

# ***Entrepreneurial Empowerment in Central Asia: Strategies, Practices, and Policies***

## ***International Paper Development Workshops***

18-19 July and 19-20 December 2025,  
Online

### ***Call for Submissions***

The Central Asian economies have been going through complex transformations during recent decades, ranging from national independence and the ensuing transformation of the Soviet planning systems into hybrid market economies that are commonly shaped by oligarchic property structures and related government interventions. Current sets of opportunities and challenges for these economies refer to the rise of China as hegemonic force, utilizing the Belt and Road Initiative to further the cause of expanding export and supply networks. In overcoming the limitations of economic structures imposed by the division of labour in the Soviet and Post-Soviet context, all the varieties of Central Asian economies aim at transcending growth models based on agrarian production and resource extraction in favour of augmenting these industries with modern services in areas such as tourism, and knowledge-based advances in digital information technologies. These efforts at the economic and social modernization and diversification of the Central Asian economies, however, come together with further extension of the dynamism of social inequality. Indeed, while inequality has been rampant in these economies during all historical epochs, differences in the terms of the urban-rural divide, industrial specialization, and gender-specific social position have seemingly become ever more pronounced. In view of this assessment, the question arises, how chances for economic and social improvement can be distributed more evenly across society? In other words, which economic and social mechanisms are available to promote the well-being of ever larger parts of hitherto marginalized and excluded segments of society to participate in the market process as a means for individual self-actualization that may fuel empowerment in economic, social and cultural as well as political terms?

In dealing with these questions, the matter of entrepreneurship has been taken to the fore repeatedly. Entrepreneurship offers socially embedded individuals and communities the opportunity to redefine the means of their economic existence by starting new business firms and promoting new business models that combine the patterns of local contexts and cultures with the opportunities of new technologies. This involves the formation of businesses based on traditional knowledge and practices in fields such as farming or crafts, which in turn can help to revive or preserve the cultural heritage, promote local self-determination, and create a new livelihood for marginalized communities. It also involves efforts at combining local knowledge resources with the dynamics of global value chains that cater to knowledge-based services at the technological frontier. Accordingly, entrepreneurship may be viewed as an empowering social force that contributes to the deconstruction of established power structures in Central Asia – and beyond. This assessment holds although entrepreneurial activity also implies overcoming the lack of financial and human resources, framed by incomplete institutional and physical infrastructures that aggravate legal uncertainty, administrative obstacles, and obstructive socio-cultural practices. Moreover, incumbent oligarchic business groups may exploit the newly created market opportunities for themselves and thus block entrepreneurial market access. These are challenges for new entrepreneurial ecosystems all of the Central Asian economies have been dealing with in a wide array of industries and markets ranging from tourism via arts and crafts all the way to digital technologies, which combine entrepreneurial empowerment with the drive for social change.

Resounding with these topics and issues, the series of online workshops on “Entrepreneurial Empowerment in Central Asia: Strategies, Practices, and Policies” is set to pursue the following key questions on the Central Asian economies:

- How do entrepreneurial strategies and practices relate to the economic and social effects of individual and collective empowerment?
- Which industries and markets stand out as fields of entrepreneurial empowerment, and in what way do they affect empowerment and social change?
- Which governmental efforts in promoting entrepreneurial empowerment can be detected, and how do they counter legal and cultural obstructions?

We invite the submission of abstracts for papers. Proposed papers need to address the questions discussed above regarding entrepreneurial empowerment in Central Asia. Papers with a focus in qualitative or quantitative empirical research are welcome, yet also theoretical papers are encouraged. Papers, presentations, and discussions will proceed in English language. Various disciplinary angles in entrepreneurship research are welcome, including business studies and economics, sociology, anthropology and geography, history, political science as well as legal studies. The workshop is open for submissions from researchers of all academic levels, involving doctorate candidates, postdoc researchers, professional researchers, lecturers, and professors. Crucially, applicants must be affiliated with a German academic institution or an academic institution in the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Moldova), or Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan). Citizens from these countries affiliated with academic institutions in other countries might also apply. The submitted abstracts are going through a selection process. Selected abstracts are developed into full papers during two online paper development workshops to be held in July and December 2025, hosted by Goethe University Frankfurt and Webster University in Tashkent. Both workshops aim to make the submitted papers publishable in international scientific outlets. In addition, a final in-person workshop is set to convene in April 2026 in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. Full funding for participation including costs of travel and accommodation should be made available by the organizers by December 2025. This final workshop in Bukhara is meant to discuss final drafts of elaborated papers. Following this workshop, a selection of these papers is set to be published in an edited special issue of a peer-reviewed international academic journal. Additionally, an edited volume with an international publisher will bring together all the workshop proceedings.

Abstracts of 600 words including paper title, contact details of author(s), research problem and research questions, sketch of theoretical framework, employed methods, and/or empirical case, and preliminary conclusions should be sent by 15 March 2025 to both the conveners, which will also provide additional information, if required:

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Key dates:

- 15 March 2025: Submission of abstracts.
- 20 March 2025: Notification on acceptance and invitations.
- 30 June 2025: Submission of first drafts of papers.
- 18-19 July 2025: First workshop for paper development, online.
- 1 December 2025: Submission of second, revised drafts of papers.
- 19-20 December 2025: Second workshop for paper development, online.
- 20 March 2026: Submission of third, final draft of papers.
- 8-11 April 2026: Third workshop, Bukhara, Uzbekistan.