



VOICES UNITE  
RESEARCH REPORT  
FOR

**SWEEP**

AUGUST 2021





# INTRODUCTION

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Through USAF's Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE), the programme currently referred to as "SWEEP" – Student Women Entrepreneurship Empowerment Programme – will aim to guide and empower female students across South Africa who are currently entrepreneurs and those who have ambitions to become entrepreneurs.

As a partner of EDHE and SWEEP, Voices Unite\* has compiled this brief research report to help guide the plans for the SWEEP programme and to serve as a starting point for future research. The report draws from data and insights that were collected through the Voices Unite research platform during 2020 and which may be potentially relevant to SWEEP.

More than 3,000 South African youth completed a wide range of research surveys through the Voices Unite platform in 2020. Of these, there are 66 female student entrepreneurs who responded to the Voices Unite survey specifically focused on entrepreneurship. It is these 66 female student entrepreneurs who form the primary focus of this short report for SWEEP. Also included is some comparative analysis on male student and non-student entrepreneurs, as well as non-entrepreneurs.

The full Voices Unite Youth Development report has also been shared with EDHE and includes more than 300 pages of research findings on the views of youth in South Africa, covering topics such as education, employment, entrepreneurship and the future world of work.

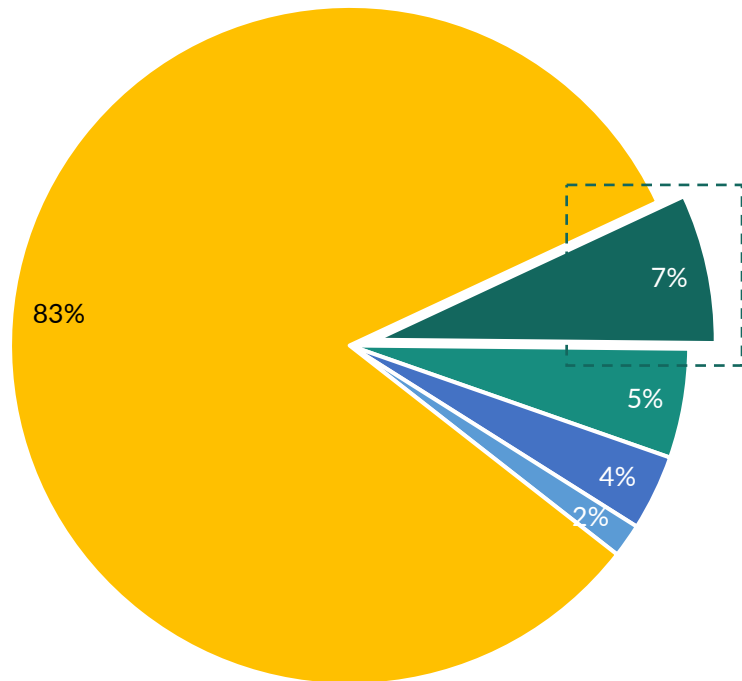
\*Voices Unite is a youth research platform launched in early 2020 by Africa-focused research firm, In On Africa (IOA)

Of the 3,233 Voices Unite members who completed surveys on the platform in 2020, a total of 924 of them completed the 'Entrepreneurship' survey. And of these 924, a total of 7% (n=66) are female student entrepreneurs.

### Entrepreneur status

- Entrepreneur student female
- Entrepreneur student male
- Entrepreneur non-student female
- Entrepreneur non-student male
- Non-entrepreneur

(N=924)



SWEEP's specific interest is this 7% of Voices Unite members who completed the entrepreneurship survey:  
**female student entrepreneurs**

### These female student entrepreneurs are...



**97%** Black African



**58%** Gauteng-based  
*(the other 42% spread across 6 other provinces)*

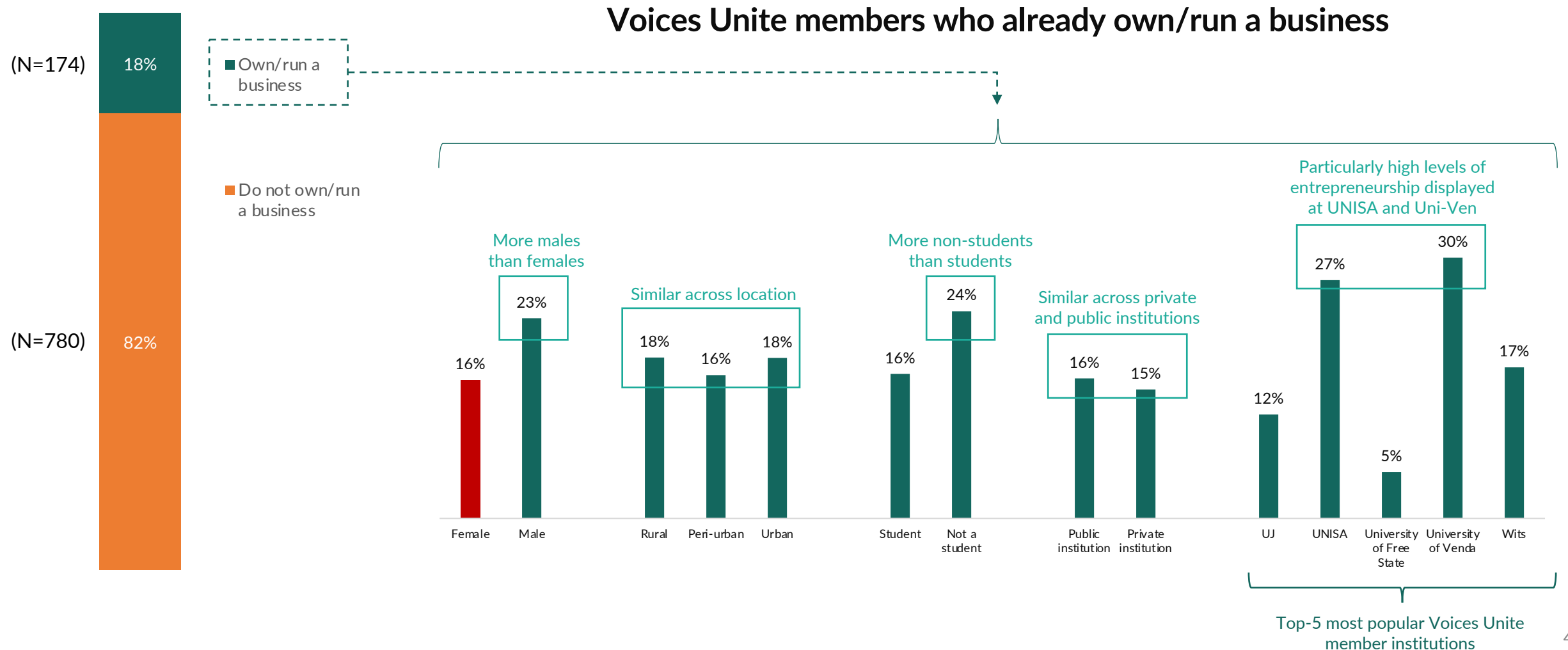


**55%** Urban-based  
*(and 25% rural, 20% peri-urban)*



**26%** Attend UJ  
*(a further 18% attend UNISA, and the rest are spread across 20 other private and public tertiary institutions)*

