



# Refugee entrepreneurship: systematic and thematic analyses and a research agenda

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**Abstract** Refugee entrepreneurship has recently entailed increased scholarly mobilization and drastic growth in the volume of salient scientific research. However, this emerging research stream is marked by fragmentation and incoherence, primarily due to the multidisciplinary and context-specific nature of its extant findings. While this process is natural for emerging fields, the current state of research necessitates a comprehensive review, synthesis, and organization of its subject matter. Hence, this study systematically and thematically explores the landscape of refugee entrepreneurship research and its intellectual territory across diverse disciplines to take stock of a repository of the literature and trace its emergence, nature, and development. By analyzing 131 publications, this paper thus lays a collective research foundation for building a coherent theory, making incremental adjustments, and forming the ontological and epistemological basis for refugee entrepreneurship research. The study also identifies gaps in the literature and opens pathways for future scholarly endeavors.

**Plain English Summary** Refugee entrepreneurship is an intriguing topic, providing a unique perspective for exploring the link between experiencing

disruptive life events caused by being forced to leave one's homeland and founding a new business in an unplanned country of resettlement. Refugee entrepreneurship has been of recent interest to researchers due to its potential to alleviate the grand socioeconomic challenges triggered by the “refugee crisis” of mid-2010s. Vigorous scholarly engagement has generated many publications on the topic. However, refugee entrepreneurship is not a well-developed research area because current knowledge is scattered across different fields, and there exists no unified conceptualization to understand refugee entrepreneurship activities. Hence, this study makes a comprehensive analysis and organization of its subject matter to create a common academic basis for future research. The principal implication of this study is that the scope for designing better refugee-integration policies should also involve a nuanced understanding of refugee entrepreneur/ship.

**Keywords** Forced migration · Refugee entrepreneurship · Refugee self-employment · Systematic literature review · Refugee crisis

**JEL classifications** J15 · L26

## 1 Introduction

Refugee entrepreneurship (RE) is an emergent global phenomenon (Desai et al., 2020). Conceptually, RE refers to entrepreneurial activity undertaken in a new

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host country by individuals who are forcibly displaced from their homes due to war, conflict, and persecution (Fuller-Love et al., 2006). Following the “refugee crisis” of the mid-2010s, RE has been deemed particularly valuable for countries facing a stringent necessity and critical challenges to integrate their recently arrived refugee populations (Obschonka et al., 2018). Scholars argue that RE provides an alternative vocational path for refugees (Fong et al., 2007) since compared to self-initiated immigrants, they encounter extreme disadvantages in the traditional labor market, challenges accounted for under the umbrella terms “refugee gap” (Bakker et al., 2017) or “canvas ceiling” (Lee et al., 2020). In addition, RE contributes to a host society by enhancing local markets and supply chains (Lyon et al., 2007), filling institutional voids (Heilbrunn, 2019), and enriching spatial practices in urban spaces (Harb et al., 2019). Apart from its socio-economic value, RE also provides an excellent context for exploring issues relevant to entrepreneurship and small business research, illuminating the unique interplay between the experience of forced migration and business startup in new socioeconomic and institutional contexts (Adeeko & Treanor, 2021).

In contrast to its unpretentious origins in the mid-1980s, today, RE research is vibrant (Desai et al., 2020). A growing number of scholars are vigorously investigating the topic, as evidenced by a surge in scientific production, even in top-tier entrepreneurship journals (Bizri, 2017; Shepherd et al., 2020). However, this research stream remains underdeveloped, with fragmented findings and a lack of any coherent body of knowledge (Christensen et al., 2020). This is primarily because RE research has independently flourished by advancing across multiple disciplines, such as sociology, migration studies, political science, and history—to name just a few. Published RE works have also been dispersed across diverse outlets from these fields. While such fragmentation is natural for emerging research streams (Keupp & Gassmann, 2009), it renders the RE stream ambivalent for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners. Hence, there is a clear need for ordering and systematization, which also aligns with the modernist view of science that a research stream only advances by developing a unified body of knowledge regarding a phenomenon of common interest (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The lack of a unified understanding of refugee entrepreneur/ship is among the other ways through

which fragmentation of the salient research stream is evident. First, few authors clearly define RE as a phenomenon and who refugee entrepreneurs (“REs”) are. To date, there is no any scholarly agreement on whether RE research should focus on well-established and integrated REs, or only recent arrivals, or on how long such REs need to have stayed in their host countries (see Sandberg et al., 2019). Second, there have been no scholarly efforts to demarcate the scope of this emerging stream, whose boundaries are muddled with adjacent research streams concerning immigrant, diaspora, and transnational entrepreneurs (Dheer, 2018). Accordingly, there is a crucial need for an investigation of the current state of RE literature to plot the boundaries of this nascent research landscape, identify research gaps, integrate current knowledge, and guide future academic endeavors.

Against this backdrop, this paper therefore elaborates a systematic literature review (SLR) undertaken across multiple disciplines to provide a transparent and unbiased portrayal of existing RE research (Tranfield et al., 2003). The SLR is complemented by a thematic review using a configurative approach (Gough et al., 2012). This is because guidance for future research should not only be based on a quantitative compilation of prevailing studies but must also be developed via a qualitative synthesis by inductively organizing the themes and patterns emerging from the analysis (Jones et al., 2011). Hence, by combining these two approaches, this review is intended to enhance knowledge accumulation on RE and enable a unified understanding of this phenomenon. This is accomplished, first, by taking stock of a repository of research on the issue, tracing its emergence, nature, and development. This analysis offers insights into the nature and current status of RE research, authorship and collaboration, disciplinary breadth, scholarly focus, and conceptual orientation. Second, by identifying the main topics of the literature, the review provides a thematic mapping to set the agenda for future research, including topics, approaches, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies.

As such, stocktaking and agenda-setting are this paper’s core contributions. In fact, to the best of the author’s knowledge, this is the first fully comprehensive scholarly exercise in systematically and thematically reviewing and synthesizing the emerging research stream of RE. While three recent articles (Heilbrunn & Iannone, 2020; Lazarczyk-Bilal, 2019;

Newman et al., [forthcoming](#)) have undertaken similar endeavors, they review fewer publications (68, 22, and 50 papers, respectively) than the 131 covered by this study. Nor do these articles define and demarcate the research field or outline the scope, content, theories, and methodologies for future RE studies. Other authors (Christensen et al., [2020](#); Desai et al., [2020](#)) share a similar ambition to discuss the RE construct, encourage further research, and offer cues for future studies, but they do not anchor their agenda-setting in systematic and thematic analyses. Therefore, while accounting for these differences, this study aims to inspire, enable, and advance RE research by establishing the foundation for collective research that will serve to build coherent RE theory and form the ontological and epistemological bases for this emerging research stream. Its findings will help interested academics identify avenues for future studies and new research approaches, and practitioners and policymakers grasp some of the issues relevant for fostering RE.

## 2 Methodology

Methodologically, this paper is guided by the systematic literature review (SLR) approach proposed by Tranfield et al. ([2003](#)). This method entails developing a clear set of protocols for identifying relevant literature in a replicable and transparent manner, facilitating the generalizability of results (Jones et al., [2011](#)). Accordingly, [Table 1](#) describes the rigorous multistep process applied in this study to identify, investigate, and select relevant literature on RE. The subsections below elaborate the review procedures and processes and provide justifications for the decisions made across every step.

### 2.1 Identification and selection of articles

To begin the SLR process, it was necessary to define the conceptual boundary for the study. As a pragmatic delimitation, a broad and inclusive definition of RE was adopted not only to account for the fragmentation of research but also to incorporate the use of alternative concepts within it. As such, different terminologies were acceptable if they conceptually described RE as any form of business startup activity initiated and carried out in new host countries by formally recognized refugees/forced migrants. In addition, there

were no cutoff criteria for the time spent by refugees in their host settings, despite its theoretical relevance for maintaining the specificity of RE. However, the guiding principle was that the relevant studies must capture the interplay of forced migration across international borders and starting a business in a new host country context (Adeeko & Treanor, [2021](#)). This stance was maintained during the exploration, identification, and selection of relevant publications.

The diverse nature of the RE research stream necessitated elaborative and iterative processes of developing search terms and specific inclusion criteria. Drawing on the literature, objective search terms were created by considering the terms used in existing studies. The main keywords identified included “refugee entrepreneur/ship,” “enterprising refugees,” “forced migrant entrepreneurs,” “refugee self-employment,” and “refugee small businesses.” These keywords were combined into different Boolean search terms to create two query strings (see [Table 1](#)). Regarding the inclusion criteria, a publication time-frame was established starting from 1980 to November 2020, when the search was carried out. The starting point of 1980 reflected the emergence of migrant entrepreneurship as a research area (Sinkovics & Reuber, [2021](#)). Search parameters were focused on peer-reviewed works on the topic. While this approach involved some trade-offs, such as a peer-review process could take longer time and practice-driven research could occasionally offer more current knowledge on emerging topics, this focus on peer-reviewed works was intended to generate validated academic knowledge on RE (Costa et al., [2016](#)). In addition, only English-language publications were queried to extract knowledge for the international scholarly community. However, the search criteria were not focused on specific publication outlets or journals based on their rankings, as these could curtail the coverage of this emerging and multidisciplinary field.

Next, the two selected query strings were entered into Elsevier’s Scopus® e-bibliographic database. Scopus was chosen because it offers the most extensive abstract and citation archives, with broad categories of scientific literature and reliable content (Gusenbauer, [2019](#)). Scopus is especially suitable for investigating literature from emerging research streams due to its greater inclusivity and accessibility compared to other e-databases—such as the Web of Science, which only covers journals with superior

**Table 1** The SLR methodological procedures

Procedures	Criteria	Rationales
1. Setting objectives	To systematically and thematically investigate the existing knowledge landscape on RE in a transparent and unbiased manner.	Helps to encompass the depth and breadth of research, and also to synthesize and analyze the available academic literature.
2. Inclusion criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Main focus of the publication: the phenomenon of RE. However, different usage of terminologies were acceptable, so long as they conceptually followed the notion of business startup activity initiated and carried out in a new host country by refugees.</li> <li>2) Type of migration: forced, cross-border mobility.</li> <li>3) Quality of papers: peer-reviewed, but no selection of journals based on their citation index and rankings.</li> <li>4) Type of publications: empirical, conceptual, research reports, book chapters, books, review articles, and conference papers.</li> <li>5) Timespan: from 1980 to November 2020.</li> </ol>	<p>This step was necessary to set the conceptual boundary for identifying and selecting relevant literature that aligned with the review objectives. The search focused on peer-reviewed publications to narrow results to outlets with academic works, ensure the review's quality, and exclude the wealth of policy guides, newsletters, and organizational reports.</p>
3. Search method and scope—stage I	<p>Search of articles in the Scopus e-bibliographic database using two query strings:</p> <p>Query string 1: "TITLE-ABS-KEY (refugee*) AND (entrepreneur*) OR (refugee*) AND (self-employ*) OR (refugee*) AND (enterpris*) OR (refugee*) AND (small business*) AND PUBYEAR &gt; 1980" (#435 hits)</p> <p>Query string 2: "TITLE-ABS-KEY (forced migrant*) AND (entrepreneur*) OR (forced migrant*) AND (self-employ*) OR (forced migrant*) AND (enterpris*) OR (forced migrant*) AND (small business*) AND PUBYEAR &gt; 1980" (#41 hits)</p> <p>Mentioned at least once in: article title, abstract, keywords</p>	<p>Specific keywords were used for both "refugees" and "entrepreneurship," including synonyms and alternative concepts. This is relevant because in the broader discourse on migrant entrepreneurship, the concepts of self-employment, enterprising, small business, and entrepreneurship are used either interchangeably or complementarily—such as in the term "entrepreneurial self-employment." Similarly, some scholars preferred the euphemistic term "forced migrants" instead of "refugees." Hence, all possible terminologies for both refugees and entrepreneurship were accounted for, to ensure that identification of relevant literature aligned with the authors' choice of words, and how they chose to position their own work.</p>
Search method and scope—stage II	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Snowballing (Webster &amp; Watson, 2002) (#11 publications)</li> <li>2) Review of conference proceedings (Rauch &amp; Frese, 2007) (#6 publications)</li> <li>3) Triangulation and search using Google Scholar (#9 publications)</li> </ol>	<p>Due to the limited nature of research, it was relevant to include a broader set of publications, search beyond electronic databases, and triangulate results.</p>
4. Exclusion by theoretical relevance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Research summaries and commentaries shorter than five pages (for instance, Fuller-Love et al., 2006), book reviews, editorial pieces, and publications in languages other than English (#25 publications)</li> <li>2) Publications that contained any of the search terms and keywords but were off-topic or lacked any relevance for understanding the phenomenon (#244 publications)</li> <li>3) Publications that mentioned RE in their abstracts but did not address the issue in any great depth (#35 publications)</li> <li>4) Studies focusing on refugees' economic adaptation, livelihood, potential, and contribution without any reference to, or significant discussion of, their entrepreneurial or self-employment activities (#41 publications)</li> <li>5) Articles on immigrant, ethnic minority, diaspora, returnee, and internally displaced entrepreneurs (#18 publications)</li> </ol>	<p>This was helpful to select only those publications that addressed RE in substantial breadth and depth in the main text.</p>

