BCE Conference 2026 – Abstract Book

Belongingness, Connectedness, and Embeddedness
in Migrant and Refugee Entrepreneurship

Table of Content

Track 1:

I Am in the Right Place? How Migration Motivations Influence Belongingness, Connectedness, and Embeddedness – The Entrepreneurs' Perspective

Belonging Through Enterprise: Evolving Motivations and Embeddedness in the Entrepreneurial Journeys of Female Migrant Entrepreneurs in Sweden

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Keywords: Female Immigrant Entrepreneurs, motivations, intersectionality, belongingness

This study explores the evolving motivations of female immigrant entrepreneurs (FIEs) in Sweden through a gendered and intersectional perspective, examining how motivations shift across start-up, growth, and exit phases. It highlights how these motivations influence women's sense of belonging, their connectedness with networks and institutions, and their embeddedness in the host country's entrepreneurial ecosystems. The analysis emphasizes the interplay between personal aspirations, structural constraints, and socio-cultural influences that shape entrepreneurial trajectories.

Female immigrant entrepreneurship has become an important driver of economic growth, social integration, and innovation in host societies (Halkias et al., 2016; Brieger & Gielnik, 2021). Despite growing recognition of these contributions, limited research has investigated how motivations evolve throughout the entrepreneurial journey (Poggesi, 2024; Lassalle & Shaw, 2021). Female immigrant entrepreneurs navigate a distinct landscape shaped by intersecting dimensions of gender and immigrant status, which differentiate their motivations from both male immigrant entrepreneurs and native-born women entrepreneurs (Webster & Zhang, 2020; Barrett & Vershinina, 2017). While prior studies point to barriers such as limited access to capital and gender bias (Talha & Alsos, 2022; Solesvik et al., 2019), few examine how such barriers interact with shifting motivations across different business phases (Cunha et al., 2024; Murnieks et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial motivation is often treated as static, yet evidence suggests it is dynamic, influenced by intrinsic factors such as passion, autonomy, and self-fulfillment, alongside extrinsic drivers like necessity, opportunity recognition, or labor market exclusion (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Shane et al., 2003; Duan et al., 2021). Start-up, growth, and exit phases present distinct challenges for immigrant women, making motivation particularly fluid (Knight, 2015; Pettersson & Hedberg, 2013). Research has tended to emphasize the start-up phase, leaving growth and exit underexplored despite their significance for long-term entrepreneurial sustainability (Duan et al., 2021).

Sweden offers a valuable context for examining these dynamics. The country combines progressive gender policies with complex labor market integration processes for immigrants, shaping both opportunities and constraints for FIEs. To capture the multiple dimensions influencing motivation, this study integrates Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and Entrepreneurial Motivation Theory (Shane et al., 2003). Intersectionality highlights how overlapping identities such as gender, ethnicity, and migration status interact with structural inequalities, reframing EMT and SDT by situating psychological and individual drivers within systemic contexts (Lassalle & Shaw, 2021). EMT emphasizes achievement, independence, and opportunity recognition, while SDT underscores the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. For immigrant women, these theories intersect to show how motivations evolve in response to systemic exclusion, cultural expectations, and resilience. Thus, motivations are not fixed but structurally

adaptive, shifting as women negotiate aspirations, identity, and constraints across different phases of entrepreneurship.

This research is guided by the question: How do migration status and socio-cultural context shape entrepreneurial motivations and their evolution over time for FIEs? By investigating the dynamic interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, the study contributes to understanding FIEs' experiences and informs policies that promote inclusion and innovation.

Method

A qualitative research design was adopted to capture the contextually embedded and temporally dynamic character of motivation among women experiencing intersecting marginalizations (Creswell, 2012). Data were gathered through 37 semi-structured interviews with FIEs from diverse backgrounds, primarily Middle Eastern, North African, and Southeast Asian. Purposive sampling ensured diversity across age, industry, and business stage. Fourteen participants were in start-up, sixteen in growth, and seven in exit, reflecting the difficulty of accessing women who had closed businesses (Chreim et al., 2018). Interviews, conducted in Arabic, Swedish, or English, lasted 45–90 minutes, were transcribed and translated into English. The interviewer's cultural proximity enhanced trust, while reflexive memos and peer debriefings reduced bias (Vershinina & Discua Cruz, 2021). Questions addressed migration and professional backgrounds, entrepreneurial motivations, and the influence of gender and socio-cultural contexts. Supplementary data from company websites, social media, and reports supported triangulation.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019) was employed using an inductive-deductive hybrid approach. Codes were generated from narratives (e.g., "family obligation," "passion," "labor exclusion") and grouped into broader themes aligned with EMT, SDT, and Intersectionality Theory. NVivo software facilitated coding. Motivations were analyzed as phase-specific and contextually adaptive, shaped by both structural barriers and personal aspirations.

Participants were mainly from Arabic-speaking countries, with Syrians and Palestinians most represented, spanning ages from their twenties to their fifties. Although many held formal qualifications, limited access to employment led them into entrepreneurship, often in unrelated fields. Businesses ranged from home-based ventures to limited liability companies, concentrated in food, trade, and services. Family and ethnic networks provided key resources and support.

Results and discussion

Motivation Across the Start-Up, Growth, and Exit Phases (Table 1)

In the start-up phase, motivations combined intrinsic drivers such as passion, autonomy, and ethnic identity with extrinsic necessities including financial stability, labor market exclusion, and family obligations. Entrepreneurship offered flexibility to balance caregiving with earning income while also serving as a means of cultural expression. In the growth phase, motivations shifted toward legitimacy, financial expansion, and social recognition, alongside intrinsic reinforcement of identity and confidence. Women sought to assert authority, gain visibility, and extend market reach, despite persistent barriers. Social networks and local collaborations were important for growth. In the exit phase, motivations reflected reflexive assessments shaped by personal, cultural, and structural factors. Extrinsic pressures included market changes,

institutional barriers, and competition, while intrinsic considerations such as family priorities, personal well-being, and resilience guided decisions to pause or close businesses. For many, the exit became a learning process in forming future entrepreneurial engagement.

Overall, motivations were structurally adaptive and intertwined across phases. Intrinsic and extrinsic drivers overlapped, with motivation continuously negotiated against the backdrop of systemic barriers and life circumstances. Belonging, identity, and agency were central to entrepreneurial journeys, while gendered caregiving expectations, labor market discrimination, and restricted networks constrained opportunities. Yet ethnic identity and cultural heritage also provided motivation and market niches. Motivation expressed autonomy differently at each stage: flexibility in start-up, authority in growth, and strategic withdrawal in exit. Family obligations and work-life balance remained constant, underscoring the relational and embedded nature of women's entrepreneurship.

Table 1 Evolving Motivations of Female Immigrant Entrepreneurs (FIEs) Across Entrepreneurial Phases

Phase	Intrinsic Motivations	Extrinsic Motivations	Key Dynamics
Start-up	- Passion and creativity - Desire for autonomy/flexibility - Cultural expression / ethnic identity	- Financial necessity - Labor market exclusion - Family obligations - Reliance on ethnic networks	Entrepreneurship as survival and self-expression; flexibility helps reconcile caregiving with economic needs.
Growth	- Increased self-confidence - Personal development - Identity reinforcement (challenging stereotypes)	- Financial growth and stability - Market expansion and legitimacy - Social recognition - Access to social networks	Women assert authority, build legitimacy, and expand beyond ethnic niches, while navigating gendered and structural barriers.
Exit	- Family priorities and caregiving - Personal well-being and resilience - Learning from failure / reflection	- Market fluctuations - Institutional barriers - Competition and limited resources - Gendered expectations	Exit is seen not only as failure but also as strategic withdrawal or transition; motivations become reflexive and inform future ventures.

The study contributes to theory by conceptualizing motivation as relational, phase-dependent, and structurally embedded. It introduces the notion of "structurally adaptive motivation," capturing how FIEs navigate between agency and constraint in response to intersecting systems of inequality. For practice, findings highlight the need for phase-specific, culturally responsive support: mentorship and flexible formalization pathways at start-up; financing, legitimacy, and networking opportunities during growth; and exit-phase support addressing transitions, re-skilling, and well-being. Interventions must acknowledge how belonging, connectedness, and embeddedness are mediated by gender, migration, and socio-cultural contexts.

In conclusion, female immigrant entrepreneurs in Sweden demonstrate motivations that evolve dynamically across their entrepreneurial journeys, shaped by aspirations, systemic barriers, and socio-cultural influences. Their trajectories reveal entrepreneurship as both a space of opportunity and constraint, where belonging and identity negotiation are central. Future research should explore comparative immigrant experiences, longitudinal motivation shifts, and the role of social networks in fostering embeddedness within both local and global ecosystems.

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Entrepreneurial support programs in Germany: Are they effective for migrant women?

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Entrepreneurship is a resource-intensive process, whereby the effective acquisition and management of financial, human, and knowledge-based resources are pivotal to success in which entrepreneurial support programmes (henceforth ESPs) can play a critical role in equipping entrepreneurs with these resources (Spigel, 2016; Yusuf, 2010). A number of measures and initiatives designed to foster entrepreneurship are being introduced in Germany in the form of business advice, guidance, consultancy, training, and incubators with government and/or private sponsorship (Garavan & O′Cinneide, 1994; Harima et al., 2020; Solano, 2021) that are executed by non-governmental organisations, chambers of commerce, other EU and international organisations (David B. Audretsch et al., 2007).

This study examines the combined effect of ESP-provided training and resource access on the establishment and sustainability of successful business practices among target group of migrant women entrepreneurs in Germany. In light of the gender gap in migrant entrepreneurship (GEM Report, 2024; Zybura et al., 2018), the research will employ the external perceived usefulness theory to examine these programmes (Kösters & Obschonka, 2011; McMullan et al., 2001; Storey, 2000) that will indicate the founder's perspective on the perceived usefulness resulting from the participation in ESP. This will entail an evaluation of ESP's subjective measures (McMullan et al., 2001; Yusuf, 2010) among an under-researched target group of migrant women, with a particular emphasis on the extent to which these programmes facilitate the enhancement of their skills, the provision of resources, and the achievement of business outcomes (Cox, 1996; Henry et al., 2005; van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020). For the effective assessment, a control group comprising a non-participant cohort of migrant women entrepreneurs in Germany has been incorporated, thus facilitating a more nuanced and comparative examination of business establishment dynamics (McMullan et al., 2001; Storey, 2000).

Identity and Belonging Reconstruction of Globally Mobile Individuals: A Dialectical Perspective

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With circa 3.6% world population on the move (Hajro et al., 2021), global mobility, *i.e., cross-border movement of people*, is often celebrated as the circulation of global talent, knowledge, and capital across borders (see e.g., Tung, 2016; Hajro et al., 2023). Yet, at the personal level, mobility can be very disruptive for globally mobile individuals (GMIs). Each cross-border relocation demands considerable investment of time, financial and emotional/psychological resources, while simultaneously unsettling identities, disrupting social ties, and requiring continual "reconfiguration of self, others and belonging" (Schiller & Irving, 2015, p. 14; Harrison et al., 2019). Despite these realities, much of the migration and entrepreneurship scholarship continues to treat these issues as secondary, rather than as topics that warrant dedicated and systemic attention (Ram et al., 2017; David et al., 2025).

Aligning with David and Schäfer (2022), this study shifts the focus from global mobility as geographic movement to mobility as a lived, transformative experience. My main interest lies in understanding how GMIs construct identity and experience belonging by/ through their lived mobility experiences, which hopefully serve as a fresh lens to advance scholarly debates in migrant entrepreneurship. In this work, mobility is viewed as a trigger or catalyst for ongoing processes of change in identity and belonging. For people who construct their lives through global mobility, identity and belonging are "ephemeral, and they can suddenly shift according to places, situations and significant events, that is, lived experience" (Martel, 2024, p. 20). Yet, currently, little is known about how these shifting or constructive processes take place or unfold. Within migrant entrepreneurship, identity and belonging concepts are treated as fixed or monolithic, and migrant entrepreneurs are often idealized as embodied heroes, endowed with all the agency needed to conquer every challenge in their entrepreurial journey (Van Merriënboer et al., 2025). This common belief leaves the underlying dialectical and processual dynamics under-theorized and empirically overlooked (Ram et al., 2017).

