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Demand Side
Report



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Executive Summary

The Empower Her initiative – Demand Side Mapping explores the employment and income generation experiences of women aged 18–35 across four tracks: non-tech wage employment, tech wage employment, freelancing, and entrepreneurship. Using 16 focus group discussions (FGDs) with diverse participants from Cairo and other governorates, the study adopted a qualitative approach to capture women’s perspectives, challenges, and aspirations.

Findings revealed that job seekers in both tech and non-tech fields faced systemic barriers such as employers demanding prior experience, limited opportunities outside Cairo, cultural constraints, and gender-based pay inequities. While employed women often relied on informal networks and referrals to secure jobs, they continued to encounter workplace discrimination and long working hours. Training programs were valued for improving employability skills, but participants stressed the need for practical internships, exposure to workplace dynamics, and career coaching.

For freelancers, LinkedIn and referrals were the most effective channels for securing work, while platforms like UpWork and Freelancer were underutilised due to high commissions and fraud concerns. Freelancers highlighted the importance of negotiation skills, client management, and continuous self-learning, but struggled with inconsistent income, lack of protections, and challenges in managing foreign currency payments.

Entrepreneurs were motivated by personal experiences, community problem-solving, and academic projects, yet faced barriers such as limited business education, lack of management expertise, and restricted access to finance. Mentorship was seen as critical, with founders calling for tailored, ongoing guidance in scaling, partnerships, and personal wellbeing. Family support played a vital role in enabling women to balance entrepreneurship with personal responsibilities.

Across all tracks, women prioritised career growth over job stability, underscoring their ambition and resilience despite systemic challenges. The study highlights the urgent need for integrated support systems that combine training, mentorship, finance, and business services, alongside fair employment practices, structured internships, and inclusive ecosystems. These interventions are essential to empower women to participate fully and equitably in Egypt’s evolving labor market.

Introduction

Phase Two of the Empower Her initiative sought to deepen understanding of the demand side of Egypt's labor market by exploring the perspectives, needs, and challenges of women aged 18–35. Building on the supply side mapping conducted earlier, this phase aimed to capture the lived experiences of women navigating different employment and income generation tracks, including non-tech wage employment, tech wage employment, freelancing, and entrepreneurship.

The demand side exploration was designed to provide a qualitative picture of how women perceive opportunities, barriers, and support systems in their career journeys. By focusing on attitudes, motivations, and personal experiences rather than numerical data, the study offers insights into the systemic and cultural factors shaping women's participation in the workforce. It also highlights the aspirations of young women who are eager to grow professionally, despite facing structural inequities and limited access to tailored support.

Through collaboration with multiple stakeholders and implementing partners, the initiative engaged diverse participants from Cairo and other governorates, ensuring representation across different backgrounds and circumstances. The findings serve as a foundation for identifying actionable interventions that can strengthen women's access to meaningful employment, enhance their entrepreneurial potential, and foster inclusive ecosystems that support their long-term career growth.

Methodology

The demand side mapping under the Empower Her initiative adopted a qualitative approach to explore the perspectives of women aged 18–35 on employment and income generation. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were chosen as the primary tool, as they allow for rich, in-depth insights, group interaction, and efficient data collection. The FGDs were structured around four tracks—non-tech wage employment, tech wage employment, freelancing, and entrepreneurship—with separate frameworks for job seekers and those already employed to ensure relevance and depth.

Each framework addressed specific themes such as motivations, job search experiences, access to opportunities, challenges, skills development, workplace environment, support systems, and future aspirations. For freelancing, discussions focused on the journey, market opportunities, barriers, skills, and growth, while entrepreneurship FGDs explored prerequisites, barriers, work-life balance, mentorship, finance, challenges, and support systems. The guides served as flexible banks of questions, tailored to each group's context, with participant numbers ranging from 6–10 per session, conducted either onsite or online.

Stakeholders and implementing partners played a key role in participant recruitment, with 11 entities involved, including Athar Accelerator, AUC, EFE, El-Harefa, Nile University, AMAN, Cilantro, EdVentures, iCareer, Robusta, and Simplex. In total, 16 FGDs were conducted, though the freelancing (not working) group could not be held due to lack of participant willingness. The exercise aimed not at statistical representation but at capturing diverse perspectives, needs, and motivations to provide an indicative picture of women's experiences in Egypt's labor market.



Data Collection and Analysis

Non-tech Wage Employment (Job Seekers)

Two focus group discussions were held with a total of 15 participants provided by iCareer and the American University in Cairo through its Rabeha training-for-employment program. The participants, all university graduates aged between 21 and 33, were mostly based in Greater Cairo, with four residing in Al-Minya, Al-Fayoum, and Al-Beheira. Among them, three were married with children; these individuals had prior work experience and were now seeking to re-enter the job market. Overall, the groups represented young graduates with diverse personal circumstances and geographic backgrounds, united by their interest in employment opportunities.

Job Search Experience

Participants reported using a variety of online platforms in their job search, including Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram groups, LinkedIn, Forasna, and Wuzzuf. A strong preference emerged for hybrid work arrangements, as commuting was seen as time-consuming, yet fully remote work was not favored due to the value of face-to-face interaction, especially for those starting their careers. Most had applied to many jobs before securing interviews, with some receiving no responses at all. Interview experiences often revealed issues such as long working hours, shifting schedules, and discrepancies between job advertisements and actual roles.

All participants sought jobs aligned with their fields of study, though some expressed interest in expanding into technology-related fields. Married participants with children faced additional challenges, as they required roles accommodating their circumstances, but many employers were unwilling to adjust despite their qualifications. Overall, the discussions highlighted both the persistence of young graduates in their job search and the structural barriers they encounter in securing suitable employment.

Access to Job Opportunities

Participants noted clear differences in job opportunities depending on location: those living in Greater Cairo reported many available positions, while those in Al-Minya, Al-Fayoum, and Al-Beheira faced very limited prospects, which was particularly challenging for married individuals with children. When discussing gender-related barriers, most participants felt that women faced added competition compared to men, not only due to employer preferences but also because of their own perceptions that men had greater stamina, resilience, and ability to handle long working hours or workplace pressures. Although these jobs did not require physical strength, participants often believed men were better suited to endure such demands. When asked which sectors were more welcoming to women, most had no clear answers, with only a few mentioning telecommunications, retail, and sales.

Challenges and Barriers to Employment

Participants identified several challenges in their job search journey, including the lack of prior work experience and the frequent requirement by employers for experience even in entry-level positions. Those outside Greater Cairo and individuals who were married with children faced particularly limited opportunities, while many also encountered mismatches between advertised roles and actual job requirements revealed during interviews.

