

Freelancing in Europe

2024

Facing the Disruption of Skills in Europe:
How Freelancers and Companies are
Redefining the Work Market

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INTRODUCTION

Note from our Chief Community Officer



Perrine Ferrault,
Chief Community Officer at Malt

Freelancers are an asset for navigating the future of work

*I speak to freelancers almost every single day—and what inspires me most is that **they don't ever question their choice to have embarked on a freelancing journey.** Even today's challenging economic environment hasn't rattled their confidence. Over two-thirds of freelancers surveyed (69%) said they feel confident about their long-term future as a freelancer. This is because they simply love what they do.*

*At Malt, we've had a front-row seat to the evolution of Europe's freelancing movement for many years now. **What we've seen recently is more highly skilled and seasoned professionals making the leap to freelancing.** They tell us over and over again—and this was confirmed by the survey results as well—that they want to do meaningful work and support their clients' success. And while flexibility, including the ability to scale up and down workloads, is one of the most well-recognized perks of freelancing, what we saw in this year's survey is that it is purely an operational motivator. What 70% of the freelancers surveyed care about most is building strong, long-term relationships with their clients.*

*This is precisely why **they have fully embraced the power of choice:** the freedom to choose who to work with, what projects to work on, where to work from, and how to create a business that works for them.*

This is why I firmly believe that freelancing is not only here to stay, but it's also the way of the future. The question companies should be asking themselves now is not "Should I be working with freelancers?" but rather, "How do I work with freelancers and integrate them into my organization more effectively?"

Truth be told, **small- and medium-sized businesses (SMB) caught on to this trend early.** They saw freelancers as business enablers who could jump in quickly, get to work, and help spark rapid innovation. Perhaps this is simply part and parcel of a more Agile mentality. But I think it goes beyond that. What these smaller businesses realized is that they could scale their teams' capabilities instantly by filling critical, often in-demand skills gaps with highly qualified professionals on an as-needed basis.

As a result, **two things became clear to these types of businesses:** 1) they could leverage the skills and expertise of top talent to fill in the critical gaps where a full-time headcount was not needed; and 2) they could lean into and benefit from a freelancer's cross-company or cross-industry experience to upskill their teams on the latest trends, technologies, and best practices. In other words, the value of a freelancer is not just in the work they are technically hired to do but also in the wealth of diverse knowledge, insights, and outside perspectives they bring to every client engagement they tackle.

This is actually where freelancers have a competitive edge against their full-time counterparts. Because freelancers have to essentially "hustle" for work, they also have to think ahead about how their value will need to evolve to remain competitive in a fast-changing marketplace—one that's quickly becoming heavily influenced by the promise of AI and its potential to reshape job roles of the future.

This is why it wasn't surprising to see in the survey that freelancers choose to spend an average of 5 hours per week on training and skills development—whether purely out of sheer curiosity or to get a competitive edge in the market. **AI has undoubtedly become a key upskilling focus in recent months** not only because many clients today are looking for talent with some form of AI experience but also because they realize that they need to learn how to leverage AI strategically to transform their value proposition. This is a great example of how freelancers take their professional destiny in their own hands to stay ahead of the curve, address evolving client needs, and remain resilient despite economic uncertainty.

All of this reinforces why I believe that freelancing won't lose steam any time soon. For one, there are more freelancers today across Europe than ever before—and they are really thriving. This is the story that everyone, across every business, industry and sector, should be talking about.

“Therefore, the real challenge today for companies, of all shapes and sizes, is to embrace a fact that we, at Malt, have always known to be true: Freelancers are highly qualified experts who can inspire new ways of thinking and also help them adopt new ways of working.

And while this year's survey data showed that, in the past year alone, freelancers have spent 44% more time working on projects for large corporations in France, Germany, and Spain, there's still a lot of room to grow.

The companies that use freelancers best are those that invite them to ideate and innovate alongside them. Not just execute the projects assigned to them. This is what the future of work looks like—and there's no question in my mind that it'll be fueled, in large part, by freelancers.





Key Takeaways

We interviewed Malt clients and surveyed over 5,000 freelancers. The results show that **freelancing is gaining momentum across Europe**, catalysing rapid business transformation during uncertain economic times.

INSIGHTS FOR COMPANIES

#1 Companies are shifting strategy focus from resource-gaps to skill-gaps when hiring freelancers

The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) reviewed millions of online job postings for 680 different roles across multiple industries to create the Skill Disruption Index (SDI)¹. Our research shows that Malt freelancers provide skills for roles that are changing the most from one year to the next, **occupying jobs that are 25% more disrupted than the labour market average**.

#2 Large companies are building hybrid super-teams to combine freelance and in-house talent

Large corporations are now tapping into freelancers' skills, knowledge, and expertise more strategically than ever before. Based on multiple conversations with senior-level stakeholders at large corporations across Europe, we've learned that freelancer hiring strategies have shifted from being predominantly focused on resource gaps to being based on skills gaps in their teams.

Additionally, from 2022 to 2024, the amount of time freelancers spend working annually with large corporations has jumped by 55% in Germany, 73% in France, and 220% in Spain.

#3 Client-freelancer relationships are going beyond brief projects to longer-term collaborations

Companies prefer to work on multiple projects with the same group of freelancers to reduce onboarding time and make hybrid teams more efficient. **54% of full-time freelancers on Malt have done more than one project with the same client** over the span of two years.

This also impacts freelancer behaviour, with 7 out of 10 freelancers now making it their top-most priority to build lasting relationships with their clients.

¹The Skill Disruption Index is an assessment of how much the required skills or pre-requisites have changed over time for job roles across various industries and sectors. The skills for the job roles are analyzed and scored on a 100-point scale, from "least disrupted" being 0 to "most disrupted" being 100.

“ **CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVES** Freelancers are often top industry talent, and not second-class citizens in the working world. Our decision to work more effectively with freelancers today comes more from a need to re-think how we can 'borrow' essential and niche skills that we don't currently have in-house rather than from the current economic situation”.



Ambroise de Boisriou

HR SVP, Power Systems & Services, Schneider Electric

INSIGHTS FOR FREELANCERS

#1 Freelancing is a long-term career and a truly viable alternative to full-time employment

Freelancers have remained resilient throughout the economic context of the last two years. Even though the overall European labour market cooled down, **69% of freelancers are confident about their long-term freelancing future**.

Additionally, 90% of freelancers are not actively looking for an in-house employee position, making it clear that it is a chosen career. This also provides evidence about the willingness of companies to continue relying on freelance resources.

#2 Freelancers, just like full-time employees, are seeking fulfillment in their work

Although freelancers still highly prioritise being able to choose their projects and having the flexibility of changing their working location, they are also focused on other key motivators such as client relationships and personal values. Our survey revealed that 70% of freelancers prioritize building lasting relationships with their clients regardless of the size or duration of a project.

Although there are several motivators driving solid freelancer-client relationships, we found that a staggering **74% of freelancers are more likely to take on projects with clients who are aligned with their own values**.

#3 Freelancers come with extensive experience as salaried employees

In many European economies, there is still some confusion about the distinction between freelancers and “gig economy” workers. However freelancers distinguish themselves through several aspects, the most important being their experience and expertise.

The vast majority of freelancers (93%) start their journeys with full-time experience under their belts with 53% of them having over seven years of experience as in-house employees. We also found that freelancers spend an average of 4 to 6 hours per week on skills development to stay competitive and showcase the disruptive nature of their jobs.



Methodology

To bring this report to life, the following quantitative and qualitative data collection tactics were used:

- **An online survey was sent to all freelancers registered** on Malt in France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the UK. Survey participants could submit their responses between May 15, 2023 – June 23, 2023. Given Malt's recent growth, we were able to collect responses from a larger and more diverse freelancer pool than ever before. A total of 5,092 responses were collected, making it one of the biggest research studies on the subject.

- **A series of six 30-minute interviews with C-Level executives from large (multinational) corporations**—all with extensive experience collaborating with freelancers via Malt—in France, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands and across a wide range of industries and sectors, including energy, pharmaceutical, digital services, and consumer goods.

- **A deep dive into internal Malt data** (from 2020 onward) to give the survey results added context.

[Visit Malt](#)

In a parallel path, we wanted to specifically hone in on the traits that enable freelancers to both stand out and bring tremendous value to the marketplace—adaptability, flexibility, dynamism, innovation, in-demand expertise, and resilience—through the lens of a still challenging and uncertain labor market. So, we organized all key inputs for this report (i.e. the freelancer survey, customer interviews, and internal data analysis) around three recurring themes in industry conversations over the past year:

- 1. The impact of economic uncertainty on freelancing.**
How have businesses evolved their policies and hiring strategies to leverage freelancers more effectively in a still tense economic environment?
- 2. The key characteristics of successful freelancer-client collaborations.**
What encourages freelancers and clients to collaborate together on multiple projects?
- 3. The unique value that freelancers bring to a competitive labor market.**
Why do companies choose to work with freelancers versus full-time talent in some cases?



1

How has economic uncertainty impacted freelancing?

Freelancing is still very much in high demand

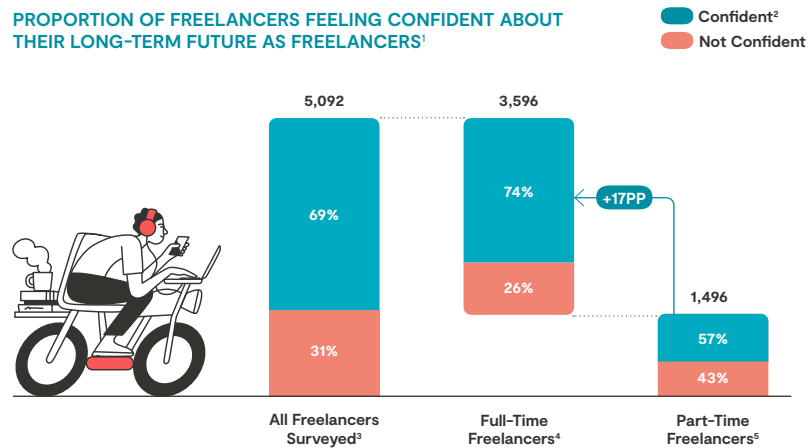
The majority of freelancers across Europe continue to be optimistic about their freelancing businesses and aren't looking to stop freelancing any time soon. If anything, they've seized this period of economic uncertainty to build a stronger foundation for a full-time freelancing future.

Freelancers are confident about their freelancing future

The freelancers we surveyed showed a significant amount of confidence in their freelancing future, in spite of still somewhat uncertain economic times. Overall, **69% of all freelancers surveyed feel confident about their long-term future in freelancing**—only slightly down from 71% in 2022. This sense of optimism was greater for full-time freelancers (74%) versus part-time freelancers (57%). A possible explanation for this difference may be that full-time freelancers have not only learned how to embrace the ongoing ups and downs of the labor market but also are better prepared to work through the challenges of unexpected surprises.