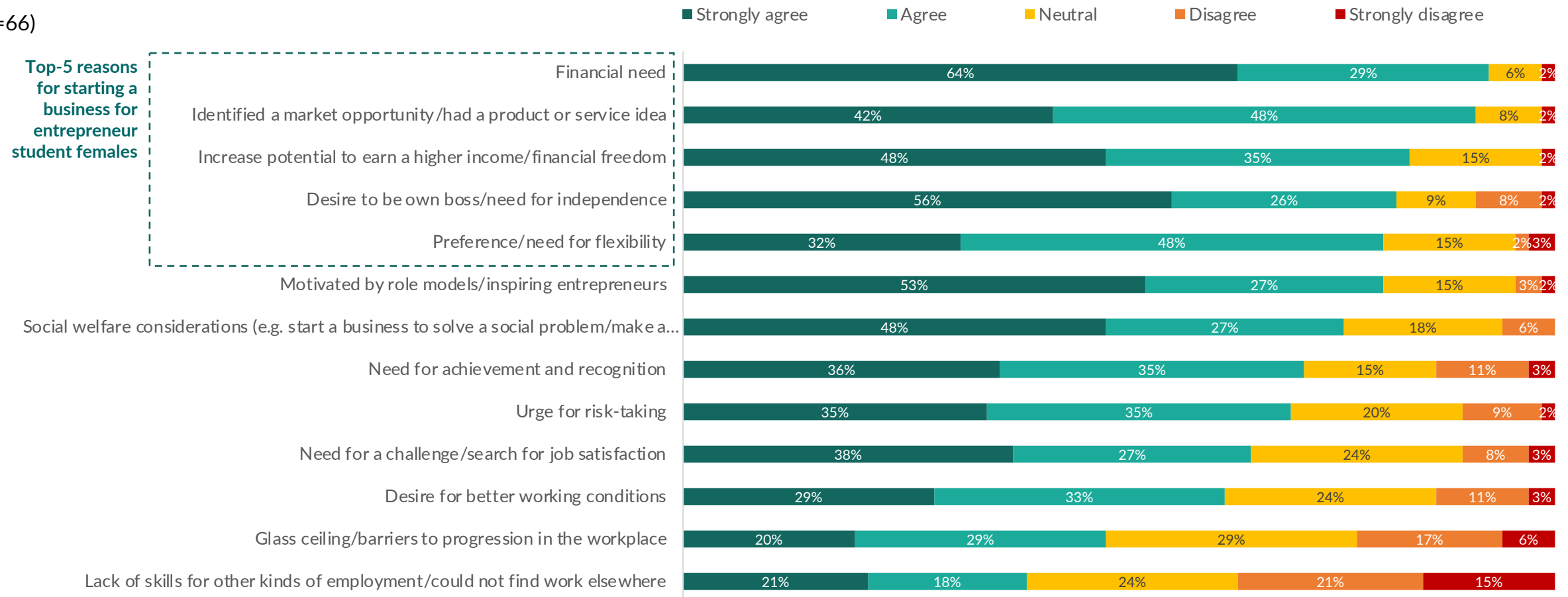
When looking more broadly at the Voices Unite members who are entrepreneurs (i.e. already own/run a business), we see a somewhat smaller percentage of females compared to males (16% vs 23%).



# Financial need and the identification of market opportunities are the most popular reasons that drive female students to start a business. This is followed by the desire for financial freedom, independence and flexibility.

## Factors that motivated student female entrepreneurs to start a business

(N=66)