Source: author's own table

academic influence (Pranckutė, 2021). The first query string resulted in 435 document results, while the second yielded 41. Once duplicates were removed, the combined sample comprised a total of 468 documents.

The identified documents were subjected to several screening procedures. In the first round, 25 editorial materials, book reviews, and non-English-language publications were removed, which reduced the sample to 443 documents. Then, the titles, abstracts, keywords, and conclusions of these documents were meticulously scrutinized to determine whether to retain them. In this process, 244 irrelevant works—mostly articles on the “refugee effect,” extolling the positive effect of unemployment on self-employment (e.g., Aubry et al., 2015; Cueto et al., 2015; Thurik et al., 2008)—were immediately excluded. Next, 35 publications that mentioned RE in their abstracts but did not address the issue in any great depth were excluded. Another 41 articles were then excluded since they broadly conferred refugees’ livelihood (Omata, 2012), economic potential, situation, and adaptation (e.g., Mamgain & Collins, 2003; Roth et al., 2012) or refugee camp economies (Beehner, 2015) with limited or marginal reference to RE. Finally, 18 works dealing with immigrant, ethnic minority, diaspora, returnee, or internally displaced entrepreneurs were eliminated. Following all these exclusions, a sample of 105 publications was left.

Applying SLR to nascent research streams necessitates searching beyond conventional e-databases. To do so, two additional steps were taken. First, the author manually reviewed the bibliographies of the designated sample studies using the so-called snowballing technique (Webster & Watson, 2002) and manually searched the proceedings (Rauch & Frese, 2007) of major entrepreneurship and migration conferences.<sup>1</sup> These searches yielded an additional 11 and six academic works, respectively. In the second step, an independent literature search was performed with Google Scholar (GS). This primarily helped triangulate the results from Scopus and eventually mitigated the potential loss of articles due to the rigidity of SLR.

<sup>1</sup> These conferences included the Babson College Entrepreneurship Conference (BCERC), the Nordic Conference on Small Business Research (NCSB), the Research in Entrepreneurship and Small Business Conference (RENT), the International Conference on Innovation Management, Entrepreneurship and Sustainability (IMES), and the International Council for Small Business (ICSB)

GS thus yielded an additional nine articles. Overall, the combined search procedures generated a final sample of 131 articles<sup>2</sup> in a range of formats, all dealing with RE and published from 1986 to November 2020. All these publications satisfied the paper’s two main criteria—nontrivial coverage of RE and a significant contribution to its research stream.

## 2.2 Analytical methods

The search and screening process was accompanied by a full text review and analysis of the final publication set. The analysis consisted of three main stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Jones et al., 2011). The first stage was a descriptive classification in an Excel spreadsheet, where a coding structure was used to standardize information on author(s), publication year, title, journal, research purpose, geographical context, theoretical perspective, methods, variables, key findings, etc. Publication data, such as each journal’s main topic area and quality, were also recorded. This standardized information facilitated descriptive analysis of the full sample of publications. Observations and patterns emerging from the analysis are presented as figures and tables wherever appropriate.

The second step was a thematic analysis of the publications. Here, the author used a configurative approach (Gough et al., 2012), as the existing research is heterogeneous in terms of topics, samples, methods, and theory. This approach entailed inductive organization and the arrangement of patterns that emerged from the data. Inductively identifying themes without relying on a previously defined framework allows a structure to be derived via fundamental concepts that reflect the relevant phenomenon (cf. Jones et al., 2011). Following this procedure, all the sample publications were closely reread, and the author noted preliminary ideas for potential themes. The author then compared these initial themes with the descriptive classifications from the first stage and redefined first-order themes for each publication based on the stated research purpose, methodology, and constructs in the spreadsheet. This thematic analysis followed an iterative process, where themes were continuously validated by comparing them with the content, coding, and themes of other articles and redefined as needed.

<sup>2</sup> All the 131 publications included in the review are marked by an asterisk (\*) in the reference list

In the final analytical stage, the author organized and interpreted the identified themes following Jones et al.'s (2011) analytical procedures. First, the publications in the sample were mapped to one or more first-order themes, depending on their focus. Then, the first-order themes were sorted and grouped to create second-order themes, which represented higher-order patterns. The creation of second-order themes was also iterative, based on the purpose, meaning, and coding of the articles. The second-order themes were eventually aggregated to a higher level of abstraction, forming thematic areas. Developing these thematic areas involved cross-checking them with the first- and second-order themes and occasionally returning to the publications to verify the correct groupings.

### 3 Results: descriptive analysis and classification

#### 3.1 Longitudinal development of RE research: a brief retrospective

A brief retrospective on the longitudinal development of RE research reveals four phases, reflecting the evolution of scientific production, research contexts, trends in global refugee movements, and types of refugee groups studied (see also Table 2). The decade from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s was the formative period of RE research. During this time, the earliest article addressing the phenomenon emerged in an academic context (Fass, 1986), which was followed by the first trickle of scholarship that delineated the specificity of RE and distinguished it from immigrant entrepreneurship. Specifically, Gold (1988, 1992) discussed how the ontological distinctions between refugees and immigrants are manifested in their entrepreneurial activity. In his subsequent publications, he highlighted the specific characteristics of self-employed refugees and the resources and motives that drive their new ventures and compared them with those of nonrefugee groups described in the immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship literature. Based on his findings, Gold advocated a separate analysis of RE. This first wave of research focused on political refugees fleeing their home countries during World War II, the Vietnam War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union and was almost exclusively led by North American scholars with a distinct social science background.

From the second half of the 1990s, RE research declined. Gold's (1988, 1992) repeated calls for a nuanced analysis of refugee entrepreneur/ship did not motivate many scholars. Rather, extensive scholarship dwelt on refugees' economic and labor market adaptations, with only marginal discussions on their entrepreneurial and self-employed activities (for instance, Hauff & Vaglum, 1993; Valtonen, 1999). However, one notable exception was Johnson's (2000) article, which empirically compared ethnic differences in the extent of self-employment among different Southeast Asian refugee groups in Canada.

Between the mid-2000s and early 2010s, there was an increase in the influx of refugees to Western societies, reigniting scholarly interest in RE. Indeed, some of the foremost contributions to the research stream emerged during this phase. For instance, Wauters & Lambrecht (2006) systematically investigated RE by focusing on its potential and practice while adding their voices to Gold's (1988, 1992) earlier call for a distinct research domain. A few years later, in a study that continues to be an oft-cited RE reference, these authors also developed the first empirical explanatory model for understanding the multifaceted barriers toward refugee entrepreneur/ship (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). Two other significant publications from this period are Fong et al.'s (2007) comprehensive investigation of the successes and challenges of enterprising refugees and Lyon et al.'s (2007) empirical analysis, primarily from a policy perspective, of their impact. Despite these scholars' substantial contributions, however, it would be several years before their works sparked wider academic interest.

The second half of the 2010s was the peak period for RE research, when both urgent academic work and political interest were engendered by the "refugee crisis" of 2015. Earlier calls for a dedicated research stream (Gold, 1992; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006) were picked up by scholars, accelerating scientific production and increasing the number of RE publications. Bizri (2017) thus published the first pathbreaking article, which serves as one of the primary references for current researchers. Much of the RE literature from this period features Syrian refugees (e.g., Baltaci, 2017; Mehtap & Al-Saidi, 2018), as they are part of the largest recent refugee movements. Obschonka et al.'s (2018) article is highly relevant for its sophisticated and rigorous quantitative analysis and specifically for introducing agency-based

**Table 2** Publications indicating some of the key developments in RE research

Author, year, journal, and main contribution	Type and method	Research focus	Main theoretical perspectives	Data sources	Refugees studied	Host country	GS cit.
Fass (1986, IMR). Earliest discussion of RE in academic context.	E, Mixed	Becoming self-reliant through RE	Self-reliance concept	Document reviews and secondary data	Hmong	U.S.	36
Gold (1988, ERS). First empirical attempt at differentiating the characteristics of self-employed refugees, and their entrepreneurial resources, ventures, and motivations, from those of immigrants.	E, Qualitative	Refugees and small business	Cultural and disadvantage theories	Interviews	Soviet Jews and Vietnamese	U.S.	104
Gold (1992, RPR). Pioneering insights on the differences between immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs by taking into account their characteristics, resources, and motives for opening businesses, and their use of community-based sources of entrepreneurial capital.	E, Qualitative	Employment potential of RE	Cultural and disadvantage theories	Interviews	Soviet Jews and Vietnamese	U.S.	57
Johnson (2000, JSBM). A quantitative study comparing the extent of self-employment in different refugee groups.	E, Quantitative	Differences in refugee self-employment	Cultural and disadvantage theories	Survey data	Indo-Chinese	Canada	54
Wauters & Lambrecht (2006, IEMJ). The primary scholarly work to study RE systematically by focusing on its potential and practice, along with the call for its separate analysis.	E, Quantitative	Potential and practice of RE	Cultural theory, and integration and demographic models	Own survey and official data	Diverse groups	Belgium	63
Fong et al. (2007, JECDSW). Comprehensive analysis of the successes and challenges of REs.	E, Qualitative	Successes and challenges of REs	Ecological theory and strengths perspective	Interviews and focus groups	Diverse groups	U.S.	66
Lyon et al. (2007, LE). Empirical analysis of the contributions of refugee entrepreneur/ship from a policy perspective.	E, Qualitative	Impacts of RE	No explicit theories	Interviews and focus groups	West African and Asian	England	51

**Table 2** (continued)

Author, year, journal, and main contribution	Type and method	Research focus	Main theoretical perspectives	Data sources	Refugees studied	Host country	GS cit.
Wauters & Lambrecht (2008, JEMS). Formulated the first empirically underpinned conceptual framework for analyzing the multifaceted barriers toward refugee entrepreneurship/ship.	E, Mixed	Barriers toward RE	ME and Waldinger et al.'s (1990) model	Interviews and secondary data	Diverse groups	Belgium	111
Bizri (2017, ERD). The pathbreaking article on RE after the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015, featuring the recent waves of Syrian refugees.	E, Qualitative	Characteristics of refugee ventures	Social capital theory and ME	Interviews, observations and documents	Syrian	Lebanon	90
Obschonka et al. (2018, JVB). Pioneer in the application of agency perspectives in RE research. The study also applies sophisticated and rigorous quantitative data analysis techniques.	E, Quantitative	Refugees' early integration process	EI, alertness, and career adaptability	Own survey data	Syrian	Germany	64
Shepherd et al. (2020, JBV). Comprehensive qualitative study analyzing refugees' entrepreneurial actions in highly constrained environments.	E, Qualitative	REs' resilience in the face of substantial and persistent adversity	Positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship	Semi-structured interviews and field notes	Palestinian	Lebanon	21

E, Empirical. EI, Entrepreneurial Intentions. GS, Google Scholar. ERS, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*; IM, *Immigrants and Minorities*; IMR, *International Migration Review*; IEMJ, *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*; JBV, *Journal of Business Venturing*; JECDSW, *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*; JEMS, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*; JSBM, *Journal of Small Business Management*; JVB, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*; LE, *Local Economy*; RPR, *Review of Policy Research*. ME, Mixed Embeddedness. RE, Refugee Entrepreneurship. REs, Refugee Entrepreneurs. U.S., United States. GS cit., Google Scholar citations, as of November 21, 2020. Source: author's own table



perspectives to the culturalist- and structuralist-oriented RE literature. Similarly, Shepherd et al. (2020) addressed the agentic properties of refugees by capturing their entrepreneurial actions in highly constrained environments.