To this end, this qualitative study seeks to answer the main research question: *'how are identity and belonging constructed by/ through GMI's lived mobility experiences, and, what implication does this have for migrant entrepreneurship (ME) research?"* Theoretically, this study draws on a dialectical perspective, which is particularly suitable for capturing the instability and fluidity inherent in transnational lives (De Haas, 2009, 2010; Ram et al., 2017), where ambivalences, tensions, contradictions are not anomalies but constitutive elements of everyday lived experience (cf. Putnam et al., 2016). Through this lens, identity is posited as continuously shaped through the interplay of agency and structure (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Van Merriënboer et al., 2025)*,* belonging emerges through provisional (mis)alignments between self and shifting social hierarchies, mobility trajectories, and relational encounters (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011; David et al., 2025), and contradictions, e.g., between recognition and misrecognition, autonomy and constraint, self-definition and external ascription, are viewed as generative rather than defining or limiting (Benson, 1977; Ram et al., 2017).

Empirically, this qualitative study employs an abductive, narrative-based approach, suitable for uncovering emergent patterns and extending theoretical understanding of complex lived experiences. Data were collected through interviews with over 35 GMIs from both the Global North (10 pax) and Global South (25 pax) – all currently residing in Finland. Interviewees represent diverse mobility trajectories, including first-time movers and serial cross-border

movers, reflecting heterogeneity in socio-cultural background, professional experiences and positionality in the host society. Through narrative interviews, participants recounted their life histories, pivotal mobility moments, experiences of recognition and misrecognition, and reflections on identity and belonging across places. This approach also created space for participants to reflect on and make sense of transitions, turning points, tensions, and ruptures in their mobility experiences. Collected data were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021, 2023). During the analysis process, I have adopted a 'lite' version of abductive reasoning, which is to iteratively move back and forth between data and theory in search of the plausible explanations (Lukka & Modell, 2010; Paavilainen-Mäntymäki & Plakoyiannaki, 2025). This approach is about identifying and evaluating hunches to explain anomalies emerging from empirical data (Sætre & Van De Ven, 2021). Particularly, through this abductive logic, I was able to identify recurring triggers, patterns, and contextual contingencies; to surface dialectical tensions (e.g., self-ascribed vs. socially ascribed identity; professional competence vs. external recognition; privilege vs. marginalization), which are critical for processual mapping how identity and belonging are constructed, disrupted, and reconfigured over time through mobility journeys and experiences.

Preliminary findings indicate that enduring tensions between self-perceived identity and socially ascribed identities constitute key sources of dialectical dynamics. These tensions emerge through the interplay of opposing forces. On one hand, individuals draw on their personal histories, achievements, competencies, and international experiences to craft a sense of self. On the other hand, host-country institutions and social structures impose racialized, linguistic, and cultural hierarchies that often contradict or diminish this self-concept, thereby complicating the construction of a sense of belonging (David et al., 2025; Van Merriënboer et al., 2025). Such contradictions materialize across both professional domains (e.g., recognition of expertise) and social domains (e.g., everyday interactions, categorization, relational positioning), generating oscillating moments of alienation and acceptance. Importantly, though all GMIs actively engage in processes of identity and belonging (re)construction, global power asymmetries between countries of origin and destination perpetually differentiate and inflect these processes and their outcomes. Individuals from the Global South often encounter heightened tensions and contradictions, as their identities and competencies are frequently questioned and devalued. In contrast, individuals from the Global North may benefit from symbolic privileges, such as presumed cultural superiority and the legitimacy attributed to their national and professional identities, which can ease, though never fully eliminate, these tensions. Such tensions and contradictions are central drivers of changes and transformations in GMIs' identity and belonging.

By conceptualizing identity and belonging as *unequal, evolving, processual, and contextually situated*, this study emphasizes that these constructs are provisional alignments forged through the interplay of individual agency, social hierarchies, global mobility trajectories, and the unresolved contradictions embedded in everyday life. The main theoretical contribution of this work is to conceptualize identity and belonging as ongoing and unfinished processes situated within the contradictions, dialectics between agency and multiple structures, rather than as fixed intersectional products assumed in ME (see e.g., Lassalle & Shaw, 2021; Van Merriënboer et al., 2025). Insights from this study also challenge the prevailing belief that entrepreneurs are proactive, self-reliant heroes capable of creating change and even disrupting structural constraints, which overemphasizes their agentic capacity while overlooking the power inequalities shape their entrepreneurial opportunities and trajectories (Terstriep et al., 2025).

My work calls for further conceptual and empirical research to examine the complex, dynamic, and transformative nature of mobile identity and belonging through dialectical and processual perspectives, and to position ME as a form of 'potential to change', rather than stable or fixed phenomenon.

Practically, by foregrounding the "transformative" side of global mobility and ME, this work invites policymakers, practitioners, organizational leaders, and individuals to recognize GMIs as individuals undergoing continual changes, whose lives constitute an ongoing process of negotiation, tension navigation, and shifting dynamics of belonging and identity construction at the crossroad of agency and social, cultural, and institutional structures. It highlights the need to acknowledge these change dynamics and develop targeted support policies, rather than treating all entrepreneurs through the lens of 'heroic, agentic, self-reliant' stereotype.

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Unlocking Potential, Fostering Resilience: Balancing Migrant Women's Entrepreneurship and Inter-generational Care Responsibilities in Europe

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Migrant women in Europe embody creativity, resilience, and deep reservoirs of knowledge and skills. Yet they often face structural and intersectional barriers that limit their participation in entrepreneurial ecosystems, including restricted access to culturally sensitive networks, guidance and training, digital exclusion, interrupted careers due to caregiving, and age- and gender-based discrimination. These challenges are especially pronounced for women balancing intergenerational family responsibilities. Senior migrant women (over 60) experience a migration–gender–age gap in economic participation while also facing care expectations from older family members and grandchildren (Aydin et al., 2019).

While the 'motherhood penalty' is well documented (Achouche, 2022), little is known about the 'grandmother penalty'. Even native-born senior women feel invisible in the labour market - so what does this mean for senior migrant women? Could entrepreneurship and culturally embedded artisanal practices offer a pathway forward (Aman et al., 2022)?

This paper contributes to debates on inclusion, embeddedness, and connectedness in European entrepreneurial ecosystems, highlighting senior migrant women as innovators, knowledge bearers, and active contributors. It also explores their untapped artisanal know-how, such as embroidery, weaving, and knitting.

Drawing on desk research on migrant and senior entrepreneurship, we examine how culturally rooted practices - like passing on craft skills – can become unique assets for personal development. Using the capabilities approach (Sen & Nussbaum, 1993, 2000), we explore how intergenerational dynamics, caregiving responsibilities, and artisanal knowledge transfer create opportunities for senior migrant women.

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Track 2:

Three Decades Following the Collapse – Post-Soviet Migration and Entrepreneurship

Does Poland's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Foster Startup Intentions Among Migrant Students from Fragile Countries?

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Keywords: entrepreneurial intentions; entrepreneurial ecosystem; startup; migrants' entrepreneurship; migrant students

The objective of this paper is to explore the attractiveness of Poland's entrepreneurial ecosystem from the perspective of migrant students originating from fragile countries. The situation of these individuals is particularly complex, as they are often compelled to migrate due to political instability or conflict in their home countries. In this context, starting a business abroad may serve not only as a pathway for professional development but also as an effective means of integration into the local labour market. Entrepreneurial intentions are a well-known topic in literature. However, given the group studied, it requires a new perspective, which has not been addressed in previous research. Migrant students are characterized by a certain specificity due to their affiliation. On the one hand, they can be considered typical young people in education, assuming broad prospects for their entrepreneurial endeavors. On the other hand, they are migrants who must grapple with the challenges of living in a foreign country. The fact that they come from conflict-affected countries further complicates their situation, as they almost always have no prospect of returning to their home country. Poland lacks extensive experience as a migrant-receiving country, so we believe this topic requires further exploration. In this paper, we aim to answer the following three research questions:

RQ1: What factors contribute to Poland's attractiveness as a location for migrant student entrepreneurship?

RQ2: How is Kraków's attractiveness for doing business perceived?

RQ3: What barriers discourage migrant students from engaging in entrepreneurial activities in Poland?

The study adopts a qualitative approach based on in-depth focus group interviews conducted with 15 migrant students from countries directly or indirectly affected by armed conflict. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, supported by the ATLAS.TI software.

The findings reveal three core thematic areas that shape both enabling and constraining factors influencing entrepreneurial intentions in Poland. Encouraging factors include personal attitudes and traits, the perceived entrepreneurial climate in Poland, and the potential of offering country-of-origin products in the local market. Conversely, the main obstacles identified were residence legalisation processes, regulatory constraints, and the lack of support networks. The identified factors correspond well with established findings in the literature on entrepreneurial intentions. However, the specificity of the target group and the research context allow for the identification of new elements and shed fresh light on the entrepreneurial potential of a population that remains largely under-researched. The dual context of this study enhances its contribution. First, the uniqueness of the research group—migrant students—combines typical

characteristics of migrants with those of international university students, especially in the context of entrepreneurial intentions. Second, their difficult geopolitical background, particularly about their countries of origin, adds a further layer of analytical value.

The factors identified by respondents as increasing the attractiveness of Poland as a place to do business largely align with standard determinants of entrepreneurial intention: personal disposition and the surrounding ecosystem. One additional factor relates specifically to the migrant experience—the perceived demand for country-of-origin products. However, this is not viewed exclusively through the lens of ethnic enclave entrepreneurship, but rather as a broader market opportunity.

Conversely, the discouraging factors stem directly from their migrant status and are common in research on migrant entrepreneurship: legal residence issues, regulatory challenges, and limited access to support networks. These challenges, while typical for migrants, appear somewhat moderated by the respondents' educational background. As students enrolled in higher education institutions in the host country, they benefit from access to academic resources, expert knowledge, and relevant information. Prior studies emphasize the important role of entrepreneurship education as a driver or moderator of entrepreneurial intentions among young people. Hence, further research is needed to determine whether education facilitates acculturation and fosters entrepreneurial motivation among migrant students. This could provide meaningful insights for university-based support programs and for cultivating an inclusive entrepreneurial climate within academia.

The contextual layer highlights the difficult circumstances of the research participants. Ukraine is currently a country at war, and the students from Ukraine are migrants from an active conflict zone, with all the implications this entails. While Belarus is not formally at war, the situation is more nuanced. Belarus has provided military support to the Russian Federation in the war against Ukraine, including the use of its territory, airfields, and logistical infrastructure. It has been subject to international sanctions and is regarded by the EU and the U.S. as co-responsible for Russian aggression. Among respondents, this situation generates significant anxiety and uncertainty, compelling them to seek entrepreneurial opportunities abroad

The study offers valuable implications for both future research and policy. It provides an empirical foundation for formulating hypotheses that can be tested in quantitative studies. Furthermore, practical recommendations are proposed for various stakeholders within Poland's entrepreneurial ecosystem, aimed at leveraging the entrepreneurial potential of migrant students. This research contributes new insights into an understudied group of migrants in Poland, particularly relevant in the current context of heightened geopolitical instability.

Deskilling and labor exploitation of Central Asian talent in Northern Europe

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Keywords: deskilling; labor market; labor exploitation; talent utilization; Central Asia, Northern Europe.

Theoretical background

Skilled migrants still face the problem of deskilling when they cannot leverage their educational qualifications in the labor market of the receiving country (Iredale, 2001; Braverman, 1974). This is especially prevalent among migrants from Central Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe when their qualifications are not recognized by host countries with advanced economies in the UK, EU, or the USA (Kofman & Raghuram, 2006; Mattoo et al., 2018, IMO, 2020). Deskilling is particularly commonly practiced in licensed professions, including law, engineering, and healthcare, where the qualifications obtained from their home countries are considered invalid (Papademetriou et al., 2020). The problem of labor market integration in the host country may be worsened by foreign talent's liability of foreignness factors, such as language constraints, institutional barriers, and sometimes employer bias (Elo et al., 2020; Bhachu, 2021).

