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## **Strategies of Russian-Speaking Migrant Entrepreneurs in Germany: Preliminary Results of the Study**

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**Russian-speaking migrants in Germany start and develop their entrepreneurial ventures with enthusiastic aspirations. Given the cultural and historical ties between Russia and Europe, and Germany in particular, we can assume that Russian-speaking entrepreneurs are influenced by certain factors that do not affect migrants from other regions of the world. The influence of the cultural and historical context on the development of entrepreneurial strategies of migrants has yet been underexplored in research literature. We aim to bridge this gap by contributing to migrant and transnational diaspora entrepreneurship research. We examine how and why Russian-speaking entrepreneurs set up their businesses, what resources they use, and what the entrepreneurial forms of their business projects are. Preliminary results of our research show that Russian-speaking migrant entrepreneurs constitute a diverse, heterogeneous and rather understudied cohort of international entrepreneurs. This is the first exploratory study that uncovers characteristics of the Russian-speaking migrant entrepreneurs' strategies.**

*Keywords: Russian-speaking, international entrepreneurship, migrant entrepreneurship, transnational diaspora*

## **Introduction**

Migration and entrepreneurship are closely intertwined phenomena (Baycan-Levent & Nijkamp, 2009). Migrants are traditionally considered to have high entrepreneurial motivation, compared to native populations of host countries (Dabic et al., 2020). Migration contributes substantially to the development of various societies, economies and their competitiveness (Tung, 2008). Entrepreneurship and migrant entrepreneurship crucially influence the acceleration of productivity growth and increase innovation and competition (Kushnirovich et al., 2018; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). This is especially the case in high-income countries (Acs, 2006). Migrant entrepreneurs foster the economic growth of their host countries through activities and through their impact. The share of migrant entrepreneurs in OECD countries is slightly higher than the share of natives involved in entrepreneurial activities, though these numbers differ across countries (OECD, 2010). Migrant entrepreneurs have unique characteristics that distinguish them from the native entrepreneurs and migrants in wage employment, and it makes them stand out as a distinctive group (OECD, 2010) that needs to be examined by scholars and practitioners alike. Advancing the knowledge on migrant and diaspora entrepreneurship and the respective transnational business activities can contribute to more sustainable integration of individuals of migrant origin into society and recognition of the value they bring to host countries with their entrepreneurship (Elo et al., 2018; Czinkota et al., 2020). This is also highly important for the governance and policymaking on diasporas, migrant entrepreneurship and migration (Newland & Tanaka, 2010; Elo et al., 2018).

The post-Soviet outmigration has generated a heterogenous global diaspora that speaks Russian and participates in international business as family business owners, entrepreneurs, investors, traders and representatives of the global highly-skilled talent (e.g. Sommer & Gamper, 2018; Elo & Dana, 2019). Russian-speaking entrepreneurs in Europe have been prominent economic players for several decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also historically as Russian emigrants. They do not only contribute to the GDP of countries where they are residents, but maintain and develop trade and economic ties with Russia and other CIS countries with their particular market specific capabilities and knowledge (Elo, 2017). In the international business literature, strategies for entering foreign markets, FDI and export activities of companies abroad are actively studied from the MNE perspective, but the issues of developing entrepreneurship among migrants, their economic ties with the country of origin and business strategies are often primarily examined through the sociological lens focusing on other aspects than business operations and strategies (e.g. Kloosterman, 2010). Extant studies typically address migrant entrepreneurs from China or India, partly due to the notable size of their diasporas abroad (Bolt, 1997). When addressing the entrepreneurial orientation, aspiration and activity in different diasporas and migrant cohorts (Kontos, 2003; Vandor, 2020), the Russian-speaking migrant entrepreneurs are amongst those migrant entrepreneurs that most often create their business in their country of residence (Joronen, 2012). Unique historical transformations that affected the post-Soviet context remain the source of diversity of Russian-speaking migrant entrepreneurs in the CIS context and beyond (Elo, 2016; 2017). Though the importance of socialist legacies has been considered by scholars (Smallbone & Welter, 2001; Vershinina et al., 2019), there is still a lack of knowledge on how the cultural legacies of migrant entrepreneurs that enter European states from these countries affect the way entrepreneurs develop and implement their business strategies, and how their social norms reproduce within the new institutional setting of the host country (Vershinina et al., 2019).