### 3.2 Number and type of publications and citation trends

Figure 1 illustrates the yearly publication and citation trends of RE research that were captured by the review. In terms of publication growth, the graph depicts a relatively positive general trend despite significant interyear differences. This highlights how the research stream has grown both steadily for most of the selected period and rapidly during the last few years. The existing body of literature ( $n = 131$ ) comprises published articles (65.6%), book chapters (22.9%), conference papers (4.6%), books (2.3%), research reports (3.1%), and doctoral dissertations (1.5%). The average year of publication was 2003, and the vast majority of studies (approximately 73%) have been published since 2015. However, further growth should also be anticipated, given the extensive ongoing worldwide refugee movements and the fact that many of the recent waves will likely settle in their host countries in the forthcoming years (Desai et al., 2020) and then engage in RE once they obtain a better understanding of their local conditions (Obchonka et al., 2018).

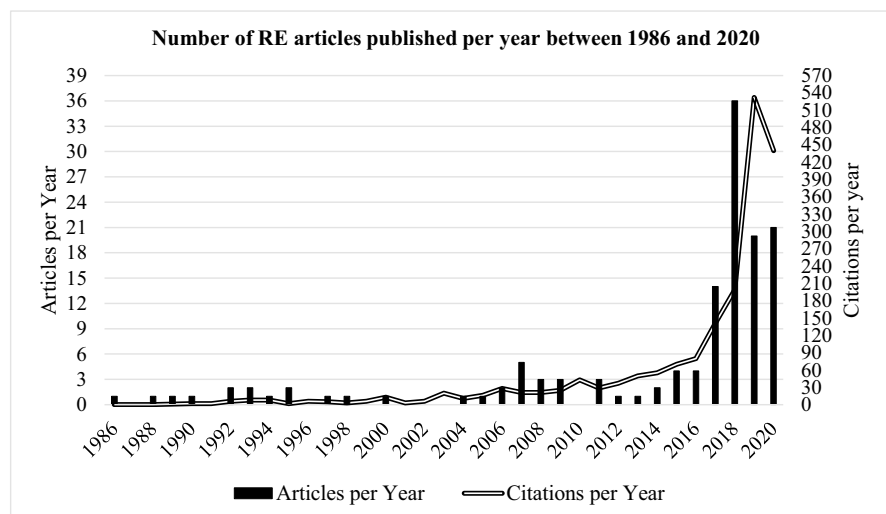
The works in the sample received a total of 1800 citations, with an average citation rate of 13.7 and an average number of citations per item of 0.1 during the study period. The citation analysis also indicates that 9.2% of the articles remain uncited, while 45.0% have been cited between one and five times, 14.5% between six and 10, and the rest (31.3%) more than 10. These figures suggest that the intellectual contribution to and influence of RE research in the scholarly arena is insignificant compared to, for instance, immigrant entrepreneurship research (see Dheer, 2018).

### 3.3 The context of academic discussion: authorship, coauthorship, and scope of collaboration

There are a total of 263 authors for the 131 publications in the sample, who are affiliated with 82 different institutions located in 37 different countries worldwide. The top five countries for author numbers are the USA (23), the UK (22), Germany (18), Canada (9), and Australia (9). Anglophone institutions and researchers collectively account for 47% of the knowledge production in RE research. Regarding continental distribution, 51% of the studies had at least one author affiliated with an institution in Europe, 21% in North America, 15% in Asia, 7% in Oceania, and 4% in Africa. Only one article was affiliated with a South American institution, and one publication was the work of an independent researcher.

Table 3 indicates whether scholars collaborate in authorship and the extent of collaboration across

**Fig. 1** Annual number of published articles and their total citations



**Table 3** Descriptive classification and analysis of the publications

Subject areas*		Ethnic, migration, and minority studies (n = 30)	Entrepreneurship (n = 44)	Marketing, economics and management (n = 18)	Public health and medical sciences (n = 1)	Earth and planetary sciences (n = 6)	Arts and humanities (n = 7)	Other social and behavioral sciences# (n = 25)	Total (n = 131)
<b>Authorship</b>									
Single	12	15	5	4	4	4	16	56	
Co-authorship	8	16	6	2	2	3	37		
Multiple authorship	10	13	7	1	0	6	38		
<b>Collaboration**</b>									
Cross-university	14	13	10	1	2	3	45		
Cross-country	10	6	4	1	1	1	24		
Cross-continent	9	4	3	1	1	1	19		
<b>Type of study</b>									
Empirical	26	41	15	1	6	5	116		
Conceptual	4	2	2	-	-	1	12		
Review	-	1	1	-	-	1	3		
<b>Research method</b>									
Qualitative	20	37	10	-	3	7	100		
Quantitative	2	5	4	-	1	-	14		
Mixed	8	2	4	1	2	-	17		
<b>Theoretical perspectives used**</b>									
Immigrant/ethnic minority entrepreneurship perspectives	7	10	6	-	2	1	3	29	
Sociological, philosophical, social work, and anthropological theories	1	7	2	-	1	-	1	12	
Psychological theories	-	4	-	-	-	-	3	7	
Globalization, migration, and integration theories	1	3	3	-	-	-	4	11	
Refugee entrepreneurship frameworks	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	4	
Economic and development theories	4	3	1	-	1	1	5	15	
Entrepreneurship concepts	2	2	2	-	-	-	-	6	
Institutional theories	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	3	

**Table 3** (continued)

		Subject areas*								Total (n = 131)
		Ethnic, migration, and minority studies (n = 30)	Entrepreneurship (n = 44)	Marketing, economics and management (n = 18)	Public health and medical sciences (n = 1)	Earth and planetary sciences (n = 6)	Arts and humanities (n = 7)	Other social and behavioral sciences# (n = 25)		
None or not explicitly stated		13	18	7	1	1	4	9	53	
Geographical context**										
	Asia	6	7	4	1	2	1	5	26	
	Africa	9	4	-	2	-	-	6	21	
	Europe	6	27	8	1	3	3	3	48	
	Oceania	2	2	2	-	-	-	2	8	
	North and Central America	6	2	2	2	2	2	4	18	
	Latina America	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	

\*The 'subject areas' category is formulated based on the list of Scopus subject area classifications.

\*\*The 'collaboration,' 'theoretical perspectives used,' and 'geographical context' categories are not mutually exclusive. #The 'other social and behavioral sciences' category include sociology, anthropology, psychology, social work, law, political science, education, planning and development, and international relations. Source: author's own table

universities, countries, and continents. The data show that RE research, particularly during the formative period, is characterized by solitary authorship, which constitutes approximately 43% of scholarly production. However, there seems to have been a change in this trend since 2010, when publications written by two authors (28%) and three or more authors (29%) increased. This collaborative climate is also marked by extensive cooperation across universities (52%), while collaborations across countries and continents have accounted for 27% and 21%, respectively.

### 3.4 Disciplinary breadth, publication outlets, and nature of research

The analysis shows that RE research has attracted scholarly contributions from diverse academic disciplines—albeit mostly within the domains of the social and behavioral sciences and humanities, which collectively account for 48% of the reviewed publications. Other disciplines that have approached the topic include marketing, economics, and management (14%); entrepreneurship (33%); earth and planetary sciences (5%); and public health (1%). However, it should be noted that very few publications in the areas of entrepreneurship (six out of 44) or marketing, economics, and management (five out of 18) appeared before 2015.

In regard to publication outlets, research outputs are notably scattered over a wide range of academic journals across multiple disciplines, indicating the lack of consistent channels for disseminating results. The published body of knowledge on RE (n = 86) is spread across no fewer than 64 journals representing diverse research interests and areas. Despite this diffusion, a few journals have recently exhibited a notable increase in their quantity of published RE articles: *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research* (n = 6), *Journal of Refugee Studies* (n = 5), *Small Business Economics* (n = 5), and *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* (n = 3). Moreover, according to SCImago Journal Rank (SJR), approximately 50% of the journals are in Q1, indicating that RE research has started to receive positive representation in publication outlets with good scientific standards.

Analyzing the nature of RE research reveals that empirical studies (88.5%) far outweigh conceptual contributions (9.2%), while literature reviews account

for 2.3%. In addition, much of the empirical literature ( $n = 116$ ) has been generated through qualitative approaches (76%) drawing on ethnographic data collection strategies, such as semistructured interviews, participant observations, and focus groups, often involving smaller samples. Such qualitative methods are typically complemented by a review and analysis of policy documents, organizational reports, and previous research. Publications deploying quantitative and mixed-methods research strategies account for 10.6% and 12.9% of the empirical literature, respectively. Many of these studies use secondary sources, including data from census reports (Kaplan, 1997), publicly available data sets and document reviews (Fass, 1986; Kaplan 1997; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008), and governmental data repositories (Miyares, 1998). Only a few researchers have taken the initiative to collect quantitative data directly using survey instruments (Crush & Tawodzera, 2017; Johnson, 2000; Obschonka et al., 2018; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006).

### 3.5 Geographical research context

Analysis of the geographical research contexts (see Table 3) reveals that numerous RE publications refer to Europe (48), Asia (26), Africa (21), and North and Central America (18), but only a handful cover Oceania (8) and South America (2). During the formative period, the dominance of the USA as a research context is clear, probably due to its long experience with migrant entrepreneurship, which dates to the late 19th century (Light, 1984). Much of this early literature examines the small-business activities of formerly Soviet Jewish and Indo-Chinese refugees, the largest refugee groups to enter North America during the mid-1970s (Gold, 1988, 1992). However, the bulk of current research, particularly following the “refugee crisis” of the mid-2010s, primarily concerns Europe and Asia, as many countries in these regions have become destinations for the recent refugee waves from East Africa, the Middle East, and West Asia. Empirical contexts in Europe are mainly related to Syrian refugees in Germany due to its open-door refugee policy; in Asia, several studies also refer to this group in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Finally, research on the African context features diverse refugee groups from

eastern and central parts of the continent in relatively advanced urban settings such as Nairobi, Cape Town, and Johannesburg.