In the last few decades, Central Asian migration to Northern Europe has remarkably increased, driven by socio-economic challenges in the home country and labor demands in host countries. Between 2000 and 2017, the number of migrants from Central Asia to Northern Europe rose by over 60%, with most of them looking for employment in low-wage sectors such as agriculture, construction, and hospitality (Frouws & Mazzucato, 2018). These migrants often face labor market exploitation, characterized by low wages, poor working conditions, and limited access to legal protections (Martens, 2020). A study revealed that over 40% of Central Asian migrants in Northern Europe reported experiencing labor exploitation, highlighting systemic issues within the labor market (Sukhomlinova & Zakharchenko, 2021). Central Asian talent in Northern Europe, particularly from countries like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, is often subject to labor exploitation due to a combination of factors, including non-recognition of qualifications, language barriers, and restrictive immigration policies. Many skilled migrants face deskilling and are employed in low-skill, low-wage jobs that are inappropriate for their qualifications. This mismatch is compounded by a lack of reskilling and upskilling opportunities in the host countries, which limits their ability to transition into jobs that better align with their expertise.

Research objectives

Studies highlight that transferability of skills is a significant issue for Central Asian migrants, as employers in Northern Europe often undervalue or ignore their qualifications and experience (IOM, 2022; Mattoo et al., 2008). Hence, more research is urgently needed to address these gaps and improve policy interventions, as deskilling not only impacts the economic well-being of migrants but also leads to significant losses in human capital for both sending and receiving

countries. Understanding the factors that influence skill recognition, exploring pathways for effective reskilling and upskilling, and minimizing unethical labor exploitation practices are essential for optimizing the integration of Central Asian talent in the Northern European labor market (World Bank, 2021). Hence, the aim of our research is to explore:

- How is Central Asian talent being utilized in Northern European Countries?

- What kind of labor market exploitation cases of Central Asian immigrants have been salient in Northern Europe?

- How may the problem of deskilling be solved through reskilling and upskilling Central Asian talent in Northern European Countries?

- How can the brain circulation of Central Asian talent in Northern European Countries be practiced most ethically?

Methods

In order to have a comprehensive view of the Central Asian Talent's employment integration path into Northern European countries' labor market, we will have a multi-layered approach and analyze (1) their individual employment structure (micro-level), (2) the work structure, including the intermediary agencies (meso-level) and (3) institutional structure, including the governmental policies aimed to control the foreign labor rights (maco-level). Data will be collected in four steps. First, we will provide hybrid workshops (online+offline) with focus group interviews with Central Asian talent residing in Northern European Countries (Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Germany) the purpose of exploring and identifying common patterns in external and internal factors shaping their career dynamics. We explore the drivers and influence factors of this dynamism. Second, beyond the focus groups, we will provide in-depth interviews with each workshop participant with a purpose of exploring their individual subjective perceptions and experiences of the factors (in pre-migration, migration and post-migration periods) shaping their career dynamics and investigating their proposals for advancements. Third, the data collected will be complemented by interviews conducted with meso-level organizations such as employers and migration intermediary agencies. Fourth, we will conduct interviews with macro-level instituions, including integration program offices, non-profit organizations and regional and state-level institutions (i.e., Migration Institute in Turku) providing various forms of support to migrant employees and entrepreneurs. Finally, these emic migrant voices and the institutional perspectives are reflected with extant research findings and developed into theoretical and practical implications. As an outcome, models and solutions for successful and sustainable brain gain and use are co-created with the participants. In total, we will provide 10 workshops with 100 Central Asian talent and entrepreneurs from different regions of Northern Europe. In addition, we will conduct 200 interviews, including 170 interviews with Central Asian Talent working in various employment sectors of Northern Europe and 30 interviews with institutions in Northern Europe providing various forms of support to this talent and their labor market mobility between different countries.

Contributions

Beyond its theoretical contributions, our research has societal impact at the individual, institutional, and national levels. Research on Central Asian migration and labor market exploitation in Finland is crucial for several reasons. First, Finland is experiencing an increasing influx of migrants from Central Asia, yet comprehensive studies focusing on this demographic

are limited. Understanding their experiences can inform policy development to enhance integration and protect workers' rights (Tapanainen, 2020). Second, as Finland's labor market faces challenges such as an aging population and skills shortages, insights into the contributions and challenges faced by Central Asian migrants can help optimize labor market strategies and improve economic outcomes (Salmi et al., 2020). Finally, exploring the social dynamics and discrimination faced by these migrants can contribute to broader discussions on social cohesion and equity in Finnish society (Pyykkönen, 2021).

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Migrant Entrepreneurs and Class Hierarchies in the Central Asian Diaspora in Russia

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Keywords: migrant entrepreneurship, diaspora, class, Central Asia, Russia

This paper challenges the romanticized notion of diasporas as cohesive and egalitarian communities by revealing their internal class divisions. Focusing on the Central Asian diaspora in Russia, the study uses Castoriadis's framework of order-givers and order-takers to analyze the relationship between migrant entrepreneurs and their migrant employees. Based on qualitative interviews with Central Asian entrepreneurs in Moscow and St. Petersburg in 2021, the study explores how class hierarchies influence intradiasporic labor relations. The findings reveal that migrant entrepreneurs often invoke diaspora solidarity while simultaneously exploiting, controlling, and marginalizing their co-ethnic workers. By demonstrating how diaspora solidarity can be used to perpetuate inequality and precarity, the paper contributes to debates on class and migration and emphasizes the need for deeper understanding of migrant enterprises as sites of both empowerment and subjugation.

Entrepreneurs as Agents of Change: Translocal Civic Ecosystems and Ukrainian diaspora businesses

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The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has spurred growing research on Ukrainian diaspora entrepreneurship, particularly under temporary protection schemes in EU countries that permit business activity. A central theme is the transnational character of these entrepreneurs. Unlike many refugee groups—such as Afghans, Syrians, or Rohingyas—who face barriers to maintaining home-country ties, Ukrainians operate in a different context. Despite the war, economic activity persists in parts of Ukraine, enabling many — especially women entrepreneurs — to travel, sustain businesses, and forge transnational civic and economic linkages.

However, existing studies on Ukrainian entrepreneurship in major host countries have, so far, only marginally addressed the **political and social dimensions** of these activities. Our study seeks to contribute to the emerging literature on the Ukrainian diaspora by exploring the **transnational civic engagement of Ukrainian entrepreneurs** in three key locations: Poland, Germany, and the UK. To do so, we draw on **the concept of *civicness***—defined as bottom-up, largely informal social networks with civic-oriented goals that emerge in and around conflict zones (Kaldor & Radice, 2022). This framework is complemented by Appadurai's 'scapes' dimensions model (2010). Following this approach, **we introduce a term of civicscapes** as the spatial perceptions of civic actors (in this case: Ukrainian entrepreneurs). Civicscapes consist of the spatial configuration of places, events, people, social relations, contacts, materials, and objects, together with their representations (such as posts, videos, or emails), as well as the ideas and meanings that are tangible and real for the actors involved. This would allow us to grasp the local, embedded relations and positionality of actors (i.e. entrepreneurs) in civic ecosystems as well as their experiences in particular geographies from a local perspective.

Through participant observation, mind maps and semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in these three countries, we aim to deepen the understanding of how transnational civic ecosystems evolve and what role Ukrainian entrepreneurs play in shaping them. In particular, we aim to evaluate how the civic engagement of the actors has changed from ad hoc early phase of Russian invasion to present time. We also want to analyze how the civicscapes in which those civic entrepreneurial actors have evolved since 2022. The proposed paper aims to present the first results from Polish field study, relying on a sample of 15 Ukrainian social and for-profit entrepreneurs.

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Track 3:

Ecosystems of Belonging: The Role of Institutions and Entrepreneurial Support Programs in Refugee and Migrant Entrepreneurship

Refugees Welcome: Interstitial spaces as localities of empowerment

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Experiences of crisis and intersectionality throw many societal actors into a state of marginalization that deprives them of their very capacity to effectively envision and construct a desirable future (Bhatt et al., 2024; Chaudhry & Amis, 2025; Lassalle & Shaw, 2021).

Without a functioning future-making capacity, the weight of their adverse past and present can work as a paralyzing and haunting force that creates a lingering sense of distress and obstructs their ability to move forward. Without external support mechanisms, these actors are at the risk of becoming indeterminately trapped in an undesirable present in which severely constrained access to resources and societal participation leaves them with little hope and opportunities for a better future (Harima & Plak, 2025; Kodeih, Schildt, & Lawrence, 2023). Particularly salient examples include undocumented migrants, oppressed indigenous communities, people with severe disabilities, child laborers, victims of human trafficking, homeless people, long-term unemployed, drug addicts, or residents of informal settlements.

For all these actors, it typically requires organizational solutions that not only address their present needs but also enable them to restore their future-making capacity through effective support mechanisms.

As a growing research area within organizational studies, future-making concerns the discursive, bodily, and material practices through which societal actors construct, negotiate, and realize fictional expectations of the future (Thompson & Byrne, 2022). Especially in the face of increasing societal inequalities, scholars have started to explore how possibly dystopian futures can be turned into more desirable futures (Gümüsay & Reinecke, 2024; Rauch, 2025). In this regard, the future has been problematized as an inherently unknown, uncontrollable, and open-ended temporal category that cannot be constructed by relying on planning and calculation practices alone (Wenzel et al., 2020). Instead, scholars proposed that it will also require situated and collaborative organizational actions (Thompson & Byrne, 2022; Whyte, Comi, & Mosca, 2022) for future-making to unfold its full potential under turbulent and uncertain societal conditions (Beckert, 2021). Despite these advances, existing literature has disproportionately focused on privileged actors and contexts where the agentic capacity to envision and enact desirable futures is largely taken for granted. In contrast, little is known about the spatial enablement of future-making practices, particularly for socially deprived individuals for whom future-making is not a given but a struggle. This oversight leaves critical gaps in our understanding of different organizational spaces as enablers of future-making practices.

In this paper, I address these shortcomings by exploring the potential of interstitial spaces as organizational instruments to restore the future-making capacity of marginalized actors.

Interstitial spaces are informal micro-settings in which social actors from different institutional fields occasionally come together to engage in activities of common interest (Furnari, 2014). Examples include purposefully created facilities for cross-field collaboration, such as coworking spaces (Yacoub & Haefliger, 2024), startup incubators (Villani & Phillips, 2021), or social meetups and events (Ruebottom & Auster, 2018). Since these spaces typically foster interactions among social actors with diverse institutional backgrounds, they have been posited as fertile grounds for the genesis and diffusion of new practices and opportunities (Furnari,

2014). In this study, I build on these insights and demonstrate that they can also play an essential role in the collaborative construction of desirable futures for, with, and by marginalized individuals. In the empirical context of an interstitial space for refugee support, I explore the following research question: *How can interstitial support spaces enable marginalized actors to restore their future-making capacity?*

My research makes two major contributions. First, I contribute to the emerging literature on future-making, which has mainly focused on the future-making practices of social actors with high levels of agency and has largely overlooked the role of organizational spaces in facilitating the construction of desirable futures. By showing how the future-making capacity of marginalized social actors varies before, during, and after their interaction in interstitial support spaces, I shed light on the future-making practices of social actors with low levels of agency. At the same time, I foreground the enabling role of organizational spaces in this process. Second, I contribute to the nascent literature on interstitial spaces by illuminating their potential as organizational instruments for reducing social inequality. In particular, I distinguish interstitial support spaces from other kinds of interstitial spaces and demonstrate how they integrate a liminoid and a liminal dimension to transform the future-making capacity of marginalized actors. By doing so, I further challenge the theoretical assumption that social actors who frequent interstitial spaces occupy relatively stable and durable structural positions that they 'do not lose or change' through their occasional interactions within them (Furnari, 2014: 444; Villani & Phillips, 2021: 8). In addition to these theoretical contributions, I outline several practical implications for practitioners and policymakers.

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Entrepreneurial Journeys in Homemaking Processes: Stories of (dis)belonging

Christian de Kraker (Hanze University)

Introduction

This contribution aims to stimulate discussion on the drivers of refugee entrepreneurship within homemaking processes and support ecosystems. It explores the dynamics of life long learning, start-up readiness, support ecosystems and spatial inequalities related to the transitions of social and human capital into the host country.

Entrepreneurial journeys of refugees highlights thresholds, frictions, bumps, and successes they encounter in their efforts to feel at home and reconnect with pathways to entrepreneurship and labor market entry (McMullen & Dimov 2013). The homemaking processes of refugees are often compared to those of other migrant groups. However, there are several key differences—aside from the significant diversity among refugees themselves—that result in many refugees starting at a greater disadvantage when entering entrepreneurship or a new labor market. Refugees are primarily driven by 'push' rather than 'pull' factors. An unprepared, forced departure not only leads to traumatic experiences but also has profound material, social, and cultural consequences. The resources, knowledge, and experience accumulated in the home country are typically not transferable to the host country and must be reacquired. In most cases, this results in downward social mobility (Phillimore 2011). Wealth, status, traditions, and networks from the country of origin no longer hold value in the host country, necessitating significant adjustments in the lifestyles of refugees (Connor, 2010).

