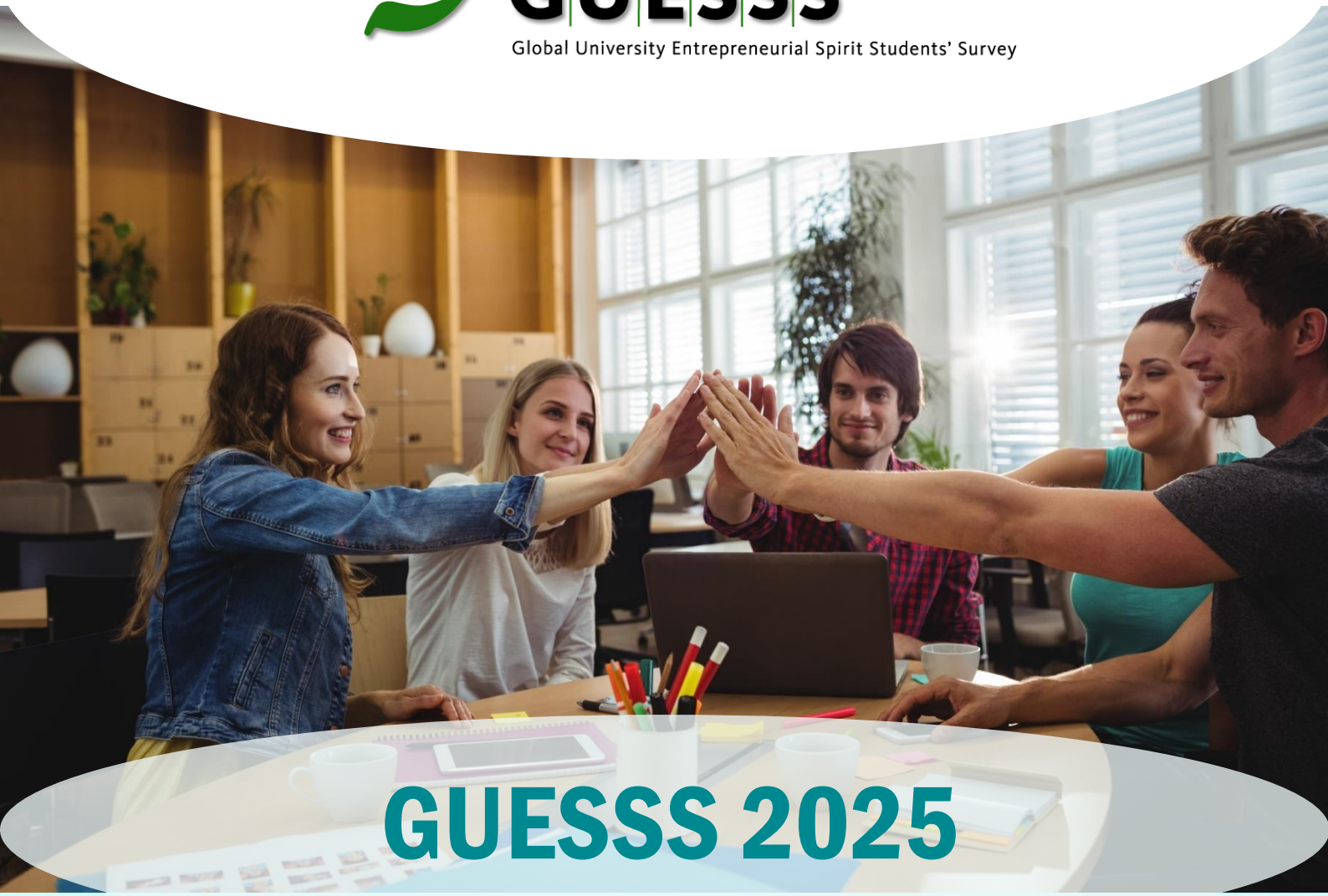
GUESSS

Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey



GUESSS 2025

National Report
FRANCE

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Citation

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Executive summary

The Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS) is an international research project that investigates student entrepreneurship. In the 11th edition of the GUESSS survey in 2025, 66 countries participated in the project. This report presents the results of the data collection conducted in France. The sample consists of 1,710 students across 16 higher education institutions in France. The following sections provide insights and results regarding the characteristics of student entrepreneurship in the French sample.

Career choice intentions and entrepreneurial intentions:

- While most students prefer immediate employment in large firms (24.9%), their intention to become founders nearly triples five years after graduation, rising from 9% to 24%;
- France relies on mandatory curriculum integration for entrepreneurship education, with 32% of participated students taking compulsory courses;
- Entrepreneurial intentions are higher among male students, those with entrepreneurial parents or networks, students with over two years of professional experience, and Business Administration and Computer Science students.

Nascent entrepreneurs:

- Nascent entrepreneurs represent 8% of the French sample, with nearly half (46.6%) intending to start their business during their studies;
- The majority (65.7%) plan to be solo founders, a trend that is even more pronounced among female students (77%) compared to males;
- Primary activities for these students include collecting market information and developing products, though they face significant concerns regarding bank financing and regulatory constraints.

Active entrepreneurs:

- 3% of French students are currently active entrepreneurs, most of whom manage young ventures where they maintain majority ownership;
- These entrepreneurs report higher social and environmental performance than general firm performance, signaling a strong commitment to sustainability;
- The main challenges and fears reported include opportunity costs and financial security, with female entrepreneurs expressing higher anxiety regarding funding.

Potential successors:

- 26.4% of French students come from entrepreneurial families, yet 65.1% of these family businesses lack a formal succession plan;
- French students perceive a "very weak" willingness from their families to transfer the business (41.4%);
- Succession intentions are higher among male students, those who have prior work experience within the family business, and who perceive their parents' rewards from the business as positive.

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1. GUESSS 2025 France

1.1. The GUESSS project

The Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS) is an international research project about student entrepreneurship. It focuses on students' career choices, entrepreneurial intentions and activities, family business succession, and the assessment of the university and national environment. The project's primary objective is to generate new insights into student entrepreneurship through both academic and practitioner-oriented outputs.

Founded in 2003, GUESSS conducts a large-scale online survey every two to three years. The 11th data collection wave took place in 2025 across 66 countries, gathering responses from more than 196,000 students worldwide (Sieger et al., 2026). The project is jointly coordinated by the University of St. Gallen and the University of Bern in Switzerland.

GUESSS employs a centrally managed online survey that includes validated measurement instruments, enabling detailed cross-country comparisons and within-country analyses. Each participating country is represented by an official national team responsible for coordinating data collection. These teams distribute the survey to students at their institutions and recruit university partners to broaden participation nationwide. This report presents an analysis of the data collected by the French national team and participating higher education institutions throughout France.

1.2. National context: student entrepreneurship in France

In recent years, France has experienced significant growth in student entrepreneurship, driven by public policies, higher education institutions, and innovation stakeholders. This development is part of a broader effort to transform universities and business schools into environments that not only provide academic knowledge but also foster transversal skills such as creativity, autonomy, project management, and the ability to innovate.

One of the key elements of this transformation is the gradual recognition of entrepreneurship education as a strategic training lever (Douyon, 2025). As a result, institutions have increasingly integrated modules related to business creation, innovation, and entrepreneurial project management, as well as the development of university incubators to promote and support business creation. This evolution is also encouraged by the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research, which supports initiatives aimed at bringing academia closer to the socio-economic world and promoting students' professional integration through entrepreneurship.

Every year, the French Ministry of National Education and Youth organizes awareness campaigns for young people, for example focusing on women and business creation. Targeting individuals aged 13 to 25, these initiatives aim more broadly to promote an

“entrepreneurial mindset” and encourage young people to consider entrepreneurship as a viable path.

Across France, initiatives are emerging led by a youth increasingly aware of contemporary challenges. These students do not only aim to create economic value, but also to generate positive social and environmental impact. Their projects reflect a collective awareness and a strong desire to act (Douyon, 2024).

In parallel, specific support schemes have been created to structure and assist student entrepreneurs. The Pépite France network plays a central role in this dynamic. It allows students and recent graduates to benefit from the national “Student Entrepreneur Status,” which facilitates the adaptation of their academic schedules and provides access to personalized support. This scheme supports the transition from idea to concrete project by offering mentoring, guidance, and access to professional resources (Gabay-Mariani & Boissin, 2021).

The ecosystem is also supported by financial and institutional actors such as BPI France, which contributes to financing innovation and business creation. In addition, many university incubators, business nurseries, and accelerators have developed within campuses, strengthening the territorial anchoring of student entrepreneurship.

This growth can also be explained by a profound cultural shift: entrepreneurship is no longer perceived solely as an isolated risk-taking activity, but as a genuine career path (Tounés, 2006). Students are increasingly encouraged to experiment, test their ideas, and develop concrete projects during their studies. This evolution contributes to spreading a culture of innovation and initiative among French youth.

Finally, despite these advances, several challenges remain, particularly regarding equal access to support schemes, early awareness of entrepreneurship, and the long-term sustainability of created projects. The current challenge is therefore to further strengthen the integration of entrepreneurship education into academic curricula and to reinforce the links between the academic and economic worlds.

Student entrepreneurship in France has become a true laboratory of ideas and concrete actions addressing contemporary challenges. These young entrepreneurs demonstrate that it is possible to combine economic ambition with social impact, proving that the companies of tomorrow will be strongly oriented toward the common good.

1.3. Data collection and university partners

In France, the GUESSS 2025 data collection took place between September and December 2025. UCLy (Lyon Catholic University) acted as a country delegate for the project. The research team was responsible for recruiting higher education institutions across France and coordinating the survey administration process. It distributed the link to the online questionnaire to UCLy students and shared it with national university partners, who in turn administered the survey within their respective institutions. To support data collection efforts, participating institutions were given regular access to the number of completed questionnaires, enabling them to monitor response rates and encourage greater student participation where necessary.

A total of 1,710 students from 16 higher education institutions participated in the GUESSS 2025 survey. Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents across the participating institutions in France.

Table 1. Higher education institutions represented in the GUESSS 2025 survey in France

#	Higher education institution	Number of responses	Percentage (%) of the total responses in France
1	University of Strasbourg	619	36,2
2	Lyon Catholic University (UCLy), Lyon and Annecy campuses	273	16,0
3	Institut Polytechnique UniLaSalle	202	11,8
4	Sorbonne Paris Nord University	166	9,7
5	IUT Le Mans	95	5,6
6	NEOMA Business School	69	4,0
7	Grenoble IAE-INP UGA	50	2,9
8	Jean Moulin Lyon 3 University	44	2,6
9	emlyon	36	2,1
10	University of Le Mans	36	2,1
11	University of Évry Paris-Saclay (UEPS)	33	1,9
12	Other	87	5,1
	Total	**1710**	**100**

Note: Only universities with more than 10 responses are shown.

1.4. Demographic characteristics of the sample

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of study participants by age. The sample consists of young students, with the highest concentration between ages 18 and 23. The peak occurs at age 21, which records the largest number of participants.