Full-time freelancers are significantly more confident than part-time freelancers.

PROPORTION OF FREELANCERS FEELING CONFIDENT ABOUT THEIR LONG-TERM FUTURE AS FREELANCERS¹



KEY TAKEAWAYS

69% of freelancers feel confident about their long-term future despite the economic environment.

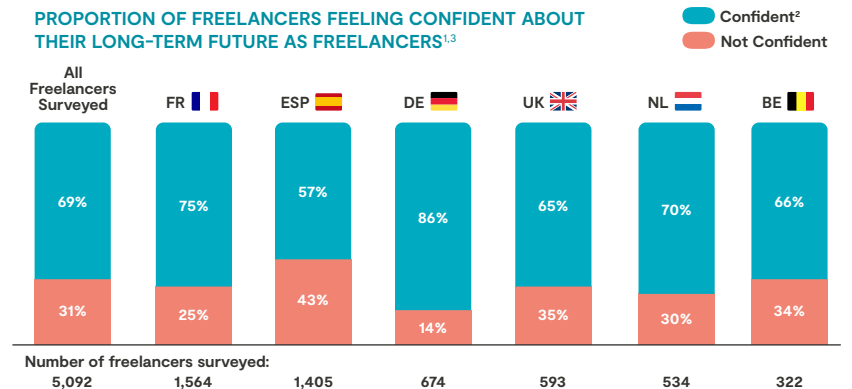
Full-time freelancers feel much more confident than part-time freelancers (Δ17pp).

That being said, feelings of confidence vary from country to country, with **86% of all freelancers in Germany (up from 79% in 2022) and 75% in France (up from 65% in 2022) exhibiting the highest levels of confidence.** In Germany, for example, this likely has a lot to do with the government recently putting new tax breaks and other incentives in place to make it easier to be self-employed in the country, thereby creating a more favorable working environment for freelancers to succeed in Germany⁶.

On the other hand, only 57% of all freelancers in Spain expressed confidence in their freelancing future—down significantly from 69% in 2022. This may be due to an increase in annual self-employment fees that went into effect at the beginning of 2023, thereby requiring freelancers to raise rates in order to cover these additional costs. Similarly, in the UK, complicated legislative measures like the “IR35” rules may have also contributed to slightly lower freelancer confidence (65%) versus the all-country average.

Confidence is high across countries, however some gaps can be observed, with lower confidence in Spain, higher confidence in Germany.

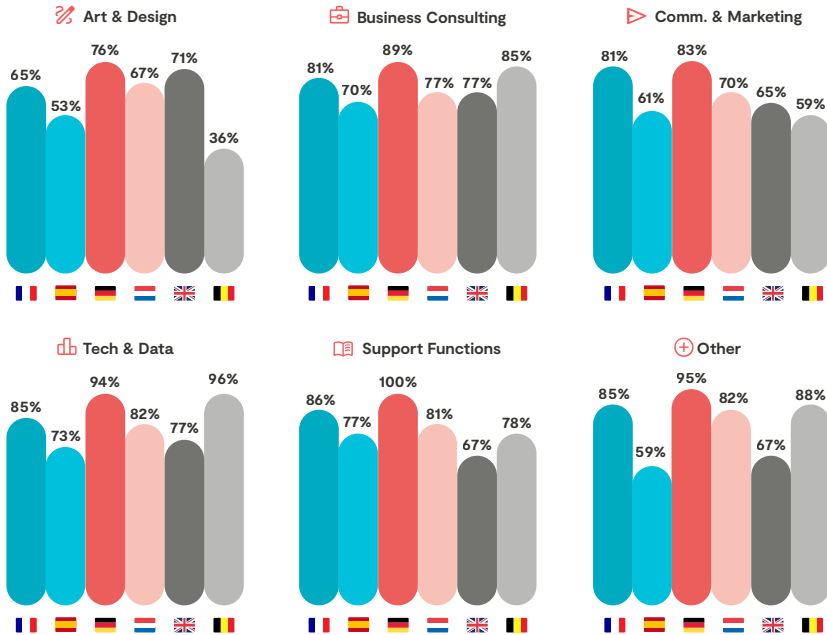
PROPORTION OF FREELANCERS FEELING CONFIDENT ABOUT THEIR LONG-TERM FUTURE AS FREELANCERS^{1,3}



1. Question asked: on a scale of 1 to 5, how confident are you about long-term future as freelancer?
 2. Freelancers considered as confident answered “Confident/Neutral”, “Very confident” or “Extremely confident”
 3. Based on 1st panel selection (~5,100 respondents)
 4. Based on 3rd panel selection (~3,600 respondents)
 5. Based on 2nd panel selection (~1,500 respondents)
 6. How Is The Freelance Revolution Shaping Up In Germany? CEOs Share Their Views. Forbes (March 2023).

Freelancers' confidence in their long-term future as freelancers across jobs and countries:

PROPORTION OF FREELANCERS FEELING CONFIDENT ABOUT THEIR LONG-TERM FUTURE AS FREELANCERS¹



CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVES

“Global economic uncertainty hasn’t really changed how we work with freelancers. However, as our company has gradually been moving towards a more network- and project-based way of working, we have a more solid foundation for working with freelancers.”



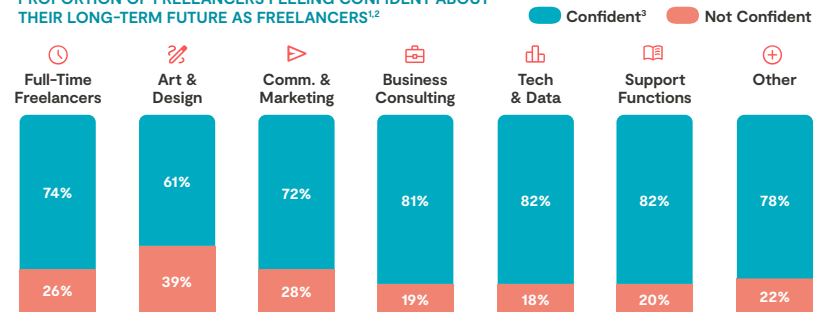
Benjamin Fischer
VP Global Alliance & Integration Management, STADA

This nuance becomes clearer when looking at the responses through the lens of each job category. We found that **the most confident freelancers, across all countries, work in Tech and Data (82%), Support Functions (82%), and Business Consulting (81%).** Conversely, those working in Art and Design (61%) expressed the least amount of confidence overall.

However, why might the responses from freelancers in the Art and Design fields keep skewing in a less optimistic direction? One explanation could be that during times of economic contraction, businesses often seek ways to cut costs. Available funds typically get funneled into growth initiatives while anything without a direct business impact gets cut. Marketing budgets, which most often fund Art and Design projects, tend to be the first expenditures to go.

Freelancers' confidence in their long-term future as freelancers across job families:

PROPORTION OF FREELANCERS FEELING CONFIDENT ABOUT THEIR LONG-TERM FUTURE AS FREELANCERS^{1,2}



A CLOSER LOOK AT JOB FAMILIES

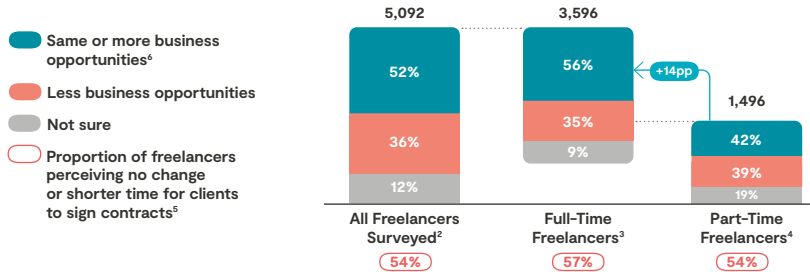
- **What are the most sought-after freelancer roles in Malt's core job families?**
- ▣ **Tech & Data:** Backend Developer, Cloud Engineer, QA Tester, Data Scientist
- ▶ **Comms & Marketing:** Editorial Manager, Journalist, Copywriter, SEO Expert
- ✂ **Art & Design:** Graphic Designer, Creative Director, Illustrator, UI Designer
- 📁 **Business Consulting:** Strategy Consultant, GDPR Consultant, Management Executive, CSR Consultant
- 📖 **Support Functions:** Jurist, Office Manager, Training Officer, Accountant

1. Question asked: on a scale of 1 to 5, how confident are you about long-term future as freelancer?
 2. Based on 4th panel selection (~3300 respondents)
 3. Freelancers considered as confident answered "Confident/Neutral", "Very confident" or "Extremely confident"

Furthermore, 56% of full-time freelancers haven't experienced any form of economic slowdown, which means their workloads have either remained the same or even grown over the past year. The remaining 44% of respondents either felt that they had lesser business opportunities or were unsure how the current economic climate would impact their business.

52% of freelancers don't have any impression of slowdown; this perception is significantly different between full-time and part-time freelancers.

PROPORTION OF FREELANCERS HAVING AN IMPRESSION OF SLOWDOWN DUE TO ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT¹



KEY TAKE AWAYS

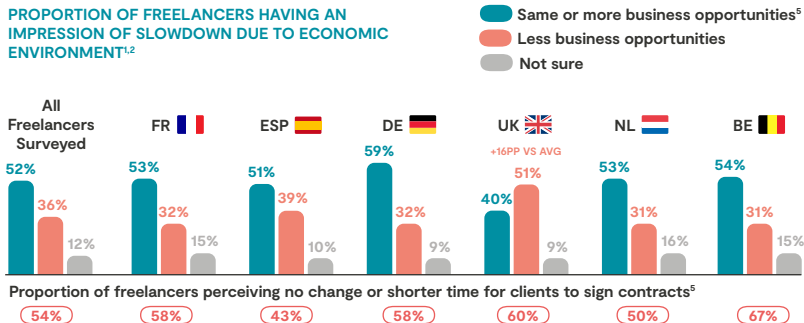
52% of freelancers feel they have same or more business opportunities despite the economic environment; this is less the case among part-time freelancers (42%).

36% of freelancers have an impression of slowdown, similar rates are observed among part-times and full-times.

Majority (**54%**) of freelancers still experience the same process when it comes to signing project contracts with clients.

Impression of slowdown is unbalanced across countries and especially higher in the UK.

PROPORTION OF FREELANCERS HAVING AN IMPRESSION OF SLOWDOWN DUE TO ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT^{1,2}



CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVES

“Every company post-COVID has had to look at the bottom line and figure out how best to control fixed costs. Times like this open up an opportunity to build better freelancing policies.”

