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# Refugee entrepreneurship: A systematic literature review and future research agenda

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## ABSTRACT

While scholars have traditionally studied successful entrepreneurship cases, they have focused less on studying how victims of adversity engage in entrepreneurial actions to create a better future for themselves and others. It is argued that while entrepreneurs are a major force of disruption, they possess resilience that enables them to cope with persistent and substantial adversity. Refugees facing extreme adversity can engage in entrepreneurial activities to create economic gains. While scholarly attention has been directed towards immigrant and migrant entrepreneurship, refugees present a different perspective due to the severity and persistence of their adversity. In this study, we conducted a systematic review of the refugee entrepreneurship literature. A total of 83 articles published between 2000 and 2021 across 22 entrepreneurship journals were analyzed. We identified four widely used theoretical lenses, namely mixed embeddedness, social networks, institutional theory and opportunity. Studies have primarily been conducted among refugees in European host countries, with an absence of studies in neighboring countries or refugee camps. Results show that scholarly enquiry into refugee entrepreneurship is still in its nascent stages with respect to theoretical perspective, method and data. The study contributes to the extant literature by outlining several potential research streams that could strengthen the notion of refugees in the entrepreneurship literature.

## 1. Introduction

Currently, the global refugee crisis is far from being resolved and is escalating. In 2022 and 2023 alone, millions were once again set to flee their country as the result of conflicts in, for example, Ukraine and Gaza. At present, an estimated 108.4 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide, of which 35.3 million are defined as refugees (UNHCR, 2021). While global migration, in general, has shaped civilization throughout history, refugees and asylum seekers are migrants who have forcibly had to flee their country (Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2018, pp. 18–137). According to UNHCR (2021), the majority, about 70%, are hosted in countries neighboring their countries of origin, with 40% being under the age of 18. Due to restricted opportunities for employment in host countries, refugees find themselves pushed into different types of entrepreneurial activities (Dana, 1997; Levie, 2007; Kloosterman, 2010; Joardar & Wu, 2011; Guo et al., 2020). Entrepreneurship becomes a vehicle not only for earning a living but also for successful integration into the hosting society (Heilbrunn & Iannone, 2018; Harima

et al., 2019).

Refugee entrepreneurs differ from migrant and immigrant entrepreneurs (Elo, 2015). Refugees and asylum seekers have a starting point and contextual elements different from those of migrant entrepreneurs because they are forcibly displaced (Christensen, Newman, Herrick, & Godfrey, 2020). They also cannot, for fear of persecution or violence, return to their home country if they do not achieve success in their endeavors in their host countries (Christensen et al., 2020). Furthermore, the portrayal of refugees in the media as an economic and social burden (De Coninck, 2020) may lead to social conflicts within the host country (see, e.g., Hokkinen, 2019). Similar to migrants, refugees, as well as their children, may also face racialization, which may influence their socio-economic mobility (Ossipow et al., 2019). In terms of entrepreneurship motives, refugees may do so out of the pure necessity to get food on the table (Carsrud & Brännback, 2011) or, as highlighted in the recent literature, in pursuit of opportunities, which, coupled with the adversities and constraints they face, make them “distinctive entrepreneurial agents” (Harima et al., 2021, p. 653).

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Several recent literature reviews covering the topic of migrant and refugee entrepreneurship show that interest in the latter is growing (e.g., Abebe, 2023; Dabic et al., 2020; Desai et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2023; Sinkovic & Reuber, 2021). However, only one of the aforementioned reviews is published in an entrepreneurship journal (Abebe, 2023) and none is focused on a review of the explicitly entrepreneurship field. While these previous literature reviews provide us with a broad knowledge of research in refugee entrepreneurship, either by reviewing the topic in journals across various fields (Abebe, 2023; Desai et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2023) or by focusing on the broader concept of migrant entrepreneurship (Dabic et al., 2020; Sinkovic & Reuber, 2021), we argue that it is crucial to review what entrepreneurship journals especially have published on the topic. By choosing a journal-driven approach with a focus on entrepreneurship journals listed in the Academic Journal Guide (AJG), we are limiting our selection of the reviewed items. This ensures that the reviewed articles are built on “sufficiently rigorous research methods” and cover research published in outlets that are viewed as key literature in the entrepreneurship field (Hiebl, 2023). Such an approach allows us to focus specifically on the entrepreneurship perspective, theory and concepts, whereas a broader review would include articles that could view entrepreneurship as a secondary issue. Not having it as a main focus leads to potential bypassing of aspects crucial for the entrepreneurship field. However, we acknowledge that a journal-driven approach may lead to a particular representation of the field and elaborate on that in our further research suggestions (see Section 6). For instance, a literature review within hospitality journals could give fruitful results regarding refugee entrepreneurship, being one of “the most attractive areas for refugees to venture” (Alrawadieh et al., 2019, p. 718).

Since refugee entrepreneurship is concerned with *entrepreneurship*, one could assume a much larger body of research on the topic is published in entrepreneurship journals. Several scholars in top-quality entrepreneurship journals have called for research with societal impact (Aguinis et al., 2010, 2019; Landström & Harirchi, 2019; Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019; Shepherd, 2015). Sergeeva and Andreeva (2016, p. 243), citing Locke and Golden-Biddle (1997), stated that “top journals represent both a methodological standard of academic research and an accurate picture of state-of-the-art views on the topic, and, therefore, can be treated as a proxy for academic scholarship in the discipline.” Additionally, in its newest Standards 2020, the accreditation organization AACSB looks for intellectual contributions in its specialty discipline. Thus, an entrepreneurship scholar is expected to publish in entrepreneurship journals. Of course, this becomes problematic if entrepreneurship journals are not considered high quality and, thereby, the basis for tenure, salary and promotion. While we can argue at great length whether articles published in top-tier journals may not be high quality (Singh et al., 2007; Niles et al., 2020; Ramani et al., 2022; Kickul, 2023), tenure, promotion and salary do drive the choices of a research topic and publication target (Kaplan, 2019; Kickul et al., 2023). Thus, if top journals are not likely to publish on refugee entrepreneurship, scholars seeking tenure and promotion are not likely to engage in scholarly enquiry into the topic (Kaplan, 2019). Furthermore, better inclusion of the topic in top journals is crucial for sparking discussions among entrepreneurship researchers, practitioners and policymakers (Ojong et al., 2021), which, in turn, can provide the much-needed practical solutions to the issues at stake.

Indeed, it seems that the topic of refugee entrepreneurship is predominantly covered in peripheral journals by peripheral scholars and even by reputed scholars in peripheral journals and carried out in a broad range of *other* disciplines, such as economics, marketing, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, geography, and minority and urban studies (Atasü-Topcuoğlu, 2019; de Lange et al., 2021). It might be argued that recent reviews should be sufficient, since, for instance, Abebe (2023) provided a broad-scope literature review of refugee entrepreneurship, taking into account peer-reviewed publications (e.g., journals, books, book chapters) in different academic fields in the

Scopus database. However, Abebe (2023) concluded that research on the refugee entrepreneurship topic in the entrepreneurship field itself is still rather limited. Hence, in this article, we are specifically interested in whether entrepreneurship journals publish research into refugee entrepreneurship, a topic we consider important, urgent and with potentially high societal impact. Thus, our study is guided by the following questions.

1. How and to what degree is refugee entrepreneurship subject to high-quality scholarly enquiry in entrepreneurship research?
2. What are the key elements of refugee entrepreneurship found in the entrepreneurship literature, including highly cited articles, prevalent keywords, methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks and lenses and geographic focuses?

This study contributes to the entrepreneurship literature in several ways. First, we conduct a domain-specific (entrepreneurship) structured literature review and analyze the extent to which refugee entrepreneurship appears to be considered a relevant basis for scholars in entrepreneurship. Second, the study contributes to the debate on the need to conduct research with societal impact by theorizing the potential of studies on refugee entrepreneurship and generating research results with societal impact. Third, building on the insights from the results, the study offers a future research agenda on the topic for the entrepreneurship research community.

The article is structured as follows. First, we provide an overview of the methods with the help of which the literature review was conducted. Second, we present the results of bibliometric analysis, highlighting, for instance, the number of publications on the topic, most cited papers and co-occurrence of keywords. Next, we delve into an overview of major research themes in terms of theory and empirical context as well as the methodological choices of the reviewed studies. Finally, we offer a discussion of the results with future research propositions as well as conclusions.

## 2. Methods used in the literature review

A systematic review process provides an increased reliable knowledge base by accumulating knowledge from topic-specific studies, ensuring context sensitivity and methodological rigor (Paul & Criado, 2020; Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003). At the same time, Pellegrini et al. (2020) found that there are difficulties in keeping clear track of the development and evolution of the fast-increasing number of scientific publications. To frame the refugee entrepreneurship field within the overall entrepreneurship literature, we used a systematic literature review approach presented by Tranfield et al. (2003). This includes a quantitative bibliometric method using protocols to map and identify, in a scientific, transparent and replicable way, the development of a scientific field (Paul & Barari, 2022) and specific disciplines, together with a bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer to analyze and visualize the results (see Tranfield et al., 2003; Zupic & Čater, 2015). Similar methods have recently been used within the refugee entrepreneurship field (see Abebe, 2023; Newman, 2023). In the next section, the decisions made for each of the review procedures and processes are presented.