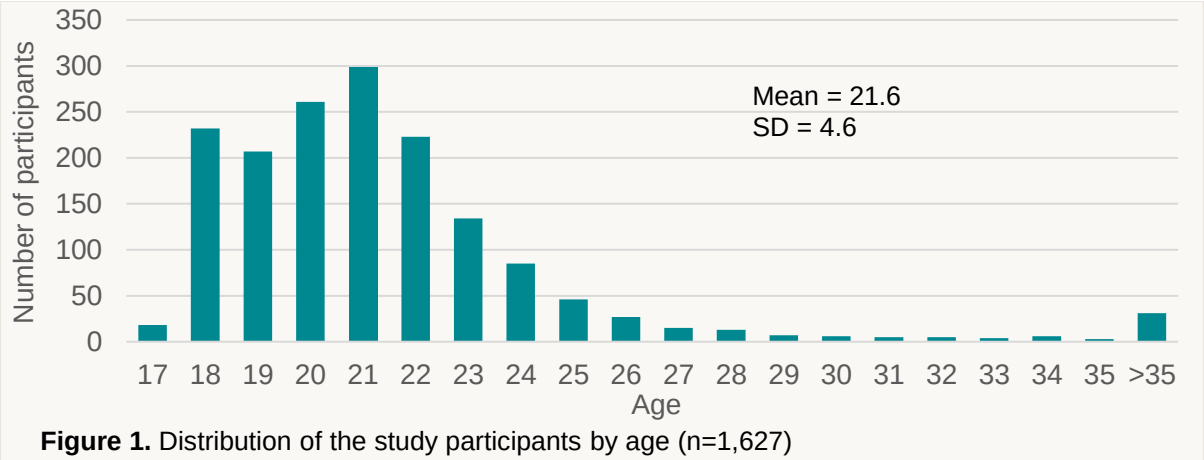


Figure 1. Distribution of the study participants by age (n=1,627)

The sample comprises 61% female and 39% male students, indicating a predominance of female participants (Figure 2).

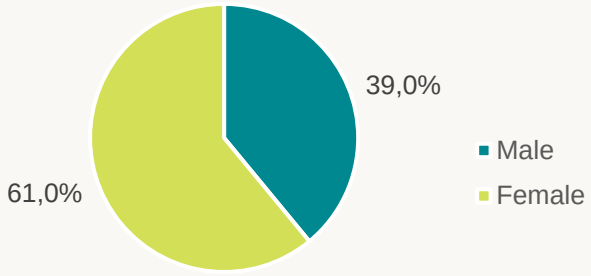


Figure 2. Distribution of the participants by gender (n=1,676)

In France, the majority of respondents are enrolled in Master's degree programs (51%)**,** followed by Bachelor's students (36.9%)**,** indicating a larger representation of graduate-level participants (Figure 3). In comparison, the international sample is largely dominated by Bachelor's students (77.3%)**,** while only 14.9% are Master's students. PhD students and participants enrolled in other programs represent a relatively small proportion in both samples**.**

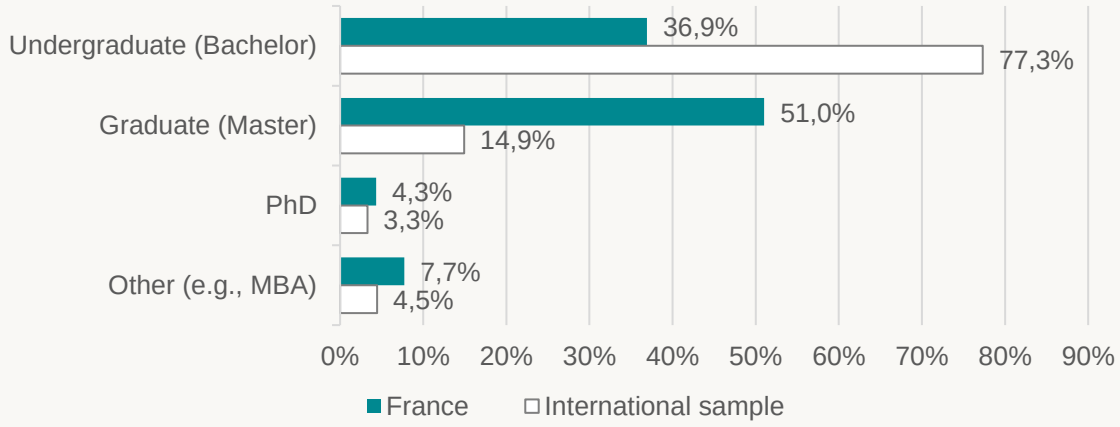


Figure 3. Distribution of the participants by study level
(n=1,709 in France and 193,904 in the international sample)

The distribution of students in French universities across fields of study varies, with differences between the French and international samples (Figure 4). In the French sample, Business administration and management represents the largest share, accounting for 28% of respondents, followed by Natural sciences at 14.5%. Other fields in France include Engineering (9.6%) and Social sciences (9%), while Law (7.2%), Humanities (5.9%), and Human medicine and health sciences (5.3%) are moderately represented. Economics (4.8%) and Computer sciences (4.4%) account for smaller shares, and Mathematics and Arts-related fields remain marginal (both around 1.1%). The international sample is also more heavily concentrated in Business administration and management (20.8%). In contrast, it is followed by Engineering (15.1%), social sciences (9.5%)**,** Human medicine and health sciences (9.4%)**,** and Computer sciences (8.8%), among other disciplines.

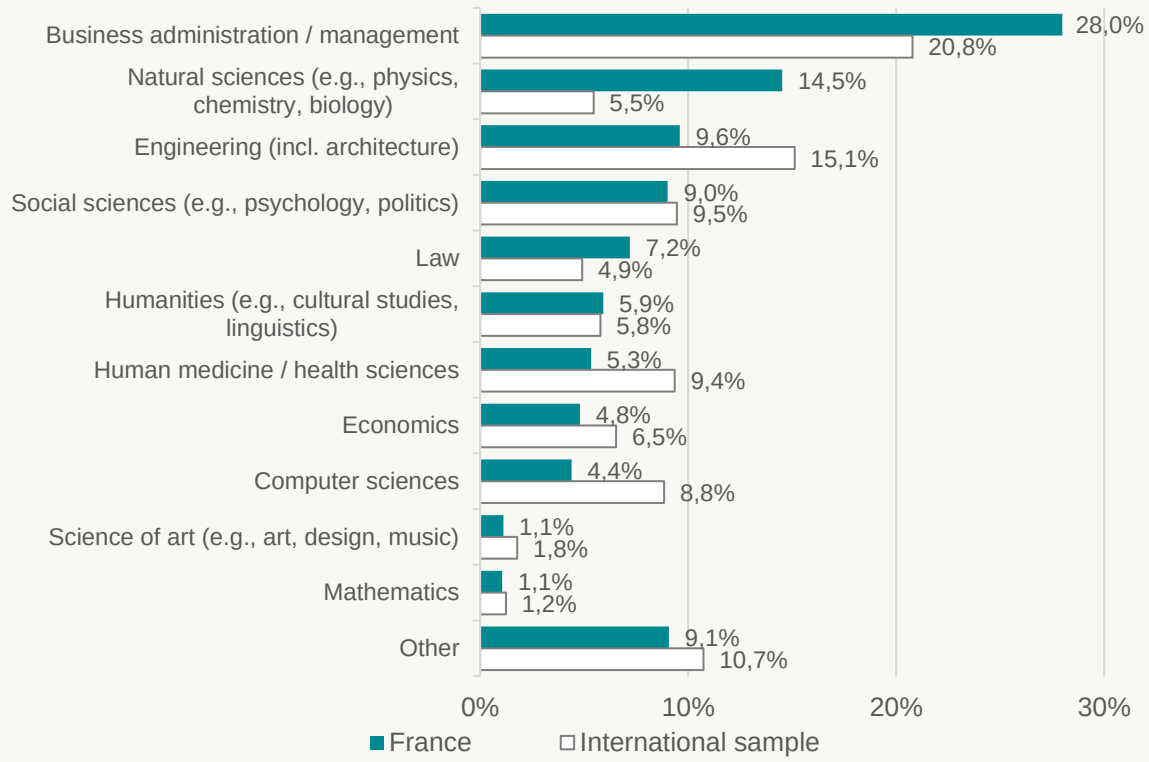


Figure 4. Distribution of the participants by study field
(n=1,708 in France and 193,992 in the international sample)

In the GUESSS survey, students are divided into several groups based on filtering questions: **nascent entrepreneurs**, who are in the process of starting a business; **active entrepreneurs**, who already own and manage a business; and **successors**, whose parent(s) own and manage a business or are self-employed.

Figure 5 presents the proportion of nascent and active entrepreneurs among participants, comparing the French and international samples. The results indicate that entrepreneurial activity is consistently higher in the international sample than in France. Specifically, nascent entrepreneurs account for 8% of students in France, compared to 16.6% in the international sample. A similar pattern is observed for active entrepreneurs, who represent 3% of the French sample and 6.4% at the international level.

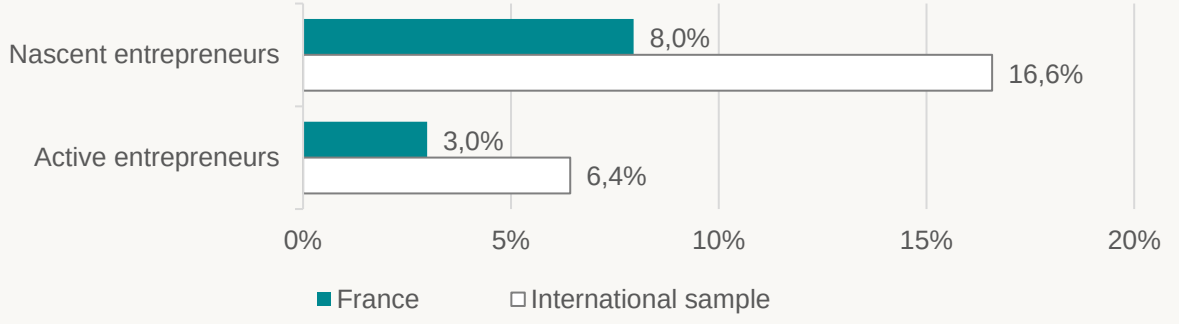


Figure 5. Nascent and active entrepreneurs among participants
(n=1,710 in France and 194,452 in the international sample)

Figure 6 presents the entrepreneurial status of participants' parents. The majority of respondents report no parental entrepreneurial status, with 73.6% in France and 68.9% in the international sample**,** indicating that most participants do not come from entrepreneurial families. Among those with entrepreneurial parents, having an entrepreneurial father only is the most common situation, representing 13.9% in France and 16.7% internationally. In contrast, the proportion of participants with an entrepreneurial mother only is lower, at 6.3% in France and 5.1% in the international sample**.** Finally, participants reporting that both parents are entrepreneurs account for 6.3% in France and 9.3% in the international sample.

