

RICHIESTA PER L'ATTIVAZIONE DI UN ASSEGNO DI RICERCA
Dipartimento di Scienze Aziendali – Università di Bologna

Titolo italiano: Immigrazione, innovazione e imprenditorialità

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Acronimo di progetto: *IMIGIEN*

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Progetto di riferimento: MIG.EN.CUBE – fostering MIGrant ENtrepreneurship inCUBation in Europe (EU Erasmus+, referente scientifico Daniela Bolzani) (descrizione in Appendix 1)

1. Motivation and background of the research project

The number of people moving around the world has increased constantly over the last decades, with the most recent estimates highlighting that the total number of international migrants is 271.6 million, representing nearly 3.5% of the total world population (UN DESA, 2019). In this global scenario, Europe, counting around 82.3 million migrants, has become one of the most important destination regions for international migrants (UN DESA, 2019).

Researchers and policy-makers have been interested in the entrepreneurial activities carried out by migrants since the late 1970s (Bolzani, 2021). In Europe, this interest has been fostered not only by increasing migration flows, but also by the fundamental transformations in the labor market and in the industrial structure which took place over the last 40 years, pushing towards a general shift favoring self-employment and employment in small and medium-sized enterprises (Blaschke et al., 1990). The most recent estimates show that, on average, self-employment in the EU accounted for 14.9% of total employment in 2018. For immigrants, this rate was slightly lower (13.7% for those born in another EU member state, 13.1% for those born outside the EU), which means that around 3.6 million immigrants were entrepreneurs in the EU in 2018 (OECD, 2019). Therefore, the economic and social contribution of immigrant entrepreneurs in developed economies is undoubtedly significant (The Economist, 2008; Arslan, 2014).

The phenomenon of migrant entrepreneurship is significant not only in quantitative terms, but also from a qualitative point of view. Migrant-owned businesses have been characterized increasingly by a growing diversity (or super-diversity; Ram et al., 2017) in motivations, business models, entrepreneurial teams, organizational structures, and performances, among other aspects (e.g., Arrighetti et al., 2014; Nazareno et al., 2018).

2. Objectives of the research project

To date, while numerous studies have addressed issues of interest from a sociological, anthropological, or regional development point of view, the topic of migrant entrepreneurship also has attracted considerable attention from management scholars (Dheer, 2018). However, available reviews of the literature on this topic show a general neglect of several key issues for management and entrepreneurship researchers, including the processes of identification and exploitation of opportunities (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Dheer, 2018), and organizational-level strategy and performance (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Ilhan-Nas et al., 2011).

In contrast to the common misbelief that depicts immigrants as almost entirely concentrated in ethnic markets (e.g., Zhou, 2004; Ndofor and Priem, 2011; Arrighetti et al., 2014), immigrant-owned enterprises operate in a wide variety of markets and sectors, such as in technology, business services, finance, and creative or cultural industries (e.g., Smallbone et al., 2005; Cucculelli and Morettini, 2012). We argue that for these firms, notably those in high-tech sectors, innovation is a key factor in creating and sustaining competitive advantage, similar to other small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (e.g., Hult et al., 2004).

This research project therefore aims at collecting new empirical evidence about (1) immigrant entrepreneurs' involvement in start-ups characterized by high innovation potential, for instance those established in high-tech sectors, and with a specific focus on Italy and the United Kingdom; and (2) immigrant entrepreneurs' access to the support of external actors and networks, such as incubators, accelerators, and other business support services, with a specific focus on Italy, France, and The Netherlands. In addition, this research project aims at disseminating these research findings through several means, such as the participation to academic and policy-practice workshops, seminars, and conferences; the publication of press releases and articles in practitioner-oriented outlets; social media and a dedicated website.

3. Methodology of the research

The research project for this fellowship is structured according to three phases: (1) review and understanding of the literature and of available sources of data; (2) data collection, data structuration, and data analysis; (3) writing of reports, articles, and dissemination of results.

