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**The Role of ICT-Based Communication in Facilitating Refugee
Entrepreneurship for Enhancing Livelihoods and Economic
Inclusion in Lithuania**

Master thesis

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Abstract

A global rise of forced migration due to armed conflict, persecution, and climate change poses notable challenges for refugees in accessing employment opportunities in host countries. Refugee entrepreneurship presents an alternative pathway to economic integration. However, prior scholarly research on this topic is scarce within the context of Lithuanian society.

This paper examines the practical obstacles refugee entrepreneurs face and highlights the role of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) -based communication in enhancing their livelihoods and economic inclusion in Lithuania. The study uses qualitative and quantitative methods, involving three types of data collection: 1) interviews with 13 refugee entrepreneurs, 2) individual interviews with two experts, and 3) a group discussion with seven experts. Using the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), the findings demonstrate that language barriers, limited access to mentorship and business networking, and funding constraints are significant challenges for refugee entrepreneurs. ICT-based tools offer transformative solutions by addressing communication gaps, facilitating stakeholder engagement, and fostering a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The study concludes with unique recommendations for leveraging ICT-based communication to build targeted, integrative approaches that enhance human, social, and financial capital. These interventions aim to empower refugee entrepreneurs, promote economic inclusion, and strengthen their integration into Lithuanian society.

Keywords

Refugee Entrepreneurship, ICT, Digitalization, Livelihoods, Economic Inclusion

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List of Abbreviations

ICT	– Information, Communication, Technology
ILO	– International Labour Organization
IOM	– International Organization for Migration
OECD	– Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SLA	– Sustainable Livelihoods Approach
UNHCR	– United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Introduction

Global concern over ongoing refugee issues has risen, as elaborated in the Global Trend Report 2023 (UNHCR, 2024a). The report shows that the number of forcibly displaced people is astonishingly 117.3 million across the globe as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and climate change. The trend of these statistics has been on a steady incline for a decade. The total number of refugees worldwide was 43.4 million at the end of 2023.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has resulted in the displacement of approximately 6 million refugees by the end of 2023, reflecting a 5% rise from the previous year. Nearly 44% of these individuals have sought refuge in neighboring countries, while the remaining 3.4 million have resettled in other parts of Europe and beyond. (UNHCR, 2024a)

Refugee-related research must begin by understanding the definition of a refugee. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which are cornerstone legal instruments of international refugee law, define the term "refugee" under Article 1(A)(2) of the Convention:

"A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 1951, p. 14).

Initially, this definition was restricted to people displaced by events occurring before January 1, 1951, with a geographical limitation applying predominantly to Europe. However, the opening up of the 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees freed these barriers, which included the phrase "as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951" and related provisions from Article

1(A)(2)(UNHCR, 1967). Through these amendments, international refugee law has expanded to a manifest universal nature that bears no temporal or geographic restriction. Countries that acceded to these instruments are bound to comply with the Convention and Protocol as fundamental legislation determining the rights and duties of refugees and asylum-seekers.

It is crucial to mention the difference between refugees and migrants before exploring the main topic of this paper. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) describes migrants as follows.

"An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons." (IOM, 2024)

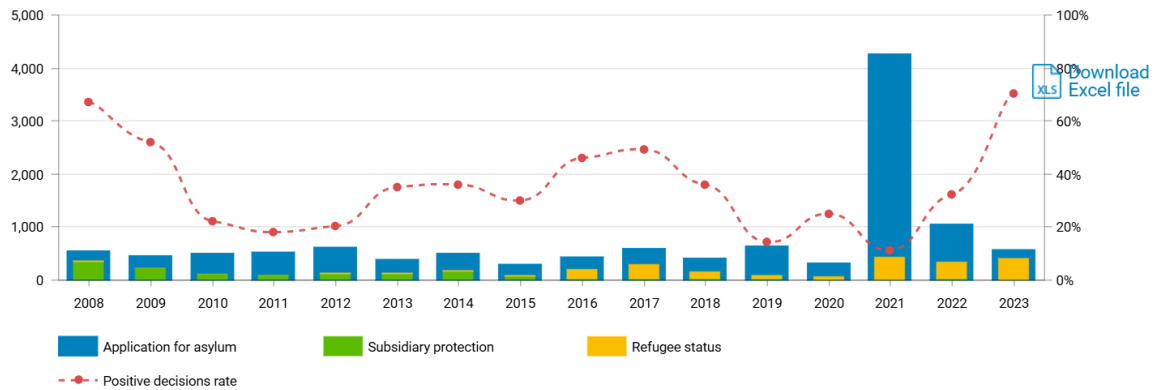
The crucial difference between refugees and migrants is that migrants are generally described as people who spontaneously decide to move to improve their living conditions by seeking better work opportunities, accessing education, or reuniting with family members. Unlike refugees, whose movement is compelled by threats to their safety or persecution, migrants voluntarily relocate to enhance their quality of life or achieve personal goals (UNHCR, 2019a). Accordingly, refugees often face immense difficulty in rebuilding their lives owing to employment, whereas fewer complications arise for migrants making the transition under normal circumstances.

Drawing on refugee issues in Lithuania, this is a considerable increase, with more than 4000 asylum applications being received in some years from 2011 through 2022. There is a significant spike in 2021, reaching the highest number with over 4,000 applications. This surge likely correlates with global migration crises or regional conflicts. By 2023, the number of applications decreased substantially to 575, almost half of the 2022 figures (1051 applications). As shown in a red dashed line with data points, this represents the percentage of positive asylum decisions. There has been a steady increase in the positive decision rate over time, with a notable rise in recent years, reaching

approximately 80% by 2023. (European Migration Network,2024)

Asylum in Lithuania: 15 years overview

Lithuania has three forms of asylum: refugee status (permanent), subsidiary protection (granted for two years with the possibility to be prolonged) and temporary protection (can be granted by the government if there is an increased number of people asking for asylum). [Read more →](#)

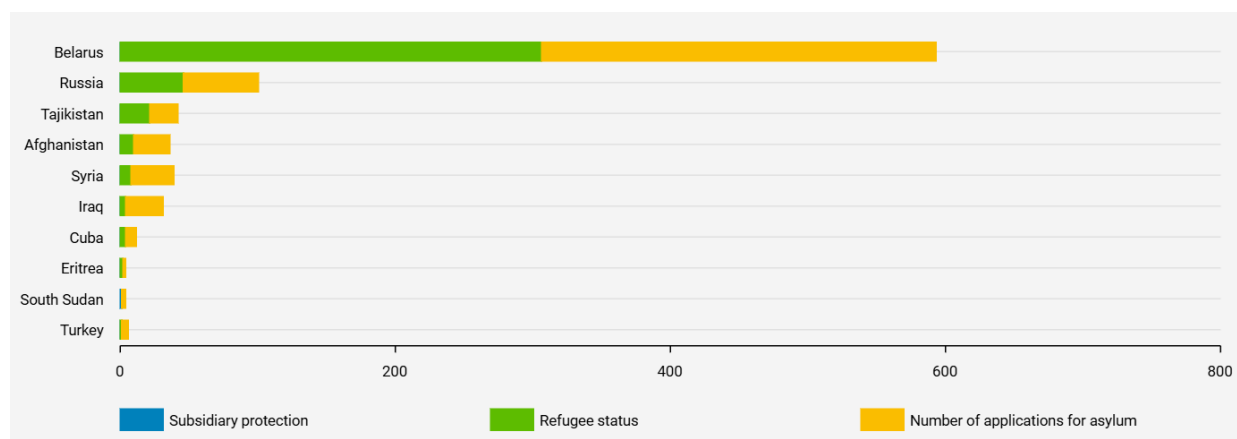


Data Source: European Migration Network, 2024.

European Migration Network (EMN) reports that the type of status falls into three categories of legal status in Lithuania:

1. Refugee Status: Permanent protection
2. The subsidiary protection lasts for two years, with an extension possible.
3. Temporary Protection, Which the government can grant in cases of increased asylum applications

The following graph illustrates the number of asylum applications and statuses (subsidiary protection and refugee status) granted to individuals from various countries in Lithuania during 2023. Belarus had the highest number of applicants., followed by Russia (European Migration Network,2024).



Data Source: European Migration Network, 2024.

Transitioning the emphasis to Ukrainian war refugees in Lithuania, UNHCR (2024b) reports that approximately 87,000 refugees from Ukraine have been granted temporary protection since February 2022, with the current number around 43,000.

Ukrainians who escaped to Lithuania after the war received temporary protection rather than refugee status due to the activation of the European Union's Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC). This directive was invoked for the first time in response to the mass influx of displaced persons following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (ASIL Project, 2022; European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2001).

In summary, the discussion of accepting refugees in Lithuania has recently become crucial because of the influx of refugees from Belarus and Ukraine.

Research Gap and the Novelty of the Research

Drawing on living in host countries for refugees, some studies show they face enormous difficulties, notably joining the labour market in host countries. Entrepreneurship shows an alternative pathway to economic integration and the practical problems they face when starting their businesses. Despite the importance of this approach, only some studies have examined refugee entrepreneurship in

Lithuanian society, especially using ICT-based communication to overcome the obstacles of refugee entrepreneurs. This study addresses this gap, contributing a novel perspective to forced migration research and providing valuable insights into refugee inclusion in Lithuanian society and European integration.

Theoretical and Empirical methods used

This thesis uses theoretical and empirical methods to analyze the obstacles refugee entrepreneurs encounter and the role of ICT-based communication in fostering livelihoods and economic inclusion in Lithuania. The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) remains the basic intellectual framework that provides a view to understanding refugee entrepreneurs' challenges and the assets they leverage to transcend them. SLA delivers insights into how economic and various capital assets interplay within the broader ecosystem of refugee livelihoods.

Empirical data were collected through three distinct semi-structured interviews with refugee entrepreneurs and experts in Lithuania. This data collection consists of three distinctive phases:

1) interviews with 13 refugee entrepreneurs, 2) individual interviews with two experts, and 3) a group discussion with seven experts. This qualitative and qualitative method provides an in-depth analysis of participants' lived experiences regarding how they used ICT-based communication to navigate entrepreneurial challenges.

Integrating theoretical and empirical methods can provide an overall understanding of how ICT-based communication can develop refugee entrepreneurship, overcome barriers, and achieve economic inclusion.

Research Questions, Aim, Objectives, and Structure of the Thesis

Research Questions:

This study explores the following research questions:

1. What obstacles do refugee entrepreneurs face in fostering their livelihoods and economic inclusion?
2. What is the role of ICT-based communication in overcoming these obstacles in Lithuania?

Aim of the Thesis:

The aim of this paper is to examine the obstacles refugee entrepreneurs face in Lithuania and analyze how ICT-based communication enhances their livelihoods and economic inclusion.