Discrimination was reported on the basis of gender, age, family status, and appearance, with some women facing bias despite job postings not specifying gender preferences. Job offers were often rejected due to low salaries and long working hours, and although most participants attempted to negotiate pay, employers typically did not respond, leaving them feeling undervalued and constrained in their employment prospects.

"I am the only one who will accept your circumstances, it is obvious that you cannot find a job", said an employer to 33-year-old married with children participant from Cairo

Skills Development and Training

Participants were divided into two groups regarding skills development training: some had never attended such programs, while others had participated in the Rabeha Training for Employment (TFE) program, implemented by the American University in Cairo's School of Global Affairs and Public Policy with support from UN Women, UNIDO, the National Council for Women, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Government of Canada. This program focused on enhancing soft skills for employability among women graduates and job market returnees. Those who attended reported improvements in CV writing, LinkedIn profile development, and confidence in interviews. When asked about additional training needs, participants highlighted learning a second language (especially English), specialised training in their fields, and gaining practical experience through internships, employment fairs, and networking events. However, many noted that available internships often involved only administrative tasks, offering little real work experience.

Workplace Environment

Participants emphasised that proximity to their residence and fair compensation relative to working hours were key considerations when evaluating job opportunities, particularly for those starting their careers. Married participants with children placed greater importance on workplace benefits such as medical and social insurance, and all participants valued clarity and flexibility from employers. They suggested that the job interview process could be improved by fostering diversity, minimising bias, ensuring fairness through multiple interviewers, and providing clearer, more accurate job advertisements that align with the actual role, as many had experienced discrepancies between postings and interviews.

Support Systems and Services

Participants expressed that the most valuable support for easing their job search would be access to real internships that provide genuine work experience, as employers often demand prior experience but rarely offer opportunities to gain it. They emphasised that training programs alone were insufficient without practical exposure. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of career coaches and mentors who could guide them in understanding their career paths, identifying suitable roles, and recognising areas for personal and professional development.

Future Aspirations

Participants expressed strong commitment to building distinguished careers in their respective fields, prioritising career growth over job stability, even among those who were married with children. This reflects a clear focus on advancement and professional development rather than simply securing long-term positions. A general observation made during the discussions was that several participants struggled with communication, often misunderstanding questions and responding inaccurately, which could present challenges in job interviews where clarity and comprehension are critical.



Non-Tech Wage Employment (Employed)

Four focus group discussions were conducted with 30 participants provided by iCareer, AMAN for Microfinance, Cilantro, and Simplex. The participants were mostly university graduates aged between 21 and 38, with only two still completing their undergraduate studies. Of the group, 23 lived in Cairo, while the rest were spread across Al-Minia, Assiut, Al-Qalioubia, and Al-Sharkia. All participants were single except for one married individual with a child. They represented a wide range of occupations, including human resources, customer service, business development, project management, social media, telesales, content development, procurement, training, monitoring and evaluation, microfinance fieldwork, and roles in the food and beverage sector such as barista, shift supervisor, and assistant branch manager.

Path to Employment

Most participants reported securing their jobs primarily through informal networks and referrals, which proved to be the most effective channel across diverse sectors and locations. A smaller number transitioned from internships into full-time roles, while others found opportunities via LinkedIn and Facebook. Several participants had begun working during their undergraduate studies, with many already on their second or third job, noting that each role helped qualify them for subsequent positions. In terms of job search methods, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Wuzzuf were commonly used, but referrals and personal connections were consistently highlighted as the most successful. The average time from discovering a job opportunity to employment was relatively short, ranging from 15 days to a month. Regarding support during their job search, participants fell into three groups: those who relied on informal help from family and friends, those who had no support and depended solely on personal effort, and a minority who attended workshops or job readiness programs, with some securing internships or jobs through these initiatives.

"This is my 4th or 5th job, and I landed all of them through referrals."

29-year-old employee, Cairo

Access to Job Opportunities

Cairo participants noted that while there are many job opportunities available, the challenge lies in their suitability rather than quantity, though they agreed it has become easier for women to find work compared to the past. In contrast, participants outside Cairo reported fewer opportunities, often concentrated in limited sectors such as teaching, and generally offering very low salaries. Across locations, sectors like human resources, sales, telesales, graphic design, and online marketing were identified as more welcoming to female employment.

Challenges and Barriers to Employment

Participants across six governorates reported facing similar challenges in their job search, highlighting systemic issues rather than location-specific ones. Common difficulties included employers requiring prior experience even for entry-level positions, limited opportunities close to home, long working hours, and lower salaries offered to women compared to men for the same roles. Fresh graduates also struggled with limited market awareness and uncertainty about where to begin. Discrimination was another recurring issue, with women often being steered into roles like sales based on appearance rather than skills.

"There is a perception that women will accept lower salaries in comparison to men because we do not have responsibilities. Men applying for the same job are offered higher salaries."

25-year-old employee from Cairo

Cultural and family expectations added further barriers, particularly for participants outside Cairo.

"I used to work in a nursery and got a job offer at a microfinance company, someone had to sit with my dad to convince him of the job and he agreed. To reach where I am today, I went through a lot and had to deal with a lot of resistance from my father, but I was persistent."

27-year-old employee, Al-Minya

While Cairo residents faced only minor restrictions, those in Upper Egypt encountered significant opposition from families, who often limited acceptable jobs to teaching or caregiving roles with shorter hours, and resisted opportunities requiring relocation. Some families rejected jobs in tourism, banking, or customer-facing roles, and discouraged women from pursuing managerial positions. Participants also declined job offers due to low pay, long commutes, excessive working hours, or

changes in job terms after interviews. Others turned down offers despite attractive salaries because they valued growth opportunities in their current companies. Overall, the challenges reflected a mix of structural, cultural, and gender-based barriers to employment.

Skills Development and Training

Around 40% of participants had attended skills development or employment readiness programs, such as training in presentation, communication, and soft skills, as well as career coaching. These were delivered by initiatives like the MINT program (powered by EGBank), MCIT's ICDL program, Ma3an Association, and EFE Egypt. The remaining 60% had not received formal training, though a few had participated in internships that helped prepare them for the job market. Those who attended training agreed it was beneficial, helping them with CV writing, interview preparation, and introducing them to workplace expectations. Some even secured internships or jobs through program-linked employment services. Participants expressed a need for additional training in business acumen, problem-solving, analytical skills, English language, and practical, hands-on experiences to better prepare them for real work environments. They also highlighted the importance of exposure to workplace dynamics, HR policies, labour law, and access to employment fairs, networking events, and career coaching as crucial for their professional growth.

