

Innovation Meets Good Governance: Entrepreneurship's Advancement in Lebanon

A research project by Kevin Awkar for the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for
Freedom Lebanon

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Executive Summary

Entrepreneurship, defined as the capacity to generate new possibilities and reshape production patterns, when paired with innovation, serves as a central facilitator of contemporary development. In Lebanon, this connection brings particular impact, shaping pathways for adaptation and competitiveness in stages of uncertainty.

To observe this dynamic, the study adopts semi-structured interviews that capture how entrepreneurs perceive and steer the current landscape. This process highlights lived experiences, essential liberal values, and adaptive strategies, while also emphasizing the importance of freedom of expression as a foundation of innovation.

For this reason, the findings suggest that Lebanon's entrepreneurial ecosystem retains strong potential to advance recovery, champion confidence, and promote sustainable development. Entrepreneurs appear not only as creators of economic ventures but also as agents of reform, strengthening the link between creativity and e-governance. Hence, the key recommendations resulting from this research:

- *Support E-governance and Institutions:* promote transparent, accessible, and citizen-oriented digital platforms for business registration and licensing, reform liquidation laws to encourage risk-taking, and formally recognize social enterprises to ensure equal opportunity within open markets.
- *Mobilize Finance and Partnerships:* encourage diaspora co-investment and private sector participation through liberal financial instruments that reduce barriers to entry, enhance market confidence, and economic collaboration grounded in voluntary partnerships.
- *Advance Sustainable Urban Innovation:* empower local communities and municipalities, in collaboration with universities and the private sector, to establish innovation hubs, expand renewable energy initiatives, and promote open digital infrastructures that enable entrepreneurial freedom and competition.

- *Safeguard Freedom of Expression*: protect open debate and civic participation as liberal cornerstones of innovation, ensuring that individuals and entities can freely contribute ideas, challenge norms, and shape Lebanon's entrepreneurial future.

By aligning practical perspectives with conceptual depth, this research contributes to scholarly debates while offering concrete policy guidance on how entrepreneurship can support renewal and flexibility in different contexts. Accordingly, via institutionalizing reforms, mobilizing partnerships, and safeguarding freedoms, entrepreneurship can evolve from a survival mechanism into a foundation of national success.

About FNF Lebanon and the Researcher

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, Lebanon

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) is a German foundation devoted to promoting liberal principles and political education. Its mission is to advance freedom for all people in every area of society, in Germany and abroad. FNF works with local partners through civic education, international dialogue, and political counseling programs. In Lebanon, FNF promotes liberal thinking by organizing seminars, conferences, and publications, while also providing consulting to liberal political parties to enhance programs, strategies, and citizen engagement in an election-based democracy.

Kevin Awkar

Kevin Awkar is a strategic leader aligning expertise in project management, soft skills development, and research, supported by a Master of Arts in Middle Eastern Studies with honors, to drive impact and growth. He has designed advanced programs and accelerators that strengthen innovation and opportunity, and has successfully led multi-year initiatives with leading global and local partners, reaching more than 10,000 beneficiaries while championing both organizational objectives and individual potential. As an enthusiast with innovative knowledge of the entrepreneurship ecosystem, Kevin is developing this research to present reflections that may open pathways for future policy proposals and scholarly contributions on the role of entrepreneurship in the contemporary landscape.

Table of Contents

About FNF Lebanon and the Researcher	4
List of Abbreviations	6
Section 1: Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Lebanon from Initiation through Research Practice.....	7
Lebanon's Entrepreneurship and Innovation Outlook	7
Research Direction and Objectives	9
Section 2: Interview Insights and Analytical Reflections	12
Interview Narratives and Emerging Themes	12
<i>E-Interview with Ms. Samar Dani, Executive Director of INJAZ Lebanon</i>	12
<i>E--interview with Ms. Joyce Hamze, Co-founder of Wave</i>	15
<i>E-interview with Dr. Nancy Boueri, Director of the Asher Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (ACIE) at USEK</i>	17
<i>E-interview with Mr. Nasri Mouawad, Chairman and CEO of BIAT</i>	20
Analytical Reflections: Emerging Themes	23
Section 3: Way Forward: Linking Innovation, Good Governance, and Entrepreneurship in Alignment.....	25
Innovation and Good Governance as Drivers of Entrepreneurial Sustainable Development in Lebanon	25
1. <i>First Recommendation: Upkeep Lebanon's Comparative Advantage</i>	27
2. <i>Second Recommendation: Policy Pathways for an Innovative Tomorrow</i>	27
3. <i>Third Recommendation: Support E-governance and Institutions</i>	27
4. <i>Fourth Recommendation: Mobilizing Capital and Partnerships for Growth</i>	28
5. <i>Fifth Recommendation: Safeguard Freedom of Expression</i>	28
Closing Statement.....	29
References	30

List of Abbreviations

<i>ACIE</i>	Asher Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship
<i>BIAT</i>	Business Incubation Association in Tripoli
<i>BSOs</i>	Business support organizations
<i>FNF</i>	Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom
<i>GDP</i>	Gross Domestic Product
<i>KPIs</i>	Key Performance Indicators
<i>MENA</i>	Middle East and North Africa
<i>SAL</i>	Société Anonyme Libanaise (Joint Stock Company)
<i>SARL</i>	Société à Responsabilité Limitée (Limited Liability Company)
<i>SDGs</i>	Sustainable Development Goals
<i>SDG 11</i>	Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
<i>SDG 16</i>	Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
<i>SDG 17</i>	Sustainable Development Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Section 1: Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Lebanon from Initiation through Research Practice

Lebanon's Entrepreneurship and Innovation Outlook

Entrepreneurship, defined as the capacity to create new possibilities and reshape production patterns, when joined with innovation, emerges as an impactful pair of interconnected constructs in contemporary advancement. Across diverse settings, these two concepts operate in tandem to accelerate growth, positive competitiveness, and institutional renewal, guiding how societies adapt to uncertainty and change.

