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Rostamkalaei, Anoosheh and Saridakis, George (2026) *Introduction to the special issue on "The diversity of immigrant entrepreneurship and its impact on economic development".* The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, 27 (2). ISSN 1465-7503.

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Introduction

The increasing scale of global migration, driven by geopolitical, economic, and environmental crises, has significantly reshaped the distribution of human and social capital across countries. (McAuliffe and Oucho, 2024; OECD, 2023). According to the International Organization for MIgration (2022) approximately 3.6% of the world's population is international migrants, a figure expected to rise. Existing literature argues that immigrants – individuals moving to a new country with the intention of residing there permanently or long-term – make important contributions to entrepreneurship, innovation, and internationalization (Jiang et al., 2016; Nathan, 2014; Naudé et al., 2008; Quak, 2019; Saridakis et al., 2022; Zimmermann, 2007). Entrepreneurial activity among immigrants is a means of improving economic and social conditions and overall well-being (Brzozowski, 2017; Lassalle, 2018), while serving as a mechanism of emancipation that enhances self-efficacy, identity formation, and community contribution (Ozgoren et al., 2025).

Despite growing scholarly interest, empirical studies (particularly large-scale analyses) on the relationship between immigration and entrepreneurship remain limited due to inherent challenges in identifying and tracking immigrants' entrepreneurial contributions (Peroni et al., 2016). Extant literature associates immigration with higher rates of marginal self-employment, often characterized as necessity entrepreneurship (Maritz, 2004). Some immigrant business owners tend to find employment in relatively low-skill jobs with limited income (Wang and Lofstrom, 2020). Many immigrants experience segmented labour market integration, with a concentration in low-wage sectors and limited job satisfaction (Aldén et al., 2022; Grenier and Xue, 2011; Razzak et al., 2023; Villarreal and Tamborini, 2018). In contrast, immigrants with higher skill levels are more likely to access higher-quality employment (Brown et al., 2019; Kerr and Kerr, 2020).

Although there is considerable heterogeneity in the nature and performance of immigrant-owned businesses (Kerr and Kerr, 2020), such firms are often constrained in their growth potential and tend to exhibit lower survival rates (Fairlie, 2012). The barriers limiting the entrepreneurial performance of immigrant entrepreneurs include limited language proficiency, restricted access to financial resources and social networks, cross-cultural differences, and the devaluation of prior education and professional experience (Dabić et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2016; Nijhoff, 2021; Walsh and Cooney, 2023). In addition, the country of origin may expose immigrant entrepreneurs to discrimination, further constraining their prospects (Barth and Zalkat, 2020). The processes of adaptation and integration are also shaped by meso- and macro-level characteristics of the host country, including institutional frameworks, co-ethnic social capital, and the availability of support mechanisms (Brzozowski et al., 2014; Kloosterman, 2010; Refai et al., 2018). While entrepreneurship is often

associated with agency and opportunity, immigrants frequently operate within constrained environments shaped by institutional, social, and economic limitations.

Research on immigrant entrepreneurship should, therefore, move beyond simply acknowledging heterogeneity in backgrounds and capabilities. In response, this special issue called for contributions that foreground the agency of immigrant entrepreneurs across diverse contexts and experiences. We invited manuscripts that (a) examine the role of institutions in shaping immigrant entrepreneurship; (b) explore immigrants' contributions to host economies; (c) investigate the impact of technological change; and (d) analyze individual-level determinants of performance and survival. We particularly encouraged multi-level analyses (micro, meso, and macro) to advance understanding of immigrant integration into labour markets. While authors were invited to distinguish clearly between migrants and related constructs (e.g., ethnicity), the final collection adopts a broader perspective than initially anticipated.