Methodology

Utilizing the method of 'mapping entrepreneurial journeys' (McMullen & Dimov, 2013). By focusing on the journey, McMullen and Dimov highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of entrepreneurship, which aligns with the concept of mapping entrepreneurial journeys. This research will examine, in cooperation with refugee entrepreneurs, how these journeys manifest in the multi-embeddedness of the social and economic domains. Data from refugee entrepreneurs will be used with informed consent and in co-research. This discourse highlights spatial inequalities within the entrepreneurial journeys of refugees through Cultural History Activity Theory, employing participative observation with refugee entrepreneurs as co-researchers.

Research Question

What is the nature of interaction in the entrepreneurial journeys reflecting on dynamics of belongings and transitions of spatial, social, and human capital within Northern region of the Netherlands?

Further Discussion Questions

What does refugee entrepreneurship mean from the perspectives of ecosystem supportsystems? What role do thresholds and bumps play in the sense of belonging for refugee entrepreneurs towards learning and start up readiness?

Knowledge Production

This research aims to contribute to the development of knowledge in the fields of migrant and refugee entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial journeys, the migrant voice, and multi-embeddedness in cultural and social capital in spatial domains.

Role of Institutions and Support Programs in Migrant Women's Entrepreneurship in Finland

Jaanika Kingumets (University of Helsinki)

Keywords: institutional entrepreneurship ecosystem, migrant entrepreneurship, Finland, female migrants, enabling structures

This paper examines the role and effectiveness of institutional help in enabling entrepreneurship of migrant women in Finland with particular emphasis on female-dominated service sectors. Traditionally, much of the research has indicated the role of traditional help from migrants' kinship and co-ethnic networks and communities, but more recently, there is a shift from reliance on ethnic networks to formal institutional support (Serpente, Martinelli & Bolzani, 2024). Instead of approaching entrepreneurship solely as an individual project dependent on personal resourcefulness, I highlight the role of institutional arrangements, policy frameworks, and support infrastructures in facilitating or constraining business development in these fields. I address the institutional barriers (Marcinkowski, Gaweł & Patlatoi, 2025) but also ways how entrepreneurs navigate constrained entrepreneurial ecosystems (David & Terstriep, 2025). Similarly to Aman et al (2024), my study contributes to the growing literature on the gendered aspects of migrant entrepreneurship ecosystems.

Drawing on ongoing research on female migrant entrepreneurship in Finland (a case study which is part of a 4-year project on critical nodes in migrants' employment life in Finland that started in 2024), I analyze the role of institutional entrepreneurial ecosystem consisting of national and municipal integration policies, entrepreneurship allowances, public funding instruments, municipal enterprise agencies, and third-sector initiatives in providing—or withholding—structural supports. The research asks, *How do migrant women entrepreneurs in service sectors and experts in the ecosystem perceive the institutional support system and evaluate its effectiveness in Finland?* Within this angle, I am interested, whether the experiences are seen as gender specific in some respect. Finally, I explore how the different parties solve situations where the support system is identified as insufficient.

The empirical data draws on biographic interviews (15) with migrant female entrepreneurs in female dominated fields such as beauty services, care, cleaning and food, on one hand, and semi-structured interviews (7) with ecosystem specialists dedicated on fostering migrant entrepreneurship, on the other hand. In those data, the discussed support structures frequently include general business consultancy in the initial phases, taxation consultancy, facilitation mentoring networks, occasional training sessions, and networking events (the latter ones often in Finnish language alone). The major part of the data from both migrants' and experts' side, however, addresses access to timely and relevant information – for example related to taxation, communication with officials, funding options – that could be provided on-demand bases in custom form once the business is running. Both entrepreneurs and experts regard that institutional mechanisms are incapable and uninterested in offering such help. Besides the access to personalized help, gaps persist in long-term support, access to finance, and recognition of entrepreneurial activity in sectors outside technology and high-growth fields. Furthermore, there is a worrisome trend that the growing emphasis in institutional help privileges startup entrepreneurship (Bilmez 2020) and further disregards the female-dominated service sectors.

As a consequence, the institution support is regarded as short-handed and ineffective, and female entrepreneurs tend to rely on personal support networks, which in general discourage entrepreneurship.

It also appears that institutional entrepreneurship support structures in Finland are not separate from institutional employment ecosystem, but on the contrary – they lean on the same logics and reproduce the same patterns of inefficiency and ignorance.

The paper contributes by (1) conceptualizing enabling/disenabling structures as a key analytical lens in the study of entrepreneurial ecosystems; (2) demonstrating how institutional design and implementation shape migrant women's entrepreneurial opportunities in Finland; and (3) suggesting the need for more inclusive support infrastructures. I argue that strengthening enabling structures within the institutional ecosystem can transform entrepreneurship support from fragmented initiatives into a coherent system that sustains migrant women's entrepreneurial capacity in Finland.

Local start-up ecosystems for migrant and refugee entrepreneurs - belonging through structural change and participation

Ralf Sänger (Perspektive neuStart e.V)

This article discusses how local start-up ecosystems can be designed in such a way that belonging and connectedness of migrant and refugee founders are not left to chance but emerge as a systemic outcome. My thesis: belonging is not created solely through individual resilience or symbolic recognition, but through the dismantling of structural barriers and the institutionalised co-design of local framework conditions.

Local start-up ecosystems form the central space for action, as entrepreneurial success is generated collectively - through rules, resources, routines and relationships. Traditional support instruments such as counselling are not sufficient, as they do not address systemic hurdles - such as the lack of interfaces between residence rights, financing, recognition and markets. Belonging is therefore less a by-product of individual adaptation efforts and more a result of inclusive structures, intercultural networking and institutional visibility.

The article presents a practical process of how local ecosystems can be initiated and further developed under migration-specific conditions. It proposes a twofold movement: (1) the opening up of existing structures, for example through intercultural awareness-raising in support centres or inclusive financing instruments, and (2) the integration of new players, in particular migrant organisations, which have hardly been integrated institutionally to date.

It is particularly important to emphasise that a start-up ecosystem for people with an immigration or refugee background raises specific questions that must be addressed by all stakeholders involved. The aim is not only to present a practical process, but also to introduce a guideline of questions that will serve as a starting point for the joint further development of local ecosystems. The migration-specific challenges are seen as a catalyst for making ecosystems more resilient and inclusive. The integration of migrant founders into local start-up ecosystems is not a marginal issue, but a central task for the future.

Beyond Inclusion: Unveiling the Four Layers of Exclusion in Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

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Caren Weinberg (Ruppin Academic Center)

Keywords: Entrepreneurial ecosystems, exclusion, intersectionality, critical entrepreneurship theory, institutional theory, Foucauldian analysis, power-knowledge

Objective

This study investigates how entrepreneurial ecosystems systematically exclude marginalized groups despite their meritocratic rhetoric. Exclusion is exposed as an embedded structural feature rather than an accidental byproduct of typical ecosystem designs. Specifically, the paper reveals how four interconnected layers: structural foundations, institutional mechanisms, identity-based exclusion, and rhetorical-discursive dimensions, operate simultaneously to maintain barriers while projecting narratives of equal opportunity and inclusion.

Relevance

Entrepreneurial ecosystems are widely promoted as engines of innovation and economic growth, yet persistent disparities in access and outcomes reveal fundamental contradictions between inclusive rhetoric and exclusionary realities. Despite decades of diversity initiatives, women receive only 2% of venture capital funding, and minority entrepreneurs face systematic barriers in accessing resources, networks, and legitimacy. Understanding how exclusion operates as a systemic rather than incidental feature is critical for advancing theoretical debates on power, inequality, and institutional change in entrepreneurship, while also informing policy interventions that address root causes rather than symptoms. This research is particularly urgent as entrepreneurship continues to be promoted as a solution to economic inequality, potentially reproducing the very conditions it claims to address.

Theoretical Background

Entrepreneurial ecosystems have come to be understood as pivotal environments in which the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion actively shape access to economic opportunity and innovation. David et al. (2025) point out that while these ecosystems are structured to offer access and benefits across different social backgrounds, including variations in gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, the process of integrating entrepreneurs from marginalized groups is often incomplete or unsuccessful. This ongoing discrepancy highlights a significant disconnect between the vision of inclusivity and the everyday exclusion many experience. The gap becomes most visible when examining how ecosystems distribute access to vital resources and networks, often privileging certain participants over others. David and Terstriep (2025) expand on this by showing that mere inclusion within an ecosystem's boundaries does not automatically lead to tangible benefits or progress; rather, successful participation frequently depends on the ability to form strategic connections, utilize creative problem-solving strategies such as bricolage, and navigate complex cultural and institutional landscapes. Their findings suggest that physical proximity to resources, by itself, is insufficient, systemic and context-specific obstacles often demand a much greater degree of agency and adaptability. Furthermore, the conceptualization offered by Kamran Hameed et al. (2022) reflects the multidimensional

challenges inherent to genuine inclusivity. They define entrepreneurial ecosystems as intricate, interdependent networks in which governance, culture, resources, policies, and markets must all contribute to fair and inclusive growth. Yet, these pillars are routinely undermined by entrenched institutional and structural barriers—including bureaucratic complexity, discriminatory behaviors linked to gender or ethnicity, and policy approaches that ignore the intersecting nature of disadvantages. Complicating the picture even more, David et al. (2025) document how targeted programs and interventions frequently fail to dismantle the compounded obstacles faced by those at multiple margins, such as migrant women entrepreneurs. In these cases, the intersection of gender and cultural biases restricts access to capital and networks, heightening the risk of exclusion far beyond what single-issue solutions can resolve. Accordingly, these barriers are not just institutional but also cultural and social. Established actors often retain privileged positions within networks, resulting in persistent underrepresentation, limited access to decision-making, and a sense of alienation for newcomers and outsiders, especially those from marginalized backgrounds. Despite these barriers, many marginalized entrepreneurs find ways to assert their agency, employing informal strategies and alternative forms of resource mobilization to gain a foothold in constrained environments. Such resourcefulness indicates that exclusion is rarely a matter of explicit denial; rather, it manifests as a system of disadvantage that requires ongoing, extraordinary effort to counteract.

In response, scholars increasingly assert the need for evaluation frameworks that measure more than just the number of new ventures. The focus must extend to gauge the quality of participation, growth, and agency among those typically excluded. Kamran Hameed et al. (2022) make the case for reorienting inclusion policies beyond the mere opening of markets, arguing that real progress depends on enhancing the capacity and competencies of excluded groups alongside interventions that transform both structural conditions and underlying power relations in entrepreneurial ecosystems. True inclusivity, in this view, demands not only surface-level change but also fundamental shifts in the logics and institutional practices that govern these environments.

We lean on critical entrepreneurship theory (Calás et al., 2009; Tedmanson et al., 2012), Bourdieusian capital theory, Foucauldian power analysis, institutional theory, and intersectionality theory, for conceptualizing exclusion as a multidimensional system embedded within ecosystem design. While critical entrepreneurship scholars have challenged the heroic entrepreneur myth (Ogbor, 2000) and examined how entrepreneurial discourse serves neoliberal agendas (Berglund & Johansson, 2007), existing work has not yet synthesized these insights into an integrated model showing how structural, institutional, identity-based, and discursive mechanisms reinforce one another.

Method

We conducted a comprehensive conceptual analysis integrating multiple theoretical traditions to develop a novel four-layer framework of exclusion. Through extensive literature review and theoretical synthesis, we analyzed scholarly sources across entrepreneurship, sociology, and critical management studies to identify recurring patterns of exclusion. The analysis synthesized insights from Bourdieu's capital theory, Foucault's power-knowledge framework, institutional theory, and intersectionality theory to construct an integrated model revealing exclusion's interconnected nature.