Given the cultural and historical ties between Russia and Europe, we can assume that Russian-speaking entrepreneurs are influenced by certain factors that do not affect migrants from other regions of the world (Dana, 2002; Elo & Ivanova-Gongne, 2020). Overall, research on cultural aspects of entrepreneurship has been steadily growing during the past couple of decades (Dabic et al., 2020). However, these studies have been predominantly focused on the application of various national cultural models, as e.g. that of Hofstede (1980) (ibid.). Hence, the influence of the cultural-historical context on the development of migrant and diaspora entrepreneurship in host countries (Dana, 2007), particularly on the entrepreneurial strategies of migrants becomes highly interesting as a possible explanatory feature beyond the language (Sui et al., 2015).

Another important characteristic of migrant entrepreneurs is their ties with the country of origin (see e.g. Smans et al., 2014). Knowledge of the language, cultural and institutional norms, as well as a network of contacts in the country of origin allow migrants to build effective business relations with their country in a new quality and employ their mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001; Light & Gold, 2000). Russian-speaking entrepreneurs doing business in European countries often maintain ties in their country of origin and focus their

business on these markets. The question of how migrant entrepreneurs use their new life experience in another country, which skills, knowledge and business practices they acquire and how they are used in conducting business operations with the country of origin, remains understudied particularly in multiethnic linguistic and cultural cohorts like that of the post-Soviet diaspora. Taking into account the exchange of knowledge, practices and technologies, we explore in this study the new and/or diasporic experience of migrant entrepreneurs affecting their aspirations and establishment of business, ways of doing business and interactions with partners in the country of origin.

The study examines how and why Russian-speaking entrepreneurs set up their businesses, what resources they use, and what the entrepreneurial forms of their business projects and ventures are. This more granular understanding of migrant entrepreneurship and the respective strategies has been called for, particularly in terms of in-depth qualitative empirical research (Ram et al., 2017; Cruz et al., 2020).

We chose Germany as an empirical host country context for our investigation, and Russian-speaking migrant entrepreneurs as a research object for multiple reasons. First, Germany is a country where one fourth of the population has a migration background (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2020), making this particular context fruitful for investigating various phenomena related to migration. Second, in Germany migrants are on average more active in creating their own businesses compared to the native population, with 38% of migrants being more inclined to be self-employed versus 29% of the general population in Germany (KfW-Gründungsmonitors, 2018). This shows the relevance of migrant entrepreneurship phenomenon in the German context and makes it suitable for our research. Third, as of 2016, there are about 2.49 million people from post-Soviet countries that permanently live in Germany (Mediendienst Integration, 2020). Importantly, there is also a group of ethnic returnees who have German heritage and who formed a particular cohort, so called Volga-Germans, that further facilitate the Russo-German social and entrepreneurial relations (Hoerder, 2002). In total, this group is very diverse (Isurin & Riehl, 2017) and poorly studied in the academic literature. Popular media often employs political discourses that do not foster any multi-layered analysis or holistic understanding of this group of migrant entrepreneurs and the Russian-speaking diaspora in Germany.

Preliminary results of the study reveal a different and more entrepreneurially oriented picture of the cohort despite diverse impediments and bottlenecks. The entrepreneurs originating from post-Soviet countries are entrepreneurial like other entrepreneurs with migration background despite their different economic heritage, in many cases presenting strong entrepreneurial aspirations. They initiate their businesses in Germany, but there are large differences in their strategies and experiences that require deeper understanding. This study aims to fill in this gap and contribute to deeper knowledge on entrepreneurial strategies of migrants from post-Soviet countries in Germany.

This working paper presents the first results of the study and thus does not aspire to provide the final account of research. Since the nature of the research is inductive, we iteratively move back and forth and after the first round of analysis we will continue gathering interviews and then further analyse them. This paper aims to give an idea of the first study results.

## Literature review

The UN Migration Agency (IOM) defines a migrant in the following way: a migrant is any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a state away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is (United Nations, 2020). Migrants contribute to the economic growth of their host countries in a number of ways, using their competencies and skills in a new setting and acting against labour shortages. Nevertheless, there is a paucity of research on the contribution of migrants to entrepreneurial activities and creation of employment opportunities (OECD, 2010). Migration forms diasporas that are notable cohorts and resource platforms for migrant and transnational diaspora entrepreneurship (Cohen, 2008; Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011, Brinkerhoff, 2009). Migrant entrepreneurship is considered to be entrepreneurial activity of migrants. The phenomenon of migrant entrepreneurship is examined through the lenses of various disciplines, and diversity of this phenomenon makes the investigation a complex endeavor (Elo et al., 2018).