### 2.1. Process and workflow

In order to identify the articles relevant to this research and present a consolidated review of the refugee entrepreneurship field in the entrepreneurship literature, we followed a process inspired by Shamseer et al., 2015 PRISMA-P framework together with the approach described in Pellegrini et al. (2020), Zupic and Čater (2015) and Debellis et al. (2021). The process included identification using search engines and manual analysis (see Webster & Watson, 2002) of relevant articles within the entrepreneurship literature in AJG Guide 2021, which focused on the topic of refugee entrepreneurship, followed by the use of

a VOSviewer's specific clustering algorithm to analyze the identified articles. The strategy for selecting articles is described in Fig. 1.

The journals chosen were all from the "Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management" field in the Academic Journal Guide 2021 ranking (2021). The guide is based on peer review and editorial and expert judgments and is a reliable source for academics to choose which journals to aim for (2021). The guide provides a list of the top international entrepreneurship journals, thus forming the main data set for the search (see Appendix 1). The first step in the workflow for the concept compilation of data (see Webster & Watson, 2002) was to identify the articles to be analyzed. When conducting the search, we were unable to access the International Journal of Management, Entrepreneurship & Technology (IJMET). The search was conducted on different search engines and combinations of words, but the homepage of the journal was not accessible.

As a result of not getting access to the IJMET journal, the search was conducted on each of the remaining 31 journals' homepages, where 19,227 articles had been published between 2000 and 2021. Prior and recent literature reviews of refugee entrepreneurship have predominately adopted a historical perspective, commencing their reviews from the 1980s (see Abebe, 2023; Newman et al., 2023). However, the past 15–20 years have witnessed a dramatic escalation in international migration, including the global refugee population (see UNCTAD, 2018), due to conflicts, war and other crises in the Middle East, Africa,

Ukraine and other regions (see UNHCR, 2021).

Consequently, our selection of a 21-year time frame provides coverage of the past two decades of research into the topic of refugee entrepreneurship as it appears in the peer-reviewed entrepreneurship literature (see Fig. 2 for the number of articles published each year). According to Newman et al. (2023), even if researchers began to look at the topic in the 1980s, most research has been published since the mid-2010s. Consequently, the timeframe used in this literature review provides us with an updated and relevant understanding of the current discussion in the entrepreneurship literature.

According to Tranfield et al., (2003), the systematic search for literature starts with deciding and identifying the keywords for the search. The articles were then screened using the words "refuge\*" and "entrepren,\*" and 490 articles were identified, of which 20 were excluded due to being editorials or book reviews. The remaining 470 articles were then manually analyzed and searched independently by the four authors by the initial scanning of the journals searching for the keywords "refugee" and "entrepreneur" in the whole text of the articles, and then, each article was read and checked for relevance. An article was considered relevant when it had sufficient focus on refugees, e.g., had refugees as an empirical sample or was discussed in the theory. Thus, for example, in cases where the word "refugee" was mentioned only in connection to a definition related to migrant entrepreneurship or the like, it was excluded. We have also excluded articles that had, for

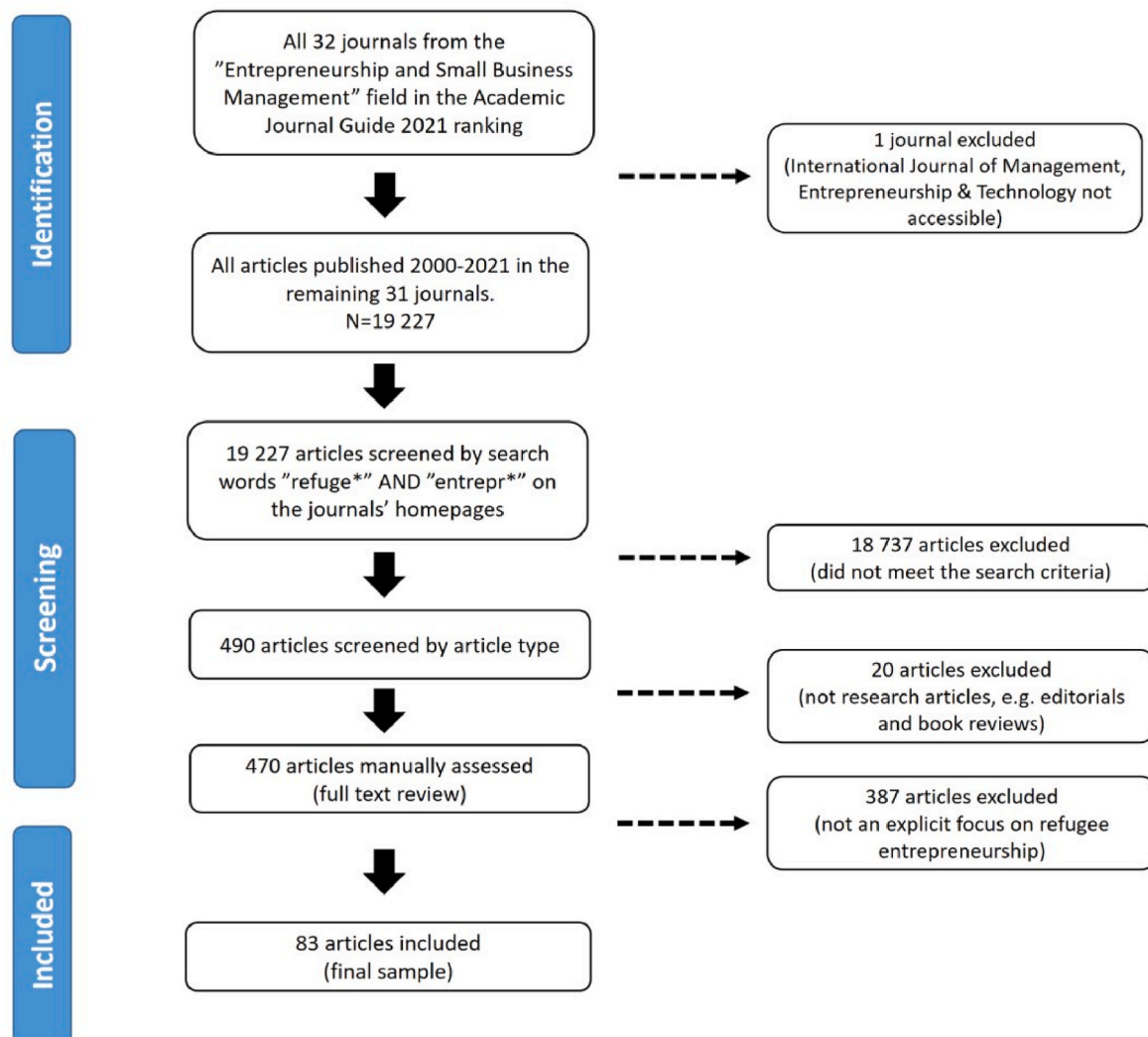


Fig. 1. Prisma P – protocol for selecting articles.

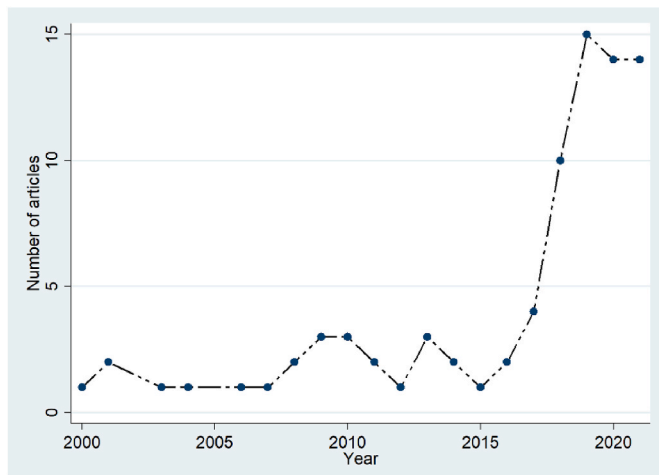


Fig. 2. Publications and year—entrepreneurship journals.

example, the word “refugee” solely in the reference list or that focused on the concept of “refugee effect,” which is originally a concept from the field of economics and focuses more on the “positive effect of unemployment on self-employment” (Abebe, 2023, p. 4) in general discussion about entrepreneurship (e.g., Cueto et al., 2015; Thurik et al., 2008) rather than in relation to refugees or migrants. The final sample consisted of 83 articles in 22 journals that specifically had some relevance to the topic of refugee entrepreneurship (see Table 1).

Based on the final data set of 83 articles, a thematic analysis was conducted by defining the specifics of each article, resulting in bibliometric analysis. The sample of 83 articles had limitations. However, by explaining and clearly defining the scope and structure of the analysis, we provide transparency and a rationale for using this specific sample for this literature review. For the bibliometric analysis, the researchers used Microsoft Excel in order to classify and code the articles in relation to the basic characteristics of the articles and journals reviewed, i.e., authors, title, journal, year of publication, research agenda/purpose, context, method, citation count, keywords, etc., in order to standardize the information. Figures and tables are used to describe the results and