Objectives:

This thesis explores the following objectives to achieve this aim:

1. To examine a comprehensive understanding of refugee entrepreneurship as a pathway to enhance economic inclusion in host countries, focusing on challenges in Lithuania.
2. To analyze the role of ICT-based communication in enhancing refugee entrepreneurs' ability to overcome barriers such as language, access to networks, and regulatory complexities.
3. To indicate actionable recommendations for promoting ICT-based communication with stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions, to support refugee entrepreneurship through tailored programs and improved ICT ecosystems.

This paper is structured as follows: Firstly, It begins with a literature review, which shows an overview of the challenges refugees face globally and in Lithuania, with a particular emphasis on barriers to labor market integration and economic inclusion. The review stresses the benefit of refugee

entrepreneurship as an alternative pathway to promote livelihoods and economic integration, outlining its immense potential and practical challenges. It then introduces the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) as a framework for understanding refugee entrepreneurship and analyzes the role of ICT-based communication tools in overcoming these challenges.

This paper investigates ICT-based communication for refugee entrepreneurs based on a literature review. This section describes the definitions and functions of ICT and AI, elucidating their connection with entrepreneurial practices. It discusses how these technologies enable the exploitation of possibilities around barriers like language and cultural differences for connecting refugees with resources, networks, and markets. The research methodology section outlines the aims and methods of the study, emphasizing qualitative and qualitative approaches, such as semi-structured interviews with refugee entrepreneurs and experts.

The section also discusses the research design and sampling approach, which aimed to capture diverse perspectives on the role of ICT in fostering entrepreneurship among refugees in Lithuania. The results section presents the findings from interviews and group discussions, focusing on key themes such as the role of ICT in facilitating customer engagement, storytelling, training, and skill development, with a focus on communication engagement. The findings are interpreted using the SLA approach to highlight the immense potential of ICT-based communication in refugee entrepreneurship.

1. The challenge for refugees to join the labor market

1.1 Introduction to Employment Barriers for Refugees

Employment considerations are the focus of this chapter on the assimilation of refugees in the host countries and how employment opportunities have contributed positively to the overall integration endeavors. It is stated by F., Frattini, T., & Minale, L. (2021) underline that entering the labor force is challenging for refugees. The study explores the labor market performance of refugees vis-a-vis comparable migrants across 20 European countries over time, using several theories and frameworks to analyze socioeconomic integration. They suggest that labor market effects for refugees consistently deteriorate more than for other migrants, showing that 11.6% are less likely to have a job and 22% are more likely to be unemployed than other migrants with similar characteristics. This finding suggests the challenges refugees face in gaining job opportunities compared to migrants.

The study of F., Frattini, T., & Minale, L. (2021) also points out that insufficient health conditions and a lack of local language skills for migrants to interact with locals in host countries lead to vulnerable labor market consequences and more obstacles to obtaining jobs than other migrants.

These findings demonstrate one main reason why refugees face more significant employment challenges than other migrants: they have a double hurdle to overcome: health problems and the language barrier. These two challenges limit refugees' chances of getting jobs in the host country.

Brell et al. (2020) also demonstrate the similar findings, comparing them to the situation of migrants.

This paper shows several significant obstacles for refugees to integrate into host countries economically, utilizing various micro datasets focusing on refugees and cross-national public surveys. This research analyzes the backgrounds and histories that might lead to attachment or suppress the income refugees could obtain in a host country.

According to Brell et al. (2020), the most relevant impediments to refugees joining the labor market include health issues, acquiring the local language, and being low-income with limited social

networks. Psychologically, a person would have roots in violence and trauma, which would typically affect their mental capability as well. These experiences often result in psychological conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), adapting to new environments and becoming even more challenging. (Brell et al., 2020). The authors note that the prevalence of this obstacle is far higher among refugees than the local population in host countries, resulting in a downside influence on their labor market integration.

Bogic, Njoku, and Priebe (2015) examine how mental health issues such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety persist long after resettlement among war refugees, mainly due to complex post-migration challenges based on a system review of studies assessing depression and anxiety in adult war refugees five or more years post-displacement reveals. The mental state of refugees was shown to be poor on account of the lack of some socioeconomic factors, and it places a more significant burden on employment challenges, creating a self-reinforcing cycle impeding integration and economic stability in the host countries (Bogic et al., 2015).

A second finding of Brell et al. (2020) shows that the language proficiency of refugees is consistently lower than that of other immigrants in target countries, except Switzerland. Gericke et al. (2018) examine the critical role of social capital as both a facilitator and a barrier to employment in refugee integration based on interviews with 36 Syrian refugees who had already secured jobs in Germany. This research highlights that language barriers strongly correlate with the high unemployment rate among refugees and suggests the need for language learning support.

The third perspective, highlighted by Brell et al. (2020), is that refugees must navigate social networks to gain job opportunities. Gericke et al. (2018) emphasize that vertical bridging social capital, encompassing connections such as social workers, volunteers, co-workers, supervisors, and social system contacts, is a crucial resource for Syrian refugees in Germany seeking meaningful employment. These findings offer fresh insights into how various forms of social capital can support refugees in integrating into the labor market at different phases of their journey.

The fundamental background of three key obstacles that refugees often encounter is an uncertain future. According to Brell et al. (2020), refugees have uncertain status as asylum seekers, subject to assessment and probably even the rescission of this status periodically. Far-reaching consequences follow. Analysis within the literature suggests that such uncertainty can work negatively upon mental health concerns and motivation to learn the local language, as well as impede attempts to expand one's social networks. These mutually relate to the previously described challenges, highlighting the pervasive impact of an uncertain legal status on refugee integration.

A comparative study of the above previous studies indicates that refugees face obstacles in entering the labor market in host countries. This shows their experience from that of other immigrants. Such challenges include mental health issues, language barriers, and a lack of social networks. Such obstacles contribute hugely to the slow integration of refugees into host societies and hence affect their livelihood.

The challenges refugees face is multifaceted, and it is just as important to understand how the conditions in the labor market of host countries shape their experience of integration. Becker and Ferrara (2019) examine the dual impact of forced migration on refugees and the host communities, particularly regarding employment and economic outcomes. They note that refugee arrivals often have minimal adverse effects on local jobs and, in many cases, can even strengthen economies. Refugees usually supplement the local labor force, especially in the informal sector, increasing productivity.

However, the employment of refugees may inadvertently contribute to social tensions or divisions within host communities. To address these challenges, studies have highlighted alternative pathways to overcome barriers to employment opportunities, with refugee entrepreneurship emerging as a viable solution.

Refugee entrepreneurship is defined in this thesis as the operation through which refugees create and manage their businesses, utilizing all the available skills, experiences, and innovative ideas to

overcome the hindrances of traditional employment markets (UNHCRb, 2022; OECDb, 2019). This is an avenue to a vital pathway for economic integration and social inclusion of refugees that allows them to gain self-reliance while contributing to their host communities (Skran & Easton-Calabria, 2020). This thesis examines the dual potential of refugee entrepreneurship as a means of individual empowerment and a driver of broader economic and social cohesion.

The following sections further the practical implications and theoretical underpinnings of refugee entrepreneurship. It identifies and analyzes options to see it as an alternative pathway for refugees and perspectives exploring benefits and challenges. To achieve this, SLA will be adapted as the primary analytical approach to identify and analyze the critical assets and support mechanisms, such as ICT-based communication, that enable refugee entrepreneurship.

1.2 Fostering livelihoods and economic inclusion

Integration is critical to holistic migration management, promoting social inclusion and harmonious relations across diverse groups, thereby fostering cohesive societies (IOM, 2024). According to Ager and Strang (2008), it involves achieving and accessing various sectors such as employment, housing, education, and health, as well as understanding and practicing citizenship and rights and building social connections within and between community groups (Ager & Strang, 2008, pp. 184-185). These descriptions highlight the importance of social integration for newcomers, particularly refugees.

Besides social integration, economic integration greatly influences their self-reliance. One of this paper's main aims is to enhance the livelihoods of refugees and socioeconomic inclusion via ICT-based communication. They will ensure all members of their society, including vulnerable and underserved populations, primarily refugees, have fair access to key resources such as labor markets, financial services, land, and entrepreneurship opportunities. Refugees face self-reliance, resilience,

and the possibility of sustainably and with dignity fulfilling their needs. That promotes their independence from aid, wards off harmful coping mechanisms, and empowers them to contribute positively to the host country's economies, preparing them for future resettlement, reintegration, or return to their home countries (UNHCR, 2019b; WFP, 2021).

Drawing on the economic impacts of forced displacement on host communities, Verme and Schuettler (2019) discuss how economic inclusion can help mitigate the adverse effects of displacement. Although challenges initially arise, such as pressure on labor markets and increased competition, the literature states that providing refugees with access to labor markets and opportunities for enterprise creation can lead to long-term positive outcomes for refugees and host communities. These effects include enhanced productivity, structural economic changes, and the creation of new enterprises, which ultimately support local economic growth (Verme & Schuettler, 2019). However, achieving economic inclusion requires considering political, social, and cultural factors influencing refugees' integration in host countries.

Political Factor

According to The Global Compact on Refugees, the UN General Assembly (2018) emphasizes that refugee inclusion shows the importance of international cooperation and responsibility-sharing, which can significantly enhance a nation-state's global standing. Promoting the acceptance of refugees and enabling their economic integration can strengthen governance and create a more significant political image of the nation in the international arena.

Furthermore, legal frameworks and policies that follow the Geneva Convention and EU standards—such as residency, family reunification, and access to citizenship—significantly enhance a country's global reputation (Wolffhardt, Conte, & Huddleston, 2019). In this regard, refugee integration shall serve a dual purpose of being beneficial and meaningful in the context of fortifying the governance for an improved standing of these nations within the political arena.

Social Factor

Previous studies reveal that social inclusion influences social cohesion in host communities. Jayakody et al. (2022) assert that combining various approaches can strengthen social cohesion between refugees and host communities: equitable access to resources, economic integration, targeted support services, and language training programs. These are, generally, contributions addressing the challenges caused by displacement while promoting mutual trust and harmonized existence (Sustainability 14(6):3413). This research also mentions the economic competition for employment and the role of international aid in fairness, creating social tension between the refugees and the host community. Therefore, it is crucial to work on economic inclusion with a win-win situation for both locals and refugees in the context of social factors.

Cultural Factor

Cultural factors are also crucial in mitigating social tension and promoting economic inclusion, as locals and refugees have faced cultural differences. Schukking, A. F., & Kircher, R. (2022). Professional intercultural communicative competence (PICC) is essential to help educated refugees integrate into the Dutch labor market. This research demonstrates that developing PICC would help refugees overcome challenges, thereby facilitating their labor market integration. Thus, cultural adaptability and learning different cultures significantly impact the success of economic inclusion from the perspective of social factors.