There are several research streams that either constitute the field for migrant entrepreneurship research or intersect with it. Entrepreneurship scholars investigate why so many migrants engage in entrepreneurship (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990; Busenitz & Lau, 1997). Expatriates research focuses on the effects of long-term international relocations of managers, but only addresses entrepreneurship as a post-career outcome, i.e. expatpreneurship (Carpenter et al., 2001; Fee & Gray, 2012; Selmer et al, 2018). International business and entrepreneurship research examine knowledge resources, psychic distance, commitment, steps and speed of internationalisation, new international ventures and their paths (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, 2009; Zahra & George, 2002). Entrepreneurial cognition research focuses on the role of knowledge in the identification of new business opportunities (Corbett, 2007; Shane, 2000; Shepherd & DeTienne, 2005) while entrepreneurial opportunities are often perceived to be international (Muzychenko, 2008).

Different approaches addressing ethnic/migrant entrepreneurship are, for example, middleman minorities approach (Bonacich, 1973); disadvantage approach (Light & Gold, 2000); ethnic enclave economy approach (Wilson & Portes, 1980), interaction approach (Waldinger et al, 1990) and mixed embeddedness approach (Kloosterman & Rath 2001) and diaspora approaches (Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Elo & Minto-Coy, 2018).

Migrant entrepreneurs experience unique influence of ethnic characteristics of their parents, perceptions of their home countries, and cultural differences of home and host contexts (Dabic et al., 2020). Existing literature on migrant entrepreneurship remains fragmented (Elo & Minto-Coy, 2018; Dabic et al., 2020), and the importance of taking into consideration various narratives of migrant entrepreneurs remains in place. Scholars continuously call for deeper contextualisation in international business and international entrepreneurship research, and embeddedness in a particular context is considered to have fundamental importance in explaining the strategies of migrant entrepreneurs (Elo et al., 2018).

The default assumption of scholars is that entrepreneurs have the same motivations as other people fulfilling their needs, though they pursue their motivations by starting their businesses (Carsrud & Brännback, 2011). Scholars define two categories of motivators behind migrant entrepreneurship; these are push and pull factors which explain first the migration and then why individuals decide to set up their businesses. In the latter, push factors are considered to be negative external influences that make a person start a business project, for example, due to unemployment or the lack of job prospects. These influence their motivation to seek self-employment (Sommer & Gamper, 2018). Other push factors may be external family-related issues, such as a desire to overcome excessive family embeddedness. Pull factors represent positive motivators to set up one's own venture, such as an aspiration to have more independence and more control of one's own career which is hardly accessible in the traditional employment paradigm. Positive motivations can be related to the desire of self-growth and intrinsic rewards that stem from company ownership (Walcutt, 2015). Another paradigm that captures a similar idea is opportunistic versus necessity entrepreneurship. The idea is that entrepreneurs exploit emerging opportunities in pursuit of a future gain and act accordingly, even if attractive employment options also exist. As for necessity entrepreneurs, they are motivated by the livelihood generation and survival, rather than opportunity-driven success reasoning. The crucial motivation in this case is to earn money to make a living and support one's family (Reynolds et al., 2002).

Scholars point out that immigrants and return migrants are on average more likely to become entrepreneurs than native population and explain this fact mainly through (self)-selection processes. The immigration policy of many countries supports individuals with specific characteristics such as high level of education and business experience which are valuable for entrepreneurs (Wright et al., 2008). Moreover, those who voluntarily move to another country may be positively self-selected, because they possess a particular mindset and interests (Vandor, 2020). Besides selection and self-selection factors of migrant entrepreneurship researchers pay attention to institutional factors such as discrimination (Light, 1972) and access to ethnic networks and markets (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990) which further reassure immigrants to strike out on their own.

Vandor & Franke (2016) propose a different angle to look at the underlying reasons migrant entrepreneurs are driven by. They argue that cross-cultural experience contributes to the development of individuals skills and knowledge which help them to identify entrepreneurial opportunities. Particularly, globally

connected and cosmopolitan migrant entrepreneurs may develop strategies to identify and exploit international entrepreneurial opportunities in “empty” places which are still emerging (Elo et al., 2019). Migrant entrepreneurs that gained cross-cultural experience will be more likely to identify profitable opportunities (Vandor & Franke, 2016; Vandor, 2020).

Earlier studies of ethnic entrepreneurship were criticised for their narrow understanding of the phenomenon in connection to low socio-economic background of immigrants (Rath, 2000; Pecoud, 2010). Further, the concept of ethnic entrepreneurship was advanced with immigrant entrepreneurship discussions that brought in an institutional setting including state regulations and unemployment (Kloosterman, 2000). Thus, ethnicity was considered only as one feature of the migrants, whereas other characteristics became the focus of various studies: gender perspective (Hillman, 1999; Kontos, 2003), transcultural perspective (Pütz, 2004), multicultural (Pecoud, 2002) and transnational (Çağlar, 2001) perspectives.