Geographical contexts also differ in terms of their research focus and theoretical and empirical orientation. In North America, RE research has been strongly influenced by immigrant entrepreneurship theories, particularly cultural theory (Light, 1984). Hence, most studies have focused on the supply side of RE, that is, on refugees’ group cultural characteristics and ethnocultural resources, which predispose them toward entrepreneurship and confer advantages when engaging in it. Research in European contexts, meanwhile, addresses the demand side of RE by highlighting its structural, political, and institutional contexts. This is partly because of the growing popularity and influence of the mixed-embeddedness approach (Kloosterman et al., 1999), which outlines a strong framework to account for the conditions in which refugees start businesses. On the other hand, research on the Asian and African contexts is largely explorative and descriptive, offering only limited theoretical insights.

### 3.6 Theoretical approach

Regarding their theoretical aspects, the publications under review are classified based on the extent and type of theories that they apply to explain the phenomenon of RE. In terms of the extent of theories, the publications are divided into two groups: (1) those with no explicit theoretical foundations/discussions and a marginal/nonexistent grounding in the literature ( $n = 53$ ) and (2) those with a theoretical underpinning and conceptual input ( $n = 78$ ). Members of the latter group draw on eclectic theories without contributing much original theory themselves, reflecting the lack of clear theoretical development in existing RE research. The sections below elaborate some of the widely used theoretical frameworks and concepts (see also Table 3).

Many publications draw on theories and concepts borrowed from immigrant entrepreneurship research. Some apply orthodox cultural theory to associate refugees’ motivational antecedents with their home cultural values, suggesting that these inherently predispose refugees to entrepreneurship (Gold, 1988, 1992; Halter, 1995; Johnson, 2000).

Drawing on reactive cultural theory, other studies argue that ethnocultural institutions and networks (Gold, 1992) and resources (Halkias et al., 2009a, b; Kaplan, 1997; Katis, 2017; Klaesson & Öner, 2020) spur refugees' entrepreneurial entry. On the other hand, studies that employ structural approaches imply that refugees' economic disadvantages in their host country push them toward business ownership (Barak-Bianco & Rajiman, 2015; Kupferberg, 2008; Lyon et al., 2007; Meyer & Pilkova, 2017; Refai et al., 2018). Finally, several publications use interactive frameworks such as Waldinger et al.'s (1990) model (Predojević-Despić & Lukić, 2018; Price & Chacko, 2009; Tömöry, 2008) and the mixed-embeddedness approach (Bagwell, 2018; Bizri, 2017; Idris, 2019; Sepulveda et al., 2011; Villares-Varela et al., 2017; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008) to examine the interplay of internal and external forces that drive RE.

Approaches from the social and behavioral sciences are also modestly applied. Scholars have used social capital theory to explore the different dimensions of refugees' social capital (Bizri, 2017), its development mechanisms (Iannone & Geraudel, 2018; Yeröz, 2019), and how it influences the establishment and operation of refugee ventures (Baktir & Watson, 2020; Meister & Mauer, 2019; Sandberg et al., 2019; Williams & Krasniqi, 2018). The concept of embeddedness is also applied to evaluate this connection (Eimermann & Karlsson, 2018; Jiang et al., 2017). Other related sociological approaches include Bourdieu's forms of capital (Atasü-Topcuoğlu, 2019), habitus (Refai et al., 2018), and practice theory (Yeröz, 2019). A few single studies use ecological theory (Collins, 2017) together with the strengths approach (Fong et al., 2007) to understand successful RE. In addition, institutional theories are used to examine how RE unfolds and functions in favorable (Baktir & Watson, 2020) and precarious/fragile host contexts (de la Chaux & Haugh, 2020; Heilbrunn, 2019; Ritchie, 2018). Other studies have focused on perspectives of globalization (Bhagat, 2020; Campbell, 2005, 2007; Hawthorne, 2019), migration (Palalić et al., 2018; Turner, 2020), and integration (Alrawadieh et al., 2019; Garnham, 2006; Louise & Jiang, 2018; Meyer & Pilkova, 2017). Finally, in recent years, scholars have applied psychological concepts such as positive psychology (Modesti et al.,

2020; Shepherd et al., 2020) and intention (Mawson & Kasem, 2019; Obschonka et al., 2018) to understand the cognitive drivers of RE.

Furthermore, the review shows that certain publications have applied economic/development approaches and concepts developed within the innovation and entrepreneurship literature, albeit to a lesser extent. Two studies, for example, have applied the self-reliance concept (Fass, 1986; Huq & Venugopal, 2021). The petty commodity production framework is used to understand the development trajectory of small refugee enterprises in capitalistic environments (Basok, 1989, 1993), while scholars apply the concept of an informal economy to study the nature of RE in unregulated contexts (Al-Dajani et al., 2016). Certain studies have also applied specific concepts such as refugee economies (Betts et al., 2017; Crush & Tawodzera, 2017), refugee livelihood (Nayak et al., 2019; Werker, 2007), and refugee camp entrepreneurialism (Jauhiainen & Eyvazlu, 2020; Werker, 2007). Moreover, to grasp the particularities of entrepreneurial support systems and their impacts on RE, scholars have drawn on business incubation (Harima & Freudenberg, 2020; Harima et al., 2019) and entrepreneurial ecosystem (Birdthistle et al., 2019) frameworks. Other studies have discussed the social entrepreneurship concept in the context of refugees (Freudenberg & Halberstadt, 2018; Gonzales et al., 2013; Kong, 2011; Kong et al., 2018; Lee, 2018). A single publication has applied the concept of entrepreneurial bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005) to explore how refugees overcome institutional voids through entrepreneurial actions (Heilbrunn, 2019). Of particular concern, however, is that only two studies employ conceptual frameworks developed specifically for RE research (Meyer, 2018; Rashid, 2018).

#### 4 Results: thematic analysis

The thematic analysis groups the publications into two clusters based on their research focus: *refugee entrepreneur/ship as a phenomenon* (cluster I) and *refugee entrepreneur/ship as a career path* (cluster II). The former mostly includes publications from the social sciences and humanities, which address the distinctiveness and determinants of refugee

entrepreneur/ship, while the latter investigates its potential as a career trajectory for refugees from business and management approaches. Moreover, the two clusters comprise thematic areas that are developed from second-order themes after sorting out and aggregating several inductively identified first-order themes based on Jones et al.'s (2011) methodology. Tables 4 and 5 present the two research clusters and their corresponding thematic areas, first- and second-order themes, and descriptions.

#### 4.1 Cluster I: Refugee entrepreneur/ship as a phenomenon

Publications within the *refugee entrepreneur/ship as a phenomenon* cluster are further divided into two thematic areas. The first, *distinctiveness of refugee entrepreneur/ship*, includes the second-order themes *refugee/nonrefugee entrepreneur/ship comparative research* and *impact of refugee entrepreneur/ship*, derived from seven first-order themes. The second thematic area, *determinants of refugee entrepreneur/*

**Table 4** Cluster I: Refugee entrepreneur/ship as a phenomenon focus

Thematic area	Second-order theme	First-order theme	Description of theme	Emerged in	No.
Distinctiveness of Refugee Entrepreneur/ship	Refugee/Non-Refugee Entrepreneur/ship Comparative Research	Characteristics	Characteristics of REs, and nature of their start-ups and resources	1995	11
		Self-Employment rate	Factors influencing the likelihood of refugees and immigrants engaging in self-employment	2000	2
		Delineation	Distinction of refugee entrepreneur/ship from immigrant entrepreneur/ship	1988	5
	Impact of Refugee Entrepreneur/ship	Self-reliance	Economic self-reliance of refugees	1986	4
		Integration	Entrepreneurship and refugee integration	2018	3
		Societal Development	Contributions of refugee businesses to local communities and urban neighborhoods	2007	3
		Economy	Economic contribution to the host country	1990	3
Determinants of Refugee Entrepreneur/ship	Venture Creation and Operation	Enablers	Factors contributing to the emergence and operation of refugee entrepreneurial ventures	1995	21
		Barriers	Constraints facing refugees when initiating and operating their ventures	2008	12
		Opportunities	Opportunities for refugee entrepreneurial ventures	2009	2
	Institutional Environment	Institutions	Regulative and normative environment for refugee entrepreneur/ship	1993	11
		Entrepreneurial Ecosystem	Type of refugee entrepreneurial support programs and their effects	1992	7
		Institutional Voids	Refugee entrepreneur/ship in hostile and precarious environments	2007	17

Source: author's own analysis

**Table 5** Cluster II: Refugee entrepreneur/ship as a career path focus

Thematic area	Second-order theme	First-order theme	Description of theme	Emerged in	No.
Refugee Entrepreneur/ship as a Career Path	Entrepreneurship Potential	Self-selection	Analysis of refugees' entrepreneurial intentions and capabilities	2017	3
		Motivations	Factors that motivate refugees to create their own businesses	2006	6
		Occupational Pathways	The potential of entrepreneurship as refugees' career trajectory	2017	2
	Type of Refugee Entrepreneur/ship	Refugee Women Entrepreneur/ship	Patterns and experiences of women refugees in self-employment; factors affecting their entrepreneurial motivation and the challenges they encounter	2011	8
		Informal Refugee Entrepreneur/ship	Characteristics of informal REs and their ventures, and critical factors for their success	1989	8
		Social Refugee Entrepreneur/ship	Social entrepreneurial initiatives for and by refugees	2013	9

Source: author's own analysis

ship, includes the second-order themes *venture creation and operation* and *institutional environment*, derived from six first-order themes (see Table 4 below).

#### 4.1.1 Refugee/nonrefugee entrepreneur/ship comparative research

The second-order theme *refugee/nonrefugee entrepreneur/ship comparative research* is associated with the thematic area *distinctiveness of refugee entrepreneur/ship*. This second-order theme is generated by aggregating three first-order themes: *characteristics*, *self-employment rate*, and *delineation*. Taken together, publications in this thematic area assess the distinct nature of refugee entrepreneur/ship in comparison with non-refugee entrepreneur/ship, principally, immigrant entrepreneur/ship.

The *characteristics* first-order theme investigates the nature of RE by looking at its typical settings (Freiling & Harima, 2018) and the distinct aspects

of refugees' entrepreneurial culture (Halter, 1995), their utilization of social networks for venture startup (Sandberg et al., 2019), the type and features of their businesses (Bizri, 2017), and the scope of their entrepreneurial activity (Grey et al., 2004). Other scholars do the same by investigating the characteristics of entrepreneurial refugees in different settings, such as in the tourism and hospitality industries (Alrawadieh et al., 2019), informal economies (Crush & McCordic, 2017; Crush & Tawodzera, 2017; Crush et al., 2017c), and small business sectors (Halkias et al., 2009a, b). However, deriving any generalizable characteristics of the phenomenon from this strand of research is hindered by the heterogeneity of refugees, the diverse conditions for their entrepreneurial activity, and the context-specific nature of findings.

Two publications comprise the *self-employment rate* first-order theme. The first compares the *self-employment rate* of three Southeast Asian refugee groups in Canada (Johnson, 2000), showing that interethnic differences in self-employment are

related to differential home culture influences and host country experiences. The second study empirically compares the differences between refugees and immigrants in the UK concerning their propensity for self-employment (Kone et al., 2020). Its findings reveal that mediating factors, such as the presence of social networks and time since migration, differently influence the likelihood of self-employment among both groups. In short, the insights from these studies suggest that failing to account for refugees' heterogeneity and their ontological differences from immigrants can mask important factors related to their entrepreneurial behavior.

