

Tunisian Student entrepreneurship: 2023 GUESSS Report



Siwar Youssef, Henda El Gharbi, Lotfi BelKacem

2023-2024

The Research project GUESSS:

One of the most important studies looking at student entrepreneurship throughout the world is the Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students 'Survey (GUESSS), GUESSS was founded at the Swiss Institute of Small Business and Entrepreneurship (KMU-HSG) in 2003. Since 2016, it has been jointly organized by the University of St. Gallen (KMU-HSG) and the University of Bern (IMU-U).

Understanding and analysing college students' intentions, behaviours, and attitudes on entrepreneurship is the project's main objective. Thus, a consistent questionnaire structure is used to conduct the GUESSS survey, which measures entrepreneurial spirit among university and graduate school students every two to three years in more than 50 countries worldwide, through this questionnaire various educational, social, cultural, personal and economic context affect student entrepreneurship behaviour. The 2023 survey covered 57 countries with 226.000 valid responses (Sieger et al, 2024).



Tunisia has been taking part in this project since 2021; this is its second survey participation. The project tasks had been coordinated by Siwar Youssef (Corvinus University of Budapest), Henda El Gharbi and Lotfi Belkacem (Sousse University, Tunisia).

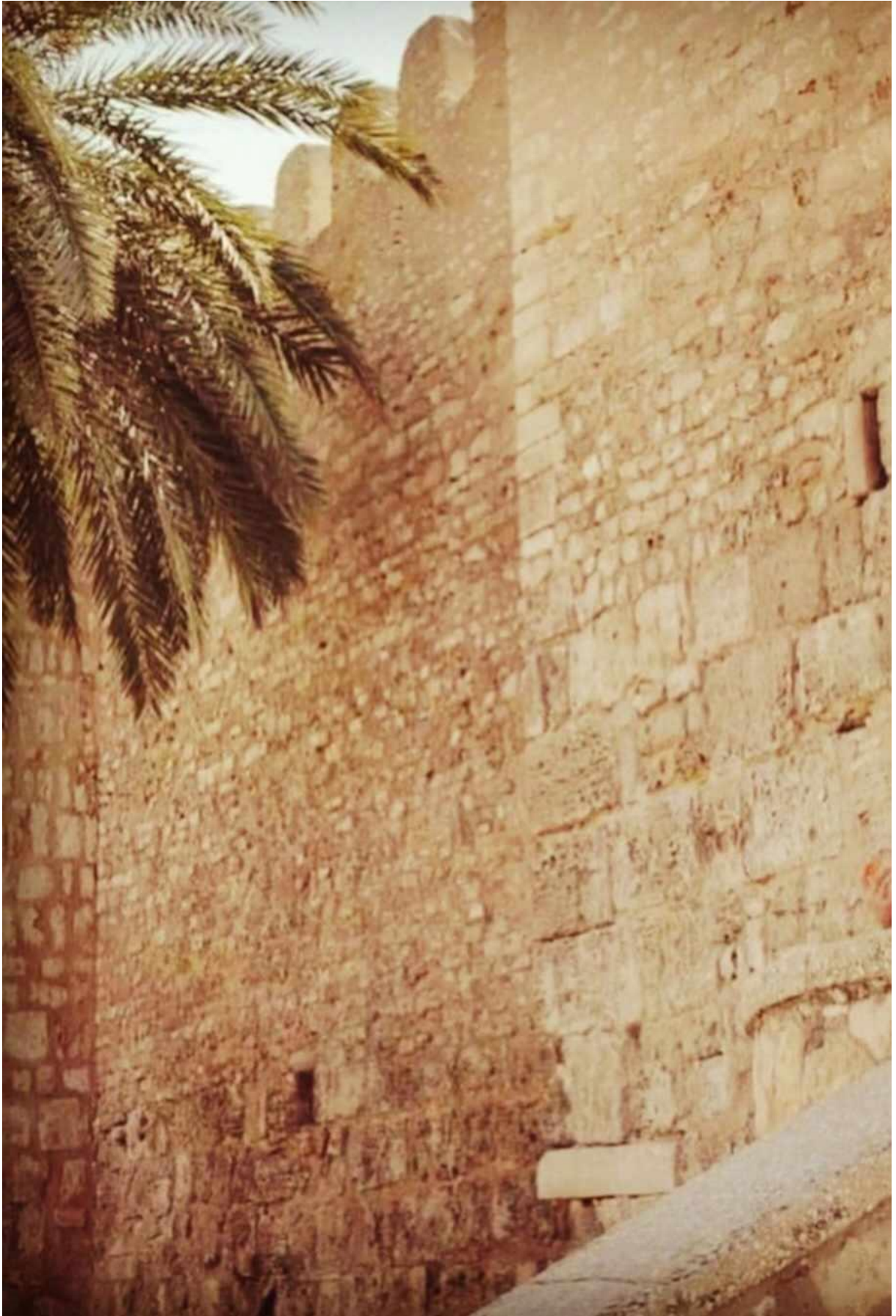
The country report for Tunisia is based on data collected in 2023 by the research team at Sousse University. The sample consisted of 151 students from various fields and levels of studies, the survey was in an online format, which student respondents accessed through a personal computer or smartphone to respond. We prepared an online post through the university website with the URL of the survey's website and approached the students in their classes to ask them to take the questionnaire.

The report presents the findings from the 2023 data collection as well as some comparisons with the 2021 data collection waves for the country data.



About Authors

	<p>Lotfi BELKACEM obtained his Ph.D. degree in Applied Mathematics from the University of Paris IX – Dauphine and Versailles-based Data Processing and Automatic National Research Institute (INRIA). He also studied Engineering, Statistics and Economy at the Paris-based National School of Statistics and Economic Administration (ENSAE). Actually, He is a full professor of Quantitative Methods, President of the University of Sousse and the Director of Laboratory Research for Economy, Management and Quantitative Finance (LaREMFiQ) at the Institute of High Commercial Studies (IHEC) of Sousse. He served as a Vice-President of the University, in charge of training, programs and professional integration between 2018 and 2020 and a Dean of the IHEC from 2002 to 2008. His research focuses on statistics and related fields, quantitative finance, insurance, employment economics, and entrepreneurship. Lotfi BELKACEM has supervised more than 35 PhD theses in the field of Applied Quantitative Methods. He is also author of several scientific publication in indexed and impacted international reviews.</p>
	<p>SIWAR YOUSSEF, ABD. Tunisian economics Sociology Doctoral Candidate at Corvinus university of Budapest-Hungary with an interest in Management, entrepreneurship, Gender and MENA issues. She is a teaching assistant for "Foundations of organizational sociology" subject and a reviewer with Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy. Her bachelor's degree was in logistics engineering, she holds her research master's degree from the University of Sousse on Management and Entrepreneurship.</p>
	<p>HENDA ELGHARBI, Ph.D in management sciences obtained at IAE of Caen Basse Normandie and assistant professor at ISFF Sousse. She was an associate researcher at the Research Center in Social Sciences and Management: CR2S-Management, IGS Paris, and the NIMEC research laboratory. Currently, she is a member of the Genre unit and the PMO unit at the University of Sousse. Founding member of the Tunisian Association for Gender Studies (ATEG). She participated in the implementation of the European project "Erasmus + Gender Studies Curriculum", Master-Design I4DE, Building Capabilities for the Future Work (TRANSFER), Wemag and We4lead. This work focuses on gender and entrepreneurship, emotional intelligence, social and human management.</p>



Introduction:

It is relevant to understand that entrepreneurship tends to establish itself sustainably within universities. To achieve this goal, it is essential to implement actions and resources to continue the developments of the oriented programs. The university perspective is reflected in the creation of structures that promote research, innovation, and business creation, for example. In practice, this is often manifested by strong encouragement from the State to develop specific initiatives focused on entrepreneurship, sometimes through incentives or even obligations. This movement is also evident at the university level, leading to the involvement of actions (such as training and consulting) and resources (including teachers, researchers, and local stakeholders).