Table 1

List of journals and articles in the systematic review

Journal title	Number of articles (final data) [articles in the first stage]	References	Percentage of total (%)
<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research</i>	11 [53]	Alexandre et al. (2019), Bagwell (2008, 2018), Bisignano and El-Anis (2019), Cheung et al. (2019), Heilbrunn (2019), Jones et al. (2008), Mawson and Kasem (2019), Meister and Mauer (2019), Nazareno et al. (2018), Thompson and Illes (2020)	13
<i>Small Business Economics</i>	11 [35]	Andersson and Hammarstedt (2010), Backman et al. (2021), Brieger and Gielnik (2021), Clark et al. (2017), Desai et al. (2021), Hammarstedt (2004), Klaesson and Öner (2021), Kone et al. (2021), Levie (2007), Loschmann and Marchand (2021), Senthana et al. (2021)	13
<i>Entrepreneurship and Regional Development</i>	10 [44]	Al-Dajani et al. (2019), Baycan-Levent and Nijkamp (2009), Bizri (2017), de la Chaux and Haugh (2020), Hammarstedt (2001), Jones et al. (2014), Kloosterman (2003, 2010), Kwong et al. (2019), Sepulveda et al. (2011)	12
<i>Journal of Enterprising Communities</i>	9 [39]	Dahles (2013), Hack-Polay (2019), Hack-Polay and Igwe (2019), Harima et al. (2019), Kazlou and Wennberg (2021), Khosa and Kalitanyi (2015), Qin (2021), Zehra and Usmani (2023), Zighan (2020)	11
<i>Journal of International Entrepreneurship</i>	8 [13]	Cruz et al. (2020), Elo et al. (2018), Etemad (2018), Poblete (2018), Selmer et al. (2018), Vinogradov and Jørgensen (2017), Williams and Efendic (2019), Williams and Krasniqi (2018)	10
<i>International Small Business Journal</i>	5 [21]	Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010), Cheung and Kwong (2017), Mickiewicz and Olarewaju (2020), Ram et al. (2013), Williams (2020)	6
<i>International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal</i>	4 [16]	Guerrero et al. (2021), Guerrero and Wanjiru (2021), Harima et al. (2019), Wauters and Lambrecht (2006)	5
<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business</i>	4 [50]	Baklanov et al. (2014), Ganzaroli et al. (2013), Hoxha (2009), Sandberg et al. (2019)	5
<i>Journal of Business Venturing</i>	4 [18]	Bird and Wennberg (2016), Jiang et al. (2021), Shepherd et al. (2020), Vandro and Franke (2016)	5
<i>Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice</i>	3 [14]	Scott et al. (2012), Sequeira et al. (2009), Webster and Watson (2002)	4
<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation</i>	2 [10]	Hack-Polay et al. (2020), Refai et al. (2018)	2
<i>Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies</i>	2 [14]	Aljuwaiber (2020), Indarti et al. (2020)	2
<i>Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development</i>	2 [19]	Fadahunsi et al. (2000), Nijhoff (2021)	2
<i>Journal of Social Entrepreneurship</i>	2 [15]	Harima and Freudenberg (2020), Kong (2019)	2
<i>Entrepreneurship Research Journal</i>	1 [3]	Vinogradov (2011)	1
<i>Family Business Review</i>	1 [8]	Tan and Fock (2001)	1
<i>International Review of Entrepreneurship</i>	1 [4]	Gruenhagen and Davidsson (2018)	1
<i>Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy</i>	1 [8]	Moberg and Reil (2018)	1
<i>Journal of Small Business Management</i>	1 [7]	Shinnar and Zamantılı Nayur (2019)	1
<i>Social Enterprise Journal</i>	1 [29]	Kraff and Jernsand (2020)	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>83 [470]</b>		<b>100</b>



conclusions from the analysis of the data. VOSviewer was used to analyze the connections between the keywords in the 83 articles and to illustrate the results. The thematic analysis was divided in accordance with the TCCM framework (i.e., Theory, Context, Characteristics and Methodology), which provides a structured way to categorically group and present the findings (Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019). Consequently, the TCCM framework offers a structured approach for organizing, categorizing and managing the existing literature by systematically categorizing, for example, concepts and themes. This enhances the ease of understanding and interpretation of the results. Hence, the framework contributes to a clear and transparent reporting of the findings and a process and framework for conducting a literature review.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Findings of bibliometric analysis

##### 1) Number of publications and most prominent journals

Table 1 shows that just a few articles have been, in some way, related to refugee entrepreneurship as a topic in the past 21 years. While the number of articles on the topic in AJG4 is surprisingly low (7 articles, 8%), most of the articles come from AJG3 journals (39 articles, 47%). Thus, while the topic has not yet received considerable attention from the very top outlets, interest in the topic is certainly on the rise, given that half of the articles are in AJG3 journals. The other half of the articles, 37 (45%), were published in AJG2 and AJG1 journals. The articles were written by a variety of authors, which indicates a wide interest in the topic. On the other hand, it may lead to the expertise being too spread out across the disciplines and not having a solid core, with the topic being “additional” to other main focuses. Therefore, a focused scholarship of refugee entrepreneurship has yet to be established and institutionalized as a legitimate area of research.

##### 2) Most-cited papers

According to Levine-Clark and Gil (2009), in the academic world, citation analysis is, in many cases, used to appraise the performance of research. Baird and Oppenheim (1994, p. 8) argued that “whatever measure you take for the eminence of an individual scientist or of a journal or of an institution, citation counts provide strong correlation

with that result.” In this study, we used Google Scholar to provide us with data on citations. Google Scholar was used as a reference for the citation number, due to the wider range of journals and publications included in the database, as well as its simplicity and increasing importance in the academic society, in particular when it comes to the employment and evaluation of scholars in universities (Dziubaniuk et al., 2021). In Table 2, the top 10 most-cited articles in this research are presented.

The results reveal that the most-cited article focusing specifically on refugees and entrepreneurship, by Jones et al. (2008), centers on the narrative construction of the social entrepreneurial identity, whereas the second most-cited article, by Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010), explores how Palestinian refugee women in Jordan operate home-based enterprises and make a critical contribution to family incomes. The results emphasize that a wide range of themes strain the foundation of the analyzed research area. However, as Table 5 shows, there are only a few studies directed at each topic and theme. The wide range of topics presented with just a few studies of each topic indicates that there could be a rather unestablished sphere of research, which allows scholars to conduct a wide range of studies in the future (see the results of the review and further research suggestions in Section 4.6). Seven of the top 10 articles were empirical and used qualitative methods. Nine out of ten articles come from AJG-3 and 4 journals, confirming the statement by Sergeeva and Andreeva (2016, p. 243) that top-ranked journals “can be treated as a proxy for the academic scholarship in the discipline.” Only one article, Scott et al. (2012), was taken from an AJG-4 journal.

##### 3) Analysis of the co-occurrence of keywords

Keyword analysis is a part of bibliometric analysis and a quantitative method that delivers a statistical understanding in systematic literature reviews (Laudano et al., 2018; Zupic & Cater, 2015). According to Chang-Tang (2020), bibliometric analysis is suitable for analyzing academic papers and accumulated knowledge in a specific domain over a period of time. The analysis generally focuses on analyzing meta information from journal articles, where keywords are singled out in order to gather knowledge patterns (Yoon & Park, 2005). Among the five different bibliometric approaches presented by Zupic and Cater (2015), co-word analysis is one of the methods used to find connections among concepts that co-occur, for example, in keywords. Co-word analysis uses actual content from the articles/text to analyze keywords in four steps.

**Table 2**

Top 10 most-cited papers on “refugee and entrepreneurship” during the last two decades (citation count as of August 30, 2022).

Authors	Title	Journal	Type of article	Citation Count	Citations per year
Kloosterman (2010)	Matching Opportunities with Resources: A Framework for Analysing Migrant Entrepreneurship from a Mixed Embeddedness Perspective	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	Qualitative	700	58
Levie (2007)	Immigration, In-Migration, Ethnicity and Entrepreneurship in the United Kingdom	Small Business Economics	Quantitative	399	27
Baycan-Levent et al. (2009)	Characteristics of migrant entrepreneurship in Europe	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	Quantitative	280	22
Jones et al. (2008)	Narrative construction of the social entrepreneurial identity	International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research	Qualitative	246	18
Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010)	Defying contextual embeddedness: evidence from displaced women entrepreneurs in Jordan	International Small Business Journal	Qualitative	217	18
Jones et al. (2014)	Mixed embeddedness and new migrant enterprise in the UK	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	Qualitative	212	27
Sepulveda et al. (2011)	Population superdiversity and new migrant enterprise: The case of London	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	Qualitative	205	19
Scott et al. (2012)	Enterprise and inequality: A study of Avon in South Africa	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	Qualitative	188	19
Hammarstedt (2001)	Immigrant self-employment in Sweden - its variation and some possible determinants	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	Quantitative	188	9
Bizri (2017)	Refugee-entrepreneurship: A social capital perspective	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	Qualitative	181	36

**Table 3**

Workflow model—keywords.

Research design	Bibliometric analysis
Compilation of bibliometric data	Keywords from the 83 journal articles
Analysis	Co-occurrence of author keywords based on the bibliographic database files
Visualization	Threshold selection and visualization through VOSviewer's specific clustering algorithm
Interpretation	VOSviewer together with qualitative analysis

First, we compiled all the keywords in the 83 articles, then we conducted the analysis using the VOSviewer's specific clustering algorithm and then presented the data for interpretation. The protocol of the different steps in the process is presented in Table 3.

A wide range of keywords is used in journal articles to express the main idea(s) behind the research paper but also to present the author's specific understanding of their work (Ali et al., 2019). The keywords included by the authors in the 83 entrepreneurship articles in this study are presented in Table 4. In order to define the knowledge patterns in the keywords, we present only those keywords that were used more than once. Based on Zupic and Čater's (2015) workflow, we conducted science mapping through bibliometric methods, providing a structure for

analyzing the topics associated with refugee entrepreneurship.

Based on the findings in Table 4 and the VOSviewer analysis (its specific clustering algorithm), a wide spread of topics and themes were introduced. The keywords provided by the reviewed authors were rather broad, which increased the chances of the articles being found and the citation count. Thus, Uddin and Khan (2016, p. 1171) found that while new author-selected keywords may indicate “knowledge innovation and/or the introduction of a new concept,” such words have a negative correlation with citation count. The only focused entrepreneurial literature concept that occurred more than once in the keywords was “entrepreneurial intention.” The frequent appearance of keywords such as “ethnic entrepreneurship,” “emerging economies” and “mixed embeddedness” may indicate the similarity of interests among migrant and refugee entrepreneurship scholars, since migrant entrepreneurship is often focused on these issues (Dabic et al., 2020). However, to understand the specific nature of refugee entrepreneurship, more emphasis should be placed on tracing the differences between migrant and refugee contexts and entrepreneurship.