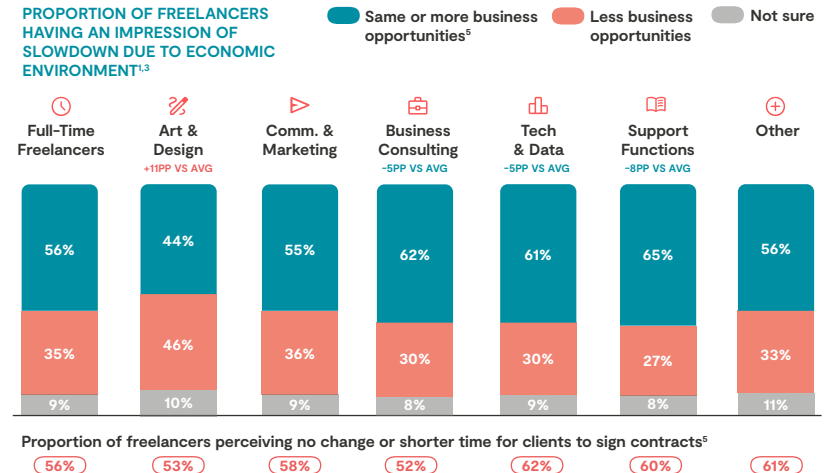


Zora Hadden
SVP Global Procurement Indirect, Coty

We see some differences across job categories, where full-time freelancers in Support Functions (64%), Business Consulting (60%), and Tech and Data (60%) fields saw an uptick in business while 46% of full-time freelancers working in Art and Design fields actually saw the number of projects decrease. This underscores why, as noted above, Art and Design freelancers were the least confident overall.

Freelancers in Support Functions, Business Consulting and Tech Data have very low impression of slowdown compared to Art & Design freelancers.

PROPORTION OF FREELANCERS HAVING AN IMPRESSION OF SLOWDOWN DUE TO ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT^{1,3}



1. Question asked: Have you seen a slowdown in your business due to economic environment?
 2. Based on 1st panel selection (~5100 respondents)
 3. Based on 3rd panel selection (~3600 respondents)
 4. Based on 4th panel selection (~1500 respondents).
 5. Question asked: On a scale of 1 to 5, what is your observation about the time it takes for clients to sign or approve a project contract?
 6. Respondents included in this group answered "Same business opportunities" or "More business opportunities".

Freelancers aren't looking for the "security" of full-time employment

The survey results revealed that **only 10% of freelancers have decided to actively seek out traditional full-time employment once again** while another 28% are still unsure about which way to go. This is in contrast to the 62% of freelancers, across all countries and job categories, who said they were not considering full-time employment opportunities at this time—only a slight drop from 68% in 2021. Ongoing economic uncertainty may have influenced this slight shift towards considering full-time work.

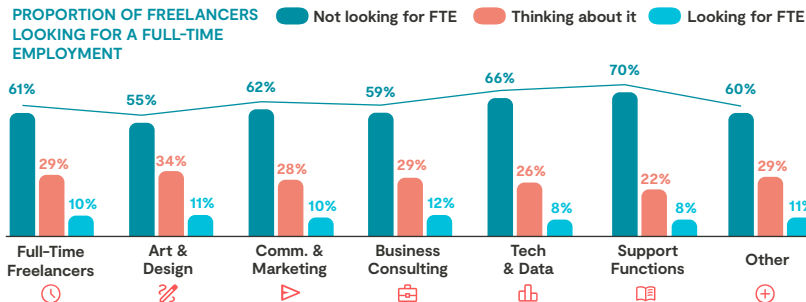
“Our intention is not to replace all full-time employees with freelancers. Rather, we want to ensure we have the right experts when and where we need them at all times. For us, it’s about creating a complementary model between our internal and external workforces—because we believe that our people will benefit from this ‘outside-in’ view as well.”



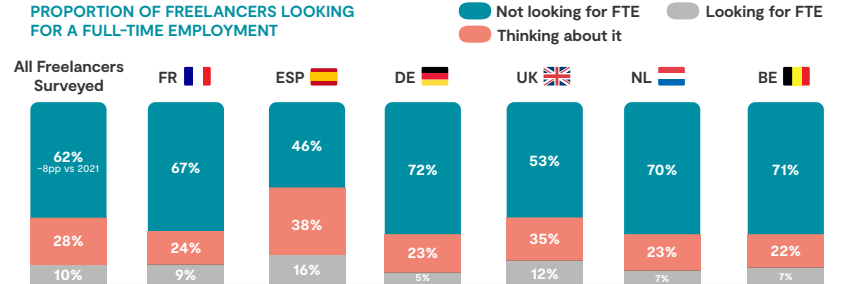
Ambroise de Boisriou
HR SVP, Power Systems & Services, Schneider Electric

These trends held fairly steady across different job categories as well, with the only noticeable exception being 45% freelancers in Art and Design fields showing greater interest in exploring full-time job opportunities (even if they are only “thinking about it” at the moment).

90% of freelancers are not actively looking for an in-house employee position.



Germany, Netherlands, and Belgium have the highest rates of freelancers not actively searching for an in-house position.

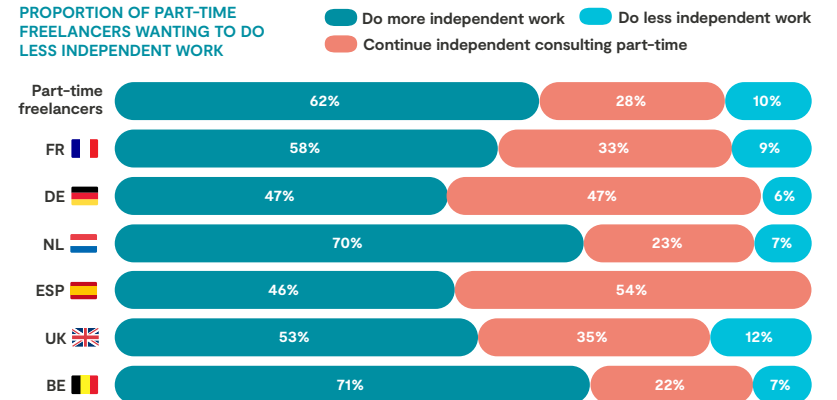


50% of all part-time freelancers surveyed expressed interest in doing more freelance work in the future while another 44% plan to maintain their current freelance workload. Only 6% anticipate cutting back on this work. Despite some variance from country to country, the long-term outlook for freelancing is quite positive—whether in a full-time or part-time capacity.

67.5% of the total respondents said that they chose freelancing as a career mainly due to personal reasons as opposed to external factors. This is another important indicator of the growing attractiveness of freelancing. It is a chosen career.

Although this percentage varies to some degree from one country to another – **63%** for the UK, **64%** for Spain, **65%** for France, **74%** for Germany, and all the way to **77%** for the Netherlands and Belgium – the data decidedly shows that the majority of freelancers opt to leave full-time jobs and pursue an independent career thanks to an intrinsic motivation.

Only 6% of part-time freelancers want to do less independent work to focus on their full-time job.

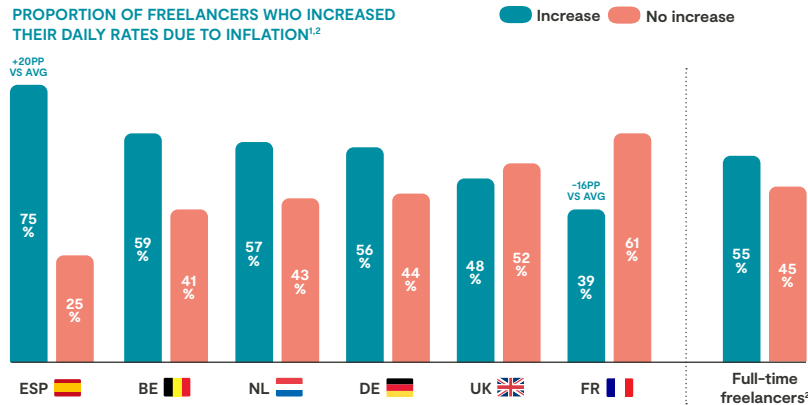


Freelancers are cost-effective in a challenging economic context

One reason why freelancers have a competitive edge in the marketplace is because they can often provide their services with fewer overhead costs and much more flexibility. In the long run, clients can rely on them for **high-quality services at an incredible value**—even at a time when many companies are pulling back on budgets.

Even though **over half (55%) of full-time freelancers increased their rates over the last year** to keep up with inflationary pressure, they still succeed in remaining competitive with full-time employees owing to their expertise and constant upskilling.

55% of full-time freelancers aligned their daily rates with inflation; high adjustments in Spain vs no change in France.

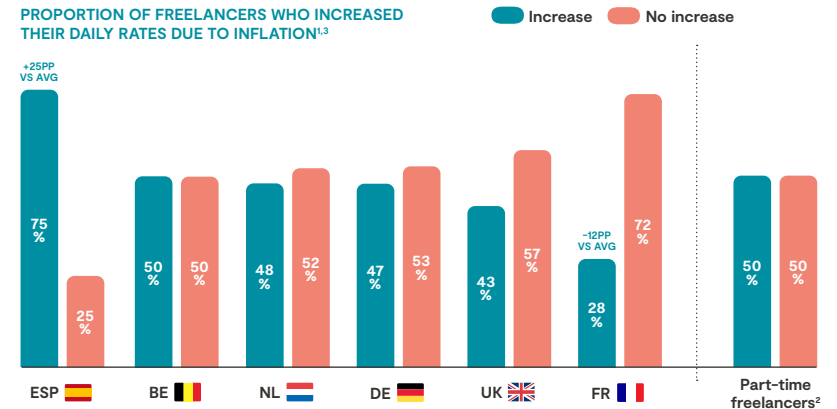


This ability to raise rates was more pronounced in Spain, where a whopping **75%** of full-time freelancers did so successfully—compared to only **39%** in France and **56%** in Germany. This may be because freelancers in Spain either had been historically under-pricing themselves or were now looking for an easy way to offset recently increased self-employment fees.

We also found that part-time freelancers followed a similar pattern. Across all European countries, **there was more or less an even split between part-time freelancers who decided to raise rates versus those who didn't**. The decision to increase rates was, once again, most prevalent in Spain (72%).

Still, part-time freelancers seemed less willing to raise rates than their full-time counterparts. This may be the result of their own price sensitivity or, in other words, fearing that requesting additional compensation could jeopardize a valuable supplemental income source.

50% of freelancers working part-time have even aligned their daily rate on inflation with high adjustments in Spain vs no change in France.



“THE FREELANCER EXPERIENCE
 I’ve increased my daily rates in the past year for a number of reasons. Recent inflation is certainly one of those factors. But my growing experience as a freelancer has a lot to do with it, too. The longer I’ve run my freelancing business, the more credibility and confidence I’ve earned with my clients. Now that I’m getting more project requests than ever before, prioritizing clients who are willing to pay higher rates has naturally shifted my daily rates upward.



Sara Arévalo,
 Accounting and Tax Consultant (Spain)

1. Question asked: Have you increased your daily rate due to inflation?
 2. Based on 3rd panel selection (~3,600) respondents.