Nowadays, entrepreneurship education plays an increasingly crucial role in society as it promotes wealth and job creation and contributes to the socio-economic and cultural development of countries (Fayolle, 2013). Several authors have highlighted the current situation and development prospects of entrepreneurship education in both Francophone and Anglophone countries, opening up a vast field of study (Fayolle et al, 2009). However, the initial interest in entrepreneurship education dates back to the 1970s in the United States and Europe, particularly in France thanks to the research of Alain Fayolle (1999).

The literature on entrepreneurship suggests that an individual's decision on their career path may be influenced by the possession of certain knowledge. Thus, the primary objective of entrepreneurship education is to encourage trained individuals to have the intention to undertake entrepreneurial ventures and to increase their desirability and feasibility.

Tunisia has seen its entrepreneurial ecosystem develop year by year thanks to the efforts of entrepreneurs, universities, investors, the state, funding agencies, and both public and private accelerators and incubators. To illustrate the dynamics and growth of Tunisia's entrepreneurial ecosystem, we refer to statistics revealed by the research firm Briter Bridges. According to their report, Tunisia is ranked among the top African countries for start-ups. This was highlighted in the "African Tech Ecosystems of the Future 2021/2022" report published by FDI Intelligence.

Tunisia ranks 5th among the most favourable countries for start-up creation, surpassed only by Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, and Egypt. In addition to the diversity of actors involved in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, a legislative and regulatory framework has encouraged start-ups to invest in innovative projects.

It should be noted that Tunisian universities have played an important role in developing the entrepreneurial ecosystem by introducing entrepreneurial culture within academic institutions. This is achieved through entrepreneurship courses that students take during their undergraduate and professional master's studies. A conducive environment has been created within Tunisian universities through the development of business plans as part of final study projects and competitions organized by Employability and Entrepreneurship Center “CEE”¹ and 4C networks².

Furthermore, the University of Sousse, as a partner and coordinator of European Commission projects such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, has strengthened territorial and inclusive entrepreneurship by promoting the innovations of student project leaders. Innovative university courses in the field of entrepreneurship have been designed within the framework of European Master-Design projects, such as the I4DE³ project focusing on digital entrepreneurship for Industry 4.0.

As a socially responsible university, the University of Sousse has facilitated access for innovative project leaders to position themselves in the territorial entrepreneurial ecosystem with the support of its socio-economic partners. By following strategies for territorial attractiveness and development, Tunisian universities have reinforced the University-Territory link, particularly through the transfer of research to the socio-economic world. Universities' support for entrepreneurship is also evident with the creation of student-entrepreneur support hubs.

In recent years, universities have mobilized to raise awareness within their institutions about sustainable development issues by recognizing the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in academic curricula, especially in entrepreneurship education. This mobilization includes addressing environmental, social responsibility, and ethical issues. As a result, universities have fostered future responsible entrepreneurs who will play a role in societal transformations.

¹ CEE is created in order to support and to reinforce personal, professional and entrepreneurial skills of the students and graduates from the institutions of Sousse University.

² 4C-University: Career, certification and skills center of the University of Sousse. The role of the center is to strengthen the skills of students in soft skills through training, activities and seminars on the socio-economic environment. Currently, the 4C-establishments have different examination and certification centers such as: Microsoft, ICDL, DELF and DALF, SiSCO.

³ <https://www.master-i4de.com/fr/>

Various Tunisian universities have tried to organize support seminars for entrepreneurship through the presentation of role models and consultants. These consultants are known for their motivating effect, helping individuals overcome their fears to be entrepreneurs.

This is the scenario of the establishment of the ISI Incubator program within 4C centers “Career and competency certification center (4c). Designed for students with ideas that have great potential for growth on a national and international scale and possess cutting-edge innovations, ISI Incubator aims to foster an entrepreneurial culture among university students by providing:

- Expert guidance and mentoring from the ideation phase onward; a welcoming environment where students may refine their concepts and turn them into a POC (proof of concept) or MVP (minimum viable product).
- Cycles of training that will enable candidates to carry out their projects to completion, including business plans, business models, financing access, etc.
- Test and refine their strategy through expert and mentor input.
- Gain in-depth understanding of the market.

Therefore, this report aims to provide a deep comprehension for the university student’s entrepreneurial profile through the program learning provided by Tunisian universities.

The Research project GUESSS:

Introduction

1. General Information about respondents:

1.1 Level of Study:

1.2 Field of Study:

1.3 Gender

2. Carrer Choice Intentions:

2.1 Career path right after completion of studies and five years after

2.2 Entrepreneurial Intention:

3. Nascent entrepreneurship

4. Active entrepreneurship

5. Entrepreneurship Education:

Conclusion

References

List of Figures:

Figure 1: Level of Study

Figure 2: Field of Study

Figure 3: Gender

Figure 4: career path right after completion of studies

Figure 5: career path 5 years after completion of studies

Figure 6 : Entrepreneurial Intention

Figure 7 : Nascent Entrepreneurship

Figure 8 : Nascent Entrepreneurship by Gender

Figure 9 : Active Entrepreneurship

Figure 10 : Active Entrepreneurship by Gender

Figure11 : University environment

Figure 13 : Entrepreneurship Education

Figure 14 : Program Learning

1. General Information about respondents:

1.1 Level of Study:

The study levels of respondents were 41% undergraduates, 37% graduate students in master's programs, 4% in doctoral programs, and 18% in other graduate programs (e.g., MBA).

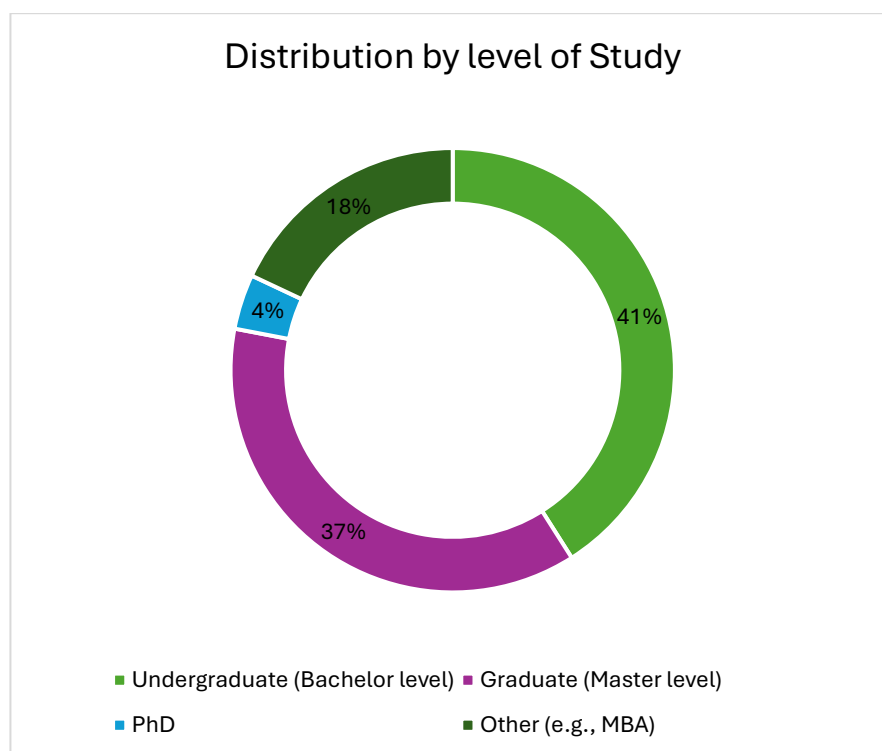


Figure 1: Level of Study

1.2 Field of Study:

We inquired about the academic field that the respondents were enrolled in. With 29% of the total, Business / management was the most prevalent field, followed by economics 11% and Engineering (incl. architecture) (11%). (1%) represents the percentage of respondents for Law, Mathematics, Natural sciences, Human medicine / health sciences and Science of art (e.g., art, design, dramatics, music), thus they represent all together 5% of the responses. Other fields represent 32% of the responses while humanities studies were not represented in this sample with (0%).

