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► **To cite this version:**

Eunice Cascant. How entrepreneurial ecosystem embeddedness reduces institutional bottlenecks faced by women refugees' social entrepreneurs in France. Diana International Research Conference 2023, Babson college - Wellesley, massachusetts 02482,; <https://www.babson.edu/>, Jun 2023, Wellesley, United States. hal-04134044

**HAL Id: hal-04134044**

<https://univ-lyon3.hal.science/hal-04134044v1>

Submitted on 20 Jun 2023

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**How entrepreneurial ecosystem embeddedness reduces institutional bottlenecks faced by women refugees' social entrepreneurs in France.**

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** Refugee-inclusive entrepreneurship has become one of the grand challenges of this century. Although it opens up entrepreneurial opportunities to refugees despite their race, gender and ethnicity, it is still far from being achieved. Unfortunately, research in the field of entrepreneurship and other domains has not fully explored gender notions emerging from cultural, political and social issues that impact the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Brush et al., 2020) . This paper extends research path calls on gender entrepreneurship toward societal concerns about diversity and inclusion more broadly (Jennings & Tonoyan, 2022). As we examine how embeddedness within host countries' entrepreneurial ecosystems reduces institutional bottlenecks faced by women refugee social entrepreneurs in their venturing processes. We focus on women refugee social entrepreneurs (WRSE) for three reasons.

(a) Their migration trajectory differs from that of voluntary migrants and has an impact on their social networks (Backman et al., 2021). (b) They are not able to fully benefit from the host country's entrepreneurial ecosystems due to blocked mobility and disconnections (Duan et al., 2021). (c) They are prone to precarious conditions due to labor market discrimination, socio-cultural, gendered and information barriers hindering them from accessing entrepreneurial opportunities (Kainat et al., 2021; Malach Pines et al., 2010; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017; Naudé et al., 2017). This is particularly true for women refugees usually left out when considering broader discussions surrounding diversity and complexity of gender in entrepreneurship as previously argued in Marlow and Martinez Dy's (2018) critical and thought-provoking analysis of gender within entrepreneurship research (Marlow & Martinez Dy, 2018). Nevertheless, WRSE view entrepreneurship as a way of self-empowerment, integration, creation of social value, and a pathway out of poverty (Santos et al., 2022). Although impacted by non-equitable ecosystems and non-double crossed system policies. Our research aims at opening this black box and bridging both research and empirical gaps by investigating "How does embedding in host country's entrepreneurial ecosystems reduces

institutional bottlenecks encountered by WRSE? We draw upon the mixed embeddedness theory as *“it has been proven to be a powerful concept to analyse the processes and consequences of entrepreneurial activities of those suffering from little accessibility to entrepreneurial resources”* (Zhu et al., 2019 : 392). It is also suitable for understanding the interactions of WRSE through their agency in navigating contextual ecosystems (Granovetter, 1985; Langevang et al., 2015). In addition to their engagement with a wide array of actor in public and private support structures (Audretsch & Belitski, 2017; Neumeier & Santos, 2018).

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** We conducted a qualitative study to gain a deeper understanding of our subject matter (Eisenhardt, 1989). We carried out 35 semi-structured interviews with WRSE and service providers, as well as 10 interviews with women native entrepreneurs in France from April-July 2021 and January-September 2022. We aimed at having a comparative analysis as to whether both groups encounter the same institutional challenges during their venturing processes. This process was followed by content analysis which led us to seven thematic categories (Gioia et al., 2013). Notably: (1) Ecosystem institutional service provider legal support. (2) Financial training and accessibility. (3) Intra and internetwork accessibility. 4) Management training and coaching for supporting start-ups. (5) Pioneering technologies through innovation support programs. (6) Economic empowerment and (7) Measuring of intended social impact of the women refugee social ventures.

**Findings:** Our research responds to suggestions towards wider and non-discriminatory perspectives on what constitutes entrepreneurship whilst leading to better theory and more insights in embracing entrepreneurial diversity (Welter et al., 2017). We highlight the roles played by non-state actors in reducing barriers to entry by offering active support on the restrictive legal and bureaucratic start-up regulations. How findings highlight how WRSE are able to access ecosystem funding through the different actors which are key pillars in sustaining their ventures (Landström, 2017). Our findings unveil how women refugees benefit from inter and intra-ecosystem networks that are crucial in their social venture sustainability.

**Originality and value:** Our work builds on new realities by addressing diversity in women entrepreneurship with regard to structural contexts, processes, and individuals in the French context. WRSE turn societal problems into opportunities through the development of products and services that generate social value. Yet entrepreneurship research has not yet acted as *“a window into and a tool for shaping social and economic equity constructed to include not only issues of structural inequality but also empowerment and emancipation more broadly”* (Welter et al., 2017, p. 317). To the entrepreneurial ecosystem research, we integrate a new term of sustainable inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems to cater for disadvantaged entrepreneurs such as refugees. We recommend building equitable ecosystems that require consciousness in raising and double-crossing systems’ policies to accommodate women refugee social entrepreneurs (Orser, 2022) We advance the framework of mixed embeddedness by providing an improved conceptualization encompassing the entrepreneurial ecosystem elements within the formal and informal institutions that were not originally included (Kloosterman et al., 1999). Our policy implications are two-fold: 1) Ecosystem enablers and actors, there is a need to create sustainable inclusive policies and implement programs that cater for a demographically diverse set of

entrepreneurs. 2) We urge policymakers to measure sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem indicators with inclusive entrepreneurial support. We posit that female refugee social entrepreneurs do not face the same institutional hurdles as their native counterparts. We recommend policymakers to promote diversity and equality in entrepreneurship as women empowerment is a cornerstone of the 2030 Sustainable development goals agenda (OECD & European Commission, 2021).

**Keywords:** Gender, women refugee social entrepreneurship, embeddedness, ecosystems.

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