Figure 1: Four Layers of Exclusion Framework - Iceberg Model

Unveiling the Hidden Layers of Exclusion in Entrepreneurial Ecosystems.
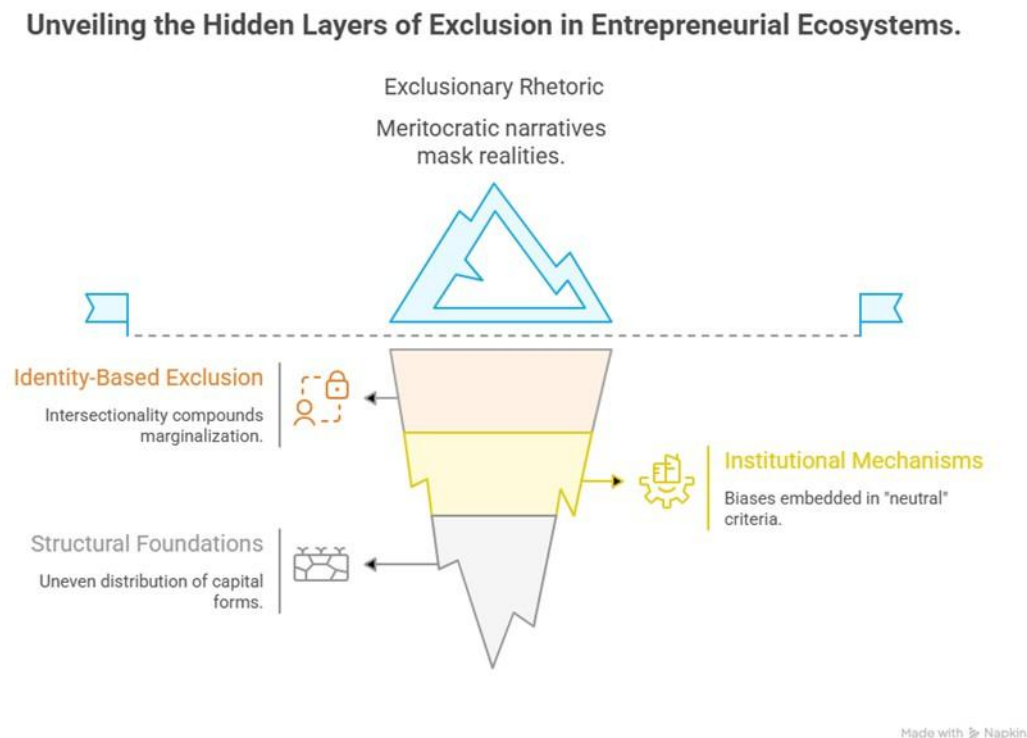
Our framework conceptualizes exclusion as an iceberg structure, where visible meritocratic rhetoric masks deeper layers of systematic exclusion. The model reveals how these four layers interconnect to create systematic exclusion.

Structural Foundations: Uneven Distribution of Capital Forms

At the deepest level, ecosystems are built on differential access to economic, social, and cultural capital. Entrepreneurs from privileged backgrounds leverage inherited wealth, elite networks, and cultural fluency in ways that create compounding advantages. This structural layer establishes fundamental inequalities that subsequent layers amplify rather than counteract.

Institutional Mechanisms: Biases Embedded in "Neutral" Criteria

Ecosystem institutions such as venture capital firms, incubators, and accelerators employ evaluation criteria that appear objective but systematically favor entrepreneurs who match dominant cultural templates. These institutional mechanisms translate structural inequalities into seemingly meritocratic selection processes while maintaining the appearance of fairness.

Identity-Based Exclusion: Intersectionality Compounds Marginalization

Multiple marginalized identities interact to create unique forms of exclusion that cannot be understood through single-axis frameworks. Women of color, working-class LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs, and immigrant founders face compounded barriers as different aspects of their identities trigger overlapping biases. This layer reveals how intersectionality operates within ecosystem structures to intensify exclusion beyond additive effects.

Exclusionary Rhetoric: Meritocratic Narratives Mask Realities

At the visible surface, entrepreneurial ecosystems project narratives of meritocracy, equal opportunity, and inclusive innovation. This rhetorical layer performs critical ideological work by attributing success to individual talent while obscuring structural determinants. The contradiction between inclusive rhetoric and exclusionary realities constitutes what we term the **paradox of meritocratic entrepreneurship**.

Theoretical Contributions

We advance beyond single-theory approaches by synthesizing Bourdieusian, Foucauldian, institutional, and intersectionality theories into a cohesive framework that explains how different forms of exclusion interconnect systematically. Our iceberg model structures exclusion into interconnected layers, representing a significant advancement over literature that examines barriers in isolation. This framework reveals exclusion as embedded in ecosystem design rather than as policy failures or individual deficiencies. We theorize the "paradox of meritocratic entrepreneurship" as the systematic contradiction between inclusive rhetoric and exclusionary realities, providing a new lens for understanding the gap between ecosystem discourse and outcomes. Applying Foucauldian analysis, we reveal how power operates through the rhetoric- reality gap, showing that discourse itself functions as an exclusionary mechanism by masking structural barriers while celebrating ostensible openness. We provide sophisticated theoretical application of intersectionality, moving beyond additive models to show how multiple identity dimensions interact within ecosystem structures to create "compounded exclusion" that exceeds the sum of individual disadvantages.

Practical Implications

For policymakers and practitioners, this framework underscores the necessity of multi-layered interventions. The iceberg metaphor reveals why surface-level diversity initiatives often fail: they address only the visible rhetoric while leaving deeper structural and institutional layers intact. Effective inclusion requires coordinated action across all four dimensions: redistributing access to capital forms, redesigning institutional evaluation criteria, addressing intersectional barriers, and replacing meritocratic mythology with honest acknowledgment of structural advantages. Isolated interventions at any single layer are unlikely to achieve meaningful change, as the interconnected nature of exclusion means that unaddressed layers will continue to reproduce inequality.

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Migration Policy as a Determinant of Social Positioning:
Highly Skilled Migrants in Germany

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Keywords: highly skilled migration, migration policy, EU Blue Card, social hierarchy

Germany has become one of the central destinations for highly skilled migrants in Europe, particularly since the introduction of the EU Blue Card and a range of state-led initiatives to attract international professionals. These policy instruments are often evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in reducing labour shortages or enhancing competitiveness. Yet their broader social effects remain understudied. This paper investigates how policy instruments such as the EU Blue Card, cultural support schemes, and state-driven recognition programs shape the social and cultural positioning of highly skilled migrants in Germany. The German state has actively sought to attract and retain highly qualified migrants, offering a range of mechanisms designed to reduce bureaucratic barriers and provide access to financial and institutional resources. While such measures are often evaluated in terms of economic outcomes, this study emphasises their broader implications for how migrants are positioned within host societies. By examining how policies and support mechanisms facilitate access to cultural and symbolic capital, networks, and recognition, the paper sheds light on the processes through which highly skilled migrants negotiate classed and cultural hierarchies in Germany.

The analysis draws on 30 in-depth qualitative interviews with highly skilled Turkish migrants who arrived in Germany after 2010, clustered in three main professions: white collar jobs, science, and the arts. The interviews revealed explored professional recognition facilitate access to networks and it inevitably elevates focus groups' position in the host society. Besides, we contend that institutional support directly affects how migrants perceive themselves and their place in the social hierarchy.

Our focus group differentiate themselves from established Turkish diaspora in Germany, particularly the guestworkers of the 1960s and their descendants. Participants frequently emphasised that arriving as university graduates with language skills distinguished them from guestworkers whom they perceive as the "unskilled". This distinction is not merely a matter of perception. Still, it reflects broader structural changes: Germany's shift from large-scale recruitment of manual labour to selective admission policies, such as the Blue Card, which privilege specific skills and credentials. The German case therefore illustrates how migration and support policies function not only as economic tools but also as socially constitutive mechanisms. However, by reinforcing distinctions between "desirable" and "undesirable" migrants, they also reproduce hierarchies and exclusions.

By linking state policies to processes of social and cultural positioning, this paper contributes to ongoing debates on migrant entrepreneurship and integration. It shows that Entrepreneurial Support Programs and related instruments must be analysed beyond their economic outcomes, as they profoundly influence how migrants are situated within host societies.

Proactive Strategies of Migrant Ventures: Anticipating and Redesigning Ecosystem Constraints in Germany

Rudo Femuko (Leuphana University of Lüneburg)

Migrant-founded ventures continue to face significant barriers in entrepreneurial ecosystems, including exclusion from mainstream finance, networks, and institutional support. Prior research often portrays these firms as reactive actors who adapt incrementally to structural obstacles. In contrast, this study shows how migrant entrepreneurs in Germany are increasingly designing their ventures strategically to anticipate and counteract ecosystem barriers before they are encountered. Drawing on qualitative research with migrant ventures across different phases of development, the study identifies a repertoire of proactive design strategies, including: (1) embedding transnational operations to offset local market barriers, (2) using technology platforms to bypass traditional gatekeepers, (3) creating bi- and multi-cultural products to access multiple consumer bases simultaneously, (4) cultivating alliances with native actors for early legitimacy, and (5) positioning around sustainability narratives to appeal to institutional stakeholders. We find that these strategies are not ad hoc responses but deliberate design logics embedded into the business model from inception. This insight challenges existing views of migrant entrepreneurship as primarily reactive, instead framing migrant ventures as institutional innovators who transform disadvantage into a basis for strategic foresight. The paper contributes to research on entrepreneurial ecosystems, migrant entrepreneurship, and strategy by advancing a proactive model of strategic adaptation under constraint, with implications for scholars and policymakers seeking more inclusive entrepreneurial environments.

Track 4:

Connected or Confined? Rethinking the Role of Proximity in Migrant Entrepreneurship

Belongingness as a Relational Dimension of Productive Entrepreneurship: First Insights from the IMANI Project

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Alexandra David (IAT - Institute for Work and Technology)
Judith Terstriep (IAT - Institute for Work and Technology)
Irene Aniteye (AiDiA Pitch)
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Joan Dahlke (CYP Management)

The framework of productive entrepreneurship (Stam & van der Veen, 2019) has significantly advanced our understanding of how entrepreneurial activity generates economic value, fosters innovation, and contributes to societal well-being. Yet, the human dimension—emotional, social, and cultural factors shaping entrepreneurial agency within ecosystems—remains underexplored. This paper introduces *belongingness* as a critical relational dimension that extends the explanatory power of productive entrepreneurship by linking entrepreneurial identity, resilience, and innovative capacity to experiences of inclusion and recognition.

Drawing on first results from the **IMANI Project**, we examine how men and women entrepreneurs navigate the absence of belonging and develop strategies to foster it. Our findings highlight, among other observations, gendered differences in experiences of exclusion, recognition, and support, demonstrating that belongingness functions both as a resource and a filter for entrepreneurial motivation, persistence, and opportunity recognition.

We argue that *belongingness* nurtures entrepreneurial identity (Baumgartner & Leary, 1985) and constitutes a precondition for innovation within trust-based communities such as entrepreneurial ecosystems. Only when entrepreneurs experience belonging are they motivated to share ideas, take risks, and innovate collaboratively. In the absence of belonging, however, entrepreneurs tend to seek alternative communities—often translocal or identity-based—where recognition, trust, and opportunities for innovation are available.

We conceptualise belongingness across four interrelated dimensions: (1) **psychological**—self-recognition and openness to experimentation; (2) **social**—access to networks, resources, and collaborations; (3) **cultural**—integration of diverse experiences and perspectives; and (4) **trust-based**—enabling collective learning and innovation through reduced fear of rejection or appropriation. At the ecosystem level, inclusive and supportive structures foster belonging, lower perceived risks, and strengthen collective resilience.

By integrating belongingness as a human and relational dimension, we propose an expanded understanding of productive entrepreneurship that complements economic and institutional perspectives with **social, cultural, and emotional productivity**. This perspective opens new avenues for research on gender, inclusion, and innovation in entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Visualizing Berlin's Migrant Economy: Insights from Yellow Pages

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Hasan Koc (Berlin International University of Applied Sciences)

Keywords: Migrant Entrepreneurship, Berlin, Yellow Pages

This paper narrates the stories of immigrant entrepreneurs in Berlin through a novel and visual representational approach using the bilingual yellow pages directories, Gelbe Seiten – İş Rehberi, published in German and Turkish. It focuses on six printed editions published at four-year intervals between 1996 and 2016 to examine the spatial and sectoral distribution of businesses founded by Turkish migrant entrepreneurs in Berlin. By digitizing these printed directories, the study compiles a dataset of 15,549 observations covering twenty years, analysed through an interdisciplinary methodology that incorporates geographic information system (GIS) mapping. Utilizing the open- source, cross-platform software QGIS, this research constitutes a pioneering application of GIS in the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship in Berlin. The paper visualizes trends in economic activities and spatial clustering of immigrant businesses over time, connecting these developments to the broader socio-economic and urban transformations in Berlin following German reunification.