In this aforementioned wider global perspective, Lebanon reflects these dynamics in a distinctive trajectory, particularly in the context of the socio-economic challenges that have intensified since 2019 and are rooted in earlier structural barriers.¹ Building on these foundations, Lebanese entrepreneurs continue to embody a spirit of perseverance, sustaining their efforts even under conditions that might otherwise delay ambition and constrain effectiveness. Within an environment increasingly marked by upcoming opportunities, they demonstrate adaptability and resourcefulness.² Hence, by connecting digital technologies, engaging international networks, and implementing locale-tailored creativity, they have managed to carve out spaces for economic renewal and general progress. This paper therefore situates entrepreneurship and innovation at the intersection of governance and systemic reform, tracing their evolution through the integration of research frameworks and observed reflections.³ It argues that entrepreneurial agency not only enables navigation through crises but also contributes to shaping pathways toward institutional growth and transformation.

¹ Harvard Kennedy School Growth Lab. (n.d.). *Lebanon*. Growth Lab. <https://growthlab.hks.harvard.edu/policy-research/lebanon>

² Atallah, S., & el-Helou, J. (2024). Fiscal decentralization in Lebanon: An exit to the crisis? SSRN. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4880172>

³ United Nations Development Programme. (2021, July 1). *UN calls for urgent recovery to prevent prolonged crisis in Lebanon*. UNDP. <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/press-releases/un-calls-urgent-recovery-prevent-prolonged-crisis-lebanon>

Lebanon's economy has been undergoing a prolonged downturn, producing wave effects across the economic sphere. By late 2024, cumulative Gross Domestic Product (GDP) losses since 2019 approached 40%, marking one of the sharpest contractions in the country's modern history.⁴ Yet within this delicate path stands a prospect for renewal. Forecasts of moderate growth in 2025, based on the effective application of reforms, indicate that economic recovery remains possible when united with institutional strengthening and policy consistency. The election of the President of the Republic, together with the formation of a reform government in early 2025, provides a strong and interesting opening to advance essential sectors and upkeep a good environment for entrepreneurial activity.⁵ As Michael Porter has emphasized, national competitiveness and economic revival are inseparable from innovation and entrepreneurship, both of which transform individual initiative into drivers of systemic change.⁶ Despite some limitations, Lebanon's entrepreneurial support architecture has steadily expanded. Local policy frameworks are increasingly attentive to gender dynamics, recognizing women as pivotal contributors to entrepreneurial growth.⁷ Social entrepreneurship programs have shown that community-led initiatives not only respond to urgent societal needs but also sustain local economic activity. Similarly, accelerator initiatives and cross-border collaborations illustrate that structured support, even under adverse conditions, can significantly enhance startup survival and scalability.

⁴ World Bank. (2025, June 19). *Fragile stabilization fuels growth in Lebanon*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2025/06/19/fragile-stabilization-fuels-growth-in-lebanon>

⁵ World Bank. (2022, June 21). *Lebanon economic monitor: The great capture*. World Bank. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099742206192539590>

⁶ Michael E. Porter is a professor at Harvard Business School and a leading authority on competitive strategy, innovation, and the competitiveness of nations (Porter, 1990; 1996).

⁷ Atallah, S., & el-Helou, J. (2024). Fiscal decentralization in Lebanon: An exit to the crisis? SSRN. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4880172>

Accordingly, entrepreneurship may be defined as the creation and expansion of ventures that yield both economic values, while innovation constitutes the adaptation of novel ideas, technologies, or methods for systemic improvement.⁸ In Lebanon, conceptual frameworks such as the knowledge-based economy, national innovation systems, and the tri-sector collaboration model between universities, industry, and government provide convenient lenses for analyzing how technology, institutional capacity, and human capital interact under adversity.⁹ Viewed through this perspective, entrepreneurship and innovation are not merely survival mechanisms but strategic levers for Lebanon's long-term institutional and economic renewal.

Research Direction and Objectives

This research aims to showcase how entrepreneurship and governance interact constructively within Lebanon's crisis-affected landscape. Previous studies have emphasized persistent gaps in regulation, finance, infrastructure, and the policy environment.¹⁰ At the same time, international organizations and scholars highlight the potential of digital tools, diaspora engagement, and inclusive approaches as critical anchors for recovery.¹¹ Through the use of interviews, this study seeks to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of key actors who navigate both adversity and opportunities for reform.

Correspondingly, semi-structured interviews are well suited to exploring how entrepreneurs perceive constraints and opportunities in challenging contexts.¹² This approach offers the flexibility to highlight important narratives, fundamental values, and adaptive strategies, thereby

⁸ Lundvall, B. Å. (1992). *National systems of innovation: Towards a theory of innovation and interactive learning*. Pinter Publishers. <https://www.worldcat.org/title/24909952>

⁹ Etzkowitz, H., & Leydesdorff, L. (2000). The dynamics of innovation: From national systems and "Mode 2" to a Triple Helix of university–industry–government relations. *Research Policy*, 29(2), 109–123. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333\(99\)00055-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333(99)00055-4)

¹⁰ Kohli, S., El Chaarani, H., & El Abiad, Z. (2023). The role of entrepreneurship and innovation in crisis economies: Evidence from Lebanon. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 15(1), 189–210. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-023-01644-8>

¹¹ United Nations Lebanon. (2022, January 13). *UN supports micro, small and medium enterprises in Lebanon with matchmaker excellence*. UN. <https://lebanon.un.org/en/184036-un-supports-micro-small-and-medium-enterprises-lebanon-matchmaker-excellence>

¹² Orange Corners. (2024, April). *Entrepreneurship in fragile contexts: Research line 3*. Orange Corners. <https://www.orangecorners.com/app/uploads/2024/04/RESEARCH-LINE-3-Entrepreneurship-in-fragile-contexts.pdf>

generating insights that can later inform quantitative events when such approaches become practically feasible within the Lebanese scene and given the required timeframe.¹³

Based on the aforementioned, engaging with a set of core questions is essential to frame this study within a structured and results-oriented perspective. *Five questions* are designed to reflect both theoretical reasoning and applied relevance, ensuring that the research remains grounded in lived realities while also contributing to broader academic and policy debates¹⁴.