A VOSviewer analysis provides, through the clustering of the keywords, a map of how the different themes are interconnected. The results show that the themes are scattered across different research areas. However, the analysis of the keywords also revealed that seven main themes or streams are included. 1. *Entrepreneurship*, which is the main

**Table 4**

Keywords used in the literature (more than once).

Keyword	Number of articles	References
<i>entrepreneurship</i>	22	Alexandre et al. (2019), Aljuwaiber (2020), Backman et al. (2021), Bisignano and El-Anis (2019), Cheung and Kwong (2017), Cheung et al. (2019), Clark et al. (2017), Desai et al. (2021), Guerrero and Wanjiru (2021), Hoxha (2009), Kwong et al. (2019), Levie (2007), Mawson and Kasem (2019), Meister and Mauer (2019), Nazareno et al. (2018), Nijhoff (2021), Sandberg et al. (2019), Santamaria-Velasco et al. (2021), Senthana et al. (2021), Williams and Efendic (2019), Williams and Krasniqi (2018), Zighan (2020)
<i>refugee</i>	12	Desai et al. (2021), Guerrero and Wanjiru (2021), Harima and Freudenberg (2020), Kazlou and Wennberg (2021), Kone et al. (2021), Loschmann and Marchand (2021), Moberg and Reil (2018), Nijhoff (2021), Refai et al. (2018), Sandberg et al. (2019), Santamaria-Velasco et al. (2021), Wauters and Lambrecht (2008)
<i>immigrant</i>	8	Alexandre et al. (2019), Andersson and Hammarstedt (2010), Bisignano and El-Anis (2019), Clark et al. (2017), Guerrero and Wanjiru (2021), Meister and Mauer (2019), Nazareno et al. (2018), Sandberg et al. (2019)
<i>immigrant entrepreneurship</i>	8	Cruz et al. (2020), Indarti et al. (2020), Kazlou and Wennberg (2021), Klaesson and Öner (2021), Kloosterman (2003, 2010), Vinogradov (2011), Vinogradov and Jørgensen (2017)
<i>self-employment</i>	7	Andersson and Hammarstedt (2010), Clark et al. (2017), Desai et al. (2021), Kloosterman (2003), Kone et al. (2021), Mawson and Kasem (2019), Webster and Haandrikman (2022)
<i>immigration</i>	5	Baycan-Levent and Nijkamp (2009), Cruz et al. (2020), Desai et al. (2021), Hammarstedt (2001), Levie (2007)
<i>refugee entrepreneurship</i>	5	Bizri (2017), Harima et al. (2021), Jiang et al. (2021), Zehra and Usmani (2023), Zighan (2020)
<i>emerging economies</i>	4	Gruenhausen and Davidsson (2018), Guerrero et al. (2021), Guerrero and Wanjiru (2021), Santamaria-Velasco et al. (2021)
<i>ethnic groups</i>	4	Bisignano and El-Anis (2019), Fadahunsi et al. (2000), Mawson and Kasem (2019), Nazareno et al. (2018)
<i>international entrepreneurship</i>	4	Nazareno et al. (2018), Selmer et al. (2018), Vandro and Franke (2016), Vinogradov and Jørgensen (2017)
<i>migrant entrepreneurship</i>	4	Baycan-Levent and Nijkamp (2009), Guerrero et al. (2021), Mickiewicz and Olarewaju (2020), Vandro and Franke (2016)
<i>mixed embeddedness</i>	4	Bagwell (2018), Jones et al. (2014), Kloosterman (2010), Ram et al. (2013)
<i>business development</i>	3	Bagwell (2008), Heilbrunn (2019), Meister and Mauer (2019)
<i>ethnic enclaves</i>	3	Cruz et al. (2020), Hack-Polay (2019), Klaesson and Öner (2021)
<i>human capital</i>	3	Guerrero et al. (2021), Sandberg et al. (2019), Vinogradov and Jørgensen (2017)
<i>institutions</i>	3	Guerrero and Wanjiru (2021), Williams (2020), Williams and Efendic (2019)
<i>labor markets</i>	3	Desai et al. (2021), Hammarstedt (2001), Loschmann and Marchand (2021)
<i>migrants</i>	3	Guerrero and Wanjiru (2021), Hack-Polay (2019), Kone et al. (2021)
<i>refugee entrepreneurs</i>	3	Harima and Freudenberg (2020), Harima et al. (2019), Qin (2021)
<i>United Kingdom</i>	3	Bagwell (2008), Clark et al. (2017), Kone et al. (2021)
<i>economic growth</i>	2	Aljuwaiber (2020), Gruenhausen and Davidsson (2018)
<i>entrepreneurial intention</i>	2	Alexandre et al. (2019), Mawson and Kasem (2019)
<i>ethnic entrepreneurship</i>	2	Indarti et al. (2020), Wauters and Lambrecht (2008)
<i>forced migration</i>	2	Backman et al. (2021), Desai et al. (2021)
<i>integration</i>	2	Hack-Polay (2019), Moberg and Reil (2018)
<i>labor market integration</i>	2	Kraff and Jernsand (2020), Webster and Haandrikman (2022)
<i>networks</i>	2	Meister and Mauer (2019), Williams and Efendic (2019)
<i>opportunity structure</i>	2	Bagwell (2018), Kloosterman (2010)
<i>refugee camps</i>	2	de la Chaux and Haugh (2020), Moberg and Reil (2018)
<i>social capital</i>	2	Kloosterman (2010), Sandberg et al. (2019)
<i>social entrepreneurship</i>	2	Cheung et al. (2019), Harima and Freudenberg (2020)
<i>Sweden</i>	2	Backman et al. (2021), Hammarstedt (2001)
<i>Syrian refugees</i>	2	Senthana et al. (2021), Zighan (2020)

theme and part of the main search in the literature review, is directly connected to the other themes, except to the immigration entrepreneurship theme. 2. *Refugee*, the refugee theme, is mainly linked to integration, ethnic enclaves and refugee camps. Thus, more research on refugee camps and related topics in the future can help distinguish refugee entrepreneurship from migrant entrepreneurship. 3. *Immigrant entrepreneurship* has links to ethnic entrepreneurship and mixed embeddedness, which corresponds to previous literature (see, e.g., Dabic et al., 2020). 4. *Self-employment* is another topic linked to refugee entrepreneurship, showing its importance for this societal cluster. 5. *Immigration* shows links to Sweden, which is one of the top host countries for refugees and migrants. 6. *Emerging economies* are associated with migrant and international entrepreneurship as well as economic growth. The literature shows that and refugee entrepreneurship can be drivers

for economic growth if approached in a correct manner (Baycan-Levent & Nijkamp, 2009). Therefore, more research into this phenomenon in emerging economies can bring societal and economic benefits to these markets.

The keywords presented in Table 4 provide the research community with a view of the different authors' understandings of the research. As a result, this study will provide a thorough understanding of where the research stands today as well as possible further research paths.

