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Call for Extended Abstracts for the Conference

## **Belongingness, Connectedness, and Embeddedness in Migrant and Refugee Entrepreneurship**

Conference Date: 29-30 January 2026 | Location: Bremen, Germany

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Migrant and refugee entrepreneurs often encounter profound feelings of not belonging within their host communities, significantly hindering their ability to form meaningful connections with local networks, institutions, other entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurial ecosystems more broadly. Experiences of exclusion, rejection, loneliness, detachment, displacement, and alienation create critical barriers to developing trust and cooperation, both essential elements for establishing and sustaining entrepreneurial ventures.

Despite their pivotal role in local economies, migrant and refugee entrepreneurs frequently find their efforts to embed themselves into local entrepreneurial ecosystems severely compromised. Without belongingness, connectedness cannot flourish (David et al., 2025), and without strong connectedness, long-term embeddedness within local or transnational entrepreneurial networks remains elusive (Harima, 2022). These dynamics contribute to their marginalisation and exclusion (Bolzani & Mizzau, 2020; Neumeyer et al., 2018), limiting access to the opportunities and resources vital for sustainable business development.

To explore how the relational interplay of belongingness, connectedness, and embeddedness shape migrant and refugee entrepreneurship, especially during times of political instability, we invite scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to submit extended abstracts for the upcoming conference. Contributions should examine these concepts within the context of migration, forced displacement, and the entrepreneurial barriers these groups face.

We welcome extended abstracts for the following tracks:

- Track 1:** I Am in the Right Place? How Migration Motivations Influence Belongingness, Connectedness, and Embeddedness - The Entrepreneurs' Perspective
- Track 2:** Three decades following the collapse: Shifting global migration, entrepreneurship and diaspora development from the Post-Soviet space
- Track 3:** Role of Entrepreneurial Support program in fostering Migrant and Refugee Entrepreneurship
- Track 4:** Connected or Confined? Rethinking the Role of Proximity in Migrant Entrepreneurship
- Track 5:** Open Track

## Track 1

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

### Chairs:

Jolanta Maj, Assistant Professor at Wrocław University of Science and Technology

Sabina Kubiciel – Łodzińska, Assistant Professor at Opole University of Technology

**Track Description and Motivation:** The decision to leave one's country of origin represents a profound turning point in an individual's life, often accompanied by complex emotional, social, and economic upheavals. Yet an even greater challenge frequently lies in adapting to the host country's new social, cultural, political, and institutional environment. While migrant entrepreneurial activities have been widely studied, less attention has been paid to how the initial motivations for migration —economic, educational, political, or forced displacement— shape migrants' subsequent experiences of belonging, connectedness, and embeddedness within the new context. This track seeks to deepen our understanding of the ways different groups of migrants and refugees navigate entrepreneurial pathways while simultaneously negotiating feelings of inclusion, exclusion, alienation, and the ongoing process of home-making in often unfamiliar and dynamic socio-economic environments. It aims to explore how these experiences of (non)belonging influence migrants' access to vital resources, support networks, and market opportunities critical for entrepreneurial survival and success. In doing so, the track also highlights the broader implications for entrepreneurial ecosystems, particularly their ability to foster inclusivity, resilience, and mutual value creation in increasingly diverse societies.

We invite submissions that address themes such as:

- Intersectional issues of belonging, connectedness, and embeddedness in the case of migrant and refugee entrepreneurs
- The barriers to, and opportunities for, forming connectedness within local and transnational entrepreneurial networks
- How educational migrants' motivations influence their entrepreneurial experiences, and identify measures to enhance their integration and success
- Policy recommendations to foster belonging, connectedness, and embeddedness in migrant and refugee entrepreneurship.