The *delineation* first-order theme differentiates refugee entrepreneur/ship from immigrant entrepreneur/ship. Gold's (1988, 1992) earlier research explores the factors that distinguish self-employed refugees by comparing their resources with those of immigrants. Other studies have also argued for the specificity of RE based on refugees' ontological differences from immigrants in terms of their motives for migration, their sudden departure and relocation to unplanned destinations, and the complex legal situations and institutional distortions that they face upon arrival in a new country (Betts et al., 2017; Bizri, 2017; Garnham, 2006). According to these scholars, the detrimental conditions refugees encounter, linked with their forced migration, distinctly influence their entrepreneurial behavior. However, there is a dearth of research empirically addressing how these refugee-specific factors shape their entrepreneurial behavior differently from voluntary migrants.

In sum, publications in the *refugee/nonrefugee entrepreneur/ship comparative research* theme establish the ontological basis for expanding the inquiry into the specificity of the phenomenon. Their arguments are based on the specific social, economic, psychological, and legal characteristics that differentiate refugee from immigrant populations (Gold, 1988, 1992). Accordingly, scholars suggest that the distinct nature of RE emerges from refugees' comparative and acute disadvantages in terms of their constrained access to extensive social networks (Bizri, 2017), inability to mobilize homeland resources (Garnham, 2006), and psychological instability (Alrawadieh et al., 2019), all of which hamper their entrepreneurial activity. Scholars also underscore the fractured legal status and institutional challenges and voids (Betts et al., 2017; Crush & Tawodzera, 2017; Crush et al.,

2017c) that refugees face after relocation. Overall, these publications have provided certain foundational arguments that have facilitated the current widespread scholarly mobilization in support of a separate and nuanced analysis of the topic.

#### 4.1.2 Impact of refugee entrepreneur/ship

The *impact of refugee entrepreneur/ship* second-order theme belongs to the thematic area *distinctiveness of refugee entrepreneur/ship* and consists of publications that focus on various impacts of the phenomenon at the micro/individual, meso/community, and macro/country levels. The first-order themes that represent the publications addressing these different levels of impacts include *self-reliance*, *integration*, *societal development*, and *economy*.

At the micro level, salient research explores the impact of entrepreneurship on refugees' *self-reliance*. While the earliest analysis of this theme was undertaken in the mid-1980s (Fass, 1986), it has been recently extended by contemporary scholars following the mid-2010's "refugee crisis," which has pushed the issue of refugees' *self-reliance* to the top of international and domestic political agendas (Skran & Easton-Calabria, 2020). Embiricos (2020) has explored the challenges associated with refugee *self-reliance*. Similarly, Huq and Venugopal (2021) reexamined *self-reliance* ideology in the context of female REs. Thus, despite the limited research, these studies have revealed that entrepreneurship is not a fast track for refugees' *self-reliance*, given the complex barriers and bureaucratic red tape they encounter during business startup (see also Fong et al., 2007).

On the theme of *integration*, studies suggest that entrepreneurship facilitates refugees' labor market entry (Predojević-Despić & Lukić, 2018) and access to knowledge sources, skills, and social relationships (Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019). Louise and Jiang's (2018) study further shows how entrepreneurship enables refugees to simultaneously achieve the sociocultural, economic, and psychological facets of *integration*. In general, the research untangling the nexus between RE and *integration* remains nascent; thus, the issue has been only marginally addressed (for instance, Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006; Lyon et al., 2007). As such, scientific evidence for thoroughly understanding the issue and drawing reliable conclusions to guide policy and practice is limited.



Additionally, as Louise and Jiang (2018) point out, research typically considers different facets of refugee *integration* mutually exclusive. Hence, scholars can improve this research area by applying comprehensive integration frameworks, dynamic processual approaches, and temporality in their analyses.

At the meso level, RE contributes to *societal development* in urban neighborhoods and cities. Lyon et al.'s (2007) study shows that refugee enterprises enhance social inclusion and community cohesion by serving as community centers and information points for members of a (coethnic) community. Such business-led processes of social capital formation may facilitate the construction of community identities among refugee groups and of their relationships with their wider community. Economically, refugee businesses can augment "local multiplier effects" by enriching spatial practices in cities (Harb et al., 2019) and creating jobs and developing local supply chains in deprived urban neighborhoods (Lyon et al., 2007). In parallel, Kadkoy's (2020) recent investigation of Syrian REs demonstrates that they also serve as economic actors and agents of social cohesion in urban spaces.

Regarding the macro level, a few studies highlight the effects of refugee entrepreneur/ship on a host *economy*. Earlier research exploring the impacts of German-Jewish REs on the recession-hit Dutch economy of the 1930s found that their contributions were actually trivial in economic terms due to their low value-added nature (Moore, 1990). However, this finding largely ignores the unquantifiable roles that REs play in certain sectors of the *economy* by introducing new techniques, processes, and ideas. More recently, studies have focused on the anticipated impacts of refugees as part of the attempts by host governments to make them neoliberal economic agents so that they can contribute to their host *economy* (Gürsel, 2017; Turner, 2020).

#### 4.1.3 Venture creation and operation

The second-order theme *venture creation and operation* falls under the broader theme *determinants of refugee entrepreneur/ship*. Within this theme, publications focus on the *enablers*, *barriers*, and *opportunities* for refugee entrepreneur/ship. Their discussions provide relevant insights for understanding the factors contributing to the emergence and operation of

refugee ventures and the type of challenges REs face when pursuing such endeavors.

The *enablers* first-order theme discusses factors that are critical for the emergence and success of refugee entrepreneurial ventures. At the personal level, scholars underscore the role of imported educational qualifications, technical skills, and knowledge (Palalić et al., 2018; Tömöry, 2008). However, empirical results are occasionally inconsistent. For instance, Williams and Krasniqi (2018) emphasize the effect of acquired human capital. Other scholars underscore previous business experience, cultivated through either owning a venture (Alrawadie et al., 2019; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2007) or working in a family-owned business (Kolb, 2018; Smith-Hefner, 1995), as a relevant factor. In sum, refugees with both generic and entrepreneurship-specific human capital are deemed better able to recognize and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities and possess relevant skills for venture operation.

Another line of research highlights the role of social capital (Iannone & Geraudel, 2018; Nayir, 2018). Specifically, Bizri (2017) argues that the structural, cognitive, and relational dimensions of social capital maximize the possible entrepreneurial opportunities for refugees. Findings also suggest that strong ties facilitate bonding social capital for REs to access inexpensive labor and financing (Abebe & Moog, 2018; Alkhaled, 2018; Ghoul, 2017; Palalić et al., 2018; Sandberg et al., 2019). However, bridging capital or weak ties based on local networks make more of a difference, offering better access to knowledge and information about the legislation and financial capital required for business startup and operation (Abebe & Moog, 2018; Harima et al., 2018; Hartmann & Schilling, 2018; Kolb, 2018). Scholars also argue that refugees benefit from their ethnic enclaves (Kaplan, 1997; Klaesson & Öner, 2020) and transnational networks (Bagwell, 2018; Campbell, 2007; Sandberg et al., 2019). However, the broad applicability of these works' findings is limited, given refugees' chaotic migration patterns and blocked homeland access, which constrain their access to such resources.

On the other hand, two studies incorporate several *enablers*. First, Sepulveda et al.'s (2011) analysis demonstrates how the elements of ethnicity, migratory status, and other similar variables interplay with wider political and economic contexts to shape the diverse processes of refugee business startup and

operation activity. Second, by using Waldinger et al.'s (1990) interactionist model, Tömöry (2008) attributed the emergence and success of ventures among refugees to the interaction between their group characteristics and opportunities for resource mobilization with favorable market conditions and access to business ownership in their host country. Hence, these studies advocate the relevance of a composite and contextualized understanding of refugees' business formation and development process.

Scholars have also investigated the *barriers* refugees face when initiating and operating ventures at different levels. Certain challenges experienced at the individual level include weak host language proficiency, limited cultural awareness (Katis, 2017), poor financial literacy, a lack of local business experience, limited knowledge of market opportunities/strategies (Meyer & Pilkova, 2017; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008), and psychological trauma (Plak & Lagarde, 2018). At the community level, barriers to refugee entrepreneur/ship comprise a lack of social networks, limited access to financing (Iannone, 2018; Johnson & Shaw, 2019), and a lack of formal support (Meyer, 2018). In addition, xenophobia and social exclusion prevent REs from accessing certain markets and selling certain products while reducing their chances of securing startup financing (Maalaoui et al., 2018; Tengeh, 2018). Finally, institutional-level challenges arise from refugees' fractured legal status, bureaucratic hurdles, and strict regulatory regimes, which restrict their access to entrepreneurship (de Lange et al., 2020; Kessler, 2018; Rashid, 2018).

Two publications are within the *opportunities* first-order theme. Omorede and Axelsson's (2018) study explores refugees' opportunity identification strategies during different stages of the entrepreneurial process and reveals their use of a multistrategy opportunity approach and the role of social embeddedness in their identification process. Price and Chacko's (2009) article evaluates the role of concrete (social networks) and abstract (politico-institutional environment) embeddedness in determining the broader opportunity structures or market openings for RE. Their findings underscore the relevance of the mixed-embeddedness framework (Kloosterman et al., 1999) for understanding how the interplay of individual, socioeconomic, and politico-regulatory factors determines the scope of refugees' opportunity structures and their availability, appeal, and accessibility.

#### 4.1.4 Institutional environment

The second-order theme *institutional environment* is represented by three first-order themes: *institutions*, *entrepreneurial ecosystem*, and *institutional voids*. Publications in these themes explore the diverse effects of host countries' institutional environment on refugee entrepreneur/ship. Scholars have thus addressed factors related to both favorable/supportive and hostile institutional contexts.

On the positive side, the first-order theme *institutions* concerns different aspects of host institutional arrangements that support refugee entrepreneur/ship. Scholars discuss the relevant policies and legal situations that strengthen refugees' participation and competence in entrepreneurship (Chliova et al., 2018; De Jager, 2015). Relatedly, Baktir and Watson (2020) highlight how institutional trust fosters increased refugee entrepreneurial activity. Some countries offer special assistance to refugees in the form of federal business grants to facilitate access to startup capital and financing (Miyares, 1998). Research also underscores the role of different types of assistance, such as microfinance initiatives and entrepreneurship education programs provided by charitable institutions and aid agencies (Ayadurai, 2011; Idris, 2019; Nayak et al., 2019; Sinclair, 1993). However, it is unclear exactly how influential supportive host institutions are on refugees' entrepreneurial intentions and behavior or what type of refugees benefit the most from such contexts.

At the meso level, studies reveal the positive effects of favorable normative-regional-institutional environments on RE. Specifically, Singh (1994) and Bristol-Faulhammer (2017) underscore the influence of the legitimacy accorded to entrepreneurial activity in a host region. Their findings demonstrate that a region with cultural norms that foster entrepreneurship creates favorable business conditions, rules, and regulations for refugees to engage in business startup. Similarly, Baltaci's (2017) article discusses the positive impacts of regional pro-enterprise sociocultural values and thought patterns on refugees' entrepreneurial tendencies and intentions.

Similarly, research has explored the *entrepreneurial ecosystem* in receiving countries to account for the types of support systems for refugee entrepreneur/ship and their effects (Birdthistle et al., 2019). Thus, scholars have evaluated various entrepreneurial

infrastructures that are pertinent to refugees, such as business apprenticeships (Latowsky & Grierson, 1992), startup programs (Marchand & Dijkhuizen, 2018), and incubators (Collins, 2017; Harima et al., 2019). Findings indicate that refugee-specific business incubators particularly increase refugees' entrepreneurial development by alleviating their liabilities of foreignness and fostering their embeddedness in their new host context (Harima et al., 2019; Meister & Mauer, 2019). Despite these insights, however, current research on this theme still lacks holistic and systematic analysis. Hence, future studies should employ widely acknowledged frameworks, such as the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Cohen, 2006), to produce a more systemic understanding than the current factor-level analyses allow.

