlet to exchange pictures and accomplishments of migrant women throughout the project and promote a sense of achievement.
- Offer the opportunity for participants to share their journeys and showcase their businesses in front of policy, practice and academia representatives at a major event.
- Developing a short video sharing the stories of four participants:  
[https://youtu.be/O\\_q7INAKdj4](https://youtu.be/O_q7INAKdj4)





**Pictures:** A number of informal gatherings were organised to offer aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs the opportunity to discuss, showcase and pitch their business ideas.

### A focus on promoting understanding among various stakeholders involved in business startup-support across the Yorkshire region:

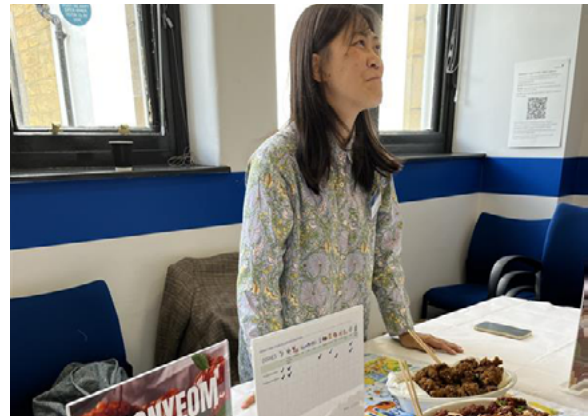
- Conduct interviews and focus groups with aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs whilst they access mainstream business support, to help identify barriers and feedback learnings to the providers as well as WYCA.
- Conduct one-to-one interviews with various policy and practice representatives involved in business start-up support to bridge the provision gap, understand the challenges from a provider's perspective and offer advice on potential ways forward.

“The TERN team was impressed by Migration Yorkshire and partners’ strong commitment to addressing the unique needs of migrant women in business on the programme. Their focus on integrating best practices to break down barriers and meet these needs in the programme’s delivery stands out as a model of thoughtful, impactful support. This approach lays a solid foundation for future programmes in the region and offers a blueprint for replicating success in programmes that include migrant and refugee women entrepreneurs elsewhere”.

**Fred Kastner, Co-Founder at TERN - The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network**



**Picture:** Example of an arts and craft business (handmade candles) run by migrant women, who were encouraged to showcase their businesses during multiple events.



**Picture:** Example of a business in the food sector run by migrant women, who were encouraged to showcase their businesses during multiple events.



**Picture:** Example of an arts and crafts business (handmade jewelries) run by migrant women, who were encouraged to showcase their businesses during multiple events.



# Positive outcomes of the project:

- Boosting confidence based on shared aspirations and personal values.
- Building a community of likeminded people that is likely to go beyond the duration of the project. Through this community, networks are developed with potential to grow as a means for continuous support and inspiration 'by migrant women', 'to migrant women'.
- Strengthening dispositions around value contributions to social, environmental and psychological aspects as a consequence of sharing mutual interests and transformative journeys.
- Promoting wellbeing and emotional status through offering a space to listen to women's aspirations and encouraging their development. Several women are encouraged to draw links between their businesses and home countries in ways that promote cultural and social value, alongside financial, thus promoting their wellbeing and supporting their emotional status.
- Setting a foundation for potential future co-ops by bringing like-minded women with mutual interests together. Such co-ops come with great value to overcome many social and financial challenges facing migrant women entrepreneurs.
- Introducing financial support options, and introducing participants to ways of accessing them.
- Holding a major policy and practice focused closing event towards the end of the project at the University of Leeds, which served to highlight the importance of this event, particularly through attracting major stakeholders from across Yorkshire and Humber, including representatives from WYCA, Leeds City Council<sup>17</sup>, The Prince's Trust<sup>18</sup>, Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network (Y-PERN)<sup>19</sup>, alongside established academics in the field of entrepreneurship, and the aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs who participated in the project.
- Setting strong networks of collaborations between policy, practice and academia that would serve as a foundation for further future developments.