The research frames these empirical investigations within the mixed embeddedness theoretical framework, which integrates the individual-level resources and motivations of immigrant entrepreneurs with the structural context of economic conditions, institutional settings, and local opportunity structures (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001). Mixed embeddedness highlights how immigrant entrepreneurship emerges from the dynamic interplay between entrepreneurs' social capital—especially co-ethnic networks, cultural knowledge, and personal motivations—and the wider political-institutional and economic environments they operate within. This framework facilitates a nuanced understanding of how Turkish entrepreneurs navigate Berlin's evolving urban economy, adapting to both opportunities and constraints shaped by policy, demographic changes, and neighbourhood-level transformations.

Against this theoretical backdrop, the paper asks critical questions about how immigrant entrepreneurs' economic practices and spatial distributions both reflect and shape urban socio-economic landscapes. Key research questions include: Which sectors have attracted the greatest involvement from Turkish migrant entrepreneurs? How have their business locations shifted in response to changing Berlin neighbourhoods? How do these developments relate to broader processes of urban regeneration, gentrification, and multicultural accommodation since German reunification?

Methodologically, the study employs a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative component involves digitization and GIS mapping of business entries, enabling visualization of spatial and sectoral trends over two decades. The qualitative dimension contextualizes these patterns via urban studies, migration research, and entrepreneurship literature, thereby moving beyond top-down representations often seen in urban planning to illuminate immigrant entrepreneurs' agency in the city.

Findings reveal sectoral diversification and growth, with notable increases in gastronomy, retail, and service-oriented businesses, reflecting both market demands and community needs. Spatially, entrepreneurial activity clusters have shifted from traditional immigrant enclaves toward more diverse neighbourhoods, indicating both integration and adaptation. These trends mirror Berlin's post-wall socio-economic restructuring and highlight the entrepreneurial role in urban vitality and minority representation.

The paper contributes to the track on migration, urbanism, and economic geography by demonstrating the value of combining rich historical directory data with advanced GIS methods framed by mixed embeddedness theory. It offers a deeper appreciation of immigrant entrepreneurship as a contingent and creative process informed by multilayered social structures and spatial contexts. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of recognizing immigrant economic contributions in urban development strategies, while advocating for more inclusive policies that support migrant entrepreneurs' sustainable growth and spatial rights.

In conclusion, this research advances the literatures on mixed embeddedness and immigrant entrepreneurship by providing a 20-year, spatially explicit depiction of Turkish business activity in Berlin. It fosters discussions about the interactions between migration, economic opportunity structures, and urban transformation—important for scholars, policymakers, and community stakeholders seeking to understand and support the multifaceted roles of immigrant entrepreneurs in European cities.

Entrepreneurship and migration in small island contexts

Johan Sjölund (Âbo Akademi University)

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Small islands, Migrant entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurial ecosystems, Constraints, Social sustainability, Context, Entrepreneurial motivation, Resource limitations, Cultural diversity, Social networks, Remote regions

Topicality of the research

Entrepreneurship is a crucial factor for economic growth and countries, regions, and governments struggle for policies, projects and infrastructure enhancing entrepreneurship (Schumpeter, 1934; Drucker, 1985; Birch, 1985). Small islands and entrepreneurship in small island societies work under constraints and are faced by unique challenges i.e. limited land area, finite resources and knowhow, small domestic markets, physical isolation, and dependency on transportation and communication (Baldacchino & Fairbairn, 2006).

Today, due to different crises and conflicts, there is an important change in the whole society, small island societies are no exception, and many regions are integrating new inhabitants from different backgrounds and cultures. Migration, not only refugees, has always had an effect on both the origin country as well as the host country shaping societies and cultures, influencing development and diversity nationally and globally, and has an impact on business, entrepreneurship and job creation. (Koser, 2007; Tsegay, 2023).

These factors call for an increased understanding of migrants' entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial motivation in a small island context.

Theoretical background

The model of the classical entrepreneurial journey, from identifying a business opportunity, developing concept and business model, assessing the necessary resources, to managing and harvesting the venture, relates to the process itself, but it is also necessary to analyse the real factors that motivates the entrepreneur (Freitas 2024). It is argued an entrepreneur has the same motivations as anyone else for fulfilling their needs and wants, but also rather driven by the venture itself, implying that the entrepreneur identifies and creates the venture and works in it (Carsrud and Brännback 2011). Whereas this may refer to the opportunistic entrepreneur, the almost opposite model refers to entrepreneurs driven by necessity, e.g. a refugee entrepreneur's motivation that could arise from pure necessity for survival (García-Cabrera et al. 2020; Lång et al. 2024).

In order to develop a broader perspective on entrepreneurship and a more comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurial opportunities, Korsgard et al. integrates ideas from various disciplines, i.e. economics, sociology, and psychology (Korsgaard et al. 2016). Welter argues entrepreneurship cannot be fully understood without considering the various contexts in which it occurs i.e. historical, temporal, institutional, spatial, and social contexts, however providing both opportunities and set boundaries for entrepreneurial actions (Welter 2011).

The temporal setting is especially interesting in the small island perspective since the location itself is continuously dependent on timing, logistics and other external factors - it is the business of *when*.

The effectuation theory, framework and the metaphor of "the kitchen" illustrates entrepreneurs starting with the ingredients they have (who they are, what they know, and whom they know) could also be a metaphor for the small island entrepreneurs operating in isolated and resource-constrained environments (Sarasvathy 2001).

A comparative analysis on entrepreneurial ecosystems between remote islands and core regions, indicated that entrepreneurs on remote islands are rather driven by necessity and focus on firm survival than the business opportunity itself (Freitas and Kitson 2018). Freitas argues that the geographical environment significantly influences the entrepreneurial process and calls for increased understanding of the specific contexts and challenges faced by entrepreneurs in different geographical locations (Baldacchino and Fairbairn 2006; Freitas 2024). A similar study from Scotland focusing on start-ups in remote island entrepreneurial ecosystems, comparing island entrepreneurs to their mainland and UK counterparts found that island entrepreneurs tend to be older, less well educated, more likely to be female, and less likely to be from an ethnic minority (Cowling et al.2024). Island entrepreneurship shares similarities with rural entrepreneurship ie. remoteness, limited infrastructure, and small communities, but may differ in scale, connectivity, and better access to broader markets. (Hunt et al. 2021).

Using an entrepreneurial ecosystems approach to study island entrepreneurship helps address research gaps and complex local dynamics, including resource use and institutional support. Research shows island ecosystems differ from general ones, especially between core and peripheral areas, in terms of e.g. labor markets, social capital, institutions, and financing (Rytkönen et al. 2024; Freitas and Kitson 2018;).

Similar to island entrepreneurs it is interesting to observe how migrant entrepreneurs navigate entrepreneurial ecosystems with constraints, ie. language barriers, limited social, cultural and network access and even legal barriers related to immigration status and business. Migrant entrepreneurs leverage their agency to ensure the survival and success of their ventures, using multifaceted strategies, and ultimately reshaping and resisting these contexts.(David and Tierstep, 2024)

Research question

Taking into account that entrepreneurship is a crucial factor for economic growth and development, the current societal challenges and changes, and the unique context of the small island societies, the aim for this research is formulated in the following research question:

- How does the unique context of small islands influence migrants' entrepreneurship for an economically and socially sustainable business?

Methodology

The general idea of this research project is to carry out a comparative study of a number of small and diverse islands within the EU, where the Åland Islands is one of the study objects. The research will include qualitative aspects, where e.g. entrepreneurial context, social networks and institutions mapped, and interviews will be conducted; as well as quantitative analysis for comparing e.g. company and societal data, development and growth.

Expected contribution to the field

The idea of this research is to deepen the perspective of entrepreneurship in small island contexts, and more specifically the unique context of small islands influencing migrants' entrepreneurship and motivation, and most possibly how migrants' entrepreneurship will affect the small island context.

Track 5:

Diversity & Intersectionality in Entrepreneurship

Beyond Survival: Refugee Identity Work Through Labour in Nakivale Settlement

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Aki Harima (School of Business and Governance, Tallin University of Technology)

Keywords: Refugees, work, liminality, Identity work

Objective

This study investigates how refugees in protracted displacement engage in work as a practice of identity construction. We aim to explore the meanings that refugees attach to work in liminality, with a particular focus on how work helps them maintain gender and social roles, construct new identities beyond "refugeehood," and participate in collaborative community life.

Relevance

As of mid-2024, there are 43.7 million refugees worldwide, with 86% hosted in developing and least-developed countries (UNHCR, 2024). Uganda is one of the largest host countries and applies a progressive self-reliance model that grants refugees freedom of movement and the right to work. Despite these favourable conditions, refugees face significant challenges in accessing meaningful employment, often experiencing downward occupational mobility, precarity, and the erosion of former identities. Understanding how refugees make sense of work under such circumstances is critical for advancing theoretical debates on identity work, belonging, and embeddedness, while also informing humanitarian and policy interventions that recognize refugees as active agents rather than passive aid recipients.

Theoretical background

Prior studies on refugee labour and entrepreneurship emphasize structural barriers such as resource scarcity, limited institutional access, and informality (Harima & Plak, 2024; Brown, Saxena & Wall, 2022). Research on identity shows that displacement disrupts established social and occupational roles, placing refugees in a state of liminality (Ram et al., 2022). Yet little is known about how refugees use work to renegotiate these disrupted identities. Building on identity work theory and refugee entrepreneurship research, this study addresses this gap by conceptualizing work as a multidimensional site of identity reconstruction.

Methods

We conducted an inductive qualitative study in Nakivale Refugee Settlement, Uganda—the oldest settlement in Africa and a global reference point for progressive refugee policy (Ahimbisibwe & Belloni, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2022). Data collection spanned nine months in 2024–2025, including 40 in-depth interviews with Congolese refugees, observations, and contextual engagement. The researchers built on prior professional involvement with UNHCR Uganda to gain trust and deep access. Data analysis followed the Gioia methodology (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013), engaging in iterative coding and active categorization (Grodal, Anteby & Holm, 2021).

Findings & Contributions

Our analysis reveals three overarching themes of refugee identity work in liminality:

1. **Work as a means to maintain gender identity and social role.** Work enabled refugees to reassert disrupted gender and social roles. Men emphasized provider identities and long-term aspirations for their children, while women balanced

caregiving with income-generating activities. At the same time, cultural norms constrained women's access to employment, and only jobs in reputable organizations were widely considered to restore social legitimacy.

2. **Work as a means to construct identity beyond refugeehood.**

Refugees engaged in entrepreneurial activities that allowed them to claim entrepreneurial identities, mobilize prior competencies, and pursue dignity beyond survival. However, self-employment was contested—many dismissed it as not "real work" compared to salaried positions. Nevertheless, refugees used work to project aspirations, build networks, and carve out freedoms that transcended the refugee label.

3. **Work as collaborative community work.**

Work was embedded in community reciprocity and solidarity. Refugees pooled resources, engaged in group enterprises, and created social spaces that enriched community life. Collaborative practices reinforced social bonds and facilitated integration with host communities under Uganda's settlement model.

Contributions

This study contributes to scholarship on identity work, refugee entrepreneurship, and embeddedness by conceptualizing refugee work in liminality as a **multidimensional identity practice**. Work serves simultaneously to maintain disrupted roles, construct new identities, and foster collective belonging. The findings highlight the symbolic and communal dimensions of refugee labour, moving beyond a survival lens to emphasize refugees as active agents of identity reconstruction and community-building. For policymakers and practitioners, this underscores the importance of designing interventions that value refugees' agency and support both individual and collective identity work through employment.

