

Freelancing in Europe 2021

Welcome to the new work order

Summary

Executive summary 3

Introduction

5

1. Portrait of the Digital Freelancer 8

Freelancing is not a trend, it's here to stay

Digital freelancers are a diverse population

2. The digital freelancer: independent and happy 13

Freelancing is a true career choice

They are happy with what they do

3. A Day in the Life of a Freelancer: Choice, Habits & Challenges 14

Time management

Where do they work?

How do they find projects and what are they looking for?

What challenges do they face in their daily lives?

Knowing your worth

4. Freelancers already represent the new work order 21

Efficiency first

Remote working

Self-training

Agile methods

Lessons learned from COVID-19

Conclusion

25

It's all about Choice

Masthead

Executive Summary

In June 2020, Malt and BCG jointly conducted a survey of more than 2,324 respondents in three countries (France, Germany, Spain) to better understand freelancing dynamics in Europe. We wanted to know the following: who are the freelancers? Why do they choose to work as freelancers? What can we learn from their ways of working in the new normal shaped by the digital revolution and COVID-19?

Who are they?

In Europe, freelancers are mainly male (65%), 40+-year-old highly educated individuals (>75% have a 3-year higher-education degree). They live in major employment areas and switched from employee to freelance status deliberately a few years ago (5 to 9 years, depending on market maturity), after their gathering first experiences as employees (for ~95% of them). Over 80% of respondents work in tech/data, communication/marketing and web/photo/sound creation professions.

Why are they freelancers?

First, freelancing is not by default a choice made for lack of a better opportunity. In fact, “choice” lies at the very center of their career. Freelancers value three main elements:

- **Autonomy** (manage their own time):
81% of respondents
- **Freedom of choice** (on assignments):
76%
- **Choice of workplace**:
73%

This choice is a “no-way-back decision” as ~80% of them want to continue as freelancers despite any crisis headwinds.

What do they do differently?

Freelancers are thus generally former employees who have spun their ways of working. 66% of freelancers practice agile ways of working and work remotely. Also, they dedicate 5+ hours per week to individual training to remain highly skilled and to match market demand in a fast-moving environment where skills can rapidly become obsolete. Freelancers stand at the forefront of the new work order, where flexibility, adaptability, and focus on results are the key differentiators.

Why do they represent opportunities for companies?

At first sight, companies value the skills, flexibility, efficiency of the freelancer.

But freelancers can contribute more broadly to companies.



“As front-runners of new ways of working (agility; continuous learning, value focused), freelancers can act as catalysts for companies’ digital transformation and new working model. An interesting prospect given that >75% of employees surveyed by BCG after the first lockdown period in Europe considered digital as a priority for their company to win in the new normal, and felt their company should invest more in new ways of working.”

Vinciane Beauchene

Managing Director & Partner – Boston Consulting Group (BCG)



“Although freelancers have experienced a slowdown in their activity in recent months, we saw a rebound in missions even before the end of the first lockdown, driven particularly by companies looking to accelerate their digital transformation projects. Companies are coming to realize that they need the skills and abilities of freelancers now more than ever.”

Vincent Huguet

CEO & Cofounder – Malt

Introduction

With Europe experiencing a second lockdown phase, transforming ways of working remains at the top of companies' agenda and indeed has become a matter of survival. In the Spring of 2020, almost 100% of workers ended up staying at home, and this Fall will not be much different. Despite what was learned from the first wave, similar questions remain open: How to best manage scattered teams? How to foster collaboration in a virtual environment? How to be more agile in a world of uncertainty? These are the questions freelancers face every day from the outset. In this context of radical and rapid changes, freelancers represent an interesting observation field to get insight into what the future could look like as companies and individuals question their definition of work and previous operating models.

For this reason, we believe now is a critical time to better understand the freelance phenomenon. Since the beginning, in light of the scarcity of tech talent, established corporations have called upon freelancers to provide specific and hard-to-find skills, especially where recruiting is difficult. But the opportunity and benefits may in fact be much broader.

In many ways, freelancers are today spearheading a new way of thinking about work, in which organizations become open networks or ecosystems of talented individuals who collaborate on projects and flash organizations. The digital revolution has empowered many talented people to become freelancers (i.e., self-employed workers who have their own company but do not employ others). They are consultants, graphic designers, web developers, or SEO experts providing technical or artistic expertise and services to companies directly or via platforms. **They put choice at the center of their careers.**

For the past 4 years, Malt has carried out a study on the subject, leveraging our freelancer community throughout Europe (France, Germany, Spain, where Malt is present) to shed an exclusive light on the freelance model. This year, in partnership with the BCG, the survey aims to better understand the nature of this new class of worker: What are their aspirations? Their motivations? What difficulties do they face in their daily lives? What can we learn from the way they work?

To better understand the current changes in the world of work, we need to explore their daily lives, their choices, and their difficulties.

Vincent Huguet

CEO & Co-founder - Malt

Vinciane Beauchene

Managing Director & Partner - BCG

The Gig Economy vs. the Talent Economy

In Europe, over 22 million workers are self-employed. This rather broad category includes many different types of professions ranging from manual work (drivers, farmers, etc.), to doctors, lawyers or consultants, all the way to experts working in the digital field like developers, data scientists or designers.

However, developers or designers are too often quoted alongside online taxi and food delivery services when talking about the “Gig Economy” or “Platform Economy”. **This narrative needs to change.**

On the one hand, we need to acknowledge the platforms that specialize in straightforward short term gigs, encouraging high competition among service providers and thus low prices. This mechanism means the workers on these platforms have little security and are very dependent on client usage rates.

But there is a large portion of self-employed workers who have high-in-demand skills and, as this study will illustrate in detail, no desire to work in permanent employment. The European Forum of Independent Professionals (EFIP) calls them i-Pros (Professional Intellectuals). Currently there are more than 3 Million i-Pros working in Germany, France and Spain (*Eurostats).