"No one taught us about HR policies or the labour law; this is something we were never exposed to before getting employed. We never learnt about workplace dynamics or how to deal with my colleagues and manager professionally."

25-year-old employee from Cairo

Workplace Environment

Most participants expressed high satisfaction with their current roles, citing meaningful work, professional growth, and inclusive, empowering workplaces that encouraged personal development. Several described their companies as supportive of fresh graduates, offering opportunities for advancement and flexible work arrangements. Challenges varied across groups, with some noting long working hours without overtime pay, limited support from middle management, and difficulties tied to job nature. Despite these issues, the majority agreed that promotions and salary increases were merit-based, and that senior management actively supported female advancement into leadership roles. Employers were also seen as accommodating, providing flexibility for female employees and working students, and offering personal development programs to foster growth.

Future Aspirations

Almost all participants expressed a strong preference for career growth opportunities over job stability even if that meant putting in more time and effort at work.



Tech Wage Employment (Job Seekers)

Two focus group discussions were conducted with 14 participants provided by Athar Accelerator and Education for Employment (EFE). The participants, aged between 20 and 34, were all university graduates, with six specialising in computer science and information technology. Geographically, eight lived in Greater Cairo, four in Al-Minya, one in Assiut, and one in Alexandria. Among them, one participant was married with children, had prior work experience, and was seeking to re-enter the job market.

Motivations and Job Preferences

Participants' choice to work in the technology field stemmed from different motivations. Those with computer science or IT backgrounds wanted to pursue careers aligned with their studies, while others shifted to technology because they were either uninterested in their original fields or found limited opportunities there. Some viewed technology as a way to complement their existing fields and enhance employability. A few participants discovered their interest in technology after trying jobs in their original fields and realising they were better suited to areas like data analysis, testing, or UI/UX design. When discussing target employers, most participants preferred starting with local companies to gain experience before applying to multinational firms, and many expressed willingness to begin with internships to build practical skills and exposure.

"I tried many things but found that I like the testing space, it fits my personality and character."

24-year-old job seeker, Assiut

Job Search Experience

"I went for an internship in data enabling, I was supposed to be paid but wasn't. It was supposed to be a learning experience, but they kept pressuring me, highlighting my mistakes and leading me to feel not enough. I was not being taught anything."

27-year-old job seeker, Cairo

The majority of participants relied on LinkedIn for their job search, with others also using WhatsApp and Facebook groups, Wuzzuf, and employment fairs, particularly those organised by EFE. LinkedIn was consistently cited as the most effective platform for finding relevant opportunities, while job fairs were valued for expanding awareness of companies and sectors. Participants were mainly searching for roles in data engineering, data analysis, testing, UI/UX design, graphic design, and web development. About half had gone through job interviews or internship interviews, with experiences varying widely: some employers were considerate of their status as fresh graduates, while others demanded prior experience even for entry-level positions. A few participants also reported facing discrimination, including bias against those from Upper Egypt. Overall, internships were often treated with the same rigorous interview processes as full-time jobs, further highlighting the challenges faced by job seekers.

Access to Job Opportunities

Participants viewed the technology sector as broadly open to women, with opportunities depending more on competence than gender. Fields such as UI/UX design, web development, graphic design, testing, and data analysis were highlighted as areas where women could excel due to skills like design sense, accuracy, patience, and attention to detail.

Cybersecurity and networking were seen as less suitable because of their 24/7 availability demands, which could pose challenges for women, especially those with family responsibilities. Remote work opportunities were considered to be growing, particularly in web development and testing, though

these often-required prior experience to ensure security standards. While many participants welcomed remote or hybrid models, nearly half noted facing additional barriers compared to men, citing cultural perceptions that men are more naturally inclined toward technology, better at group learning, and more committed to long-term employment. These biases, combined with societal expectations, were seen as contributing to employers' preference for hiring men over women in technology roles.

Challenges and Barriers to Employment

"Most companies require previous experience even from fresh graduates."

23-year-old job seeker, Cairo

Participants unanimously agreed that the biggest challenge in securing employment was the constant requirement for prior experience, even for entry-level roles, creating a catch-22 where employers demand experience but provide few opportunities to gain it. Some even noted that internships required experience yet often offered little real learning or guidance. The situation was particularly difficult for those in Upper Egypt, where technology-related job opportunities were scarce and concentrated mainly in Cairo. Social and cultural barriers were not significant for Cairo participants, but those in Upper Egypt faced family discouragement against relocating or working outside their hometowns. One married participant with children highlighted the added difficulty of being unable to move to Cairo, making it necessary to find opportunities locally. Overall, the lack of practical experience opportunities and regional disparities were the main barriers to employment.

Skills Development and Training

The majority of participants had attended technology-focused training programs or earned certifications in areas such as UI/UX design, graphic design, web development, data analysis, and front-end development, regardless of their university major. These programs were widely seen as beneficial, helping participants gain a clearer understanding of the technology field, build teamwork and communication skills, and identify career paths. However, participants from Upper Egypt highlighted significant challenges, including limited access to training opportunities, high program fees, and the concentration of most courses in Cairo. They also noted that training alone was insufficient without practical work experience, which they viewed as essential for building employability. Many emphasised the need for internships or real-world projects to apply their skills, gain hands-on experience, and meet employer expectations.

"At this point I do not want more training, I want to gain practical work experience and to learn to deal with people on the job, through an internship."

24-year-old job seeker, Cairo

Workplace Environment

The majority of the participants were fresh graduates and when asked about the important factors when considering employment opportunities, fair pay and equal pay were consistently identified as important factors, proximity to their place of residence was also mentioned as an important factor, a good work environment with opportunities for growth and skills development were also highly valued.



Support Systems and Services

Fresh graduates expressed a strong need for career guidance services and personalised coaching or mentoring to help them navigate entry into the workforce. They highlighted that such support should address both professional development goals and personal challenges. A major gap identified was the lack of awareness about the importance of internships during university, which left many unprepared for practical experience. Participants emphasised the necessity of integrating internships or job shadowing into university programs to provide real-world exposure, improve students' understanding of the job market, and create a talent pool that employers could recruit from more effectively.

"Nobody told us during university that we need to partake in an internship, we did not have this awareness."

27-year-old job seeker, Cairo

Future Aspirations

There was consensus that career growth was preferred over job stability especially at the beginning of their careers.