The first question asks: “*What are the most pressing challenges facing entrepreneurship in Lebanon at present?*” This serves as a diagnostic entry point. Identifying pain points is not only descriptive but analytically vital, as it allows the study to situate entrepreneurship within systemic constraints such as capital shortage, regulatory uncertainty, and infrastructural needs. In line with entrepreneurship theory, challenges must be mapped before opportunities can be leveraged.

The second inquiry moves toward enablers: “*In your view, are essential enablers such as funding, digital tools, and legal infrastructure available to entrepreneurs, and how can e-governance in Lebanon help strengthen them?*” Here, the emphasis is on the architecture of support that allows entrepreneurial ecosystems to thrive. This question integrates insights from digital governance literature, highlighting the possibility that technology-enabled transparency and regulatory efficiency may reduce challenges, expand access, and promote more equitable opportunity structures.

The third question broadens the scope toward cultural and societal dynamics: “*What steps do you consider key to creating a more supportive environment for entrepreneurship?*” The reasoning is that entrepreneurship is never isolated from its environment; it is embedded in collective work, trust, and shared norms. Examining this dimension highlights the advancements necessary to sustain entrepreneurial dynamism, including educational reform, the strengthening of social capital, and the promotion of inclusive cultural attitudes toward risk and innovation.

¹³ Naudé, W. (2010). *Entrepreneurship, developing countries, and development economics: New approaches and insights* (WIDER Working Paper No. 2010/20). United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER). <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/54133/1/636480496.pdf>

¹⁴ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) & Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT). (2021, March). *Entrepreneurs as peacebuilders in fragile states*. IFIT. <https://ifit-transitions.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Entrepreneurs-as-Peacebuilders-in-Fragile-States.pdf>

The fourth query engages with foundational values: “*As a liberal principle, freedom of expression advances innovation. How does it empower entrepreneurs to reach their goals in today’s landscape?*” By foregrounding freedom of expression, this study highlights the important link between democratic liberties and entrepreneurial creativity. Research in innovation studies consistently shows that environments which protect expression and openness also enable greater experimentation, knowledge-sharing, and leadership development.

The fifth and final question turns to forward-looking guidance: “*Given the current environment in Lebanon, what key advice would you offer to aspiring entrepreneurs?*” This question is not only reflective but also generative, providing space for interviewees to display lessons learned and to inspire the next promising wave of entrepreneurial actors. It transforms individual experiences into collective insight, bridging present challenges with future aspirations.

Taken together, these five questions represent more than a data collection instrument. They embody a deliberate research strategy: to spot barriers, to connect digital governance with entrepreneurial enablement, to recognize the cultural foundations of innovation, to emphasize the role of liberal values in economic creativity, and to demonstrate practical, forward-looking perspectives.¹⁵ Through this approach, the study seeks to align practical indications with conceptual depth, thereby contributing to both scholarly literature and policy-oriented debates on entrepreneurship in many settings.

Accordingly, Section 1 has mapped the trajectory of Lebanon’s entrepreneurial background, defining it in relation to innovation within this context through established conceptual models. This has been framed around the articulated purpose and foundations of the study, culminating in a qualitative, interview-based strategy informed by practitioner perspectives.

¹⁵ Awada, I., & Masri, R. (2025). *Decentralized autonomous organizations for Lebanon: Pathways to youth-led governance reform*. arXiv. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2505.05523>

Section 2: Interview Insights and Analytical Reflections

Interview Narratives and Emerging Themes

To advance this study, interviews were conducted with entrepreneurs recognized for their expertise, knowledge, and diverse contributions to Lebanon's entrepreneurial landscape, engaged across different regions and sectors including organizations, companies, institutions, and individual ventures to ensure a variety of perspectives. The main objective was to generate important insights through goal-directed appraising. These valuable interviewees, whose contributions are sincerely appreciated, offered reflections that open pathways for future research. Their voices highlight Lebanon's abundance of ambitious entrepreneurs and influential figures who continue to shape innovation amid ongoing challenges and emerging opportunities.

P.S.: The following interviews are presented in alphabetical order by family name, in accordance with APA style.

E-Interview with Ms. Samar Dani, Executive Director of INJAZ Lebanon

The e-interview with Ms. Samar Dani, Executive Director of INJAZ Lebanon, was conducted on Monday, July 21, 2025.

Samar Dani, a dedicated advocate for youth empowerment, combines her background as an agricultural engineer and experienced marketer to drive positive change. As Executive Director of INJAZ Lebanon, she draws on over 20 years of experience to inspire youth in entrepreneurship, leadership, and innovation. She strongly believes in the power of education to shape future leaders and is dedicated to advancing a culture of learning. With a deep passion for turning ideas into action, Samar is energized by working alongside young people as they explore their potential and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

1. What are the most pressing challenges facing entrepreneurship in Lebanon at present?

Ms. Samar Dani clarified that the most pressing challenges are **insecurity** and **instability**:

"The biggest challenges? Definitely insecurity and instability. They affect everything: motivation, operations, income, even the ability to simply start. Then, of course, there is the financial crisis. Hyperinflation and the collapse of the banking system make it impossible to access credit. Most entrepreneurs now rely on grants, and this dependency has created a false sense of

entrepreneurship. Many are building businesses only when there is a grant, instead of developing something sustainable. [...]

