



PhD Studentship

Title: Precarity and Forced Migrant Entrepreneurship – An Exploratory Research

Closing date: 4th November 2022

Interview date: 1st December 2022

Supervisory team

Director of Studies:

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Research Group: [Sustainable Organisations

<https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/academic-schools/worcester-business-school/business-research/sustainable-organisations-research-group.aspx>]

Collaborating organisations: ACH <https://www.ach.org.uk/>

The Project

Applications are invited for a fully-funded, full-time PhD studentship for the project [Precarity and Forced Migrant Entrepreneurship – An Exploratory Research].

Context

The research introduced here proposes to use precarity as a lens to explore forced migrants' transition through the entrepreneurial journey. By forced migrants we mean refugees, as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR, 2021), and those who were forced to leave their countries but were resettled into their host countries under other legal routes, e.g. Homes for Ukraine (GOV.UK, 2022a).

While precarity could be seen as a political concept motivating social movement that mainly focuses on contractual types of work (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008), precarity is increasingly conceptualised as an experience (Alberti et al., 2018, Grenier et al. 2020). Precarity amongst forced migrants received some attention in the literature, but it was mainly focused on manifestations that emerged due to restrictive asylum and migration regimes (e.g. Ertorer, 2021; Lewis & Waite, 2015). There is little understanding of the different manifestations of precarity that forced migrants, who have legal rights in their country of residence, experience. This is even more so when considering how these manifestations of precarity change, influence or result from engaging in entrepreneurship. For the purpose of this research, precarity is conceptualised as a subjective experience of uncertainty, insecurity, and instability (Allan et al., 2021), that has different dimensions which change over time. The following paragraphs will highlight the context of forced migrant entrepreneurship and explore the challenges or precarities that forced migrants may experience, and finally highlight the needs to explore the “bad” side of entrepreneurship particularly within forced migrant populations before introducing the research question.

Forced migrants are more likely to pursue self-employment compared to country nationals (Collins, Watson, and Krivokapic-Skoko 2017). While intrinsic motivation to pursue entrepreneurship is evident amongst forced migrants (Mawson and Kasem, 2019), the higher percentage of self-employment amongst forced migrants, and immigrants generally, is attributed to a range of barriers to employment. These include language barriers (Obschonka, Hahn, and Bajwa 2018, Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008), discrimination (Kupferberg, 2003), limited knowledge of the host country’s culture and business environment, a lack of recognition (or downgrading) of formal qualifications (Gericke, Burmeister, Löwe, Deller, & Pundt, 2018; Hall, 2020 Strang & Ager, 2010). The literature speaks of a so-called refugee gap, namely that it is difficult for refugees, compared to other types of immigrants, to successfully achieve economic integration in the host nation (Bakker, Dagevos, & Engbersen, 2017), leading to high levels of unemployment or underemployment amongst refugees (Garnham, 2006; Roth, Seidel, Ma, & Lo, 2012; Vinokurov, Trickett, & Birman, 2017; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008; Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzalez, 2008).

Against these barriers, promoting entrepreneurship is increasingly considered to be an effective approach to overcoming some of the challenges of economic and social integration for forced migrants (Centre for Entrepreneurs, 2018; UNCTAD et al., 2018). Subsequently, there is an increasing programming for support of forced migrant entrepreneurship. This includes, for example, a pilot programme by the Home Office that concluded in 2020 (Richey et al., 2021). In addition, there are several social enterprises in the UK and Europe that have supporting forced migrants at the core of their mission. Yet, we do not know how service providers can support forced migrants to achieve the best outcomes for themselves, particularly when considering the precarities that forced migrants may experience before and after setting up their businesses.

Different manifestations of precarity have been observed for example in relation to elderly people (Grenier et al., 2020), yet we know little about these manifestations in relation to forced migrants, and the transitional moments, trajectories, or circumstances that cause or worsen precarity. However, prior research provides some pointers in that direction. Forced migrants may have experienced extreme adversity from the disasters of war and the associated death and injury (Tay and Silove, 2017). Consequently, these individuals have to leave their homes, which generates further loss and separates family members and friends (Betancourt et al., 2015). Further challenges are faced by many forced migrants when resettling into their host societies and trying to rebuild their economic and social lives, as mentioned earlier, in addition to social expectations and pressures to remit money to family (Lewis & Waite, 2015). While some individuals are resilient to adverse events and can maintain positive functioning, others may experience personal dysfunction because of such circumstances (Shepherd et al., 2020). For some, entrepreneurial action plays a central role in resilience to adversity (Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2017; Shepherd et al., 2020), while for others, entrepreneurship could generate another

setback in their lives, particularly when they lack social support and relevant prior work experience (Chatterjee et al., 2022).