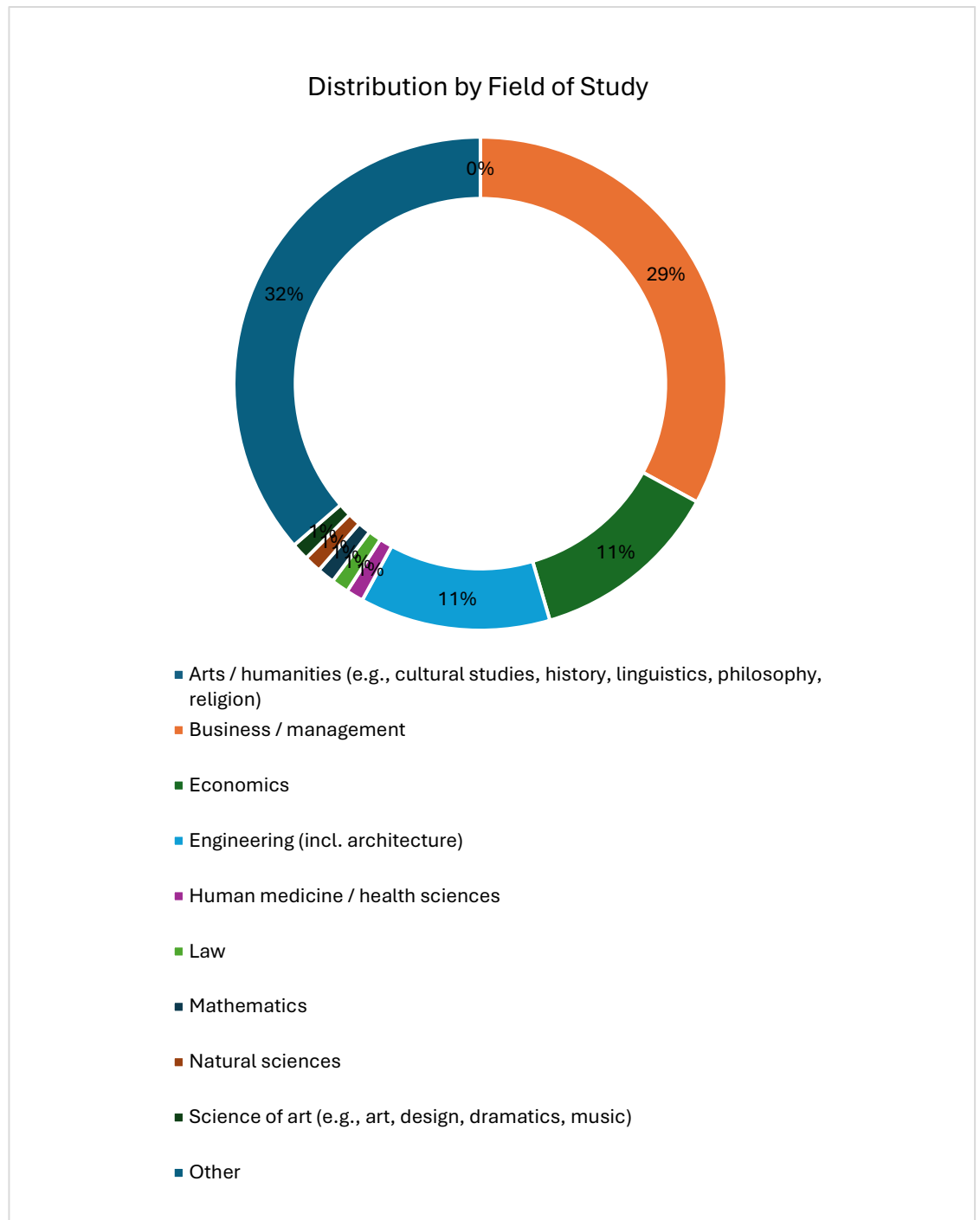


Figure 2: Field of Study

1.3 Gender

Like the 2021 report, the females represent the majority of the respondents of the 2023 sample, its consisted of 77% female respondent with only 23% Male respondents.

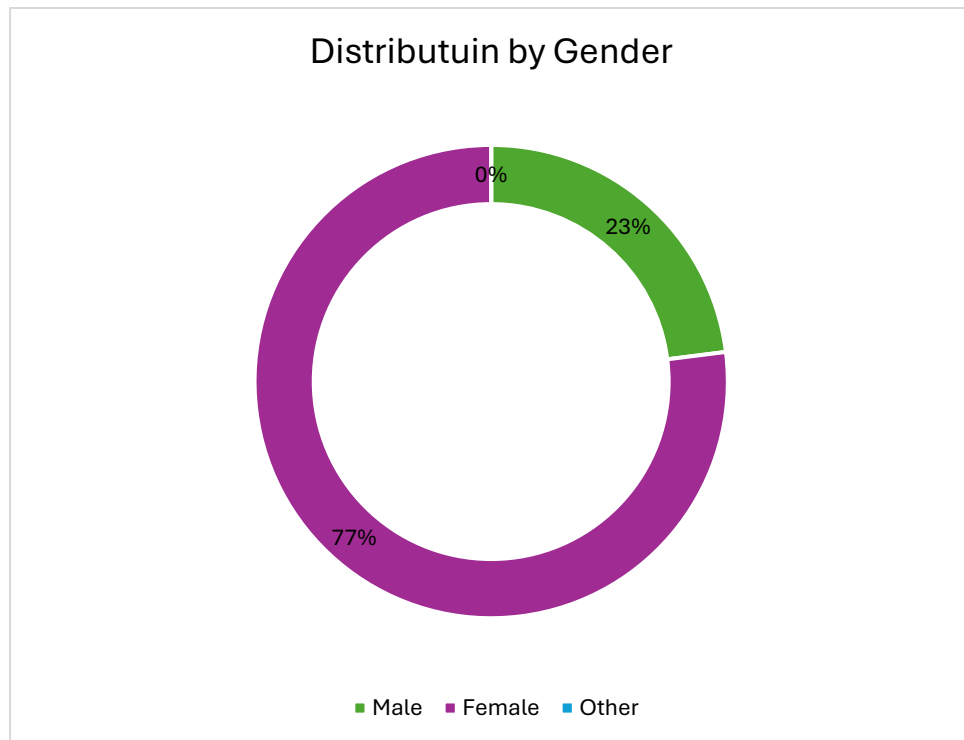


Figure 3: Gender

2 Carrer Choice Intentions:

We questioned participants about their expected job paths both five years and immediately following graduation.