A few studies examine the drivers of returnee migrants’ entrepreneurship; McCormick and Wahba (2001) revealed that those who return to their home from abroad engage in entrepreneurial activities more often than non-migrants with similar characteristics and resources. Returnee migrants capitalize on their work experience and university degree gained abroad and utilise non-formal knowledge about services and products which they can use in their future entrepreneurial career. A recent study of Burer et al. (2013) has acknowledged that expatriates are ideal candidates for entrepreneurship because they possess international social and human capital endowment. This underlines the importance of understanding the reasoning and strategies of venturing in the host country context.

Rodgers et al. (2019) examined the role of social networks in sustaining migrant entrepreneurial journeys. The practice of using personal connections to gain ground or to bypass formal regulations has been recognised as a common social practice all around the world. The scholars attempted to critically evaluate the use of *blat* (informal personal connections in Russian speaking countries) by Eastern European migrants across transnational spaces. They studied how these migrants access, construct and maintain *blat* social networks in both in the UK and their home country. The study of Rodgers et al. (2019) demonstrates how Russian-speaking migrants transform the *blat* social networks across borders. Forms of social and cultural capital based on language and legacies of a shared Soviet past are important in facilitating entrepreneurial activity development (Rodgers et al., 2019; Elo & Ivanova-Gongne, 2020). The importance of social networks for migration entrepreneurship is well documented and often debated in literature (Castles & Miller, 2003; Faist & Ozveren, 2004). Some scholars claim that the benefits of social networks are often overestimated (Vershina et al., 2010), while others point to the negative effects of social networks (Ram et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2014).

The mixed embeddedness approach tends to contextualise embedded migrant entrepreneurs in co-ethnic networks within broader social, political and economic space in the host country (Kloosterman 2010; Ram et al., 2008). It corresponds to the idea that studying migrant entrepreneurship, we should consider ethnicity

as just one characteristic that is being complemented by other ones (Hillman, 1999; Kontos, 2003). The sole focus on ethnicity leads to oversimplification of the picture. Therefore, the mixed embeddedness approach emphasises the need to consider not only ethnic strategies but also personal strategies within specific economic, social and regulatory environment. This approach argues that the embeddedness of migrants in their ethnic minority networks should not be overestimated, leaving in shadow the wider social, political and economic environment of a host country (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001).

The research on migrant entrepreneurship highlights the continuing linkages with and importance of the home country in the activities of the entrepreneurs (Brinkerhoff, 2009). This phenomenon was studied within growing research stream on migrants transnational economic practices (Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011; McKenzie & Menjivar, 2011; Walther, 2012; Wilding, 2006, see also Drori et al., 2009). This kind of entrepreneurial practice differs from deep transnational life to a business activity which requires frequent travelling abroad and includes a reliance on the contacts and associates from another country which is usually the country of origin of a person who sets up business (Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Munkejord, 2017).

Another line of research highlights the role of language as a resource and a hindrance simultaneously in creating a new business (Sui et al., 2015). Scholars highlight the importance of language capital when venturing internationally (Coviello, 2006; Dana, 2007). Knowledge of a language affects the choice of business type and target audience (Sui et al., 2015). Knowing the local language of a host country becomes a critical issue influencing self-employment and wage employment possibilities (Dabic et al., 2020). Ethnic businesses such as groceries and restaurants of national cuisines are considered to be the first created within the ethnic community (e.g. Dana, 2007). As soon as the ethnic community enlarges, entrepreneurs may differentiate their businesses. Being rooted in an ethnic community is considered a safe strategy but also one that limits further development (Waldinger et al., 1990).

## Methodology

Given the scarcity of knowledge on entrepreneurial practices of Russian-speaking migrant entrepreneurs, we used a qualitative interpretative approach since it is the most appropriate to get a detailed description of the interviewees' own understanding of their multiple social relations (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004; Munkejord, 2017; Bagwell, 2008). Scholars often use narratives within interpretative methodology to study how respondents comprehend their everyday life situations, since narrating their stories helps individuals draw on memory and current experience and therefore to connect the past and the present (Munkejord, 2017; Terjesen & Elam, 2009).