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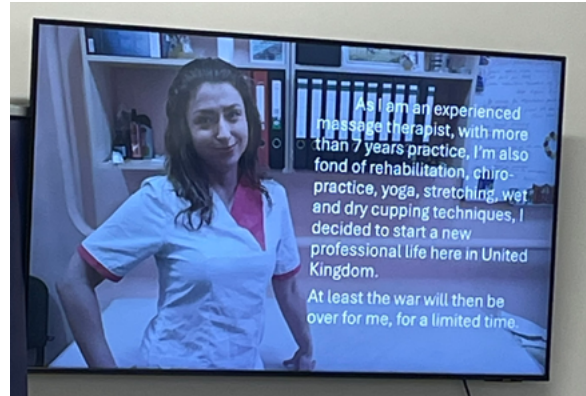
<sup>17</sup> <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/>

<sup>18</sup> The UK's leading charity for young people, offering free courses and support to start careers (<https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/>).

<sup>19</sup> <https://y-pern.org.uk/>

### On the 'Migrant Women in Business' project:

- A total of 61 hours of 1:1 mentoring were delivered.
- 85% of participants feel more confident about starting a business.
- 6 participants (24%) registered their businesses since joining the programme.
- 80% of participants feel more confident about accessing mainstream business support.
- 8 participants (32%) accessed further business support.
- 75% participants report better understanding of the available financial support and how to access it.
- 3 graduates (12%) on this project applied for Skylight Ventures interest free loans and received a total of £3000.
- All participants are part of a WhatsApp groups (from both cohorts 1 and 2), offering an ongoing community space for sharing ideas, events and concern'.



**Picture:** Reflections on promoting women's wellbeing through business startup support.



**Picture:** A major policy and practice focused closing event, held at the University of Leeds Business School in July 2024, to disseminate the project's findings and raise debates among major stakeholders in the region.



**Picture:** The policy and practice focused closing event in July 2024 included opportunities for aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs to showcase their businesses and discuss potential opportunities and ways forward with major stakeholders in the region.

# Reflections on the challenges facing migrant business startups:

The challenges facing business startups by migrants are considered at micro and macro levels. This consideration focuses on challenges facing aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs, challenges facing WY business startup provision, and challenges facing the wider Y&H and national regions, as detailed next.

## A. Recognising business startup challenges at the level of migrant women

Evidence from this project stress the combined intersecting challenges facing aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs, which impact on their ability to startup, run and sustain their businesses. The main challenges uncovered through this project include:

- **Childcare**, particularly considering the high childcare service fees in the UK, and the limited funding sources for migrant women.
- **Geographical instability**, which is exacerbated by housing challenges. Whilst establishing a business requires building strong community networks, migrants can be faced with legal requirements to evacuate their temporary Home Office accommodations within a short duration of time once they attain their settled status. In many cases, migrants build strong networks within the community where they are first settled in Home Office accommodations, and those who are aspiring entrepreneurs will start to ‘test the water’ around various business ideas within those communities

– in hope to start formal businesses once they settle. However, once they obtain their settled status, they are required to evacuate within four weeks to private accommodations or social housing through the council. Due to the long waiting lists and backlogs, social housings are rarely available in time, and many migrants end up facing serious homelessness risks. Those who are lucky enough to find suitable housing, will usually need to move miles away from their initial accommodation, thus risking losing many of their established (and limited) networks. This is reflected in the case of Emi (pseudonym).

### The case of Emi:

On our project, one participant, who started an authentic food cuisine on a small scale in her community, was forced to evacuate her accommodation. The only substitute accommodation available for her was miles away, thus leading to losing her established community networks. Unfortunately, it became too difficult for her to maintain her business, which had to be put on hold. Currently, she is trying hard to find any employment opportunities that could



potentially help her cover various life-expenses, and is hoping that one day in the future she would be able to re-start her business again.

- **Emotional instability**, coupled with lack of confidence and trust, and feelings of being discriminated against. Many women related those challenges to communication gaps and proficiency in English levels. These aspects are noted among the main drivers for migrant women to startup their own businesses.
- **Financial instability**. Most migrant women who are able to secure employment, usually work for low rates. This has implications on their financial records, and negatively impacts their eligibility to secure funding for their businesses.
- **Concerns of becoming socially outcast** due to challenges around understanding the norms and requirements of the new context.
- **Concerns of becoming legally liable** were pervasive. For example, concerns around understanding the business registration forms and tax requirements are noted among the most pronounced concerns due to their serious consequences.
- **Lack of a clear and accessible structure** to the available business startup support in the region. Despite various support streams available, migrant women reflected on their lack of access to such support, and described the search for support as being confusing and unclear.
- **Stress around the short duration** or limited provision of funded projects to support aspiring migrant women

entrepreneurs. Migrant women at early stages of business startup are rather vulnerable and in need for longer-term mentoring and business support. Funded project that last between 6-24 months (particularly those less than a yearlong) are flagged up as insufficient – leaving participants at critical stages when they still need a lot of support.