Economic inclusion refers to three major components: creating better employment opportunities, valuing economic contributions in the host countries, and strengthening political, social, and cultural ties. Moreover, decent work leads to resilience, secures broader social and economic rights, and contributes to durable solutions and social justice (ILO, 2021). Refugees should be empowered to rebuild their lives and take an active role in their new communities by combining information from

academic literature and the frameworks developed by international organizations on livelihood and economic inclusion. This paper will reveal the role of ICT-based communication for refugee entrepreneurship to promote economic inclusion while emphasizing the critical meanings of decent work in achieving long-term sustainability.

1.3 Refugee Entrepreneurship: Definitions and immense potential

Given the employment barriers face, entrepreneurship provides an alternative pathway for economic inclusion and self-reliance. This section explores the definition of entrepreneurship. Herron and Robinson define entrepreneurship as "the set of behaviors that initiate and control the reallocation of economic resources to create value using those same resources" (Herron, L., & Robinson, R. B. 1993, p. 282). Stam offers a more specific definition: "Entrepreneurship is the introduction into the marketplace of new economic activity by an individual. The enabling condition of entrepreneurship is innovation, just like the entrepreneurial opportunities themselves and heterogeneous individuals willing to exploit them." (Stam, 2012, p. 161).

This description highlights important facets of entrepreneurship: value creation, new economic activities, innovation, and the exploitation of opportunities. Noticeably clear in this definition of entrepreneurship is its achievement by creating ventures, which include the creative forces that provide dynamic shifts in the market context.

1.4 The Importance of Refugee Entrepreneurship as an Alternative Pathway

Refugee entrepreneurship is an answer to economic and social problems encountered by refugees. It goes on to refuse to accept traditional barriers to guaranteed employment. A few job openings can help build independence, integration, and internal cohesion within both communities. They can greatly benefit both the communities themselves and the refugees. Several studies have examined refugee entrepreneurship, broadening the application of entrepreneurship concepts across diverse social and economic contexts. Karen Jacobson was one of the first researchers to connect refugee entrepreneurship with a positive economic impact on refugees in host countries, applying the analysis of opportunities for African states to develop. Her research shows that refugees bring their human capital and skills, with some starting small businesses to meet the needs of local communities and refugees in Africa (Jacobson, 2003, P. 578, 583).

Similarly, Skran, C., & Easton-Calabria, E. (2020) argue that entrepreneurship serves as a viable alternative for refugees to achieve secure livelihoods, particularly in the face of significant obstacles to accessing traditional employment opportunities in host countries. Their research demonstrates that entrepreneurship enables economic self-reliance and fosters cross-community connections, even within challenging settings such as refugee camps. As discussed in this research, the employment constraints faced by refugees align with those identified by Fasani, Frattini, and Minale (2021) and Brell, Dustmann, and Preston (2020), stressing the challenges refugees encounter when accessing the labor market.

In addition to the scholarly exposition, UNHCR (2022c) highlights refugee entrepreneurship as a practical solution. It can contribute to increased economic inclusion, reduced aid dependency, and stronger social cohesion of forcibly displaced persons throughout their displacement cycle. Also, OECD (2019c) suggests the two positive impacts of promoting start-up businesses for refugees.

Firstly, it provides them with another pathway to work for them, such as generating income and improving their quality of life. Secondly, this approach can offer many non-financial outcomes for individuals, including self-empowerment, improved self-confidence, more robust and extensive social and professional networks, and more significant social capital. (OECD, 2019, p14)

Both scholarly and official reports have suggested the potential benefits of entrepreneurship for economic integration into host states. However, refugees encounter significant obstacles when starting their businesses.

1.5 The practical challenge for refugee entrepreneurs

Alrawadieh, Z., Karayilan, E., & Cetin, G. (2018) explore the practical difficulties of refugee entrepreneurs in tourism and hospitality in Istanbul, Turkey, drawing on qualitative data collected through 20 semi-structured interviews. The study identifies the four main critical issues in the following datagram.

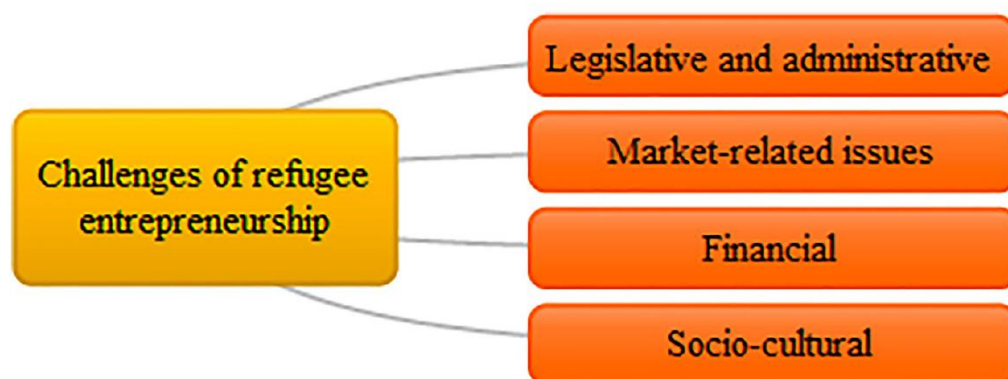


Figure 1. Typology of challenges of refugee entrepreneurship.

Source: Typology of challenges of refugee entrepreneurship. (Alrawadieh et al., 2018, p728)

Firstly, Alrawadieh et al. (2018) reveal legislative and administrative challenges. These can be categorized into bureaucracy, complex procedures, limited mobility freedom, ambiguous regulations, no tailored legislation and benefits, unjust tourism, and insufficient governmental support concerning the existing legislative and administrative procedures. A practical example is Lithuania's restricted access to the labor market, with only limited rights granted to refugees compared to nationals, and asylum seekers face even more restrictions on employment (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, 2004).

Secondly, Alrawadieh et al. (2018) identify several market-related challenges for refugee entrepreneurs. These include:

1. Human resource shortages: Difficulty in finding qualified staff
2. Black market impacts: Competition from informal economic activities
3. Stakeholder discrimination: Bias from suppliers, customers, or partners
4. Market instability: Unpredictable business environment
5. Unfair competition and harassment: Challenges from established businesses
6. High employee turnover: Difficulty in retaining staff
7. Limited sales: Struggles to achieve sustainable revenue
8. Unfamiliarity with the local market: Lack of knowledge about local business practices (pp. 728-729)

OECD (2019c) also argues a similar perspective that refugee entrepreneurs face market-related issues, including low levels of human capital, entrepreneurship skills, insufficient networks, and harmful cultural bias and discrimination (OECD, 2019c, p15-19).

Third, Alrawadieh et al. (2018) demonstrate that refugee entrepreneurs face various financial challenges, including limited access to economic resources such as credit, rigid bank procedures, high tax rates, limitations on capital mobility, and limited payment facilities. IOM Lithuania (2024)

reports that financial stability is the top priority challenge for those displaced from Ukraine in Lithuania.

Fourthly, as Alrawadieh et al. (2018) state, refugees face Socio-cultural challenges in their relationship with local culture and social structure. These challenges include the language barrier, racism and discrimination, harassment from locals, alienation, and social insecurity, which were the most frequently mentioned issues. Notably, the study finds that the language barrier seemed to be the most severe challenge within this perspective (Alrawadieh et al., 2018). Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008) also stated similar arguments are related to the fourth obstacle: barriers to such connection, mainly stemming from a lack of linguistic and cultural competencies due to fear and instability for the successful integration of refugees (Ager, A., & Strang, A., 2008, p185). This study concludes the above four critical challenges based on semi-structured interviews with 20 refugees in Turkey.

Embiricos.A (2020) also suggests similar views on the challenges faced by refugee entrepreneurs. His research used a qualitative approach with two main methods: (i) conducting semi-structured interviews and participant observation in spaces frequented by social entrepreneurs, refugee entrepreneurs, and social initiatives, and (ii) conducting desk-based research in Berlin. This study suggests three critical challenges for refugee entrepreneurs: (1) access to financing and start-up capital, (2) lack of skills and knowledge, and (3) lack of social networks (Embiricos.A, 2020. p253)

These results are similar to those shown by Alrawadieh, Z., Karayilan, E., & Cetin, G.(2018). On the other hand, The suggestions of Embiricos. A (2020) emphasizes the lack of social networks in contrast to Alrawadieh, Z., Karayilan, E., & Cetin, G.(2018), which investigates the practical problem of entrepreneurship. The insufficient lack of social networks is categorized into practical issues and includes the overall challenge of refugees joining the labor market for refugee integration in host states.

Compared to the previous section on general challenges refugees face when entering the workforce, this section focuses on specific issues for refugee entrepreneurs. The general challenges

include fundamental obstacles such as mental health issues, language barriers, and limited social networks. In contrast, refugee entrepreneurs encounter additional challenges, including legislative and administrative restrictions, market-related hurdles, and financial difficulties. This literature review highlights the significance of mental health, language proficiency, and social connections as general barriers while also emphasizing the unique challenges that refugee entrepreneurs face in navigating the labor market.

1.6. Applying the Sustainable Livelihood Approach to Refugee Entrepreneurship

This paper uses the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) to analyze the role of ICT-based communication in fostering refugee entrepreneurship. The SLA framework was selected for its ability to holistically evaluate the conditions of refugee livelihoods and economic inclusion, focusing on the interplay between capital assets, vulnerability contexts, and institutional structures. Through an analysis of refugees' economic and social inclusion within the SLA framework, this study shall identify significant challenges and opportunities in ICT-based communication. In this way, this strategy provides a holistic way of seeing how refugee entrepreneurs navigate systemic barriers and harness digital tools to build sustainable businesses, which is this thesis's key guiding research question.

As defined by Serrat O. (2017), SLA is a framework that provides a comprehensive method for understanding and improving the lives of vulnerable populations, Serrat O. (2017)states:

"The sustainable livelihoods approach is a way of thinking about development activities' objectives, scope, and priorities. It is based on evolving thinking about how the poor and vulnerable live and the importance of policies and institutions. It helps formulate development

activities that are”. (p21)

A livelihood is a resilience to withstand and recover from stresses and shocks. Strengthening resilience against these challenges is crucial to effectively adapting to livelihoods and managing difficulties (Davies, 1996). Scoones (1998) emphasizes that enhancing general resilience within the concept could lessen the intensity of the harmful effects of stress and shocks.