Tech Wage Employment (Employed)

Three focus group discussions were conducted with 17 participants from Athar Accelerator, iCareer, and Robusta Technology Group. The participants, aged 20 to 39, were all university graduates with backgrounds in computer science, IT, engineering, and other fields. Most lived in Cairo, while a smaller group came from Al-Minya and Assiut. One focus group consisted mainly of fresh graduates aged 20–30. The other two groups included more senior employees with over seven years of experience.

Path to Employment

"Finding work in Al-Minya was very challenging. I completed my ITI scholarship and got a job as an Information Security Engineer in Cairo. I travel back home once every week or 2 weeks."

22-year-old employee from Al-Minya

Participants described varied entry points into their jobs, including referrals, headhunting, LinkedIn, and Wuzzuf, with referrals being especially common among senior employees. Referrals from peers, friends, and mentors were seen as the most effective channel, while LinkedIn was also valued for job opportunities. Most participants preferred hybrid work for its balance of onsite collaboration and remote flexibility, while those in Upper Egypt often worked remotely due to limited local opportunities.

Career coaching, mentoring, and specialised programs such as women-in-tech initiatives and the ITI diploma played a crucial role in supporting job seekers, helping them refine CVs, LinkedIn profiles, and interview skills. Senior participants noted that such support was not available when they first entered the workforce.

Challenges and Barriers to Employment

Participants faced multiple barriers in their job search, including limited onsite opportunities in the technology sector in Upper Egypt and the requirement of prior experience even for internships or remote roles. Working mothers struggled to find suitable work modes that aligned with their responsibilities, while others found adjusting to Cairo's environment difficult. Social and cultural resistance from families posed additional challenges for participants in Upper Egypt, particularly when pursuing opportunities outside their home cities. Job offers were often rejected due to low salaries, unclear working hours, or inconvenient locations.

"I live in Al-Minya, that sums up all my challenges."

26-year-old part-time employee, Al-Minya

Onsite employees highlighted long commutes and extended hours as major issues, while remote workers struggled with setting boundaries, internet connectivity, and maintaining effective communication with their teams.

Skills Development and Training

Most participants had engaged in technology-focused training programs or earned certifications, regardless of their university major, with many completing the ITI 9-month diploma or taking online courses on platforms like Udemy and Coursera. Others joined international initiatives such as the Samsung Innovation Campus and the US Embassy's Tech Women program. These programs were widely seen as beneficial, offering both technical knowledge and opportunities to collaborate and communicate in group settings. For participants from Upper Egypt, the ITI diploma was particularly critical in shaping their careers. While certain certifications were acknowledged as useful for future promotions, there was consensus that practical work experience carried more weight than additional training in making candidates competitive.

Workplace Environment

Many participants expressed satisfaction with their current roles, highlighting meaningful work, professional growth, and inclusive, empowering workplaces that encouraged personal development. Flexible work arrangements and supportive team cultures were widely appreciated, though some noted gaps in benefits such as family medical insurance. Challenges remained for those in Upper Egypt, where limited opportunities made finding suitable jobs close to home difficult, and for working mothers balancing remote roles with family responsibilities. Long commutes and extended hours were common struggles for single employees, while mothers faced ongoing challenges in managing both career and household duties.

Support Systems and Services

Senior participants expressed a need for more inhouse structured mentoring programmes to support them in their career growth. Other participants cited the need for mentors and coaches to guide them in their career growth journey.

Future Aspirations

Senior participants with over seven years of experience aspired to move into leadership and management roles that provide stability, predictability, and a stronger sense of purpose. In contrast, younger participants who were newer to the job market focused on learning new skills, gaining experience, and advancing their careers while balancing family and personal responsibilities. Overall, senior employees prioritised stability and impact, while younger ones sought clear pathways for growth and promotion.



Working Freelancers

Two focus group discussions were held with 13 freelancers provided by Athar Accelerator and El-Harefa, aged between 20 and 40, mostly university graduates with a few still studying and some married with children. Participants came from various governorates across Egypt, though only two lived in Cairo, and most worked in fields unrelated to their university studies. Freelance work included graphic design, copywriting, content writing, UI/UX design, data entry, and voice-over, with about 40% engaged in graphic design. The initial aim was to explore freelancers in the online gig economy through platforms like UpWork, Fiverr, and Freelancer, but it became clear that most female freelancers did not use these platforms, a trend that was further examined in later discussions.

Journey to Freelancing

Most participants entered freelancing unintentionally, often through friends, university colleagues, or online searches, with many starting during their undergraduate studies to earn income or make use of free time. Limited full-time opportunities in their home cities also pushed them toward freelancing, which was generally seen as a side job or supplementary income rather than a long-term career path. While income was inconsistent, freelancing provided a backup source of earnings and, for some, a stepping stone to entrepreneurship. The experience significantly enhanced participants' communication, negotiation, and self-confidence, helping them set boundaries with clients and uncover hidden strengths in resilience and creativity. Those combining freelancing with full-time jobs found that workplace interactions and learning from peers enriched their freelance careers.

"Freelancing changed my perception of myself, I learnt how to communicate with people with confidence, how to negotiate, I was conned once, so I learnt it the hard way. I also learnt how to understand clients and their expectations."

23-year-old freelancer, Al-Minya

Market Opportunities and Freelance Job Search Experience

Participants found freelance opportunities mainly through LinkedIn and referrals, with some using ElHarefa and fewer engaging with platforms like Khamsat, Mostakel, UpWork, Freelancer, or Facebook, often avoiding them due to high commissions, competition, and fraud concerns. Proactive outreach and networking were key strategies, alongside selectively choosing clients. Many highlighted the need to strengthen negotiation skills, with some benefiting from training programs and conferences. Success in freelancing was linked to qualities such as commitment to deadlines, self-confidence, assertiveness, professional communication, continuous self-learning, time management, flexibility, and managing client expectations, all of which developed over time as participants gained more experience.

Challenges and Barriers to Securing Freelance Jobs

"Finding client takes a lot of time, it is difficult for me, because there is a lot of supply of talent, need recommendations."

25-year-old freelancer, El-Sheikh

recurring issues.

Participants highlighted several challenges in securing freelance jobs, with the most common being the difficulty of finding and vetting suitable clients and bridging the gap between theoretical training and real-world experience. Managing client expectations, project scope, and the lack of opportunities for junior roles in fields like data analysis were

Some faced gender and regional biases, including lower pay offers for women and rejection from Egyptian clients due to being from Upper Egypt, while others struggled with setting boundaries in client interactions. Payment challenges also emerged, ranging from partial payments or fraud to difficulties in receiving foreign currency, often due to limited awareness of payment systems. Balancing freelancing with personal responsibilities, full-time jobs, or studies was another ongoing challenge, though participants valued the flexibility freelancing offered in managing their time.