## Track 2

Three decades following the collapse: Shifting global migration, entrepreneurship and diaspora development from the Post-Soviet space

### **Chairs:**

Maria Ivanova-Gongne, Associate Professor, Åbo Akademi University

Maria Elo, Professor, University of Southern Denmark and Belt and Road Institute of International Business at Shanghai University

Raushan Aman, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Oulu

Mukhammad Yusuf Shaimardanov, Senior Lecturer, Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK)

**Track Description and Motivation:** Migration from the post-Soviet space has increased significantly since the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent conflicts such as the Nagorno-Karabakh war, the Tajik civil war, and more recently, the wars in Georgia and Ukraine and the Belarus protests. These events triggered forced displacement and economic migration, particularly to Russia during the 2000s and 2010s (Heleniak, 2004; Elo, 2016; Benedetti et al., 2025). However, Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and tightening migration policies have pushed many migrants, especially from Central Asia, to seek new destinations (Benedetti et al., 2025). Meanwhile, millions of Ukrainians and political refugees from Belarus and Russia have relocated across Europe and neighbouring post-Soviet countries (Maj et al., 2024; Hanson & Baltabayeva, 2024). While entrepreneurship rates in post-Soviet countries remain relatively low (GEM, 2024), migrants from the region often show strong entrepreneurial drive and adaptability (Tepavcevic, 2020; Elo et al., 2024), significantly contributing to host economies (Puffer et al., 2018). A shared Soviet legacy and the Russian language have historically fostered transnational business ties (Elo et al., 2022), although these networks have been strained since 2022. Like other migrant entrepreneurs, post-Soviet migrants' sense of belonging and embeddedness varies depending on cultural and linguistic proximity (Ivanova-Gongne et al., 2024). This track explores mobility patterns within and from the post-Soviet space and examines how recent geopolitical shifts affect migrant and refugee entrepreneurship, belonging, and entrepreneurial ecosystems.

We invite submissions that address themes such as:

- Development and reconfigurations of Post-Soviet diasporas affecting entrepreneurial ecosystems
- Transnational entrepreneurial ecosystems and inherent socio-cultural ties in the era of political turmoil
- Evolving senses of belonging, identity and homeland
- Ethnic and non-ethnic Policy responses and their effects on mobility, migrant entrepreneurship and integration
- Policy responses to returnee migrants and their integration into the labour market and entrepreneurial ecosystem of the host country
- Adaptation strategies in new host societies and under unstable conditions
- Experiences of Central Asian labour migrants in Russia and their shifting trajectories post-2022, including increased migration to European countries.

### Track 3

Role of entrepreneurial support program is fostering migrant and refugee entrepreneurship

#### Chair:

Deepica Sachdeva, PhD candidate at Fulda University of Applied Sciences

**Track Description and Motivation:** This track seeks to critically explore the evolving role of Entrepreneurial Support Programs (ESPs) in advancing migrant and refugee entrepreneurship, with particular attention to intersectional perspectives across gender and identity groups, including men, women, and FLINTA (Female, Lesbian, Intersex, Non-binary, Trans, Agender) individuals. Addressing a significant gap in academic literature and policy discourse, this track moves beyond general business support frameworks to examine tailored ESPs designed with migrant-specific and gender-responsive strategies. Current research treats migrant entrepreneurs as a homogeneous category within broader ESP evaluations, often neglecting how diverse needs and systemic barriers—such as legal status, discrimination, and cultural capital—shape entrepreneurial trajectories differently. In contrast, this track aims to foreground differentiated access to and outcomes from ESPs, while advancing a nuanced understanding of how these programs can actively redress structural inequities with their approach of connectedness, and embeddedness in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

We invite submissions that address themes such as:

- **Mechanisms:** Analysing the design, structure, and strategic focus of ESPs targeting migrant and refugee entrepreneurs, including the availability and efficacy of resources, mentorship, and knowledge transfer mechanisms.
- **Intersectional Approaches:** Investigating how ESPs engage with intersectional identities and the extent to which gender-informed models enhance inclusion and impact for underrepresented groups, including FLINTA participants.
- **Ecosystem Connections and Interaction:** Exploring the dynamic connections and interactions between ESPs and other actors within the entrepreneurial ecosystem—such as policymakers, financial institutions, civil society, and educational entities—and how these relationships facilitate or hinder migrant entrepreneurial success.
- **Impact and Outcomes:** Assessing the measurable contributions of ESPs and the broader ecosystem in enabling opportunity creation, business sustainability, and long-term integration for migrant and refugee entrepreneurs.