This approach examines the broader context of how vulnerable people live, considering their immediate needs and the systems and resources that affect their ability to thrive. The approach consists of three key factors: (1)Capital assets, (2)Vulnerability context, and (3) Policies, institutions, and processes as in the diagram(Serrat O.,2017.p22)

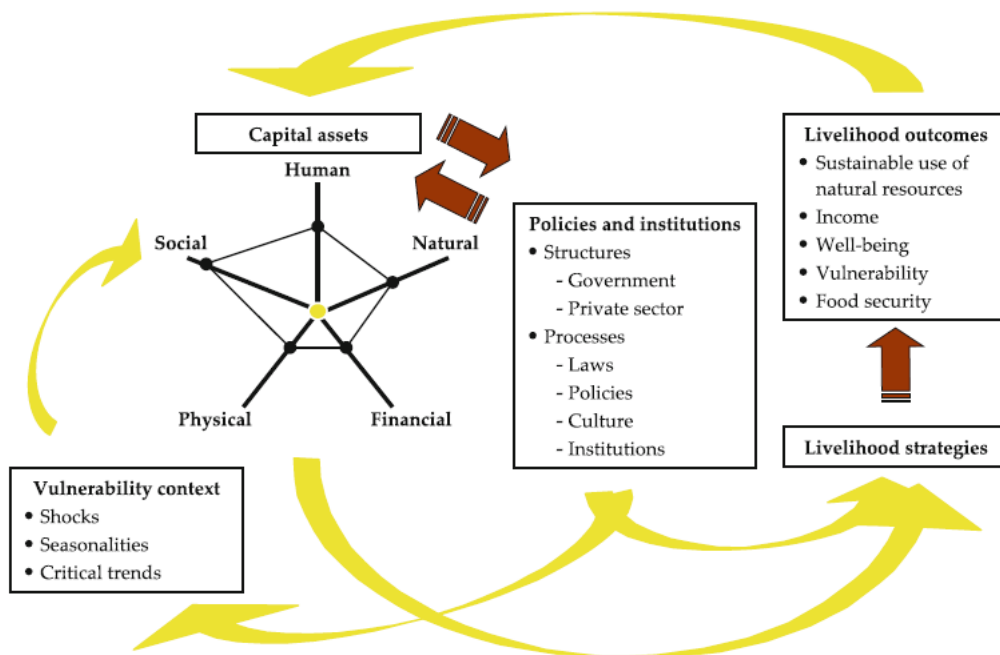


Fig. The sustainable livelihoods framework. *Source* Author

Source: Adapted from Serrat, O. (2017).

The approach possesses particular relevance to refugee entrepreneurship as it offers a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by refugee entrepreneurs. It is expected that, in examining the

project that fosters refugee entrepreneurs in Lithuania, this study will consider first, the relatively fluid conditions under which refugee entrepreneurs run their businesses; second, the various forms of capital available to refugees; and last, environmental factors.

This framework provides a valuable avenue for inquiries into the role of ICT-enabled communication by refugee entrepreneurs in Lithuania. It allows us to consider how these entrepreneurs apply various factors to identify the challenges and rules of ICT-based communication.

1.7 ICT-based communication tools for Refugee Enterprise start-up

1.7.1 The definition of ICT and its correlation with AI

This section defines ICT and analyzes the relevant literature on correlation with AI. According to UNESCO (2024), ICT encompasses diverse technological tools and resources that facilitate information transmission, storage, creation, sharing, or exchange. This incorporates a wide range of technologies, including computers, the Internet, broadcasting technologies (like radio and television), and telephony systems (UNESCO,2024)

It is crucial to mention the correlation between ICT and AI. Cisco (2024) suggests that Artificial Intelligence could allow robots to perform tasks that otherwise demand human intellect, such as learning and problem-solving. This article aims to elaborate further on the incessant demands for AI's integration into an ICT framework, particularly explaining how it will imply an enormous impact on job roles, processes, and productivity within ICT(Cisco,2024). This sentiment was also conveyed in the report on AI in the Digital Age by the European Parliament (2024), which cited the potential of AI in developing communication technologies and information management systems in ICT. Based on these current trends and correlations, ICT-based communication services for refugee entrepreneurs should involve AI to expand opportunities while addressing specific challenges.

Given these trends, ICT-based communication systems for refugee entrepreneurs should focus on overcoming social and cultural challenges by utilizing AI-driven solutions. AI-powered translation software can, for the first time, give the power to eliminate language barriers among people. Virtual platforms create environments through which ideas and messages can be perceived in one way or another by creating culturally oriented content. Additionally, ICT enables access to global markets, helps refugee entrepreneurs overcome geographical barriers, and facilitates the exchange of ideas, mentorship, and support networks. This paper represents ICT as a road communication to build up ICT communication as a suitable method at the hands of refugee entrepreneurs to help them traverse social and cultural barriers, promote inclusion, and increase successful innovation opportunities.

1.7.2 The Role of ICT in Overcoming Barriers to Refugee Entrepreneurship

This section will analyze previous studies on ICT's role in refugee entrepreneurship. The research of Díaz Andrade, A., & Doolin, B.(2016) presents novel insights into the role of ICT in promoting social inclusion for refugees. This study conducted 39 semi-structured interviews with 53 resettled refugees in New Zealand, helping them gather qualitative data on how refugees engage with ICT to meet their social, cultural, and economic needs. Díaz Andrade and Doolin (2016) explore how ICT assists refugees in five key areas: 1) connecting to services, 2) improving communication, 3) understanding their host society, 4) building social connections, and 5) keeping cultural ties alive. These areas also play a critical role in helping refugee entrepreneurs adapt to and succeed in a new business environment.

1. Accessing Essential Services and Information

Díaz Andrade and Doolin (2016) find that ICT enables refugees to connect with online resources that can be vital for daily life, such as job listings, banking, and educational tools. This perspective

shows that having access to these resources can open doors to market information, financial services, and customer bases for refugee entrepreneurship. Studies also indicate that connecting with these online services helps refugees integrate and empowers them to make informed business decisions in their host countries (Mansell, 2002; Wilding, 2009).

2. Enhanced Communication

ICT assists refugees in overcoming language and cultural barriers by providing alternative communication channels, such as email and translation tools, which facilitate interaction with employers and service providers. According to Díaz Andrade and Doolin (2016), these tools reduce feelings of isolation and help refugees integrate socially. Building practical communication skills also contributes to business success, fostering trust and enabling smoother transactions (Caidi et al., 2010; Benítez, 2012).

3. Learning About Host Society

Understanding the social, cultural, and political context of a host society is another capability facilitated by ICT, as noted by Díaz Andrade and Doolin (2016). They observed that having this information makes it easier for refugees to adapt and thrive as business owners. This element enables entrepreneurs to understand new market values and position themselves effectively to showcase relevant products or services. (Lloyd et al., 2013; Selwyn, 2002).

4. Building Social networks

ICT enables refugees to stay connected with family and friends across borders while also assisting them in forming new relationships in their host countries. Díaz Andrade and Doolin (2016) pointed out that these social connections offer much-needed stability and even potential business contacts. Social networks can introduce entrepreneurs to mentors, collaborators, or investors, creating

otherwise unavailable opportunities (Benítez, 2012; Caidi et al., 2010).

5. Preserving Cultural Identity

Maintaining cultural identity is crucial for many refugees, providing a sense of continuity and self-assurance. Díaz Andrade and Doolin (2016) show that this cultural connection is an important part of well-being, and it can help entrepreneurs attract customers interested in authentic cultural experiences (Panagakos & Horst, 2006; Wilding, 2013).

Díaz Andrade and Doolin (2016) argue that ICT empowers refugees to achieve agency, thus improving their well-being while supporting them to adapt to new societies and re-establish stability within their disrupted lives. This research highlights new insights about how ICT endorses the integration of refugees whilst elucidating the flavor of entrepreneurship amongst the refugees. Their analysis gives an original understanding of how services in the context of information and communications technologies, or ICTs, facilitate the integration of refugees while providing an opportunity to foster refugee entrepreneurship. Five capabilities have been pointed out: gaining access to essential services, enlargement of cultural identity, and empowerment in communication, which are vital in enabling refugees to start and develop their businesses in their host countries.

These identifications, accessing essential services, maintaining cultural identity, and significantly enhancing communication—can be vital in helping refugees start and sustain businesses in host countries. Notably, the second finding on advanced communication in this section can play a crucial element in this paper in that it emphasizes how ICT-based communication can be put into contact with vital clients, suppliers, and support networks critical to business success.

2. ICT-based communication tools for refugee entrepreneurs

2.1 The Role of ICT in Refugee Entrepreneurship

2.1.1 Previous research/introduction to research

This chapter focuses on the previous research on ICT-based communication for refugee entrepreneurs. This area has limited literature but several helpful resources about digital entrepreneurship. According to Soltanifar, Hughes, and Göcke (2021), digital technologies profoundly reshape contemporary entrepreneurship, driving innovation and societal engagement. This identified the four key ICT-based communication tools: 1) social media platforms, 2) AI and big data, 3) cloud computing, and 4) e-signature and digital payment.

First, Social media platforms are crucial for marketing and customer engagement, as they allow entrepreneurs to interact directly with consumers, broadening their reach and developing their brand presence (Soltanifar & Smailhodžić, 2021).

Second, AI and big data enhance personalized communication because they help organizations predict better and serve customer needs, improving customer experience (Pfau & Rimpp, 2021).

Third, cloud computing fosters digital business communication by enabling effective information sharing and collaboration, which is particularly needed with remote teams and scattered business operations. The core infrastructure provides a seamless communication experience throughout an organization (Göcke & Weninger, 2021). This is important in business, particularly in connection with remote teams and dispersed business operations. It serves as a key component of the cloud's infrastructure, allowing communications throughout the organization (Göcke & Weninger, 2021).

Fourthly, e-signatures and digital payment systems guarantee that all transactions are completed safely, promoting trust and efficiency. These tools have simplified everything and helped lend legitimacy to digital transactions, and hence, they are crucial for modern entrepreneurship (Gerth & Heim, 2021). The fourth tool, digital financial inclusion through e-signature and payment systems,

promotes secure transactions and strengthens trust.

Four digital communication tools can help entrepreneurs promote their businesses. As reported by Paul, J., Alhassan, I., Binsaif, N., & Singh, P. (2023), digital entrepreneurship can assist companies in creating new business opportunities and achieving sustainable growth by leveraging ICT and digital platforms. It also emphasizes the importance of digital technologies and ecosystems in transforming traditional companies into digital enterprises.

2.1.2 The Role of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in ICT-Based Entrepreneurship

In addition to ICT-based tools, the concept of an entrepreneurial ecosystem is essential for understanding how digital platforms and resources support refugee entrepreneurs. Tansley (1935) originally introduced the term ecosystem as an interdependent system encompassing living organisms and their physical environment, characterized by dynamic exchanges between organic and inorganic elements across various scales. Expanding on this concept, Spiegel and Harrison (2018) describe an entrepreneurial ecosystem as a community where interdependent actors and their surroundings collaborate to foster innovation and business growth. Members of this ecosystem leverage shared technologies, skills, and knowledge to sustain competitive advantages and drive entrepreneurial activities (Zahra et al., 2022).