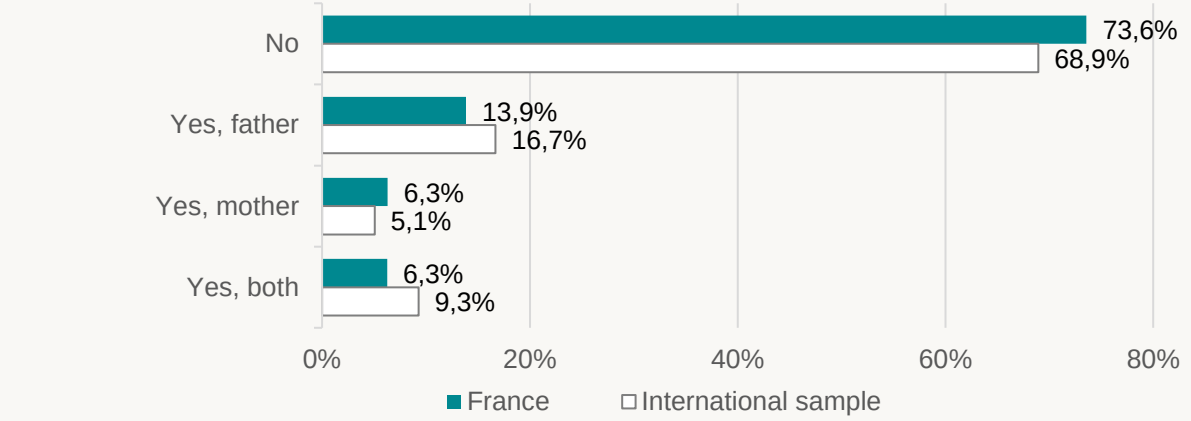


Figure 6. Entrepreneurship status of participants' parents
(n=1,710 in France and 194,452 in the international sample)

This report is structured according to participant groups: all students responding to common questions on career choice and entrepreneurial intentions, and the subgroups of nascent entrepreneurs, active entrepreneurs, and potential successors, each receiving questions tailored to their situation.

2. Students' career choice intentions

A comparison of participants' career choice intentions immediately after completing their studies and five years later (Figure 7) indicates a preference for employment in large organizations, particularly in the short term, whereas entrepreneurship appears more attractive after gaining some experience.

Among French students, 24.9% intend to work in large firms right after their studies, a proportion that remains relatively stable five years later (22.7%). A similar pattern is observed among international students (22.6% and 19.4%, respectively). Employment in medium-sized companies is also a common career aspiration, especially in the short term (16.1% among French students vs. 11.6% among international students).

A clear change appears in the entrepreneurial career choice. Among French students, the proportion intending to become founders of their own business increases from 9% immediately after studies to 24.0% after five years. This upward trend is also observed among international students, with the rate rising from 15.4% to 28.3%.

Career paths in public service and academia show moderate and relatively stable levels of interest across both groups, while employment in non-profit organizations remains marginal. Similarly, few students intend to take over a family business, although this option may be considered later in their careers. Finally, a notable proportion of respondents report uncertainty or alternative career plans ("other/do not know yet"), particularly in the short term (19.5% among French students and 16.8% among international students).

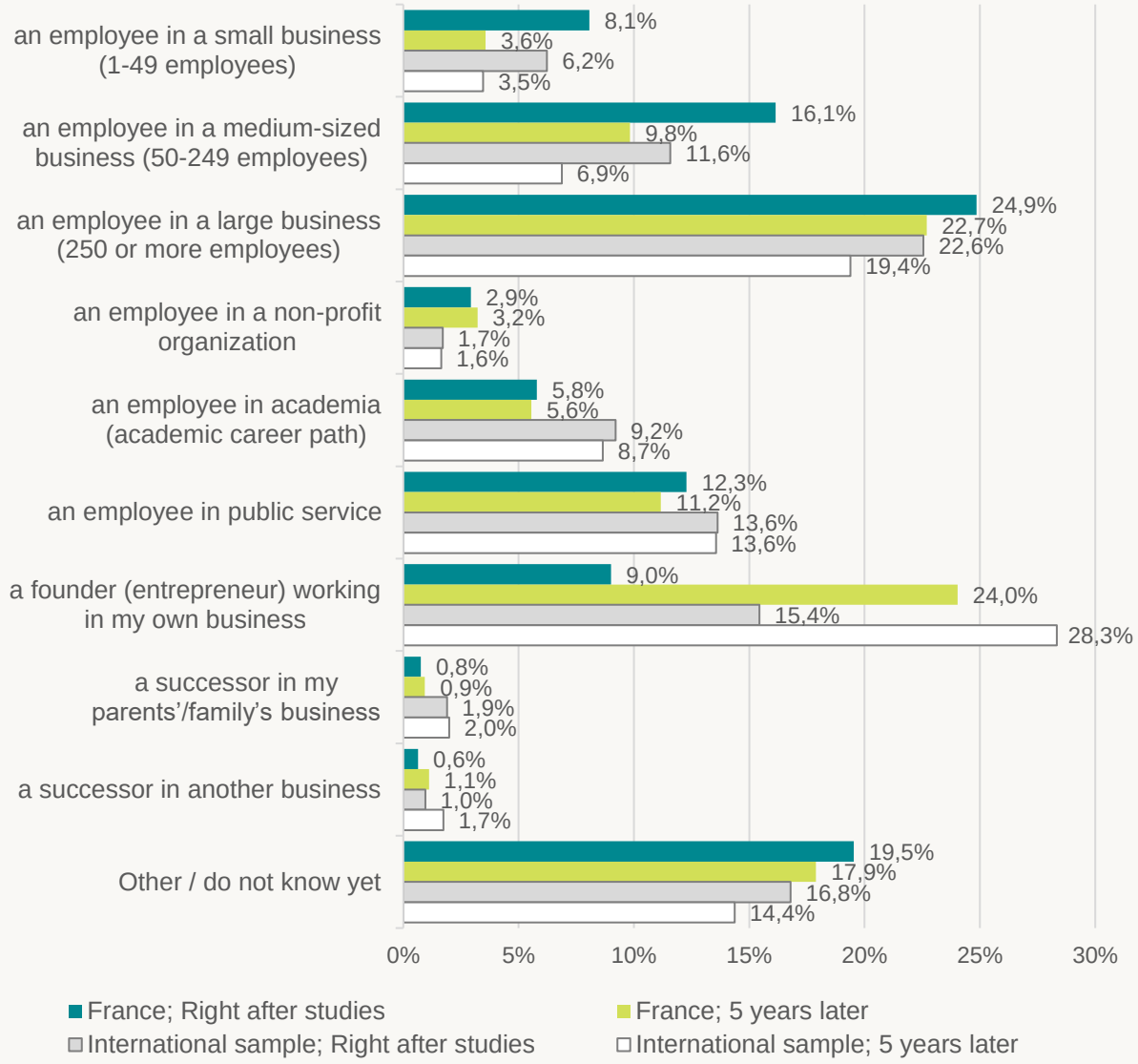


Figure 7. Career choice intentions right after studies and 5 years later (n=1,710 in France and 194,452 in the international sample)

Figure 8 presents the distribution of participants' preferred economic sectors for their future careers, highlighting a marked heterogeneity in sectoral preferences alongside a clear concentration in specific domains. Excluding "other" category, the pharmaceuticals sector (white economy – 11,7%) emerges as the dominant preference, followed by the renewable energy (green – 10.5%) and the arts, fashion, and design sector (orange – 10.5%). Moderate levels of interest are observed for the IT sector (yellow – 9,5%), manufacturing and construction (red – 8.3%), social and solidarity economy (8.0%), and the rural economy (6.3%). In contrast, non-renewable energy (brown –1.6%), fisheries (blue –1.4%), and elderly care (silver – 0.9%) exhibit very limited appeal.

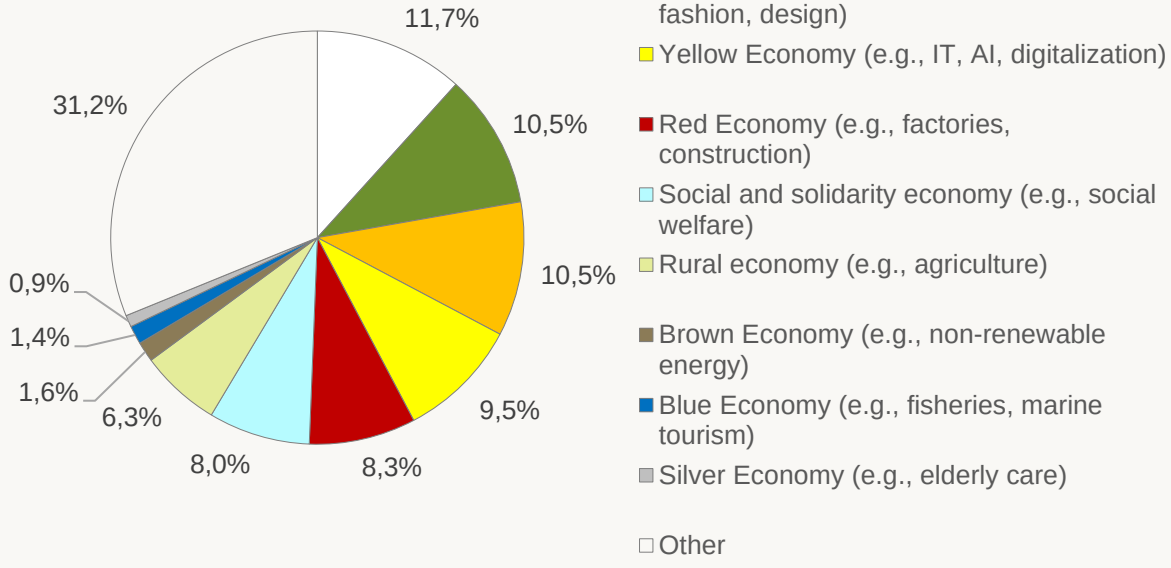


Figure 8. Preferred economic sector for future career (n=1,521)

3. Entrepreneurial intentions

3.1. The university environment

The university environment plays an important role in shaping students' entrepreneurial intentions by providing education, resources, networking opportunities, and institutional support (Beliaeva et al., 2017). Entrepreneurship education exposure among study participants is presented on Figure 9. Students who have not attended any entrepreneurship course represent the largest group (55.8% in France and 57.5% in the international sample). France outpaces the international sample in the proportion of students who have taken a compulsory entrepreneurship course (32% vs. 19%), while lagging behind in participation in elective entrepreneurship courses (15.1% vs. 23.2%). This suggests that entrepreneurship education in France relies more heavily on mandatory curriculum integration.