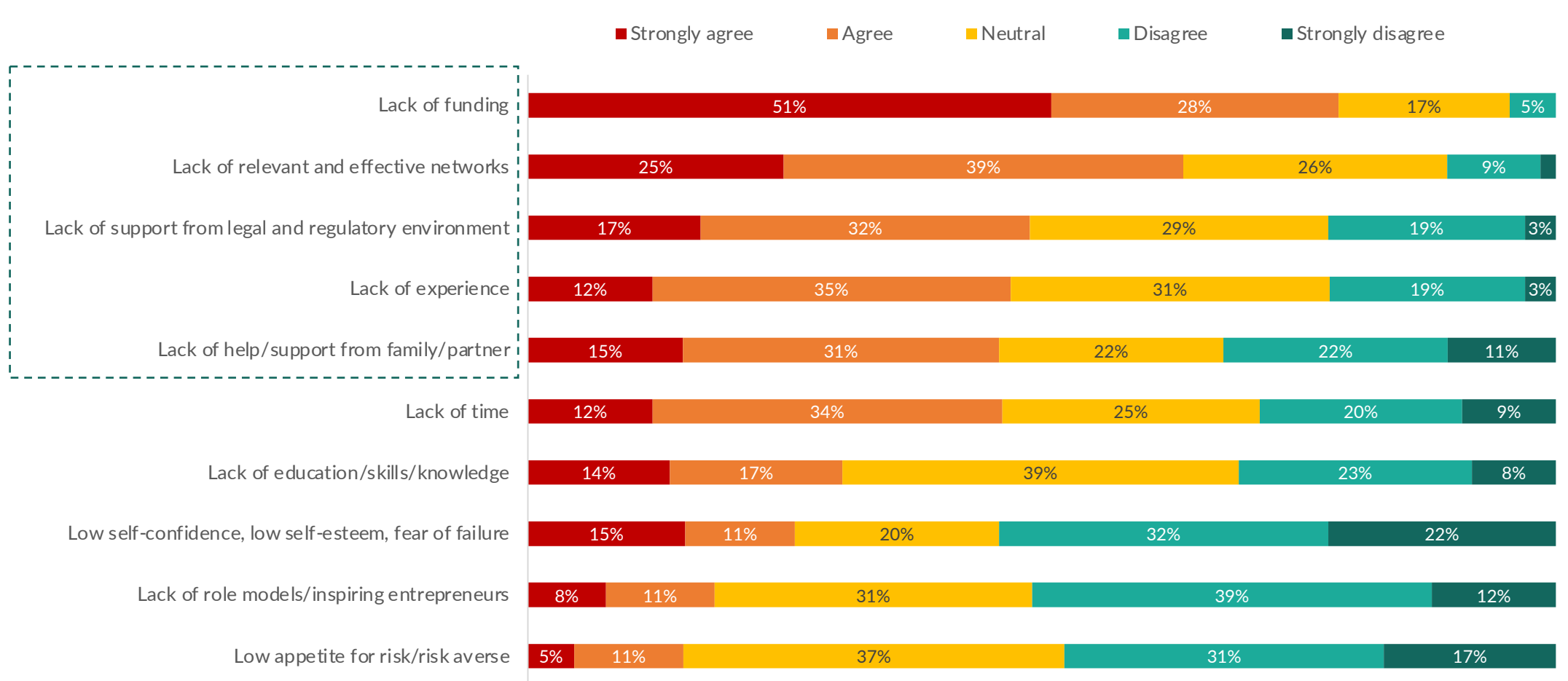


# The lack of funding, networks, support (from the legal and regulatory environment, as well as from partners/family) and experience are the top barriers encountered by female student entrepreneurs.

## Barriers that are being encountered by female student entrepreneurs

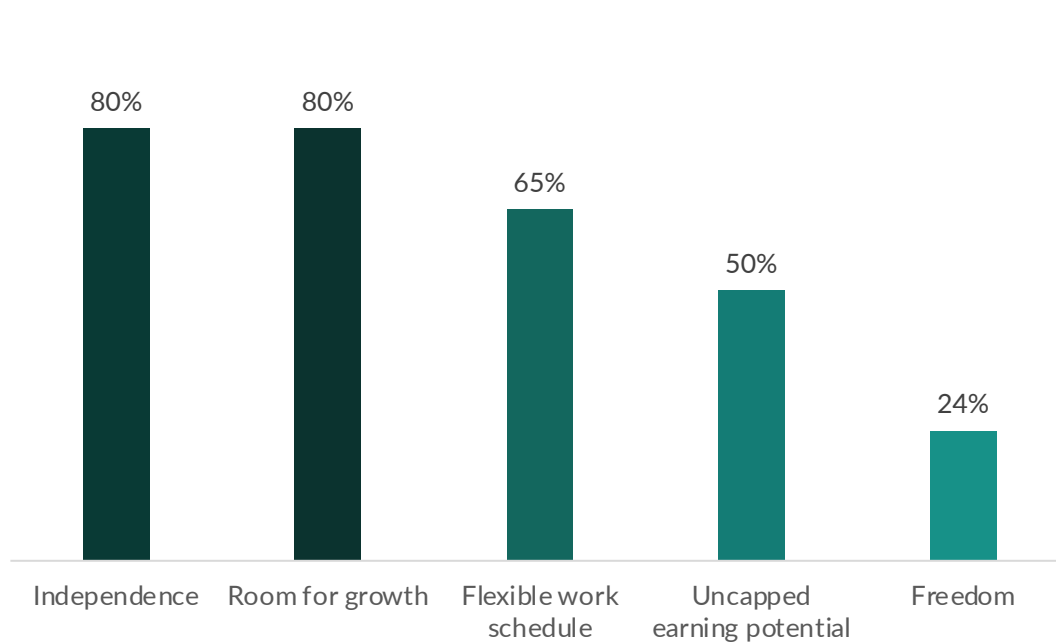
(N=65)

Top-5 barriers experienced by entrepreneur student females

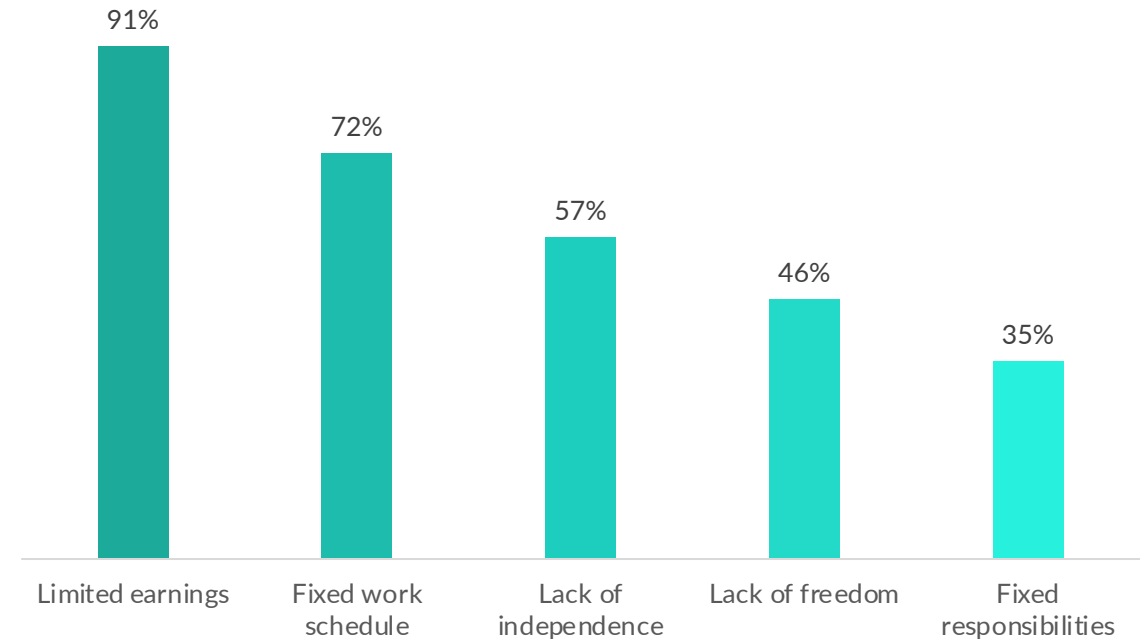


The biggest factors drawing female students to self-employment are the independence and growth potential. Conversely, female student entrepreneurs consider the limited earning potential as most unattractive in employment.