### 3.2. Research agenda

#### 1) Theory

The results show that several core theories and concepts are used in

**Table 5**  
Theoretical lenses and concepts used in the literature.

Theoretical lenses	No of articles	References (Authors & year)	Total Percentage
Mixed embeddedness	17	Bagwell (2008); Bagwell (2018); Bisignano and El-Anis (2019); Brieger and Gielnik (2021); Dahles (2013); Hack-Polay (2019); Hack-Polay and Igwe (2019); Jones et al. (2014); Kloosterman (2003); Kloosterman (2010); Qin (2021); Sepulveda et al. (2011); Ram et al. (2013); Meister and Mauer (2019); Harima et al. (2021); Jiang et al. (2021); Nijhoff (2021)	20
Social networks	12	Bagwell (2008); Meister and Mauer (2019); Bizri (2017); Kloosterman (2010); Loschmann and Marchand (2021); Williams and Krasniqi (2018); Zehra and Usmani (2023); Cruz et al. (2020); Fadahunsi et al. (2000); Hack-Polay (2019); Williams and Efendic (2019); Sandberg et al. (2019)	15
Self-employment	12	Andersson and Hammarstedt (2010); Clark et al. (2017); Hammarstedt (2004); Hammarstedt (2001); Kloosterman (2010); Kone et al. (2021); Levie (2007); Mawson and Kasem (2019); Webster and Haandrikman (2022); Loschmann and Marchand (2021); Klaesson and Öner (2021); Kazlou and Wennberg (2021)	15
Opportunity	11	Bagwell (2018); Guerrero et al. (2021); Harima and Freudenberg (2020); Harima et al. (2019); Jiang et al. (2021); Khosa and Kalitanyi (2015); Kloosterman (2003); Kloosterman (2010); Shinnar and Zamantılı Nayır (2019); Vandro and Franke (2016); Vinogradov and Jørgensen (2017)	13
Institutional theory	11	de la Chaux and Haugh (2020); Guerrero and Wanjiru (2021); Hack-Polay et al. (2020); Heilbrunn (2019); Mickiewicz and Olarewaju (2020); Nijhoff (2021); Poblete (2018); Williams (2020); Williams and Efendic (2019); Guerrero et al. (2021); Hoxha (2009)	13
Integration	9	Wauters and Lambrecht (2006); Zehra and Usmani (2023); Backman et al. (2021); Bird and Wennberg (2016); Hack-Polay and Igwe (2019); Hack-Polay (2019); Kazlou and Wennberg (2021); Kraff and Jernsand (2020); Moberg and Reil (2018)	11
Ethnic context/networks/bus iness/ embeddedness	9	Cruz et al. (2020); Fadahunsi et al. (2000); Hack-Polay (2019); Indarti et al. (2020); Levie (2007); Tan and Fock (2001); Wauters and Lambrecht (2006); Klaesson and Öner (2021); Ganzaroli et al. (2013)	11
Family/Family networks/resources/ e mbeddedness	7	Bagwell (2008); Bird and Wennberg (2016); Hack-Polay et al. (2020); Tan and Fock (2001); Zehra and Usmani (2023); Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010); Kazlou and Wennberg (2021)	8
Social capital	7	Bagwell (2018); Bizri (2017); Kloosterman (2010); Loschmann and Marchand (2021); Williams and Krasniqi (2018); Zehra and Usmani (2023); Sandberg et al. (2019)	8
Human capital	7	Andersson and Hammarstedt (2010); Vinogradov and Jørgensen (2017); Williams and Krasniqi (2018); Guerrero et al. (2021); Bird and Wennberg (2016); Kazlou and Wennberg (2021); Sandberg et al. (2019)	8
Female entrepreneurship	6	Al-Dajani et al. (2019); Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010); Brieger and Gielnik (2021); Scott et al. (2012); Senthana et al., (2021); Webster and Haandrikman (2022)	7
Context/contextualization	6	Al-Dajani et al. (2019); Aljuwaiber (2020); Cheung and Kwong (2017); Kwong et al. (2019); Nijhoff (2021); Refai et al. (2018)	7
Motivation	5	Alexandre et al. (2019); Khosa and Kalitanyi (2015); Kone et al. (2021); Shinnar and Zamantılı Nayır (2019); Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006	6
Social entrepreneurship/Social enterprise	5	Cheung et al. (2019); Harima and Freudenberg (2020); Jones et al. (2008); Kong (2019); Kraff and Jernsand (2020)	6
Transnational entrepreneurship	5	Bagwell (2018); Poblete (2018); Sequeira et al. (2009); Sandberg et al. (2019); Baklanov et al. (2014)	6
Necessity	4	Guerrero et al. (2021); Khosa and Kalitanyi (2015); Shinnar and Zamantılı Nayır (2019); Zighan (2020)	5
Identity	4	Jones et al. (2008); Refai et al. (2018); Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010); Shepherd et al. (2020)	5
Diversity	4	Ram et al. (2013); Jones et al. (2014); Alexandre et al. (2019); Sepulveda et al. (2011)	4
Returnee	3	Dahles (2013); Loschmann and Marchand (2021); Gruenhagen and Davidsson (2018)	4
Gender theory	3	Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010); Brieger and Gielnik (2021); Senthana et al., (2021)	4
Diaspora entrepreneurship	3	Elo et al. (2018); Etemad (2018); Williams (2020)	4
International entrepreneurship	3	Elo et al. (2018); Etemad (2018); Sequeira et al. (2009)	4
Bricolage	3	Cheung et al. (2019); Heilbrunn and Iannone, (2018); Kwong et al. (2019); Cheung and Kwong (2017)	4
Employment	3	Klaesson and Öner (2021); Levie (2007); Loschmann and Marchand (2021)	4
Social embeddedness	2	Bird and Wennberg (2016); Kazlou and Wennberg (2021)	2
Cross-cultural	2	Alexandre et al. (2019); Vandro and Franke (2016)	2
Resilience	2	Alexandre et al. (2019); Shepherd et al. (2020)	2
Intention	2	Alexandre et al. (2019); Mawson and Kasem (2019)	2
Displacement	2	Cheung et al. (2019); Kwong et al. (2019)	2
Decision making	2	Cruz et al. (2020); Levie (2007)	2
Business incubators	2	Harima et al. (2019); Meister and Mauer (2019)	2
Policy	2	Ram et al. (2013); Kloosterman (2003)	2
Learning	2	Kong (2019); Thompson and Illes (2020)	2



refugee entrepreneurship research. By going through all the articles manually and extracting the main theories and concepts used in each of the articles, we were able to identify 33 concepts or theories that were applied in more than one article (see Table 5).

Twenty percent of the articles used mixed embeddedness as one of the main theories and concepts. The concept of mixed embeddedness has been widely used in migrant entrepreneurship literature (Ram et al., 2017). The other main theoretical lenses were *social networks*, *self-employment*, *opportunity* and *institutional theory*, which correspond to the core themes in migrant entrepreneurship literature (Dabic et al., 2020). In the next paragraphs, we describe the findings related to the four top theoretical lenses as well as the self-employment concept.

**Mixed embeddedness:** The articles employing a mixed embeddedness lens focus on contextual factors and predominantly discuss the interconnections of the refugees with their host and home country contexts and transnationalism (e.g., Brieger & Gielnik, 2021; Bagwell, 2008; Bisignano & El-Anis, 2019) and various support system influences (e.g., Meister & Mauer, 2019; Nijhoff, 2021; Hack-Polay & Igwe, 2019), as well as, to a minor extent, the concept of diversity/superdiversity (Jones et al., 2014; Ram et al., 2013; Sepulveda et al., 2011). While most studies discuss the host country context, Dahles (2013) applied the concept of mixed embeddedness in relation to returnee refugees and whether they are able to leverage being embedded in both home and host country contexts in that situation. The return aspect is also raised to some extent in Bisignano and El-Anis (2019, p. 990), who focus on the individuals'/refugees' interpretation of mixed embeddedness, arguing that "market opportunities and structures in which agents are embedded are in a continuous status of flux," thereby accounting for the much-needed time factor in migrant and refugee studies. Time is also accounted for in Qin (2021), who emphasized change in refugee embeddedness along their journey, dividing it into three phases—entry phase (occurrence of forced migration), transition phase (voyage to host country) and exit phase (integration or return to homeland).

**Social networks:** The articles taking on social networks as one of the core theoretical lenses focused on the importance of various connections, both local and transnational (e.g., Meister & Mauer, 2019; Williams & Krasniqi, 2018), as well as co-ethnic, for refugees' businesses (e.g., Bizri, 2017; Fadahunsi et al., 2000). Some of the articles also emphasized the crucial role of family (e.g., Zehra & Usmani, 2023), in both economic integration to the host country as well as overall psychological support. The transnational aspect of the networks was raised in both a host country context (e.g., Sandberg et al., 2019) and that of returnee refugees (Loschmann and Marchand, 2021). Thus, Loschmann and Marchand (2021) mentioned that the capacity of refugees returning to their home country, who, according to the authors, have fewer opportunities to become employed, could be improved by establishing connections with experts and organizations in the former host country. The diversity of social networks, particularly ethnic diversity, was also highlighted, being both a positive and a negative factor depending on the context. Williams and Efendic (2019), on the example of internally displaced refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina, found that the positive effect of diversity can be diminished in the case of "institutional discrimination based on ethnicity" (p. 575).

**Institutional theory:** The articles taking on an institutional lens as part of their theoretical framework predominantly discuss the challenges that arise from institutional voids that affect refugees' decisions to become entrepreneurs and in relation to their choices when establishing a business (e.g., Hack-Polay et al., 2020; Heilbrunn, 2019; Poblete, 2018). Institutionally rooted discrimination and non-inclusive policies may lead to a motivation of necessity to start a business in the first place (Guerrero et al., 2021), resort to ethnic business (Hack-Polay et al., 2020) or become a transnational, international entrepreneur (Poblete, 2018). This relates to both refugees and migrants from developing countries in developed countries (Nijhoff, 2021), as well as those from developing countries residing in other developing countries (Guerrero et al., 2021). In turn, refugees in countries with weak institutions and

those in refugee camps act as bricoleurs (Heilbrunn, 2019), juggling supportive aspects of both formal and informal institutions to their advantage (de la Chaux & Haugh, 2020). Finally, a few studies discuss the role of institutional improvements in the home country for the re-integration of returnee refugees (Williams, 2020; Williams & Efendic, 2019) and the importance of not only financial but, more crucially, social remittances (i.e., ideas, behaviors, identities and social capital) for post-conflict economies (Williams, 2020).

**Self-employment:** Most of the articles using the term self-employment focused on the comparison of self-employment rates among various types of migrants (including refugees) and locals depending on such factors as self-employment traditions in the country of origin (Hammarstedt, 2001), reason for migration (Kone et al., 2021), intergenerational transmissions (Andersson & Hammarstedt, 2010), education level (Hammarstedt, 2004) and time in the host country (Hammarstedt, 2004; Kone et al., 2021). Migrants or refugees with self-employment traditions have higher chances of self-employment in their home country (Hammarstedt, 2001), with a previous generational history of self-employment (Andersson & Hammarstedt, 2010) and after a longer stay in the host country (Kone et al., 2021). Hammarstedt (2004) also stated that for migrants and refugees from Southern Europe and non-European countries, the propensity to be self-employed is lower if they have a higher level of education. Kone et al. (2021), based on a study conducted in the United Kingdom, found that asylum seekers are likelier to be self-employed than locals and migrants who came for other reasons. Based on a United Kingdom study, Mawson and Kasem's (2019) findings also elaborate that refugees who arrive independently have higher entrepreneurial intentions than those who came through United Nations and host country resettlement programs. The reason is that individuals who arrived independently were able to build their "personal capabilities as autonomy, independence and resilience," as well as "felt incentivised to engage" with the local life and culture (Mawson & Kasem, 2019, p. 1139, 1142). Finally, while Klaesson and Öner (2021) found that ethnic concentration and segregation have a predominantly negative effect on employment and self-employment, Kazlou and Wennberg (2021) highlighted the positive role of family embeddedness and ethnic capital in overcoming the risks of unemployment after exiting from self-employment.