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## B. Recognising business startup challenges at the level of West Yorkshire

Several streams to business support exist in West Yorkshire. These involve some options to support earlier stages of business startups. Examples include StartUp West Yorkshire, a programme providing expert business support for small businesses in West Yorkshire – fully funded by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership, delivered by PeoplePlus and West Yorkshire Local Authorities. With an aim to help business support seekers to achieve their business goals, the Startup West Yorkshire offers mentoring, various support means, webinars as well as networking opportunities. Similar early startup support is also provided by Business and IP Centre Leeds (BIPC), which offers free support to new and existing businesses, or anyone with a business idea in Leeds and West Yorkshire.

Other business support streams are also available – targeting more advanced businesses that are already registered and/or trading. Examples include the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), AD:VENTURE, Digital Enterprise, manufacturing growth programme, cyber security support, Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small business Programme, Business Enterprise Fund and others. Other general advice on various streams of business support is available

in a rather abstract form<sup>20</sup>, alongside advice and financial support through government-backed schemes on issues related to starting and running a business, tax and exporting<sup>21</sup>.

Upon reviewing various business support streams and conducting in depth discussions with various business support providers in WY, certain gaps and challenges facing business startup provision have been uncovered, including:

- **Funding opportunities:** Historically, these have been more likely to be offered to programmes supporting businesses that are already trading, with a focus of growing these businesses and furthering their tax contributions. This is obvious in the general focus of current provision on, for example, improving business productivity, product ranges, job creation and upskilling of staff, growing and speeding manufacturing and engineering businesses through digital technologies and smarter solutions, granting support to grow the business, particularly for the creative and digital sectors, international expansion and trading overseas, greener business models, connecting with local businesses. While such support is necessary and essential for economic growth, it does not address the specific needs of early startups.
- **Recognising the specific needs of early startups:** There is a general lack of understanding of the specific needs of early-stage startups, and an inclination towards a one-size-fits-all approach. Through this project, various stakeholders reflected on the liabilities of businesses at the early stages of startup. Aspiring entrepreneurs come with different

expectations and will require a lot of guidance, mentoring and support. Most of the available support however is focused on training sessions that take trainees through standardised sessions from ideation to startup.

- **Recognising the specific needs of marginalised and under-represented groups within communities:** The specific needs of marginalised and under-represented groups are largely overlooked in policy and practice. This includes business support that directly targets the needs of such groups as migrants, refugees, women, neurodiverse, rural... communities, whose needs can be much different than those of trading businesses in less constrained, well-resourced and/or urban areas.

The recent funding streams by WYCA, of which this project is part, have considered such gaps through exploring business start-ups of neurodiversity groups, ethnic minorities and migrant women. This is a positive step forward, but more needs to be done to find sustainable long-term solutions through targeted support.

- **Financial and time resource limitations:** during the early stages of startup, aspiring entrepreneurs seek a more personalised approach involving mentoring and coaching, and usually go through long incubation periods during which they would reflect on their business ideas and their alignment with personal various life aspects. However, due to limited duration of time on projects offering support to early startups, it is not possible to provide such thorough follow up. This is a challenge that has been highlighted by both aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs

<sup>20</sup> For example, in West Yorkshire, advice can be accessed through (<https://www.wybusiness-skills.com/>).

<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/set-up-business#:~:text=Get%20help%20and%20support.%20You%20can%20get%20help%20with%20setting>

and business support providers in WY. The latter add that by the time participants on their business support programmes arrive at decisions to pursue their businesses or at least start to feel more confident about themselves, the startup provision in which they are enrolled would have ended, and they would have to refer to other programmes, therefore putting an end to the relationships and trust they built together.