## Track 4

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

#### **Chairs:**

Dr. Judith Terstriep, Head of Research Department “Innovation, Space & Culture”, Institute for Work and Technology, Westphalian University of Applied Sciences, Gelsenkirchen

Lukas Zaghow, Researcher, Institute for Work and Technology, Westphalian University of Applied Sciences, Gelsenkirchen, PhD Candidate at the Humboldt-University Berlin

Dr. Alexandra David, Senior Researcher, Westphalian University of Applied Sciences, Gelsenkirchen

**Track Description and Motivation:** In times of political upheaval, migrant and refugee entrepreneurs often face exclusion, discrimination, and marginalisation within entrepreneurial ecosystems (Brown & Mason, 2017; Bolzani & Mizzau, 2020; David et al., 2025). These barriers restrict their access to networks, resources, and opportunities, leading many to seek alternatives such as co-ethnic enclaves, diasporic networks, or transnational and digital ecosystems (Audretsch et al., 2024; Elo et al., 2022). Some disengage from local ecosystems altogether, leveraging multiple or remote ecosystems to access resources (David et al., 2024). This track explores how non-inclusive ecosystems (David & Terstriep, 2024) reinforce spatial and relational disconnectedness (David et al., 2025) and deepen processes of disembeddedness (Harima, 2022). At the same time, it examines how migrant and refugee entrepreneurs actively shape new proximities by bridging, blending, or bypassing traditional local spaces. We aim to unpack the tensions and opportunities arising from multi-level proximities—geographical, cultural, social, and digital (Leendertse et al., 2025; Lamotte, 2025)—and to highlight the emerging phenomenon of unbounded or remote diasporic ecosystems.

We invite submissions that address themes such as:

- Proximity and Exclusion: How do different forms of proximity (geographical, social, cultural, digital) impact migrant and refugee entrepreneurship?
- Ecosystem Rejection: How do local ecosystems reject migrant entrepreneurs, and what are the consequences for their engagement and the broader ecosystem?
- Opportunity Costs: What unrealised economic, social, and cultural value results from disembeddedness in entrepreneurial ecosystems?
- Transnational Ties: How do dual embeddedness strategies help migrant entrepreneurs access resources across locations, and what are the effects on local ecosystems?
- Policy and Practice: What governance or organisational frameworks can mitigate exclusion and better leverage the potential of migrant and refugee entrepreneurs?

## Track 5

### Open Track

Under the 'Open Track', we invite submissions from a wider thematic sphere that do not fall under any of the Topics suggested by the thematic tracks listed above A. The organisers will create ad-hoc thematic tracks for accepted submissions in the Open Track.

### Important Dates

Submission Deadline: 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2025

Notification of Acceptance: 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2025

Please submit your proposals to: [david@iat.eu](mailto:david@iat.eu).

For any enquiries regarding the call, please get in touch with us at: [david@iat.eu](mailto:david@iat.eu).

### Abstract Submission Requirements

- Authors should prepare abstracts no longer than 500 – 1000 words, excluding references.
- Please provide the following information: Abstract title, title of your preferred track, list of co-authors
- Abstracts should include the following aspects:
  1. Keywords
  2. Objective / relevance / theoretical background / conceptual literature
  3. Clear research question
  4. Method (if applicable)
  5. (Expected) results and contribution to the chosen track's topic
  6. Conclusions
  7. Implications (optional)

### Organisers

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