Finally, several recent publications disclose how RE emerges in host environments without formal institutions for supporting business operations, referred to in the literature as *institutional voids* (Khanna & Palepu, 1997). Under this theme, an emerging research area investigates the dynamics of small business activity that occurs in camp settings, termed "refugee camp entrepreneurship" (Kachkar, 2019; Tavakoli, 2020). Concerning this topic, scholars have identified the motivations for entrepreneurial actions in refugee camps (de la Chaux & Haugh, 2020; Shepherd et al., 2020) and the underlying factors that enable or restrict the emergence and development of this phenomenon (de la Chaux, 2018; Heilbrunn, 2019; Jauhiainen & Eyvazlu, 2020; Kachkar et al., 2016; Omata, 2018). In addition, two articles have evaluated local and international policies (Tavakoli, 2020) and economic distortions (Werker, 2007) that affect refugee camp entrepreneurialism. Another related research area explores how refugees with a marginal and precarious status start and operate their own businesses in hostile, extreme, and precarious host environments (Barak-Bianco & Rajjman, 2015; Omeje & Mwangi, 2014; Refai et al., 2018) that are marked by xenophobia (Bhagat, 2020) and racial capitalism (Hawthorne, 2019). In such resource-poor environments, refugees' entrepreneurial actions function as survival strategies to fulfill their own needs and those of their communities through bricolage (Heilbrunn, 2019; Heilbrunn & Rosenfeld, 2018).

As highlighted in various studies, refugees' entrepreneurial motivations, experiences, and outcomes vary depending on their host country's institutional

context (see also Harima et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the diverse situational and institutional circumstances for refugee entrepreneur/ship contribute to the heterogeneity of the phenomenon. In addition, research carried out in different and contrasting institutional contexts provides varying accounts and understandings. As such, the institutional heterogeneity and context-specific nature of findings make the insights from existing literature in many ways ungeneralizable beyond the empirical setting of a given study.

## 4.2 Cluster II: Refugee entrepreneur/ship as a career path

The second cluster comprises publications addressing topics such as why refugees leap into self-employment, their potential to be entrepreneurial agents, and the types of refugee entrepreneur/ship. Collectively, these publications comprise the thematic area *refugee entrepreneur/ship as a career path*. Studies in this thematic area are subclassified into two second-order themes based on their focus on either *entrepreneurship potential* or *type of refugee entrepreneur/ship* (see Table 5).

### 4.2.1 Entrepreneurship potential

The second-order theme *entrepreneurship potential* consists of three first-order themes, i.e., *self-selection*, *motivations*, and *occupational pathways*. Broadly, these themes encompass publications addressing different issues related to refugees' individual choice or propensity to engage in entrepreneurial self-employment in the aftermath of their forced migration to a new host country.

The theme of *self-selection* investigates why refugees engage in entrepreneurship and the different factors that affect their choice. According to Mawson and Kasem (2019), refugees' entry into self-employment is predicted by their entrepreneurial intention (EI), which is shaped by their perceived capabilities that are linked to the refugee lived experience, particularly their personal experience of migration. A similar study (Villares-Varela et al., 2017), drawing on Sen's (1990) capability approach, associates refugees' entrepreneurial career choice with their higher aspiration levels, involving the possession of positive business entry motivations, growth plans, and the requisite capabilities to realize them. Additionally,

Obschonka et al. (2018) underscore the role of proactive personality characteristics, such as resilience and self-efficacy, in fostering refugees' EI. Thus, by analyzing RE at the individual level, these studies provide relevant knowledge on how refugees' personal agency plays an active role in orchestrating their entrepreneurial career.

A limited stream of research has explored refugees' entrepreneurial *motivations*. According to scholars, such *motivations* arise from a diverse range of personal drives, such as earning a living (Alexandre et al., 2019), finding independence (Kupferberg, 2008), and a forward-looking approach to the future (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006). Refugees who are motivated by a strong entrepreneurial identity also maintain a deep emotional connection to prior entrepreneurial actions (Alexandre et al., 2019; Dana, 2012) and a desire to use their venture as an identity vehicle (Kupferberg, 2008). Further motivational antecedents are related to prosocial concerns, including a strong sense of responsibility to invest in family members' future quality of life (Eimermann & Karlsson, 2018) and to achieve sociopolitical visibility (Ruparanganda et al., 2018). While this line of research does provide some insights into the motivational antecedents of RE, it remains marginal in the literature and thus theoretically underdeveloped.

Finally, two publications have investigated the factors that structure entrepreneurship as an *occupational pathway* for refugees. In their analysis of refugees' entrepreneurial trajectories and outcomes in relation to employment and persistent inactivity, Backman et al. (2020) underscore the relevance of demographic factors and education. Their study shows that older and female refugees transition into self-employment due to their higher probability of experiencing recurrent or prolonged periods of inactivity, reflecting their less successful labor market integration trajectories. Moreover, educational qualifications increase the chances of such refugees embarking on a pathway of rapid transition to employment, which subsequently leads to self-employment. Another study demonstrates the effects of refugees' dual embeddedness in their home and host countries on their career reconstruction process through entrepreneurship (Jiang et al., 2017). Therefore, both of these studies highlight the need to articulate the wider framework of refugees' *occupational pathways* that are linked to their individual circumstances, i.e., human capital,

demographic characteristics, employment transitions, and contexts.

#### 4.2.2 Types of refugee entrepreneur/ship

One of the first-order themes under the *types of refugee entrepreneur/ship* second-order theme is *refugee women entrepreneur/ship*. In this theme, an emergent strand of literature explores the entrepreneurial motives (Mehtap & Al-Saidi, 2018), challenges (Ayadurai, 2011), and coping strategies (Alkhaled, 2018) of women refugees in enforced, fragile, and strained circumstances. These studies also investigate the nature of their enterprises (Ritchie, 2018) and the resources they employ to overcome sociopolitically and economically obstructive environments (Al-Dajani et al., 2016). By analyzing RE within deeply patriarchal and masculinized contexts, these studies demonstrate its ability to help reduce poverty and empower women.

Research has also investigated this issue in highly advanced host contexts. Accordingly, a few studies have focused on refugee women's patterns of self-employment (Gold, 2014) and entrepreneurial experiences (Senthanaar et al., 2020) and on the sociocultural capital development processes of their businesses (Yeröz, 2019). Their findings show that the entrepreneurial motives of and resources for women refugees contrast with those highlighted in the research on the experiences of refugee men (Gold, 2014). In addition, these studies have uncovered a web of multifaceted contextual factors—family, class relations, ethnicity, legal status, and cultural outlooks—that affects the phenomenon, implying the relevance of an intersectional analysis (Senthanaar et al., 2020; Yeröz, 2019).

Given the legal hurdles and precarious livelihoods refugees face, informal entrepreneurial activity functions as one of their survival mechanisms (Mehtap & Al-Saidi, 2018). As such, publications in the *informal refugee entrepreneur/ship* first-order theme have explored diverse topics, such as the interplay of factors affecting the emergence of RE in informal settings (Northcote & Dodson, 2015) and its significance for refugees and their host society (Atasü-Topcuoğlu, 2019). Other works have focused on the various strategies (Basok, 1989, 1993) and resources (Campbell, 2005) used by refugees to ensure the survival and success of their informal ventures in unregulated contexts. Some studies have also sought to

critically evaluate the policy environment where refugees create and operate informal businesses (Crush et al., 2017a, b). Despite its limited scope, such research thus provides an evidence-based illustration of the marked prevalence of informal RE activity, its sociospatial variations, and the motives for engaging in such endeavors, all of which merit further scholarly investigation.

The final first-order theme, *social refugee entrepreneur/ship*, comprises publications focusing on social entrepreneurial initiatives for and by refugees. Recent research has uncovered the role that social enterprises for refugees play in enhancing their self-reliance (Kong et al., 2018; Kong, 2011), facilitating their vocational integration (Freudenberg & Halberstadt, 2018), and increasing their household expenditure while improving food security (Sahyoun et al., 2019). Additionally, Harima and Freudenberg (2020) examine the cocreation of opportunities for social initiatives by a team composed of local and refugee entrepreneurs. According to their study, such mixed social venture teams help refugees overcome their liabilities of foreignness and gain legitimacy when founding a business.

Studies focusing on social ventures by refugees investigate the opportunities and challenges for such endeavors (Gonzales et al., 2013) and the determinant factors for their emergence (Modesti et al., 2020). Some of these factors include the attainment of legal refugee status and homeland democratization (Lee, 2018), resilience (Freudenberg, 2018), and social and psychological capital (Modesti et al., 2020). Overall, research on *social refugee entrepreneur/ship* introduces concepts, such as social enterprises and social entrepreneurship, into the RE literature that help overcome the tendency of prevailing studies to reduce the phenomenon to a purely livelihood pursuit. However, despite providing a promising research avenue with incredible potential to support the development of approaches that foster the long-term integration of refugees, this topic has received less academic attention than others (Freudenberg & Halberstadt, 2018).

#### 4.3 Trends in the temporal development of research themes

To trace the evolution of RE research trends, this section outlines the temporal development of its various thematic areas. This timeline analysis shows

that cluster I constitutes several of the earlier studies, which emerged during the formative period of RE research. In this cluster, the first-order themes of *characteristics*, *enablers*, *barriers*, *institutions*, and *institutional voids* were rather steady topical areas during the study period. However, in recent years, scholars have focused on understanding the *enablers* for (Alrawadieh et al., 2019; Klaesson & Öner, 2020) and *barriers* to RE (de Lange et al., 2020; Kessler, 2018; Rashid, 2018), as well as its role in refugees' *self-reliance* and *integration* (Embiricos, 2020; Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019). Similarly, several scholars have shown how RE unfolds in both supportive institutional settings (Birdthistle et al., 2019; Harima et al., 2019) and in *institutional voids* (Heilbrunn, 2019; Heilbrunn & Rosenfeld, 2018). These topical trends can be considered sound developments, given the current political interest in understanding factors fostering or hindering RE.

In comparison, the bulk of cluster II publications, except for Basok's (1989, 1993) contributions, emerged either during the refugee movements of the mid-2000s or after the "refugee crisis" of the mid-2010s. Research on *informal refugee entrepreneur/ship* has been relatively stable over time. This theme has received continual interest due to the legal barriers refugees face, which often push them toward a gray economy and its relevance to their livelihood. However, more recent trends relate to refugees' entrepreneurial *motivations* (Alexandre et al., 2019, Ruparaganda et al., 2018) and *social refugee entrepreneur/ship* (Harima & Freudenberg, 2020; Lee, 2018; Modesti et al., 2020). Interest in the latter is fueled by the rise of social enterprises as strategic responses to facilitate refugee integration (Chliova et al., 2018). Another growing theme is *refugee women entrepreneur/ship*, with scholars showing an increasing interest in feminist and intersectional analyses of RE (Senthanar et al., 2020; Yeröz, 2019).

To conclude, the extant themes of RE research are only loosely intertwined due to highly fragmented scholarly efforts and limited interdisciplinary conversations. Despite the prevailing topical and thematic variations, however, RE research in general has prompted increased scholarly mobilization in recent years (see also Heilbrunn & Iannone, 2020). This has primarily been triggered by discourse concerning the global "refugee crisis," where entrepreneurship has surfaced as an unobstructed career path and means

of upward socioeconomic mobility for refugees in their host societies (Harima et al., 2021). Relatedly, recent studies strive to investigate why refugees self-select an entrepreneurial career (Mawson & Kasem, 2019; Obschonka et al., 2018) and identify the influence of institutional heterogeneity on their enterprising behavior (de la Chaux & Haugh, 2020; Shepherd et al., 2020). However, the research theme that compares refugees with nonrefugee entrepreneur/ship by delving into the *characteristics* and conceptual *delineation* of RE remains underdeveloped. Such research is nevertheless particularly relevant for maintaining the distinctiveness of RE as both a specific socioeconomic phenomenon and an emerging research stream.