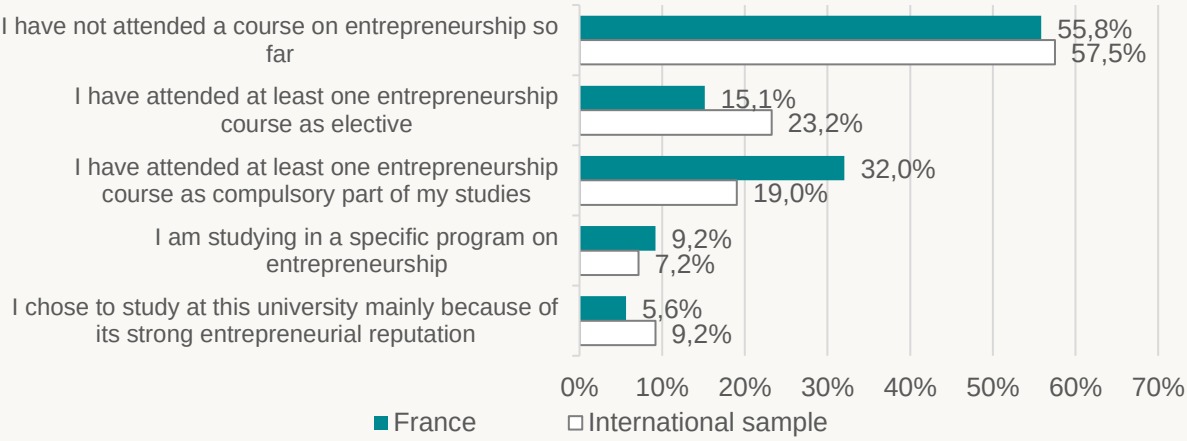


Figure 9. Entrepreneurship education of the study participants (n=1,710 in France and 194,452 in the international sample)

The university entrepreneurial environment was rated most highly by students in business administration, engineering, and computer science. Drawing on Franke and Lüthje (2004), students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the following statements (1=not at all, 7=very much): “The atmosphere at my university inspires me to develop ideas for new businesses”; “There is a favorable climate for becoming an entrepreneur at my university”; and “My university encourages students to engage in entrepreneurial activities”.

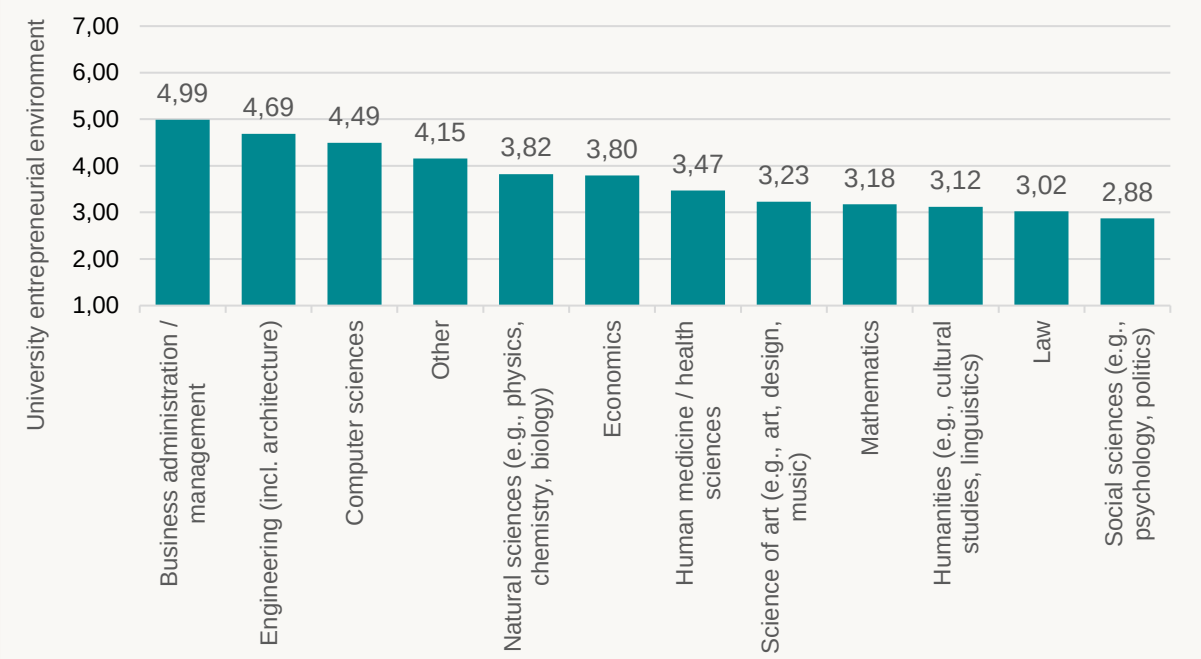


Figure 10. University entrepreneurial environment across different study fields (n=1,688)

3.2. Drivers of entrepreneurial intentions

Entrepreneurial intentions of university students were measured by asking respondents to indicate their agreement with six statements (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree): “I am ready to do anything to be an entrepreneur”, “My professional goal is to become an entrepreneur”, “I will make every effort to start and run my own business”, “I am determined to create a business in the future”, “I have very seriously thought of starting a business”, and “I have the strong intention to start a business someday” (Liñán & Chen, 2009). The level of entrepreneurial intentions was calculated as the mean of these items.

Gender differences remain pronounced, with male students reporting higher entrepreneurial intention scores than female students (3.70 vs. 3.01) (Figure 11). This gap may reflect gender differences in self-perceived entrepreneurial capability and risk-taking.

Students with entrepreneurial parents show clearly higher entrepreneurial intentions (3.85) (Figure 12). This supports the idea that family role models and socialization play a significant role in encouraging entrepreneurship.

Similarly, having entrepreneurs in one's network is associated with higher intention scores (3.46), suggesting that access to entrepreneurial role models and informal guidance fosters entrepreneurial intentions (Figure 12). Such exposure may enhance students' confidence, reduce perceived barriers to entrepreneurship, and provide more concrete insights into the entrepreneurial process.

Furthermore, entrepreneurial intentions increase with professional experience, particularly among students with 2–5 years (3.71) or more than 5 years (3.69) of experience (Figure 13). Work experience appears to strengthen confidence and opportunity recognition, likely by developing practical skills, improving familiarity with organizational contexts, and increasing awareness of potential market opportunities.

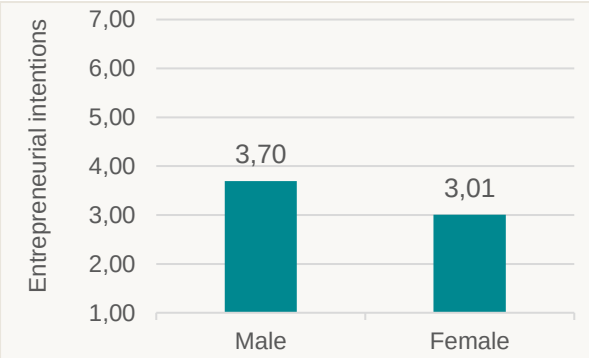


Figure 11. Students' entrepreneurial intentions by gender (n=1,459)

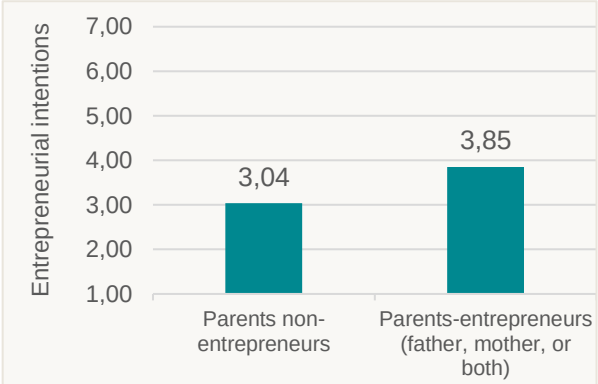


Figure 12. Entrepreneurial intentions and parents-entrepreneurs (n=1,480)

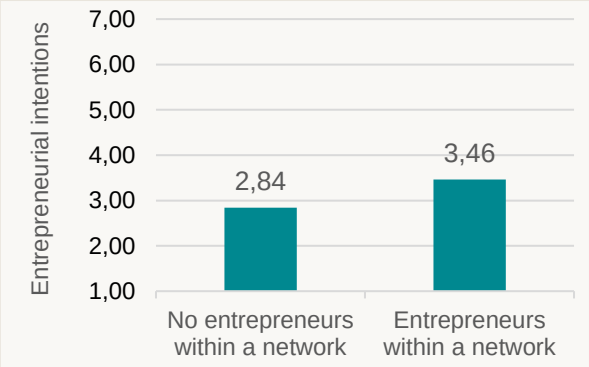


Figure 13. Entrepreneurial intentions and the presence of entrepreneurs within a network (beyond parents) (n=1,467)

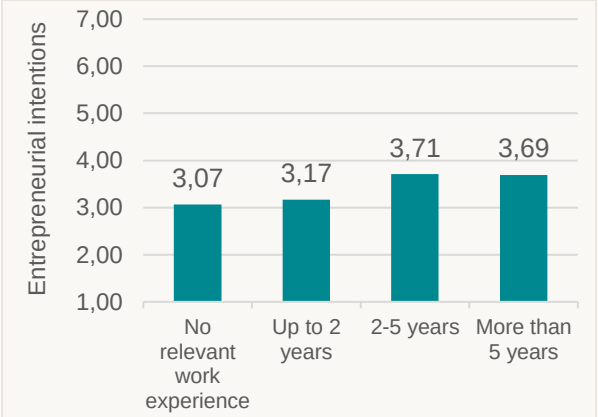


Figure 14. Entrepreneurial intentions and work experience (n=1,479)

Significant differences appear across fields of study (Figure 15). Students in business administration (3.95) and computer sciences (3.87) report the highest entrepreneurial intentions, followed by economics (3.33), while students in humanities (2.55), social sciences (2.55), and arts-related disciplines (2.47) exhibit low levels. This pattern suggests that disciplinary cultures and perceived alignment with market opportunities may influence entrepreneurial aspirations. For example, more practice-oriented fields may provide greater exposure to entrepreneurial thinking, applied problem-solving, and industry connections, which can reinforce the perceived feasibility of starting a business.