The limited time and financial resources can also sometimes limit the business support programmes' ability to attract the most fit support workers to various posts, or put them at high risk of losing them – while their projects are running – for better employment opportunities.

From a provision perspective, this also has implications on employees' job security and wellbeing due to the temporary nature of contracts that such programmes involve.

- **Definitions of success:** Upon assessing criteria for measuring the success of various business support programmes, it becomes obvious that success criteria are rather limited, where outcome reports on various business support projects are mainly focused on numbers, e.g. number of businesses enrolled, those who completed the programme, withdrawals, profitability, growth rates, sales... As such, outcome reports are very descriptive without adequate potential to furnish for future subsequent projects. These reports also give much lesser attention to success around social, psychological, community and/or environmental value, which are extremely important, particularly within vulnerable and marginalised communities.
- **Fragmented business support provision:** there are several business support providers

across the region. Some of this provision is done through councils and authorities, and others are independent. This provision remains fragmented, without adequate streamlining nor clear database showing who the providers are, and what their provision involves, leading to inefficient utilisation of resources, and inadequate provision at many instances.

- **Referral systems:** Upon talking to policy and practice stakeholders involved in business startup provision, it becomes clear that referral systems between various business support providers are lacking. Despite that some efforts are in place to have such systems, those systems remain very confined to limited providers, with minimal application across the region.

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## C. A wider look at Yorkshire & Humber

As part of the project, a panel hosting major stakeholders in the Yorkshire and Humber (Y&H) region was held in order to gain better perspectives and understanding of business startup support in the wider regional context. The aim is to understand where Y&H stand in terms of businesses support, what the available business support streams are, whether these have any distinguishing factors in terms of, for example, the scope of provision, acknowledgement and accommodation of the specific needs of different groups (e.g. migrants, refugees, women, neurodiverse, disabled...), the alignment of business provision in Y&H with the wider ecosystem of enterprise and business support in the UK, the extent of communication and referrals across different streams of provision, main challenges hindering dissemination, extent of success and how that is perceived and measured, how future provision can be improved and what needs to be done.

There are some variations in the scope and geography across Y&H, alongside differences in demographics, funding and resources. Nevertheless, challenges across the region are widely similar. It is interesting to note though that the efforts placed by WY appear to be leading in Y&H in relation to the recently

funded projects by WYCA for supporting business startup by marginalised communities. Stakeholders in the wider regional context have described these funding streams as ‘inspiring’, with calls to replicate them more widely across the region.



**Picture:** The project’s closing event in July 2024 hosted a panel of major stakeholders in the Yorkshire region to gain in depth insights on business startup support in the wider context of Y&H (from left to right: Ewa Lelontko (Migration Yorkshire), Jon Brunton (Growth Hub Manager/Hull and East Yorkshire Business), Fatima Khan-Shah (West Yorkshire’s 1st ever Inclusivity Champion), Simon Middleton (Growth Hub Delivery Manager York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority/ YNYCA), Roger Wilde (Senior Development Manager – Education, Skills and Employability/ South Yorkshire Combined Authority/ SYMCA), Dr Deema Refai (University of Leeds)).





**Simon Middleton – Growth Hub Delivery Manager – York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority (YNYCA).**

“Our strategic priority as a Growth Hub is to create positive impact within the businesses we support. It is not just us who are responsible for that either, we work very closely with local authority colleagues at the City of York and North Yorkshire, and also with many private sector partners to ensure what we deliver is what businesses need. Being part of the business community is really important to us. That is reflected in our delivery model where we have locality managers covering every part of our region. They are embedded within their communities and are well known and respected by the businesses in their respective areas. As a result, we frequently see referrals passing from professional service providers such as accountants and ourselves. Partnership and collaboration are absolutely critical to the success of our work.