And just as there are different ways of being self-employed, there are different ways of building a marketplace. Depending on the group it targets and the type of collaboration it promotes, the marketplace influences the type of work environment it fosters.

Methodology

We collected the answers from 2,324 such persons who use Malt in France, Spain, and Germany. Thanks to them, we were able to paint the portrait of a particularly important group among the self-employed: **digital freelancers working in the Talent Economy.**

The following study not only shows how they see themselves, what challenges they face, and how they work, it also shows why they are crucial to the digital transformation of the modern economy.

About Malt

Founded in 2013, Malt is the leader in the field of freelance business relations in France. With a team of 200 people, Malt supports new modes of working by connecting 200,000 freelancers in the digital industry to 30,000 client companies, 85% of which are listed on the CAC 40. The management team formed by Vincent Huguet (cofounder and CEO), Hugo Lassiège (cofounder and CTO), and Alexandre Fretti (CEO) is supported by major investors and directors: Idinvest (Nicolas Debock), Serena (Marc Fournier, Marie Brayer), ISAI (Jean-David Chamboredon), Antoine Freysz (Kerala), and Jérôme Caillé (ex CEO Adecco). The French company intends to become the spearhead of the “New Work Order” and to promote new ways of organizing work that values the independence of the workers in the Talent Economy.

malt.com



About BCG

Boston Consulting Group partners with leaders in business and society to tackle their most important challenges and to capture their greatest opportunities. BCG was the pioneer in business strategy at its founding in 1963. Today, BCG helps clients with total transformation—inspiring complex change, enabling organizations to grow, building competitive advantage, and driving bottom-line impact.

To succeed, organizations must blend digital and human capabilities. BCG’s global teams bring deep industrial and functional expertise as well as a range of perspectives to spark change and deliver solutions through leading-edge management consulting along with technology and design, corporate and digital ventures—and business purpose. BCG works in a uniquely collaborative model across the firm and throughout all levels of the client organization, generating results that allow their clients to thrive.

bcg.com

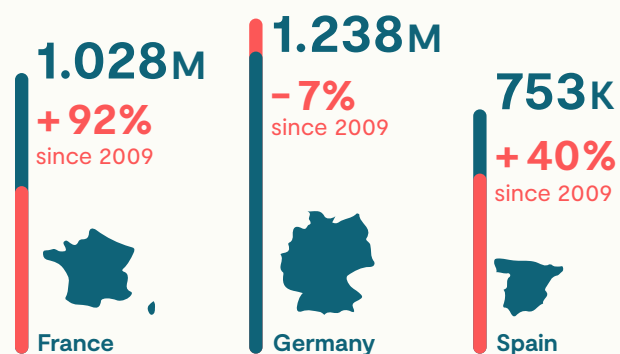


1. Portrait of the Digital Freelancers

Freelancing is not a trend, it's here to stay

The way we work today is changing profoundly. New jobs emerge, while others decline or disappear completely. Yet, the single most striking evolution of the past two decades may well be the rise of freelancers in Europe. Salaried work peaked around the year 2000, and since then, the number of independent workers has been on the rise across Europe.

Among them, freelancers are spearheading the growth of independent work: they are the fastest-growing segment of the European labor market. Indeed their overall number increasing steadily over the last 10 years. The exception is Germany, where we can see a slight deceleration, occasioned by the quite early adoption of freelancing there. Since 2009, the number of freelancers in Germany has remained steady at around 1.3 million.

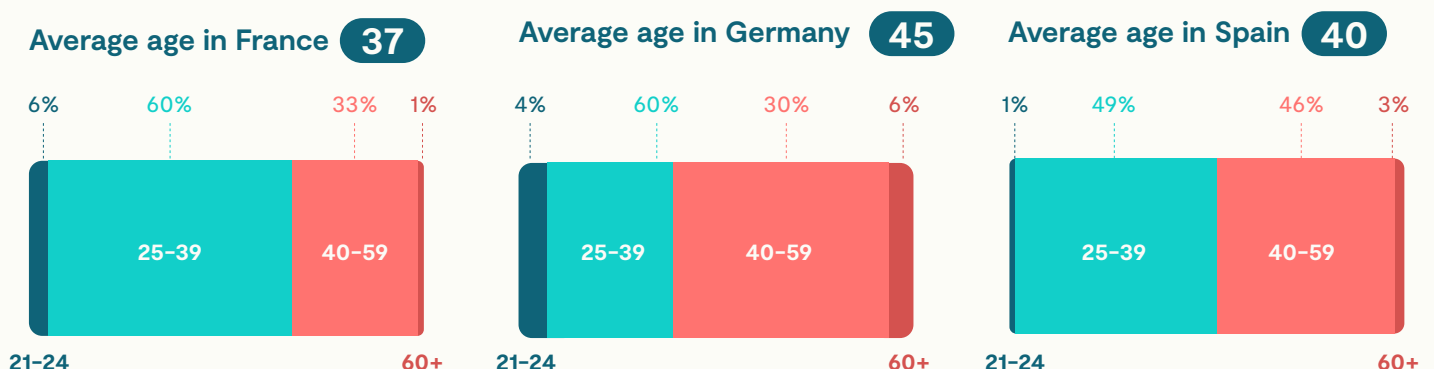


Source: Eurostat

Digital freelancers: Who are they?

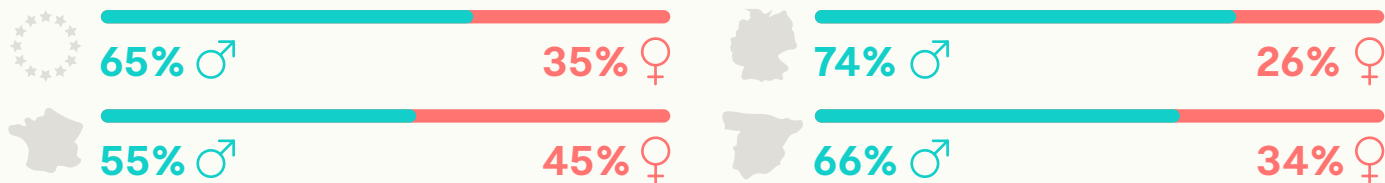
Average age

Freelancers aren't all 'millennials', far from it! As more and more professionals capitalise on their expertise, network and reputation to start a career as freelancers, it comes as no surprise that in fact on average they are not that young.