The empirical data collection will be based on the following data sources:

- Secondary (internet search) and primary (interviews and online survey) data collection about incubation and business support services dealing with migrant entrepreneurs in Italy, current practices to incubate migrant entrepreneurship in Europe, and the training needs of incubation experts dealing with migrant entrepreneurs in Italy, France, and The Netherlands;
- Spinouts UK (<http://www.spinoutsuk.co.uk/>), offering information about spinouts and start-ups from universities in the United Kingdom, among which many are founded by immigrant scientists/entrepreneurs;
- Italian Innovative Startup register (<https://startup.registroimprese.it/isin/home>), providing access to the list of innovative startups defined according to the law 221/2012;

- Chamber of Commerce data about the companies established by immigrant entrepreneurs (e.g., Telemaco database in Italy; Companies House register in the United Kingdom);
- Financial statements and data regarding strategic dimensions such as venture financing, mergers and acquisitions, etc. in immigrant-owned ventures (e.g., AIDA or Zephyr - Bureau van Dijk);
- Patent data about immigrant-owned ventures (e.g., PatStat);
- Regional data to contextualize information about immigrant-owned ventures (e.g., OECD regional indicators, ISTAT, Eurostat).

Additional sources of information will be identified during the project, and the efforts will be aimed at maximizing the chances to obtain organize multi-level and (when possible) longitudinal datasets to achieve the objectives of the research.

The collection, structuration and analyses of the data will be mainly based on Excel files and tools, or if possible statistical packages (e.g., Stata).

4. Timing of the research project

The project IMIGIEN is structured in four working packages (WPs), as described below (with the indication of length of effort expressed in months), and summarized in Figure 1.

WP0: Project management (months 1-12)

The research fellow will support the Principal Investigator in the management of the project, for instance in terms of organizing meetings with relevant stakeholders or project partners.

WP1: Analysis of the literature (months 1-2)

In this WP, the research fellow will be in charge of understanding the available literature on immigrant entrepreneurship, its relevant gaps, and the potential contribution of this research project. This will be aided by the Principal Investigator, who will provide a first list of relevant references both regarding the academic literature (e.g., available reviews on the topic by Ilhan-Nas et al., 2011; Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Dheer, 2018; Nazareno et al., 2019; Bolzani, 2021) and the policy landscape (e.g., OECD, 2019).

WP2: Data collection and database creation (months 3-11)

Drawing on the different data sources described in the Methodology of the research, the research fellow will deliver three datasets:

5. Profile of the research fellow

Desirable profile

The following points describe the preferential characteristics of the research fellow for *IMIGIEN*:

- Have experience in carrying out academic or policy-practice research activities in the domain of entrepreneurship, innovation, immigrant entrepreneurship, or immigration;
- Have experience in the management and analysis of quantitative data, with the support of data spreadsheets (e.g., Excel) or statistical softwares (e.g., Stata);
- Have experience in the design and administration of online surveys (e.g., via Qualtrics);
- Have at least an intermediate level of English (CEFR B2) or preferably advanced or proficient level (CEFR C1 or C2);
- Demonstrate experience in the organization and management of dissemination efforts towards managers, policy-makers, academia, or the general public, in domains of entrepreneurship, innovation, immigrant entrepreneurship, or immigration (e.g., social media moderation; website management; writing of press releases or short non-scientific articles);
- Have published reports or articles based on research efforts.

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Appendix 1

MIG.EN.CUBE

Fostering MIGrant ENTrepreneurship inCUBation in Europe

Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership for Adult Education
2020-1-IT02-KA204-080069
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MIG.EN.CUBE – Fostering MIGrant ENTrepreneurship inCUBation in Europe – is an Erasmus+ project funded by the European Commission (Strategic Partnership for Adult Education, 2020-1-IT02-KA204-080069). Led by the University of Bologna (Italy) (P.I. Dr. Daniela Bolzani), it involves the University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands), Institut Supérieur de Gestion (France), Fondazione Grameen (Italy), Impact Hub Amsterdam (The Netherlands), Place Network (France), Impact Hub Company (Austria), and Migration Policy Group (Belgium).

MIG.EN.CUBE is set to take into account the current critical issues in fostering migrant entrepreneurship in Europe, characterized by a fragmentation of incubation programs targeting migrant entrepreneurs, the diversity of actors that provide incubation activities, a strong focus on the “demand side” (i.e., migrant entrepreneurs) but a lack of training opportunities and exchange of best practices for incubation professionals targeting this group, and the super-diversity of (would-be) migrant entrepreneurs.