3. Based on 2nd panel selection (~1,500) respondents.



2

What motivates
freelancers
to succeed?

Freelancers are deeply committed to their clients' success

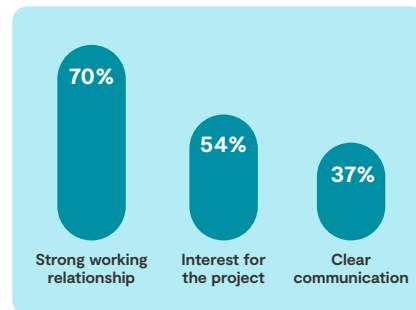
There are many perks of being a freelancer. One is the flexibility to choose who to work with, what to work on, and where to work from. Another is the ability to fluctuate workload to achieve specific financial goals, professional ambitions, and so on. **Although these perks may seem highly individualistic in nature, the survey results actually showed that freelancers care most about one thing: their clients.**

Freelancers want to build strong client relationships

When asked about what would motivate them most to continue working with the same client on multiple projects over the long-term, **70% of freelancers across all countries said maintaining a strong working relationship with their clients was the most important factor.** This was followed by “having a real interest in the projects they work on” (54%) and “keeping the lines of communication ongoing and open” (37%) with their clients at all times.

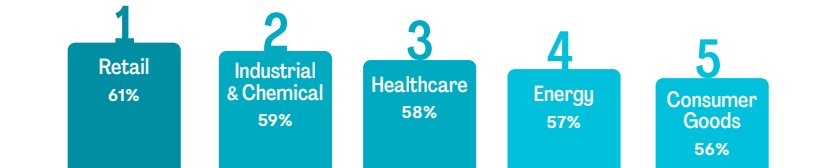
Freelancers value a strong working relationship, interest in the project and regular communication when collaborating with clients

MOTIVATIONS TO CONTINUE WORKING WITH THE SAME CLIENT ON DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROJECTS, OVER A LONGER PERIOD OF TIME^{1,2}



We also found that **54% of full-time freelancers on Malt have done more than one project with the same client over the span of two years**—with little variance across job categories. This highlights that businesses no longer consider working with freelancers as a one-off or short-term collaboration. **In fact, there's a good chance that a business will work again with one out of every two of their freelancers.**

Malt data reveals that the highest project repetition rates are in the sectors of:



“CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVES
“We often hire freelancers to help us address immediate—and often unforeseen—needs in a short-term capacity. However, there are some freelancers on our team who have worked with us for well over a year, and those engagements have been equally successful.”



Amador Nieto
 Chief Technical Officer, Decathlon Spain

- 25% Learn new skills
- 21% Interest for clients' industry
- 20% Alignment with clients values
- 18% Clear briefings
- 13% Understand clients' strategy
- 12% Potential to increase billable hours
- 11% Test and learn culture
- 8% Work in person

1. Question asked: What factors would most encourage you to continue working with the same client on different types of projects and/or larger projects over a longer period of time?
 2. Based on 3rd panel selection (~3,600 respondents)

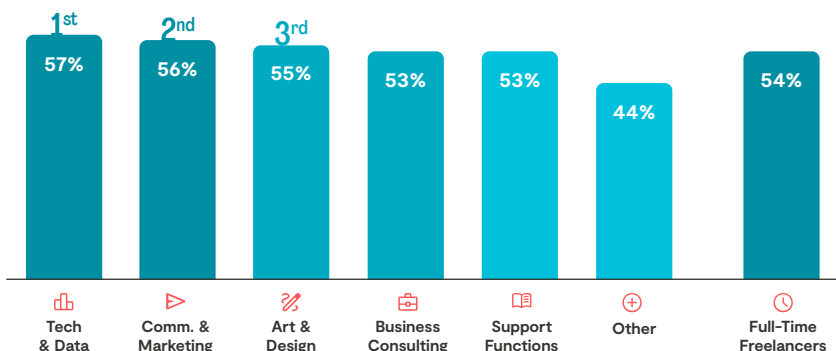


We also found that freelancers who left their clients a positive post-project rating and review were more likely to do another project with them again in the future.

However, doing repeat work is not just about having a positive working relationship. In our conversations with companies that regularly do work with freelancers, it was found that sometimes the reason for hiring freelancers is only to address specific short-term project needs, not as a test to consider a longer-term engagement. Similarly, some freelancers are more interested in tackling a variety of smaller projects for various clients. Either way, even if an initial project goes well, repeat work may not happen instantly and can take a couple of years to materialize.

54% of freelancers do more than 1 mission with the same organization within 2 years.

PROPORTION OF FREELANCERS TO DO MORE THAN 1 MISSION WITH THE SAME ORGANIZATION WITHIN 2 YEARS¹



Nothing is without its obstacles

While we certainly hope that every freelancer engagement will be a success, some factors actually deter freelancers from working with the same client again.

This list of obstacles includes:

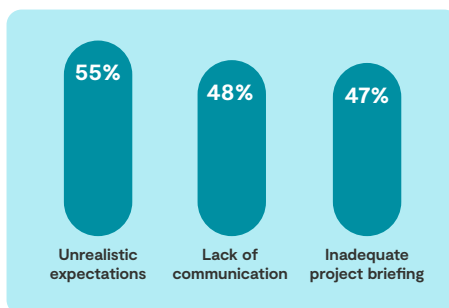
1. being held to unrealistic expectations (55%);
2. having a lack of clear and open communications (48%);
3. kicking off a new project with an inadequate briefing (47%).

Without these elements in place, it's both harder to build strong and collaborative working relationships and easier to create an excuse for parting ways after a project's completion.

These obstacles can quickly get in a company's way of being able to build and maintain a roster of high quality freelancers for future projects. But this can be avoided simply by preparing a thorough project kick-off and remaining accessible to support a freelancer's success from start to finish.

Top obstacles to successful freelancer-client collaboration

OBSTACLES TO SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIONS WITH CLIENTS^{2,3}

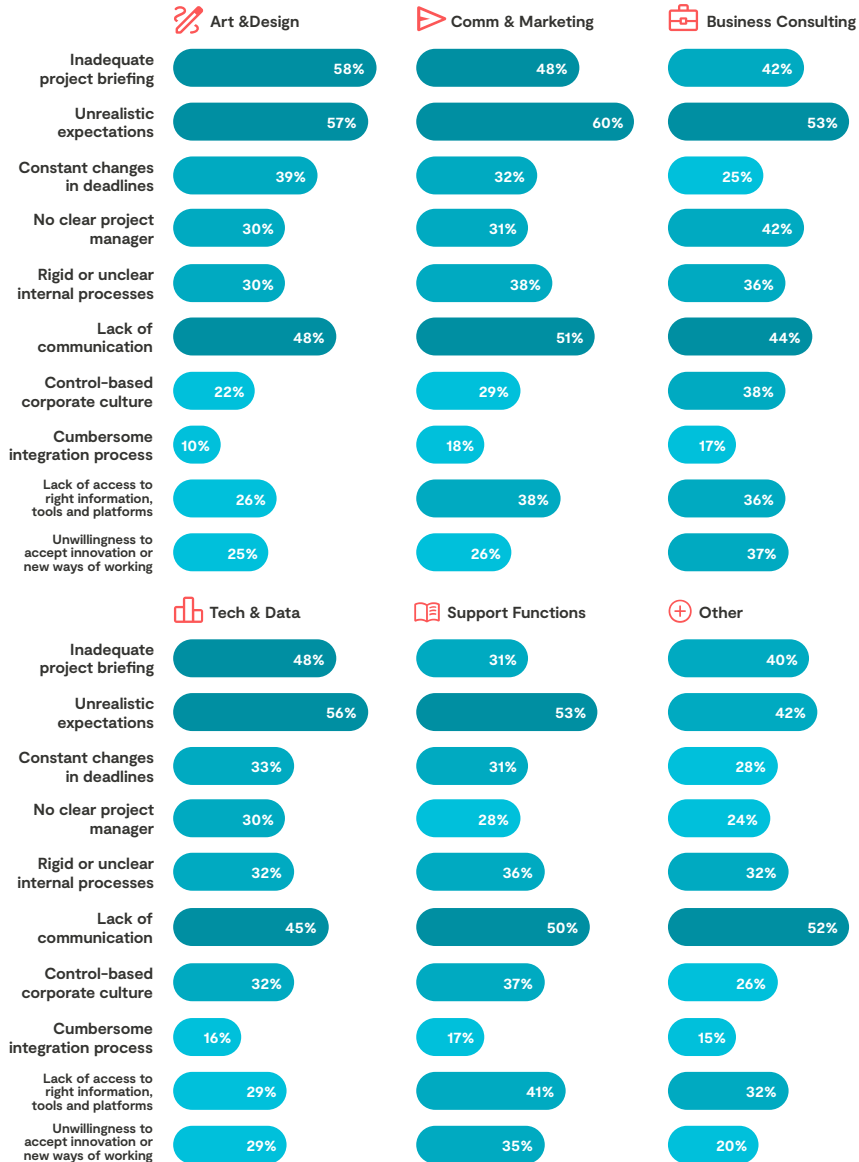


- 35% Rigid or unclear internal processes
- 33% Lack of access to right tools
- 33% No clear project manager
- 32% Constant changes in deadlines
- 31% Control-based corporate culture
- 19% Difficulty to accept innovation or new ways of working
- 16% Cumbersome integration process

1. Focus on corporate client, all countries. Source: Malt Analysis
 2. Question asked: What are the main roadblocks freelancers and clients have to face? MCQ with 10 responses.
 3. Based on 3rd panel selection (~3,600 respondents)



Obstacles to successful collaborations with clients among categories^{1,2}



CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVES

“ We are now moving towards a ‘Total Talent Vision’ when it comes to hiring both full-time and external resources. This approach is gaining momentum—and is positive for freelancers.

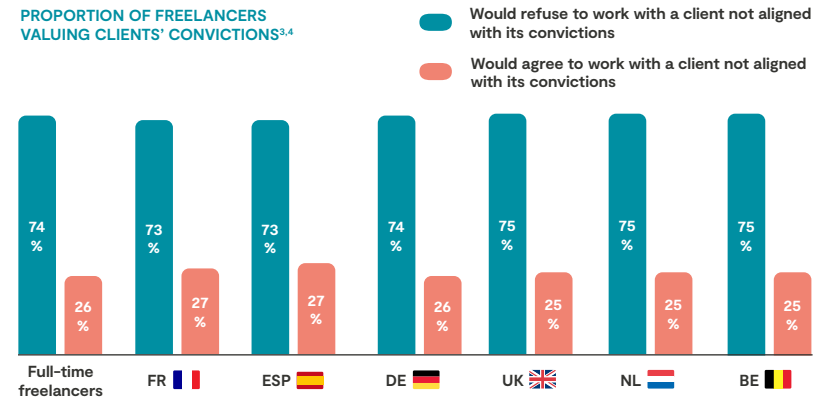


Jan Van Acoleyen,
Human Capital Leader, Proximus

Freelancers want to do work aligned to their passions and interests

Here’s an eye-opener: **74%** of full-time freelancers would refuse to work on a project or with a client who is not aligned with their values. Thanks to their power of choice, freelancers have the flexibility to determine which projects bring them the most joy in their work.