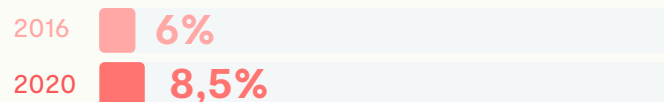
Gender distribution

Men clearly outnumber women among freelancers:



Some jobs show great disparities and impact the average, even though the gap is getting smaller. Here is the proportion of women on Malt for various job categories:

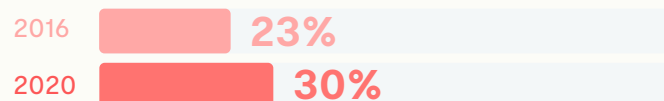
Tech and data



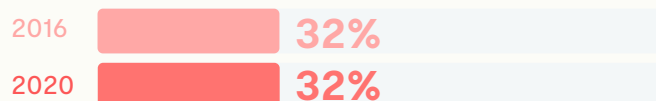
Communication



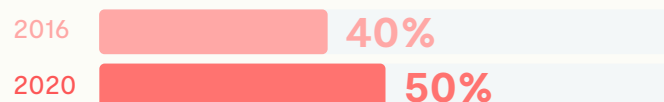
Project managers and agile coaches



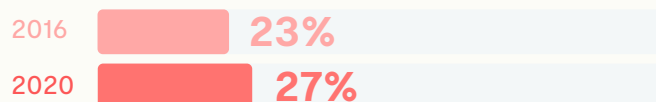
Marketing



Web and graphic design



Business consulting



Picture and sound



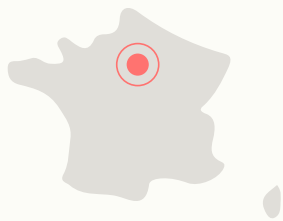
Changes are small, but we do see women getting more traction with time, even though there is a long way to go before achieving equal participation in the workforce. Interestingly enough countries like Finland, Sweden or Denmark, who repeatedly rank highest in Europe's Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), also show a high representation of women in the digital workforce.

*These figures only apply to the French market, as we have worked the longest in that country. We estimate that we need at least 4 years to obtain significant evolution data.

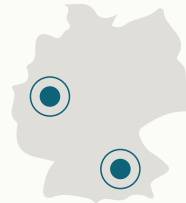
Location

Technology seems to be abolishing distance: People are increasingly becoming more connected, and virtual communication has become easier than ever. In reality, however, economic activity and the freelance population are concentrated in just a few areas. Though it's theoretically possible to work remotely anywhere, most freelancers choose to remain well connected to their networks and live in denser areas, generally near their clients. Digital nomadism remains a marginal phenomenon.