The most common response for the first question “Which career path do you intend to pursue right after completion of your studies? I want to be...”, excluding those who said "other" or "don't know yet," was "a founder (entrepreneur) working in my own business."

This result comes similar to the 2021 finding which indicated that the high percentage of students preferred to be a founder (entrepreneur) right after studies with (31%).

The second high percentage of the responses affirmed that students preferred to be employees in large businesses with (17%), again this result is same as students' preferences during the 2021 data collection.

2.1 Career path right after completion of studies and five years after

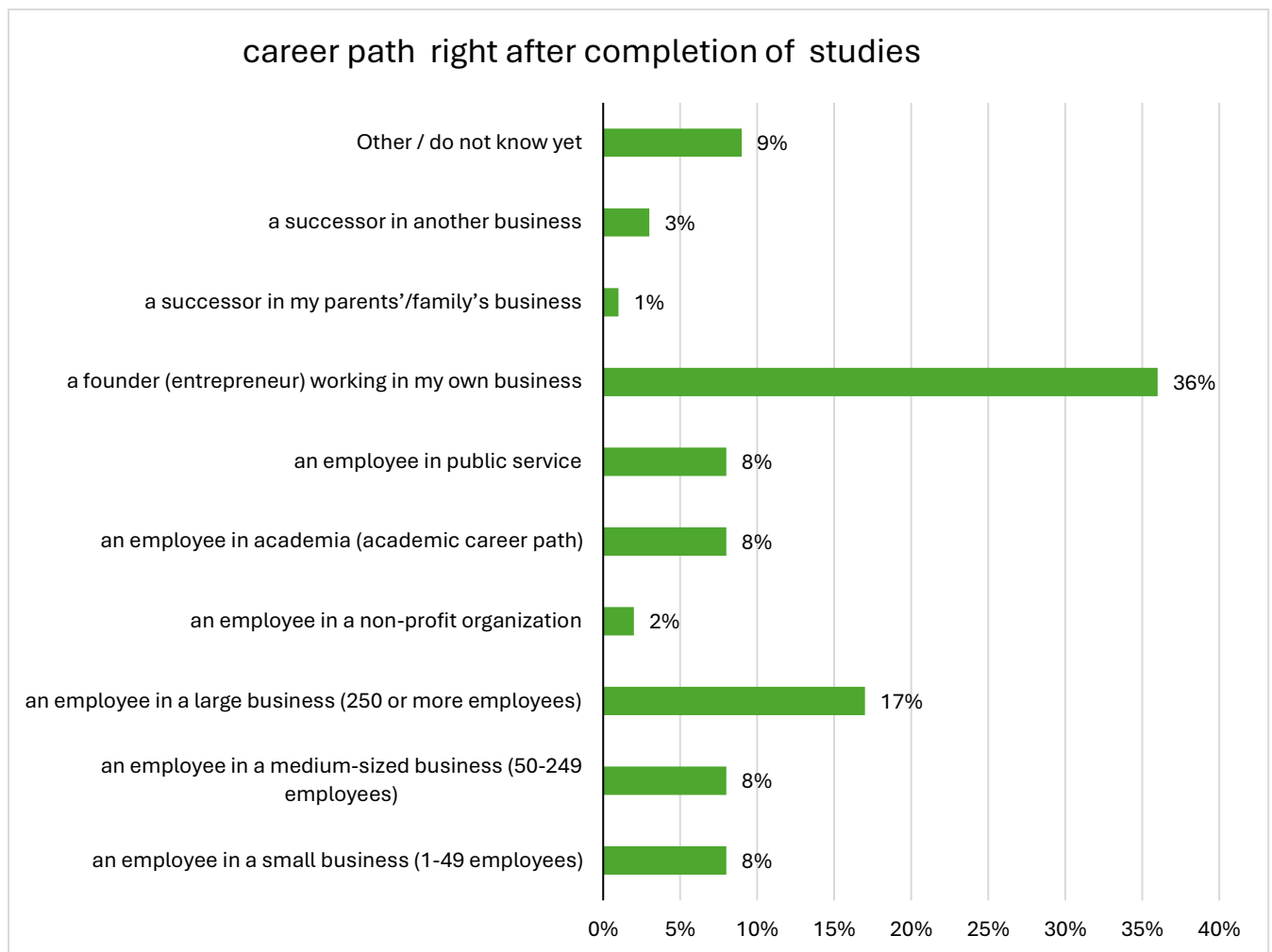


Figure 4: career path right after completion of studies

On the other hand, five years later, the most common response for the question “Which career path do you intend to pursue 5 years later? I want to be...” for recent graduates was "other" or "don't know yet," but the most common response for recent graduates worldwide was "to be working at a large business."