She added, “Infrastructure is another huge issue. Electricity, internet, transportation, everything is costly and unreliable. But honestly, one of the toughest challenges is cultural. A lot of young people underestimate the effort it takes to become an entrepreneur. They lack teamwork experience, and too many jump from one grant program to another without really committing. And finally, the ecosystem itself is fragmented. The same entrepreneurs move from program to program, and no one is tracking their growth or making sure they are actually moving forward. That is something we really need to fix.”

2. In your view, are essential enablers such as funding, digital tools, and legal infrastructure available to entrepreneurs, and how can e-governance in Lebanon help strengthen them?

The interview mentioned that these enablers remain **very limited**:

“If you want to register a company, whether it’s an SARL (Société à Responsabilité Limitée), SAL (Société Anonyme Libanaise), or even as an individual, it’s costly, requires a bank account, endless paperwork, and once you’re in, it’s almost impossible to exit. There’s no legal status that truly supports entrepreneurs, especially those starting out or pursuing social entrepreneurship. Legal and financial knowledge is also very weak, so many young entrepreneurs postpone registration until they’re sure, but that leaves them unprotected. [...]

She added, “We see this constantly, three or four people start a project together without any formal structure, and later disputes arise over ownership. This lack of protection discourages proper business development. Even for us, working with global programs, we often cannot buy from our alumni because they’re not legally registered, and donor regulations require official suppliers. On the digital side, entrepreneurs have the tools, but government-related digital infrastructure is missing. If we had an effective e-governance system to handle licenses, permits, and clear guidance, it would remove a huge burden. E-governance could simplify these processes and make it easier for entrepreneurs to focus on their work rather than fighting bureaucracy.”

3. What steps do you consider key to creating a more supportive environment for entrepreneurship?

Education, financial support, and legal infrastructure are the pillars of a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem, said Ms. Samar Dani:

“Education is absolutely critical, not just entrepreneurship education, but also legal, rights-based, and financial education. Good financial literacy is a need we see across early-stage entrepreneurs. They can have great ideas, but without proper cash management and financial planning, many struggle or burn through their funding. We also need financial support, but not just in the form of grants. Entrepreneurs must be able to raise money, take loans, and access financial tools like any other business. Thus, there must be a coordinated ecosystem, based on

continuous and structured support that gives entrepreneurs the confidence that, five or six years from now, they will still have guidance and resources to grow.”

4. As a liberal principle, freedom of expression advances innovation. How does it empower entrepreneurs to reach their goals in today’s landscape?

The interviewee mentioned that **freedom of expression is deeply connected to entrepreneurship**:

“Freedom of expression and production are tightly linked. If you cannot speak up about what’s wrong, how can you improve how things are done? You need an environment where trust exists, where entrepreneurs feel that they are competing fairly. Entrepreneurs already face a long and difficult journey, and many of them will not continue, we know that. But for those who have a chance to succeed, they must feel that the system is just. If we build trust and fairness into the system, we create the conditions for entrepreneurs to truly thrive.”

5. Given the current environment in Lebanon, what key advice would you offer to aspiring entrepreneurs?

Ms. Dani highlighted that **Lebanon is full of opportunities** for future entrepreneurs:

“I think there’s a great opportunity for entrepreneurs in Lebanon. Entrepreneurship is about solving problems. Many of these problems can only really be tackled by young people here, because they have the knowledge, creativity, and determination to make it happen. My advice is simple: if you really want to be an entrepreneur, you have to do the work. There are many organizations and institutions ready to support you, but you need to commit, respect your team and your partners, and stay focused. Lebanon is a great place to test ideas. [...]”

Samar Dani concluded, *“Don’t rely only on creativity. Understand your finances, your market, and your problem deeply. Seek mentors, build your network, and be patient. This is not a competition or a quick win; it’s a long journey that requires stamina, willpower, and real commitment. If you do that, you’ll be in a much better position to turn your idea into something that truly works.”*

E--interview with Ms. Joyce Hamze, Co-founder of Wave

The e-interview with Ms. Joyce Hamze, co-founder of Wave, was conducted on Monday, July 21, 2025.

Joyce Hamze is the Co-founder of Wave, a Lebanese-Dutch social enterprise offering electric bike subscriptions adapted to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. With expertise in communications and entrepreneurship, she drives Wave's strategic growth and operations in Lebanon. Passionate about sustainable urban mobility and women's leadership, Joyce is a 2024 alumna of the Swedish Institute's She Entrepreneurs programme and a participant in the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) MENA She Leads program. Together with the Wave team, she has achieved year-on-year growth despite Lebanon's challenging environment and is now preparing to expand the fleet to meet high demand and scale internationally.

1. What are the most pressing challenges facing entrepreneurship in Lebanon at present?

Ms. Joyce Hamze explained that while entrepreneurs in Lebanon face several obstacles, two remain the most pressing, **economic instability** and the **sociopolitical situation**:

"Very often, when we focus on growth, unexpected economic or sociopolitical developments force us to shift our attention to survival", she said. "Although this adjustment is demanding, it has made Lebanese entrepreneurs exceptionally adaptable. We have learned to find solutions and persevere. That ability to pivot has become one of our greatest strengths. For example, Wave had to pause all scaling plans during the recent period of instability and instead focus on providing support to its stakeholders during those challenging times."

2. In your view, are essential enablers such as funding, digital tools, and legal infrastructure available to entrepreneurs, and how can e-governance in Lebanon help strengthen them?

The interviewee highlighted that the most critical gap for Lebanese entrepreneurs is **funding**:

"Funding is limited in Lebanon. Unlike other countries where startups rely on ecosystems that provide financial or non-monetary support, we face some restrictions. Much of this is tied to the aforementioned challenges, which make investors hesitant to commit their time and capital. Institutions like Berytech and others do a great job in supporting us entrepreneurs, but they also face limitations due to the uncertain situation in the country. [...]"