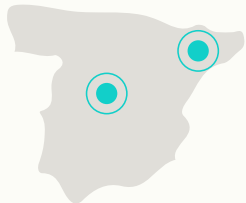
France



Germany



Spain

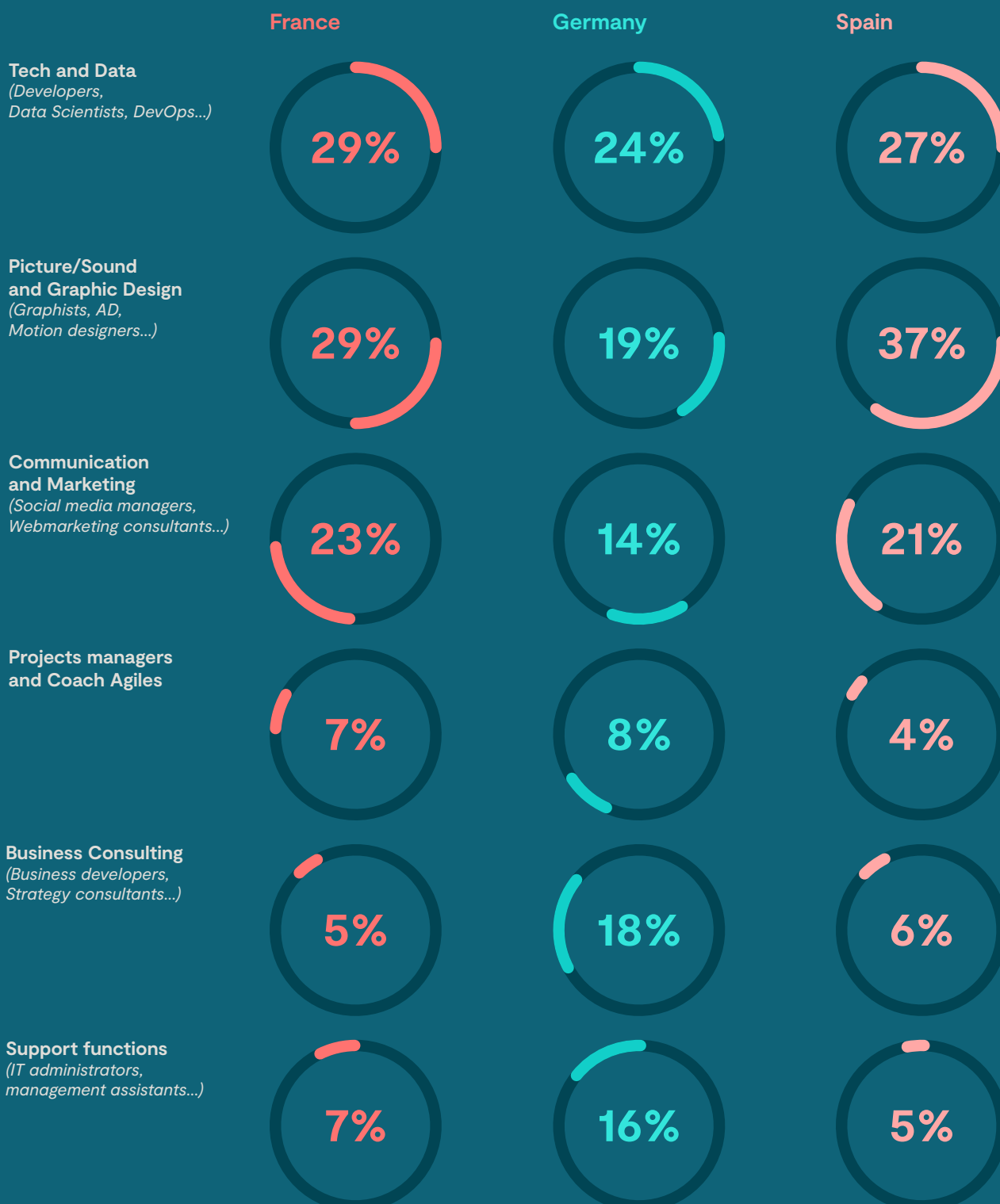


Education



Occupations

Freelancers now work in multiple industries. Though the digital freelancer movement was initially driven by the rise of the IT sector and software developers, it is now continuing to grow thanks to workers from a wide variety of industries.



Average income (daily rate) per job category

When we compare different countries, we see how the national economic context and the level of awareness regarding freelancing impact daily rates. More specifically, it is interesting to note that German freelancers have the highest incomes, thanks to Germany being ahead of the freelancing curve (with over 1 million freelancers in 2009 according to Eurostat) and the country's overall strong economy. At the other end of the spectrum, with a more difficult economic situation, lies Spain with the lowest daily rates.

Tech and Data

(Developers, Data Scientists, DevOps...)



Picture/Sound and Graphic Design

(Graphists, AD, Motion designers...)



Communication and Marketing

(Social media managers, Webmarketing consultants...)

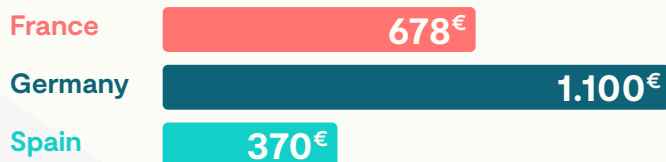


Projects managers and Coach Agiles



Business Consulting

(Business developers, Strategy consultants...)



Support functions

(IT administrators, management assistants...)



“As a freelancer my income has been tripled and my freedom as well, plus the advantage of being able to work on the projects I like best and from wherever I want. I wouldn't go back to working as an employee, neither in the short term nor in the long term.”

Francisco José Navarro Garcia

Senior iOS Developer

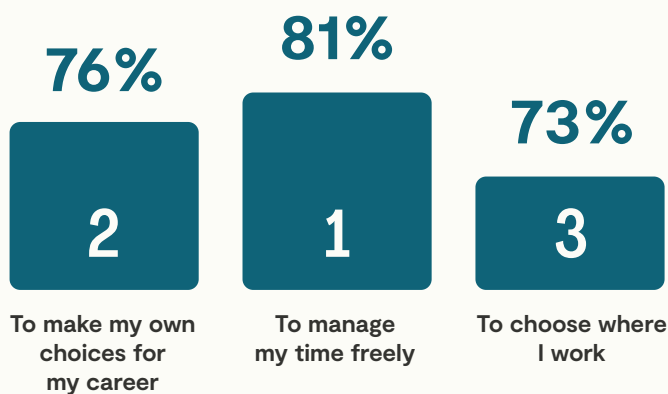
2. The Digital Freelancer: independent and happy

Freelancing is a true career choice

People opt for freelancing to be fully autonomous. It is not a choice “for lack of a better opportunity” or a “gap” series of gigs.

Here are the main reasons given by freelancers for choosing to become independent:

There are many reasons to become a freelancer, but they almost always correspond to an aspirational choice: to be more autonomous and to have better work conditions. What freelancers value most is being able to decide on their projects and their work logistics. This is what sociologists call “agentivity,” that is, the ability to map out your own life, as opposed to following what is imposed by an organization.



“I became a freelancer simply to be free, to work on the projects I like with the clients I choose. I like to be able to switch projects, clients and even work methods.”

Jérôme Clément-Sanz

Senior Android Developer

They are happy with what they do



Despite a common misconception and far from the “Gig Economy” bias, we know that freelancers represent a pool of highly trained experts. In most cases, they have built up their skills for years as employees before moving on to becoming independent consultants going from project to project.

France



Germany



Spain



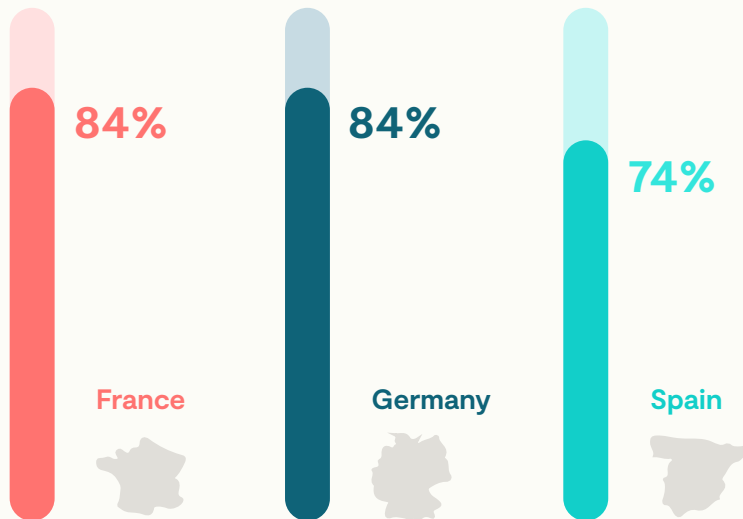
i (50% of freelancers have more than 8 years of experience as independent workers in their area of expertise)

These numbers are striking since this is also one of the most important reasons why employees leave their employee jobs. 79% of employees who quit their jobs cite a lack of appreciation as a key reason for leaving (O.C. Tanner: Performance Accelerated). Most freelancers know the corporate world. And more importantly, they do not want to return to it.