**Opportunity:** Most studies applying the opportunity concept have focused on the "international" aspect of opportunity related to refugees separately or in relation to the concept of a migrant. They highlight the benefits of being embedded in both a host and a home country context for the transnational entrepreneurship of refugees (e.g., Bagwell, 2018; Shinnar & Zamantılı Nayır, 2019), as well as the cross-cultural knowledge (e.g., Vador & Franke, 2016) and prevalence of migrants embarking on international opportunities in comparison to local entrepreneurs (e.g., Vinogradov & Jørgensen, 2017; Bagwell, 2018). These studies, however, treat refugees and migrants as one group. Jiang et al. (2021) emphasize that refugees may be less prone to being embedded in both their home country and host country, due to the specific disruptive circumstances of their migration, and it is more beneficial for them to focus on the "present" (host country integration). Other studies frame refugees' opportunity recognition and structure in terms of the institutional and social support received. Thus, Harima and Freudenberg (2020) and Harima et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of collaboration between refugees and local entrepreneurs and support from business incubators, which, however, should be adapted to the specifics of refugees. Finally, while refugees have traditionally been associated with necessity entrepreneurship, the number of articles focusing on opportunity vs. necessity was 11–4, respectively.

Surprisingly, concepts such as *intention* and *motivation*, which are also among the core concepts in the migrant entrepreneurship literature (Dabic et al., 2020), received less attention in the reviewed articles on refugee entrepreneurship. Furthermore, crucial concepts, such as *diversity* and *resilience*, were rarely in focus. The concept of diversity in relation to entrepreneurship is crucial for innovation and the exchange

of ideas (Audretsch et al., 2021; Karlsson et al., 2021) and should be applied more in relation to refugees and migrants, who can use their diversity to their advantage. Resilience, in turn, is an inherent concept of a refugee and can be a push factor for establishing a business (Yeshi et al., 2022); therefore, it should be given more attention in top entrepreneurship journals.

## 2) Context

According to the results shown in Table 6, a majority of the studies have a Western country perspective. The focus is on the host country and the specific circumstances that exist when a refugee arrives in a Western country. The top three countries in Europe—the United Kingdom, Germany and Sweden—are among the countries that have been open to helping refugees and asylum seekers through the years, especially since the last wave of refugees entered Europe in 2016 (NRC, 2022). Even though the majority of refugees often end up in a neighboring country, e. g., Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey (NRC, 2022), only four of the studies had included Jordan and just three of the studies focused on Lebanon. The small amount of research in these areas may be linked to the focus of the host countries on local policies, rather than a proactive approach to refugee integration that includes measures taken before refugee arrival. For instance, pre-departure measures, such as cultural orientation, were indicated as one of five policy priorities in the European Union action plan on the integration of third-country nationals set out in 2016 (IRC, 2018; European Commission, 2016). However, before the refugee crisis in 2015, such pre-departure programs were few and far between due to the small number of refugees on the European continent (IRC, 2018). The research was primarily conducted in three European countries—the United Kingdom, Germany and Sweden. In the United Kingdom, the

research focused mostly on refugees from Southeast Asia, Asia, the Middle East and Africa, while the German research had focused on the Middle East and specifically on Syrian refugees. In the Swedish-based research, the refugees originated from the Balkans, Asia and the Middle East. Thus, Middle Eastern refugees have been widely researched in the context of host countries. However, very few studies have found their way to the region itself, e.g., refugee camps, which would be necessary in order to understand the full pathway of refugee integration and development of entrepreneurial spirit. Interestingly, the studies conducted in Jordan, the country with one of the largest refugee camps in the world, focus solely on refugee entrepreneurship outside camps (e. g., Al-Dajani et al., 2019; Zighan, 2020). While most refugees in Jordan reside outside of camps (Al-Dajani et al., 2019), entrepreneurship is one of the income sources for many refugees in camps (Yesufu & Alajlani, 2019); thus, such experience may provide the refugees with new capabilities that could be further developed by certain institutional tools when they are relocated to the host country.

## 3) Methods

Historically, entrepreneurship research has been dominated by positivist approaches and data gathering methods and entrepreneurship scholars have therefore concentrated on answering research questions that quantitative data are able to answer (McDonald et al., 2014). However, with the complexity of the research area, in which extreme situations form the specific circumstances for the study in some cases, a plurality of methods could bring a more complex and multifaceted picture of the research topic. Interestingly, our results show that most of the reviewed studies (80%) were conducted through qualitative research methods, with interviews and observations used as the main

**Table 6**  
Countries of focus in studies.

Country of focus	Number of articles	References	Percentage of total (%)
<b>UK</b>	13	Bagwell (2008, 2018), Bisignano and El-Anis (2019), Clark et al. (2017), Fadahunsi et al. (2000), Hack-Polay and Igwe (2019), Hack-Polay et al. (2020), Jones et al. (2014), Kone et al. (2021), Levie (2007), Mawson and Kasem (2019), Ram et al. (2013), Sepulveda et al. (2011)	19
<b>Sweden</b>	8	Andersson and Hammarstedt (2010), Backman et al. (2021), Bird and Wennberg (2016), Hammarstedt (2001, 2004), Kazlou and Wennberg (2021), Klaesson and Öner (2021), Sandberg et al. (2019)	11
<b>Germany</b>	5	Harima et al. (2019), Harima et al. (2019), Harima and Freudenberg (2020), Jiang et al. (2021), Meister and Mauer (2019)	7
<b>Jordan</b>	4	Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010), Al-Dajani et al. (2019), Refai et al. (2018), Zighan (2020)	6
<b>Lebanon</b>	3	Alexandre et al. (2019), Bizri (2017), Shepherd et al. (2020)	4
<b>Netherlands</b>	3	Kloosterman (2003), Nijhoff (2021), Thompson and Illes (2020)	4
<b>Pakistan</b>	3	Cheung et al. (2019), Kwong et al. (2019), Zehra and Usmani (2023)	4
<b>Afghanistan</b>	2	Cheung et al. (2019), Loschmann and Marchand (2021)	3
<b>Australia</b>	2	Jones et al. (2008), Kong (2019)	3
<b>France</b>	2	Harima et al. (2019), Jiang et al. (2021)	3
<b>Hong Kong</b>	2	Cheung and Kwong (2017), Selmer et al. (2018)	3
<b>Kosovo</b>	2	Hoxha (2009), Williams (2020)	3
<b>Singapore</b>	2	Selmer et al. (2018), Tan and Fock (2001)	3
<b>South Africa</b>	2	Khosa and Kalitanyi (2015), Scott et al. (2012)	3
<b>Syria</b>	2	Bizri (2017), Cheung et al. (2019)	3
<b>Belgium</b>	1	Wauters and Lambrecht (2006)	1
<b>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</b>	1	Williams (2020)	1
<b>Cambodia</b>	1	Dahles (2013)	1
<b>Canada</b>	1	Senthanar et al. (2021)	1
<b>Chile</b>	1	Guerrero et al. (2021)	1
<b>Denmark</b>	1	Baklanov et al. (2014)	1
<b>Ireland</b>	1	Harima et al. (2019)	1
<b>Israel</b>	1	Heilbrunn (2019)	1
<b>Kenya</b>	1	de la Chaux and Haugh (2020)	1
<b>Middle East and North Africa</b>	1	Aljuwaiber (2020)	1
<b>Montenegro</b>	1	Williams (2020)	1
<b>Nigeria</b>	1	Mickiewicz and Olarewaju (2020)	1
<b>Switzerland</b>	1	Jiang et al. (2021)	1
<b>Turkey</b>	1	Shinnar and Zamantılı Nayır (2019)	1
<b>US</b>	1	Nazareno et al. (2018)	1
<b>Total</b>	70		100

methods (47% of the studies). The articles that were most cited also used a qualitative approach. Only a few studies had a quantitative approach throughout, e.g., surveys or theoretical model testing. The result confirms the trend identified by McDonald et al. (2014) that more studies include methods other than a quantitative and positivistic approach, which has been called upon in recent entrepreneurship literature to provide “deep insights into the field” (Dabić et al., 2020, p. 34). It may also indicate that the refugee entrepreneurship field is still in its nascent/infancy and thereby requires a more explorative approach to set a foundation for future studies. Table 7 presents the different methods used in the 83 studies.

#### 4. Conceptualizing the refugee entrepreneurship field and outlining further research avenues

To conclude, the findings from the analysis of the 83 articles show that the topic of refugee entrepreneurship is a recent field of research. Even if refugees emerged in the literature as early as the 1980s and there were some important articles published during the 1990s and 2000s, the bulk of papers published in this field have been published in the past few years. The topic gained a [new] renaissance in the entrepreneurship literature during the 2010s. The results of this literature review also show that refugee entrepreneurship has been noticed in the wider entrepreneurship field. However, the topics are scattered into different areas.

In summary, the results of the literature review revealed four main research streams that could be further developed. We structure our further research streams in accordance with the TCCM framework proposed by Paul and Rosado-Serrano (2019), thus taking into account theory (T), context (C), characteristics (C) and methodology (M).