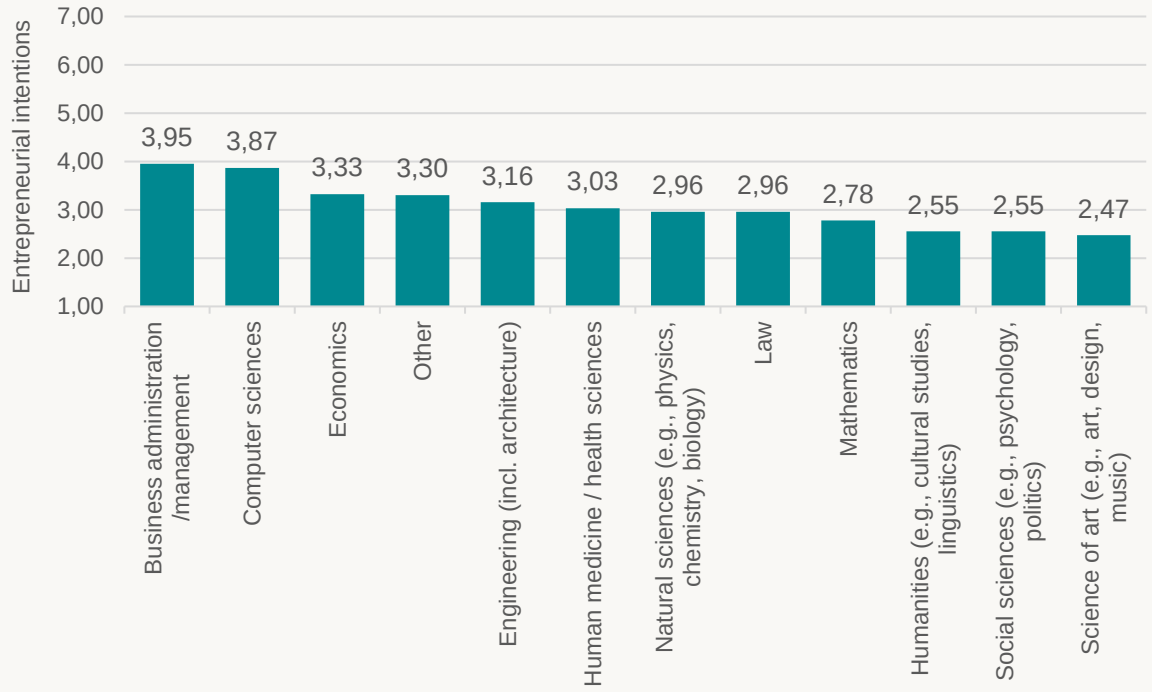


Figure 15. Entrepreneurial intentions across different study fields (n=1,479)

Finally, entrepreneurial intentions are strongly associated with formal exposure to entrepreneurship education (Figure 16). Students who selected their university for its entrepreneurial reputation (5.23) or who are enrolled in specific entrepreneurship programs (3.99) report higher levels of entrepreneurial intentions compared to those without such exposure. However, this relationship may also reflect reverse causality, as students with stronger pre-existing entrepreneurial intentions may be more likely to choose institutions or programs with a strong entrepreneurship focus. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of structured educational environments in shaping—while also being shaped by—students' entrepreneurial intentions.

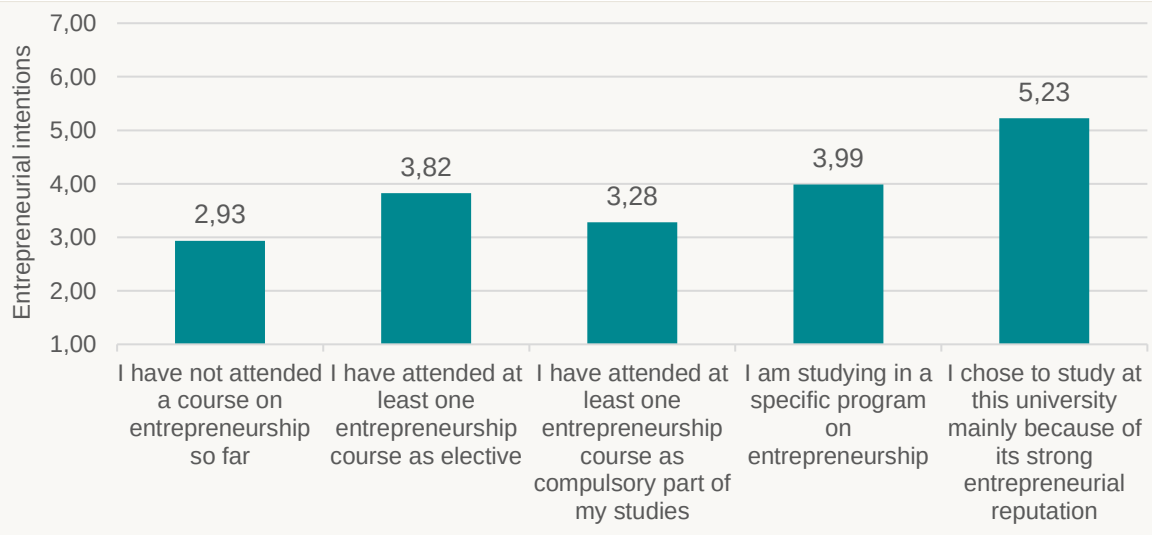


Figure 16. Entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurship education (n=1,422)

4. Nascent entrepreneurs

4.1. Characteristics of the intended business

Nascent entrepreneurs, who are in the process of creating their own business that has not generated regular sales yet, represent 8% of the French sample (136 students). This section provides an overview of their main characteristics in France.

Nearly half of nascent entrepreneurs (46.6%) intend to start a business during ongoing studies than postpone entrepreneurship until after graduation (Figure 17). This result reflects a growing perception of entrepreneurship as a parallel career path, rather than a post-study option.

Most nascent entrepreneurs plan to start their venture alone (65.7%), while 21.1% expect to have one co-founder and a smaller proportion anticipate two or more co-founders. This suggests a tendency toward individual entrepreneurship, possibly reflecting a preference for autonomy or limited access to co-founding partners.

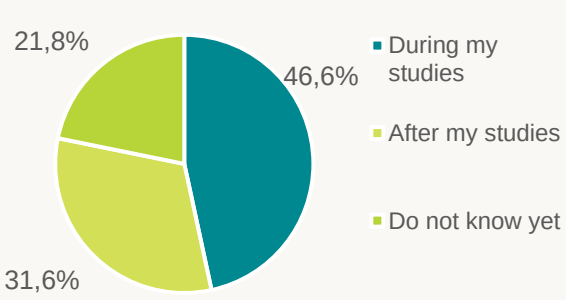


Figure 17. Planned timing of business founding (n=133)

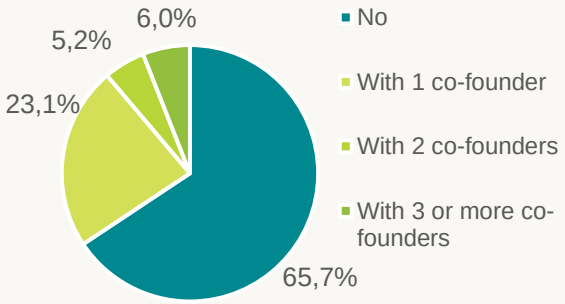


Figure 18. Number of co-founders in business creation (n=134)

Gender-based differences suggest that female nascent entrepreneurs are more frequently solo founders (77% vs. 55.7%), while male nascent entrepreneurs are more represented in team-based ventures (31.4% vs. 14.8% with one co-cofounder). This may reflect differences in network access or risk-sharing strategies.

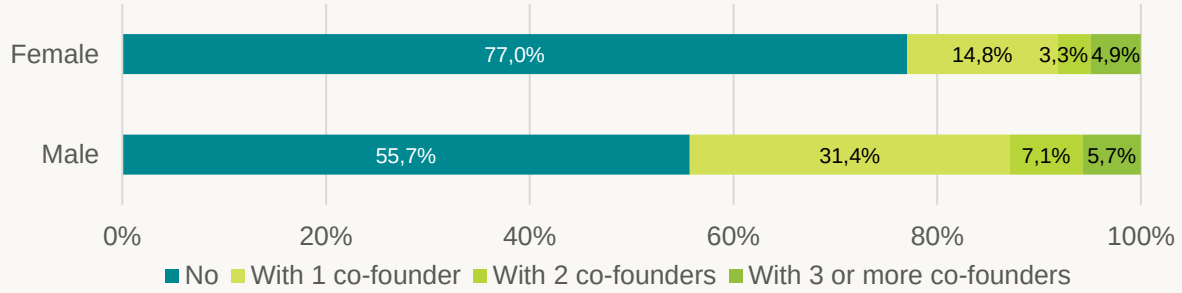


Figure 19. Number of co-founders and gender of nascent entrepreneurs

4.2. Institutional support and gestation activities

Institutional (structural) support for entrepreneurship was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree), based on Turker and Sonmez Selcuk (2009) (Figure 20). Overall, perceptions of the entrepreneurial environment are generally positive, particularly regarding ecosystem support and opportunity availability. However, respondents also highlight access to bank financing and regulatory constraints as obstacles, indicating a more mixed institutional climate.