Most freelancers start their career in a permanent position. But after taking the leap most of them have no interest in going back to full time employment. The appeal of agentivity and the autonomy gained are quite difficult to let go of! However, the COVID-19 crisis may be changing career opportunities because of societal changes and the economic climate. What we observe differs depending on the country.

Freelancers who don't want to go back to full-time employment:



In France, this trend is even stronger for freelancers working in tech and data (89%) and communication and marketing (84%). In Germany, the numbers are higher among tech and data professionals, where 95% of freelancers say they are not looking for a permanent job. In communication and marketing, 85% of German freelancers are not looking to surrender their autonomy.

This optimism can be linked above all to their initial aspiration (81% of respondents state the ability to manage their time freely as their main motivation) and to their confidence in the future. Indeed, with the boom of digital projects following the first lockdown, the massive democratization of remote work and the freeze on recruitment, companies have strong incentives to call upon freelancers to meet their needs.

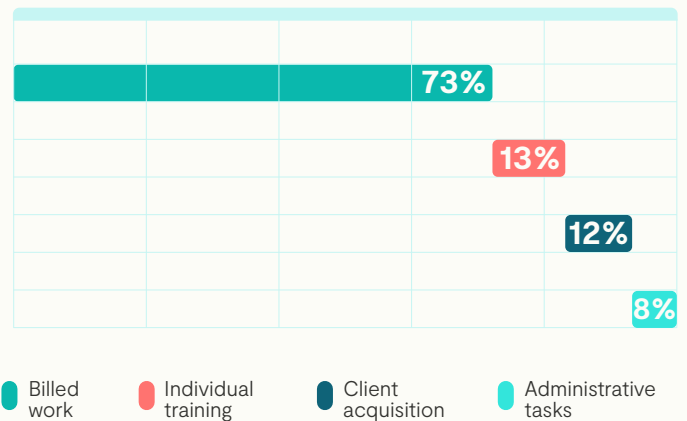
3. A Day in the Life of a Freelancer: choice, habits, challenges

Time management

43 hours/week
on average

Though they escaped the rigid constraints of 9-to-5 jobs, most freelancers tend to work about as much and sometimes more than full-time employees. But the format of salaried employment begs the question of whether wage is a function of hours of presence or actual work. On the other hand, freelancers bill clients per task accomplished. Thus, they often feel the pressure to be more productive.

But even after they are done working for their clients, they still have business organizational tasks to accomplish.

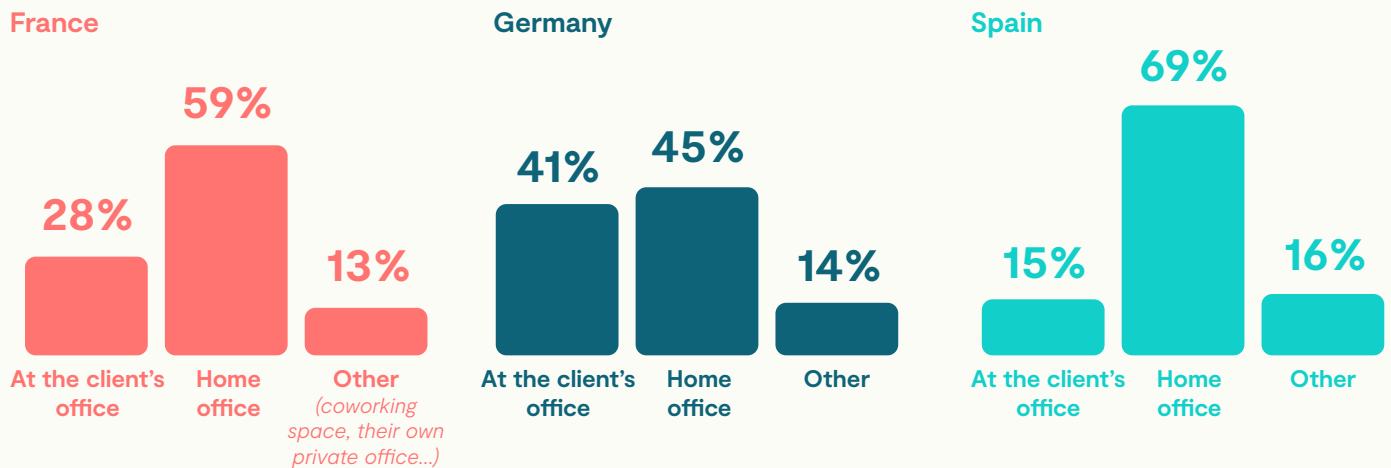


Even though most freelancers do seem to work a lot of hours, they still choose this mode of work to enjoy a better work life balance. 81% of freelancers say they chose freelancing to freely manage their schedule.

Where do they work?

Even before the COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent lockdown, freelancers were accustomed to working from home, though this does not mean being out of touch with their client's office. In most cases, freelancers adopt a hybrid model, dividing their work time between their home and the client's office. Coworking spaces are significantly less well frequented.

Time spent per workplace:



Freelancers' intimate knowledge and habituation to remote working has given them an edge during this time of global pandemic, where companies and employees are having to learn to adapt to remote working on a large scale.



“At this point, I don't think I will return to salaried work, mainly because of the lack of flexibility. The only way I would consider it is if it were a fully remote work situation, either with a decentralized company (where all employees are remote), or with a company that has offices but allows remote work. In my opinion, and freelancing aside, it would be the most flexible type of work engagement: no or very limited travel time, I get to choose where I work, I don't have to be in an open space with a lot of people around me, and I can organize my day as I see fit.”