The project thus seeks to enhance the knowledge and competences of diverse incubation professionals dealing with (would-be) super-diverse entrepreneurs, so as to foster the opportunities for migrant entrepreneurs to learn and experience how to start and grow a successful business. Specifically, MIG.EN.CUBE aims at (1) increase the understanding of specific incubation needs of migrant entrepreneurs and of the competences required for incubation professionals working with them; (2) systematize and share best practices for innovative incubation programs for migrants across Europe; (3) provide incubation professionals with new, tried-and-tested materials and tools for advising, training, performing, and assessing incubation for migrant entrepreneurs.

MIG.EN.CUBE is innovative in contents because it develops and strengthens relevant and high-quality knowledge and competences of incubation professionals, accounting for the super-diversity of migrant entrepreneurs and the diversity of incubation professionals’ profiles, extending the offer of high quality learning materials and training opportunities tailored to individual adult learners’ needs. The project is innovative in approach, because (1) it assumes that not only migrant entrepreneurs should be supported, but also the incubation professionals working with them (matching supply- to demand-side); (2) it works with a bottom-up logic, developing materials based on a scientific assessment of best practices and real training needs of targeted beneficiaries; (3) it is based on the collaboration between academic institutions, private companies, and civil society bringing complementary perspectives and competences. MIG.EN.CUBE is innovative in methods, because it proposes the development of learning materials based on a bottom-up approach and interactive processes, and the use of methodologies focusing on the development of transversal competences and action learning.

Transnationality is a key feature of MIG.EN.CUBE, which brings together 3 European countries (Italy, France, The Netherlands) characterized by different immigration flows and legal frameworks and 2 European countries providing pan-European approach (Austria and Belgium).

The methodology of the project is designed around four main phases: (1) the preparation phase, carried out before the beginning of the project and within the first three months of activity, to provide with a strong background to start; (2) a scanning and assessment phase, which aims to increase the public understanding of specific training needs of migrant entrepreneurs and incubation professionals dealing with this group; (3) the production phase, which regards the development of training contents targeted to incubation professionals; and (4) the dissemination phase, aimed at achieving impact and relevance.

The main project results will be the MIG.EN.CUBE Synoptic Scan Research Report, the Library of current practices to incubate migrant entrepreneurs, the Training Needs Diagnostic Assessment Research Report, the “Incubating Migrant Entrepreneurs” MOOC and “The Inclusive Incubator” Guidebook.

The project initiatives will be disseminated through the project website, social media, dissemination seminars and conferences, public presentations, scientific and non-scientific articles. The impact of the project is expected to be significant both numerically and in terms of results from building capacity of the target group in the long term, also aided by a relevant Associate Partner (UNCTAD). The project will strengthen the efficacy of support programs linking entrepreneurship and migration, focusing on the development of relevant high-quality knowledge and competences for operators in the supply-side and policy-makers.

The main activities of the project are the following:

- Project Management: internal communication, organization of activities for the intellectual output, monitoring and evaluation, and organization of dissemination (October 2020 – April 2023)
- Development of the Synoptic Scan Research Report (Intellectual Output #1): identification of incubation services dealing with migrant entrepreneurs, qualitative/quantitative research to map the characteristics of incubation services, and collection of current practices to incubate migrant entrepreneurship in Europe (December 2020 – August 2021), elaboration of country-level reports (August 2021) and summary Online Report and Library of current practices (September 2021).
- Development of the Training Needs’ Diagnostic Assessment (Intellectual Output #2): qualitative/quantitative research to understand the training needs of incubation experts dealing with migrant entrepreneurs (February 2021 – August 2021), elaboration of country-level reports (August 2021) and summary Online Report (September 2021).
- Development of the “Incubating Migrant Entrepreneurs” MOOC (Intellectual Output #3): development and test of a first version of the MOOC (July 2021 – July 2022), translation of the MOOC in national languages (August 2022), piloting of the MOOC with incubation experts (September 2022 – December 2022), finalization and online release of the MOOC (February 2023).
- Development of the “Inclusive Incubator” Guidebook (Intellectual Output #4): development and test of a first version of the Guidebook (June 2022 – September 2022), translation of the Guidebook in national languages (October 2022), piloting of the Guidebook with incubation experts and policy makers (November 2022 – December 2022), finalization and online release of the Guidebook (December 2022 - February 2023).
- Dissemination events: six multiplier events will be organized during the project course. Of these, three will have a national dimension (Italy, France, The Netherlands, all in September 2022) and three will have a European dimension (Italy, March 2023; Belgium, September 2022; and The Netherlands, October 2021).