This focus on the intersection between precarity and entrepreneurship is critical because while entrepreneurship has often been celebrated as the epitome of personal endeavour in the world of work and the driver of creative destruction (Schumpeter 1942), the reality of the day-to-day lives of many entrepreneurs is far less glamorous. There is an increasing attention in the entrepreneurship literature to concepts such as wellbeing (Stephan, 2018), happiness (Stephan et al., 2022) and disappointment (Williamson et al., 2020) and how they interact with entrepreneurial decision. Yet, calls to investigate further the “bad” in entrepreneurship, including the psychological and emotional reactions as well as the loss of capital (e.g., financial and social) from engaging in entrepreneurial action, continue (Shepherd, 2019). The precarity lens could prove useful in achieving that.

Allan et al. (2021) define three psychological states, or manifestations, of work precarity, precarity of work, precarity from work and precarity at work. Of relevance to the entrepreneurship context are the first two states of precarity. Precarity of work reflects “fears and uncertainty related to the continuity of work, including the continuity of workers’ employment, income, and social relationships” (Allan et al. 2021). Uncertainty is integral to entrepreneurship because the outcome of the entrepreneurial experience cannot be known from the outset (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). This is particularly true during the initial phase of entrepreneurship; for instance, only 40% of business that started in 2015 survived until 2020 (Statista, 2022). Precarity from work reflects “uncertainty and insecurity in the ability to meet basic survival needs, such as purchase food, pay rent, or pay for utilities” (Allan et al. 2021). This state is ubiquitous in entrepreneurship (Williamson et al., 2020), particularly amongst the solo self-employed (Giupponi & Xu, 2020). These states are not limited to those in precarious self-employment (e.g. delivery drivers) but extends to all entrepreneurs. However, little is known about the extent to which they exist amongst entrepreneurs generally, and amongst forced migrant entrepreneurs particularly, let alone how entrepreneurial precarity could be influenced by or influence other forms of precarity.

Therefore, this proposal raises the critical question: what different forms of precarity are experienced by forced migrant entrepreneurs at different stages of the entrepreneurship journey, to what affect, and how could they be best supported?

Aim and objectives

The research proposed here aims to examine precarity as it is experienced by forced migrant entrepreneurs at different stages of the entrepreneurship journey. To do so, the research has the following objectives:

- Identify the different forms of precarity that are experienced by forced migrant entrepreneurs at different stages of the entrepreneurship journey.
- Assess the implications of these different forms of precarity.
- Explore trajectories, or circumstances that cause, worsen or alleviate different forms of precarity.
- Examine how forced migrants seek to manage the forms of precarity they are experiencing.
- Assess how could forced-migrant entrepreneurs be supported by entrepreneurship support service providers to manage forms of precarity they are experiencing.

Indicative Method/Methodology

Although the specific methodology and methods will be determined by the student in consultation with supervisors, given the current paucity of knowledge the project will be exploratory and is likely to adopt a qualitative methodology. For example, it may involve interviewing a sample of 20-30 forced migrant entrepreneurs at varying stages of their entrepreneurial journey, from those just developing their business ideas to those well-established. Retrospective interviews are recognised as a valid instrument to inquire into remarkable events experienced by the study participants (Johnson and Rowlands, 2012). The research may also adopt a longitudinal design, with participants revisited 6-12 months after the initial interview. This will enable the project to identify how precarity changes for the same individual over their entrepreneurial journey.

Given the focus of the study and its exploratory nature, a narrative inquiry or an interpretive phenomenon analysis research design could be particularly appropriate. Such a research design would allow emphasis on participants' narratives or their lived experience. Access to participants currently involved in the lived experience being explored, who could be researched longitudinally, might increase the potential for the adoption of an interpretive phenomenon analysis research design. Therefore, the sample selection and availability might inform the final selection of the research design.

Our interest is in current or potential business owners, or self-employed, with a history of forced migration, including those who are naturalized citizens of the host country. Interviews would be carried out with participants who could share narratives of their experience or their current lived experiences. This would enable the researcher to build up a picture of the precarity faced by refugee entrepreneurs and its influence. Interviews may also be undertaken with experts who work with refugee entrepreneurs in the UK.