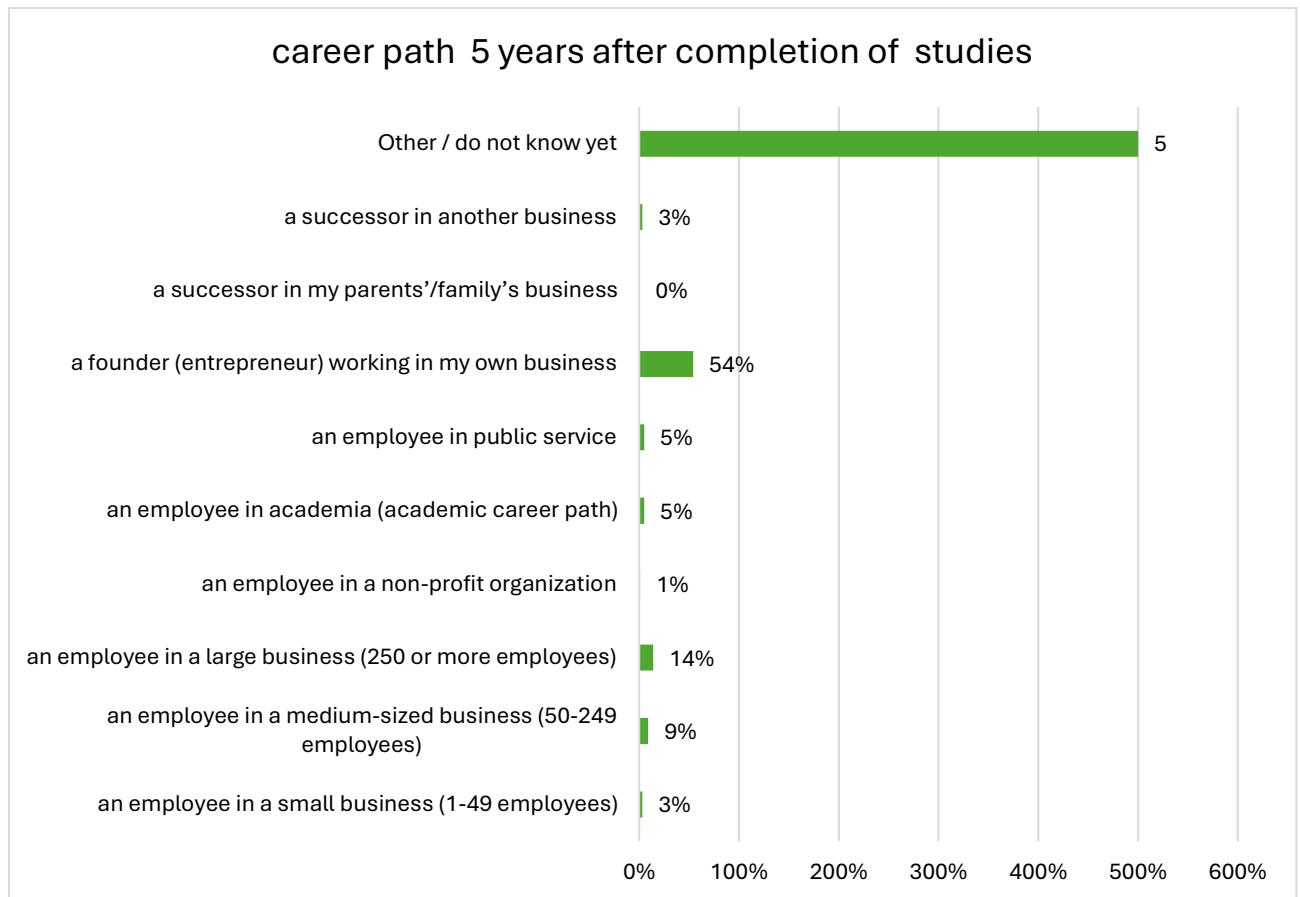


Figure 5: career path 5 years after completion of studies

2.2 Entrepreneurial Intention:

Looking to the entrepreneurial intention level among Tunisian university students we requested them to identify their agreement/disagreement with six items adopted from Ajzen questionnaire about entrepreneurial intention. “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)”.

Here we found the majority of the students preferred the neutral answer, this present a gap that should be filled for future research studies. What can be the reasons behind this position, we see students are neither with or against being entrepreneurs, small percentages are giving to the items indicating that student is making effort or ready to start his business, even for the item “I have seriously thought of starting business”, only 13 % answered 7= strongly agree, and 11% for students who strongly agree with the item “I have the strong intention to start a business someday.”. The average score of the entrepreneurial intention of the Tunisian student is 22%.

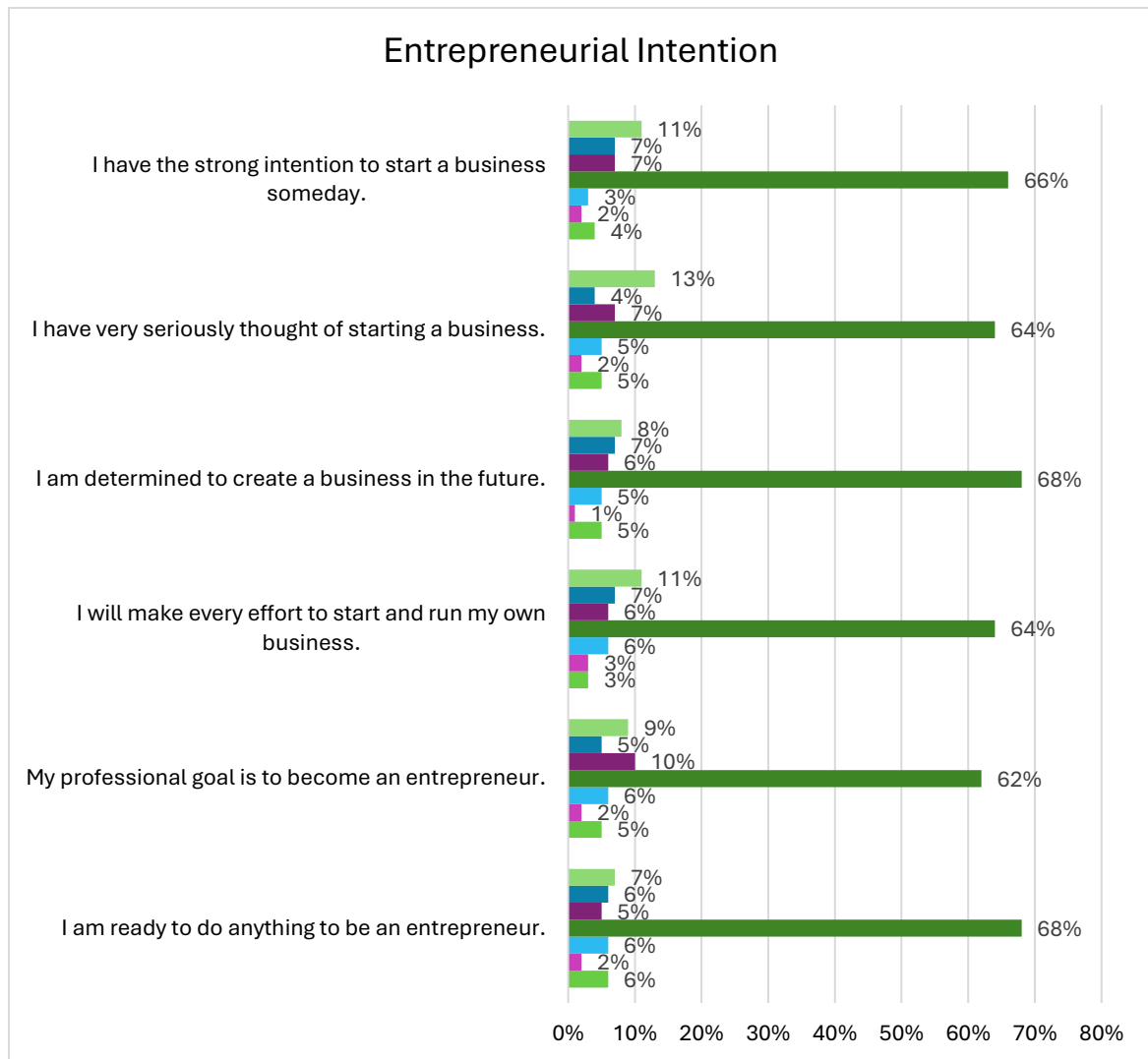


Figure 6 : Entrepreneurial Intention

3 Nascent entrepreneurship :

According to our assessment, 54% of Tunisian university students responded yes to the question “Are you currently trying to start your own business / to become self-employed? It’s almost equal to the respondents who does not agree with this statement with (46%). This means that half of the students are trying their efforts to conceptualize business ideas.