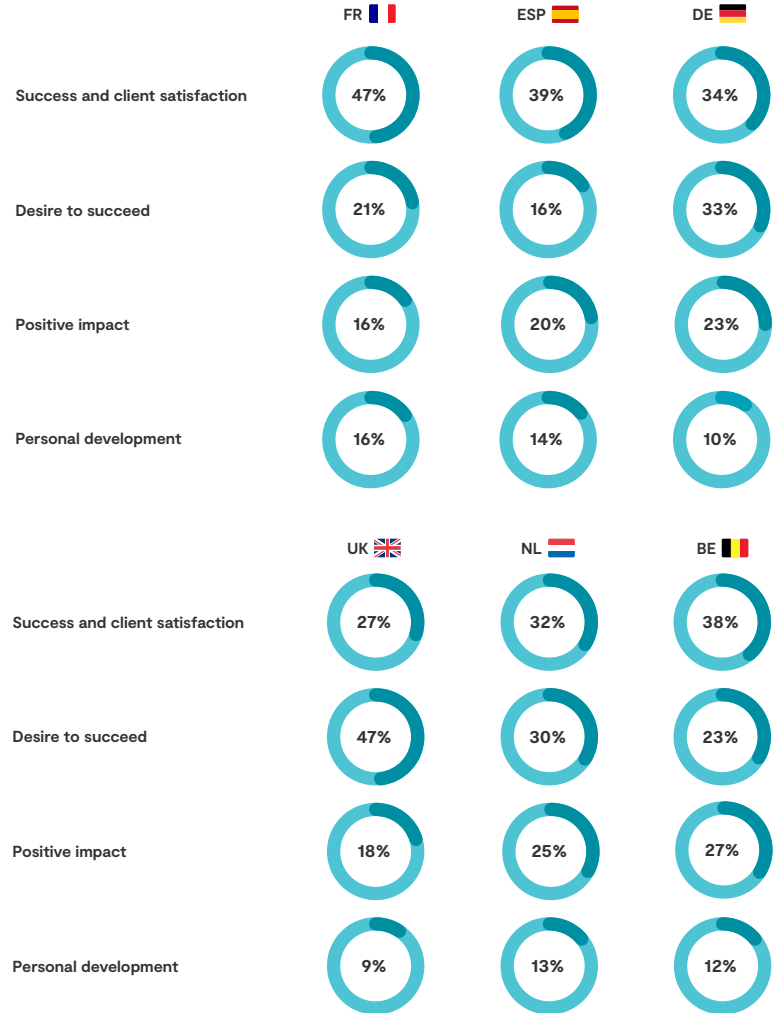
74% of full-time freelancers would refuse to work with a client who is not aligned with their values



1. Question asked: What factors would most encourage you to continue working with the same client on different types of projects and/or larger projects over a longer period of time?
 2. Based on 4th panel selection (~3,300 respondents).
 3. Question asked: Would you refuse to work with a company that disagrees with your own convictions, opinions and values?
 4. Based on 3rd panel selection (~3,600 respondents).

When working on a project, full-time freelancers are motivated by client satisfaction and desire to succeed.

FACTORS ENCOURAGING THE MOST TO ENSURE PROJECTS' SUCCESS FROM START TO END





3

Why do
companies hire
freelancers?

Freelancers are bona fide change agents

Today, freelancers are sought after for their subject-matter expertise and disruptive skill sets—in other words, the qualities that make them invaluable assets for businesses—versus simply being hired to fill temporary resource gaps, as this was the most common use case for freelancers in the past.

This has ultimately transformed freelancers into catalysts of disruption. They are being asked to challenge their clients' ideas and bring fresh, new perspectives to the table. Freelancers are aware of this and know that remaining competitive in the marketplace requires being able to both anticipate and execute on rapidly changing client needs and cross-industry competencies.

Freelancers' disruptive skills keep them one step ahead of client needs

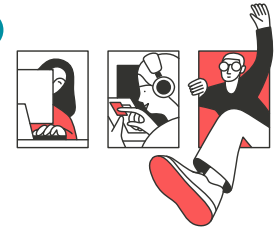
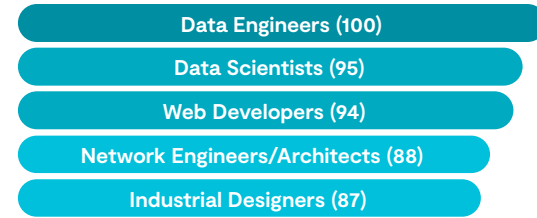
UNDERSTANDING KEY TERMS

Skill Disruption Index. When looking at the freelancers registered on Malt through the lens of BCG's Skill Disruption Index (SDI)—a measure of how the required skills for 680 roles across various industries and sectors have changed from 2016 to 2021, ranked from "least disrupted" (0) to "most disrupted" (100)—we found that they predominantly offer services in the most disrupted job roles.

For instance, while the average score for job roles listed in the SDI is 57, the average score for the roles held by Malt freelancers is 71 (based on profile information)—this is 25% greater than the SDI average. This basically means that the freelancers on Malt are well-equipped to tackle the many new and constantly evolving skills-based challenges facing companies today.

Taking that one step further, only 3% of job roles in the SDI have a score of 80 or above whereas that number soars tenfold to 30% for Malt profiles.

A few examples of highly disrupted profiles include:



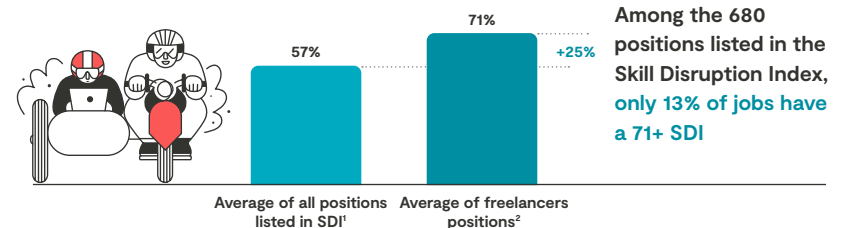
Freelancers in highly disrupted job roles represented nearly half (46%) of Malt's project value in H1 2023. This was driven by the Consumer Goods, Consulting, Energy, and Public sectors—accounting for 59% of project spend in H1 2023—along with steady growth across all job categories: Support Functions (161%), Tech and Data (90%), Business Consulting (87%), Marketing and Communications (73%), and Art and Design (32%).

This data may lead one to believe that freelancers are the most vulnerable in the marketplace because they fill roles in the most disrupted—and thus, one might assume, most at risk—job categories. However, given the fact that more than half (55%) of freelancers have successfully raised their rates, despite ongoing economic uncertainty, and so few (~10%) are actively looking for full-time employment once again, the opposite story is actually true: they see disruption as a competitive advantage.

Because freelancers are so skilled in highly disrupted roles—and, as you'll see below, take a proactive approach to upskilling themselves in order to remain competitive in the marketplace—they are well-positioned to be today's disruption and digital transformation champions.

Freelancers occupy jobs that are 25% more disrupted than market average.

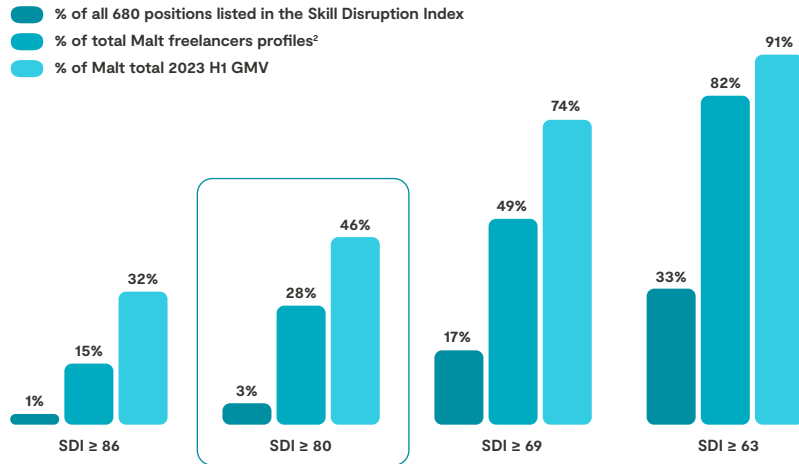
SKILL DISRUPTION INDEX COMPARISON (2022)



1. Skill Disruption Index
 2. Average on all 679 positions listed in "Shifted Skills, Moving Targets, and Remaking the Workforce" study from May 2022, by BCG, The Burning Glass Institute and Emsi Burning Glass

Malt freelancers predominantly offer services in the most disrupted job roles.

SHARED COMPARISON OF MARKETS JOBS VS MALT FREELANCERS' PROFILES VS GENERATED 2022 MALT GMV³, PER SDI¹ BUCKET (% , 2022)



Freelancers see themselves as more skilled than their clients

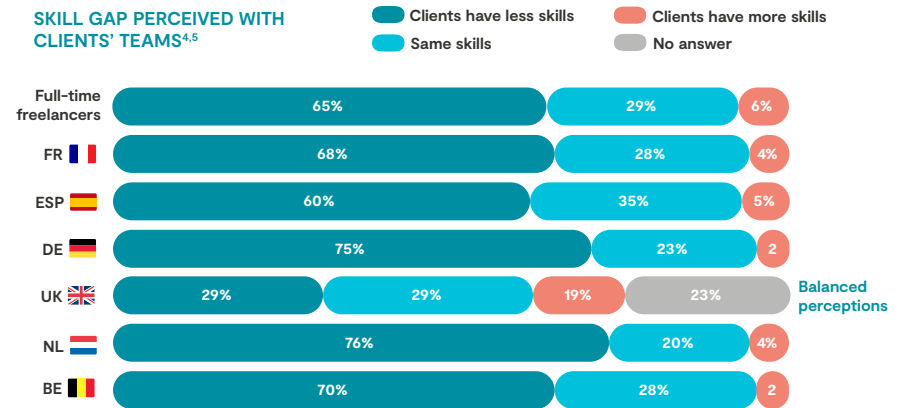
Today's freelancers not only stay informed about the latest business trends and evolving customer needs but also take the initiative to learn new skills to remain competitive in a quickly evolving market.

Based on Malt profile data, **53% of active freelancers have added at least one new skill or certification to their profile** within a year of starting on Malt. This was especially the case for roles like Web Integrator, Cloud Engineer, Cybersecurity Expert, Frontend Developer, Analytics Consultant, GDPR Consultant, Web Editor, and Scrum Master.