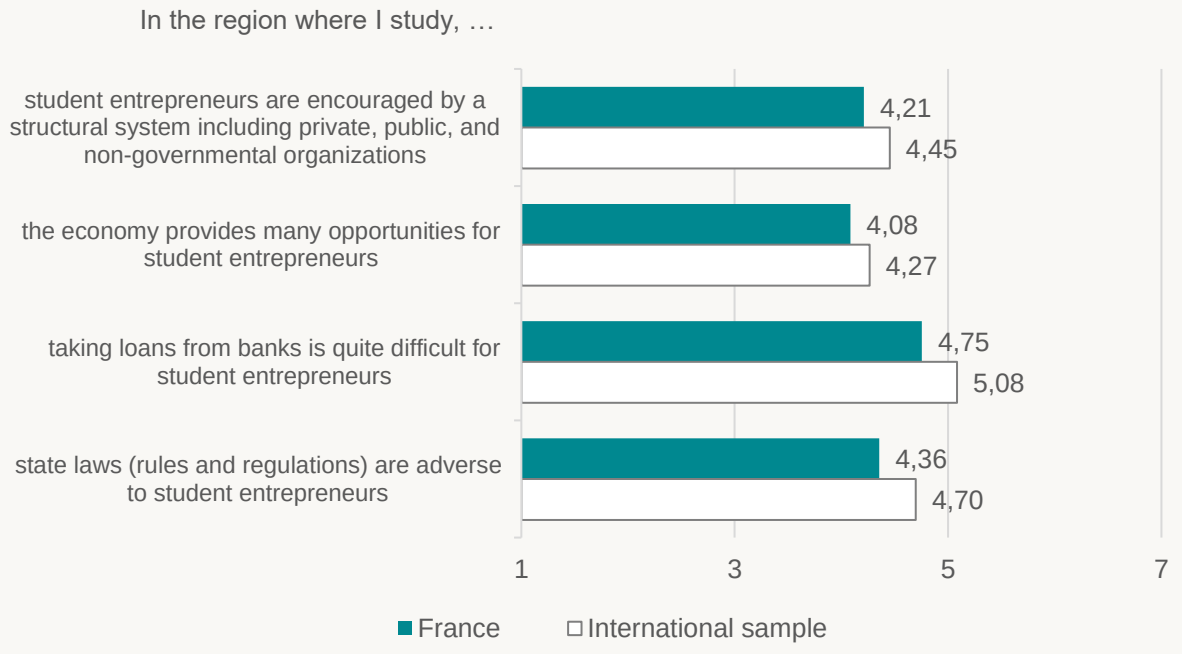
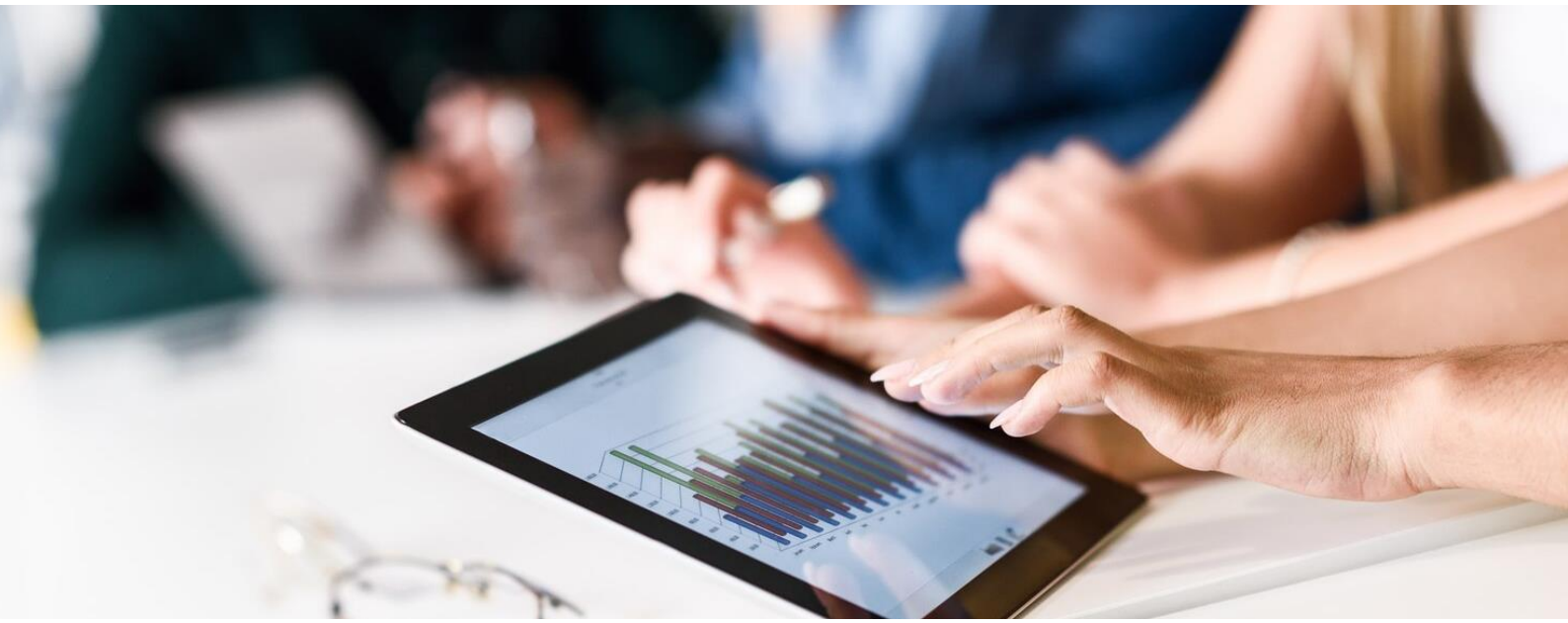


Figure 20. Perceived regional institutional environment for student entrepreneurship (n=118 in France and >25,700 in the international sample)
Note: The scale from 1 to 7 (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), means are presented.

In terms of concrete entrepreneurial behaviour, nascent entrepreneurs predominantly engage in early-stage activities such as collecting market information (66.4%), discussing business ideas (56.3%), and developing products or services (53.8%) (Figure 21). Activities associated with later stages—such as intellectual property protection (8.4%), external funding acquisition (14.3%), selling a product or service (26.1%), or formal business registration (28.6%)—remain less common, suggesting that most ventures are still in their formative phases. Moreover, French participants generally report higher levels of engagement in these activities compared to the international sample, indicating a relatively strong degree of entrepreneurial progression within the French context. This distribution reflects an early-stage entrepreneurial trajectory, in which ideation and validation activities precede formalization and market entry.

Figure 21. Entrepreneurial activities undertaken by the founding team (n=119 in France and 26,523 in the international sample)

5. Active entrepreneurs



5.1. Characteristics of the running business

Active entrepreneurs represent 3% of the French sample (51 students). They are defined as individuals who own and manage a business that has generated regular sales over the previous three months. Their main characteristics are presented below.

Student entrepreneurial ventures in the sample are largely recent, with most firms created in the last three years (2023–2025), indicating that entrepreneurial activity among respondents is new and emerging, rather than long-established (Figure 22). Additionally, ownership structures are predominantly characterized by majority ownership (73.5%) (Figure 23), suggesting that ventures tend to be founder-controlled.

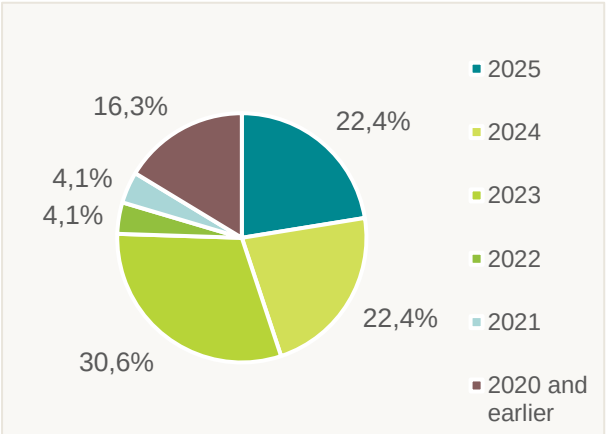


Figure 22. Year of business establishment (n=49)

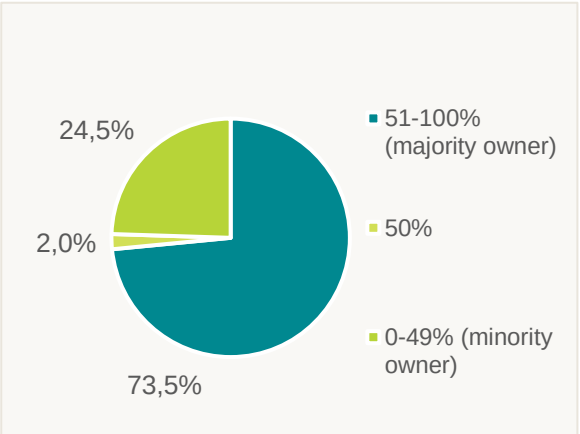


Figure 23. Ownership share in the business (n=49)

Figure 24 displays the extent to which participants' current business ideas differ from their initial ones. The distribution shows a skew toward stability, with 35.4% reporting that their idea changed very little. Results suggest that while the majority of student entrepreneurs maintained their original business idea with minimal changes, there is a notable secondary group (18.8%) that substantially revised their ideas, indicating that business pivoting occurred for roughly one in five participants, whereas most retained core consistency in their initial entrepreneurial vision.

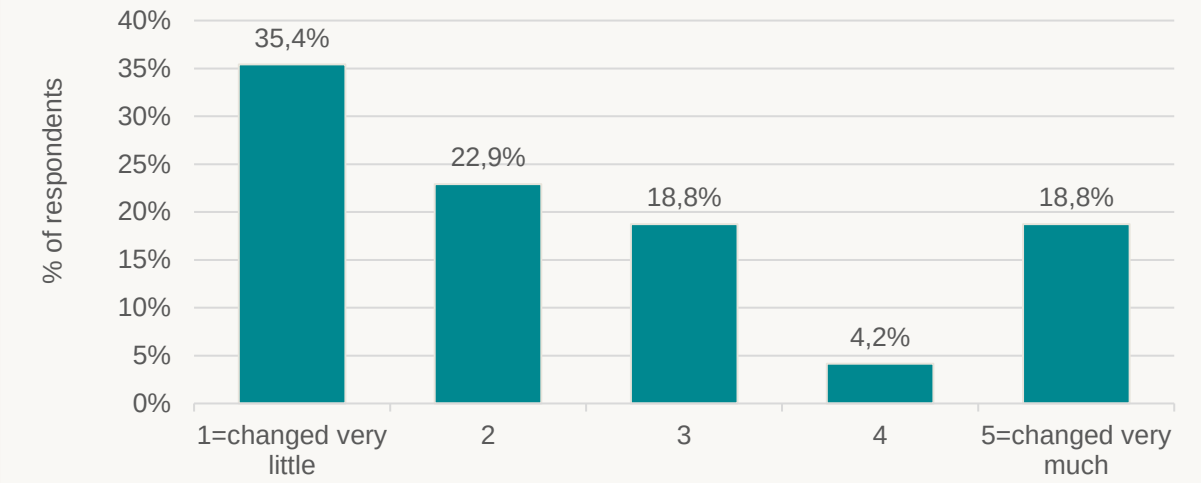


Figure 24. Degree of change in the initial business idea (n=48)

5.2. Business behavior and outcomes

The GUESSS 2025 edition includes questions on unethical pro-organizational behaviour. Based on the measure developed by Umphress et al. (2010), students were asked to rate their agreement on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) regarding their willingness to engage in unethical pro-organizational behaviour (Figure 25). Attitudes towards questionable business practices indicate a moderate level of tolerance, suggesting moral ambivalence rather than clear approval or rejection. This finding highlights the ethical tensions that entrepreneurs may face when balancing competitiveness and integrity. Notably, French participants report a slightly lower willingness to engage in such behavior compared to the international sample.

To capture the challenges faced by active entrepreneurs, fear of failure was measured by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they had been afraid of various issues over the past few months (1 = not at all afraid, 7 = very much afraid) (Cacciotti et al., 2020). As shown in Figure 26, opportunity costs, financial security, and idea potential emerge as the main concerns. Financial considerations appear slightly more important than concerns related to social approval or personal ability. Female entrepreneurs report higher levels of fear related to running out of money and difficulties in securing sufficient funding to develop their ventures.

Figure 25. Unethical behavior for business advantage
(n=48/49 in France and >11,380 in the international sample)
Note: The scale from 1 to 7 (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), means are presented.