Ms. Hamze added, *"This is unfortunate because we have brilliant ideas and a country full of potential. With proper funding and stronger support systems, entrepreneurs could scale their projects locally and internationally."*

She also emphasized, *"E-governance is essential. We cannot keep operating in outdated frameworks. A modernized, accessible system would let entrepreneurs focus on creating solutions."* Moreover, Joyce mentioned that *"bureaucracy continues to complicate the process, and exporting products or scaling ideas beyond Lebanon remains difficult."*

3. What steps do you consider key to creating a more supportive environment for entrepreneurship?

Ms. Hamze stressed **the need for a mindset shift** in the entrepreneurial ecosystem:

"We need to move away from always operating in survival mode", she explained. "Instead, we should focus on building stability and future plans. This requires stronger systemic support."

4. As a liberal principle, freedom of expression advances innovation. How does it empower entrepreneurs to reach their goals in today's landscape?

The interviewee expressed **optimism** about the role of freedom of expression in shaping entrepreneurship:

"I believe freedom of expression is increasingly present, and we see positive change coming. With a new generation bringing fresh ideas, this principle is finally being taken seriously. [...]"

Joyce added, *"If we do not safeguard and fight for this freedom, we risk staying in the same place. Entrepreneurs need an environment where they can express their ideas freely and turn them into action."*

5. Given the current environment in Lebanon, what key advice would you offer to aspiring entrepreneurs?

Ms. Hamze encouraged aspiring entrepreneurs to **remain determined and collaborative**:

"We need to believe that we can do it. If you have a great idea, do not let anything stop you from making it happen. [...]"

Joyce Hamze also emphasized the importance of community in her closing statement. *"I truly believe in the power of collaboration. Many people share the same goals, and by working together, we can create real change. Lebanon is full of brilliant minds, and that gives me hope."*

E-interview with Dr. Nancy Boueri, Director of the Asher Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (ACIE) at USEK

The e-interview with Dr. Nancy Boueri, Director of the Asher Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (ACIE) at USEK, was conducted on July 25, 2025.

Nancy Saliba is the Director of the Asher Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (ACIE) at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) and a part-time instructor in entrepreneurship and sustainable development. Since 2017, she has led entrepreneurship support programs across the South Mediterranean region and coached over 300 entrepreneurs in building sustainable ventures. A certified business coach for SMEs and startups in the Green Economy, she holds a Ph.D. in Social Sciences from HESAM Université and CNAM Paris. With over 15 years in industry, she has driven marketing, branding, and environmental initiatives, evolving entrepreneurship that creates lasting impact.

1. What are the most pressing challenges facing entrepreneurship in Lebanon at present?

Dr. Nancy Saliba Boueri stressed that the **financial crisis** and **political instability** are the most pressing challenges for entrepreneurship in Lebanon:

"Many entrepreneurs are forced to establish their businesses outside the country due to the financial situation."

From an ecosystem perspective, she added, *"While business support organizations (BSOs) provide grants, training, and networking, it is often not enough. Many entrepreneurs remain stuck at an early stage, moving from one program to another without reaching the next phase of growth. Solving this gap is one of the biggest challenges we face as an ecosystem."*

2. In your view, are essential enablers such as funding, digital tools, and legal infrastructure available to entrepreneurs, and how can e-governance in Lebanon help strengthen them?

The interviewee noted that without proper infrastructure, **entrepreneurs face unnecessary obstacles**:

"Until we have a fully digitized system that simplifies everything from company registration to legal processes, nothing is truly easy. There is no official status for social entrepreneurship, even though many initiatives arise out of necessity and aim to address social and environmental challenges [...]", she explained.

Dr. Boueri added, *"Without a clear support system, these impactful efforts remain limited, and entrepreneurs are forced to focus on survival rather than sustainable growth."*

3. What steps do you consider key to creating a more supportive environment for entrepreneurship?

Dr. Boueri highlighted that **effective policymaking and stronger collaboration within the ecosystem** are crucial for supporting entrepreneurship:

"Policymaking is essential. It is important to issue laws and policies that truly facilitate and support entrepreneurs. Right now, we work in silos. Many incubation and acceleration programs rely on donor funding, and while donors or development agencies provide support, their key performance indicators (KPIs) do not always address the core gaps in our ecosystem."

She emphasized that the lack of funding keeps entrepreneurs in survival mode and limits their ability to grow. *"We need to join forces [...]"* she added. *"Creating a consortium of active incubators would help us organize our work, share resources, and collaborate through a unified database."*

Dr. Nancy added that the administrative framework also complicates matters. *"Even if entrepreneurs secure funding and investor confidence, they frequently become stuck navigating a maze of approvals from different entities. Without comprehensive institutional support, some promising startups are forced to liquidate despite having strong teams and innovative ideas. This discourages entrepreneurship and prevents many from scaling their businesses locally before expanding abroad."*

4. As a liberal principle, freedom of expression advances innovation. How does it empower entrepreneurs to reach their goals in today's landscape?

The interviewee expressed explained that **freedom of expression is vital for innovation**:

"Freedom of expression plays a primordial role in helping entrepreneurs present their ideas and advocate for their projects. Yet many still hesitate to speak openly, especially in conservative or rural communities, where social pressures remain strong. Even talented women and young entrepreneurs often struggle to step out of their comfort zones despite having remarkable potential."

5. Given the current environment in Lebanon, what key advice would you offer to aspiring entrepreneurs?

Dr. Boueri emphasized that **aspiring entrepreneurs should approach their journey with curiosity and a willingness to learn**:

"They should not be afraid. The first step is to build the right mindset, not only for the youth but also by involving the wider community. Even if an idea seems imperfect, it is important to start, connect with others, exchange knowledge, and learn from shared experiences."