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Is it about me or my business? Understanding Identity work of African immigrant women entrepreneurs in Belgium across generations

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Keywords: entrepreneurial ecosystems, intersectionality, social identity theory, women immigrant entrepreneurship

Scholarship on entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) is on a rise (Aman et al., 2024), with issues of diversity and inclusivity gaining prominence in the agendas of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers (Neumeyer, Santos & Morris, 2019; Wurth et al., 2022). Since inclusionary and exclusionary identity ascriptions are considered in relation to the entrepreneur (Webster & Haandrikman, 2022), the EE literature has barely picked up on the intersectional discriminatory nature of entrepreneurship (Aman et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2012). In contrast, intersectional approaches to entrepreneurship relate exclusion of EEs to the entrepreneur's social identities (Aman et al., 2024; David & Terstriep, 2024) and suggest that the intersecting identities of gender, race and ethnicity are detrimental to their businesses (James et al., 2022; Robertson & Grant, 2016). However, these businesses often remain defined against the Western hegemonic discourse of entrepreneurship as high-growth oriented, innovation- and technology-driven (Verduijn & Essers, 2013; Welter et al., 2016; Spigel, 2017).

By adopting a social-identity-neutral perspective, EE research studies might overlook racial and gender biases that create barriers to resource acquisition and opportunity access (David & Terstriep, 2025; Heales et al., 2025), perpetuating the reproduction of gender (McAdam et al., 2019) and ethnic and racial inequalities (Bruton et al., 2023; Högberg et al., 2016). However, by implicitly assuming a Western-based entrepreneurship perspective, intersectionality research risks overlooking business-level barriers, reinforcing a Western discourse of entrepreneurship, which revolves around innovation and growth, an ideal that cannot be reached without questioning the construct of entrepreneurship itself (Calás et al., 2009). If siloed from each other, both intersectionality and EE literatures carry the danger of perpetuating current discourses about the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship by framing the experiences of non-normative entrepreneurs, such as those of women immigrant entrepreneurs (Webster & Haandrikman, 2022), and of non-conventional entrepreneurship (Bakker & McMullen, 2023) against these discourses. Therefore, to understand "who entrepreneurial ecosystems are for and if they can play a role in reducing inequality or rather contribute to its reproduction" (Wurth et al., 2022:46), we need to attend to both the types of businesses and the identities of the entrepreneurs EEs tend to exclude, as well as the relationship between the two (Mmbaga et al., 2020).

Despite extensive research on the experiences of exclusion that women immigrant entrepreneurs face in Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (EEs) (Chreim et al., 2018; Lassalle & Shaw, 2021; Poggesi & Mari, 2024), considerably less is known about how women themselves perceive, interpret, and react to such experiences (Robertson & Grant, 2016). Previous research has demonstrated that self-identification with social categories influences individuals'

perceptions and strategies in overcoming them (Settles & Buchanan, 2014), which we explore further by not only attending to women's ascribed identities, often propagated in the intersectional literature, but also to their self-identifications. In addition, women immigrant entrepreneurs are not only embedded in formal EEs but also in informal ones, often comprising their ethnic networks, who provide support. When women interact with multiple EEs that simultaneously position them within both inclusionary and exclusionary categories (Webster & Haandrikman, 2022), they may face conflicting dynamics related to their gender and ethnicity. Therefore, our study extends the concept of the EE to include the informal EE and examines how trying to fit into the formal one interacts with the dynamics of the informal EE. These navigation strategies will, in turn, shape the reproduction and transformation of EEs over time (Spigel & Harrison, 2017; Santos et al., 2025) and hence play a role in their exclusionary or inclusionary nature. Consequently, in this study, we address the following research question:

How do immigrant women entrepreneurs perceive and navigate exclusion in the formal and informal Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, given the dynamic interplay between their intersectional identities (both ascribed and self-identified) and their businesses?

This study hence explores the experiences of immigrant women entrepreneurs of African descent in Belgium through an intersectional identity lens, analyzing how women's self-identifications with respect to ethnicity and gender influence their perceptions of exclusion in both formal and informal entrepreneurial ecosystems. We draw from interviews with 36 women entrepreneurs of African descent in Belgium and interviews with 3 incubators. Our research followed a layered and iterative way of analyzing the data (Aman et al., 2024; van Merriënboer et al., 2023) while taking on an abductive approach in which data and theory were considered in tandem (Gioia et al., 2013).

We highlight the role of congruence between ascribed and self-identified ethnic and gender identities and reveal generational differences in attributing exclusion. While our sample demonstrates varying degrees of congruence, ranging from self-identifying with the ascribed ethnic identity to struggling with and disidentifying from it, women's ascribed gender identity was not scrutinized as such. However, its alleged compatibility with the entrepreneurial identity differed, which could be traced back to the degree to which women self-identified with their ethnic identities. In turn, the level of congruence between the ascribed ethnic identity and self-categorization steered women's perception of the barriers, which some women framed from a business perspective and others from their intersectional identities. Furthermore, the perception of the barriers shaped women's attempts to overcome them: through identity work if they perceived the barriers along business dimensions, through diversity work when such barriers were connected to their intersectional identities, and through social creativity (across both types of barriers). Women who performed identity work tried to conform to the dominant prototype of the male white entrepreneur, while women engaging in diversity work tried to challenge and diversify the prototype of white, male entrepreneur and by extension, the dominant prototype of 'the local' (e.g. what it means to be 'Belgian'). Social creativity strategies aimed to alter the perception of their immigrant social identity. Interestingly, the perception of barriers, together with the navigation strategies, occurred along generational lines, with the first generation predominantly attributing exclusion from the EE to their businesses and the second generation assigning it to their intersectional identities. Hence, we contribute to the intersectional lens in entrepreneurship studies by elucidating insights from both first and second generations, which, to our knowledge, has not previously been explored as such.

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Intersectional Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion: Migrant Women Entrepreneurs in Zurich's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

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Keywords: Entrepreneurial Ecosystems; Migrant Women Entrepreneurs; Intersectionality; Inclusion; Exclusion

Entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) have become a popular framework for understanding entrepreneurship as an actor-centred approach focusing on entrepreneurs and their economic environment (Schäfer & Mayer, 2019; Stam, 2015). Yet this perspective has been criticized for its implicit assumption that all entrepreneurs have equal access to resources and support (Brush et al., 2019). In practice, supporting structures are not equally accessible to everyone (Cowell et al., 2018; Neumeyer, 2022; Neumeyer et al., 2019). Entrepreneurs' diverse identities and everyday socio-spatial contexts are often overlooked in EE debates (Welter, 2011; Welter et al., 2017; Yamamura et al., 2022). These limitations are particularly evident for migrant women entrepreneurs, who face double disadvantages as women and as minorities (Aman et al., 2022). They face systemic exclusion and both implicit and explicit forms of discrimination (Haandrikman & Webster, 2020), alongside barriers such as limited legal knowledge, language difficulties, and racism (Meyer et al., 2023). In addition, they often struggle to be seen as credible because of their gender (Aman et al., 2022; McAdam et al., 2019). For migrant women entrepreneurs, these dynamics reinforce exclusion and limit access to resources. Without belonging and strong connections, embeddedness within entrepreneurial ecosystems remains difficult to achieve (David et al., 2025). Despite their economic and social contributions, their experiences remain underexplored, highlighting the need for intersectional perspectives in understanding their realities (Aman et al., 2022).

This paper explores the spaces and experiences of inclusion and exclusion of migrant women entrepreneurs in Zurich's entrepreneurial ecosystem in Switzerland, using an intersectional perspective. Zurich is a particularly relevant case study because while its startup ecosystem is well established and globally connected, significant structural inequalities influence who can participate and benefit from it. For instance, only 40% of founders are women, with the proportion of migrant women being even lower (Federal Statistical Office, 2024). To capture diverse entrepreneurial experiences, the study focuses on two groups: startup founders and "everyday entrepreneurs" who are small business owners, as most businesses in Switzerland are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). By including both groups, the study avoids reproducing the dominant high-growth bias in EE scholarship (Fritsch, 2024; Welter et al., 2017) and provides a more nuanced understanding of how migrant women navigate barriers and opportunities in different entrepreneurial settings.

This research is guided by the following research questions:

1.   In which spaces and in relation to which actors do migrant women entrepreneurs feel included or excluded within Zurich's entrepreneurial ecosystem?

2.   How do intersectional social categories of difference, such as age, ethnicity, family status, migration background, and socioeconomic status, shape these experiences?

3. What strategies and coping mechanisms do they develop in response, and how do these practices in turn influence the ecosystems they operate in?

Methodologically, the research is grounded in feminist economic geography and employs a creative, participatory approach. Beyond conventional qualitative interviews, participants are invited to build physical models of their entrepreneurial ecosystems with LEGO® blocks by mapping key actors, networks, institutions, and spaces. These models, together with reflective discussions, reveal how migrant women experience feelings of belonging, exclusion, comfort, and discomfort across different spaces of the ecosystem. This approach reveals structural barriers while also capturing the spatial, relational, and affective dimensions of entrepreneurship. By combining intersectional analysis with participatory feminist methods, the study generates situated and embodied knowledge of how power is materially and emotionally expressed in Zurich's entrepreneurial landscape.

The paper will present findings from ongoing fieldwork that illustrate how intersectional social categories and broader power dynamics, including capitalism, patriarchy, and racism, shape entrepreneurial opportunities and exclusions. It will also highlight the agency of migrant women entrepreneurs, who employ various strategies and demonstrate resilience to navigate exclusion, build community, and reshape the entrepreneurial ecosystems in which they operate.

By placing migrant women entrepreneurs within both local ecosystems and wider structures of inequality, this research contributes to a more nuanced and dynamic understanding of entrepreneurial ecosystems. It contributes to discussions on diversity and intersectionality in entrepreneurship by emphasizing the lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion, showing how belongingness, embeddedness, and entrepreneurial agency are interconnected within the power dynamics of contemporary urban entrepreneurial landscapes.

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Mestiza consciousness: A Bordering Approach to the Identity of Latin American Migrant Women Entrepreneurs

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Women across the globe have distinct and intricate problems, many of which are exacerbated by the long-lasting effects of colonial history. These legacies emerge in diverse forms, including economic inequalities, restricted access to capital, and institutional frameworks and cultural norms that persistently support ingrained, frequently male-dominated, business models. These layered challenges underscore the need for decolonial perspectives that critically examine and address the obstacles that inhibit women, and particularly migrant and refugee women entrepreneurs.

Using a decolonial lens and based on 12 in-depth interviews with migrant and refugee women in Ireland, our study focuses on the concept of resilience as enacted by these women to reach entrepreneurial belonging in the host country. The study of resilience has received considerable attention in the literature to explain their ability to cope and demonstrate alternative strategies grounded on individual ingenuity and risk proneness but also teamwork and even community-oriented resilience. Through the focus on resilience these studies showcase a much-needed contextualised exposure of marginal voices and their personal and entrepreneurial agency. Our study does not aim at undermining this celebration of resilience but instead at bringing another side to it that unveils the systemic structures that drive these individuals to be resilient and how these often result from historical coloniality. Thus, this study argues that a decolonial lens can help move forward the study of resilience from an individual and/or processual coping mechanism to get a better understanding of what is showcased with the idea of the resilient individual and, perhaps more to the focus of this paper, what is silenced and what these silences mean in terms of the global North/global South divide.

By introducing the coloniality/modernity question, a decolonial lens can add further nuances and layers to the enactment of resilience to achieving entrepreneurial belonging in the host country. In doing so, I believe that this paper addresses theme 1, 'the psychological, social (and 'historical') dimensions of belongingness and how these influence entrepreneurial identity and resilience' and theme 7 'Intersectional issues of belongingness, connectiveness and embeddedness'. Intersectionality already links structures and agency and decoloniality brings it a step further to unveil the colonial structures that sustain these intersections.

Unequal Belonging: Exploring Migrant Entrepreneurs' Diversity in Poland Through Perceptions of Migrant Origin

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Keywords: migrant entrepreneurship, perceived intra-migrant discrimination, Poland, new destination country, Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian migrants

Background and Aim

Poland has recently become a new destination country for migrants (David et al., 2024; Dobbs, 2025; Okólski & Wach, 2020), with entrepreneurship increasingly serving as a means of their integration into the host society. As a new destination country, Poland faces challenges in developing coherent migrant entrepreneurship policies, which, as viewed through the lens of mixed embeddedness theory (Elo & Dana, 2019; Kloosterman et al., 1999; Solano et al., 2022; Yamamura & Lassalle, 2022), reflect the interplay between underdeveloped institutional frameworks, evolving market conditions, and migrants' individual agency and social positioning. While the country attracts migrants from a diverse range of origins, Ukrainian migrants represent the largest group by far (David et al., 2024; Gaweł & Marcinkowski, 2024; Maj & Kubiciel-Lodzińska, 2020; Pędziwiatr et al., 2024). Our research question is: To what extent do migrant entrepreneurs from various countries of origin in Poland perceive the equality of the institutional barriers they encounter in the local context? Using this perspective, the study explores how migrant entrepreneurs of diverse origins in Poland perceive their relative position and sense of (un)equal belonging within the local context, with a particular emphasis on the perceived differences between Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian migrants.