Skills Development and Training

Most participants especially those who made a career shift took training courses to build the required skill set. Courses included UI/UX design, marketing (including digital marketing), graphic design, content writing and copy writing, voice over and data analysis. Access to training programmes varied among participants, with most participants having access to technical skills training in their cities of residence with the exception of one participant who lives in Al-Ismailia. Participants however mentioned that access to specific freelancing training programmes was a bit more challenging.

Growing as a Freelancer

Participants emphasised the need for stronger peer-to-peer communities where freelancers can exchange experiences and support one another, including structured mentoring groups for newcomers. They also highlighted the importance of guidance from seasoned freelancers to help them grow in their careers. Training in soft skills such as negotiation, client communication, proposal writing, and pricing strategies was seen as critical. Overall, building networks and enhancing practical skills were identified as key to advancing as freelancers.

Gaps in the Freelance Market

Freelancers reported a significant need for better guidance on how to effectively use freelance platforms to secure clients without falling victim to scams. The focus group revealed a clear gap in the market for resources that go beyond the basic "how-to" guides provided by the platforms themselves.

- ✘ **Vetting Clients and Projects:** Participants expressed a strong need for training on how to identify red flags in job postings and client profiles. Many have experienced situations where they completed work only to have the client disappear without payment. Guidance on identifying legitimate clients versus fraudulent ones is a critical unmet need that as mentioned previously dissuades participants from using freelancing platforms.
- ✘ **Avoiding Scams and Fraud:** The freelancers want practical advice on common scamming tactics, such as requests to work outside the platform, demands for "free" sample work, or payment through unsecured channels. The discussion highlighted the desire for a safer environment and the tools to protect themselves from financial loss.
- ✘ **Payment Protection and Dispute Resolution:** There is a strong need for more transparent and reliable platforms that prioritise freelancer protection. Participants felt that many platforms' dispute resolution processes are biased towards the client, making it difficult to recover payment for completed work. They require guidance on how to best navigate these systems and legally protect themselves through strong contracts.



- ✘ **Effective Profile and Portfolio Building:** Freelancers recognised the importance of building strong profiles and portfolios but expressed a need for advanced strategies such as keyword optimisation, tailoring to niches, and showcasing work effectively to attract quality clients. A major concern was the lack of traditional employment benefits like health insurance, retirement plans, and paid leave, which often pushed individuals toward full or part-time jobs. Managing foreign currency payments was another challenge, with many lacking guidance on best practices for international transactions and avoiding high fees. Overall, participants highlighted the need for better support in profile building, financial management, and access to benefits.

Entrepreneurship

Three focus group discussions were conducted with 22 participants representing 19 businesses, provided by Athar Accelerator, EdVentures, and Nile University. The participants, aged 18 to 44, were all university graduates, with 13 representing businesses in Greater Cairo and 9 from governorates including Al-Dakahlia, Al-Fayoum, Beni Swaif, Al-Minia, and Assiut. Their ventures spanned diverse sectors such as EdTech, HealthTech, sustainable clothing and building materials, AgriTech, environmental services, beauty and personal care, online programming, home and furniture, and recycling. Notably, four founders were married with children and had previously worked as full-time employees before starting their businesses.

Pre-requisites for Becoming an Entrepreneur

Participants were motivated to become entrepreneurs by a mix of personal passion, community problem-solving, and inspiration from academic or personal experiences. Some business ideas stemmed from university graduation projects encouraged by professors, while others were driven by family challenges, such as addressing learning disabilities or bridging the gap between engineering education and workplace needs. Several founders were influenced by external sources like Shark Tank, schoolteachers, or even peers, and many attended entrepreneurship training or incubation programs that provided foundations in finance, marketing, recruitment, and business modelling. While these programs offered valuable learning and networking, participants felt they would be more effective if tailored to specific industries, with ongoing mentorship and better access to finance beyond pitch days. Support from spouses and mentors also played a crucial role in building the courage to start their ventures.

"My nephew has a learning disability, and we were late in discovering it, and this affected his development, so I decided to do something about it and launched my own business."

24-year-old entrepreneur, mobile application for learning disabilities, Al-Dakahlia

Barriers to Starting a Business

Founders faced significant challenges due to their lack of formal business education, hands-on training, and management experience, despite having strong technical expertise in their ventures.

Many struggled with choosing, managing, and leading teams, as well as overcoming customer resistance to new ideas and traditional mindsets. A common difficulty was distinguishing whether their venture was a hobby or a serious business. Family support, however, played a crucial role, with parents, spouses, and siblings offering encouragement, even if initially hesitant or unsure, eventually believing in and backing the entrepreneurs' efforts.

"My background was only in education, so I did not know how to start my business, it was a big challenge. I started from scratch and now I am responsible for a company and a team."

34-year-old entrepreneur, EdTech, Cairo

Work-life Balance and Personal Well Being

"I started my business I was in my final year at university, and it was challenging to manage both the business and my studies. I learnt how to balance my time according to my own needs."

24-year-old entrepreneur, EdTech, Cairo

Participants described different approaches to balancing work and personal life depending on their circumstances. Single founders struggled initially with time management and burnout but gradually learned to pace themselves. University students faced the challenge of managing both studies and their businesses, with varying success. Founders with families shared inspiring stories of dividing responsibilities, relying on

spousal or extended family support, and involving siblings to ease the load. Across all groups, family encouragement and psychological support were seen as critical, with success linked to prioritising tasks and knowing when to dedicate time to work or personal responsibilities.

Access to Mentorship and Support

All founders emphasised the importance of mentorship in their entrepreneurial journey, noting that while some had access to mentors during incubation or acceleration programs, many lacked ongoing guidance afterward. They expressed a strong need for mentors who could support them through scaling and growth, offering not just technical or business advice but also personal understanding and encouragement. Specific areas of desired mentorship included investment, finance, marketing, and partnerships, with recognition that different stages of business require different expertise. Founders also highlighted the value of mentors who could help them manage stress, maintain personal wellbeing, and provide psychological support alongside professional guidance.

"I view mentoring as critical to business growth; I need a mentor to support me during the scaling and growth stages of the business."