She highlighted how initiatives like ideations create opportunities for collaboration and growth. *"When people interact, compete, and learn together, they often return later with renewed motivation and stronger ideas. [...]"*

Nancy Saliba Boueri also shared a personal note: *"I left the corporate world to join the university incubator because I believe in preparing young talents for both entrepreneurship and employability. Beyond degrees, we focus on skills, teamwork, and real-world engagement, which empower students to succeed regardless of their path. [...]"*

She concluded, *"This work is challenging, but the impact on the youth and the ecosystem is deeply rewarding. That is why we keep going."*

E-interview with Mr. Nasri Mouawad, Chairman and CEO of BIAT

The e-interview with Mr. Nasri Mouawad, Chairman and CEO of BIAT, was conducted on July 25, 2025.

Nasri Mouawad is the Chairman and CEO of BIAT (Business Incubation Association in Tripoli), North Lebanon's first business development center and incubator, and co-founder of Yard, the MENA region's first online startup school, and AIQ, North Lebanon's first AI academy. With extensive experience in project management, access to finance, business diagnostics, and market analysis, he has significantly shaped Lebanon's entrepreneurship ecosystem. Nasri is also the founder of several successful ventures, including Myndflow and 360 Agri Agro, and has led numerous workshops and panels on entrepreneurship and future job trends. A University of Toledo graduate, he blends business development with consultative coaching to drive impactful growth.

1. What are the most pressing challenges facing entrepreneurship in Lebanon at present?

Mr. Mouawad explained that the main challenges are **access to funding, economic instability, bureaucracy, and brain drain**:

"That's a very good question. I would say there are four main challenges that really define reality for entrepreneurs today. The first is access to funding. It's very limited. Before the crisis, the ecosystem was vibrant. Now, there are no real financial plans in place, and this has become a serious barrier for startups. [...]"

He added, *"Second, there's the unstable economy. Stability is a prerequisite for any startup. Currency fluctuations and inflation are major obstacles, and they make it very hard for entrepreneurs to plan ahead. Third, bureaucracy and outdated regulations are a huge problem. Registering a company in Lebanon is complicated, but the bigger hurdle is closing it. Before starting a business, many people are discouraged because they fear what will happen if the venture fails and how they would ever be able to close the company. Lastly, there's the brain drain. We're losing so much talent in Lebanon, and this limits the skilled labor force that entrepreneurs need to build their companies. All these factors combined make starting and sustaining a business far more difficult than it should be."*

2. In your view, are essential enablers such as funding, digital tools, and legal infrastructure available to entrepreneurs, and how can e-governance in Lebanon help strengthen them?

The interview emphasized that **these enablers remain absent overall**, with funding, digital infrastructure, and outdated legal systems as the main hurdles:

"Funding is the biggest challenge. Many startups rely on donors, family, or diaspora support. At BIAT, we offer grants and capacity building, but this can't replace what we had with subsidized loans. Digital tools are more accessible thanks to a tech-savvy generation, but infrastructure like reliable internet is still lacking. [...]"

Mr. Mouawad also mentioned that, *"Company registration is complex, and outdated bankruptcy laws discourage risk-taking. Hence, E-governance could be transformative. Estonia is an example, digitalizing government made business easier. But in Lebanon, this must go hand in hand with structural reforms to modernize registration, improve insolvency laws, and enforce contracts."*

3. What steps do you consider key to creating a more supportive environment for entrepreneurship?

Mr. Mouawad underscored the need for a **cultural shift, stronger collaboration between sectors, and institutional support**:

"We need to stop seeing entrepreneurship as a fallback when jobs aren't available and start treating it as a real career path. This is why we're launching programs at the University of Balamand on ideation, incubation, Research and Development (R&D), and commercialization. We also need reconciliation between the public and private sectors. Today, entrepreneurs face bureaucracy instead of incentives or support. Bridging this gap is essential if we want to build a true entrepreneurial ecosystem."

4. As a liberal principle, freedom of expression advances innovation. How does it empower entrepreneurs to reach their goals in today's landscape?

The interviewee stated that **freedom of speech is sacred in Lebanon** and a **vital component of entrepreneurship**:

"It allows people to challenge the status quo and create fairer competition. When entrepreneurs feel free to innovate and think outside the box, they can build stronger brands and develop bold ideas. Protecting this freedom is essential for a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem."

5. Given the current environment in Lebanon, what key advice would you offer to aspiring entrepreneurs?

Mr. Nasri Mouawad affirmed that it is essential for young entrepreneurs to **understand the difference between a businessperson** and an entrepreneur and to **remain ambitious**.

"A businessperson enters an existing market to compete. An entrepreneur innovates; finding new ways, creating unique solutions, and taking risks. [...]"

His key advice: *"Be innovative. Innovation is what drives growth and sets entrepreneurs apart. Think regional or global from day one. Build scalable businesses, not just local ones. Build networks and find mentors. BIAT's programs, such as Expert 961 and Yard, help startups connect with mentors, experts, and resources. Stay adaptable. Lebanon's challenges require entrepreneurs to adjust quickly. Network with the Lebanese Diaspora. Tap into global networks, export opportunities, and international markets. [...]"*

Nasri Mouawad concluded, *"Lebanese entrepreneurs are resilient and creative. We have a strong entrepreneurial mindset in our DNA, and that's our biggest advantage."*

Analytical Reflections: Emerging Themes

The interviews revealed a consistent convergence around the central challenges facing entrepreneurship in Lebanon, with **economic instability emerging as the dominant theme in the first question**. The esteemed entrepreneurs emphasized that the prolonged financial crisis and sociopolitical conditions challenge entrepreneurial confidence and restrict opportunities for growth. Additionally, structural barriers such as bureaucracy, limited access to funding, and the ongoing talent mobility were identified as factors that constrain entrepreneurial activity. Collectively, these insights highlight how instability across economic and different spheres continues to define the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Lebanon.

