

ESPREE
Email: info@espre.org
Phone: +81-3-5379-6001
Yotsuya 1-7-10 Daisan Shikakura Building 6F
Shinjuku, Tokyo, 160-0004
<http://espre.org/> (in Japanese)

The first government-authorized microfinancial institution for refugees in Japan

Yotsuya, TOKYO – March 1st, 2012 – Japan’s first government-authorized micro financial institution supporting entrepreneurs with a refugee-background, ESPRE, the Entrepreneurship Support Program for Refugee Empowerment, was launched by partnership with Japan Association for Refugee (JAR) and Social Venture Partners Tokyo LLC (SVP Tokyo). ESPRE is expected to provide very small loans to marginalized people, especially refugees, to start or expand small, self-sufficient businesses. ESPRE seeks to empower refugees and provide them with the opportunity to draw upon their own ingenuity and drive in starting a business. This is the first step in an effort to put an end to a cycle of exclusion and marginalization so that the Japanese society as a whole benefits.

1. Background of the ESPRE Launch

Since the Japanese government ratified the Refugee Convention and Protocol in 1981 about 2,000 asylum seekers have been granted residence status in Japan. Refugee determination in Japan involves a lengthy process and during this period, access to social assistance or Japanese language training from the government of Japan extremely limited. Even among those who pass the grueling refugee determination process, are recognized as a refugee, and are granted residence in Japan; many barriers to employment and integration remain. Many struggle day-to-day to make a living. With some opportunity, many have the ideas and the capacity to overcome these obstacles. Refugees currently have limited or no access to business resources, such as financial and marketing resources in Japan, and ESPRE seeks to fill this gap. Refugees are survivors. Their survival in the face of enormous adversity is inspiring, and their ability to maintain hope and pursue their dreams shows strength of character that few of us can live up to. Japan stands to benefit most from the meaningful engagement of our refugee population.

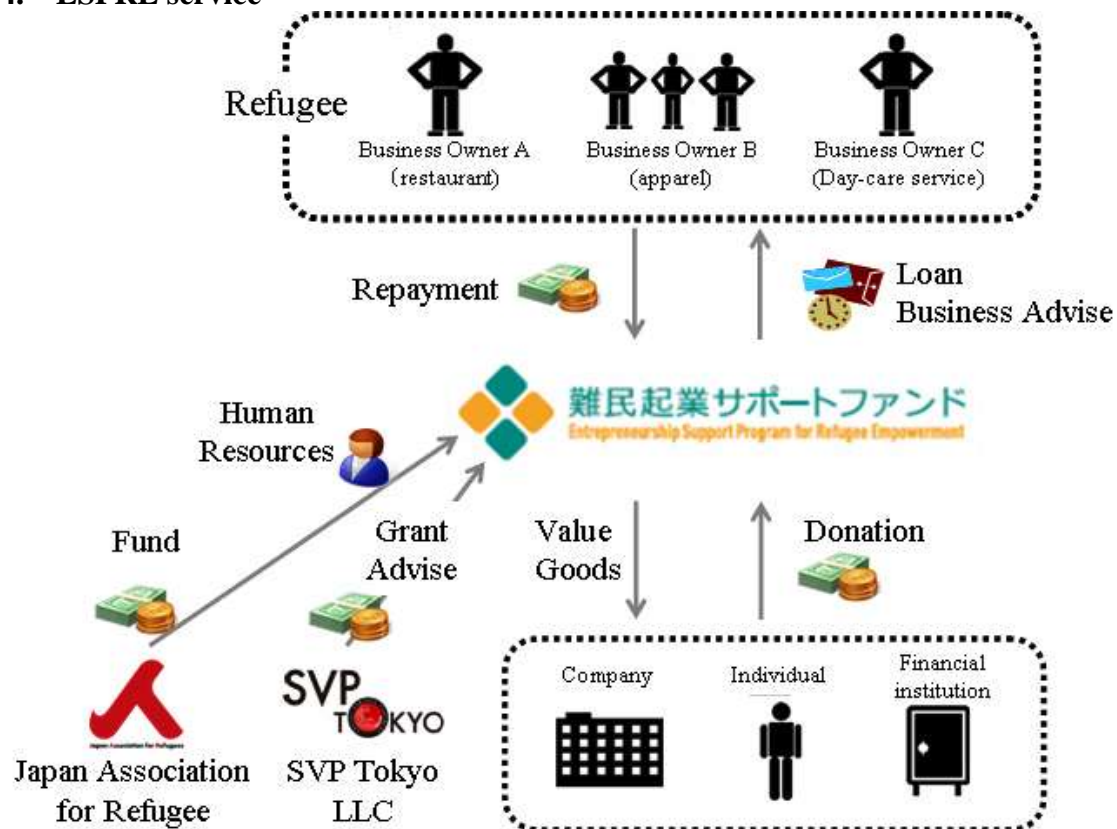
2. Role and Purpose of ESPRE

The purpose of ESPRE is to support and empower entrepreneurs with a refugee-background until his/her business become self-sufficient and sustainable. While accessing micro financial services does not guarantee sustainable business activities, it can reduce the dependency on borrowing from locals or wealthier refugees. It can also prevent the sale of precious household assets in times of need. The role of ESPRE is to provide access to funds, manage risk, and deliver customized solutions that resolve their significant issues and create lasting competitive advantage, and encourage entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency among business owners.

3. Social Return

Entrepreneurship is about creating and contributing economically and socially to the betterment of Japan society. In the case of ESPRE, a successful refugee entrepreneur will contribute to society by providing diverse culturally unique goods or services, providing employment opportunities to others, and building strong networks among communities. The story of refugee entrepreneurship has the potential to begin a paradigm shift from the misperception of refugees as an “*omoni* (economic burden) ” to the fact of their potential as an “*jinzai* (human capital) ” with the potential for innovation.

4. ESPRE service



ESPRE is primarily supported by individuals and corporate sponsors making donations. ESPRE is always open to donation, as ESPRE raises funds through grants, corporate sponsors, and foundations. ESPRE is a qualified tax exempt organization.

5. ESPRE's Partner

Japan Association for Refugee (JAR)

For more than ten years, the Japan Association for Refugees (JAR), implementing partner of UNHCR, has been helping asylum seekers and refugees with legal, social, and community needs. The idea of ESPRE was born from dialogue between refugees and JAR. ESPRE sees the need for microfinance: identifying skills that are overlooked and underutilized, engaging the strong community networks that exist among its members, and providing opportunities that will benefit Japan society as a whole. <http://www.refugee.or.jp/en/>

Social Venture Partners Tokyo LLC (SVP Tokyo)

Social Venture Partners Tokyo LLC (SVP Tokyo) is a network of engaged philanthropists (Partners) that aims to accelerate social entrepreneurship in Japan. Founded in 2003, SVP Tokyo joined Social Venture Partners International (SVPI) officially in 2006 as its first Asian affiliate. SVP Tokyo contributes his professional know-how, financial resources and philanthropic passion to social entrepreneurs (Investees). <http://www.sv-tokyo.org/english/>

For more information

Contact Person: Hiroaki Ishii, Masaru Yoshiyama, Kunihiko Kabe

Email: info@espre.org

Phone:+81-3-5379-6001

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