Our criteria for respondent selection were the following: Russian-speaking, own business or initiative in Germany, migrated after 1991. Thus, the first criterion is based on the origin and linguistic heritage. This implies that a Russian-speaking migrant might be a Russian citizen from Russia or the former Soviet Union, or a

Russian citizen but from a diaspora (not from Russia), or a non-Russian citizen but a Russian-speaking individual from post-Soviet independent states, from Russia or from a diaspora. We also admitted mixed-origin Russian-speaking migrants (e.g. with one Russian parent) and migrants who officially had a different nationality but were originally Russian. We aimed to grasp the whole diversity of the Russian-speaking people living in Germany. The second criterion dealing with “business” is purposefully quite wide because we aimed to avoid narrowing the cohort down to any particular business or sector or size and type of firm/entrepreneurship. We consider all business operations and projects including non-profit projects to be entrepreneurial initiative although the majority of our respondents indeed own a business. And finally, regarding the third criterion, we focused on the time frame starting from the collapse of the USSR when the ideological and economic break up caused a drastic change in people's lives and migration.

We conducted in-depth interviews, representing a detailed narrative of a migrant entrepreneur's story. For comparability across the entrepreneurial life courses and entrepreneurship we employed a semi-structured set of questions to guide the discussions. Hence, our respondents were able to narrate their story and viewpoint while the interviewers only guided the discussions with open-ended questions. In this way, we were able to ask additional questions to clarify unclear points and react to unexpected and surprising turns (Alasuutari, 1995). Due to the coronavirus situation all the interviews were conducted online via Zoom, Skype or WhatsApp and recorded automatically. One interview lasted from 40 to 80 minutes. Two researchers participated in the interview: while one researcher asked questions, the other one made notes and clarified details. All interviews were conducted in Russian as that is the native language of both the interviewee and the interviewer (Welch & Piekkari, 2006).

### *Data analysis*

We used the constant comparative method for analysing the data (e.g. Gerson & Horowitz, 2002). This method identifies themes by moving iteratively between subsets of the data and between the data and the literature to identify a coherent conceptual frame (Shapiro et al., 2008). All transcribed interviews were broken into two separate groups and put through two separate rounds of thematic coding. The first round of coding, conducted with each group separately and then cumulatively, identified all themes stemming from the participants. The second round of coding critically scrutinised the themes that emerged in the first round, identifying contradictions and unique responses, paying particular attention to the context surrounding the conversation so as to broaden and enrich the evolving frame. The final round of coding helped to classify the data into hierarchies of concepts and their relationship to other themes was defined in the analysis process.

We conducted analysis based on the interpretative paradigm (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2019). It means that we considered entrepreneurs' narratives as providing their understanding of their social worlds which were created and evolved in interactions with other people. The paper investigates subjective interpretations,

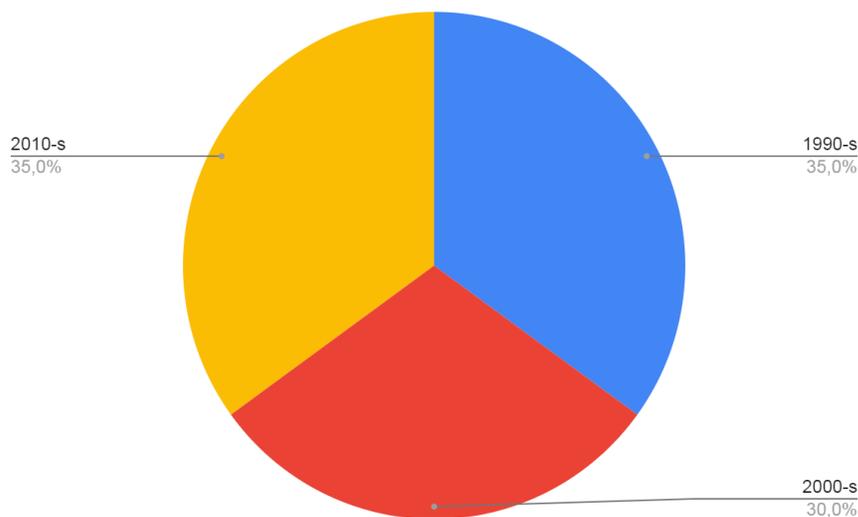
individual experiences, and micro-level practices of migrant entrepreneurs (Andrejuk, 2019). The in-depth interviews we conducted reveal more subtle details of how migrants decide to set up their own business, how they develop this idea, which resources they use, and how they make sense of this endeavor. We used a recursive approach in the analysis, rather than a linear one, where we followed an iterative approach, moving from the first-order categories and the emerging phenomena in the data until we uncovered the adequate conceptual themes (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The triangulation of data analysis was achieved by studying the Internet sources and social media accounts of entrepreneurs as well as talking to people indirectly participating in migrants' activities.