Methods

The study draws on qualitative data collected through focus groups with migrant entrepreneurs already operating businesses in Poland, both formally and informally, as well as migrants who were in the process of, or intending to, start a business. A total of 46 participants took part, comprising 29 Ukrainians and 17 non-Ukrainians from various countries of origin between 2023 and 2025. This qualitative approach allowed for in-depth exploration of personal narratives, perceived barriers, and comparisons across different migrant groups.

Results

While many barriers to entrepreneurship were commonly experienced across groups, such as bureaucratic complexity, institutional and market entry challenges, significant differences emerged in how migrants positioned themselves based on their country of origin. Non-Ukrainian entrepreneurs and nascent entrepreneurs often expressed feelings of disadvantage and perceived intra-migrant discrimination in comparison to Ukrainians, highlighting three main areas of unequal belonging:

1. Language and information access: Official information related to opening and establishing a business is often provided in Polish and Ukrainian, but not in English or other languages. Non-Ukrainians viewed this as exclusionary, while Ukrainians were seen as more willing and successful in learning Polish.

2. Legal framework: Non-Ukrainians perceived the legal pathways to residence and business establishment as more restrictive for them than for Ukrainians, who benefit from temporary protection schemes and facilitated access.
3. Institutional support: Non-Ukrainians reported that public and semi-public institutions offer more tailored programs and accessible support to Ukrainian entrepreneurs, leaving others feeling overlooked and marginalized.

Contribution to the chosen track's topic

Our research advances Track I by demonstrating that migrant entrepreneurs' sense of belonging in Poland is influenced not just by their personal motivations for migration, but also by how they perceive the privilege associated with certain origins. By uncovering perceived intra-migrant discrimination in experiences of language accessibility, legal rights, and institutional support, we highlight how feelings of inclusion and exclusion are negotiated differently across migrant groups, offering fresh insights into the relational dimensions of migrant entrepreneurs' embeddedness in new destination contexts.

Political Implications

The results point to unintended perceived inequalities created by Poland's migrant practices, which prioritized Ukrainians in terms of legal status, language accessibility, and institutional support. While this reflects geopolitical realities and humanitarian commitments, it risks producing a two-tier system of migrant inclusion, where non-Ukrainians perceive themselves as "less deserving" or disadvantaged. Politically, this may undermine broader goals of integration, entrepreneurship promotion, and social cohesion. The findings suggest the need for more balanced and inclusive migration and integration policies that avoid privileging one group over others, thereby ensuring equal opportunities for all migrant entrepreneurs, regardless of their origin, and eliminating the perceived intra-migrant discrimination.

Conclusions

The findings highlight how migrant entrepreneurs in Poland navigate not only structural barriers but also symbolic hierarchies of migrant status. Ukrainians are often perceived both by migrants from other countries of origin as "better migrants," enjoying greater institutional recognition and access. Non-Ukrainians, in contrast, experience their entrepreneurial activities as taking place within an uneven playing field, marked by a sense of unequal belonging and intra-migrant discrimination. This study contributes to understanding the stratification of migrant experiences in new destination countries, underscoring the need for more inclusive policies.

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Decolonizing Entrepreneurial Training: An Action-Research Approach Targeting Incubation Professionals

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Keywords: decolonizing entrepreneurship education, MOOC, action research, incubation professionals, migrant entrepreneurs, alternative organizing, intercultural competence, inclusive entrepreneurship

This study explores the potential of management education to function as a catalyst for decolonizing entrepreneurial support systems. The study's objective is to equip incubator professionals with the tools necessary to engage effectively with migrant entrepreneurs. Conventional entrepreneurship education and incubation practices are frequently founded on Eurocentric, individualistic, and market-driven assumptions that marginalize alternative forms of organization, particularly those of migrant communities. Utilizing an action research framework, we have developed and evaluated a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) that was co-created by academics, incubation professionals, and migrant entrepreneurs across France, Italy, and the Netherlands. The MOOC was conceived with the objective of providing professionals with the necessary training to develop their competencies in entrepreneurial incubation. This training is designed to encompass three integrated dimensions: interpersonal and social skills, intercultural competencies, and technical business knowledge. The development of MOOCs, as illustrated by the present study, exemplified an alternative organizing method, characterized by horizontal knowledge exchanges, iterative co-creation, and critical reflection among a diverse stakeholder group. Rather than advocating for a universally applicable entrepreneurial model, the course emphasizes the importance of context-sensitivity, experiential learning, and the affective dimensions of entrepreneurship. This initiative challenges the prevailing hegemonic narratives commonly entrenched in entrepreneurship education, thereby promoting a pluralistic and inclusive approach that acknowledges and values diverse cultural logics and epistemologies. This study aligns with calls to decolonize management and organization studies by confronting the epistemic violence of mainstream entrepreneurship education and replacing it with training that validates diverse ways of knowing and organizing. The integration of participant voices into the design and content of the MOOC has been demonstrated to reframe the role of management educators from content deliverers to facilitators of social transformation. Moreover, the study provides practical implications for the design of inclusive training programs that promote equitable access to entrepreneurial opportunities among structurally disadvantaged groups. The findings of this study demonstrate that effective support for migrant entrepreneurship must extend beyond the realms of technical and procedural knowledge to encompass empathy, intercultural dialogue, and critical awareness of power asymmetries. Such support, embedded in a reflective and participatory pedagogical framework, has the potential to transform not only individual practices but also the broader organizational logic of incubation ecosystems. We offer a framework for designing educational initiatives that contribute to an alternative organization based on equity, solidarity, and plurality of knowledge. These principles are fundamental to the future of education in responsible management. In this sense, the present paper contributes to the field in three significant ways. First, it illustrates how management education—when

designed through collaborative and action-oriented research—can challenge dominant ideologies and serve as a site for knowledge democratization. Secondly, it advances the conceptualization of incubation professionals as pivotal intermediaries whose training must extend beyond business acumen to incorporate relational, cultural, and critical reflexive skills. Thirdly, it exemplifies the capacity of MOOCs to function as scalable, adaptable, and contextually malleable platforms for the dissemination of alternative pedagogical approaches and the cultivation of more equitable entrepreneurship ecosystems.

Fieldwork Challenges in Women's Entrepreneurship in the Homeland: The Reflexive Perspective of a First-Generation Migrant Researcher

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Keywords: Women's entrepreneurship; migrant researchers; positionality; insider/outsider; Georgia; post-Soviet context; belongingness; connectedness; embeddedness

Objective

Entrepreneurship research has long acknowledged the importance of contextual embeddedness, along with the roles of migration, identity, and belonging in shaping entrepreneurial activity (Welter 2011; David et al. 2025). However, researcher positionality in this context has not received much attention (Yip 2024; Gounder 2025). This refers especially to first-generation migrant researchers who conduct research work in their country of origin (Azungah 2019). The present piece of work refers to this topic and addresses the challenges and opportunities that appeared during my field work on women's entrepreneurship in Georgia for my doctoral thesis. I was born and grew up in Georgia and have been living and working in Germany for about 18 years. In this work, I would like to draw on my experience as a returnee researcher navigating western and non-western patterns in entrepreneurship research in a post-Soviet country, reflecting on the notes I made during the research period in Georgia.

Theoretical Background

From a theoretical perspective, this work draws on the concept of positionality in qualitative research (Yip 2024; Gounder 2025), especially in non-Western country contexts. It further addresses theoretical concepts such as belonging, connectedness and embeddedness, which are often applied in migration and entrepreneurship studies (Elo et al. 2024; David et al. 2025). Studies often describe belonging as the ambivalent perception of the researcher as either an insider (for example, through shared cultural roots) or an outsider (for example, because of long-term residence abroad) (Yip 2024). Connectedness is highlighted by studies as an important means of gendered access to entrepreneurs' networks and other associations (Voldnes et al. 2014; Earl 2021). This access often depends on trust, common identity patterns and the social positionality of a researcher. Embeddedness is also a focal point in entrepreneurship research in international contexts, not only for entrepreneurs but also for researchers (Ivanova-Gongne et al. 2018; Banerjee and Sowards 2022). Migrant researchers conducting their fieldwork in their home country need to navigate between transnational academic structures and peculiarities within their local research environment (Azungah 2019). In addition, the intersectionality theory was also considered in the present work (gender, migration background, class) (Khayambashi 2022; Ivanova-Gongne et al. 2024), as well as the contextual peculiarities and institutional theory in the context of post-Soviet countries, especially in the south-Caucasus region (Aliyev 2017).

Methodology

Field work was conducted in Georgia in May and September 2022. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 42 local women entrepreneurs who ran small and medium sized businesses. All the interviews were conducted in Georgian, as it was the mother tongue or first language of both the interviewees and the researcher. In addition, I used the ethnographic reflection method (Earl 2021; Yip 2024) to help me to reflect on my own position as a first-generation migrant

researcher based in Germany but with Georgian roots. This reflection highlights the impact of my position and its effects on the research dynamics during field work in my country of origin.

In this process, I would like to outline the insider-outsider tension of the researcher (Yip 2024). On the one hand, shared cultural roots were perceived positively by others and helped me to gain access easily to women entrepreneurs and other stakeholders from relevant fields. In addition, it was helpful in terms of understanding and considering local, cultural backgrounds and contextual peculiarities without facing unexpected challenges in this regard. On the other hand, my status as a long-term resident of an industrial country like Germany and researcher in a Western European academic institution sometimes created distance or elicited scepticism among the interviewees (Khayambashi 2022).

Reflection and findings

I would like to highlight some findings from the field work and my reflections upon it.

I shall begin with the ambivalent feeling of belonging, which includes my role as a researcher. I was seen as a successful returnee to my home country, which was in general taken positively. However, my background as a European citizen who enjoys a better socio-economic lifestyle was present in some situations, and not all interviewees could avoid commenting on this point. This double positioning was sometimes challenging in terms of building trust with the interviewees, demonstrating how women entrepreneurs in Georgia perceive transnational connections not simply as an opportunity for them in terms of networking but also as a marker of inequality.

Next, I would like to deal with interviewer-interviewee gender relations. Based on interviews with women entrepreneurs in Georgia, this study concludes that in entrepreneurship research in transition economies, qualitative studies can benefit from both the researcher and study participants sharing the same gender. This helps with building rapport and respectful interactions with one another, something which was often criticized in previous studies in similar contexts when male managers were interviewed by a female researcher (Voldnes et al. 2014). At the same time, the author of this study encourages women researchers to use their gender as a strength and not to be uncertain when working on topics in male-dominated fields. Finally, I would like to highlight connectedness, distance and emotional distress. Conducting research as an immigrant researcher in her home country is linked to emotional distress and may influence identity tensions as also discussed by other researchers (Azungah 2019). This needs to be considered from a methodological perspective and from the perspectives of belonging and entrepreneurship, as it shows how these can be constructed in the context of a transition country.

Contribution

This piece of research contributes to the conference from different perspectives. Methodologically, based on the experiences of a first-generation migrant researcher, this work enables us to better understand the role and importance of embeddedness in research in general and in women's entrepreneurship research in a post-Soviet country context in particular (Welter 2011; Grießbach and Ettl 2024). This work also outlines the intersectionality perspectives in entrepreneurship research (Ivanova-Gongne et al., 2024), as it shows how the identity of the researcher (her gender, cultural roots and current academic and socio-economic status) impacted her access to the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Georgia. Finally, it is important to underline the importance of this research from a transnational lens (Banerjee and Sowards

2022). Qualitative studies on (women's) entrepreneurship have rarely focused on non-western countries, such as post-Soviet transition economies. Accordingly, we know little about migration and entrepreneurship dynamics in this context. This work provides a valuable perspective by showing how a researcher who lives between two worlds experiences and reflects on the tensions that arise from this unique position. It also offers insights into how a first-generation migrant researcher understands the complex sense of belonging felt by women entrepreneurs.