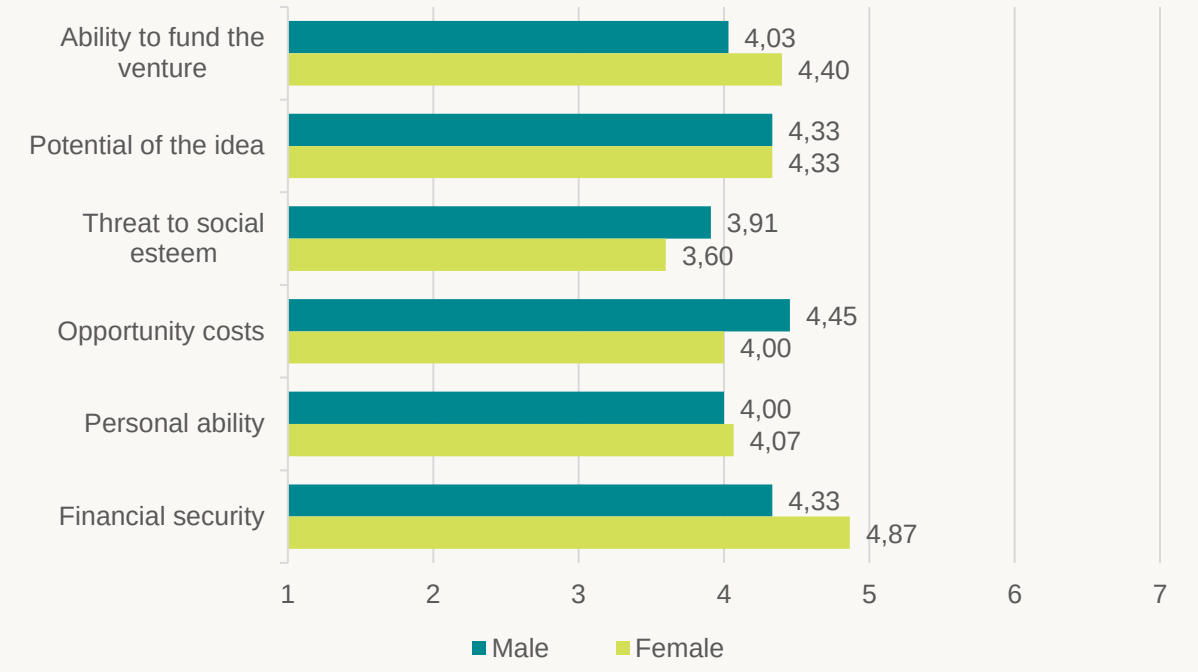


Figure 26. Entrepreneurial fear of failure and gender
(n=33 for male and n=15 for female respondents)
Note: The scale from 1 to 7 (1 = not at all afraid, 7 = very much afraid), means are presented.

Students were asked to rate the performance of their business compared to its competitors since its establishment across the dimensions of sales growth, market share growth, profit growth, job creation, and innovativeness (1 = much worse, 7 = much better) (Dess & Robinson, 1984; Eddleston et al., 2008). In addition, the social and environmental performance of student businesses was evaluated (Hooi et al., 2016). Importantly, respondents report higher levels of social and environmental performance (4.69) than of firm performance alone (3.91), indicating a strong awareness of responsibility and sustainability beyond purely financial success.

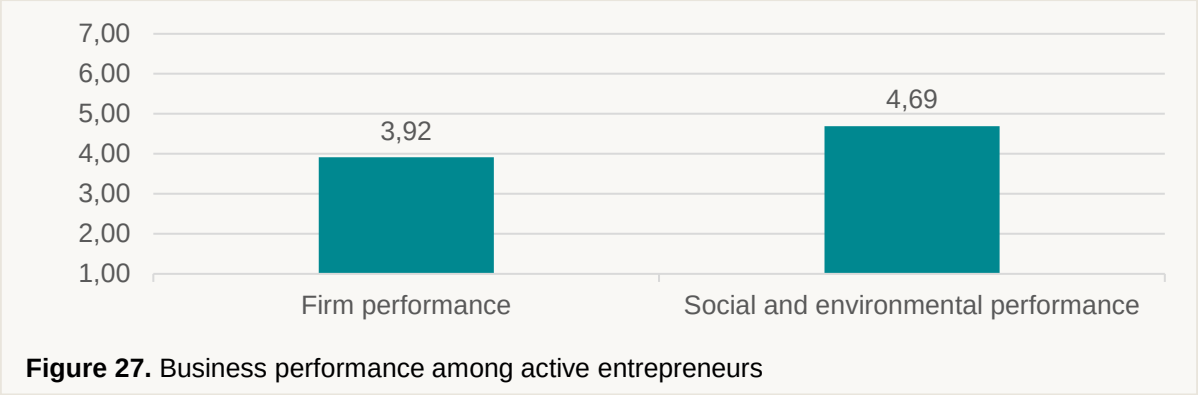


Figure 27. Business performance among active entrepreneurs

6. Potential successors

6.1. Characteristics of the family business

More than a quarter of the participating French students (26.4%; 452 students) indicated that their parents own and manage a business. This section outlines the main characteristics of these family businesses and the succession intentions of the French students.

Figure 28 presents the economic sectors in which the respondents' parents' businesses operate. Excluding the largest category "Other" (34.1%), the large proportion of family businesses belongs to the red economy sector, which includes manufacturing and construction activities (19.2%), followed by the rural economy (14.6%), mainly associated with agricultural activities. The orange economy, related to creative industries such as arts, fashion, and design, also represents a notable share of the sample (8%). The white and yellow economies, remain more moderately represented, while other sectors account for only a small proportion of respondents.

Overall, the findings suggest that respondents originate from a relatively diverse range of family business sectors, although traditional and non-specialized activities remain dominant within the sample. Interestingly, notable differences are observed between the sectors in which respondents' parents' businesses operate and the sectors in which students would like to build their professional careers (see Figure 8 in Section 2).

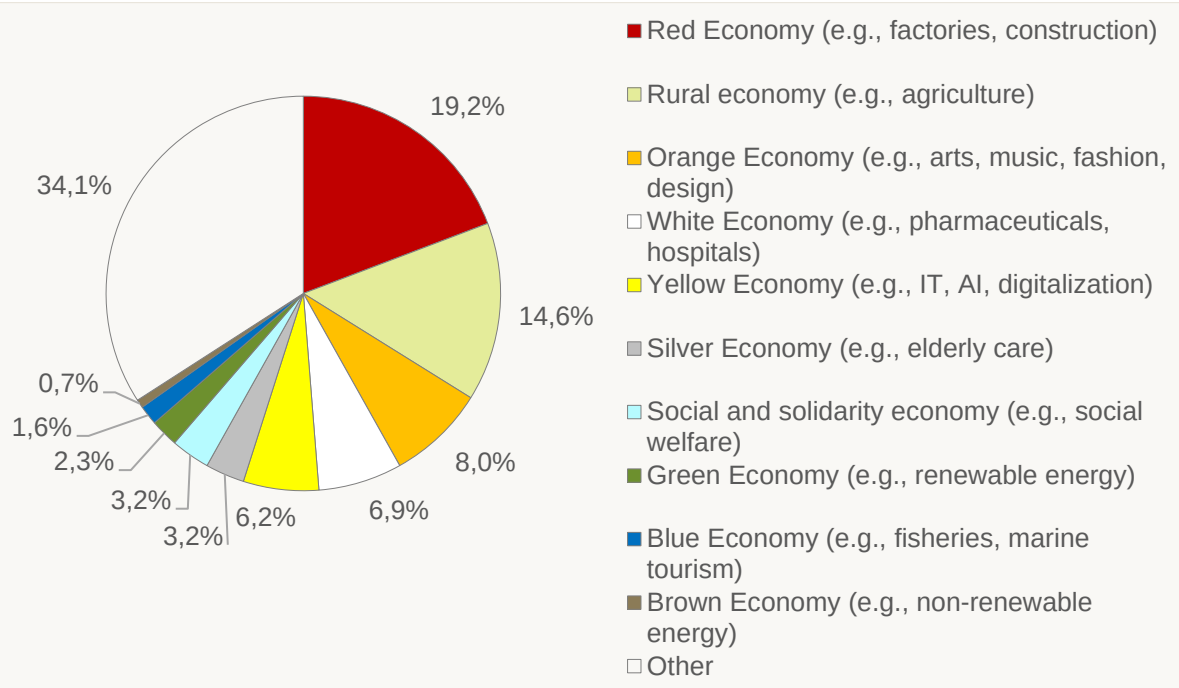


Figure 28. Economic sector of parents' business activity (n=437)

The data shows that the majority of respondents (57.2%) report no prior work experience in the family business, whereas 42.8% indicate having already worked in it (Figure 29). These findings suggest that, although a considerable proportion of students have been exposed to family business activities, most respondents remain relatively uninvolved in the operational management of the business.

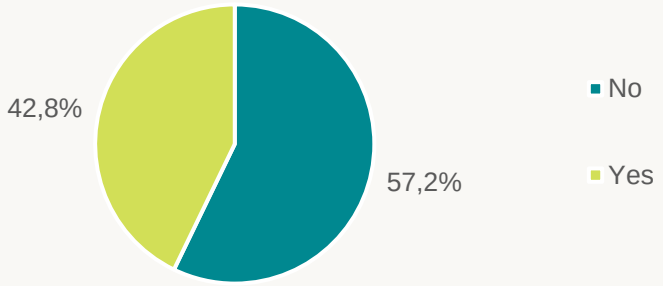


Figure 29. Work experience in the family business (n=390)

6.2. Family business involvement and succession planning

Figure 30 compares the perceived family willingness to transfer the business to the next generation between the French sample and the international sample. The French sample is characterized by a relatively high proportion of respondents perceiving a "very weak" succession intention (41.4%), compared to 24.3% in the international sample. In contrast, the international sample displays a more balanced distribution

across the different levels of succession willingness. The proportion of respondents perceiving a “very strong” willingness to transfer the business remains relatively close between the French sample (12.7%) and the international sample (10.2%). Overall, these findings suggest that succession intentions appear weaker and less strongly expressed within the French sample than in the broader international context.

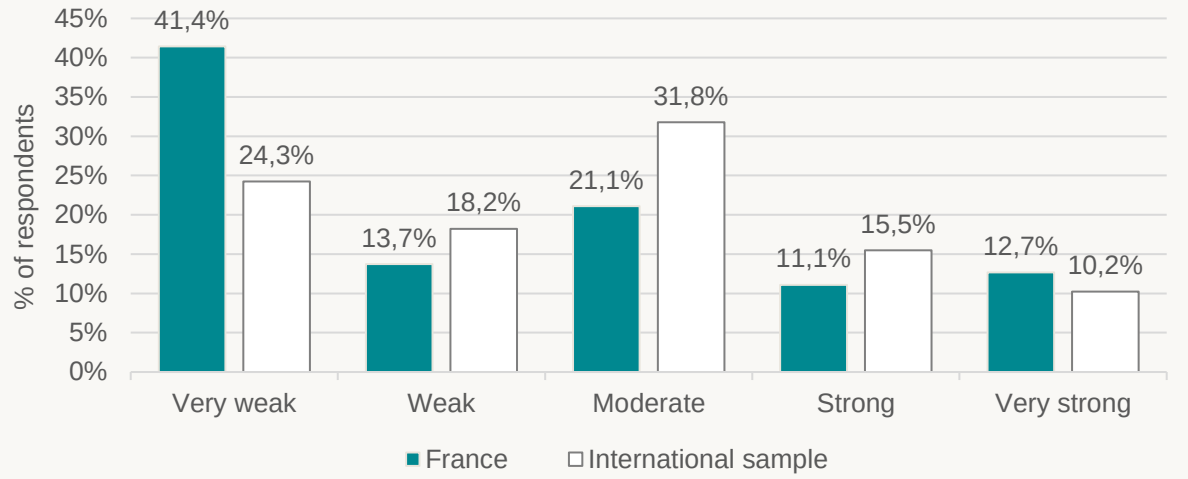


Figure 30. Family intention to pass the business on to the next generation (n=379 in France and 41,205 in the international sample)

Regarding the existence of a well-defined succession plan within the family business (Figure 31), a majority of respondents (65.1%) indicate that no formal succession plan exists, while only 12.1% confirm the presence of a clearly established succession strategy. Additionally, 22.8% of respondents remain uncertain regarding the existence of such a plan. These findings indicate that succession planning remains relatively underdeveloped among the family businesses represented in the sample, potentially increasing uncertainty regarding future intergenerational transfer processes.