ICT-based communication tools foster relationships within entrepreneurial ecosystems by connecting entrepreneurs with clients, stakeholders, and broader societal networks. For example, digital platforms such as Apple's iOS, Google's Android, and Facebook develop not only because of their infrastructure but also due to the digital entrepreneurs who use ICT tools to align their offerings with platform needs (Spiegel & Harrison, 2018). These tools facilitate real-time client communication, gather feedback for entrepreneurs, build trust, and customize their services. ICT also connects entrepreneurs with wider stakeholders such as investors, mentors, and partners, enhancing their

collaboration and knowledge sharing beyond local and international.

Moreover, ICT-based communication enhances visibility in global markets, which allows refugee entrepreneurs to extend their reach beyond local constraints. Platforms like LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Slack are instrumental in creating professional networks. At the same time, customer relationship management (CRM) systems and social media channels allow entrepreneurs to interact directly with clients and communities. Zahra, Liu, and Si (2022) emphasize that competing in entrepreneurial ecosystems requires ventures to adapt to emerging digital technologies and use ICT communication strategically to stay competitive.

Overall, ICT-based communication promotes the efficiency of entrepreneurial ecosystems and empowers entrepreneurs to build meaningful communications. It also collaborates effectively and boosts sustainable growth. These tools are significant for connected ecosystems that enable refugee entrepreneurs to thrive.

2.1.3 ICT and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems to Refugee Entrepreneurship in Lithuania

Drawing on the general ecosystem for start-ups in Lithuania, the combined enterprise value of startups surged from €1.9 billion in 2018 to €13.7 billion in 2023, marking a seven-fold increase and significantly outpacing growth in both the Baltic and CEE regions (Dealroom.co, 2023). However, previous studies identify that Refugee entrepreneurs face challenges in navigating legal and administrative requirements, accessing markets and understanding consumer demands, securing financial resources due to limited credit options, and overcoming sociocultural barriers such as language and integration difficulties (Alrawadie et al., 2018). Also, there is a lack of prior research on refugee entrepreneurship in Lithuania. Therefore, investigating the role of ICT-based communication in supporting refugee entrepreneurship in Lithuania presents a novel contribution to the existing body of research.

2.2 Research methodology

2.2.1 Research aim

This paper examines the role of ICT-based communication in addressing specific challenges refugee entrepreneurs encounter during the business start-up phase. It focuses on enabling livelihoods and economic inclusion within Lithuania's business ecosystem.

2.2.2 The aim and objectives of this research

The paper includes the aim and three objectives of this research:

The aim of this research

This research explores the role of ICT-based communication in addressing barriers faced by refugee entrepreneurs in Lithuania, focusing on its potential to foster livelihoods and economic inclusion.

The objectives

1. To identify the primary barriers refugee entrepreneurs face in fostering livelihoods and achieving economic inclusion in Lithuania.
2. To analyze the role of ICT-based communication in overcoming these barriers.
3. To indicate actionable recommendations for leveraging ICT-based communication to support refugee entrepreneurship.

This objective explores the benefits of using ICT for livelihood and economic inclusion—a perspective beyond immediate invocation.

2.2.3 Research methods

This study uses a mixed methodology, using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. According to Leavy (2014), "qualitative research strives to understand social phenomena from the vantage point of the individuals involved, emphasizing their meanings, experiences, and views." It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding and profound insights into complex, practical issues. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative methods avoid introducing treatments, manipulating variables, or quantifying predefined elements (Moser & Korstjens, 2018, p. 9).

Quantitative research is defined as a formal, objective, rigorous, deductive, and systematic approach to generating knowledge to solve problems. It involves systematic observation, measurement, and analysis of variables to establish relationships and test hypotheses. Data collected are numerical and analyzed using statistical methods to produce precise and reliable results (Mohajan, 2020).

This study uses qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the role of ICT tools in facilitating communication and entrepreneurship among refugees in Lithuania. Given their flexibility and ability to elicit detailed accounts of participants' experiences, this paper used the primary data collection method to conduct semi-structured interviews. This methodology reveals a comprehensive understanding of what refugee entrepreneurs encounter in their entrepreneurial experiences and how they leverage ICT to overcome communication barriers.

The selection of participants guides purposeful sampling. The interviewees include two groups: 1) refugees running some enterprise or planning to start their entrepreneurial endeavors, and 2) Exearts engaged in refugee support in Lithuania. This way of selecting sampling guaranteed that the participants have relevant experience and insights that contribute to the research objectives. This sampling approach ensured that participants had relevant expertise and insights to inform them of the research objectives.

The Presentation of Informants consisted of three distinct stages of data collection:

1. Individual interviews with refugees

13 refugee entrepreneurs were interviewed individually. The interviews revealed in-depth narratives about their challenges, strategies, and interactions with ICT tools. The results of the 1st step interview put the key points as follows. Table 1 puts general profiles and ICT usages, and Table 2 shows digital skills, challenges, and support needs.

Table 1 : General Profile and ICT Usage

Category	Subcategory	Count
Gender	Male	3
	Female	10
Age	Under 30	1
	31–39	8
	40–50	4
Nationality	Ukraine	8
	Belarus	3
	Truly	2
Time in Lithuania	3 years (since 2021)	11
	6 years (since 2018)	1
	17 years (since 2007)	1
Language skills not mother language	Russian	10
	English	1
	Russian + English	2
Multiple choices allowed		
ICT Usage Multiple choices allowed	Social Media	10
	Canva	2
	AI (ChatGPT)	7
	E-commerce platforms	3
	Website	2

Table 2: Digital Skills, Challenges, and Support Needs

Category	Subcategory	Count
Digital Skills	Basic to Intermediate	9
	Advanced	1
	Desire to Improve ICT	9 (Yes) 1 (No)
Type of Business	Small businesses (e.g., translation, cosmetics, Amber, clothing, flower business, food, children's literature)	6
	Professional work (e.g., legal, finance, marketing, real estate)	6
	Planning to open a small business (selling local products)	1
Obstacles & Support Needs	Financial Support	13
Multiple choices allowed	Language and Accessibility	12
	Training and Education	11
	Mentorship and Networking	10
	Policy and Administrative Challenges	11
	Technological and Digital Challenges	9
	Community and Integration Support	8

2. Individual interviews with two professionals

This study has been based on interviews with critical informants-a diverse group of those engaged in refugee integration and entrepreneurship in Lithuania-saying that they can give insight into the systemic challenges and opportunities faced by refugee entrepreneurs. These informants were selected to provide diverse perspectives on the systemic challenges and opportunities refugee entrepreneurs face.

The first key informant, Expert A, is the director of a governmental organization in Lithuania. With extensive experience overseeing programs designed to support refugee entrepreneurs, her work focuses on financial subsidies, policy development, and addressing institutional barriers. The second key informant, Expert B, is a professor at a Lithuanian university specializing in digital entrepreneurship and refugee integration. These interviews explored the fundamental obstacles and

key factors for refugee entrepreneurs, such as language and the benefits of digital entrepreneurship in Lithuania. These informants represent institutional and academic perspectives, enriching the study's understanding of fostering economic inclusion and addressing barriers for refugee entrepreneurs.

3. The group interview with seven professionals

Finally, a focus group discussion was conducted with 7 participants from UNHCR, public institutions in Lithuania, and the private sector. This panel discussion examined collective approaches to tackling the financial and systemic barriers confronting refugee entrepreneurs, covering the benefits of digitalization and the role of AI in simplifying grant applications.

Three distinctive Interviews were conducted over two months, from the first days of October to December 2024, to give the respondents more privacy to reflect upon their recent experiences. Each online interview lasted an hour, with convenience and accessibility being the main priorities, while group interviews extended to an hour and a half. The structure of the interviews was directed towards three main areas:

- participants' demographic and professional backgrounds
- the practical obstacles they faced in entrepreneurship (only for refugees)
- their use of ICT tools in communication and business management

Existing literature informed the questions and tailored to address this study's focus on ICT-based communication. The study followed ethical protocol, reviewed the data collection process, and obtained consent from all interviewees before conducting the interviews. The data collected via interview was anonymized in transcriptions and analyzed to ensure no identifying information or sensitive material was shared in anything reported. The confidentiality of the participants was upheld throughout the research process.

The analysis incorporates coding with numbering and assigning figures to specific characteristics as part of the quantitative data analysis while drawing on thematic analysis to explore participants' experiences and identify recurring patterns and themes. This approach provided a holistic view of how ICT tools reshape how refugees overcome communication challenges, build businesses, and find their place in local economies.

This methodology reveals refugees' and experts' perspectives by grounding the study in participants' real stories and insights. It highlights how ICT-based communication can become powerful enablers of economic inclusion and create pathways to dignity and entrepreneurial success for refugees. This paper uses SLA to examine ICT-based communication that supports refugee entrepreneurship. Semi-structured interviews gather insights into the experiences of refugee entrepreneurs with ICT tools, particularly regarding their role as communicative and strategic assets.

2.2.4 Research Design

This study utilized semi-structured interviews with refugees who are either planning to start a business or are in the early stages of establishing one, aiming to explore the principles of ICT-based communication. A translator fluent in Ukrainian and Russian facilitated the interviews to ensure effective communication. The interviews were meticulously recorded and transcribed, followed by an in-depth analysis using qualitative content analysis methods outlined by Krippendorff (2013) and Mayring (2015). The primary data derived from these interviews was analyzed through the lenses of the sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) to address the research questions comprehensively.

2.2.5 Research ethics

The research adheres to ethical guidelines emphasizing respect for the rights and welfare of research subjects, ensuring the integrity and credibility of the research process. Data collection took place during the internship at the Refugee Council of Lithuania. Contact was established with individuals relevant to the research, and semi-structured interviews were carried out with refugee entrepreneurs who were either preparing to start a business or had recently embarked on entrepreneurial ventures.

Privacy and confidentiality were of the most significant importance. Participants were informed beforehand about the nature of the study and the data usage. All interviewees were told to consent and informed that their participation was voluntary. Anonymity was assured, and efforts were made to ensure that all identifiable information was anonymized before transcription or analysis to protect participant confidentiality. The interviews were friendly and informal to encourage candid and uninfluenced responses.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for the research. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies were integrated, applying the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA). These frameworks offered perceptive lenses to evaluate and interpret one of the two interviews. Considerable attention was given to ensure that participants' experiences and views were represented relatively, without bias or misinterpretation. Findings emerged through thematic analysis, whereby the researchers systematically identified visually recurring patterns and themes. The structured approach ensured transparency and accountability in the research process and provided credible insights into the role of ICT-based communication among refugee entrepreneurs.