The support we provide already targets specific groups. For example, we work with a private sector provider to deliver a programme known as Courageous Females, and we are currently working on the delivery of our second cohort for an Investor Readiness programme in partnership with Lifted Ventures, who have expertise in supporting female entrepreneurs. We do not currently offer a specific programme for migrant groups although many of our programmes have a number of features that align with some of what I saw during the Migrant Yorkshire event, where we help in building confidence, business planning, sales, marketing and more. We define success by analysing areas where we have made a difference, positive impact as I call it. It is not just about recording numbers, it is the positive outcomes that matter. That can mean many things and sometimes we may play only a small part in it. It could be help to develop a new product, enter new markets, start to export, get professional help from an accountant on the correct way to set up a business, create new jobs, obtain a grant to purchase machinery that will increase production, support to recruit apprentices to develop new skills, build links with Universities to support innovation and many more besides.

Our ongoing challenge is to reach more members of the business community. York & North Yorkshire is a huge area with many rural towns and villages. We are absolutely focussed on using our communication channels and networks to use the right language to reach more businesses. Our weekly newsletter for example goes out to over 5000 people every Thursday morning. One simple change we have made that has had a big impact is the addition of team member photos to the newsletter. Each week a different team member is featured, and the inclusion of the photo is often commented on at events, where people we have not met before recognise us from the newsletter. It is a simple thing, but it really makes a difference.

Our demographic is very different to that in West Yorkshire, but it does not mean we cannot do more. With a new Mayor in place since May, we are keen to build on the additional visibility that has been created within our region, and make targeted support for businesses based on what they need and not what we think they need. York & North Yorkshire is a brilliant place to live and work, and the Growth Hub has a privileged position that we do not take for granted. We do create positive impact and I want us to continue evolving so that remains the case.”

Despite existing challenges and gaps, the business support approach in Y&H is focused on the needs of businesses and what the region requires, building on strong partnerships and collaborations that aim to include everyone as part of a business community. 'In other words, there is a shift towards adopting a bottom-up approach to identify the specific needs of communities and develop more tailored approaches, yet this approach is still in its infancy. In a similar vein, there is a lack of an adequate database to support the building of tailored solutions, where more research and credible datasets are needed to support planning and development in the region.

As indicated by the panellists, the growing trend to adopt community-based approaches has resulted in some initiatives focusing on specific groups through, for example, a recent programme targeting female entrepreneurs

and adopting inclusive business support programmes where everyone is welcomed. Nevertheless, a strong potential for growth still exists through programmes that target marginalised groups in more explicit ways that address their specific needs, including migrants who remain marginalised. In terms of measuring success, while there are attempts to look more broadly on positive impact and not just numbers, the focus is still largely on performance measures, without adequate attention towards assessing potential social, environmental and psychological outcomes, which can add much regional value. Of course, geographical aspects, including the scope of rural areas as well as towns and villages, will influence and shape business support provision in the various areas across Y&H – an aspect that requires further exploration. Overall, there is a strong commitment towards development and the achievement of positive regional impact across Y&H.



**Jon Brunton, Growth Hub Manager, Hull & East Yorkshire Business, Growth and Skills Hub.**

“The success of the ‘Migrant Women in Business’ project, funded by WYCA, and led by Migration Yorkshire, in partnership with the University of Leeds, demonstrates that tailored and targeted business support programmes can be effective in supporting refugees and migrants to set up businesses in a new country. It is vitally important that entrepreneurship could sometimes be viewed as an achievable and effective alternative to employment, especially where social, cultural and personal factors may present barriers to employment. Presently, equivalent programmes have not been delivered in the other three sub-regions of Yorkshire, which given the efficacy of the WYCA programme, would likely be a worthwhile exercise.

There is a broad range of business support available in Hull and East Yorkshire (HEY), delivered largely by the HEY Growth Hub, and the business support teams of the two HEY local authorities: Hull City Council, and East Riding of Yorkshire Council. These three organisations work closely together to ensure that the support needs of entrepreneurs and businesses are met, and that any ‘gaps’ are filled wherever possible. The support provided by HEY

Growth Hub is accessible by any business; regardless of size, sector or business maturity. By working collaboratively, and by adopting a 'business needs led' approach to fill support gaps, the business support provision is very well aligned with the wider ecosystem of enterprise and business support in HEY. This collaborative approach ensures that all business support providers and schemes are aware of each other, and that regular referrals are made so that client businesses and entrepreneurs can access the specialist support, advice, and funding they need to grow their business.