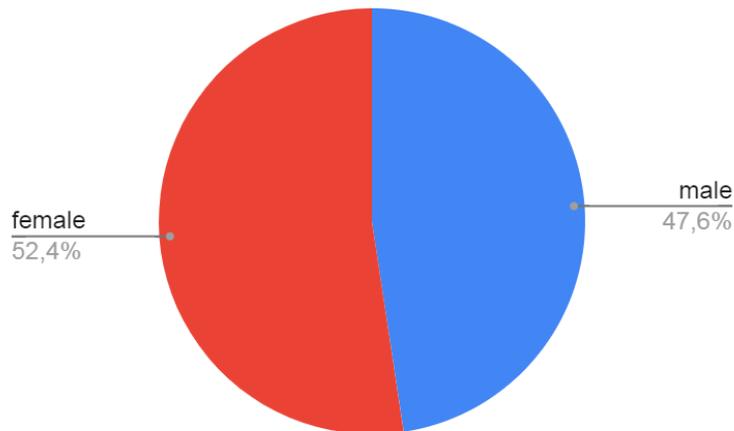
## Findings and discussion

Overall, we conducted 21 interviews, each one lasted around 1–1.5 hours. Below we provide the characteristics of our respondents. Figures 1 and 2 respectively show the migration waves and gender of respondents. We see that there is equal distribution of respondents around the three waves which took place in 1990s, 2000s, and in 2010s. There are slightly more females in the sample.

**Figure 1. Migration waves**

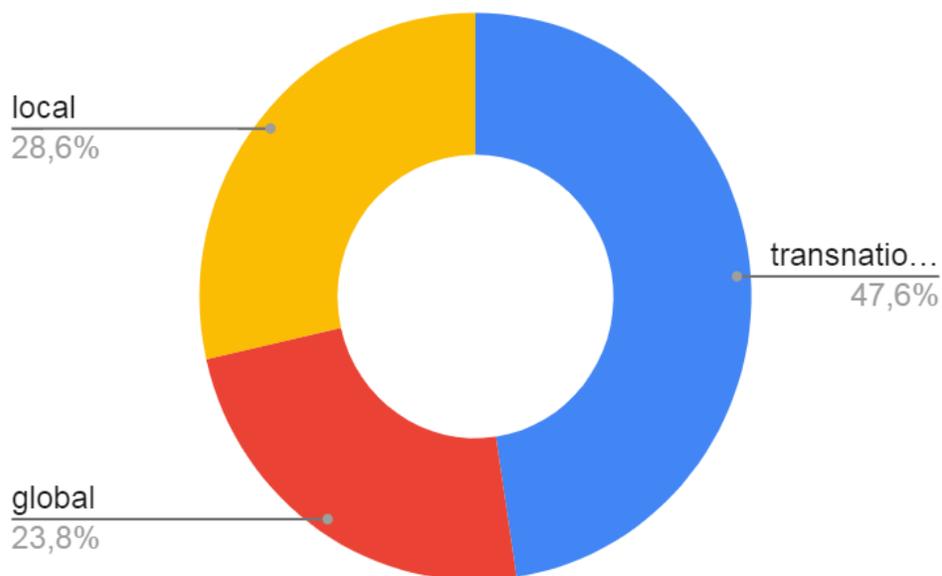


**Figure 2. Gender of respondents**



Figures 3 and 4 show the extent of entrepreneurs' activities (local, transnational, or global) and their origin. Almost a half of respondents focus their businesses transnationally, with local and global focus being almost equally distributed. In terms of origin, there are slightly more respondents that come from the cities of Russia other than Moscow, followed by Moscow, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. All in all, the sample is quite a diverse set of entrepreneurial heritages and origins, which creates qualitative diversity of the data and is beneficial when applying an interpretative approach to the analysis of the data (Kvale, 1996)

**Figure 3. Business focus**



**Figure 4. Respondents origin**

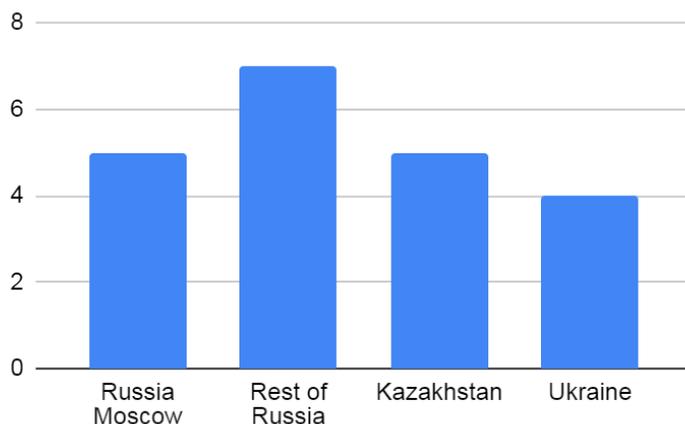


Table 1 provides further characteristics of the respondents.

**Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents**

#	Gender	Age	City of residence	Moved from	Mentioned reason of moving to Germany	Enterprise/project
1	f	36-45	Magdeburg	Kazakhstan	Ethnic Germans	translation bureau, visa services
2	m	56-65	Sankt Augustin (close to Bonn)	Russia	Ethnic Germans	software support
3	m	36-45	Stuttgart	Ukraine	Jewish	commercial photography
4	f	46-55	Kiel	Russia	Marriage	Rus-Ger magazine, visa support
5	mi	36-45	Rosenfeld	Russia	Ethnic Germans	workout equipment
6	f	46-55	Close to Dusseldorf	Kazakhstan	Ethnic Germans	music school
7	f	36-45	Berlin	Kazakhstan/Russia	Other	business forum for women, jewelry store
8	m	36-45	Hamburg	Kazakhstan	Ethnic Germans	consulting
9	f	26-35	Dortmund	Kazakhstan	Ethnic Germans	Ethnic jewelry online shop
10	f	26-35	Berlin	Finland/Russia/Netherlands	Internship	Telegram channel on Berlin (3k+ subscribers)

11	f	36-45	Frankfurt	Ukraine/Moldova	Other	construction
12	f	26-35	Dusseldorf	Russia	Marriage	photography
13	m	36-45	Essen	Russia	Other	consulting
14	m	36-45	Cologne	Russia	Jewish	consulting Rus-Ger firms
15	f	46-55	Solingen	Ukraine	Marriage	massage
16	f	36-45	Berlin	Russia	Other	cafe
17	m	36-45	Kürten	Kasakhstan	Ethnic Germans	robototechnic company
18	f	46-55	Solingen	Russia	Marriage	charity project to help Eastern Ukraine
19	f	36-45	Cologne	Russia	Other	digital marketing
20	m	26-35	Cologne	Russia	Studies	lifestyle magazine
21	m	26-35	Berlin	Russia	Other	gay fetish shop

We have analysed the data as a research team, going back and forth between data and research literature providing theoretical views and constructs to employ in interpretation. Indeed, we found a heterogenous cohort in terms of ethnic origin, citizenship, geography, business field and entrepreneurship and type of firm. The respondents represented the Russian-speaking diaspora and migrant entrepreneurship cohort in Germany offering a multifaceted set of insights into the phenomenon of migrant entrepreneurship and how they build their strategies.

As expected, based on their different migratory pathways, the respondents had different entrepreneurial journeys and pathways and did not present any “common or ethnic pattern” in terms of their entrepreneurship. Importantly, both pre- and post-migratory entrepreneurship was found. Some of them initiated the first business project after their migration or when they were already in Germany, which made Germany the home country of their firm, while some continued with the entrepreneurial business they had started before moving to Germany, making Germany a host country for their business venture. Hence, the entrepreneurial aspiration from the German perspective was two-fold, inherent or imported. Interestingly, the entrepreneurial aspirations and motivations were significant and diachronic, surviving the different transformations of migration and diaspora. There were entrepreneurs who initiated a venture based on their hobbies or established a non-profit business, providing examples of not classic opportunity driven entrepreneurship, but rather lifestyle entrepreneurship as migrants (Marcketti et al., 2006). Their aspirations were more qualitative than purely economic. There were also some respondents who were ethnic entrepreneurs and targeted their co-ethnics with their business models (Dana, 2007). Finally, some of the entrepreneurs had companies that failed to develop on the German market. Hence, also entrepreneurial exit behavior was found. Surprisingly, perhaps due to the German social security system, there was little evidence of

any actual necessity-driven entrepreneurship (Block et al., 2015). This was particularly interesting as typically immigrant and migrant entrepreneurs are seen as particularly necessity-related. However, in this cohort the strategies were not building on cost leadership and necessity as suggested by Block et al. (2015), instead, their strategies were more niche, competence/knowledge or opportunity driven providing them some other competitive advantage than price. The education and competence level of the Russian-speaking population and especially the post-Soviet female migrants are often underestimated or misunderstood leading to brain waste in employment but triggering entrepreneurial aspirations and motivations (Elo et al., 2020). We also found notably more transnational entrepreneurship in this cohort than in the early research on transnational entrepreneurship (Portes et al., 2002); this may relate to the type of individuals (Vandor, 2020) but also to the globalised, digital world (Brinkerhoff, 2009).