32-year-old entrepreneur, products from recycled tires, Cairo

Access to Finance

Most participants relied on personal savings and family contributions to launch their businesses, with some receiving pre-seed funding. Awareness of funding opportunities specifically targeting female founders was generally low. The main financial challenges they faced were securing resources to sustain and grow their ventures, including managing cash flow, expanding teams, and accessing working capital for daily operations. Founders also expressed a strong need for growth capital to enter new markets, invest in equipment, and strengthen human resources.

Challenges along the Entrepreneurial Journey

Founders reported ongoing challenges in their entrepreneurial journey, particularly in finding and retaining skilled talent, which has been worsened by economic conditions and the migration of talent abroad. Retention strategies like ESOPs were mentioned as solutions, but difficulties in customer acquisition, scalability, and growth remain. The current economic situation in Egypt negatively impacts businesses through shrinking sales, rising costs, and talent flight, though some founders saw opportunities by offering local substitutes for imports or expanding exports. Overall, economic pressures and talent retention were the most pressing barriers to growth.

Needs and Support Systems

Participants emphasised the need for integrated support systems that combine training, funding, mentoring, and business services in one place to help entrepreneurs grow sustainably. They expressed a preference for learning how to generate income rather than focusing solely on fundraising, highlighting the importance of practical mentoring.



Founders also stressed the value of support in building strategic partnerships, accessing networks, finance, and scaling their businesses, as well as employment platforms tailored to startups. While women-focused hubs were seen as useful in the early stages for community building, participants cautioned that long-term success comes from working alongside male founders to strengthen resilience and competitiveness.

Findings

The focus group discussions with females aged 18–35 explored employment opportunities across non-tech wage jobs, tech wage jobs, freelancing, and entrepreneurship, revealing both shared and unique challenges. While participants showed strong ambition for career growth, they faced systemic barriers such as limited access to practical work experience, geographic and cultural constraints, gender discrimination, and pay inequities. Employed women often relied on informal networks, job seekers struggled with the demand for prior experience, freelancers valued flexibility but faced unstable income and lack of protections, and entrepreneurs were motivated by innovation but hindered by limited finance, management expertise, and tailored mentorship. Overall, the findings highlight the need for practical training, structured internships, mentorship, fair employment practices, and integrated support systems to enable women's equitable participation in Egypt's labour market.

The following sections will zoom in on each employment/income generation track.

Non-tech Wage Employment Findings

The job search experience for non-tech wage employment varied between job seekers and those already employed. Job seekers were using the typical job search channels with LinkedIn and Facebook being the most commonly used channels. As for employed women, although they used the same channels as job seekers, yet they cited informal networks, word of mouth and connections as the most effective channels to land a job.

Both groups agreed that job opportunities in Cairo are more available than outside Cairo, and both groups agreed once again that despite the availability of job opportunities in Cairo, it was not a quantitative issue but a qualitative one related to conditions of employment, i.e., salary, type of job, working hours, proximity to place of residence.

Job seekers complained that even though they apply to multiple job opportunities and go to multiple interviews, the percentage of those who respond whether positively or negatively is minimal. Job seekers mention the need to know how well or bad they performed in a job interview to be able to develop themselves.

Female job seekers or those employed in non-tech roles highlighted challenges such as limited job opportunities outside Greater Cairo, the persistent requirement by employers for prior experience even for entry-level jobs, long working hours, mismatch between the content of job advertisements and interviews, in addition to gender-based pay inequities. Married participants especially those with children, faced additional constraints in finding suitable jobs.

Those who attended workshops, events and training for employment programmes described their experiences as positive and beneficial. Main skills acquired included, CV writing and interviewing skills. Some females also mentioned that they developed a broad understanding of the market and increased their self confidence level through the practical aspect of the programmes. However, more needs to be offered in these programmes such as assistance to acquire a second language (English in specific),

access to meaningful internship opportunities, links to employers and employment opportunities, access to employment fairs and networking events where they learn more about the job market and get the chance to network with employers. They also mentioned access to career coaches was something they sought. Other topics to incorporate in employment readiness programmes included an introduction to the Labour Law, introduction to company HR policies, business acumen, workplace dynamics, learning how to communicate with peers and superiors.

Most women whether seeking employment or already employed valued proximity to their place of residence, meaningful salaries that at least covered their basic expenses, flexibility and understanding in addition to opportunity for growth. It was noticeable that almost all female participants value career growth over job stability.

Tech Wage Employment Findings

Interest to work in the technology field, was driven by both education and career-switch motivations, with many pursuing skills acquisition and training programmes to improve their employability. There was less disparity between job seekers and employed women when it came to job search experience (in comparison to non-tech wage employment), as most females used LinkedIn, Facebooks groups, WhatsApp groups and some used employment fairs for their job search activities. Most found LinkedIn to be the most effective. For the more senior participants in the focus groups, word of mouth and referrals was their most effective job search channel.

It was agreed by both groups that most technology wage employment jobs were much more available in Greater Cairo in comparison to other governorates. It was interesting to note that most of those employed in technology who lived in Upper Egypt had remote jobs (mainly in software development) with two exceptions, the first initially lived in Al-Minia and had to move to Assiut to secure a job in a company that opened up shop in Silicon Waha, New Assiut (The Smart Village of Assiut), the second worked 5 days a week in Cairo and came back home for the weekend. Finding onsite technology jobs outside the Greater Cairo area is a major challenge facing females looking to secure employment in this sector.

Job seekers in tech employment viewed certain jobs as more suitable for women such as UI/UX design, web development, graphic design, testing and data analysis as they required skills that females are clever at. However, testing and data analysis were 2 fields that were challenging for fresh graduates seeking remote jobs, as most employers out of security measures would not expose their data to a junior person working remotely, so this becomes a stumbling block for all those women looking to start a career in data analysis and/or testing living outside Greater Cairo.

It was also interesting to note the disparity between female job seekers and those employed when it came to being compared to men working in technology. The job seekers' view was that men are cleverer, they are used to working in groups at an early age, and they have a knack for technology - in brief they viewed their male counterparts as more suited for technology jobs. Whereas on the other hand, those who were already employed in the technology sector did not have this perspective, to the contrary they were of the opinion that females can excel in any field they set their mind to.

Female job seekers or those employed in tech roles highlighted challenges such as scarce onsite job opportunities outside Greater Cairo, the persistent requirement by employers for prior experience even for entry-level jobs. It went as far as requiring experience for internships. Married participants especially those with children, faced additional constraints in finding suitable jobs.



Skills development and attending technology focused training programmes and workshops were viewed as essential and beneficial by both job seekers and employed women, even by those who majored in information technology. Further training however was not seen as an asset to being employable or for promotion, rather it was the practical on the job experience that women attained. It was interesting to see consensus regarding this point either from those employed or those seeking work. Once again, meaningful work-related internships was a requirement by job seekers.