However, there remain challenges in the dissemination of business support services to entrepreneurs. For example, we know that female entrepreneurs in HEY are less likely to engage with business support provision than male entrepreneurs, and that young entrepreneurs are more reluctant to seek help and advice than their older counterparts. Having said that, as publicly funded organisations, the HEY Growth Hub and the two HEY local authorities must fulfil the public sector equality duty, which in the context of business support, means the advancement of equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic, and persons who do not share it. Fundamentally, this means that business support services are available and accessible to all entrepreneurs and business owners, regardless of their protected characteristic. In practical terms, this means making reasonable adjustments to service provision, for example the provision of a foreign language or BSL interpreter at client meetings or ensuring that all business-facing meetings and events are held in fully accessible venues. It also requires us to monitor the protected characteristics of our service users, to ensure that the Growth Hub and local authority business support services are being accessed by entrepreneurs and business owners from all parts of our community.

Nevertheless, there is still a lot of work to do to ensure that the barriers that all under-represented groups face when accessing funded business support services, are removed. This certainly includes refugee and migrant entrepreneurs, including female entrepreneurs. For example, whilst the protected characteristics of service users is monitored and reported upon, there is not always the resources available to design, commission and deliver tailored and targeted support programmes to under-represented groups.

As mentioned, the success of the WY-based 'migrant women in business' project demonstrates the impact and value of taking a discrete approach; enabling and empowering migrant women to access advice, guidance, support and funding that they may not otherwise have done. It would therefore be desirable to replicate this programme in the other Yorkshire sub-regions, subject to available funding and resource.

Publicly funded business support provision needs to reflect the community it serves, as does the business community itself. By facilitating access to support services for groups that traditionally may not do so, this contributes towards a business support offer, and indeed a thriving business community that is diverse and inclusive for all."

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### D. A wider look at national level

While this project focuses on aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs in the region of West Yorkshire, our project partners – The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network (TERN) – have had demonstrable success in supporting refugee entrepreneurs at a national level. TERN is a social enterprise, with a mission to enable refugees to thrive through the power

of their own ideas. Over the past years, TERN has offered a set of wrap-around services that are entirely dedicated to meeting the needs of refugee entrepreneurs. In their commentary, TERN Co-founders, Fred Kastner and Charlie Fraser, reflect on the suite of comprehensive support services that TERN has, and continues to offer, with evidence of massive successes over the years, which are worthy of noting and replicating.





# A wider look at the national level



**Fred Kastner**

Social Innovation Director,  
Co-Founder at TERN



**Charlie Frase**

Co-founder, Partnerships &  
Strategy Director at TERN

TERN, whose services are entirely dedicated to meeting the needs of refugee entrepreneurs, has developed a suite of comprehensive support services over the years. These include:

- 1. Community Membership:** Refugee graduates of local pre incubator programmes can apply to join TERN's membership at no cost, gaining access to peer-to-peer networks and one-on-one video support sessions with TERN's industry experts. This community strengthens their networks and provides continued mentorship.
- 2. Online Incubators:** TERN offers two advanced programmes online to participants across the UK: an incubator for e-commerce centric entrepreneurs and an incubator for social enterprises led by refugees. These programmes give refugee graduates of local pre incubator programmes a clear next step to progress to business startup.
- 3. Year-Round, Flexible Online Support:** Refugee founders of any industry background can access TERN's flexible online support to develop their business and their entrepreneurial and technical skills development. This includes TERN's online workshops (<https://wearetern.org/all-workshops-schedule>) and TERN's WhatsApp based business chat for quick, accessible guidance (<https://wearetern.org/spark-chat>).

Building on the established experience of TERN, a number of key lessons are outlined to disseminating and managing effective support programmes in the UK. Future programmes supporting women migrant and refugee entrepreneurship in the UK could benefit from adopting several practices developed by TERN to improve outcomes and broaden impact. Here are key elements that have proven effective:

- 1. Personalised Onboarding Calls:** At TERN, new applicants receive a dedicated onboarding call, lasting up to an hour, to clarify eligibility, match them with suitable services, and ensure they fully understand their options. This upfront investment provides clarity and reduces confusion, enabling participants to make informed decisions about their support journey according to what best suits them.
- 2. Accessible, Multilingual Support:** To address low English proficiency among some applicants, TERN increasingly provides simplified English or multilingual workshop and self-paced learning content. In addition, TERN provide live, first language or bilingual workshop and 1-1 delivery in Ukrainian, Dari, Pashto, and Persian languages. The addition of native-speaking team members has made this easy to adopt, opening up TERN's support to new audiences.
- 3. Peer-to-Peer Training and Mentorship:** At TERN, alumni are trained as trainers, coaches, mentors and content creators. They are increasingly in charge of delivering TERN's services with both business expertise and firsthand lived experience of forced migration and entrepreneurship, they add insight, credibility and relatability, boosting participants' confidence in every service line.
- 4. Support at the right time and in accessible formats:** Recognising participants' varied schedules and daytime commitments to parenting, income generation etc., TERN offers are adapted to delivering evening sessions (5:30 or 6pm start) with ongoing flexible assistance through simple call booking tools and text-based communication that meets participant where they most communicate: via WhatsApp and Telegram chats. These steps accommodate family's time-poor and often hectic schedule, ensuring support is available at convenient times when and where is most suitable to them. These steps accommodate families time-poor and often changing schedules, ensuring support is available at convenient times when and where is most suitable to them.
- 5. Locally embedded, Market-Driven Pre-Incubation:** TERN advocates a market-first approach, to ensure that pre incubation focuses participants on developing business ideas that meet local industry and consumer needs. In London, by collaborating with sectors like food markets, B2B catering, fashion retail, craft markets, and service aggregators, TERN aligns business ideas with genuine market demand in Greater London. This approach connects participants with:

- **Real Market Needs:** Entrepreneurs start their ideation based on local demand rather than isolated concepts, gaining access to potential customers and infrastructure from the start.
- **Industry Expertise, Mentorship and social capital:** Local industry partners provide clarity (through mentoring or industry advice) on product and service standards, enhancing participants' understanding of customer expectations. Industry collaborators provide valuable social capital, industry insights, and mentorship, offering participants support for both immediate success and future growth.
- **Infrastructure:** Crucially, some industry partners also can share infrastructure (e.g., kitchen space, retail equipment) through rental or subscription models. Where the industry partners truly buy into the social mission of a local refugee and migrant initiative, they may offer reduced / bursary fees during the initial months of rental, thereby lowering costs and risks for beginner entrepreneurs.

The market-aligned model demonstrated by TERN in Greater London seems worth testing in other locales through the work of organisations like Migration Yorkshire. The logic of meeting market and consumer demands and embedding locally has potential to improve the connectedness, relevance and income generating potential of refugee and migrant entrepreneurs.



# Conclusion and Recommendations

Challenges facing aspiring migrant women entrepreneurs often align with those facing migrant entrepreneurs broadly, but are likely to be more pronounced in the case of women who are considered as ‘microcosms’ (Al-Dajani, 2022) of the broad spectrum of entrepreneurs, and continue to face more struggles than their counterpart men entrepreneurs. This report highlights key recommendations for enhancing business startup support, which are of relevance to research, policy and practice.

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## 1. Harnessing bottom-up business support developmental approaches.

We call for business startup support programmes that harness the value of bottom-up approaches by engaging under-represented groups and various communities in the planning, delivery and development of these programmes. Leveraging regional and national partnerships that engage multiple stakeholder representations from communities, policy, practice and academia is key to this approach. Not only will this employ inclusive scholarship practices on ground, but will also bring in fundamental values held by under-represented communities – through advisory groups for example – in ways that shape decisions around aspects that impact on their futures and the future of the wider region.

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## 2. Targeted business startup support for marginalised and under-represented communities.

Business startup support programmes need to establish clear support pathways for marginalised and under-represented communities including, for example, the migrant, refugee, neurodiverse and rural communities, in ways that acknowledge their specific needs. Some things to consider in this regard can relate to upskilling and training of business startup providers on the specific needs and ethical considerations related to marginalised and under-represented communities. Furthermore, there is need to champion the values and legacies of these communities through representations of role models and success stories from within, alongside the inclusion of trainers and business support providers with lived experiences from marginalised and under-represented communities.

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## 3. Staged approach to business startup support.