3. Results and findings

3.1 Results

This section demonstrates the results of online interviews in the key figures in Tables 1 and 2, summarising the essential contents. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with a translator fluent in Russian and Ukrainian, involving 13 refugee entrepreneurs. Most informants were women, with ten females and only three male respondents. Most participants were aged between 31 and 39 (8 people); only four were 40–50, and one was below 30. Most people were Ukrainians (8); smaller groups included Belarusians (3) and Truly (2). The time of their residing in Lithuania varied from person to person: 11 of them came not earlier than three years ago (since 2021), one of the persons had already been resident in Lithuania for six years (since 2018), and one had lived in Lithuania for 17 years (since 2007).

Participants showed considerable diversity in ICT use, demonstrating different levels of dependence on varying digital tools. Social media appeared as the most used ICT tool (10 participants), and then AI tools, such as ChatGPT (7), Canva (2), all kinds of e-trading (internet-market) (3), and website tools (2). Respondents were allowed to provide several ICT nine tools. Thus, a broadened overview of all the tools utilized for entrepreneurial activities could be gained.

Drawing on digital skills, challenges, and support needs in Table 2, most respondents rated their digital skills as essential to the intermediate level. Nine respondents, nearly all participants (9 in 10), indicated they want to improve their ICT skills, highlighting the key area of importance for digital training and development. One participant, however, stated that there was no need to upgrade ICT skills, explaining that his or her business activities were mainly non-digital, such as production.

Participants operated in widely differing fields. Six operated small businesses: translation, cosmetics, amber jewelry, clothing, a flower business, food, and children's literature. The other six were engaged in professional services that included legal work, finance, marketing, and real estate.

One was in the process of planning to start a business selling local products.

The entrepreneurs experienced multiple challenges; financial support emerged as the most compelling need (as determined by 13 participants), closely followed by the language and accessibility barriers (identified by 12 participants). Other significant needs raised were training and education (11 participants), mentorship and networking (10 participants), policy and administrative challenges (11 participants), technological and digital challenges (9 participants), and lastly, community integration support (8 participants). The multiple category selections indicate these challenges' complexity and overlapping nature and provide insight into the enormity of support needed to empower entrepreneurship.

Data from Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of the value of the state of play experienced by refugee entrepreneurs in Lithuania. The implications for ICT must be more significant, hence the challenge of language barriers, financial constraints, and access to required resources. Out of these, it seems that more than half of them, including a good number of students with a fair background in ICT (9 out of 10), consider social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram as the best preferred options for keeping in touch with stakeholders, communicating, and marketing. In that context, alongside AI tools and e-commerce options, they act as a helping means for successful navigation along the entrepreneurial pathway to tackle barriers presented before them.

Nevertheless, the challenges are accurate. The most urgent issue is financial support, identified by 13 participants; the other challenges are language and accessibility, identified by 12 participants. Quite a number thought that training and education count (11 participants), after that mentorship and networking (10 participants), and facing policies initiated and administrative issues (11 participants). The majority still see the improvement of people's digital skills as the highest priority, remaining mindful of what systematic training should be for refugee entrepreneurs to respond to these needs.

One participant critically reminded us about the risks of dependence on ICT:

"They can suspend your Etsy account without question, so relying entirely on them is very risky."

(Refugee Entrepreneur from Truly, Interview #5; see Annex A, Quote 1)

This content conveys some risks of total reliance on online platforms: sudden account suspension or data loss could jeopardize any business.

This paper integrates an interview with experts as the second data collection stage. **Expert A**, the director of a governmental organization in Lithuania, provided insights into the present and future direction of impediments, namely the legal and other societal and financial hurdles. She points out common technical mistakes Ukrainian refugee entrepreneurs make when applying for subsidies. In this interview, she stressed the importance of subsidy, mentoring, and targeting policies for advancement opportunities for refugee entrepreneurs and bureaucratic challenges; the effectiveness of subsidy programs; the differences in laws applied in treating various refugee groups; and the need to have better strategies for sensitizing different stakeholders involved in refugee support.

In another individual interview, **Expert B**, a Lithuanian university professor, discussed the digital entrepreneurship program for Ukrainian refugees. She indicates the challenges facing refugee entrepreneurs in Lithuania. She points out that among the most prominent barriers are language barriers, an inability to understand the legal system and less access to funding. The interview also covered the importance of support networks, mentorship, and the potential of digital entrepreneurship to provide accessible pathways for refugees.

In the third stage, as a group interview with professionals engaged in refugee entrepreneurship, the staff member of UNHCR and the digital innovation department described enormous differences in digital literacy levels among refugees living in Lithuania. Younger urban refugees generally command digital skills. Different from the older refugees and those from rural settings who usually encounter some challenges with basic digital tools such as e-banking and online business registration. Language barriers further exacerbate these challenges, as most official resources and platforms are

available primarily in Lithuanian, with limited translations into English or Russian.

Another notable perspective from the group interview was that ICT plays a critical role in enabling refugee entrepreneurs to scale their businesses. Business e-guides, online workshops, and digital accelerators offer mentorship and financial resources to help entrepreneurs grow. However, structural inefficiencies and gaps in digital skills hinder the accessibility of these tools. Refugees needed tailored ICT solutions to support scaling activities, such as acquiring equipment or optimizing business processes.

Based on three different interviews with refugee entrepreneurs and professionals show the critical need for tailored support programs addressing all these challenges while maximizing the opportunities of ICT to empower refugee entrepreneurs for their success and integration into Lithuanian society. The next segment explores these findings and discussion, placing them into the sustainable livelihoods approach to refine the study research questions and provide a richer theoretical perspective.

3.2 Findings and Discussion

This paper analyzes interview results through the lens of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) and the capability approach. SLA helps categorize key capital assets—such as financial, social, and human resources—that refugees use to establish sustainable livelihoods and block Vulnerability. This can identify the tactical problem and the role of ICT-based communication for refugee entrepreneurs with the livelihood framework. The following section discusses key vulnerabilities refugee entrepreneurs face, followed by an analysis of the role of capital assets in mitigating these challenges.

Vulnerability contents

Individual capital assets influence vulnerabilities such as shocks, seasonalities, and critical trends. This paper identifies that they have faced external factors based on three distinctive interviews. Individual interviews from refugee entrepreneurs clearly showed difficulties with shocks caused by war (Ukrainian) or political asylum (Truly and Belarus). This interview did not focus on illness but highlighted the potential negative impacts on their health. Refugees have obstacles to employment opportunities as sensibilities. Two refugee entrepreneurs mentioned that the business was due to limited employment opportunities.

*“I work for a company and earn a salary. After receiving asylum, I had to adapt to life here, but it wasn't easy. My salary wasn't enough to support my family. My salary, around €800, was insufficient to support my family, so I decided to start my own business.
(Refugee Entrepreneur, Interview #1; see Annex A, Quote 2)”*

“I decided to start my business after encountering language barriers and issues finding

employment at agencies. (Refugee entrepreneur interview #9 see Annex A , Quote3)”

Their situation shows the critical obstacle of limited job opportunities for refugees, which makes them vulnerable to external factors as they confront language barriers, different business cultures, low wages, and financial situations. To put it differently, their comments show that the choice of refugee entrepreneurship would lead to an alternative path to addressing their typical employment problems in host countries.

Capital assets

The lens of the five capital assets identifies the necessary perspective while extracting the interview content. This section first mentions the physical and natural capital, followed by human, social, and financial capital.

Physical Capital and Natural Capital

Physical capital includes infrastructure, tools, production equipment, seeds, fertilizer, and pesticides. Natural capital comprises land, water, forests, wildlife, biodiversity, and ecosystem services essential for sustenance and livelihoods (Serrat, 2017). While these capital assets are critical for refugee entrepreneurs in developing countries, Lithuania provides adequate infrastructure and natural resources that address many of these needs. For example, Lithuania offers well-developed transportation systems, high-speed internet, and access to public utilities are key enablers for entrepreneurship.

In addition, interviews revealed that most refugee entrepreneurs actively use digital tools,

highlighting the accessibility of physical capital related to technology in Lithuania. However, human, social, and financial capital challenges remain more prominent for refugee entrepreneurs in this context. Thus, this paper concentrates on human, social, and financial capital to address research questions and provide targeted insights.

Human capital

Human capital includes Health, proper nutrition, education, skills, knowledge, and the ability to work and adapt, essential for sustaining livelihoods (Serrat, 2017). This asset examines 1) language proficiency, 2) digital literacy, and 3) business communication and skill development.

First, Language proficiency is one of the most critical aspects of human capital for refugee entrepreneurs. All interviewees reported difficulties mastering the Lithuanian language, which creates significant challenges in communicating with local people and understanding business regulations, making integration into Lithuanian society harder. Expert B mentioned the correlation between local language and successful entrepreneurship as follows.

Based on my experience and what I've seen in Germany, refugees must first complete language courses and business training before being allowed to start a business. In Lithuania and Germany, proficiency in the local language and understanding the legal framework are prerequisites for accessing support and starting businesses. (interview with ExpertB, see Annex, Quote4)"

This argument highlights that proficiency in the local language is a fundamental skill for successful refugee entrepreneurship. On the other hand, the question reminds us whether ICT mitigates obstacles to mastering the local language. Refugee entrepreneurs frequently mentioned using ICT

tools like multilingual chat applications and AI-based translation platforms to communicate effectively with customers and partners despite limited proficiency in the local language. Refugees need to learn their local language, but it can be assumed that ICT might mitigate their difficulties.

Second, Digital skills also play a critical role in human capital development. Most interviewees use tools like email, social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Telegram), and AI applications at a basic to intermediate level. Most of Their ICT level marks are basic to intermediate level, and some of the refugee entrepreneurs need help to acquire the usage of specific social media and advanced digital skills. Despite this, they recognize the immense potential of digital tools for expanding their businesses and managing operations. As one entrepreneur from Ukraine shared,

"Language barriers and cultural differences are challenges. ICT tools like AI and multilingual platforms help streamline communication." (refugee entrepreneur #6, see Annex A, Quote 5)

ICT tools, including multilingual chat applications, AI-based translation platforms, and social media platforms like Instagram and Telegram, enable refugee entrepreneurs to communicate effectively with customers and overcome language barriers. These tools enable efficient information exchange and stakeholder engagement, although they cannot fully replace the benefits of local language proficiency.

Third, this data collection also represents business communication and skill development as instrumental to human capital. Refugee entrepreneurs with a background as lawyers in Belarus and running an online shop in Lithuania actively use social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram for marketing and public relations, using AI-based tools like GPT and Canva for content creation. Paysera and Stripe are payment systems integrated with her business activities based on learning digital skills via YouTube and online resources. However, she rates her digital skills at an intermediate level and sees the need for further improvement, particularly in leveraging AI and

automation to boost efficiency in customer engagement. She emphasizes the potential of ICT tools in overcoming business challenges and building stakeholder relationships. (Refugee entrepreneur #3, 7th October 2024, see Annex A, Quote8, contexts 1)

Based on the findings from this and other interviews, this paper identifies three main elements:

1. Customer Engagement Through ICT Tools

Most refugee entrepreneurs use social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram to engage customers. These platforms allow them to share brand stories and showcase products while communicating directly with consumers. ICT tools can facilitate information flow and improve communication, but the language barrier and lack of ICT skills still need to be enhanced in seamless exchange.