Chloé S.

Ux Researcher & Ux Conversational Designer

How do they find projects and what are they looking for?

Most freelancers rely on their professional and personal networks for client acquisition, though social media and freelancer platforms are gaining traction as business-development tools, while recruitment agencies and headhunters are receiving fewer solicitations.

This is especially true in France where freelancer platforms are widely used by corporations, replacing traditional recruitment agencies. In Germany on the other hand, sophisticated freelance marketplaces like Malt are on the rise, but have not yet taken over the corporate world, which explains why recruitment agencies are still more present than in France or Spain.

Main sources of leads for freelancers:



Even during this time of economic uncertainty, some freelancers have the comfort of choosing the projects they want to work on. We asked them what the decisive factors were when making their choice. Here is what they said:

☆ **83%**

Rate

≡ **82%**

Project topic

♥ **77%**

Relationship with the client & team

What challenges do they face in their daily lives?

The main challenges identified by freelancers on Malt per country:

France

Negotiating with clients



Access to housing



Getting paid quickly



Access to health assurance



Administrative tasks



Germany

Negotiating with clients



Rules and regulations



Working alone



Administrative tasks



Getting paid quickly



Spain

Negotiating with clients



Access to health assurance



Getting paid quickly



Maintaining good client relationships in the long run



Access to housing



When looking at the challenges freelancers face in their daily lives, two elements pop out:

The difficulties of negotiating

This hindrance comes up in all three countries: Negotiating with clients turns out to be a complicated task. This makes sense as every freelancer is also their own sales representative. This means they must learn to negotiate with and assert their conditions to a seemingly more powerful counterpart. Being a freelancer means relying only on oneself and one's skills as well as being solely responsible for one's own work and therefore success.

Knowing your worth and being able to defend it to a big client is an important part of every freelancer's professional journey whether this concerns price negotiation or getting a client to pay their bills on time. But it quite literally pays off.

Knowing your worth

Malt's data on transactions occurring on its marketplace suggest that knowing your worth actually pays off. Among all active freelance profiles on Malt, we looked at those booking the most projects (throughout all three countries).

Dr. Frank Müller-Langer, Professor of Digital Transformation at the University of the Bundeswehr in Munich and Affiliated Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition, and Dr. Estrella Gomez-Herrera, Visiting Professor of Applied Economics at the University of the Balearic Islands, are using data from Malt for their independent research on online labour markets. They have looked at what influences the number of project proposals received by a Freelancer Profile on Malt. Their research showed that price and success on the platform are correlated.

The most successful freelancers are also the most expensive ones.

The Top 25% of Global Active Freelancers*

Median Daily Rate	504€
Average Years Active on Malt	3 years

The Top 25% of Active Freelancers per Country*

Median Daily Rate in France	515€
Median Daily Rate in Germany	630€
Median Daily Rate in Spain	277€

Per Job Category	Median Daily Rate of the Top 25% per Job Category	Median Daily Rate of all Global Active Freelancers per Job Category	Gap Between the Top 25% and Same Category Freelancers
Tech and Data	536€	412€	+ 30%
Picture/Sound and Graphic Design	409€	326€	+ 25%
Communication and Marketing	413€	282€	+ 46%
Business Consulting	776€	537€	+ 45%
Projects managers & Coach Agiles	715€	560€	+ 38%

*Active freelancers are the ones who received at least one project proposal from clients.

Also: People who do missions on Malt can increase their daily rates 3x faster than people without any missions on Malt. As a result, people with higher pricing also have more missions on Malt.

A higher price communicates authority and attracts clients who are looking for quality. This doesn't mean that freelancers cannot use lower pricing to their advantage when negotiating a project that adds value to their reputation and experience. But our data show that it is important for freelancers to build a long-term reputation and to adapt their price accordingly. Recommendations from prior projects add to that reputation and allow a higher daily rate.



Dr. Frank Müller-Langer
Professor of Digital Transformation
at the University of Bundeswehr
in Munich



Dr. Estrella Gomez-Herrera
Professor of Economics
at the Balearic Islands' University

Society and legislators don't yet know freelancing well enough

The survey also identified a second challenge: administrative and legal burdens. Unlike employees who are dependent on an organization but enjoy the benefits and safety of a structured social security system, freelancers are treated by the law as small companies.

This comes with the blessing and the curse of choosing your own social security, filing your own taxes, and being your own accountant. And to this day, many freelancers still feel like they remain a misrepresented minority whose needs are not properly understood and catered to by the state.

Example: even though digital freelancers earn steady incomes, they are still perceived by many as "unstable" because they do not have salaried jobs. This misconception means freelancers have a hard time finding housing, although many of them are sufficiently solvent to pay rent or take out a loan.

This misconception surrounding freelancing is still very present in Germany.

Scheinselbstständigkeit and the German concept of work

Even though freelancing is well established in Germany – and even though many of them are experts in their field (50% of freelancers have over 8 years of freelancing experience) – the rules and regulations have yet to catch up to the future of work.

Opaque procedures and legal insecurity concerning the topic of pseudo self employment (salaried work disguised as self employment) hinders otherwise mutually beneficial relationships between companies and freelance consultants.

Andreas Lutz, Director of the VGSD, The German Association for Solo-Self-Employment, has dealt with the topic of pseudo self-employment and regulations surrounding self-employment in Germany for many years, advocating for more legal security and fighting **for the interests of self employed workers.**

Even though the law is meant to protect workers from pseudo self-employment, it does not seem to have achieved that goal:



10%

of German freelancers believe that the regulations regarding pseudo self employment are adequate.

“The 5,600 members members that we represent with the VGSD overwhelmingly made the conscious career decision to become self employed. They wanted to be independent and develop their talents, which they couldn’t achieve in a permanent position. And overall, they are happy with that status. In that sense, the results of Malt’s survey showing freelancers as autonomous and self-driven individuals are not surprising to me, it’s what I see everyday. To me, the vast majority of freelancers and self-employed workers have simply chosen to build something of their own.