Factors that make self-employment more attractive than working for an employer for female student entrepreneurs:



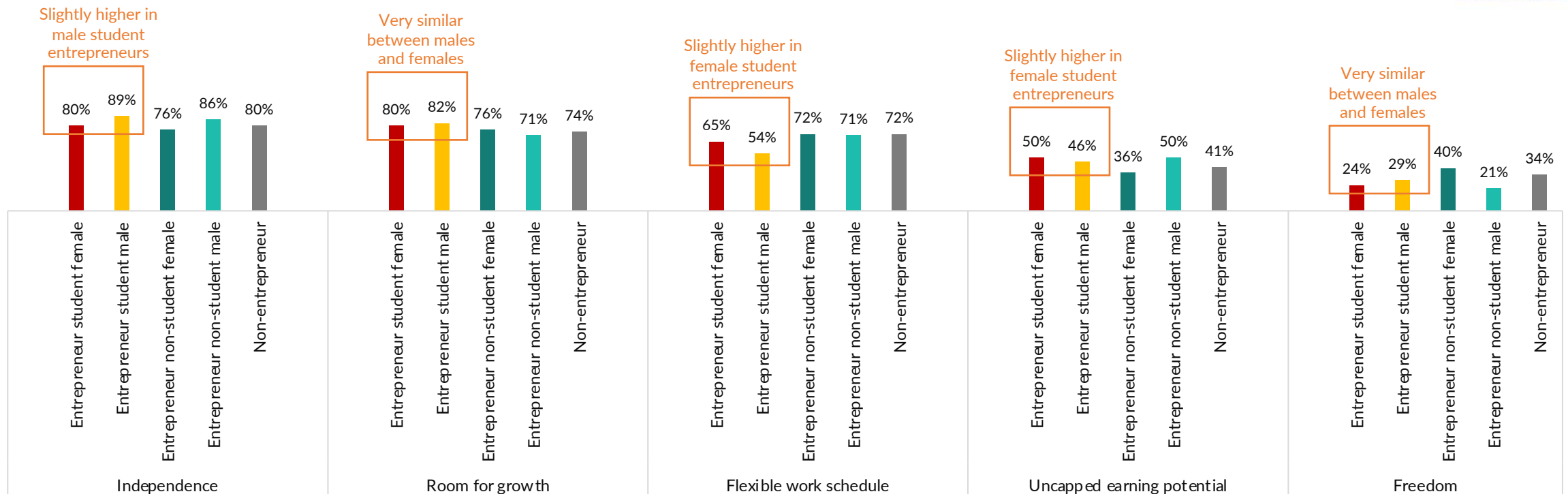
Factors that make working for an employer less attractive than self-employment for female student entrepreneurs:



(N=46)

# Comparing perspectives of female student entrepreneurs with other Voices Unite members regarding the pros of self-employment illustrate some interesting differences and similarities with male student entrepreneurs.

## Pros of self-employment VS Entrepreneur status, student status and gender (all respondents who are interested in self-employment)

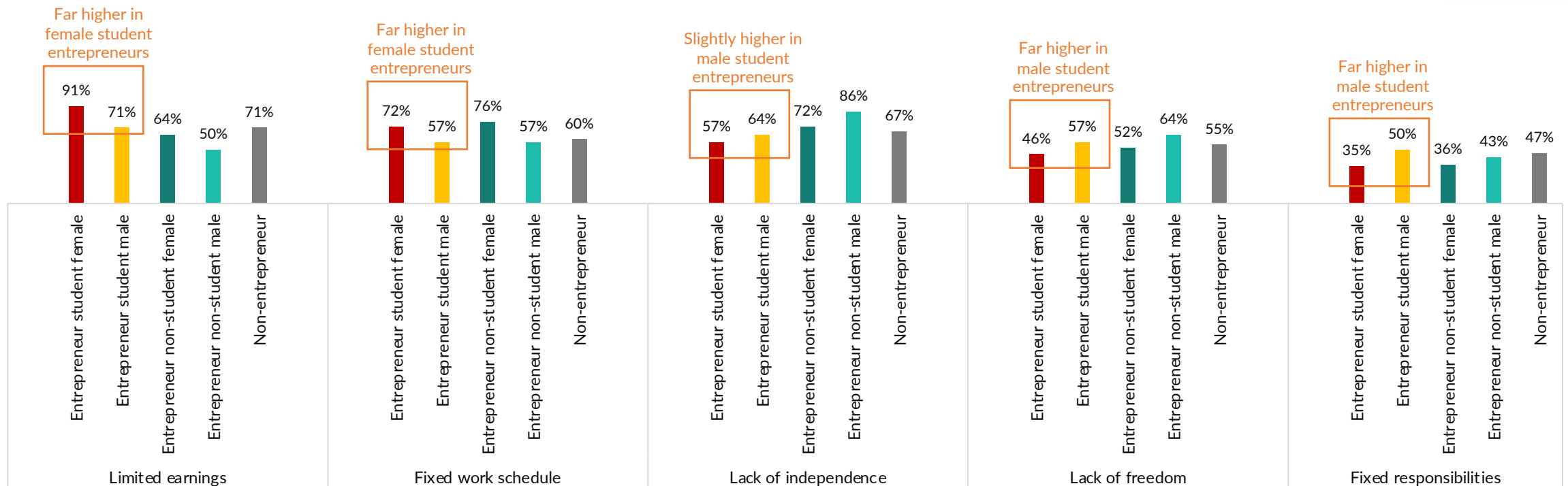


(N=553)



Female student entrepreneurs strongly support the notion that working for an employer brings with it limited earning potential - 91% of female student entrepreneurs agreed with this item compared to 71% of their male peers.

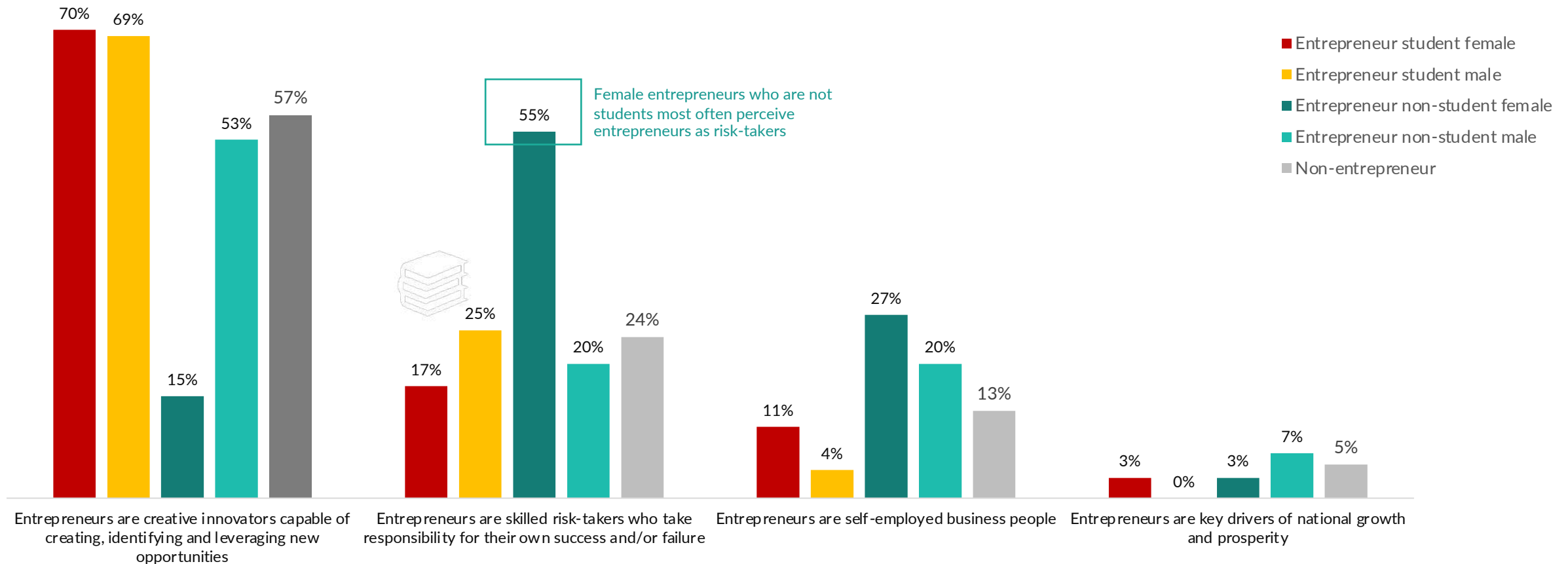
**Cons of working for an employer**  
**VS Entrepreneur status, student status and gender**  
*(all respondents who are interested in self-employment)*