#### 4.4 Analysis of REs in the literature

Before concluding the thematic review, this section sketches a broad picture of REs based on the extant descriptive data on refugee samples in the relevant empirical studies. Accordingly, the analysis reveals incredible heterogeneity among REs regarding their backgrounds and conditions for entrepreneurship. For instance, most earlier studies, which are categorized under cluster I, focused on homogenous groups of refugees escaping the collapse of the Soviet Union (Halter, 1995; Miyares, 1998), Southeast Asia during and after the Vietnam War (Fass, 1986; Johnson, 2000; Kaplan, 1997; Smith-Hefner, 1995), and Eastern Europe (Tömöry, 2008) and discussed their entrepreneurial activity in advanced host contexts, such as the USA and Canada. These refugee groups shared strong similarities with immigrant entrepreneurs in terms of their high level of education, social class position, and urban experience. In addition, they were well established in their host countries at the time of the research, similar to their immigrant counterparts, benefiting from sociocultural networks, ethnic enclaves, and institutional support.

In contrast, publications from the last decade (most cluster II publications) have focused on varied refugee groups from developing regions, such as Africa (Crush et al., 2017a, b) and the Middle East (Harima & Freudenberg, 2020; Meister & Mauer, 2019), who start their businesses in a variety of host contexts. In some of the studies, the refugees are recent arrivals with a single ethnic origin, such as Syrians (Kadkoy, 2020), Afghans (Jauhiainen & Eyvazlu, 2020), or Palestinians (Shepherd et al., 2020), with diverse

levels of human and social capital and experiencing different legal and institutional circumstances, either in supportive environments such as Europe or fragile settings, such as refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Other studies have focused on diverse entrepreneurial refugees without focusing on a single ethnocultural origin in both institutionally void (Crush et al., 2017c) and supportive host environments (Modesti et al., 2020).

In general, the heterogeneous backgrounds of refugees and the diverse institutional contexts for their entrepreneurial activity pose tremendous challenges for scholars to enable knowledge accumulation on the phenomenon of RE (cf. Harima et al., 2021). In addition, the fragmentary availability of descriptive data regarding refugee samples in several empirical studies (e.g., Kachkar et al., 2016; Omorede & Axelsson, 2018; Tavakoli, 2020) adds to this issue. Hence, this study suggests that scholars need to provide a minimum level of explicit information on refugees' country of origin, host country, human and social capital, type of business established, sector and industry, and time spent in their receiving country. Greater clarity regarding the samples of a study is the first step toward opening a pathway for demonstrating empirical commonalities and differences, paving the way for improved scholarly communication at the conceptual level (Gruenhagen et al., 2020). To address the challenges of refugees' heterogeneity, the RE research stream requires a clear operational definition for the construct of "refugee entrepreneur/ship" that demarcates the boundary conditions of salient empirical research.

## 5 Discussion

This study systematically and thematically investigates the landscape of RE research, which extends across multiple disciplines. Drawing on 131 peer-reviewed publications, the review offers insights into the nature and current status of RE research, authorship and collaboration, disciplinary breadth, scholarly focus, conceptual orientations, and thematic areas, which have characterized this research stream during the study period. The analysis shows that while the construct "refugee entrepreneur/ship" first appeared in the research context in the mid-1980s (Fass, 1986), it was only after nearly three decades, following the "refugee crisis" in 2015, which provoked intensive discussions

on the phenomenon that RE garnered a broad scholarly mobilization (see also Harima et al., 2021). Accordingly, this study also indicates that early calls for a nuanced and separate analysis of RE (Gold, 1992; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006) have been answered by contemporary scholars, as evidenced by the release of an edited book on RE (Heilbrunn et al., 2018), a special issue on the topic in the journal of Small Business Economics (Desai et al., 2020), and dramatic growths in the rate of scientific production and the volume of salient literature on the phenomenon. Hence, RE can be regarded as an emerging research stream. However, the literature analysis sheds light on four key issues with potential implications for its further advancement; these are elaborated below.

The first issue concerns the type of academic disciplines involved in extant RE research. The analysis suggests that RE research initially flourished and progressed primarily in the broader social sciences (Basok, 1989; Latowsky & Grierson, 1992), ethnic and migration studies (Fass, 1986; Gold, 1988), and humanities (Moore, 1990), before recently capturing the interest of management and entrepreneurship researchers (Bizri, 2017; Shepherd et al., 2020). While this partly explains the qualitative and descriptive nature of the bulk of extant literature, it has also profoundly shaped the focus and direction of RE research, ultimately determining what is known about the phenomenon. Specifically, the limited engagement of entrepreneurship scholars in knowledge production may have disconnected the research stream from some of the latest advancements in general entrepreneurship research regarding scholarly focus and research orientation.

It is argued that contemporary entrepreneurship research has undergone a systematic shift from investigating the traits of enterprising individuals toward understanding how they evolve as entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial behavior (Moroz & Hindle, 2012). However, this shift has not yet occurred in the RE literature. The review reveals that most salient research specifically focuses on the characteristics of refugee entrepreneur/ship (Freiling & Harima, 2018; Gold, 1988, 1992; Johnson, 2000), the nature of refugees' entrepreneurial ventures and resources (Bizri, 2017; Campbell, 2007; Sandberg et al., 2019), and ethnocultural and structural factors, which are the sources of refugees' advantages or disadvantages during business venturing (Sepulveda et al., 2011; Tömöry, 2008). As such, knowledge of how refugees

actively orchestrate their journey toward entrepreneurship after relocating to new host countries and what actions they take to create new ventures remains limited.

Another problematic issue concerns RE studies' theoretical approaches. The analysis suggests that current research follows what Keupp and Gassmann (2009) have labeled a "phenomenon-driven approach." That is, scholars primarily focus on empirically mapping and explaining RE by pulling in eclectic concepts and arguments from diverse disciplines. However, empirical evidence on RE is not proportionately supported by sufficient levels of theorization or conceptual foundations. Furthermore, in publications where researchers draw on eclectic theoretical frameworks, there are only limited efforts toward developing a clear theory that might contribute to original approaches or concepts. While such situations seem natural for emerging research streams before the development of any domain-specific theory, theory-driven research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of refugee entrepreneur/ship and to advance scholarship on it (cf. Busenitz et al., 2003).

The review also indicates that a considerable portion of RE research is conceptually grounded in the cultural, structural, and mixed-embeddedness approaches that have been borrowed from the field of immigrant entrepreneurship. However, as REs represent specific groups of migrant entrepreneurs (Christensen et al., 2020), these three approaches can provide only limited insights into some of their unique entrepreneurial characteristics and behaviors that mark them out from immigrant, diaspora, and ethnic entrepreneurs. In addition, none of the approaches have sufficient theoretical foundations and antecedents to fully account for entrepreneurial agency, which is relevant to understanding how refugees proactively pursue entrepreneurship in their host country. The culturalist approach associates refugees' entrepreneurial entry and outcomes with their home cultural values, group characteristics, and resources, while the structural and mixed-embeddedness approaches relate them to the conditions in refugees' host country structure. As such, these approaches lack the conceptual mechanisms for understanding the true dynamics of RE, involving the interplay between individuals and context (Jack & Anderson, 2002) by overstating the latter. The above discussions thus underscore the need to advance the theoretical foundations of RE.

The third issue relates to methodology. The analysis in this paper indicates that most RE literature is generated with a qualitative research design, such as ethnography or case studies. Data are collected through interviews and focus groups, often involving limited samples. However, quantitative empirical research is incredibly scarce, and the few extant quantitative studies are not based on survey data with large-scale sample sets. One of the primary reasons for this is that refugees belong to what scholars typically call “hard-to-reach” or “hidden” groups (Bloch, 2004)—that is, subgroups of a population whose members are difficult to identify and recruit for the purpose of survey sampling because of their characteristics and precarious circumstances (Duncan et al., 2003).

Scholars have revealed some of the challenges involved in recruiting refugees for a statistically powerful survey design (Leiler et al., 2019). First, migration agencies handling refugees’ protection claims and administering subsistence support collect their records, but they will not provide researchers with sampling lists due to increased data protection and confidentiality requirements (Bloch, 2004). In addition, labor force surveys and population registers either lack the required level of detail or do not include the necessary variables, such as refugee status, to identify subjects (Bloch, 1999). Hence, there are no clear sampling frames for refugee groups that are available to researchers, as their sizes and boundaries are often unknown (Shaghghi et al., 2011). Implementing a snowballing approach does not resolve this issue due to its selection bias and limited validity and generalizability. As such, the recruitment of refugees for statistically robust survey designs often creates methodological complexities regarding access and representativeness.

The final issue concerns the lack of a unified understanding of refugee entrepreneur/ship in the literature, whether as a phenomenon or as an area of scholarly investigation. Currently, the RE research stream comprises a compendium of loosely connected studies with an interest in the interface between forced cross-border migration and entrepreneurship. In fact, all the reviewed publications conceptually align with a fundamental notion that demarcates the boundaries for inquiry into the focal phenomenon—that is, entrepreneurial activity undertaken by individuals, who are formally recognized as refugees in their

new host country (Fuller-Love et al., 2006). However, there have been no attempts to provide an unequivocal operational definition of refugee entrepreneur/ship that clearly demarcates the domain and research scope of this emerging research stream.

Inevitably, the absence of a coherent understanding and operational definition has caused certain problems. First, scholars have been working independently without building on each other’s work by providing their own accounts and perspectives on the phenomenon. This situation not only thwarts the accumulation of knowledge on the topic but also, along with other factors, impels the fragmentation of RE research, with downstream implications for its viability as a research area. Second, researchers lack established boundary conditions for empirical work, rendering it difficult to conceptually demarcate RE from other closely related phenomena. For example, a recent article conceptually places the phenomenon at the intersection of immigrant, transnational, and diaspora entrepreneurship (Sandberg et al., 2019). However, its authors’ understanding is influenced by the nature of their sample, that is, well-established and integrated refugees who share several similarities with immigrant, transnational, and diaspora entrepreneurs in terms of their social capital and transnational networks.

Accordingly, to facilitate knowledge integration and transcend these theoretical inconsistencies in RE research, the following questions require definitive answers: “Who is a refugee entrepreneur?” and “When does one stop being a refugee entrepreneur?” Clearly defined conceptual boundaries can provide the basis for creating an agreed-upon scope that distinguishes the domain of RE research from adjacent fields, thus enhancing the research stream. The following section therefore attempts to provide guidance to facilitate this while addressing other related issues raised earlier.

## 6 Future research directions

Table 6 below provides directions for future research endeavors based on the preceding analysis and discussion of the literature. The subsequent sections outline the focus, theory, methodology, and scope of this future research.