2. Marketing and Storytelling

Refugee entrepreneurs expressed the importance of including engaging and culturally relevant content for market players. They frequently use Canva and AI-based application sites like ChatGPT, which have become credible tools for creating compelling stories that appeal to diverse audiences. Storytelling is thus key, especially in gaining consumers' trust and brand awareness.

3. Capacity building and skill enhancement

Developing communication capabilities, such as cultural adaptability, knowledge of local market trends, and awareness of customs, is essential for effective stakeholder engagement. initiatives like webinars, online courses, and mentoring programs have been able to successfully boost communication and marketing strategies with customers, which have, in return, led to business growth. Drawing on insights from digital skill training programs, interviews with refugee entrepreneurs from Ukraine (Interview #6, October) and a UNHCR staff member (group interview)

underscore the importance of tailoring capacity-building programs to account for disparities in digital skill levels. These disparities often correlate with age and urban or rural backgrounds. These variances should be recognized by the NGOs and UN agencies engaging in capacity building for refugees, which should consider the needs and competencies of the target audiences for designing training programs geared to their abilities.

Three arguments for business communication and skill development based on data collection can be presumed: ICT promotes communication and assists in entrepreneurship activities. Despite the potential benefit of ICT-based communication, many refugee entrepreneurs in Lithuania need more access to robust ecosystems via ICT. Addressing these gaps by developing targeted digital ecosystems can significantly strengthen their human capital, enhance stakeholder communication, and support their entrepreneurial success.

Social Capital

Social capital is a critical asset for refugee entrepreneurs, encompassing networks, trust, mutual understanding, shared values, group support, adherence to standard rules, collective representation, decision-making participation, and effective leadership (Serrat, 2017). According to the interviews, 10 out of 13 participants reported challenges such as needing knowledge about local business regulations and highlighted the importance of mentorship programs in promoting their entrepreneurial activities. Previous studies emphasize that mentorship programs, especially those featuring "entrepreneurial role models" with similar socio-cultural backgrounds, enable refugees to develop entrepreneurial intentions and confidence by addressing cultural differences and providing specific business expertise (Desiderio, 2014; Rath, 2011).

A qualitative study in the UK revealed that refugee women acting as mentors experienced

empowerment exceeding what they could achieve through individual engagement alone (Street, Ng, & Al-Dajani, 2022). These findings underscore the value of mentorship in fostering entrepreneurship among refugees. In addition to previous studies, one of the experts who joined the group interview noted the following insight.

"Ukrainian women entrepreneurs often engage in small-scale businesses like beauty services or sewing but lack familiarity with business ecosystems." (A group discussion with experts, see Annex A, Quote 6, contexts 1)

Her description highlights the lack of knowledge about specific entrepreneurial activities and underscores the importance of the business ecosystem. Most refugee entrepreneurs interviewed emphasized the need for social networks and business mentorship. However, Local networks of refugees are often small and need more access to potential investors, customers, and other partners. As a result, their skill sets still need to be discovered at the expense of entrepreneurship (Harima, 2022).

According to Hinz and Daub (2022), start-up incubator programs are essential platforms for promoting refugee entrepreneurial skills by providing a barrier against other influences like poor access to local networks, limited funding, and Immigrants' integration into the market. This research helps establish these programs as facilitators or mediators for skill deployment and sets the stage for future research regarding the entrepreneurial ecosystem and support for refugees.

Based on the interview results and prior studies, a robust business ecosystem for refugee entrepreneurs in Lithuania is urgently needed. ICT tools have the potential to establish virtual incubators, promote cooperation, and create mentorship access openings. However, digital tools

could also enhance communication among mentors, collaborators, and investors while helping the refugees overcome geographic and cultural barriers (Benítez, 2012; Caidi et al., 2010).

However, the success of these initiatives hugely depends on building a supportive ecosystem for refugee entrepreneurs within Lithuanian society. According to online communities run by refugee entrepreneurs, they still have limited networks associated with their business activities. A targeted ecosystem incorporating mentoring and ICT can encourage refugee entrepreneurs to communicate with their business-related stakeholders. This can strengthen social capital and support their entrepreneurial success.

Financial Capital

Financial capital includes savings, credit and debt (formal and informal), remittances, pensions, and wages (Serrat, 2017). The interviews indicated that most respondents had no problems opening their accounts but faced challenges securing loans and grants for new entrepreneurship activities due to insufficient business ideas, language barriers, and unsuitable legal status. Drawing on financial assets, this section mainly explores two key findings: 1) The fundamental obstacles to securing grants for entrepreneurship and 2) The potential benefit of software platforms designed to help organizations manage interactions with stakeholders. During the group discussion, the experts pointed out the fundamental and systematic problem of securing financial support.

"Refugees in Lithuania face excessive conditions for grant eligibility, such as permanent residency status. The duration of financial support is often limited by temporary protection, thus making long-term lending difficult. Most programs in Lithuania focus on green and digital entrepreneurship, making it more difficult for refugees to relate to their business ideas. (A group discussion with experts,

see Annex A, Quote 6 contexts 2)"

This perspective shows how much refugees encounter financial obstacles based on their legal status and systematic problems in Lithuanian society. Also, a refugee entrepreneur mentioned the inability to communicate effectively with local banks, which led to repeated loan application rejections.

Another shared frustration over legal restrictions that excluded them from accessing even basic credit facilities despite having a viable business plan. Their problems and requests for tailored financial support suggest the need for refugee-focused grant programs and financial training to apply for grants successfully applications. The challenges for refugee entrepreneurs in accessing subsidies were highlighted during an interview with a government official. The expert noted:

"Refugees can apply for subsidies to start businesses, with funding and supporting equipment, training, and rent. Technical errors include needing to be registered with Public Employment Services, applying for non-related expenses, or proposing existing businesses instead of new ones."
(Expert A; see Annex A, Quote 7, context 1)

The argument remained about how ICT-based communication prevents technical errors and assists in securing the grant application. Based on the data collection results, the fundamental problem needs more information and mentors, which prevents successful grant applications. Thus, a collaborative Ecosystem setting would help overcome this problem. Digital tools help refugees connect with mentors, financial advisors, and fellow entrepreneurs. These connections enable better financial planning and stronger collaborative networks.

Second, software platforms would assist their financial management. According to the interviewed refugee entrepreneurs, CRM (Customer Relationship Management) systems play a crucial role in managing their businesses by integrating offline and online store operations. These systems assist in tracking inventory, analyzing financial performance, and streamlining customer communication processes (Interview from Ukrainian entrepreneur #10, 14th October 2024). Such business software platforms would enhance customer communication to overcome the language barrier and assist their financial management, strengthening their capital assets.

Technologically convenient tools may help refugee businesses refine their business plans but should also be able to help refugees present their ideas to investors and stakeholders more confidently. Based on various proficiency levels in ICT among refugees, those will usually render simple to intermediate knowledge of such technology during targeted training programs. That would help empower refugees with expertise in navigating the financial processes and their ability to canvas business needs and engage effectively with stakeholders.

Policies and Capital Assets

Policies and Capital Assets significantly influence refugees' livelihoods by shaping their access to resources and opportunities. They often constrain their focus and hinder their ability to achieve stability. As defined in the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLA), policies and institutions determine how refugees acquire and use their capital assets, including financial, social, and human resources. A refugee entrepreneur from Belarus highlighted these challenges, stating:

"There is a significant gap in support for Belarusians in the most vulnerable situations, particularly those awaiting refugee status. These people cannot work or study for six months while their

application is processed, and there is no support for them." (Refugee Entrepreneur #3, see Annex A, Quote8 context2)

This comment underscores the systemic challenges faced by Belarusian refugees, such as the lack of accessible information and adequate support during the asylum process, which severely hampers their integration and economic opportunities. In contrast, Ukrainian refugees have benefited from swift action by the European Union, including a special directive that guarantees expedited access to healthcare, employment, and education (Kohlenberger et al., 2023). Refugees from other regions, such as Belarus, often face prolonged bureaucratic delays, restricted welfare access, and limited public support, further exacerbating their vulnerabilities.

These disparities highlight the critical role of policies and institutions in determining refugees' access to and utilization of capital assets. Addressing these inequities requires implementing streamlined procedures, reducing bureaucratic delays, and providing consistent support across all refugee populations.

In summary, the analysis highlights challenges, such as language barriers, mentoring factors, and financial hardships, faced by refugee entrepreneurs from the perspective of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach, in line with three forms of capital assets: human, social, and financial capital. The study identifies three significant findings:

First, ICT-based communication is a worthwhile transformative tool for retreating from the mentioned challenges. Multilingual applications and AI-driven platforms are among those ways used to bridge a language gap, allowing an efficient exchange of information and encouraging interactions with stakeholders. At the same time, digital tools enhance opportunities for mentorship and networking through online communities addressing the social capital gap. Financial tools help

simplify and mitigate complex financial processes through customer management systems and grant application portals, improving access to funding and financial literacy. Available capital assets further enhance refugees' powers to escape vulnerabilities, from unemployment to outside shocks.

Second, the example demonstrates interdependence among the three sets of capital assets. Improved language competency (human capital) fosters better connections among refugees, building social capital, while financial literacy training can promote sustainable entrepreneurship. ICT facilitates such linkages by showing how it integrates and amplifies these investments. Thus, a holistic approach is needed to implement assistance for refugee entrepreneurs based on capital assets and promote effective communication with stakeholders.

Third, the paper emphasizes that the business ecosystem is essential in sustaining ICT-based communication among refugee entrepreneurs. The business ecosystem supporting refugees in Lithuania is under immense resource constraints and promotes their communication. However, incorporating ICT tools to enhance their capital assets, connect mentors, and encourage cohesive communication with support organizations can fortify this ecosystem. Expert A, director of a public organization in Lithuania, stressed the importance of communication with stakeholders at the end of the interview.

"It is crucial to improve communications strategy together with improved migration policy. More involvement from the municipalities with decentralized budgets would have helped support entrepreneurship, together with the approach by all stakeholders in simplifying service provision."
(Expert A, see Quote7 context 2)

It can be assumed that such ICT-based communication assists in building a business ecosystem, encourages entrepreneurial prospects, and provides collaborative communication for enhancing

refugees' sustainable livelihoods and economic inclusion.

Given the established infrastructure and resources in Lithuania, physical and natural capital seem less of a concern; instead, the study emphasizes the importance of human, social, and financial capital. Additionally, policy and institutional environments are critical in determining the means of access to these capital assets, as shown in the unequal support extended to Ukrainian and Belarusian refugees.