This desire to learn new skills may point to why **64% of full-time freelancers feel they are more skilled than their clients or client's teams**, which was most prominent in the Netherlands (76%) and Germany (75%). Only in the UK was this sentiment evenly split between having a greater, equal or lesser skill level.

In the meantime, majority of full-time freelancers (64%) feel they have more specific skills than their clients, except in the UK where they are more balanced.

SKILL GAP PERCEIVED WITH CLIENTS' TEAMS^{4,5}



Perceptions of client-freelancer skills gaps may be related to the types of companies freelancers work with. **Full-time freelancers across all countries said they spend 51% of their time working with small businesses** (250 employees or fewer). Only 25% and 24% of their time, respectively, is spent with medium-sized companies (250-5,000 employees) or large corporations (5,000 employees or more).

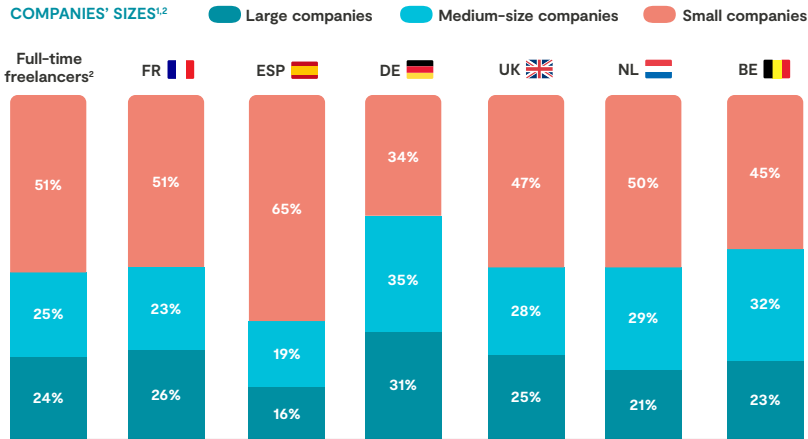
This signifies a marked change since 2022. **The amount of time freelancers now spend working with large corporations has increased significantly in France (15% to 26%), Spain (5% to 16%), and Germany (20% to 31%).** But these increases aren't surprising. In fact, it reflects exactly what clients at large corporations have told us recently: they are now finally starting to rethink how they tap into freelance talent and better leverage freelancers' skills and expertise in a strategic way to speed up innovation.

So why might perceptions of skills gaps be tied to a company's size? On the one hand, smaller companies may not yet have the budgets to invest in headcount for specialized areas of expertise and lean into freelancers as a rapid and cost-effective way to fill critical skills gaps. **Scale-ups and multinational corporations, on the other hand, typically have more internal resources to tap into before looking outside for support and can be more strategic in how they hire freelancers.**

1. Skill Disruption Index
 2. Based on freelancers' profiles, weighted by % of profiles per position among total Malt freelancers' profiles. Note: all % displayed are cumulative
 3. Growth Merchandise Value. Source: Malt, Burning Glass Institute, BCG Analysis

4. Question asked: on a scale of 1 to 5, how do you perceive the skills gap between yourself and the client teams you work with?
 5. Based on 3rd panel selection (~3,600 respondents)

Freelancers work on a wide variety of assignments, dividing their time between companies of all sizes.

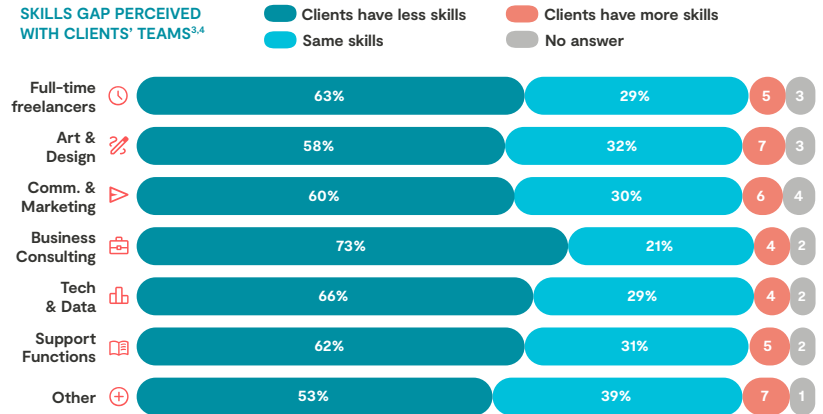


Finally, perceptions of skills gaps vary by job category as well, with full-time freelancers in Business Consulting (73%) and Tech and Data (66%) roles expressing having a higher skill level than their clients while those in Art and Design (58%) were not as confident in making the same assertion. Knowing that freelancers in the Art and Design fields are less optimistic about their freelancing future, this sentiment may have created a “halo effect” into their perception of skills dominance as well.



1. Question asked: in 2022, what percentage of your projects were done with small business (less than 250 employees), medium-sized (250–5,000) and large corporations (5,000+ employees)?
 2. Based on 3rd panel selection (~3,600 respondents)

Business consulting and Tech & Data feel they have more specific skills than their clients compared to other job categories.



CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVES

“Freelancers also upskill our own people. We hire freelancers more for their disrupted skills than for filling capacity needs. The roles where skills change the most are where we place freelancers”.



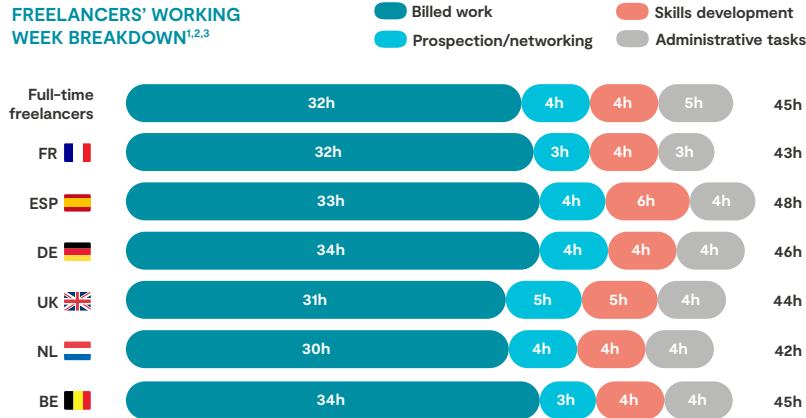
Philipp Niemann,
Chief Digital Officer, Hella Gutmann

Freelancers are early adopters of new skills

Full-time freelancers spend an average of four hours per week on skills development. When looking at data across different job categories, we also found that full-time freelancers working in either Art and Design or Tech and Data fields spend a little more time upskilling themselves—on average, five hours per week. For Art and Design freelancers, this is probably a way to expand skill sets and diversify service offerings in the face of a more challenging work environment. For Tech and Data freelancers, ongoing skills development is a proactive way to maintain a competitive edge by getting hands-on experience with the latest trends, innovations, and technologies shaping the business world.

3. Question asked: on a scale of 1 to 5, how do you perceive the skills gap between yourself and the client teams you work with?
 4. Based on 4th panel selection (~3,300 respondents)

To keep their added-value on skills disruption, full-time freelancers tend to train 4–6h per week.

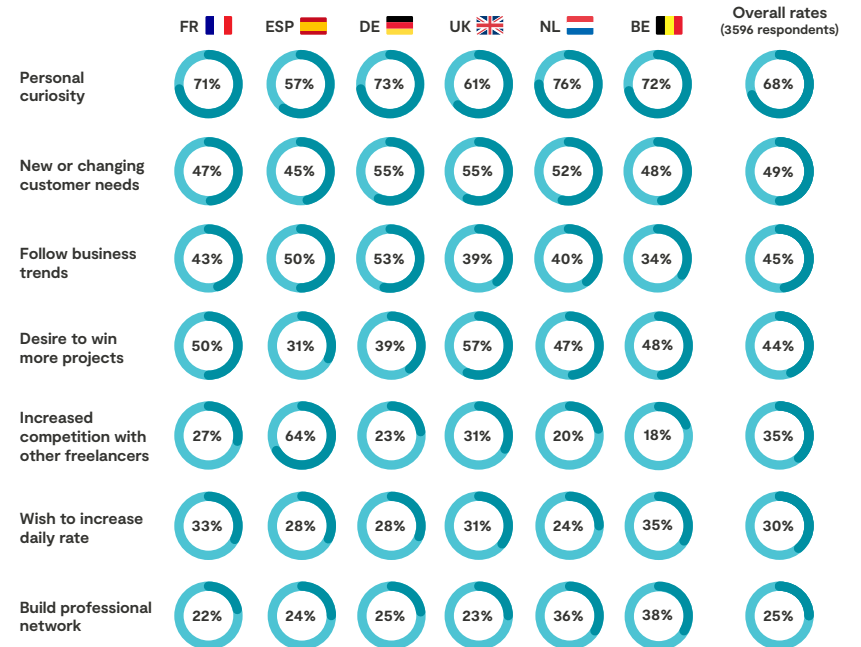


Why do freelancers learn new skills?

Across all countries, **68%** of freelancers said that their top motivator for learning new skills was “personal curiosity”—trailed by a relatively large margin by “keeping up with new or changing customer needs” (49%), “following business trends” (45%), and “wanting to win more projects” (44%).

Freelancers’ motivation to learn new skills differs by country:

MAIN MOTIVATIONS TO LEARN NEW SKILLS^{2,5}



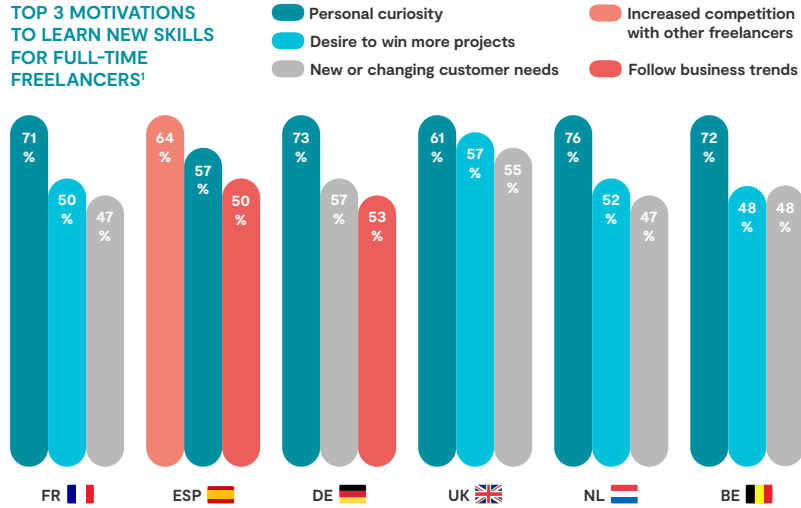
When diving into the data at a country-by-country level, however, we see a few important nuances. Only in Spain did personal curiosity come in second place; for Spanish freelancers, “increasing competition with other freelancers” was found to be their key motivator. Interestingly enough, Spain was also the only country where this desire to increase competitiveness ranked as a top three motivator for upskilling.