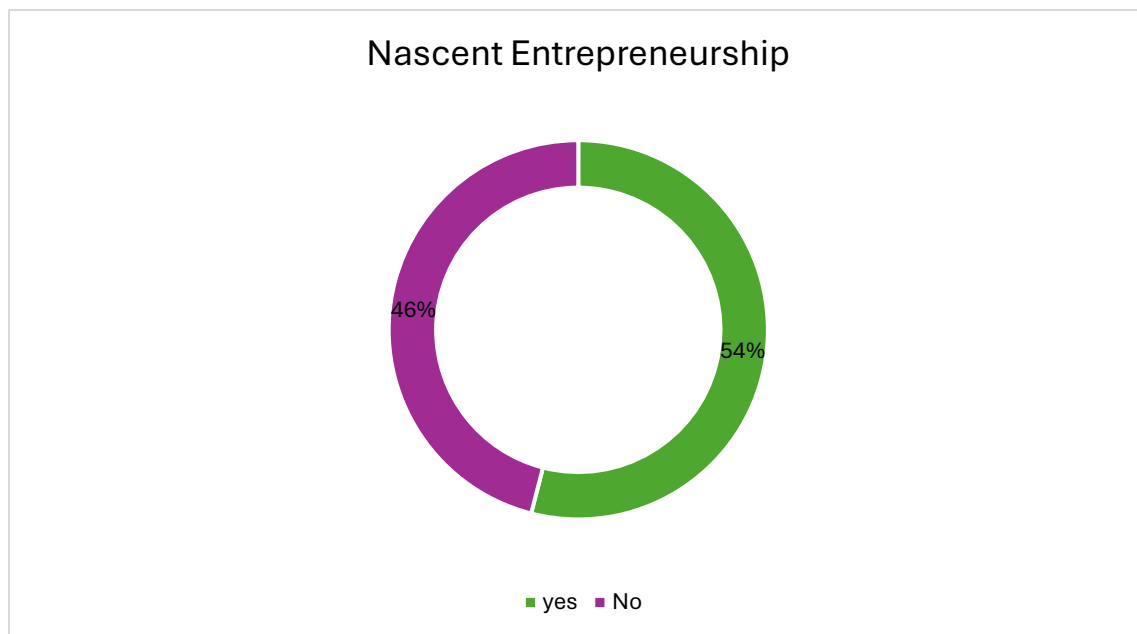


Figure 7: Nascent Entrepreneurship

The proportion of men among these nascent entrepreneurs is 60%, women represent 53% of the total sample answering yes to the question related to nascent entrepreneurship.

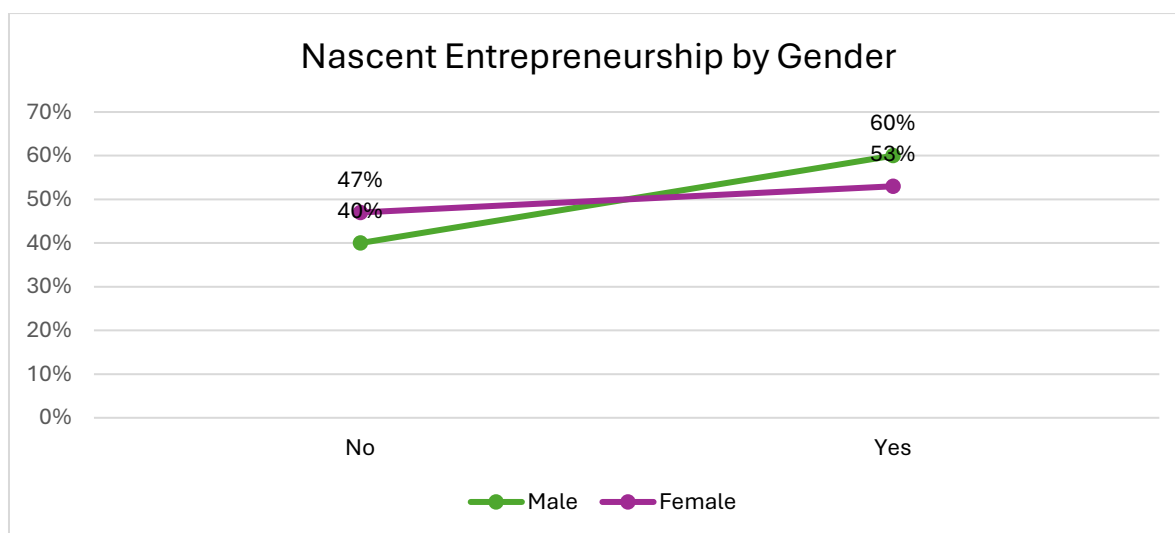


Figure 8: Nascent Entrepreneurship by Gender

4 Active entrepreneurship

Then, we wanted to delve deeper into active entrepreneurship in the Tunisian context, thus we asked students to answer with yes or no to the following statement “Are you already running

your own business / are you already self-employed?”, we concluded that 91% of the respondents are not running their business at the time of the survey collection. However, only 9% of the students answered yes to this question.

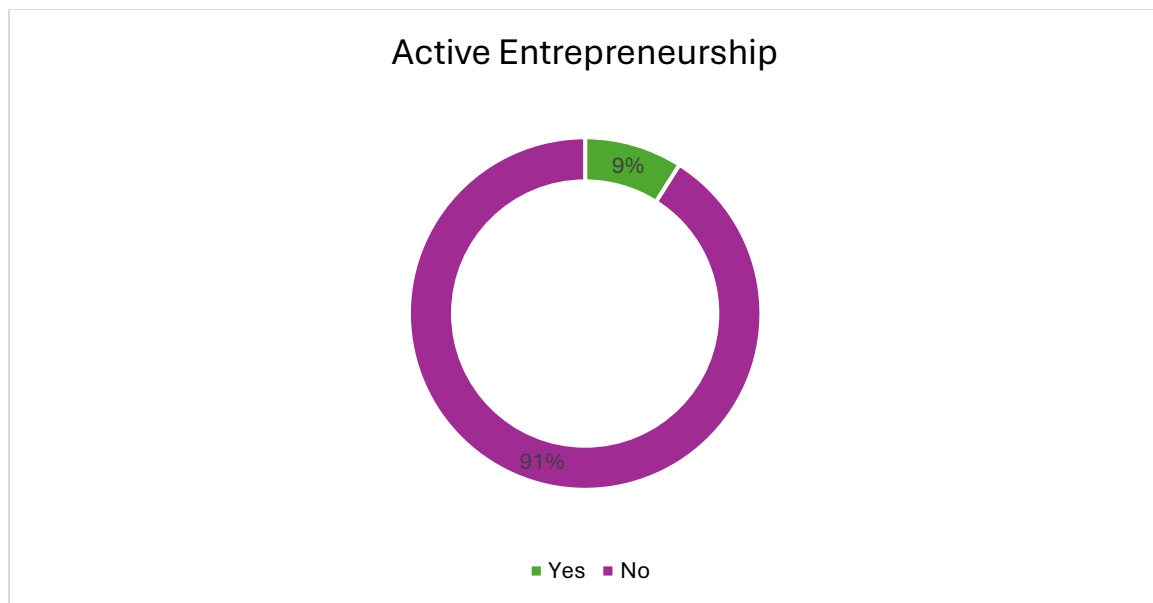


Figure 9: Active Entrepreneurship

For the active entrepreneurship question, only 3% female declared that they are active entrepreneurs. 11% of the agreeing respondents were male. The huge percentage of the responses is provided to the answer “No” for both genders.