(N=553)

# Most student entrepreneurs (females and males) describe entrepreneurs as creative innovators who leverage new opportunities. Female non-student entrepreneurs more often consider entrepreneurs to be risk-takers.

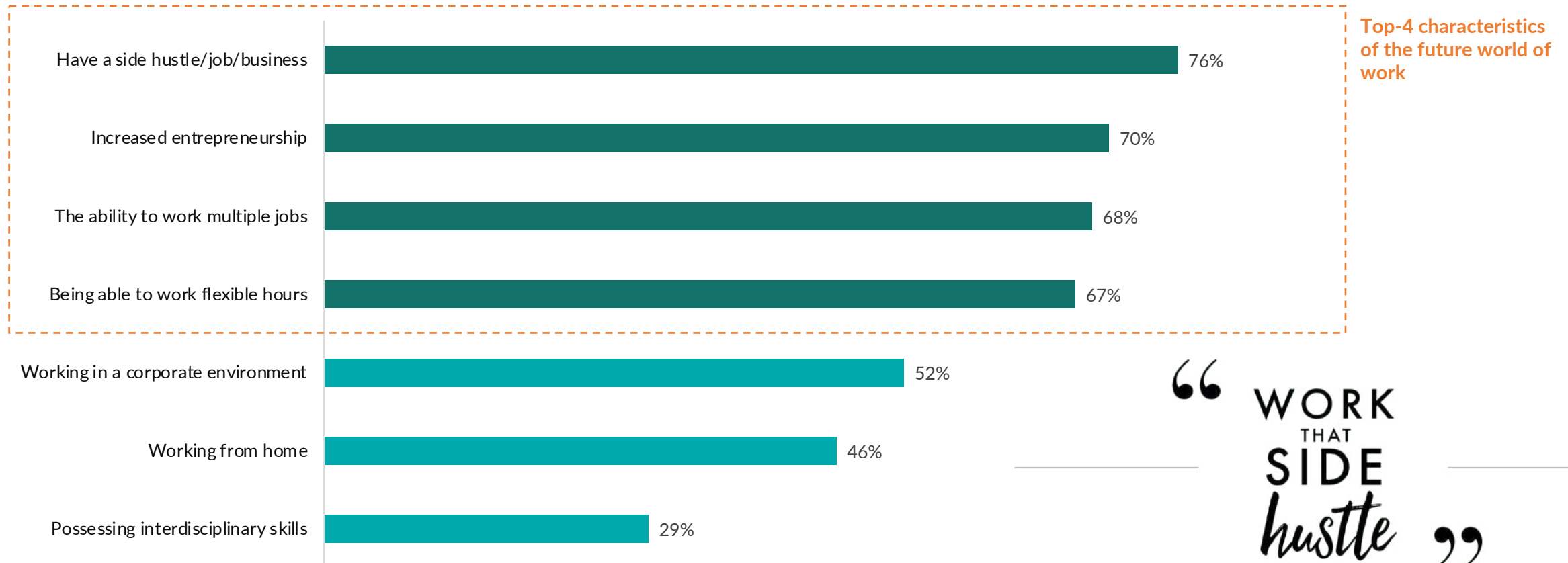
Perceptions around the best descriptions of the role of entrepreneurs



(N=924)

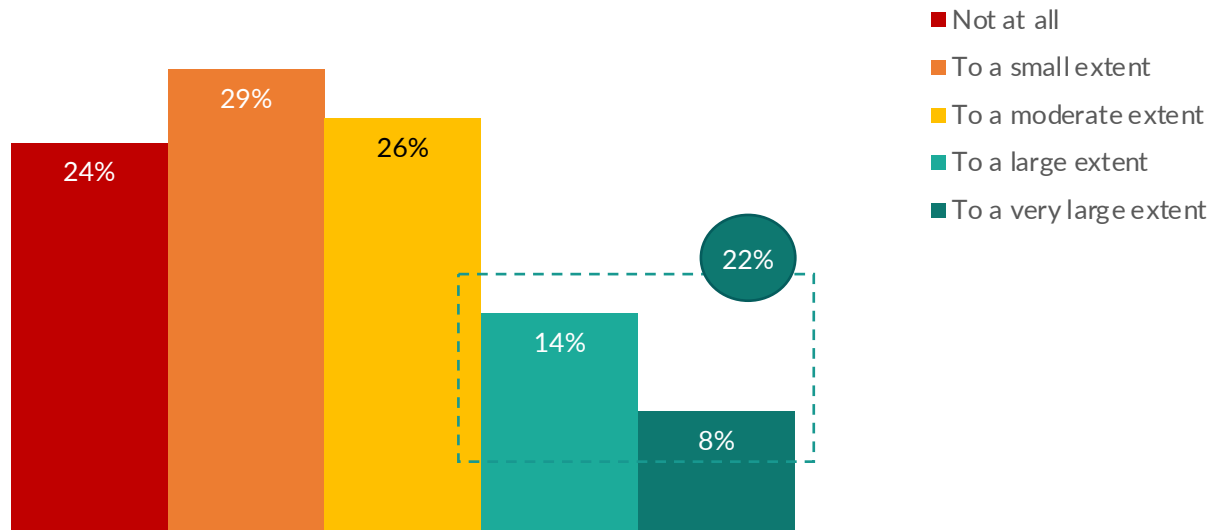
Entrepreneur student females believe that the future of work will be defined by side-hustling, entrepreneurship, the ability to work multiple jobs and flexible work hours – all closely inter-connected characteristics.