For the second question, responses joined on a clear theme that essential enablers remain unavailable in the entrepreneurial landscape. Funding was consistently highlighted as the most pressing gap, limiting entrepreneurs' ability to start and scale their ventures. Alongside this, interviewees stressed the shortage of digital infrastructure, which hinders efficiency and global connectivity, and the persistence of an outdated legal framework, which adds unnecessary barriers and discourages investment. Together, these themes underline how systemic limitations in capital access, technology, and regulation continue to obstruct entrepreneurial activity, while implicitly pointing to the need for modernized e-governance solutions.

The third question's inputs highlighted several interlinked themes as crucial for creating a more supportive environment for entrepreneurship in Lebanon. Education, financial support, and legal infrastructure were consistently acknowledged as foundational pillars for strengthening the ecosystem. Alongside these structural needs, interviewees emphasized the importance of mindset shifts, noting that entrepreneurial progress requires risk tolerance, and freedom of expression. Another recurrent theme was the call for effective policymaking and cross-sector collaboration, reflecting the view that no single actor can advance entrepreneurship in isolation. Together, these insights underscore the necessity of combining institutional reform with cultural transformation to build a resilient and enabling entrepreneurial environment.

The fourth question's insights displayed that Lebanon's long-standing commitment to open dialogue and freedom of expression continues to provide a foundation for innovation and reform. Interviewees consistently described it as both a main principle and a practical go-to, allowing entrepreneurs to voice ideas, challenge existing norms, and pursue creative solutions. **Optimism was expressed about its current role in shaping the entrepreneurial landscape,** with freedom of expression viewed not only as a value but as a catalyst for innovation, leadership, and progress. These insights affirm that safeguarding this principle remains central to empowering entrepreneurs to achieve their goals despite broader uncertainties.

As for the fifth question, the advice offered to aspiring entrepreneurs reflected a blend of personal mindset, strategic clarity, and forward-looking optimism. Respondents stressed the importance of ambition and determination, alongside cultivating curiosity and continuous learning as essential qualities for navigating Lebanon's volatile context. A distinction was also made between being a businessperson and an entrepreneur, highlighting the need for vision beyond profit-seeking alone. Collaboration and openness to partnerships were emphasized as key strategies, while optimism about Lebanon's abundance of opportunities offered encouragement to future entrepreneurs. Collectively, these perspectives underscore resilience, adaptability, and purposeful leadership as guiding principles for the next generation of entrepreneurs.

In synthesis, the five sets of responses reveal several overarching themes: entrepreneurship in Lebanon is constrained by instability and systemic gaps, yet it is simultaneously sustained by values of perseverance, creativity, and optimism. The findings emphasize that meaningful progress requires not only structural reforms in finance, governance, and infrastructure but also deeper social and regulating shifts rooted in education, collaboration, and freedom of expression. These emerging themes clarify both the obstacles and the latent potential within Lebanon's entrepreneurial ecosystem, offering a foundation for policy innovation and academic inquiry alike¹⁶.

¹⁶ Korber, S., & McNaughton, R. B. (2017). *Resilience and entrepreneurship: A systematic literature review*. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 24(4). <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-10-2016-0356>

Section 3: Way Forward: Linking Innovation, Good Governance, and Entrepreneurship in Alignment

Innovation and Good Governance as Drivers of Entrepreneurial Sustainable Development in Lebanon

Entrepreneurship in Lebanon goes beyond business creation. It reflects how individuals and communities adapt to uncertainty and search for sustainable solutions. In many ways, Lebanese entrepreneurship is not simply about starting companies, but about addressing challenges through innovation and resilience.¹⁷ To understand its potential, it is useful to view it through the lens of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Among these goals, three are particularly needed to upkeep Lebanon's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem today: SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Together, they offer both an analytical framework and a practical roadmap. They highlight how entrepreneurship can contribute to more sustainable urban development, stronger and more transparent governance, and effective partnerships that connect actors across sectors and borders.

SDG 11 underscores the importance of sustainable, inclusive, and resilient communities, a priority that resonates strongly in Lebanon's landscape. Urban and peri-urban entrepreneurship has emerged as a key driver of renewal, with entrepreneurs addressing pressing challenges in transportation, energy, and education.¹⁸ Strengthening this ecosystem requires the creation of urban innovation centers through municipal and university partnerships, targeted sustainable financing mechanisms that channel venture capital toward environmentally focused startups, and the expansion of digital infrastructure to promote smart-city initiatives.¹⁹ By embedding entrepreneurship in sustainable urban development, Lebanon can shift from endurance

¹⁷ Lundvall, B. Å. (1992). *National systems of innovation: Towards a theory of innovation and interactive learning*. Pinter Publishers.

¹⁸ United Nations. (2018). *The sustainable development goals report 2018*. United Nations Publications.

¹⁹ North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change, and economic performance*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511808678>

strategies toward structured contributions that enhance livability, ecological balance, and economic resilience.

Moreover, the success of entrepreneurship also depends on the strength of institutions, making **SDG 16** central to this research. Entrepreneurs consistently point to complicated regulations and bureaucratic instances as obstacles that undermine trust and stall growth. Hence, in a similar environment, innovation is soft, since creativity thrives mostly where institutions are predictable, accountable, and transparent. Reforming governance through e-administration offers a direct way forward: digitalizing registration and licensing, revising liquidation laws to allow fair exit strategies, increasing transparency in procurement, and granting clear legal recognition to social enterprises.²⁰ These measures would not only remove barriers to entrepreneurial activity but also reinforce the interdependence between governance and innovation.²¹

Accordingly, no entrepreneurial ecosystem progresses in isolation, and Lebanon's is no exception. **SDG 17** highlights the important role of partnerships, a goal particularly urgent in the current entrepreneurial scene. Entrepreneurs often circulate between uncoordinated programs, while support organizations act in silos, following donor priorities rather than long-term national strategies.²² Addressing this requires coordinated frameworks, such as a National Entrepreneurship Council that unites government, academia, incubators, the private sector, and international actors under one strategic umbrella. Leveraging At the regional level, integrating Lebanese entrepreneurs into Arab and Mediterranean innovation networks through joint accelerators and venture funds would expand opportunities and reduce fragmentation. Such partnerships would transform entrepreneurship into a collective national project rather than a set of isolated efforts.