Most women, whether seeking employment or already employed, valued proximity to their place of residence, meaningful salaries that at least covered their basic expenses, flexibility and understanding in addition to opportunity for growth.

Across both job seekers and employees, career growth was prioritised over stability, with structured mentoring and practical experience cited as critical needs.

Working Freelancers' Findings

Most female freelancers entered the gig economy unintentionally, often as a supplement to undergraduate university studies or part/full time jobs, or to compensate for scarce opportunities in their hometowns. For the majority, freelancing was not viewed as a long-term career path, but as a side job alongside their full/part time job whether they were currently employed or seeking employment, this also applied to most of the participants who were married with children. This is not to say that participants would pause freelancing if they secured a full-time job, but they would pursue both simultaneously if their personal circumstances allow it. It is interesting to note that most participants viewed freelancing as a supplementary source of income to their full-time job and a backup source of income when they are in between full-time jobs. Freelancing also provided flexibility, confidence, skills growth and self-discovery in areas unknown to the female freelancers.

Female freelancers relied heavily on LinkedIn and referrals rather than global freelance platforms, citing strong competition, low fees, distrust, scams and payment difficulties. Proactivity and direct client outreach on LinkedIn were cited as one of the major client attraction strategies used by participants, this in addition to word of mouth and referrals. It was interesting to note that a fair number of the participants mentioned that they would choose their clients.

Female freelancers cited the need for a number of personal qualities, traits and skills to work in this space such as commitment to deadlines, self-confidence and assertiveness, communicating professionally, continuous self-learning, time management, managing client expectations, flexibility, setting boundaries especially with male clients.

The number one challenge that most female freelancers struggled with was the initial phase of finding and vetting clients. Another common challenge was managing client expectations and project scope. Some of the challenges faced by female freelancers were gender and ethnicity related, having said that it was not a challenge faced by the majority of female freelancers. Several female freelancers faced challenges in their fees and payments. One set was related to gender, However, a number of participants mentioned that gender led to unconscious and conscious bias and lower offers. For participants working with Egyptian clients, payment gateways were not a challenge, as most clients used banks transfers, cash wallets or Instapay to transfer fees. For participants working with clients abroad, experiences in receiving payments varied from participants facing no issues in receiving foreign currency payments and others facing challenges.

Managing personal life and work was a constant balancing act for almost all female freelancers, whether single or married. Many of the single participants were either balancing a full-time job with freelancing or undergraduate studies with freelancing.

Most female freelancers especially those who made a career shift took training courses to build the required skill set. Courses included UI/UX design, marketing (including digital marketing), graphic design, content writing and copy writing, voice over and data analysis. Access to training programmes varied among participants, with most participants having access to technical skills training in their cities of residence with the exception of one participant who lives in Al-Ismailia. Female freelancers however mentioned that access to specific freelancing training programmes was a bit more challenging.

Female freelancers expressed a need for stronger, peer to peer decentralised communities where freelancers can share their experiences and support each other. Coaching and mentoring by more seasoned freelancers were also seen as a need to grow as a freelancer. They also expressed a strong need for training or coaching on soft skills related to negotiation and client communication, developing winning proposals, pricing strategies and scoping vs. pricing.

Freelancers reported a significant need for better guidance on how to effectively use freelance platforms to secure clients without falling victim to scams. Needs included learning how to vet clients and projects, avoiding scams and fraud, payment protection and dispute resolution, and effective profile and portfolio building. The lack of access to traditional benefits like medical insurance, retirement plans were also points of concern. Female freelancers also highlighted the need for guidance on how to set up and manage foreign currency payments.

Entrepreneurship

Female entrepreneurs were driven by passion for solving community problems through business innovation, inspiration from their university graduation projects and personal/family challenges in sectors such as EdTech, HealthTech, AgriTech, recycling, and sustainable products.

Female entrepreneurs who attended entrepreneurship related training programmes before they started their ventures, programmes expressed appreciation for these programmes stating they learnt business management foundations in finance, recruitment, marketing, developing and refining business models. Some were able to access networks and fundraising through these programmes. Programmes would have been more beneficial if they had been tailored to the needs of the participants. Access to finance beyond the typical pitch day was a requirement by all founders.

Lack of business education, formal hands-on business training and business management experience were seen as major challenges faced by founders when they launched their business. Most founders had experience in the technical aspect of their ventures but not in business management. Lack of experience in choosing, managing and leading teams was also seen as a major challenge. Family support and encouragement was one thing that almost all participants agreed to having, whether parents, spouses or even siblings.

Work life balance was an issue that most founders grappled with and handled differently, but there was consensus that support in that area was a must from their family, friends and surrounding community. Having a mentor to support the founders in their entrepreneurial journey was stressed as highly important by all founders. Most founders mentioned that they currently have mentors in different fields, with access either on demand or according to an agreed-on frequency of



communication. Mentoring was a need all throughout their entrepreneurial journey with changing needs at different stages.

Several participants emphasised the need for mentors who would be able to support founders in their personal wellbeing, ability to deal with stress and provide psychological support. One founder said, “I want a mentor who is supportive, encouraging, someone who sees and understand me.”

Almost all founders shared that they relied on personal savings with some receiving family contributions to launch their businesses. The challenges that currently face founders in sustaining and growing the business financially were mostly related to having the needed resources to grow the business whether growing the team in order to develop more business, or cashflow issues to expand their business. Founders described ongoing challenges in finding and retaining skilled talent, especially with the current economic conditions and the flight of talent abroad for better work opportunities. Founders mentioned that talent flight was a huge challenge in retention.

There was a strong call for integrated support systems that combine training, funding, mentoring, business support services and all the services that entrepreneurs would need in one place. Founders called for programmes that build their capacities in growing the business not by fundraising but by learning how to generate income. Others emphasised their need for support in developing strategic partnerships, access to networks that can develop the business, access to finance, personal support and scaling.

When asked whether having women-focused entrepreneurial hubs, coworking spaces or accelerators would be of added value, the founders agreed that at an early stage this would be helpful to build a supportive community but down the road it was seen as an unhealthy practice because it might develop a sense of entitlement among female founders, added to that, female founders will benefit more from existing side by side with male founders as this will build muscle.