Unfortunately this fact is often overshadowed by examples in the media, such as the recent meat industry scandal in Germany. This case is an example of groups of workers being forced by companies to declare they are “self-employed” so the company can take advantage of this status’ labour regulations. The Platform Economy debate often focuses on the groups that are mistakenly treated as self-employed, and who need protection. And paradoxically, the current legal system does not protect these workers.

The current legal criteria for pseudo self employment works exactly the other way round. Workers in need of protection, like car or food delivery drivers working in the Gig Economy have to be declared as self-employed because their work is clearly separated from the company’s core work and they are not integrated into work processes. On the other hand, IT project managers, who have to work closely with their team on site are classified as pseudo self-employed.”

Ultimately the regulations do not only fail to protect those in need of protection, they also hold back critical digital innovation and the change that is demanded by companies and employees alike in the workplace.



45%

of Tech & Data freelancers in Germany have seen critical IT projects fall through due to legal hurdles. A much higher number than in Spain (27%) or France (20%).

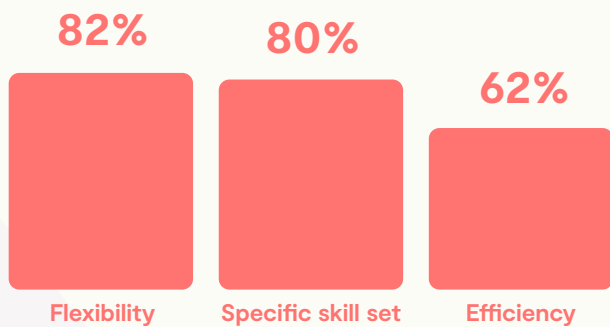
4. Freelancers already represent the new work order

Agility is the term on every manager's lips. The pandemic, digitalization, and automation have made the agile philosophy a core part of their talent recruitment and project delivery strategies. Now more than ever, companies need to respond quickly to changes in the marketplace and the global environment, to the entry of new competitors, and to ongoing technological progress. The agility of the workforce is one of the key components of efficiency: the right people doing the right thing at the right time.

Efficiency first: the missing piece in digital innovation

Despite numerous common misconceptions, and far from the "Gig Economy" bias, we know that freelancers represent a pool of experts. In most cases, they have established their skills as employees before being confident enough to become independent consultants and bring their specific benefits to companies.

The main client needs according to freelancers



Beyond skills and factual knowledge, these numbers tell us how freelancers work, which is a necessary and often forgotten phenomenon when talking about digital innovation. These professionals not only bring their expertise to the table, they also teach their clients and collaborators what their entrepreneurial DNA and agentivity is all about.

They acquired new work processes in start-ups, accompanied process optimizations in DAX/CAC/IBEX companies and coordinated teams for independent projects across countries. They transfer this knowledge from company to company and thus driven innovation.

Their ability to adapt and to challenge the status quo – both within themselves and throughout their work interactions, – is undoubtedly an extremely valuable asset for companies looking for consultants who will make a difference.

Change and growth are their specialties, which is precisely why companies need them now more than ever. Also, companies can access their skills quickly. Here, the average duration of recruitment:

9 months

**Internal
recruitment**

6 months

**External
recruitment**

6 days

Freelancer*

*Source: Gartner Research Circle



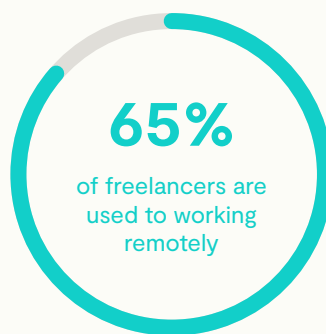
“As an external consultant, I can often drive change more easily than a full-time employee. My main motivation is to deliver a successful result without wasting time on internal processes or company politics.”

Dr. Maria Bartochat

Digital Transformation Coach & New Work

Remote working

Even before the COVID-19 crisis and the lockdown, freelancers were accustomed to working from home. This well-established habit among freelancers, however, is brand new for many companies and their employees, who must face the challenge of adapting to a world of new work practices shaken up by the pandemic.



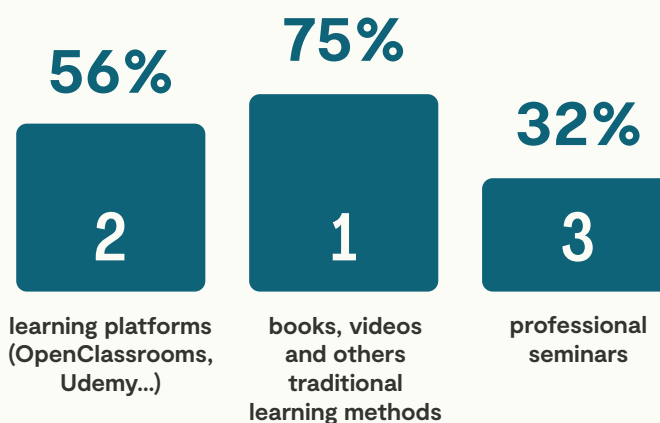
Self-training

In addition to their initial education, freelancers on average spend more than a half-day per week on continuing education. In doing so, they favor self-training over traditional professional seminars.

Also, because freelancers are not actively looking to assume managerial positions in companies, they prefer to move from project to project, learning new things as they go along. Through various project experiences and continuous self-training, they become true experts in their field and learn to master very technical subjects. 64% say “learning a new skill” is an important factor when choosing a project.

5 hours per week of self-training

Ranking of the most popular training methods:



“When I was a student, I didn’t have access to the e-learning opportunities available today. But in early 2019, I decided to use my free time, after coming home from work and putting the kids to bed, on Udemy and YouTube to teach myself JavaScript. After about a year I took the leap: I quit my public sector job and joined a 3-month coding bootcamp to become a Web Developer.”