The findings address the research questions by demonstrating the need for a holistic ICT-based communication approach to overcome key barriers refugee entrepreneurs face. Integrating explicit capital assets with well-customized policy interventions, ICT will promote building resilience, leading to sustainable livelihoods and, thus, the economic inclusion of refugee entrepreneurs into host communities in social and economic terms.

Conclusion

This paper focuses on the role of ICT-based communication in promoting refugee entrepreneurs to enhance their livelihoods and economic inclusion in Lithuania. It examines two research questions: 1) What are the barriers to refugee entrepreneurship? and 2) What role did ICT-based communication play in addressing these barriers in Lithuania? This thesis uses Empirical data collected through three distinct semi-structured interviews with refugee entrepreneurs and experts in Lithuania, applying to SLA.

Refugee entrepreneurship is one of the alternative pathways through which refugees can enhance livelihoods and economic integration within host countries. It leads to self-reliance, stimulation of the local economy, and social inclusion. However, this study identifies several barriers to refugee entrepreneurship in Lithuania, including problems arising from language, limited access to mentorship, and funding constraints. These limitations are analyzed using SLA that posits human, social, and financial categories of capital assets. The analysis gives three significant findings.

First, ICT-based communication creates a paradigm shift in overcoming language barriers, providing networking and mentorship opportunities, and easing financing procedures through multilingual applications, artificial intelligence platforms, and digital financial systems to close important gaps in human society. Financial capital to help refugee entrepreneurs overcome these practical barriers.

Second, multiple types of capital assets link up to provide interconnected benefits to promote ICT-based communication. For example, improving language competency (human capital) will also improve all other forms of capital, including social connections (social capital) and financial literacy (financial capital). This interdependence highlights the need for an integrated approach to fostering refugee entrepreneurship, whereby the co-dependence of these assets is considered and optimized.

Third, ICT can help create a stronger ecosystem for refugee entrepreneurship by fostering more

potent communication strategies and collaboration among stakeholders such as municipalities, NGOs, and private sector actors. Strengthening the online ecosystem could promote communication with a holistic approach that engages a broader range of key stakeholders. This would advocate for the needs and challenges refugees face and help refugee entrepreneurs at both individual and systemic levels, from grassroots initiatives to national and policy frameworks. Consequently, ICT emerges as a critical enabler of holistic communication in this context.

Recommendations

While the present study outlines the transformational potential of ICT-based communication, more simplified recommendations are also considered. Based on the findings, this paper suggests three elements for effective refugee entrepreneurship promotion for future research.

First, policymakers are advised to simplify administrative procedures, decentralize municipal budgets, and strengthen stakeholder collaboration to support refugee entrepreneurs. To improve current administrative systems, advocacy initiatives must extend beyond NGOs to actively engage the public and private sectors. An integrated action plan among these stakeholders would be necessary to uplift bureaucratic barriers to create an enabling ecosystem for refugee entrepreneurship.

Second, Training programs for refugee entrepreneurs should address the need to achieve ICT literacy in grant writing, networking, and financial management. SLA offers a valuable framework for implementing a holistic strategy to strengthen refugees' human, social, and financial capital while improving their livelihoods. Tailored training initiatives should focus on equipping refugees.

Third, Bilingual, ICT-driven online platforms need to be created for refugee entrepreneurs to connect with their mentors, funders, and potential collaborators, and opening opportunities. This platform can make a crucial contribution to access to mentorship, funding opportunities, and networking support, thus helping open doors. Establishing and running such platforms should be the acceptance of a collaborative effort supported by public institutions, the private sector, and refugees.

These recommendations may be concluded by contemplating how they emphasize the need for holistic integrational ICT-based communication of human social and financial capital to tailor-make necessary interventions. Enhancing livelihoods and fostering economic inclusion through entrepreneurship supports the well-being of refugees while contributing to broader social and economic growth in Lithuania. The findings and recommendations in the paper are considered to show the potential contribution of serving as a framework for not only Lithuanian society but also other European countries, offering valuable strategies to help encounter similar challenges and support refugee integration.

Limitations

Certain limitations are acknowledged. Self-assessment questions on the general use of ICT may not provide a complete understanding of refugees' ICT capabilities or demands for specific professional needs. Since respondents were accustomed to self-reported data, this introduced opportunities for a range of biases, including over-selection or under-selection of their stated abilities. Further compounding this challenge, the study found it difficult to glean nuanced information about refugees' stated professional preferences and ICT-related requirements.

To close the gaps, future research should evolve to address, among other uses, in-depth observational studies, skill-assessment contexts, and interviews based on refugees' ICT skills and preferences. Such research could yield more actionable insights and contribute to tailored eco-initiatives that enhance refugees' livelihoods and integration into host communities.

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My passion for the topic of forced migration was first ignited during my volunteering experience in Palestine in 2015. Following this experience, I implemented the multicultural project *Refugee Work Camp*, which bridged the gap between asylum seekers and Japanese participants. My work with the Japanese NGO called "Welgee" continued this effort from 2017 to 2020. However, I briefly lost my motivation while navigating professional challenges in Japan in 2022. Thankfully, studying and working in Lithuania allowed me to rediscover my dedication and passion for forced migration issues, offering theoretical knowledge and practical experience. I am deeply grateful to Vilnius University for providing a supportive environment and enriching opportunities to pursue this passion.

Reflecting on this journey, I recognize this thesis as a cornerstone of my career. When I face future turning points in life for the next time, I hope to revisit this work and cherish the invaluable experiences and precious moments spent during this transformative period.

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Annex Section

Annex A: Interview Transcripts and Direct Quotations

Quote 1: Refugee Entrepreneur, Interview #5

- Interview Date: 9th October 2024
- Nationality: Truly
- Context: Challenges and risks associated with reliance on online platforms for business operations.

"They can suspend your Etsy account without question, so relying entirely on them is very risky."

Quote 2: Refugee Entrepreneur # 1

Interview Date: 2nd October , 2024

- Nationality: truly
- Context: Discussing financial challenges

"I work for a company and earn a salary. After receiving asylum, I had to adapt to life here, but it wasn't easy. My salary wasn't enough to support my family. My salary, around €800, was insufficient to support my family, so I decided to start my own business."

Quote 3: Refugee Entrepreneur, Interview #9

- Interview Date: 14th October 2024
- Nationality: Ukrainian
- Context: Challenges in finding employment and language barriers as a catalyst for starting a business.

"I decided to start my business after encountering language barriers and issues finding employment at agencies."

Quote 4: Expert B

Date: 29th October

Position: Professouer in Lithuanian university

Context: Collelation with entrepreneurship and language

"Based on my experience and what I've seen in Germany, refugees must first complete language courses and business training before being allowed to start a business. In both Lithuania and Germany, proficiency in the local language and understanding the legal framework are prerequisites for accessing support and starting businesses.(interview with ExpertB, see Annex, Quote4)"

Quote 5: Refugee Entrepreneur #6

- Date: 9th October
- Nationality Ukuraina
- Context: Challenges in overcoming language barriers

"Language barriers and cultural differences are challenges. ICT tools like AI and multilingual platforms help streamline communication."

Quote 6: Experts during the group interview

- Interview Date: 25th November 2024
- Context 1: Importance of mentorship

"Ukrainian women entrepreneurs often engage in small-scale businesses like beauty services or sewing but lack familiarity with business ecosystems."

- Context 2: excessive conditions for grant eligibility

"Refugees in Lithuania face excessive conditions for grant eligibility, such as permanent residency status. The duration of financial support is often limited by temporary protection, thus making long-term lending difficult. Most programs in Lithuania focus on green and digital entrepreneurship, making it more difficult for refugees to relate to their business ideas."

Quote 7: Expert A, a director of a Government Institution

- Interview Date: 18th November 2024
- Position: Director of a Government Institution in Lithuania
- Context 1: Explaining the process and challenges refugees face when applying for subsidies to start businesses.

"Refugees can apply for subsidies to start businesses, with funding and supporting equipment, training, and rent. Technical errors include needing to be registered with Public Employment Services, applying for non-related expenses, or proposing existing businesses instead of new ones."

- Context 2: The needs of communication strategy

"It is crucial to improve communications strategy together with improved migration policy."

More involvement from the municipalities with decentralized budgets would have helped support entrepreneurship, together with the approach by all stakeholders in simplifying service provision."

Quote 8 Refugee Entrepreneur #3

- Date: 7th October
- Nationality Belarus
- Context: 1 The benefit of ICT tools for the business

"Payment systems such as Paysera and Stripe are integral to my operations. While I rate her digital skills as intermediate, I identify areas for improvement, particularly in leveraging AI and automation to enhance efficiency and customer interaction. ICT is the potential tool in overcoming" business challenges, building stakeholder relationships, and scaling entrepreneurial efforts

- Context 2: Challenges in overcoming language barriers

"There is a significant gap in support for Belarusians in the most vulnerable situations, particularly those awaiting refugee status. These people cannot work or study for six months while their application is processed, and there is no support for them."

Quote 9 Refugee Entrepreneur #6

- Date: 9th October
- Nationality Ukuraina
- Context: Importance of mentorship

"ICT allows me to connect globally with customers and partners, even if they are far away. Platforms like LinkedIn and social media make it easy to build networks, follow up on discussions, and explore business opportunities, regardless of location.."

Annex B: Interview questions to refugee entrepreneurs

General information

1. Age:
2. Nationality:
3. Time in Lithuania:
 - How long have you lived in Lithuania?
4. Language Skills (*not mother language*):
 - Which additional languages do you speak?
5. Type of Business:
 - What type of business do you operate or plan to start?
6. Obstacles & Support Needs (*Multiple choices allowed*):

ICT questions

1. How do you use online tools such as social media, e-commerce, or digital payments in your business?
2. Which social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) are most effective for your marketing and PR efforts?
3. How do you create content to share your brand's story and attract attention?
do you use some digital tools and AI when you create the contents
4. What ICT tools are most helpful for managing your business, including customer outreach, finances, or marketing?
5. What challenges have you faced while using ICT platforms as a refugee entrepreneur?
6. What communication challenges do you face in your business or work (such as language or cultural differences), and how has ICT (like emails, social media, or apps) helped you connect

with customers, partners, or investors and overcome these challenges?

7. Do you join an online community for your business?

If yes, how do you engage with them to support communication and collaboration?

8. Could ICT help build an online community to improve communication and grow your business?

9. Which websites or apps do you use to find new business ideas or trends, and how do they help you talk to your customers or partners?

10. Do you plan to use ICT tools to enhance communication and business growth?

11. How would you rate your digital skills (basic, intermediate, advanced) in areas such as marketing, payments, or social media management, using digital tools (computers, smartphones, online platforms) for business tasks, especially communication?

12. Would improving your ICT skills benefit your communication efforts in business? If yes, in which specific areas?