Developing business startup programmes that adopt a staged-approach to business support – as opposed to a one size fits all approach – will enable more targeted and relevant support building on clear criteria and thorough

understanding of the needs and requirements of different groups at different stages of business. A staged approach to business startup support will promote cost efficiency through more efficient distribution of human and financial resources, while also enabling the development and building of a strong database reflecting the socio-economic contributions of various communities and their potential impact and contributions, particularly in relation to marginalised and under-represented communities that remain under-explored and under-valued.

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#### **4. Enabling success measures and assessment criteria that set foundations for targeted follow up and long-term sustainable support.**

Considering the limited and sporadic funding to entrepreneurship in marginalised and under-represented communities, alongside a dominant focus on economic measures of success, there is need for more comprehensive measures at different stages of startup in ways that accommodate social and community outcomes, alongside psychological and environmental benefits, particularly for vulnerable groups and those at early stages of business. Such measures can also accommodate the contributions of business support workers in terms of what is needed by them to fulfil the required success criteria, thereby enabling the appointment of the most fit to drive the achievement of the expected targets. Comprehensive success measures and assessment criteria can consequently support the expansion of early-stage businesses through future targeted funding streams that enhance long term sustainable socio-economic growth.

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#### **5. Developing streamlined referral systems.**

Streamlined referral systems are necessary to enable more efficient mapping of the business support provision in the region. The current provision remain fragmented, thus highlighting the need for linking between business support providers and seekers through more efficient systems that are based on relevant databases and clear assessment criteria.

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#### **6. Promoting the role of universities in targeting impact through engaged scholarship.**

Last, but not least, this report stresses the significance of promoting the role of universities in targeting impact through engaged scholarship that “connects the rich resources of the university to the most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems” (Boyer, 1996)<sup>22</sup>. Such approach will promote and encourage initiatives that can deepen and widen interdisciplinary linkages within and between universities, and the regional businesses and authority bodies. Through engaged scholarship, universities’ regional presence and contributions are promoted through models of place-based projects that further maximise their embeddedness and locality, thereby boosting up their role as public anchors. Such role is necessary for establishing in depth local understanding, networks, long-term partnerships and future visions for regional and national growth, development and survival. The YPERN and YPIP initiatives in Yorkshire set great examples of nurturing the role of universities as public anchors and widening their interdisciplinary linkages with regional businesses and authority bodies. This is reflected in the valuable commentary, next, by Dr Andrew Mycock, Chief Policy Fellow, Y-PERN, University of Leeds.

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22 Boyer EL. The scholarship of engagement. *Journal of Public Service & Outreach*. 1996; 1(1):11-20

**“As this report rightly notes, the importance of migrant businesses to the UK economy cannot be overlooked.”**



**Dr Andrew Mycock, Chief Policy Fellow, Y-PERN, University of Leeds**

“Universities have become increasingly vital to regional policymaking as they seek research-driven solutions to complex, localised issues. The Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network (Y-PERN) is a collaborative network of the region’s 12 universities and all its local and combined authorities who work in partnership to foster the co-creation of evidence-based policymaking. We bring researchers and policymakers together to exchange knowledge and expertise, thus enhancing both the quality of research and its policy impact. By involving regional policymakers directly in the research process, our universities help ensure that findings are actionable and aligned with policy needs. Our partnership supports the development of evidence-based, proactive policies to address current challenges and anticipate future ones, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for our regional communities.

Y-PERN is proud to support the Migrant Women in Business – A Focus on West Yorkshire project. It provides an exemplar of how university researchers can work in partnership with a broad range of policy and practitioner stakeholders across our region. Applied research such as this project provides a clear example of how evidence-based insights can help our region’s policymakers design more effective, inclusive, and impactful strategies that enhance economic and community growth.

As this reports rightly notes, the importance of migrant businesses to the UK economy cannot be overlooked. By offering a granular perspective that is directly applicable to the unique challenges and opportunities facing our female migrant community entrepreneurs, this report provides a series of timely and practical recommendations for local, regional and national policy and business leaders. We look forward to working with the research team based at the Leeds University Business School and their partners in realising the full value of this project, and exploring how it can be further developed to ensure migrant women entrepreneurs are better supported so they can amplify their role in the UK government’s mission to grow our economy”.





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