²⁰ IDEA. (2024). *SDG 16 as an Enabler of the 2030 Agenda (Policy Paper No. 32)*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Retrieved [Month Day, Year], from <https://www.idea.int>

²¹ Fukuyama, F. (2014). *Political order and political decay: From the industrial revolution to the globalization of democracy*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

²² Sachs, J. D. (2015). *The age of sustainable development*. Columbia University Press.

1. First Recommendation: Upkeep Lebanon's Comparative Advantage

Advance Sustainable Urban Innovation

Viewed collectively, SDGs 11, 16, and 17 outline a narrative of possibility. Lebanon possesses several key strengths: a skilled workforce, extensive diaspora networks, and a culture of entrepreneurial resilience. Instability, rather than being solely a liability, has been transformed into a catalyst for innovation, generating solutions that can be applied to other contexts. By institutionalizing governance reforms, strengthening partnerships, and advancing sustainable urban development, Lebanon can convert its comparative disadvantages into competitive advantages and position entrepreneurship as a cornerstone of both economic recovery and social transformation.²³

2. Second Recommendation: Policy Pathways for an Innovative Tomorrow

The findings show that Lebanese entrepreneurs act as both problem-identifiers and problem-solvers, driving innovation even in adverse conditions. This highlights the need for frameworks that link entrepreneurial flexibility with innovative reforms. Therefore, aligning Lebanon's ecosystem with the above-mentioned suggestions offers a pioneering policy roadmap for sustainability.

3. Third Recommendation: Support E-governance and Institutions

For entrepreneurship, reform begins online. A digitized system would protect innovators and set the conditions for positive growth. Digitalizing registration and licensing would simplify entry and exit, while strengthening contract enforcement would ensure predictability. Equally essential is granting legal recognition to social enterprises, enabling them to access finance and procurement opportunities.²⁴ Together, these reforms embed fairness and accountability into the entrepreneurial landscape. In parallel, e-governance works best alongside freedom of expression as a foundation for innovation. Lebanon's tradition of open debate and protected freedom of speech creates a promising tomorrow. When safeguarded, this right functions as

²³ Sachs, J. D. (2015). *The age of sustainable development*. Columbia University Press.

²⁴ Fukuyama, F. (2014). *Political order and political decay: From the industrial revolution to the globalization of democracy*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

both a governance principle and an economic implement, supporting entrepreneurs in sharing ideas and promoting creative solutions.²⁵

4. Fourth Recommendation: Mobilizing Capital and Partnerships for Growth

Mobilize Finance and Partnerships

Access to finance remains the central barrier for entrepreneurs. Diaspora co-investment platforms could unlock global capital and restore confidence in local markets. Merged finance mechanisms, inspired by liberal principles of open markets and competition, would encourage hesitant investors by lowering risk. In this way, Lebanon's diaspora and international partners are not only financial supporters but also stakeholders in building an ecosystem that balances entrepreneurial freedom with social inclusion.²⁶

Equally important is overcoming disintegration. Donor programs, incubators, and government initiatives often work in isolation, concentrating impact. Establishing a National Entrepreneurship Council and unified data systems would bring structure, while regional integration through joint accelerators and trade agreements could position Lebanon as a hub for entrepreneurship.²⁷

5. Fifth Recommendation: Safeguard Freedom of Expression

Innovation meets good governance when entrepreneurial synergy is supported by liberal values of freedom, responsibility, and opportunity. In Lebanon, this interaction allows entrepreneurs to act as both business builders and contributors to reforms currently implemented by the Government. Liberalism provides the enabling environments of open markets, protected expression, and fair competition, through which creativity can scale into positive change. By embedding entrepreneurial resilience within transparent governance, Lebanon can advance toward long-term growth. This synergy reflects a synchronized energy among state institutions, private initiatives, and civil society, aligning their roles toward a shared path of advancement.

²⁵ Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.

²⁶ Nicholls, A., & Opal, C. (2005). *Fair trade: Market-driven ethical consumption*. SAGE Publications.

²⁷ Porter, M. E., & Kramer, M. R. (2011). Creating shared value. *Harvard Business Review*, 89(1/2), 62–77.

Closing Statement

Innovation and good governance show that perseverance, when supported by liberal values, can evolve into a pathway for impactful renewal. The research indicates that Lebanon's entrepreneurial community is not only sustaining economic activity but also contributing to reforms and trust. Liberal policy frameworks, grounded in open markets, freedom of expression, and fair competition, provide the conditions for scaling creativity into sustainable empowerment.

The implications are clear: strengthening e-governance can reduce uncertainty, simplify company registration and exit, and embed predictability across the system. Mobilizing diaspora investment and expanding mixed finance models can unlock much-needed capital, while coordinated partnerships ensure alignment between state institutions, civil society, and the private sector. Advancing sustainable urban innovation, particularly through municipal-university collaborations and expanded digital infrastructure, builds a concrete foundation for future competitiveness.

Taken together, these findings highlight that Lebanon's entrepreneurial ecosystem is positioned to convert adversity into opportunity. By aligning liberal policies with innovation and governance, Lebanon can establish an inclusive, future-oriented development model. The road ahead is strengthened by this shared momentum, where entrepreneurship enhances prosperity while contributing to the democratic life.

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