Action-oriented Recommendations

The following section will list a set of action-oriented recommendations for each group of employment format (non-tech and tech will be combined into one group) bearing in mind that some maybe common among the different employment formats. The objective of these recommendations is to inform programme design, stakeholder engagement and policy advocacy with a clear path towards improving women’s access to dignified inclusive employment. It is worth noting that many of these recommendations do not just apply to female job seekers but will also apply to their male counterparts.

Non-tech and Tech Wage Employment

The following recommendations are to be considered by those entities designing training for employment programmes, career centres in universities and employers.

1. **Bridge the experience gap**
 - ✘ Encourage university students to start enrolling in internship programmes early on and not just as a requirement fulfilment in their senior year.
 - ✘ Launch university-employer partnered internship programmes: Encourage all universities to develop partnerships with relevant employers to launch internship programmes for their students starting from the first year in university to offer them real work experiences where both students and employers benefit from the experience

- ✘ Develop partnerships between university career centres and entities working in the training for employment space to offer employment readiness programmes for university students, fresh graduates and even returnees
- 2. **Enhance career readiness**
 - ✘ Expand soft skills training to include interview comprehension and communication, salary negotiation strategies, confidence building and self-advocacy, networking skills
 - ✘ Include business acumen and workplace dynamics topics: training should address topics related to business acumen, communication skills in the workplace with peers and superiors, business ethics, an introduction to the Labour Law and human resources policies
 - ✘ Integrate or provide access to second language acquisition (especially English)
- 3. **Offer career coaching and mentoring**
 - ✘ Match job seekers with career coaches: This can be done through multiple channels, either through career centres in the university, or through employment readiness programmes.
 - ✘ Match employees with mentors in their field: Employers would introduce mentoring programmes for their employees to ensure employees' needs are addressed
- 4. **Address geographic disparities**
 - ✘ Support remote work infrastructure and job matching platforms in underserved governorates. Despite this being a policy recommendation but employment support organisations at the governorate level need to reach out to employers and to partner to bring more jobs to other governorates.
 - ✘ Governorate based employment support organisations should conduct a mapping exercise to look for technology employers in the region (such as those in Silicon Waha in New Assiut) and approach other Cairo based technology players to set up shop in Upper Egypt
- 5. **Increase employment fairs and sector-based networking events**
 - ✘ Encourage universities and entities conducting training for employment programmes to hold employment fairs on a regular basis to allow for opportunities for job seekers to interact with different employers
 - ✘ Hold technology focused networking events: this would allow technology job seekers to interact with technology companies operating in specific technology specialisations
- 6. **Promote inclusive hiring practices and improve interview processes**
 - ✘ Advocate for transparency in job ads: clearly stating working hours, benefits, work location and expectations
 - ✘ Standardise interview panels to include two HR representatives (if possible) for fairness
 - ✘ Train employers on inclusive interviewing and bias reduction
 - ✘ Encourage alignment between job ads and interviews to reduce applicant frustration and time waste
 - ✘ Establish post-interview feedback mechanisms so applicants understand why there were not selected



Freelancing

The following recommendations are to be considered by those entities designing capacity building programmes for freelancers and career centres in universities.

1. **Promote freelancing as a viable career path**
 - ✘ Raise awareness within universities and communities that freelancing can be a professional career track, encourage the exploration of skills early on in university
 - ✘ Integrate freelancing readiness modules into higher education (portfolio building, client relations, time management)
 - ✘ Highlight stories of female freelancers to inspire confidence and counter any stigma around freelancing
 - ✘ Develop skills exploration programmes for students during university to help them explore their skills and passion
2. **Strengthen skills and capacity**
 - ✘ Develop advanced freelancing bootcamps/programmes: that focus on vetting clients, proposal writing, negotiation skills, pricing strategies, project scoping, client communication and expectation management, managing payments locally and internationally
 - ✘ Develop specific programmes on how to navigate global freelancing platforms: including setting up accounts, vetting clients, detecting spam, building strong profiles and managing payments
 - ✘ Expand access to technical upskilling programmes in areas with strong demand such as UI/UX design, content creation, graphic design, data analysis and testing)
 - ✘ Embed practical experience (real projects, competitions) in training programmes to bridge the gap between learning and real-world freelancing
3. **Build supportive communities and mentorship**
 - ✘ Establish peer to peer groups (online and offline) where freelancers can share experiences, referrals and solutions
 - ✘ Create structured mentoring programmes linking junior freelancers with more seasoned professionals for ongoing guidance
 - ✘ Foster regional communities outside Cairo to reduce geographic isolation and provide localised support
 - ✘ Provide training on personal wellness and wellbeing to support freelancers in their journey and to avoid burnout

Entrepreneurship

The following recommendations are to be considered by entrepreneurship support organisations, universities and private sector companies.

1. **Skills, education, and capacity building**
 - ✘ Universities to introduce entrepreneurship education, if not through embedding them in their curriculum then by offering them as courses through their career centres especially in science-based universities (engineering, agriculture, science etc..)
 - ✘ Develop sector specific training programmes (EdTech, HealthTech, AgriTec etc.) instead of generic programmes

- ✘ Support conversion of graduation projects into businesses through incubation and seed funding
 - ✘ Train founders on team management, recruitment, business acumen, financial management and leadership skills
 - ✘ Foster internship programmes in startups for those interested in entrepreneurship to gain real life experiences
2. **Market access and customer acquisition**
- ✘ Establish corporate-startup partnerships and supplier diversity programmes to integrate women led businesses into supply chains
 - ✘ Create market access platforms (fairs, demo days, corporate showcases) where women founders can present products and services
 - ✘ Provide training on sales strategies, income generation and customer acquisition shifting the focus from fundraising to revenue growth
3. **Finance and investment**
- ✘ Expand access to diverse financing mechanisms: working capital, revenue- based financing, gender-lens investment funds, and milestone-based grants
 - ✘ Offer financial literacy and investor readiness training, tailored to stage of growth
 - ✘ Promote employee retention tools such as ESOPs to address talent flight
4. **Mentoring and support systems**
- ✘ Shift from short-term mentors to long-term, phase-specific mentorship models (ideation, growth, scaling, exporting)
 - ✘ Provide mentors who address both technical/business issues and personal wellbeing (stress management, resilience)
 - ✘ Build faculty–alumni mentorship networks to support university-linked startups
 - ✘ Encourage corporates and ESOs to provide sector-specific mentors who understand industry dynamics
5. **Wellbeing and work life balance**
- ✘ Incorporate coaching and psychological support into entrepreneurship programmes
 - ✘ Provide training on time management, prioritisation, and work–life balance, especially for student founders and mothers
 - ✘ Normalise the importance of mental health and resilience in entrepreneurship journeys