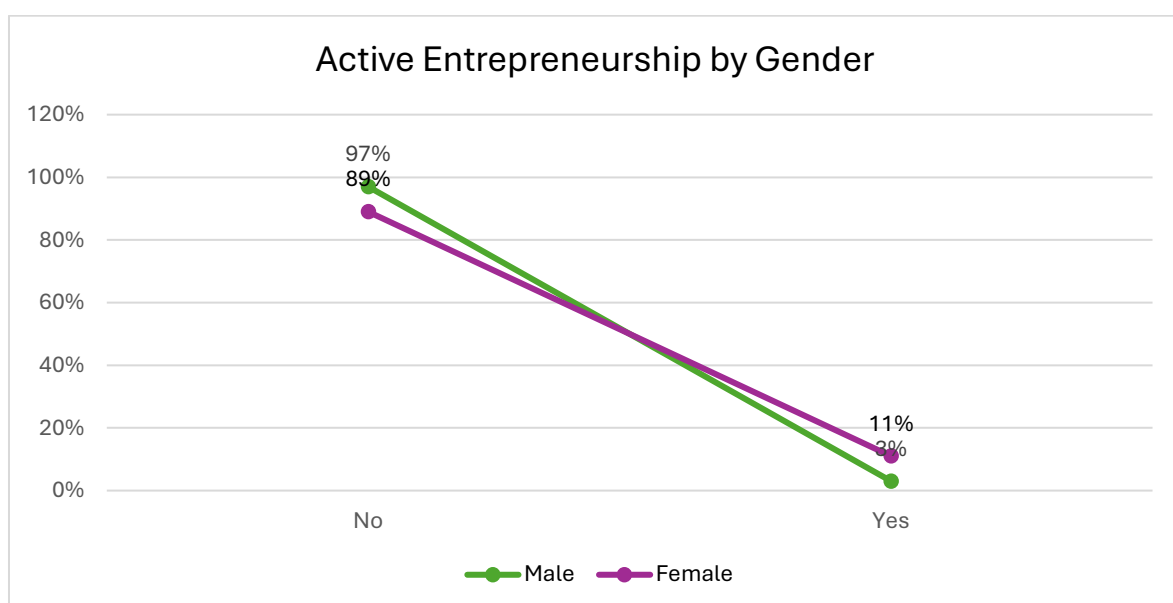


Figure 10: Active Entrepreneurship by Gender

5 Entrepreneurship Education:

The impact of entrepreneurial education on college students' attitudes and views of entrepreneurship is significant. Thus, more and more, entrepreneurship education calls for active methods based on experiential learning that involves more or less significant interactions with the real world and its participants. In Tunisia, due to the size of the task and the need to support students through these difficult decisions, the majority of programs offer an assignment that should be completed by student teams that are entrepreneurial. Furthermore, it is the policy's intention to make these programs available to all students, regardless of their educational background. These actions need significant training and support, and the resources, particularly human resources.

Therefore, in order to assess the Tunisian universities environment effectiveness', we requested students to evaluate multiple choice items from their individual perception.

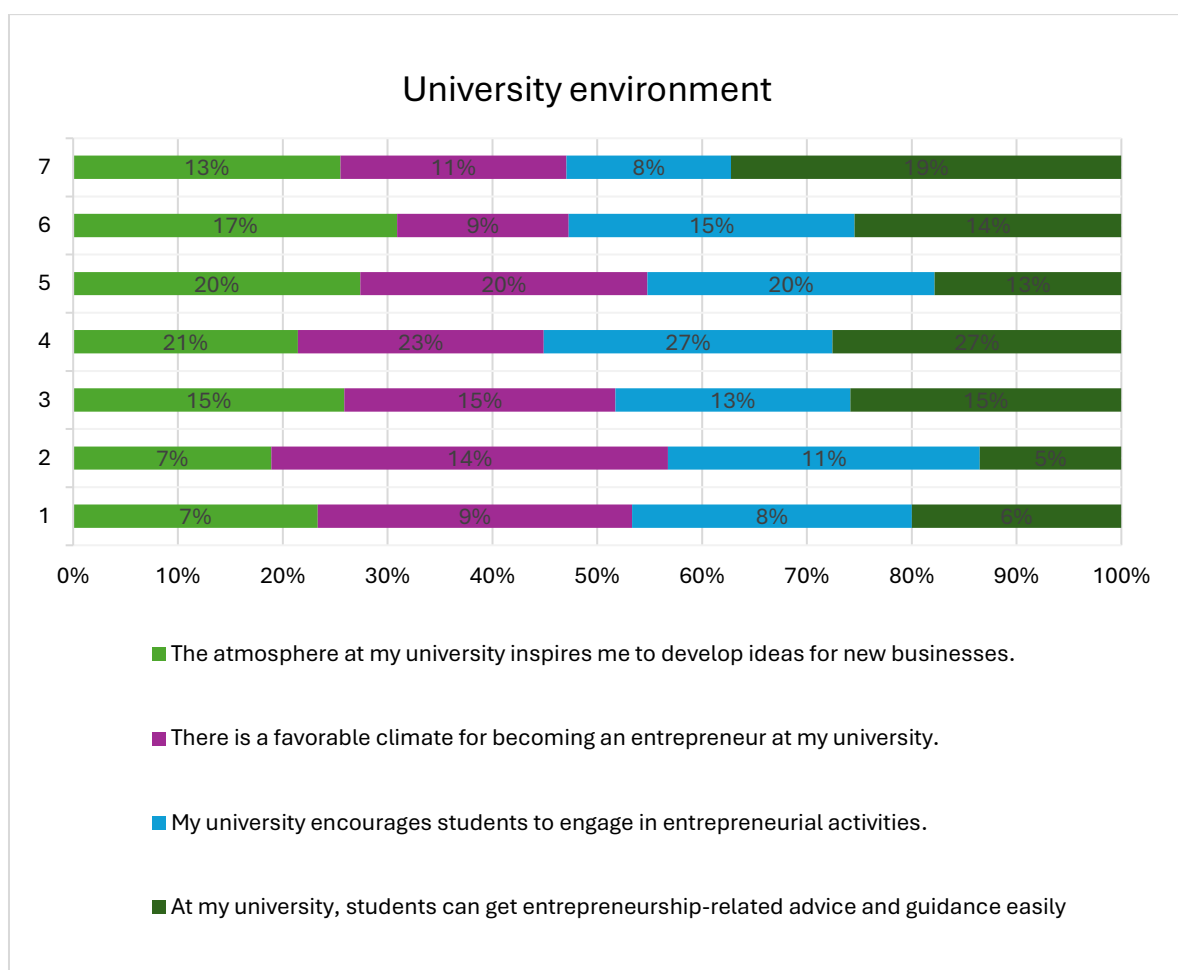


Figure11: University environment

The majority of the responses to the items related to the atmosphere, the support and the encouragement for entrepreneurship within the Tunisian universities are positive.

Overall, a proportion of almost 25% had resulted for the replies that were neutral, and 30% as agreement for the positive effect of the items.

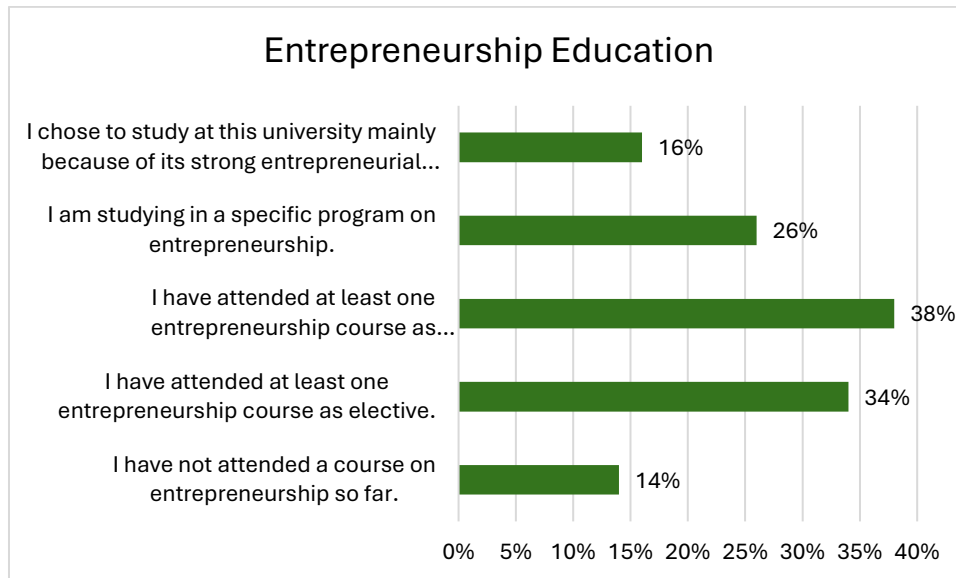


Figure 13: Entrepreneurship Education

The agreement of students that their education is oriented towards entrepreneurship either by choice or obligation is highly represented through these items. 16% of the respondents affirmed that they chose the university by purpose of its strong entrepreneurial program. 26% of respondents are pursuing specific entrepreneurial program. 38% of them had attended compulsory entrepreneurship course however 34% are pursuing it as elective. Only 14% of the responding students have not attended a course on entrepreneurship.