##### 4.1. Theory research stream: entrepreneurial concepts in focus

Current research on refugee entrepreneurship in entrepreneurship journals is widely spread across different research fields and focuses mostly on concepts and interdisciplinary terms/lenses/theories, such as mixed embeddedness, social networks and institutional theory (see Fig. 3 and Table 5). This is similar to the findings of Abebe (2023) and Newman et al. (2023), who focus on broader samples of disciplines in their literature review on refugee entrepreneurship. Paradoxically, while in most management and international business research there has been a call for more interdisciplinarity (Shenkar, 2021), in the case of entrepreneurship, the a priori interdisciplinary nature of the field acts as a certain barrier to adopting a clear entrepreneurship basis for its study. While aspects, such as mixed embeddedness and social networks, are undoubtedly crucial to consider, in order to move refugee entrepreneurship into the mainstream and delineate it as a sub-field in the entrepreneurship domain in its own right, more research should be conducted by using seminal entrepreneurial concepts, such as intention, motivation or uncertainty, in conjunction with interdisciplinary ones.

One of the few concepts related to the entrepreneurial literature that appeared most frequently in the reviewed articles was opportunity. Uncertainty and opportunity are at the very core of entrepreneurship and conceptually define the field (Magnani & Zucchella, 2018; Vinogradov & Jørgensen, 2017). At the same time, refugees are, in many cases, identified and connected with a situation in which necessity directs the action taken by the refugee. The literature review shows that, surprisingly, the focus of the reviewed articles has been more on opportunity entrepreneurship and the necessity perspective has been left in the margins. Furthermore, more research is required on such central concepts for entrepreneurship as entrepreneurial intention and motivation.

Furthermore, the reviewed articles mostly disregarded such concepts as entrepreneurial mindset, cognition and behavior. Looking at refugee entrepreneurship from a cognitive and behavioral perspective would allow us to better understand the personal agency of refugees, which is as important in the integration process as government support and

opportunities provided by institutions (Obschonka and Hahn, 2018). In particular, an entrepreneurial mindset is important in order to effectively embrace the opportunities provided by institutions, overcome uncertainties and set up and run a venture (Obschonka and Hahn, 2018). The market opportunities that may be available to refugee entrepreneurs are “in a continuous state of flux” (Bisignano & El-Anis, 2019) and depend on the levels of institutional and local society’s support, as well as other factors (see, e.g., Harima & Freudenberg, 2020; Harima et al., 2020); therefore, it would be wrong to categorize a refugee as an opportunity or necessity entrepreneur. More longitudinal research should be conducted on how the contextual conditions creating opportunities for refugees change over time and what cognitive factors affect grasping those opportunities.

Similar to reviews in broader fields by Abebe (2023) and Newman et al. (2023), our study points out that further research in the entrepreneurship field should advance our theoretical and empirical understanding of refugee entrepreneurship by applying seminal entrepreneurial concepts and better understanding the refugee specifics compared to those of other groups of migrants. The articles in our literature review pinpoint several differences—1) different institutional support and entrepreneurship education needs (e.g., Harima et al., 2019; Nijhoff, 2021); 2) both less social capital in the host country (e.g., Nijhoff, 2021), as well as potential disconnection from the home country (e.g., Jiang et al., 2021); 3) the potentially temporal nature of stay and potential need for repatriation and rebuilding of their home country (e.g., Loschmann & Marchand, 2020; Qin, 2021). Refugee situations are different, and whereas some may have to fully disconnect from their home countries and the question of repatriation may be off the table, others maintain connections to their home countries and act as a source of financial and social remittances for improving their home country post-conflict economy. Fostering refugee entrepreneurship in this case may not only help refugees to integrate and feel included in their host country but also provide an outlook for a positive future for their home country, as well as improving international relations between those countries.

We, therefore, concur with Desai et al. (2021, p. 943) in that the context of migration is multidimensional and complex, thus signaling the need “to explore in more detail the experiences of refugee entrepreneurs, the socioeconomic and institutional conditions they operate in, and how these line up with migrants at large.” Further research should, thus, focus not solely on the beginning of the refugee journey as an entrepreneur, as suggested by Abebe (2023), but also on its later stages, whether it is becoming a part of the home country society and contributing to it by, for example, the transnational or international nature of entrepreneurship or repatriating to their home country and benefiting from the connections in the host country to rebuild it.

##### 4.2. Context research stream: focusing on developing countries

Our results show that 37% of the research in the reviewed journals is focused on refugee entrepreneurship in countries such as the United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany. Furthermore, most of the reviewed research takes a Western country stance on refugee entrepreneurship. It is, however, crucial to study the situation with the topic in developing countries, which the predominant percentage of refugees inhabit. Our results show that research on the topic in developing countries is scattered across many countries (approximately 1 study per country), thereby not allowing a strong perspective on the situation in any of those countries. Developed countries often have institutional systems in place to integrate refugees into society. However, developing countries often lack resources and institutional frameworks to properly integrate refugees, provide them with a better living and use the entrepreneurial potential of refugees in order to improve their own economies. More research into refugee entrepreneurship in developing countries could be one pathway to resolve one of the sustainable development goals highlighted by the United Nations, namely the “no poverty” goal. Taking

**Table 7**  
Main methodologies used.

Main methodology used	No. of articles	References	Percentage of total (%)
<b>Interview/observations</b>	39	Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010), Al-Dajani et al. (2019), Bagwell (2008, 2018), Bisignano and El-Anis (2019), Bizri (2017), Cheung et al. (2019), Cheung and Kwong (2017), Cruz et al. (2020), Dahles (2013), de la Chaux and Haugh (2020), Fadahunsi et al. (2000), Hack-Polay and Igwe (2019), Hack-Polay et al. (2020), Harima and Freudenberg (2020), Harima et al. (2019), Harima et al. (2019), Heilbrunn (2019), Hoxha (2009), Jiang et al. (2021), Jones et al. (2008), Jones et al. (2014), Kong (2019), Kraff and Jernsand (2020), Kwong et al. (2019), Mawson and Kasem (2019), Mickiewicz and Olarewaju (2020), Nijhoff (2021), Ram et al. (2013), Sandberg et al. (2019), Scott et al. (2012), Senthanaar et al. (2021), Sepulveda et al. (2011), Shepherd et al. (2020), Shinnar and Zamantili Nayir (2019), Tan and Fock (2001), Williams (2020), Zehra and Usmani (2023), Zighan (2020)	47
<b>Secondary data/register data</b>	20	Andersson and Hammarstedt (2010), Backman et al. (2021), Baklanov et al. (2014), Baycan-Levent and Nijkamp (2009), Bird and Wennberg (2016), Brieger and Gielnik (2021), Clark et al. (2017), Guerrero et al. (2021), Hammarstedt (2001, 2004), Kazlou and Wennberg (2021), Klaesson and Öner (2021), Levie (2007), Poblete (2018), Refai et al. (2018), Sequeira et al. (2009), Vandro and Franke (2016), Williams and Efendic (2019), Webster and Haandrikman (2022), Williams and Krasniqi (2018)	24
<b>Conceptual and review articles</b>	14	Aljuwaiber (2020), Desai et al. (2021), Elo et al. (2018), Etemad (2018), Ganzaroli et al. (2013), Gruenhagen and Davidsson (2018), Guerrero and Wanjiu (2021), Hack-Polay (2020), Indarti et al. (2020), Kloosterman (2003), Kloosterman (2010), Nazareno et al. (2018), Qin (2021), Vinogradov (2011)	17
<b>Survey data</b>	7	Alexandre et al. (2019), Khosa and Kalitanyi (2015), Kone et al. (2021), Loschmann and Marchand (2021), Selmer et al. (2018), Vinogradov and Jørgensen (2017), Wauters and Lambrecht (2006)	8
<b>Focus group workshops</b>	1	Meister and Maur (2019)	1
<b>Theoretical model testing</b>	1	Moberg and Reil (2018)	1
<b>Video ethnography</b>	1	Thompson and Illes (2020)	1
<b>Total</b>	83		100

a developing country perspective may help in problematizing the current stances on refugee entrepreneurship by engaging in a “dialectical interrogation” of familiar concepts and theories with other potential stances (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). A similar challenge related to refugees in both developed and developing countries, based on our review, is that of institutionally rooted discrimination and non-inclusive policies (see, e.g., Guerrero et al., 2021; Nijhoff, 2021). Thus, more comparative research should be conducted to understand how developed countries can help developing countries and vice versa when it comes to the social and economic inclusion of refugees. Exchanging best practices and tighter cooperation on refugee issues have the potential to pave the way for a more inclusive global society in the future.

In sum, research stream 2 suggests that research should be more focused on developing countries where most of the refugees are situated rather than focusing on the host country, often in Europe, where the refugees are located when leaving the refugee camp. However, according to a few studies in our review, the entrepreneurial spirit is evident in refugee camps around the world (see, e.g., Heilbrunn, 2019; de la Chaux & Haugh, 2020). The skills they brought from their home country and new skills generated in the camps, such as bricoleuring (i.e., applying resources at hand to solve problems and create opportunities) (Heilbrunn, 2019), provide a chance for the refugees to create a purpose and an income while in the refugee camp (UNHCR, 2022a, 2022b), which goes beyond pure necessity (de la Chaux & Haugh, 2020). The entrepreneurial spirit in refugee camps also provides the potential for more successful integration in the future host country. More research on refugee camps and refugees in developing countries may provide refugee entrepreneurship with a vital point of differentiation from other migration studies in the field of entrepreneurship. The potential research questions could be as follows: Which institutions form and support the entrepreneurial context, especially in relation to refugees located in developing countries and camps, and how do they do it? What kind of governmental help is provided by the host developing country or/and refugee camp, in terms of both linguistic and educational embeddedness? What business opportunities are accessible to refugees in developing countries?