This special issue comprises seven papers, organized into three thematic areas. The first theme, Institutional Contexts and Policy Environments, explores how government policies and institutional arrangements shape the entrepreneurial opportunities available to immigrant and ethnic minority groups. It includes contributions that examine the economic paradox associated with older migrants and the role of affirmative action policies in entrepreneurial development. The second theme, Outcomes and Performance of Immigrant-Owned Businesses, focuses on firm-level outcomes and the behavioural drivers of immigrant entrepreneurship. Contributions address the role of identity and socioemotional wealth in shaping firm survival, the influence of biculturalism on innovation, and individual-level traits such as risk propensity and achievement motivation. The final theme, Broadening Perspectives in Entrepreneurship Research, adopts a more critical and expansive perspective, highlighting the need for interdisciplinary and innovative approaches. It includes work that reconsiders the relationship between entrepreneurial identity and behaviour and explores constructs such as courage and proactiveness, particularly within marginalized communities (while the last paper discusses the LGBTQIA+ community, we included this paper in this volume for its potential implications for the study of immigrant entrepreneurship). Collectively, these papers provide valuable insights that advance the literature and offer practical, policy-relevant implications for a wide range of stakeholders.

This introductory article is structured as follows. The next section reviews the contributions according to the thematic areas outlined above. A discussion of the key implications and directions for future research follows. The final section concludes by summarising the special issue and acknowledging those involved in its development.

Special issue contributions

Institutional contexts and policy environments

The contribution of immigrants to host economies remains a subject of ongoing debate, often framed as economic benefits versus social and fiscal costs. Torres et al. (2026) model this 'paradox' in the context of older migrants. Their study highlights how this group is frequently overlooked in migration policies, despite making meaningful contributions through cultural diversity, social cohesion, labour participation (particularly in caregiving), small business creation, and consumption. At the same time, these benefits are offset by increased demands on healthcare and social services, creating fiscal pressures. Torres et al. (2026) present a macroeconomic model to optimize the cost-benefit trade-off for older migrants, potentially addressing the paradox through tailored policy interventions and enhanced international cooperation.

Ramli and Williams (2026) examine the effects of affirmative action policies in Malaysia. Drawing on qualitative data from entrepreneurs and practitioners, the authors show how this policy can create institutional advantages for the majority ethnic groups while excluding others. Historical and religious factors further reinforce these dynamics, resulting in parallel formal and informal institutional systems that widen disparities in entrepreneurial activity and identity formation between the majority ethnic and other groups.

Outcomes and performance of immigrant-owned businesses

This theme explores how identity and individual characteristics influence entrepreneurial outcomes. Lupton et al. (2026) integrate social identity and socioemotional wealth theories to examine business survival among immigrant-owned firms. Social identity theory provides a mechanism for coping with discrimination while reinforcing self-esteem and continuity. At the same time, socioemotional wealth considerations, typically associated with family firms, highlight the importance of non-economic goals in decision-making. The study finds that immigrant-owned firms may prioritize longevity because maintaining social ties is important in host countries. Empirical analysis using Ecuadorian data supports this argument.

Le et al. (2026) focus on biculturalism as a source of heterogeneity among immigrant entrepreneurs. Bicultural individuals, individuals educated in both their home and host countries, may experience cognitive dissonance due to differing cultural norms, which, in turn, can enhance creativity and innovation. Using data from over 3000 US high-tech Initial Public Offering (IPOs), the authors demonstrate that bicultural ownership is associated with more innovative and competitive firms. However, they also highlight

challenges related to legitimacy and social capital, which can be mitigated through the presence of native executives and board members.

Paksoy et al. (2026) investigate entrepreneurial potential among Syrian refugees in Gaziantep, Turkey. The study examines the roles of need for achievement and risk propensity and finds that both traits positively influence entrepreneurial potential: the individual's readiness to engage in entrepreneurial activities. These characteristics create pathways for refugees to establish and grow businesses, supporting their economic integration.

Broadening perspectives in entrepreneurship research

Ironside (2026) critiques the fragmented nature of entrepreneurship research, arguing that the field's reliance on theories borrowed from other social sciences has led to a disconnect between entrepreneurial identity and behaviour. To address this, the author advocates for greater use of ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches, enabling deeper engagement with context and lived experience.

The final paper in this volume (included alongside the special issue) examines the role of courage in entrepreneurship. Cavalcanti et al. (2026) conceptualize courage as the ability to act despite fear and link it to proactiveness, risk-taking, and innovation. Focusing on the LGBTQIA+ community, the study finds that courage positively influences risk propensity and contributes to long-term growth and innovation. However, proactiveness may, in some cases, be associated with weaker social skills and negatively affect performance.