Nacira Bogenschneider
Web & Mobile Developer



“As companies accelerate their digital transformation, there is much to learn from both the ways in which digital freelancers operate and their own unique expectations. Working for the most part remotely, they are particularly adept at new ways of working such as agile mode, and they devote nearly 5 hours a week to developing their skills. This provides an interesting example of how to successfully develop a digital culture and train internal staff in new ways of working.”

Vinciane Beauchene

Managing partner & Director, BCG

Agile methods

Freelancers not only bring technical skills to a team, they also inspire traditional companies to try new organizational models: leveraging the advantages of agile methods and progressively making offices a place to socialize.

66%

of freelancers use agile
methods in their work
(73% in France)

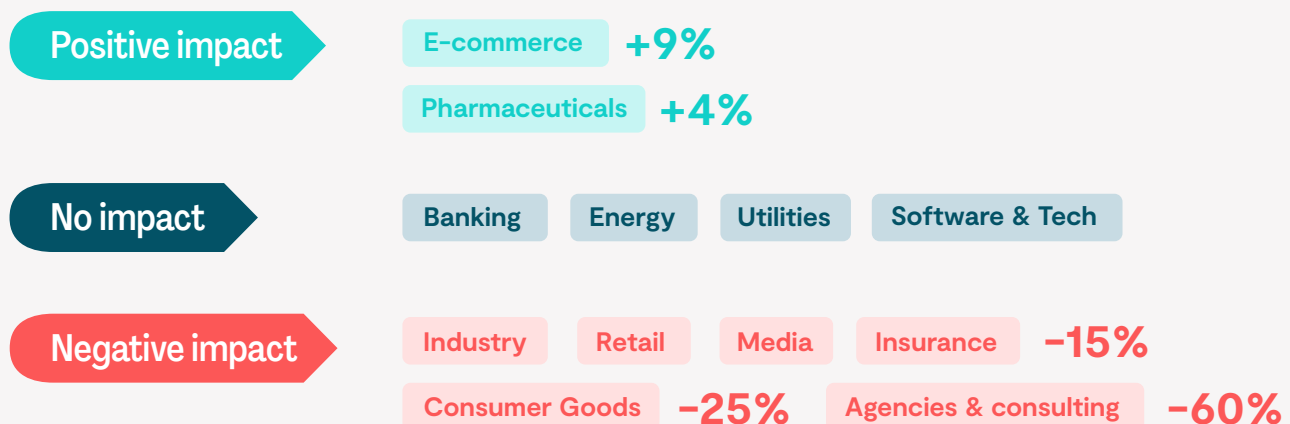
Lessons learned from COVID-19

In February 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the globe and pushed many previously pressing questions aside, the European Union presented a set of proposals for a new digital strategy to make “Europe Fit for the digital Age.” This plan is a function of a simple fact: Europe is not up to par with other major global players when it comes to the tech landscape and digital transformation. The continent was already in need of change even before the health crisis hit; agility was already on everyone’s mind. But deep change takes time.

The recent months have taught us valuable lessons about the necessity to adapt to new environments and to quickly respond to change during uncertain times. Being agile has never been more critical.

Industries on demand

During the crisis, we have seen some industries struggle and others capitalize on the possibilities of digital business and remote sourcing of external expertise. We compared the projects done on Malt with our forecasted business based on the trends from previous years. We discovered how different industries were impacted more significantly than others during the crisis and have slowed down or sped up their digital projects.



Job Categories in demand

While fewer new projects were started requiring freelancers from picture and sound, the demand for tech and data (28% of all projects are in tech), marketing (7%), communication (18%) and graphic design (23%) freelancers remained steady throughout the crisis, which could be explained by the shifts in demand related to industries and not to the need for different expertise.

As previously noted, freelancers are not ready to give up their status, even though the pandemic partly reduced their volume of business. So, it is not surprising that the number of new freelancer sign-ups has not exceeded our usual growth; rather, we have seen a stronger engagement with the platform, as exhibited by a higher completion rate of freelancer profiles. This resilience can be explained by their habits, acquired long before the health crisis. They become freelancers by choice, not because they lost their job. And even a loss in overall business revenue fails to motivate them to return to permanent employment. Rather, it makes them adapt to the situation as they are used to doing.

Conclusion

It's all about Choice

Making freelancers “integral contributors to the company’s strategic objectives” (quoted from *The Technology Fallacy: How People are the Real Key to Digital Transformation* by Gerald C. Kane) will propel organizations into the New Work Order.

Freelancers are highly skilled, efficient, flexible. Yet their most valuable asset cannot be quantified: their strong identification with the power of choice.

In the future, companies will have to extend more freedom to their employees and let them choose what is best for them. Working as a freelancer is a conscious choice, as is working as an employee for a company. Companies will have to create environments where people can thrive in their own way and put their talents to use in flexible teams.

Players can use these new organizational models to leverage the advantages of clever remote work (with the right environment, the right tools, the right trust-based company culture) and let offices progressively become a place to socialize and to be with others.

Control costs time, whereas autonomy and trust allow people to move quickly and make the right decisions, both for themselves and for the company. Freelancers are already a great example of what this new approach to work can yield.



Masthead

Editorial direction

Marion Bernes
Communications Manager France – Malt

Art Direction

Lucie Ménétrier
Art Director – Malt

Editors

Cayetano Fernández
Communications Manager Spain – Malt

Anne Rupp
Communications Manager Germany – Malt

Proofreading

Zelda Lehmann
Freelance Translator

Joseph Smith
Freelance Translator

Contributors

Vinciane Beauchene
Managing Director & Partner – BCG

Romain Gailhac
Project Leader – BCG

Audrey Marzouk
Digital & Content Manager – BCG

Quentin Debavelaere
Chief Operating Officer – Malt

 **malt** × **BCG** BOSTON
CONSULTING
GROUP