**Table 6** Suggestions for future research in terms of research focus, theory, methodology, and scope

Suggestions for future research
<p>Research focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How newly-arrived refugees fare as entrepreneurs by actively orchestrating their venture founding journey, and what they actually do to create new ventures.</li> </ul> <p>Theory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Apply the entrepreneurial process perspective to investigate the dynamics of RE, presenting the nexus between individual REs and their multifaceted host context (Jack &amp; Anderson, 2002).</li> <li>- Use agency-based approaches to gain insights into how refugees exercise their entrepreneurial agency during venture startup.</li> <li>- Make use of cognitive/psychological theories, such as Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), to understand how REs actively influence the prerequisites for new venture creation.</li> <li>- Use the ME framework (Kloosterman, 2010) and the various branches of institutional theory (Bruton et al., 2018) to illuminate the multiple spheres of circumstances, conditions, or environments in the host country that may either enable and/or constrain the persistency of refugees' entrepreneurial agency toward venture creation.</li> </ul> <p>Methodology:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Draw on longitudinal and prospective research designs that help to capture RE as it unfolds.</li> <li>- Conduct cross-national and cross-continental studies to analyze RE in different social, cultural, economic and institutional environments, and capture the influence of contextual heterogeneity on the phenomenon.</li> <li>- Develop highly efficient methodological approaches for sampling and recruiting entrepreneurial refugees for large-scale surveys. One emerging sampling approach for quantitative empirical research involves the use of social networking sites, such as drawing on posts and paid Facebook ads (Dusek et al., 2015).</li> </ul> <p>Scope of research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Forced migrants or refugees engaged in business start-up activity during the early stages of their resettlement in new host country as recent arrivals, before reaching the stages of refugeehood.</li> </ul>

Source: author's own table

## 6.1 Research focus and theory

Regarding research focus, future studies might benefit from investigating the journey through which refugees emerge as entrepreneurs or create new ventures, since this knowledge is currently lacking in the prevailing literature. As the review reveals, current research predominantly explains why refugees engage in entrepreneurship in their host countries by highlighting the various individual-, community-, and structural-level factors that confer advantages or pose disadvantages. However, these explanations elucidate only the factors that influence refugees' entrepreneurial motivations, strategies, and outcomes but do not explain how they actively orchestrate their journey toward entrepreneurship and what actions they take to create new ventures. Scholars argue that the phenomenon of new venture creation, which entails the entrepreneurial journey leading to organizational emergence, should be a core focus in entrepreneurship research (Wiklund et al., 2011). Accordingly, this paper suggests that future research endeavors should focus on refugees' entrepreneurial journey to generate valuable insights into the preorganizational intricacies through which refugee ventures come into existence.

Simultaneously, understanding refugees' entrepreneurial journey requires theoretical frameworks that place equal emphasis on personal agency and the societal structure. Scholars argue that entrepreneurship involves volitional decisions and actions taking place within a social structure, which serves as both medium and outcome (McMullen et al., 2021). The capacity of individuals to volitionally influence their entrepreneurial decisions and actions reflects their entrepreneurial agency (McMullen & Dimov, 2013). Implicitly, if not explicitly, entrepreneurship scholars typically treat structure-agency duality as mutually dependent and recursive in their analyses (Jack & Anderson, 2002). However, as stated above, the predominant approaches in RE research lack sufficient conceptual foundations and antecedents to account for this duality and dynamics, as they overemphasize either the cultural or structural contexts of the phenomenon in isolation.

Accordingly, future research needs to utilize conceptual frameworks that can express how individual REs are embedded in multiple spheres of entrepreneurial contexts (Garud et al., 2007). In the entrepreneurship literature, there are several established theories with potential complementarities that can

provide the conceptual framework for an agency-versus-structure understanding of RE. For instance, Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a proven psychologically based agency model. As a theory overemphasizing individual actors and their behavior, the TPB helps capture the cognitive mechanisms through which refugees consciously and actively exercise their agency to volitionally direct their thoughts and actions during business creation (Kautonen et al., 2015). Therefore, the TPB can be a relevant theory for understanding how entrepreneurial agency is exercised by refugees.

On the other hand, institutional theory (Brunton et al., 2018) and Kloosterman's (2010) mixed-embeddedness approach, which are less convincing regarding agentic discretion but strong with respect to structure, can aid the contextualization of refugees' entrepreneurial journey into their specific circumstances. Institutional theory, with its regulatory, cultural-cognitive, and normative pillars and its distinction between formal and informal institutions, can help account for the multitude of institutional forces that influence RE. Moreover, the mixed-embeddedness approach offers a strong analytical framework to account for the multidimensional social, economic, and politico-regulatory aspects of context, which bear upon refugees' entrepreneurial activity by determining the scope, accessibility, and attractiveness of opportunity structures for business startup.

Overall, this section stresses that future analyses of RE must place sufficient weight on agency with equal attention to the structural context where agency operates (cf. Villares-Varela et al., 2017). Hence, by coalescing the TPB and other agency-based theories with mixed embeddedness or the various branches of institutional theory, scholars can forge a conceptual base that is sensitive to refugees' entrepreneurial agency while also equally acknowledging the multiple layers of host structure that enable and/or constrain its persistency toward venture creation.

## 6.2 Methodological suggestions

Methodologically, future research needs to employ approaches that capture the complexity inherent in RE. This first entails applying a longitudinal research design based on prospective data collection strategies to study RE as it unfolds. Scholars argue that entrepreneurship is a processual phenomenon rather than

a static event (Keupp & Gassmann, 2009), which unfolds over time and hence is best captured through prospective or contemporaneous research designs (Langley, 2009). Second, future researchers should apply cross-national and cross-continental research designs to analyze refugees' entrepreneurial activity in different social, cultural, economic, and institutional environments. Capturing the influence of contextual heterogeneity on RE can further enrich the understanding of its nature, dynamics, and specificity. Finally, future studies should also employ advanced quantitative research methods by using large-scale survey designs and sophisticated data analysis techniques, which correspondingly offer opportunities for producing interesting insights.

Nevertheless, as stated before, entrepreneurial refugees are difficult to identify and recruit in large numbers through traditional sampling methods (Bloch, 2004). As such, researchers need to find alternative methods of survey recruitment. One increasingly popular approach for identifying and building samples of hard-to-reach groups for empirical quantitative research involves the use of social networking sites and digital technology (Stern et al., 2017). Specifically, there is an emerging body of literature that evaluates Facebook posts and paid advertisements (Dusek et al., 2015). As argued in this paper, this method has vast potential for RE research, given the evidence that dispersed groups of refugees widely use social media and smartphones for migration decision-making and for coping with everyday challenges (Dekker et al., 2018). However, this approach has been primarily developed and statistically validated in the context of medical and health-related research (Iannelli et al., 2020), so its application to RE research requires further empirical examination and validation. Nevertheless, the use of more innovative and efficient sampling techniques will provide RE research with a springboard for much-needed advances in methodology and analysis, allowing it to attain higher levels of academic legitimacy.

## 6.3 Scope of research

RE is a complex phenomenon at the interface of the experiences of conflict and forced cross-border migration and of starting a business in new host contexts. This means that the construct entails an implicit assumption about the existence of special

preconditions for refugees' entrepreneurial activity, which render their enterprising behaviors and characteristics different from those of other migrants, such as immigrant, diaspora, and transnational entrepreneurs, who have voluntarily relocated to their host countries (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006, 2008). Hence, the scope of research on the topic should encompass and extend the dimensions that inherently constitute REs and that differentiate them from voluntary migrant entrepreneurs.

In contrast to their counterparts, REs face specifically disadvantageous circumstances when founding a business that are linked to their experience of disruptive life events caused by involuntary displacement, blocked home country access, and complex legal situation (Desai et al., 2020). For instance, immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurs can access critical startup resources from their chainlike ethnocultural networks. However, refugees cannot create and maintain such networks because their movements are fundamentally sudden, chaotic and uncontrolled (Gold, 1992). Specifically, ethnic entrepreneurs can pool uncoded inputs of finance, customer base, and labor supply from their vast coethnic networks and enclaves by virtue of their membership in a group that is united by a common ethnocultural heritage (Drori et al., 2009). However, the entrepreneurial networks of refugees are smaller due to their diverse origins, and refugee dispersal policies in many host countries make it impossible for them to form similar bonds of coethnic solidarity. In addition, unlike transnational and diaspora entrepreneurs, REs cannot strategically maintain trade relationships or mobilize resources across the transnational space between their home and host countries. Indeed, in comparison to other migrant populations, during the early stages of relocation, refugees face stricter regulatory regimes and greater institutional voids, as well as increased psychological instabilities, all of which affect their business startup activities (Christensen et al., 2020).

While the aforementioned aspects distinguish refugee entrepreneur/ship, they also reflect its temporal boundedness as a phenomenon. As discussed above, refugees are distinct entrepreneurial agents because they suffer the most from the liabilities that extend from their refugeehood and foreignness to their host and homeland institutions during their earlier periods of resettlement (Harima et al., 2021). However, they may not significantly differ from the other

entrepreneurial groups once they reach the stages of what Nguyen (2019) calls "refugeetude"—the end of being a refugee—which can be marked by advanced integration and the acquisition of a new nationality (see Sandberg et al., 2019). As they become better embedded in the social, economic, and political spheres of their host society, refugees may also have more access to resources that are critical for entrepreneurship (Kloosterman, 2010). In addition, with new citizenship, refugees' disconnected homeland ties change (Costello, 2017), helping them to access homeland resources and engage in transnational entrepreneurship (Halilovich & Efendić, 2021). Hence, it will benefit the research stream by limiting the scope of RE inquiry to REs who have not yet reached the state of refugeetude.

Therefore, REs can be defined as forced migrants who engage in the steps of starting a new business in their host country during the early stages of resettlement, as new or recent arrivals, before attaining refugeetude. The purpose here is not to oversimplify the refugee experience or to argue that refugees discard their entire lived refugee experience at a stroke, as typical behaviors specifically related to psychological trauma may remain indefinitely (Silove et al., 2019). Indeed, enduring geopolitical conflicts entail that some enterprising refugees, such as Palestinians (Shepherd et al., 2020) and Tibetans (Nayak et al., 2019), will remain in forced displacement for generations (Harima et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the temporal dimension in the conceptualization of RE helps maintain its specificity as a phenomenon, construct, and research stream that is distinct from those mentioned above and to provide boundary conditions for future RE empirical research.

## 7 Conclusion

This paper contributes to the scholarly investigation of RE by systematically and thematically navigating the knowledge landscape of this emerging research stream across diverse academic disciplines, taking stock of a repository of the existing literature, and tracing its emergence, nature, and development. The analysis highlights certain key issues that are specifically pertinent to the advancement of RE research.

First, there is a foundational body of work that demonstrates the need for specific and separate analyses of RE by drawing on the ontological differences of

refugees from immigrants, which reflect their distinctive entrepreneurial characteristics and behavior (Gold, 1988, 1992; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006, 2008). Today, the recurring calls for a nuanced investigation of the topic are being well received by contemporary academics, entailing a growing recognition of RE as distinct from similar research areas concerning entrepreneurship among voluntary migrants. However, this study suggests that it would benefit the research stream to focus on enterprising refugees before they reach “refugeetude”—the end of the refugee experience—since the liabilities caused by their newness and foreignness to host institutions make them distinct entrepreneurial agents.

Second, for the research stream to obtain greater academic legitimacy, it needs to upgrade its methodologies by adopting advanced research methods involving large-scale surveys, longitudinal designs, and sophisticated analyses. However, entrepreneurial refugees are hard-to-reach populations and are often difficult to identify in official statistics and national population registers. As such, recruiting them in large numbers will require innovative sampling approaches. One already successful strategy in this regard could be sampling via social media by using, for instance, Facebook posts and paid advertisements (see Iannelli et al., 2020).

Third, knowledge production on refugee entrepreneurship has mostly been carried out by social and behavioral scientists, whose research primarily focuses on the sociocultural and structural determinants of the phenomenon. Currently, the literature neglects issues such as how refugees fare as entrepreneurs by actively organizing their entrepreneurial journey after their relocation and what actions they take to create new ventures. Accordingly, these issues warrant future scholarly endeavors.

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