### Perspectives of student female entrepreneurs on the future world of work



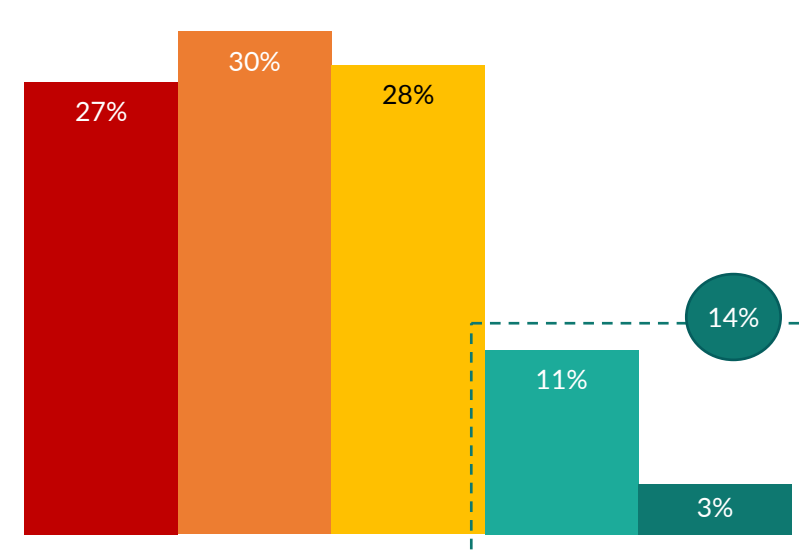
A slightly higher proportion of female student entrepreneurs have been exposed to entrepreneurship on campus compared to non-entrepreneur students – suggesting a possible impact of such exposure on campus.

### Female student entrepreneur exposure to entrepreneurship on campus



(N=66)

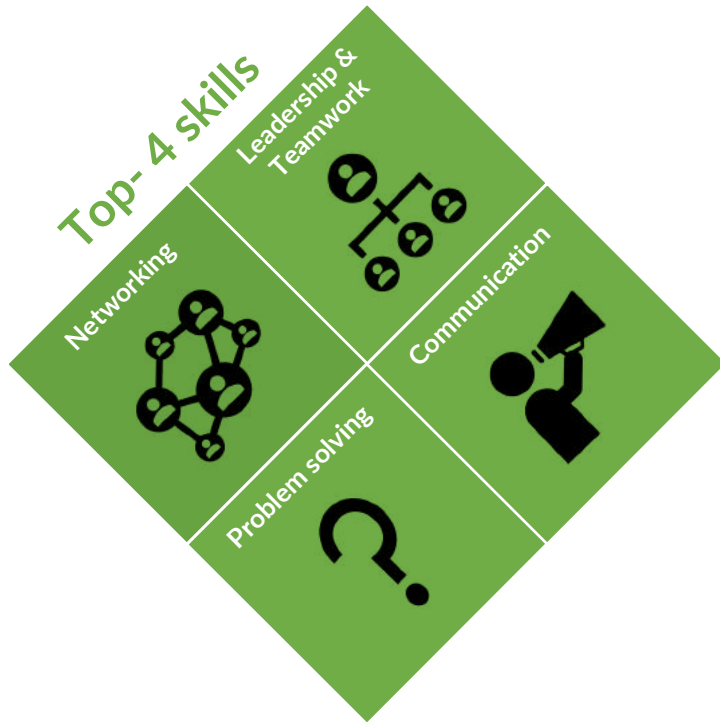
### Non-entrepreneur student exposure to entrepreneurship on campus



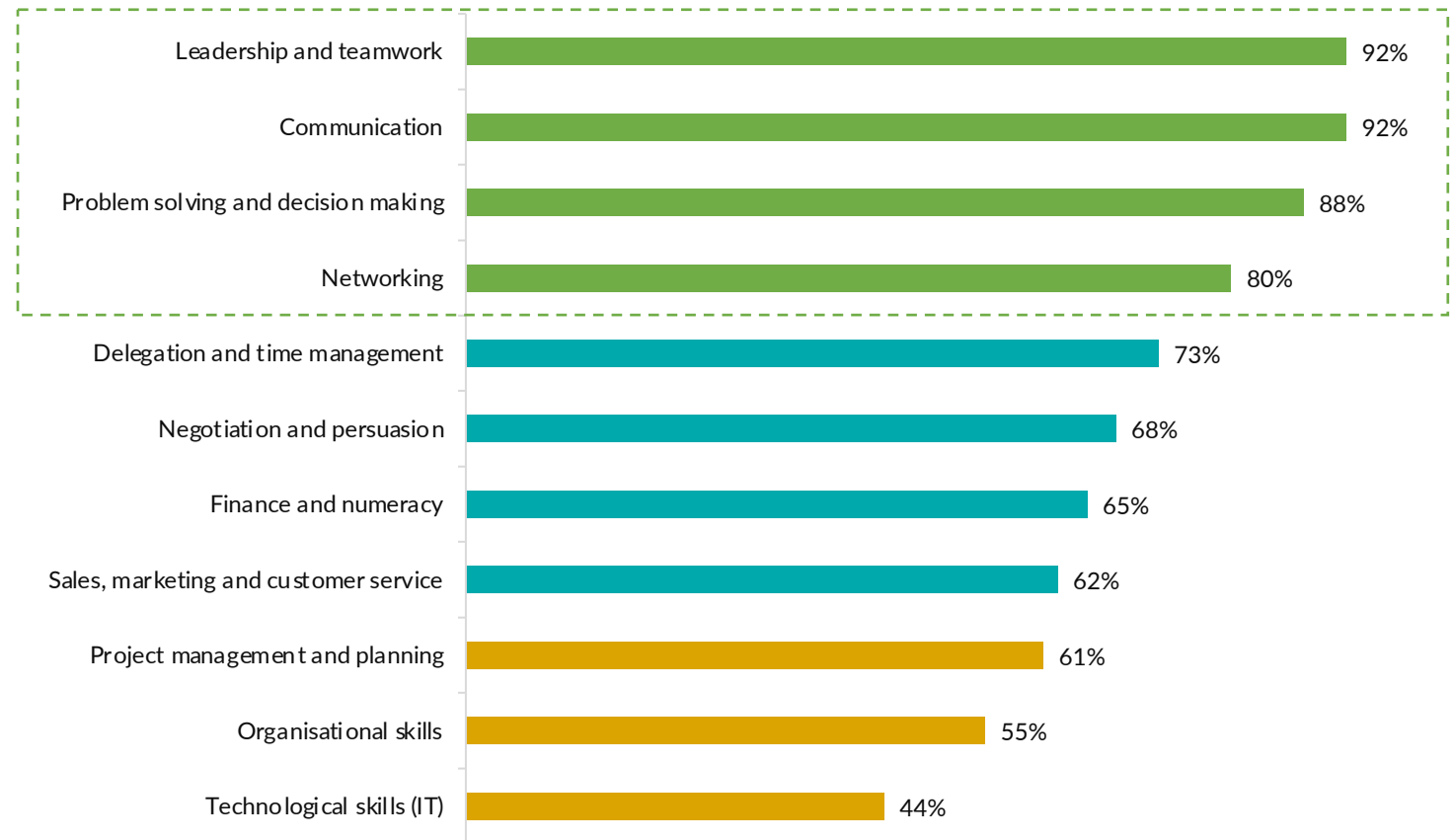
(N=581)

