



ENTE EF

Fostering Entrepreneurship through Freelancing

Global Freelancer Market Report: General Overview

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the rapidly evolving freelance and digital labour economy. Once considered a niche, freelancing has become a central component of the global workforce, accelerated by digitalization, technological advancement, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have transformed how individuals and organizations perceive work, emphasizing flexibility, autonomy, and the integration of remote employment models.

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Introduction

Freelancing now plays a vital role in global economic development. Platforms such as Upwork and Fiverr have enabled millions of workers to connect with clients worldwide, supporting both short-term and long-term projects. The market is projected to grow significantly, with the United States expected to achieve a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 13.5% between 2025–2030, while the Asia-Pacific region is forecasted to reach 20.1%, driven by expanding digital infrastructure and remote work policies.

Despite its advantages, freelancing presents several challenges, including job insecurity, market saturation, and gender-based inequalities. Understanding these dynamics is critical to supporting sustainable growth, guiding policymaking, and fostering entrepreneurship through freelancing – the core objective of the ENTEEF project.

Methodology

The report adopts a mixed-method approach combining secondary and primary data to construct a rich picture of the global freelancer market.

Secondary Data Collection

An integrative literature review was employed using Scopus AI Search to identify trends, conceptual frameworks, and empirical findings from both academic and grey literature. The review incorporated:

- Peer-reviewed journals, books, and conference papers on freelancing and digital labour.
- Reports from international organizations such as the OECD, ILO, and Eurostat.
- Industry insights from sources like Payoneer and Gigmeter.

Key terms such as freelancer, gig economy, and digital platforms were carefully defined to ensure consistency. The search revealed growing academic interest since 2015, reflecting the increasing relevance of digital labour studies.

Primary Data Collection

To capture real-world market patterns, the team gathered 10,000 freelancer profiles from Upwork. Data included demographics, skills, hourly rates, and success scores. Profiles were anonymized, ethically handled, and processed through Python scripts integrating the ChatGPT API for classification and gender estimation.

Findings show freelancers from over 50 countries, with the highest representation from Pakistan (36.8%), India (21.3%), and the United States (9.9%). The most common professional areas were:

- Design & Creative (32.5%)
- Sales & Marketing (26%)
- Coding & Web Development (24.8%)

The gender distribution was heavily skewed, with 74.7% male and 17.6% female freelancers, highlighting persistent gender gaps in the digital economy.

The Revolution of Freelancing and Digital Labour

Freelancing represents a broader transformation within the digital labour economy, redefining traditional employment structures. It encompasses short-term, project-based work enabled by digital platforms. The pandemic was a key catalyst, pushing workers globally toward flexible online work arrangements.

Historically, freelancing evolved from early studies of self-employment and entrepreneurship in the 1980s. Over time, the focus shifted toward digital work, platform mediation, and labour precarity. Research shows that freelancing is particularly prevalent among younger generations – notably Generation Z and Millennials – who prioritize autonomy and meaningful work. According to 2023 reports:

- 38% of the U.S. workforce (64 million people) engaged in freelance work.
- 52% of Gen Z and 44% of Millennials reported freelance income.
- Freelancers generated \$3.8 billion on Upwork alone, contributing 1.1% of U.S. GDP.

Freelancers benefit from autonomy, flexibility, and technological empowerment but face risks such as income instability, lack of benefits, and algorithmic oversight from platforms. AI tools have become integral to freelancing, with about 40% of freelancers using them to save time and increase productivity. However, this also introduces new dependencies and skill demands.

Geographically, the freelance market is highly concentrated:

- North America and Europe dominate demand for freelance services.
- Asia-Pacific (especially India and the Philippines) and Eastern Europe are major suppliers of technical and IT talent.

The freelance revolution is also reshaping social structures. While many view freelancing as empowering, others note that autonomy can mask economic vulnerability, transferring risk from employers to individuals. These dynamics necessitate policy innovation to ensure fair treatment, security, and skill development opportunities.

Why Freelancing Is Becoming More Important

Freelancing's growing importance stems from four major drivers:

1. **Flexibility and Autonomy:** Freelancers value control over their time and projects. Around 77% report higher quality of life compared to traditional employees.
2. **Technological Enablers:** Digital platforms and AI tools have made global freelancing accessible and efficient. Over 70% of freelancers find work through online marketplaces.
3. **Economic Necessity and Resilience:** The pandemic and inflationary pressures have pushed individuals toward freelancing for financial survival. More than 55% of freelancers took additional projects in 2023 to sustain income.
4. **Generational and Cultural Shifts:** Younger workers increasingly reject rigid employment models, favouring flexible arrangements that support creativity and personal fulfillment.

However, persistent challenges remain. Income unpredictability, lack of benefits, and limited institutional support pose long-term sustainability issues. Women continue to earn less—\$22/hour vs. \$24/hour for men – indicating enduring inequality. Policymakers must therefore develop frameworks that extend protections to gig workers, integrate freelance representation into workforce boards, and recognize freelancers' contributions to economic growth.

Conclusions

The Global Freelancer Market Report illustrates how freelancing has transitioned from a peripheral occupation into a central pillar of the global economy. Empowered by digital technology and accelerated by social change, freelancers are reshaping work patterns, economic structures, and entrepreneurial practices worldwide.

Yet, this transformation is double-edged. While freelancing promotes flexibility and opportunity, it also introduces precarity and inequality. The report emphasizes the need for:

- Continuous skill development and digital literacy.
- Policy reforms ensuring protection and fair compensation.
- Inclusive frameworks recognizing freelancers' economic and social roles.

Ultimately, freelancing represents both the future of work and the frontier of entrepreneurship – a domain where adaptability, innovation, and equity must go hand in hand.

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Link to full document:

<https://enteef.uek.krakow.pl/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/ENTEef-WP2-A2-Global-Freelancer-Market-Report-General-Overview.pdf>