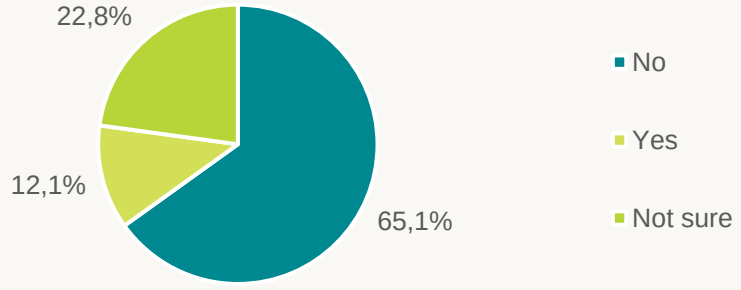


Figure 31. Presence of a well-defined succession plan (n=381)

Students’ succession intentions were measured with six items on a seven-point Likert scale, adapted from Liñán and Chen (2009). Observing succession intentions by gender (Figure 32) shows that male students report a higher average score (2.56) than female students (2.00). Although succession intention levels remain relatively moderate overall, the findings indicate that male respondents appear more inclined to consider taking over the family business than female respondents.

Additionally, students with prior work experience in the family business report a substantially higher succession intention score (2.83) than those without such experience (1.75) (Figure 33). This finding suggests that direct exposure to family business activities may positively influence students' willingness to engage in future succession processes.

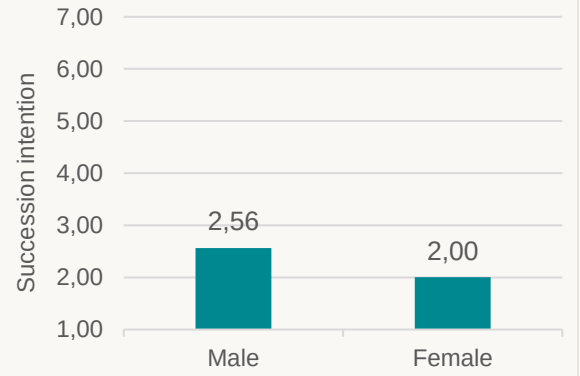


Figure 32. Students' succession intention by gender (n=357)

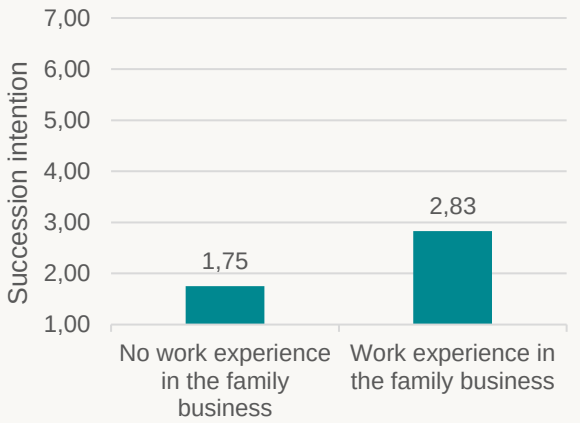


Figure 33. Succession intention by work experience in the family business (n=357)

Figure 34 illustrates succession intentions according to students' perceptions of the rewards their parents obtain from the family business. The findings reveal a gradual increase in succession intentions as perceptions become more positive. Respondents reporting very negative and somewhat negative perceptions display the lowest succession intention scores (1.69 and 1.64 respectively). By contrast, students with somewhat positive and very positive perceptions report considerably higher scores, reaching 2.33 and 2.62, respectively. These findings suggest that favorable perceptions of the benefits associated with family business involvement may strengthen the attractiveness of succession among the younger generation.

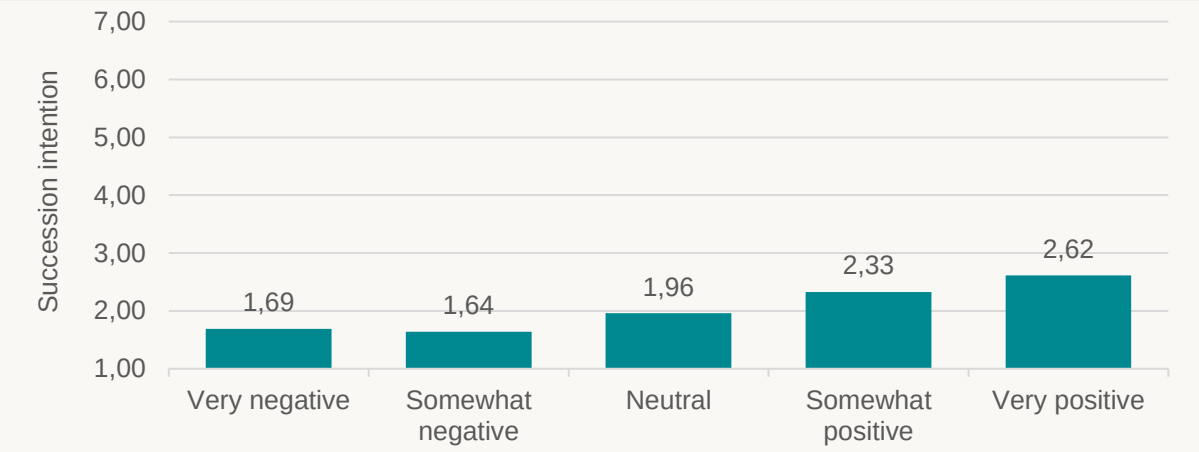


Figure 34. Succession intention by perceptions of parents' rewards from the family business (n=357)

Finally, results demonstrate a strong relationship between perceived family willingness to transfer the business and students' succession intentions (Figure 35). Respondents perceiving a very weak family's willingness to transfer the business report the lowest succession intention score (1.30). Succession intentions progressively increase across the categories "weak" (1.96), "moderate" (2.51), and "strong" (3.70), reaching its highest level among respondents perceiving a "very strong" family's willingness to transfer the business (3.83). These findings underline the important role of family's succession intention, planning, and intergenerational transmission culture in fostering students' succession intentions.

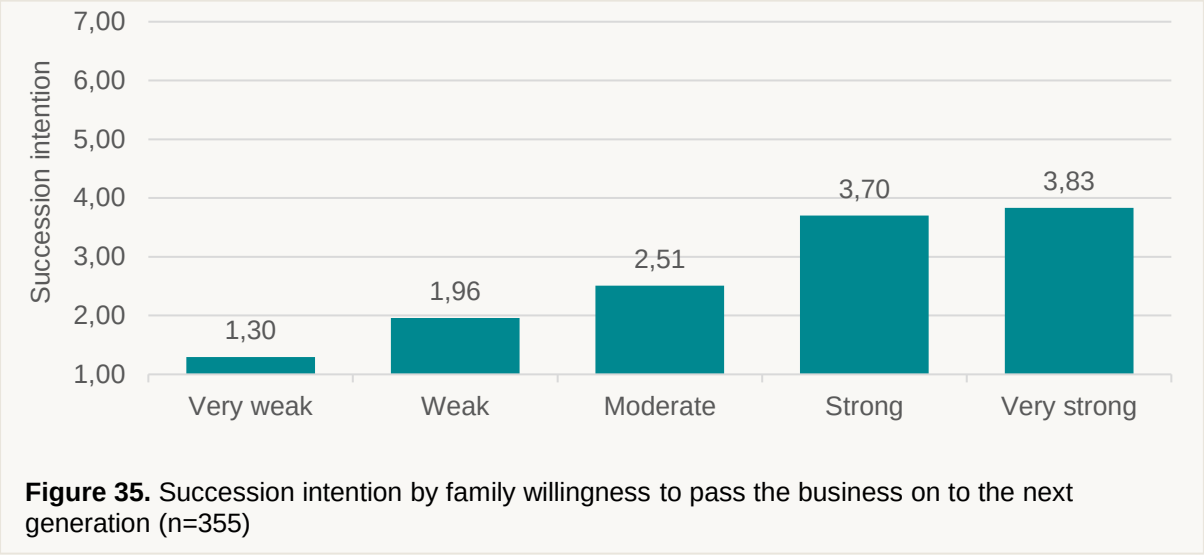


Figure 35. Succession intention by family willingness to pass the business on to the next generation (n=355)

7. Implications and summary

This national report presented the main findings of the GUESSS 2025 survey in France, comparing them with the international sample across several key characteristics. The results reveal that student entrepreneurship in France emerges from the interaction of education, social background, professional experience, and institutional context.

Career choice intentions and entrepreneurial intentions:
The transition from a preference for corporate employment to entrepreneurial founding over five years suggests that experience is a key driver of entrepreneurial confidence. Institutions should therefore enhance exposure to entrepreneurial role models and networks to reduce perceived risks and improve feasibility. In France, the reliance on mandatory coursework suggests that while awareness is high, entrepreneurship education should better reflect disciplinary differences to ensure greater inclusivity.

Nascent entrepreneurs:
The high rate of students wanting to start businesses during their studies suggests a need for more adapted academic schedules and increased access to university incubators. Support structures should be tailored to help entrepreneurs bridge the gap from ideation to formal market entry. Addressing regulatory constraints and access to financing remains essential for moving these nascent projects into the active phase.

Active entrepreneurs:
Since student entrepreneurs prioritize social and environmental impact, institutional support should include resources for responsible innovation and sustainability-led business models. Financial institutions should address the student's fear of failure by providing more accessible early-stage financing options.

Potential successors:
There is a need for succession planning support in family businesses to reduce uncertainty and encourage next-generation takeover. Encouraging early involvement and work experience within the family business can strengthen succession intentions. Ultimately, fostering a stronger culture of intergenerational succession and enhancing communication about the rewards of family business ownership will be essential for long-term sustainability of these enterprises.

Taken together, these results underscore the need for integrated educational strategies and entrepreneurship policies that address not only skill development, but also inclusion, financing, and responsible innovation. We believe GUESSS is highly important for studying and advancing student entrepreneurship at both global and national levels. Its findings help assess the current situation and guide efforts to create a more supportive environment for students' entrepreneurial intentions and activities.

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