Implications for theory and practice

This special issue offers several important implications for theory. First, it reinforces the need to move beyond homogeneous conceptualizations of immigrant entrepreneurship by foregrounding heterogeneity across individual, institutional, and contextual dimensions. The contributions and previous research collectively demonstrate that immigrant entrepreneurship is shaped not only by individual agency but also by multi-level influences, including institutional frameworks, social identity processes, and cultural configurations such as biculturalism (Dheer, 2018; Kloosterman, 2010; Le et al., 2026; Lupton et al., 2026; Ramli and Williams, 2026). In doing so, this collection extends existing theoretical perspectives by applying them to immigrant contexts and highlighting their explanatory power for firm survival, innovation, and behavioural outcomes. Moreover, the special issue advances theoretical debates by highlighting important areas requiring further exploration, including older migrants (Torres et al., 2026), refugee entrepreneurship (Paksoy et al., 2026), and marginalized communities,

while also calling for greater integration across disciplinary boundaries to address fragmentation within the field (Cavalcanti et al., 2026; Ironside, 2026).

From a practical and policy perspective, the findings underscore the importance of context-sensitive and inclusive approaches to supporting immigrant entrepreneurship (Halabisky, 2022). Policymakers and practitioners should adopt tailored interventions that recognize the diversity of immigrant groups, including the often-overlooked contributions of older migrants (Torres et al., 2026), in fostering social cohesion and economic participation. At the same time, vigilant monitoring of institutional arrangements is necessary to mitigate unintended consequences, such as the exclusionary effects of parallel formal and informal systems or affirmative action policies that privilege certain groups over others (Ramli and Williams, 2026). The evidence also highlights the need for targeted support mechanisms, including facilitating access to finance, networks, and training programmes that develop risk-taking and achievement-oriented capabilities (Paksoy et al., 2026). In addition, paying attention to the economic benefits of biculturalism (through education policies that attract and retain international students) and promoting diverse governance structures, such as the inclusion of native board members, can help reduce liabilities associated with foreignness and smallness (Le et al., 2026). Finally, in contexts where employment opportunities are limited, particularly in developing economies, policies that actively promote immigrant entrepreneurship can contribute to broader economic development and regional dynamism (Paksoy et al., 2026).

Directions for future research

This special issue also opens several avenues for future research. There is a clear need for more nuanced, contextually grounded studies that explore immigrant entrepreneurship across sectors, geographical settings, and demographic groups (Baycan-Levent and Nijkamp, 2009), particularly among under-researched populations (Ramli and Williams, 2026; Torres et al., 2026) such as older migrants and excluded ethnic groups. Future work should place greater emphasis on how institutional environments shape inclusion and exclusion, as well as how they support immigrants during periods of uncertainty and economic or other shocks (e.g., health-related crises), alongside a deeper exploration of the lived experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs within these contexts (e.g., Razzak et al., 2023). In addition, further research is required to understand how immigrant entrepreneurs construct and reconstruct their identities over time (Jones Christensen and Newman, 2024; Le et al., 2026; Paksoy et al., 2026), and how these processes influence entrepreneurial behaviour and outcomes (Ironside, 2026; Kim, 2022). Conceptual clarity is also needed, particularly in defining “immigrants” and distinguishing between different forms of cultural adaptation (Le et al., 2026). Finally, longitudinal studies would be valuable for

testing and extending existing theoretical models while capturing the dynamic nature of entrepreneurial processes (see Saridakis, 2025).

Conclusion

This special issue brings together a diverse and timely set of contributions that collectively deepen our understanding of immigrant entrepreneurship as a multifaceted and context-dependent phenomenon. By integrating perspectives across institutional environments, firm-level outcomes, and broader conceptual developments, the collection highlights the complexity of entrepreneurial experiences among immigrant and marginalized groups while underscoring their significance for economic and social development. In doing so, it not only advances ongoing scholarly debates but also opens new avenues for more inclusive and contextually grounded research. We are sincerely grateful to the chief editors for their guidance and continued support throughout this process, and to the referees for their thoughtful and constructive reviews, which have greatly enhanced the quality of this special issue. Ultimately, we leave it to the readers to assess and appreciate the importance and contribution of this collection.

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