According to student female entrepreneurs, leadership, teamwork and communication are extremely important skills for an entrepreneur to possess, followed by problem-solving abilities and networking skills.

(N=66)



**Important skills for entrepreneurs to possess according to student female entrepreneurs**

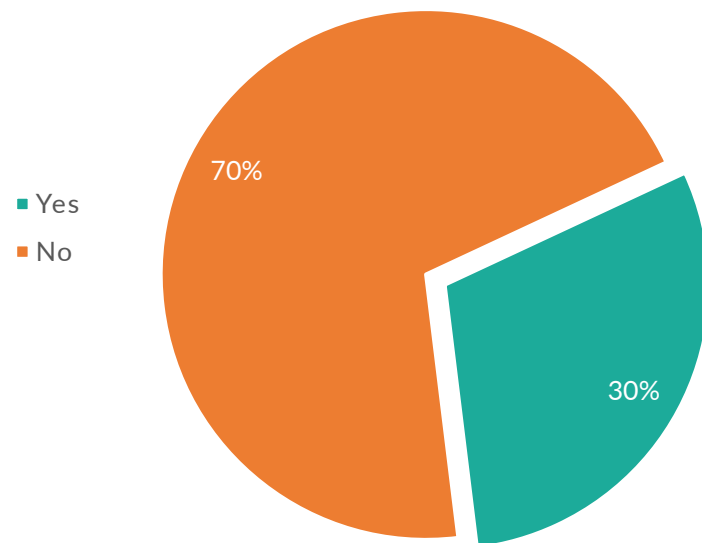


Less than a third of student female entrepreneurs are aware of any business incubators in the country, and only 3% have received assistance from one. However, almost all (92%) agreed that they would be willing to do so.

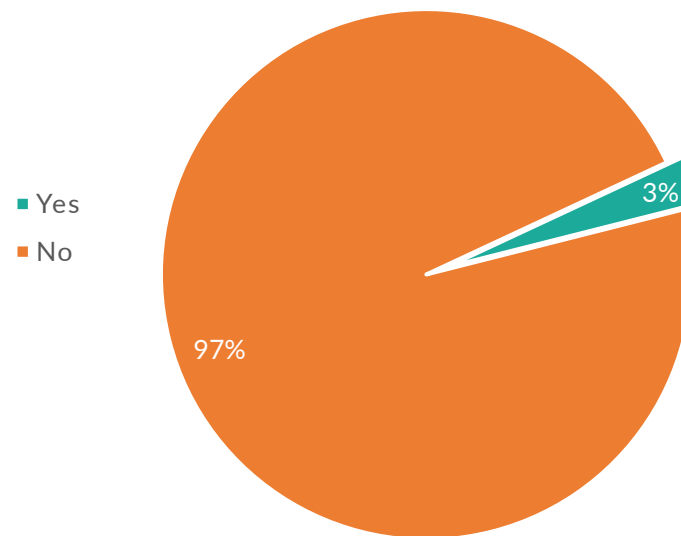
### Perspectives of student female entrepreneurs on business incubators

(N=66)