Generations of migrant entrepreneurs were subject to different waves over time, there were different ages represented, including those born during the Soviet era who were not taught entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial orientation/mindset. Though the migration waves in Germany are nothing new per se, the entrepreneurial strategies that their representative interviewees enact differ and provide a great source of business variation. We have divided the migration waves into 3 groups, based on the temporal principle. The first wave is those who migrated at the time of the USSR's collapse or a few years later. These can be either ethnic migration (Spätaussiedler — late resettlers, also called Volga-Germans) or migration related to the search for better chances and better quality of life. This wave also incorporates people from the Soviet Union who were Jewish and were able to find refuge from the West with the help of the United Nations asylum seeker status system. We see that these entrepreneurs started their ventures, as the labour market was not attractive, for example, the foreign qualifications were not acknowledged. Their strategies of entry rest on the formal institutions but at the same time they rely on the informal networks and practices of entrepreneurship and they balance between the two. The second wave are those entrepreneurs that migrated at the beginning of 2000s due to either family reasons or with the intention to establish a business in Germany. This wave was often linked to the first wave due to family relations. The third wave is the most recent, these are the respondents that migrated closer to the end of 2010s. Here the central motivation was to find a place to live that would meet their expectations with regard to a place where they can live and grow. Representatives of the third wave are more independent of ethnic connections, they establish ventures not as a necessity but as a free choice in a more Saxenian style, building on their competences and international opportunities (Saxenian, 2007). Their entrepreneurial strategies rest on their education and experience and are not directed at any ethnicity per se. The companies represent international ventures in a more classic sense (e.g. Madsen, 2013).

Most respondents of the first wave had the core motivation to start their business in order to gain “respectful employment” that corresponds to the qualifications and education obtained. Since a Russian higher education diploma is often not recognised in European countries, the respondents had to find other ways to employ their competences without having to confirm their diploma in Germany.

Thus, in line with previous literature on migrant entrepreneurship (Elo, 2019; Chrysostome, 2010), most of the first wave respondents were driven by labour market impediments, discrimination or some necessity that facilitated their entrepreneurial motivation. However, the representatives of the two following waves who continued previously established business or initiated a venture based on their hobbies have experienced very different labour markets, business models, transnationalism, and international opportunities as entrepreneurs. The advanced language skills, high education and international experience together with their transnational-cosmopolitan worldviews has largely impacted the last wave and their horizon of aspirations.

Amongst the main diachronic challenges that Russian-speaking entrepreneurs faced were that of identity construction, especially it is the case for the ethnic migrants who are often considered “Russian” in Germany and “German” in Russia/post-USSR, thus they seem “strangers everywhere” in terms of their identity. This identity-liability can also be turned into an asset in terms of communication, language, cultural and social capital. Knowledge of the Russian language has represented a considerable asset and enabled the respondents to use their Russian-speaking social network for business purposes both in Germany and in the international context. This has created a fast lane that is not only limited to Russia, as it links the entrepreneurs via diverse platforms to the whole Russophone world allowing them to develop more international strategies for their businesses (Elo & Ivanova-Gongne, 2020).

## Conclusion

The Russian-speaking business world offers great untapped potential both theoretically and practically, as it may open new avenues of understanding multi-ethnic diasporas with common language resources and their global potential (Newland & Tanaka, 2010). The study of Russian-speaking migrant entrepreneurs can contribute to understanding better how migrants interconnect in intra- and inter-diaspora settings as international entrepreneurs doing international business. This research is highly promising in uncovering how cultural and social characteristics affect entrepreneurial pathways and strategies of migrant entrepreneurs from the post-Soviet space both in Germany and globally. The findings suggest that Russian-speaking migrant entrepreneurs constitute an ethnically diverse, resource-wise heterogeneous and multi-wave cohort of entrepreneurs. They were responding to both external and internal environment challenges and institutional turn-arounds with entrepreneurial aspirations, resilience and even enthusiasm, developing new entrepreneurial strategies and endeavors. Indeed, they cannot be considered some diaspora monolith or any clear-cut ethnic group. Still, the functional aspect that unites them with a set of linguistic resources is highly meaningful for their entrepreneurship and identity. They are united by the usage of the Russian language that serves as an additional competitive asset, i.e. bi- and multilingual status in the German society where they may target both other co-ethnics and Russian-speaking people as well as the mainstream society and other migrants and minorities.

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Preliminary results of our study demonstrate the need for a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial strategies of this group of German residents and transnational diasporas. Detailed and well-targeted knowledge and data is necessary to develop better support policy programs that facilitate Russophone migrant business and venturing. In the era of geopolitical challenges, trade wars and de-globalisations, the role of well-functioning transnational business and entrepreneurship may provide meaningful tools and offer an important in-between role that helps sustain and further develop international business.

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