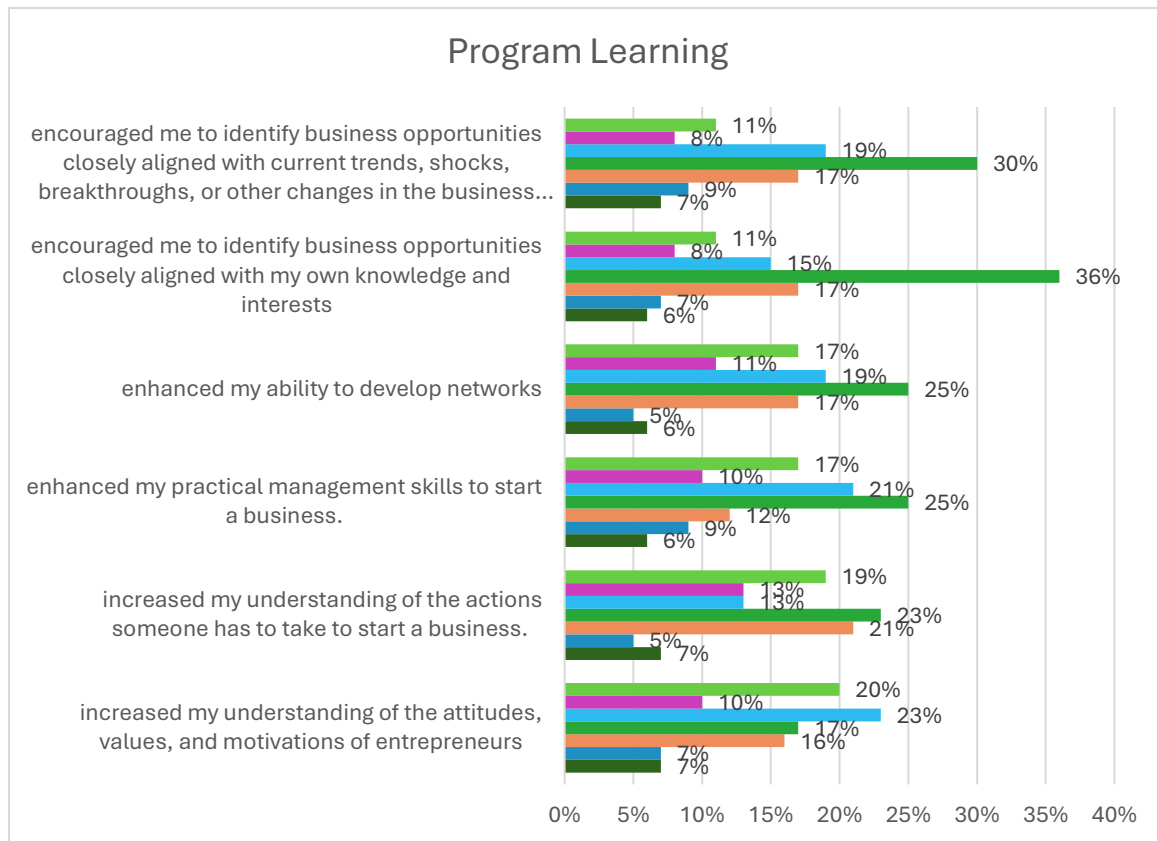


Figure 14: Program Learning

For the program learning items, most of the respondents choose to be neutral or agreeing, the percentages for being neutral with the six items are represented from 17% to 36%, for agreeing are between the 8% to 10% and for the strongly approving answer the percentages go from 11% to 20%.

Conclusion:

The 2023 edition of the GUESSS report has allowed us to observe an increase in the intentional founders among Tunisian students compared to the 2022 edition. This trend can be attributed to the new strategic directions taken by Tunisian universities to make the academic environment a place of interconnections, sharing, and assembling resources and skills with socio-economic actors.

The strategic positioning of Tunisian universities within the territorial entrepreneurial ecosystem shows a significant increase in students' entrepreneurial motivation. However, despite these positive trends, the results reveal a low rate of business creation among young students. The rate of transitioning to actual business creation remains very low compared to other countries. Additionally, Tunisian women are the least represented in the entrepreneurial field.

It is important to note that the dissemination of entrepreneurial culture should be programmed from a young age (school and post-school). Tunisia should develop entrepreneurial skills and competencies from the earliest ages by targeting primary schools, colleges, and high schools rather than waiting until university to install entrepreneurial culture. This strategy will lead to university students who are more motivated to undertake entrepreneurial ventures.

Understanding that the act of entrepreneurship is strongly linked to the entrepreneurial spirit is crucial. This mind-set should be encouraged and nurtured through fundamental teachings based on innovative pedagogical approaches. However, like all start-up ecosystems, young creative businesses are generally technological, and the role of female entrepreneurs remains limited.

In the Tunisian culture, men's access to the entrepreneurial world tends to be prioritized, reinforcing existing stereotypes. Universities must also be aware of this issue and adopt an inclusive entrepreneurship strategy that promotes attitudes breaking stereotypes in classroom activities. For example, as an inclusive strategy, it is recommended to encourage female students to choose a business plan instead of an internship report for their degree validation. Additionally, developing female leadership to foster participation, build confidence, increase motivation and commitment to a business plan, and cultivate a sense of responsibility, particularly in terms of action, is essential.

Nascent entrepreneurs can gain entrepreneurial experience when they interact with their environment to start, plan, and manage their projects. Thus, more and more students are

associating with increasingly innovative structures, such as coworking spaces and fab Labs which offer them knowledge, innovative ideas and technical tools for business creation. However, these workspaces are not traditional support structures, students may choose these environments because they particularly foster collaborative and learning interactions. It is therefore crucial for public authorities, support structures, collaborative spaces, and academics to better understand the learning dynamics of entrepreneurs in order to offer focused programs and support for these students.

References:

- Ajzen, I., 1991. The theory of planned behaviour. *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes* 50 (2), 179–211.
- Fayolle, A. (1999). *L'ingénieur entrepreneur français : contribution à la compréhension des comportements de création et reprise d'entreprise des ingénieurs diplômés* (No. hal-02297987).
- Fayolle, A., & Gailly, B. (2009). Évaluation d'une formation en entrepreneuriat: prédispositions et impact sur l'intention d'entreprendre. *Management*, 12(3), 176-203.
- Fayolle, A., & Verzat, C. (2009). Pédagogies actives et entrepreneuriat: quelle place dans nos enseignements?. *Revue de l'Entrepreneuriat/Review of Entrepreneurship*, 8(2), 1-15.
- Verzat, C., & Fayolle, A. (2013). Comment faire éclore des talents d'entrepreneur. *L'Expansion Management Review*, (1), 100-108.
- Sieger, P., Raemy, L., Zellweger, T., Fueglistaller, U., & Hatak, I. (2024). Student Entrepreneurship 2023: Insights From 57 Countries. In. St.Gallen/Bern: KMU-HSG/IMU-U.