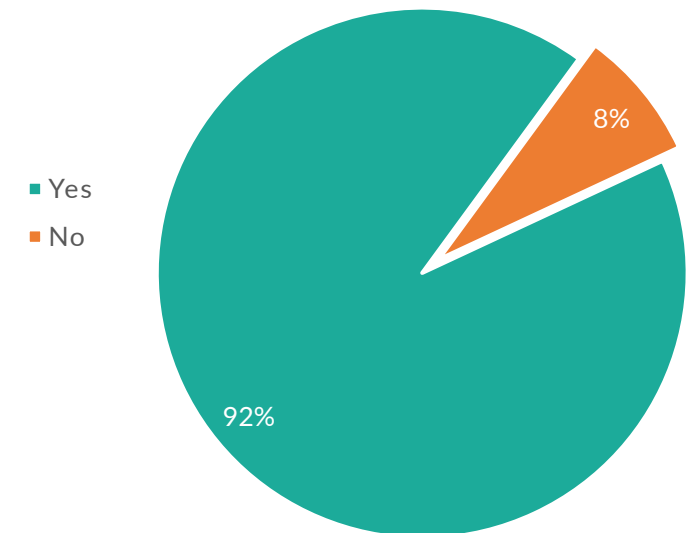
Aware of business incubators



Received assistance from a business incubator

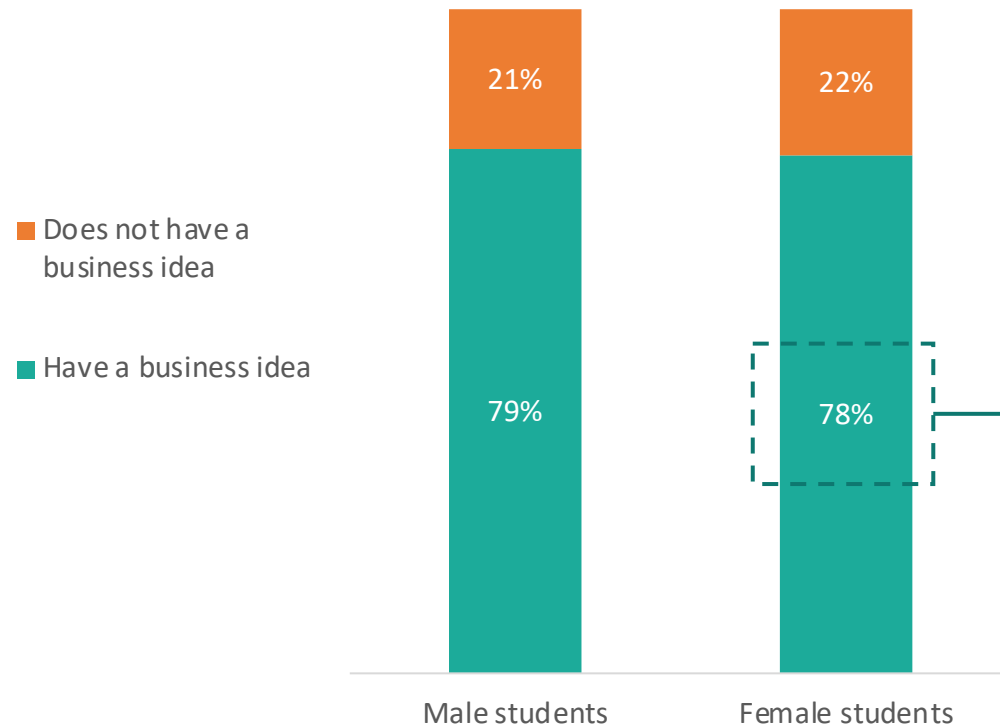


Willing to get assistance from a business incubator

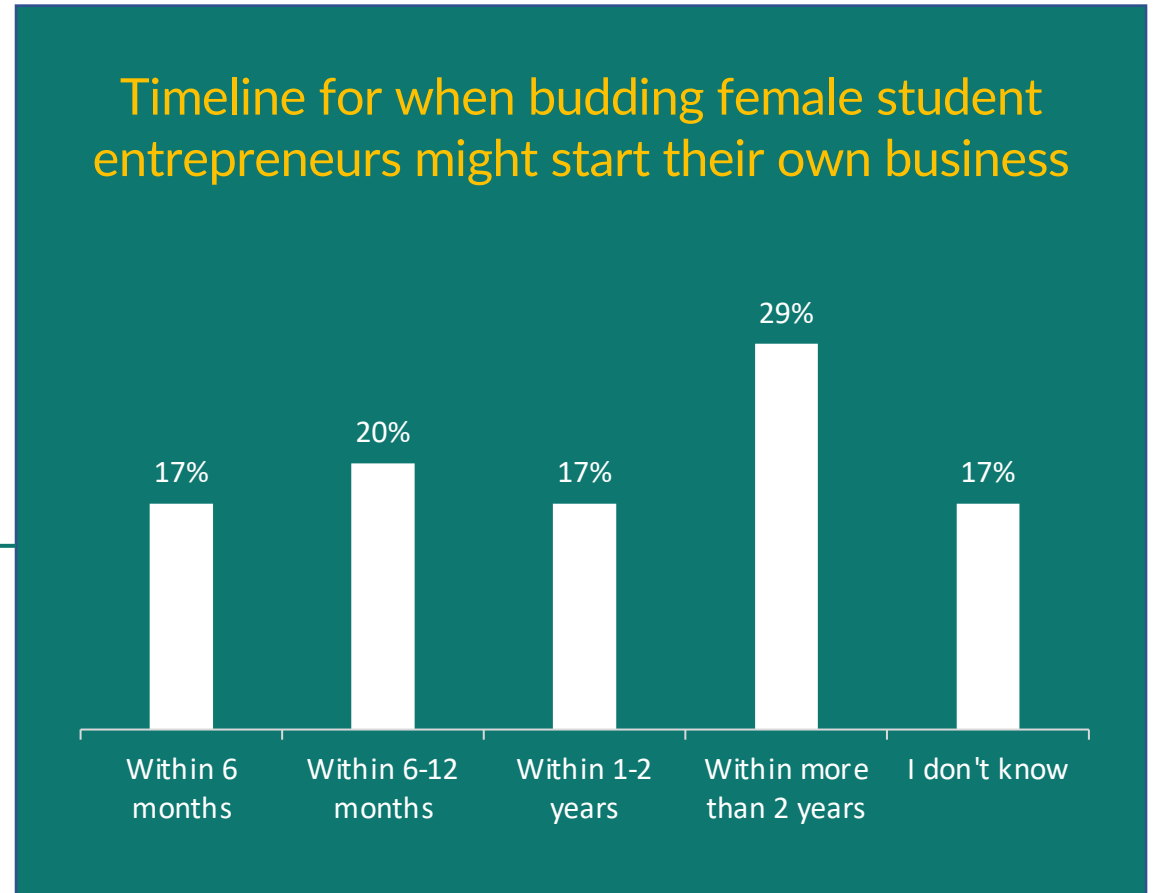


Among Voices Unite members who are students and not entrepreneurs, a surprisingly large number have a business idea that they would like to work on one day – including 78% of female students.

Non-entrepreneur students who have a business idea that they would like to work on



(N=581)



(N=332)



## A Selection of Key Findings for SWEEP from the Voices Unite Data

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- When asked about what factors motivated them to start a business, female student entrepreneurs pointed to the financial need to do so as the most influential factor. This was followed by their identification of an opportunity in the market, demonstrating that these female entrepreneurs are clearly proactive in their efforts to address their financial needs.
- However, their biggest challenges are the lack of funding and relevant networks – both critical elements to get a new business off the ground. Their lack of experience and their need for more support from those closest to them are other barriers holding them back.
- On the topics of what attracts them to self-employment and what they perceive as the most unattractive elements of working for an employer, female student entrepreneurs were more vocal around financially-related factors than male student entrepreneurs. This suggests that female student entrepreneurs more often pursue entrepreneurship for financially-motivated reasons than their male counterparts.





## A Selection of Key Findings for SWEEP from the Voices Unite Data

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- Posed with several descriptions of the role of entrepreneurs, most agreed that “entrepreneurs are creative innovators capable of creating, identifying and leveraging new opportunities”. However, one interesting difference was that female entrepreneurs who are not students most often associated entrepreneurship with taking risks – suggesting that these women more often need to take risks to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions than males or those who are studying.
- The Voices Unite results suggest that exposure to entrepreneurship on campuses may have a positive influence on female students decision to become an entrepreneur - a slightly higher proportion of female student entrepreneurs have been exposed to entrepreneurship on campus compared to non-entrepreneur students.
- Very few female student entrepreneurs are familiar with business incubators and hardly any have ever been supported by such incubators. However, almost all female student entrepreneurs indicated that they would be willing to get assistance from a business incubator. This reiterates their need for support, guidance, networks and funding.



**Voices Unite Research Report Compiled for SWEEP  
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