ACH, an organisation which supports refugees living in the UK and provides entrepreneurial training to them (ACH, 2022), will provide support in accessing and understanding forced migrant entrepreneurs and access to expert staff who support them.

References

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Details of the studentship

The studentship is offered for a 4-year period on a full-time basis. The studentship is campus based. During the period of your studentship you will receive the following:

- a tax-free bursary of £15,609 for 3 years
- a fee-waiver for 4 years (expectation that full time students complete in 3 years. If student enters year 4, bursary stops but fees waived).
- a budget to support your direct project costs including dissemination costs
- a laptop and other IT equipment and software as appropriate to the project
- use of the Research School facilities
- a 90-day access to ACH offices offering a base to do research.

You will be expected to play an active role in the life of both the Research School and of your academic School. You will be given opportunities to gain experience in learning and teaching within the School under the guidance of your Director of Studies.

Application Process

To begin the application process for this studentship please go to <http://www.worcester.ac.uk/researchstudentships> and click 'apply now' next to the project you wish to apply for. It is expected that applicants will have the following qualifications:

- A Masters in one of the following areas: entrepreneurship, human resource management, refugee studies, psychology or equivalent professional experience.
- A First or Upper Second Honours Degree

It is also expected that applicants will be able to demonstrate the following:

- A sound understanding of and interest in both the project and the wider subject area
- Experience of relevant research methods and skills
- Ability to contribute to the research design of the project
- Proficiency in oral and written English
- Ability to organise and meet deadlines
- Good interpersonal skills
- Ability to work independently
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Fluency in least one target language is desirable e.g., Arabic, Dari, Kurdish, Pashto, Tigrinya or Ukrainian.

The Interview

The interview will provisionally be held on 1st December 2022 on Teams. Shortlisted candidates will be given at least 7 day's-notice of interview. In advance of interview, shortlisted candidates will be asked to submit a sample of their written work (e.g. a publication or a dissertation). Alongside the interview, shortlisted candidates will also be asked to give a 10 minute presentation on a related topic.





Research at the University of Worcester

Research at the University of Worcester has grown significantly over the last 10 years. The outcomes of the Research Excellence Framework 2014 (REF 2014) showed that Worcester was the most improved University in the UK based on Research Fortnight's "Research Power" measure. The University's continued progress was shown in the outcomes of REF 2021 which demonstrated that both the scale and quality of our research has further increased, with over 40% of our research recognised as world-leading or internationally excellent.

The University has been successful in winning funding from a wide range of major funders: Research Councils such as AHRC, BBSRC, ESRC and NERC; major charities such as the Leverhulme Trust, the Alzheimer's Society and the British Academy; health-research funders such as the NIHR, the Department of Health and local NHS Trusts; European funding through Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+; and funding from local, national and global businesses.

The University is focused on research which addresses real world challenges and provides solutions to these challenges:

- [Human Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [Sustainable Futures](#)
- [Digital Innovation](#)
- [Culture, Identity and Social Exclusion](#)
- [Professional Education](#)

The University continues to provide a robust infrastructure for research. It has a well-established Research School which houses its growing research student body and which provides a comprehensive programme of researcher development for staff and students. It has a well-established Research Office, responsible for research funding, governance and strategy. The University is committed to further developing its research profile, through a strategic approach to its support for and investment in research. Its fully-funded studentships are part of this investment.

Research School

The Research School is a focal point for all our research students. It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking station
- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors
- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars

Worcester Business School

Worcester Business School is an approved Chartered Management Institute Centre and a member of the Chartered Association of Business Schools, the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) and the Network of International Business Schools (NIBS).

Rooted in the region, supporting business growth and leading the employability agenda, Worcester Business School (incorporating the Department of Computing) is interdisciplinary and outward-looking. Our strong emphasis on business enterprise and work-related learning delivers immediate benefit for our graduates, their organisations and the regional economy.

We work closely with organisations and businesses across the region including our partners in regional development at Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership and Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses.

Our research focuses on improving the lives of people working in and interacting with organisations. We generate knowledge that not only advances our understanding, but has a practical value on a local, national, and international level. We work with many different organisations, including those in the private, public and third sectors to deliver outcomes that have real-world impact. Our teaching is research-led, ensuring that our students are working with and generating knowledge at the cutting-edge of the discipline.

Widening Participation

As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and/or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.



For further information or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Dr Laila Kasem (Director of Studies) via email at

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Applications can be made at:

<http://www.worcester.ac.uk/researchstudentships>