

# Entrepreneurs can help to bring peace to conflict-affected regions – or make them worse

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In conflict-afflicted areas, entrepreneurs can play a crucial role in either bringing peace or exacerbating conflict, finds new research from the American University of Beirut's Suliman S. Olayan School of Business (OSB) as part of OSB's Business in Conflict research group.

The research, led by OSB professor, Dr Jay Joseph, builds on research from business and management scholars, called Business-for-peace (B4P), which explores some of the ways the private sector can engage in peacebuilding:

- Economic Development: Creating jobs and growing the economy.
- Track-Two Diplomacy: Helping with peace talks and negotiations.
- Rule of Law: Ensuring laws are followed and fair.
- Sense of Community: Businesses helping people feel like they belong and are safe.
- Conflict-Sensitive Practices: Making sure businesses don't accidentally make conflicts worse.

Until now, B4P has largely excluded the role of entrepreneurs in peacebuilding, instead focusing on larger businesses.

However, small business owners also have a responsibility to help reduce conflict, OSB's research finds. Because entrepreneurs are part of the local community and are more involved in local problems than big companies are, they can often influence the situation more directly.

Entrepreneurs can either make things better by building community ties and helping people affected by conflict, or make things worse by getting involved in illegal activities and violence. These findings draw on research from political science, international relations, geography, hospitality, and conflict-related studies, which offer a more critical view of the role of entrepreneurship in peace.

Business leaders can influence peace by participating in activities like disarmament programs, education to prevent illegal activities, and normalising CSR to create societal transformation. To achieve a positive impact in conflict-affected areas, entrepreneurs must avoid corruption and bribery to set a good example.

Entrepreneurs can't solve a region's conflict alone, but they can help stabilise the area with the support of other local businesses.

"The practical implications in this article offer an avenue to better support the pro-peace elements of entrepreneurship in conflict zones," says Dr Joseph.

Since 2018, OSB's Business in Conflict research group has worked with major UN agencies, including the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, as well as I-NGOs, such as Mercy Corps, surveying over 700 businesses in the MENA, generating reports and guidelines for how to improve business-based livelihood programs in conflict zones in the region.

This paper, Entrepreneurship and Peacebuilding, was published in Sage Journals and has won the Best Published Paper Award at the International Association for Business and Society (IABS) Conference 2024.

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