#### 4.3. Methodology research stream: mixed methods

The results from the literature review show that the focus of the research in the entrepreneurship field conducted so far has been a qualitative research approach, with a special focus on collecting data through interviews. Undoubtedly, collecting large surveys from refugees is a challenge because these subgroups are hard to identify and recruit (Abebe, 2023). However, with a narrow methodological approach, the general understanding of refugee entrepreneurship is limited. Thus, we agree with Abebe (2023), who conducted a review in a broader field of studies, that including mixed methods or quantitative methods would provide a broader range of research to develop the topic of refugee entrepreneurship, specifically in the entrepreneurship field. By including quantitative research methods, entrepreneurship researchers would be able to generate a general picture of large samples of refugees; detect more general trends and patterns; allow researchers to make predictions and generalizations to larger, more universal populations outside a test sample; and estimate causal relationships, e.g., to estimate the effect of policy changes. Therefore, the use of mixed methods and quantitative methods would give a broader understanding of the phenomenon for the entrepreneurship research community, policy makers and other stakeholders.

#### 5. Conclusions

In this paper, we have accepted the challenge of Desai et al. (2021), who argued that there is a need for research to understand and establish the basic trends in refugee entrepreneurship and further develop the embedded dimension of the forced migration context. We specifically focus on the entrepreneurship literature, as that is what refugee entrepreneurship is about— entrepreneurship (Abebe, 2023; Newman et al., 2023). The aim of this study is therefore to analyze *how and to what degree refugee entrepreneurship is subject to scholarly enquiry in entrepreneurship research*. Through a systematic review of 31 entrepreneurship journals, the results present the current scientific discussion about refugees in the context of entrepreneurship but also contribute to entrepreneurship literature by presenting the research path that the refugee entrepreneurship literature has taken in the past 21 years. The main



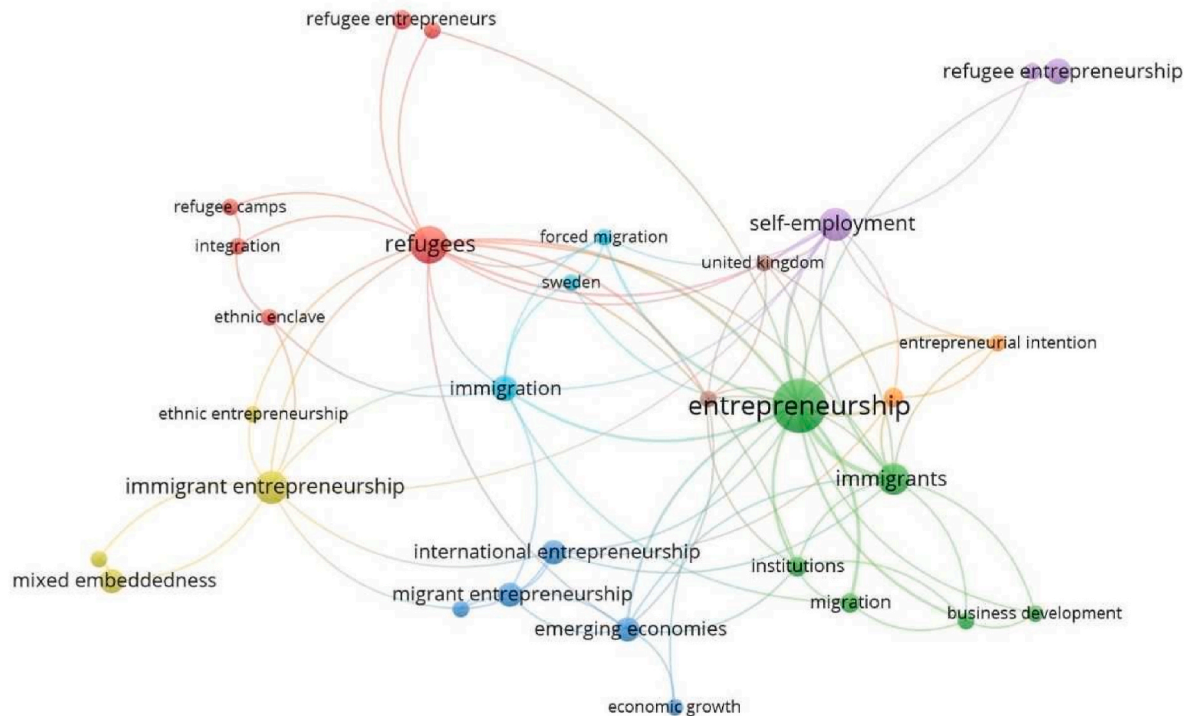


Fig. 3. The VOSviewer analysis of keywords.

results of the study reveal that refugee entrepreneurship has been a neglected topic in entrepreneurship research and it is just in the past few years that new studies have been published. In the past, most of the studies focused on immigrants and entrepreneurship from different perspectives, and just a few studies had refugees as their main theme. Out of the first round of search, in which refugees were mentioned, most of the articles had a specific focus on immigrants and entrepreneurship. Out of the 470 articles identified in the first round of search, 83 articles focused particularly on refugees and entrepreneurship. Even if we are aware of the contributions of literature reviews in the sphere of migrant entrepreneurship (i.e., Aliagla-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Camara Malerba & Ferreira, 2021; Dabić et al., 2020; Desai et al., 2021; Dheer, 2018), we argue that this research has made several contributions to the limited research of refugee entrepreneurship in the entrepreneurship field.

The main contribution of this study is the understanding of the current situation within research done on the topic of refugee entrepreneurship, specifically in top AJG-listed entrepreneurship journals. While Abebe (2023) and Newman et al. (2023) provided a broad-range review of refugee entrepreneurship, focusing solely on AJG list journals in entrepreneurship allowed us to understand the state of the art on a given topic within a focused field (entrepreneurship), since such journals can be “treated as a proxy for academic scholarship” (Sergeeva & Andreeva, 2016, p. 243). Through our results, the entrepreneurship research community can define several avenues from a cross-disciplinary perspective. Hence, the result provides a headway through the three research streams presented in Section 5 to be explored within this important topic. From a theoretical perspective, the literature review reveals that, similar to immigration entrepreneurship research (see Dabić et al., 2020), the research has used, for example, mixed embeddedness and institutional theory as theoretical lenses approaching the refugee entrepreneurship topic. However, most research has been conducted from a host country or post-refugee camp perspective. Thus, while Abebe (2023, p. 339) highlighted the need for further research on the “journey through which refugees emerge as

entrepreneurs,” we posit that it is also necessary to investigate the pre-start or early start of the refugee pathway, namely how the entrepreneurship spirit develops already before arrival in the host country, in refugee camps. We also consider further research into the “end” of the refugee entrepreneurs’ journey, i.e., economic integration into the host country or failure, as well as repatriation of the refugees and potentially their business to the home country, to be equally as important as research into the beginning of the journey. The results from the review highlight the absence of specific sectors on which refugee entrepreneurs tend to focus. While the literature presented mainly focuses on mainstream entrepreneurship, it should also consider the diverse entrepreneurial contexts, especially the tourism and hospitality sector, which has been “among the most attractive areas for refugees to venture” (Alra-wadie et al., 2019, p. 718).

Furthermore, while Abebe (2023), in his broader review, stated that publications from the last decade (2010 s) include refugees in developing countries, our literature review in entrepreneurship journals shows a different picture. Thus, most of the reviewed research has been geographically concentrated in the Western world, mainly in Europe, with a few exceptions. The fact that the highest concentrations of refugees are in neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2020), such as Jordan, Lebanon, Kenya, Uganda or Poland, there is a gap in the literature to explore the specific circumstances in these geographically close areas where war or societal, economic or political reasoning have forced people to flee (Guo et al., 2020). Thus, when a person becomes a refugee, they remain as such for many years, and many will be displaced in a refugee camp environment lasting for sometimes up to two decades (UNREFUGEES, 2021). By including geographical “hot spots” for refugees in the research, new knowledge of refugee entrepreneurship focusing on, for example, uncertainty, market opportunities, human capital, social networks, access to entrepreneurship and the societal environment (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008) as well as practical issues like how the legal and economic systems that allow refugees to become entrepreneurs are possible. The opportunity to become an entrepreneur



with the potential for creating a livelihood and possible long-term success could be helped by an education system that takes into consideration the specific circumstances of a refugee. Thus, entrepreneurship education in, for example, refugee camps could help the refugees to create a sustainable livelihood but also prepare them for more successful integration when arriving in a host country.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Stefan Lång:** Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Maria Ivanova-Gongne:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Jonas Lagerström:** Software, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology. **Malin Brännback:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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### Appendix 1

Full list of Entrepreneurship journals included in the study with rankings.

Journal Title	AJG2021	AJG2018
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	4	4
Journal of Business Venturing	4	4
Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal	4	4
Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	3	3
Family Business Review	3	3
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research	3	3
International Small Business Journal	3	3
Journal of Small Business Management	3	3
Small Business Economics	3	3
Entrepreneurship Research Journal	2	2
International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation	2	2
International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business	2	2
International Journal of Management, Entrepreneurship & Technology	2	–
International Review of Entrepreneurship	2	2
Journal of Business Venturing Insights	2	–
Journal of Family Business Strategy	2	2
Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development	2	2
Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	2	2
Venture Capital	2	2
International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal	1	1
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Venturing	1	1
International Journal of Management and Enterprise Development	1	–
Journal of Enterprising Communities	1	1
Journal of Enterprising Culture	1	1
Journal of Entrepreneurship	1	1
Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy	1	1
Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies	1	1
Journal of International Entrepreneurship	1	1
Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship	1	1
Small Enterprise Research	1	1
Social Enterprise Journal	1	1
World Review of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development	1	1

Source: <https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide-2021/> Accessed December 1, 2022.

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