1. 4 questions asked: 1/ Amount of working hours per week; B/ Amount of prospection time per week; C/ Amount of time dedicated to improving skills, trainings and education; D/ Amount of time dedicated to administrative tasks
 2. Based on 3rd panel selection (~3,600 respondents)
 3. Outliers have been removed: working hours >70h or <10, prospection time >20h, administrative tasks >20h, education >20h
 4. Based on 4th panel selection (~3,300 respondents)
 5. Question asked: What motivates you to acquire new skills? MCQ with 7 choices.

Personal curiosity is among the top 3 motivations to learn skills across all countries.

TOP 3 MOTIVATIONS TO LEARN NEW SKILLS FOR FULL-TIME FREELANCERS¹



This uncovers a rather unexpected story about freelancers and their learning and development journeys. Because they aren't required (by an employer or otherwise) to follow a specific training path related to their core job description, freelancers have the freedom to absorb as much knowledge as they possibly can, on their own terms. In other words, their motivation for learning new skills isn't because they have to but rather because they want to—whether it's directly related to their freelance work or simply because they are eager to expand their realm of expertise in any way they see fit.

Given this, it's no surprise that more operational motivators for learning new skills, like "a desire to increase daily rates" or "an interest in growing one's professional network," ranked low.



1. Question asked: What motivates you to acquire new skills?



4

Who are Europe's
freelancers?

Freelancers are the real deal

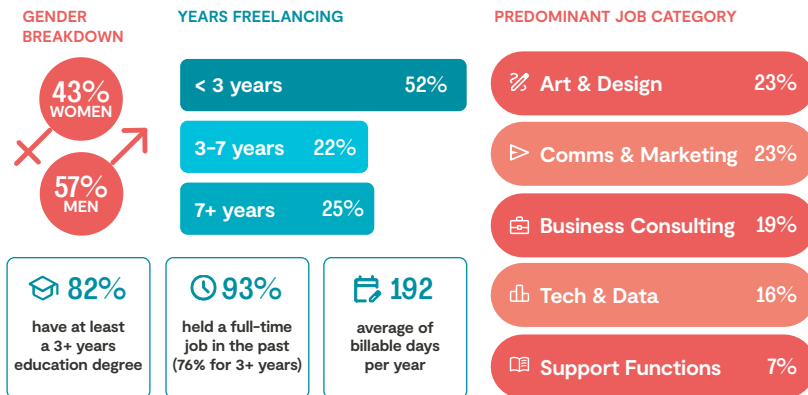
The freelancers on Malt are seasoned professionals and sought-after subject-matter experts who have decided to set traditional employment aside and put their professional destiny into their own hands.

Based on the responses from all the freelancers surveyed, here's what we know about them: They are well-educated—half (50%) with post-graduate education—**nearly all (93%) have full-time experience**, and almost half (47%) have been running their freelance businesses for three years or more.

For these reasons, **it's time to set aside perceptions about freelancers as having little professional experience** or simply testing the freelancing waters as a foot in the door to land a full-time job. **The data clearly shows that today's freelancers are the “real deal.”**

Europe's freelancers, by the numbers

At a high level, this is what Europe's ever-growing freelancer community looks like:



An even more compelling story emerges for respondents who have made freelancing a full-time career. Over half (53%) of full-time freelancers have worked as salaried employees for seven years or more—with 76% having at least three years of solid expertise to bring to their client engagements.

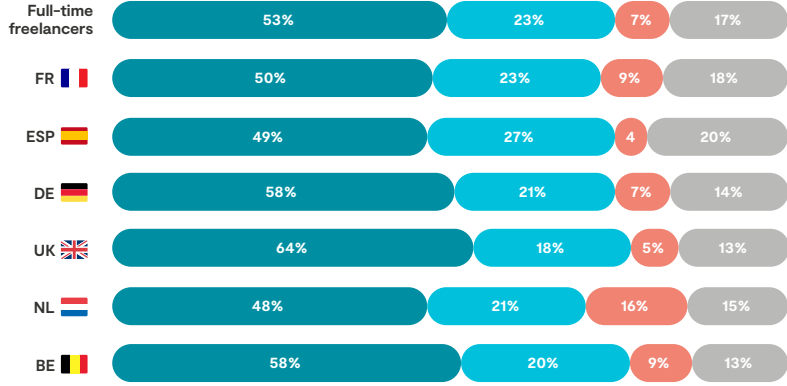
The country whose freelancers have the most prior full-time experience is the UK, where 64% confirmed having worked for seven years or more. Compared to the rest of Europe, the UK has a longstanding relationship with freelancing and is often viewed as a mature and highly experienced freelancing market.

This helps explain why 72% of full-time freelancers said they now either earn more or the same as a freelancer than they once did as a salaried, full-time employee. In other words, a freelancer's past work experience gives them the credibility to charge rates commensurate with how they would be normally compensated as full-time employees. The only outlier here is the UK, where nearly one-third (31%) of full-time freelancers confirmed earning less. But this shouldn't be seen as a negative. As this study has already shown, many freelancers in the UK have made the leap to freelancing to strike a better balance between their personal and professional goals. For them, money isn't the key motivator.

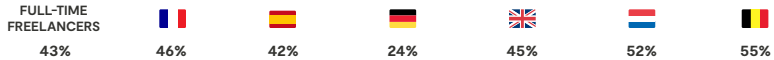


Freelancing attracts experienced profiles, with > 58% having more than 7 years experience as full-time employees (FTE).

FREELANCERS' PRE-EXPERIENCED AS FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES^{1,2}

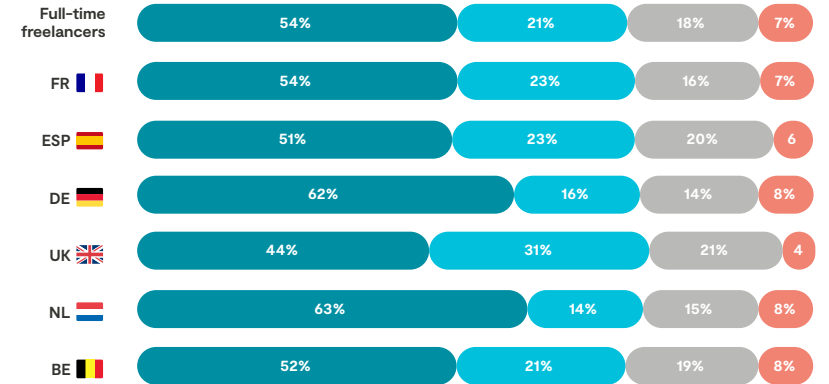


Proportion with freelancing experience < 3 years ^{2,3}



Full-time freelancers tend to earn more than when they were full-time employees (FTE), except in the UK where they are more balanced.

FREELANCERS' SALARY AS FREELANCERS VS SALARY THEY HAD AS FTE⁴



1. Question asked: How long have you worked as a full-time employee?
 2. Based on 3rd panel selection (~3,600 respondents).
 3. Question asked: How long have you worked as a freelancer?
 4. Question asked: Do you earn more money today as a freelancer than you did when you were a full-time employee?

“ THE FREELANCER EXPERIENCE

I decided to become an independent consultant after holding various in-house sales, marketing, and customer success positions at companies like Nexans, DHL, and Renault. As I grew in my career, I saw firsthand just how much internal politics gets in the way of organizational success. That wasn't how I saw my career moving forward. I wanted to be able to add greater flexibility to my professional life and work according to my own values. The independence I now have as a freelance consultant opens up so many possibilities for me to work on projects that are tailored to

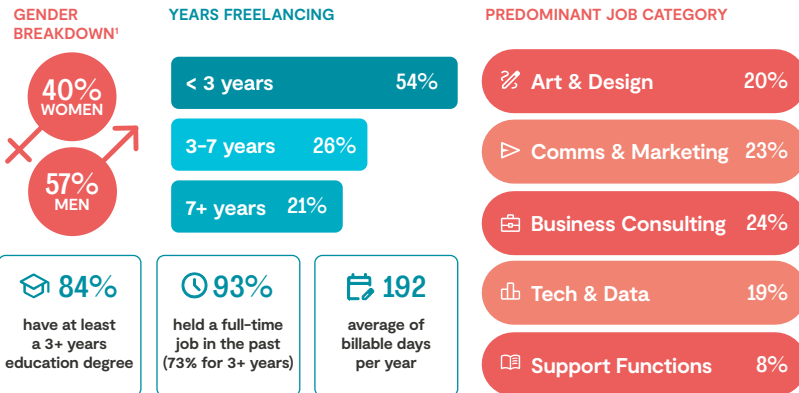
both my interests and expertise—and to do so with some of the most well-respected companies in the world. Not only does this motivate me to deliver stellar results for all the clients I work for, but now I can also dedicate more of my time and energy to forging strong relationships, built on clear communication and mutual understanding.



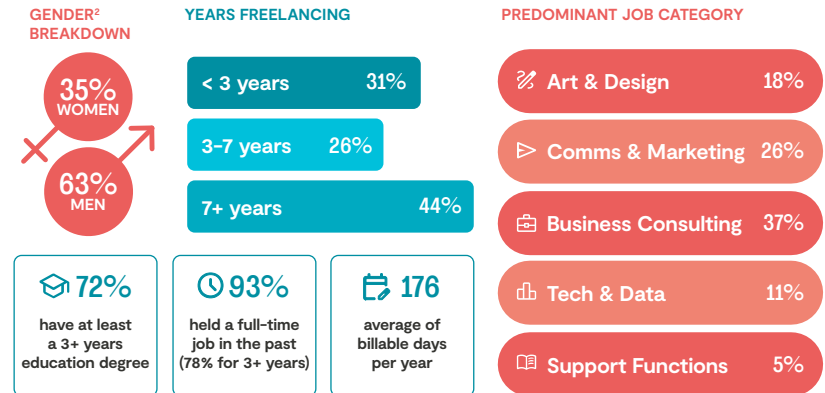
Azzedine Kettani,
Organizational Development, Strategy, and M&A Consultant

Now that we've taken a look at the data from a European-wide perspective, here's a quick snapshot of some of the nuances that happen on a country-specific level:

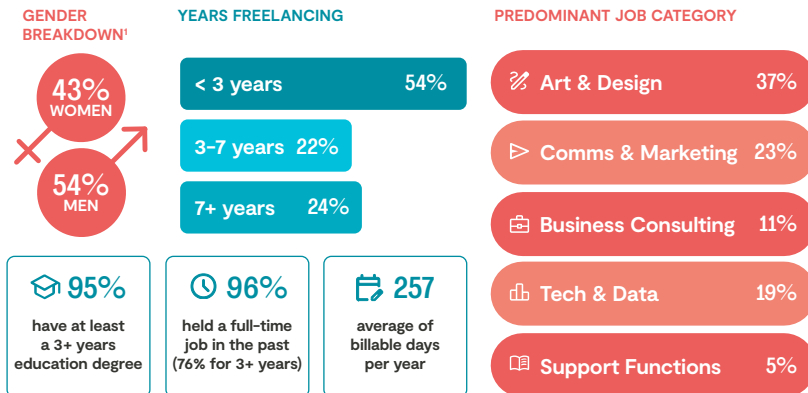
France 🇫🇷



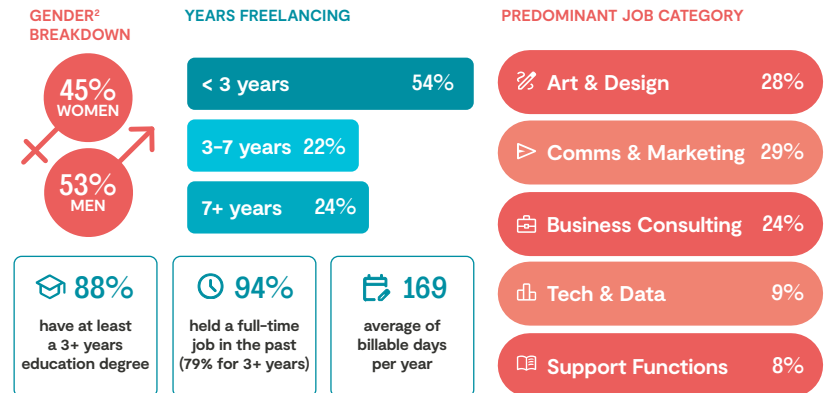
Germany 🇩🇪



Spain 🇪🇸

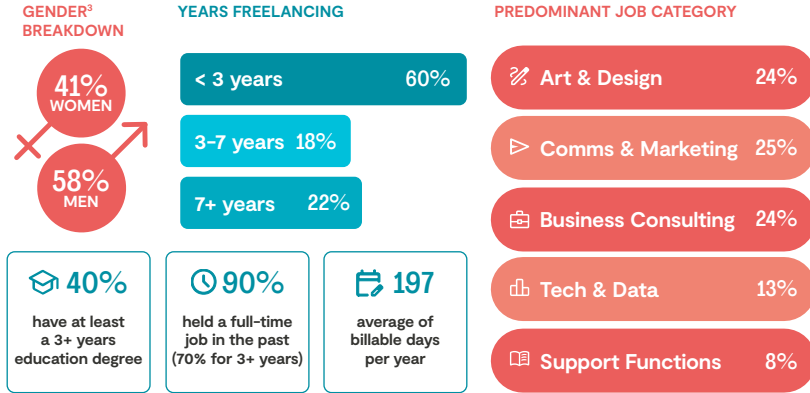


UK 🇬🇧

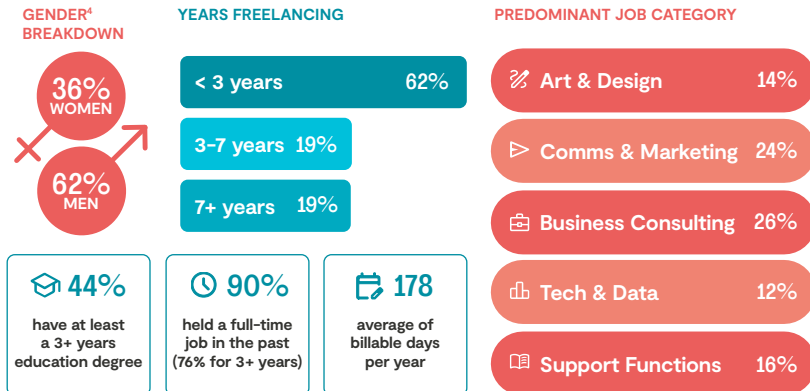


1. The remaining 3% of freelancers surveyed in France and Spain selected "Other" as their response. This includes those who identify as transgender or non-binary or simply preferred not to answer the question.
 2. The remaining 2% of freelancers surveyed in Germany and the UK selected "Other" as their response. This includes those who identify as transgender or non-binary or simply preferred not to answer the question.

Netherlands



Belgium



3.The remaining 1% of freelancers surveyed in the Netherlands selected "Other" as their response. This includes those who identify as transgender or non-binary or simply preferred not to answer the question.

4.The remaining 2% of freelancers surveyed in Belgium selected "Other" as their response. This includes those who identify as transgender or non-binary or simply preferred not to answer the question.

BUSINESS OUTLOOK

Tips for successful project collaborations

It's time to re-think your freelancer sourcing strategy

As part of this study, we interviewed a handful of Malt customers to better understand how they work with freelancers today. Much of what we heard during these conversations reinforced the survey's findings: the current economic climate has not slowed down freelancer recruitment as much as it has given companies, of all shapes and sizes, an opportunity to rethink their approach.

What became abundantly clear is that companies now look at freelancers in a completely different light. Because of the in-demand expertise they bring to every project—and their ability to address targeted needs, especially in highly specialized sectors—freelancers have quickly become embraced by companies as legitimate change agents who can take their projects to the next level.

Why do companies work with freelancers?

One of the biggest reasons why companies choose to work with freelancers is to tap into hard-to-find skills that don't already exist within their organizations. This is especially true for highly specialized industries, like pharmaceuticals and tech, where a higher degree of subject-matter expertise and industrial know-how is needed.

Other reasons Malt customers say they work with freelancers include:

Project speed. When a project requires a quick turnaround, freelancers can hit the ground running and execute in a timely manner, without any organizational “layers” slowing them down.

Rapid hiring. Unlike the process used for hiring full-time employees, freelancers can be sourced, hired, and onboarded rapidly to address immediate resource gaps or specific project needs. Additionally, freelancers can also be staffed in an “interim” capacity while you take the time to find, interview, and hire the right full-time employee.

Internal upskilling. Freelancers can bring the skills they’ve learned externally to help build new competencies within internal teams that last well after a project ends. **You can do this by inviting freelancers to host workshops on future skills, like artificial intelligence (AI).** Not only will this enable internal teams to build new muscle memory around the latest technologies or industry best practices, but it will also help you extract even more value from your freelancer engagements by allowing them to play this dual role as “professional coach.”

Business innovation. By bringing outside perspectives and experiences to the work they do for companies, freelancers can be a key asset for sparking innovation and business transformation. This is even more critical for businesses with low employee turnover, as we learned in many of our clients conversations, where they regularly encourage freelancers to share new skills and the latest industry best practices as a way of helping in-house teams gain fresh new perspectives.

CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVES

“For us, hiring freelancers is a decentralised decision process that requires the finance, HR and purchasing departments to work together closely. Shifting to our ‘Total Talent Vision,’ a more integrated approach to hiring that takes into account both the financial and results-oriented needs of the business, has enabled us to more effectively evaluate what functions, skills, activities, and HR levels are needed to help us reach our broader business goals by 2026.



Jan Van Acoleyen,
Human Capital Leader, Proximus

How can companies ensure successful freelancer collaborations?

As the labor market continues to evolve, businesses have had no choice but to change their internal processes to adapt to new ways of working. This includes integrating freelancers into existing teams with greater agility and creating new best practices around communication and collaboration.

The better companies can weave freelancers into existing organizational structures, the more likely strong ties will begin to form. The survey findings showed that freelancers care deeply about creating strong relationships with their clients. Here’s what companies can do to ensure it actually happens:

1. Appoint a centralized freelancer manager: As your organization grows, you’ll want to put processes in place to ensure that how your company sources, hires, onboards, and engages with freelancers is consistent across the board. A great starting point is to identify someone within your organization who can be a freelancer success manager—a cross-functional resource who can work with all teams to ensure every freelancer engagement is a success from start to finish.

2. Hire based on real-time team needs: Think strategically about which skills your team is missing to identify what kind of freelancer you need to help everyone operate at a higher capacity. By being more thoughtful about why you are hiring a freelancer to fill a specific role or need, you begin to set the foundation for the freelancer’s (and the entire team’s) success.

CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVES

“We typically ask ourselves two questions before hiring freelancers: ‘Do they bring us skills we don’t currently have in-house?’ and ‘Will the business impact of a project be even greater with the support of external resources?’



Zora Hadden
SVP Global Procurement Indirect, Coty

3. Verify a freelancer's skills: If you need to hire a freelancer with a very specific skill set, be sure to take some time during the vetting process to confirm that the person you ultimately choose to work with is prepared to tackle the demands of the project. This is especially important for longer-term projects where you may need to rely heavily on this freelancer's skills and expertise.

4. Clearly define project scope: As we saw in the survey results, not being clear upfront about what a project entails can get a new freelancer engagement off to a rocky start. Ideally, you should have the scope of work outlined before you start your freelancer search. Not only will this help freelancers prepare more accurate quotes and organize their time effectively, but it will also set clear expectations in advance about what a project's success looks like.

5. Set transparent start and end dates: Having a detailed timeline will make it easier for freelancers to adhere to deadlines, especially when a quick turnaround is required, while also giving them the space to proactively line up new projects and avoid billable hour "downtime."

6. Integrate freelancers into existing workflows: If freelancers need to work with other team members to accomplish the tasks at hand—or work within the parameters of certain project management flows—make sure they are integrated seamlessly into these processes and not operating as an outlier. Oftentimes, the more freelancers feel as though they are a part of the team, the more likely they are to collaborate to get the job done more effectively. Or feel comfortable enough to ask other team members questions to help them get their work done.

7. Provide access to the right tools and platforms: Does your organization have file sharing or communications systems in place to enable better collaboration? If so, make sure freelancers have access to these platforms—as well as any other tools they need to do their work effectively. By eliminating these operational roadblocks, you make it easier for them to step into their role and get to work immediately.

8. Take a results-based approach: The survey made it clear that freelancers care deeply about the work they do on behalf of their clients; they make a personal investment in their work. So why not consider shifting your measure of success from tasks and deliverables to outcomes and results? Doing so will not only help to achieve your goals more effectively but may also help full-time employees understand why working with freelancers is important for project success.

CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVES

“A culture shift is necessary when working with freelancers. You must put the project's goals and outcomes first—and also adhere to a core set of values and principles. This makes it easier to build high-functioning hybrid teams, made up of both internal and external resources who are focused on achieving those objectives together.”



Benjamin Fischer

VP Global Alliance & Integration Management, STADA

9. Offer a “thank you” bonus: If you feel that a freelancer has gone above and beyond to do great work for you or want to provide added incentive upfront to drive the best results, consider either outlining a clearly defined bonus-based compensation opportunity during the project's kick-off or offering a surprise bonus at a project's completion. Either tactic can go a long way towards creating a stronger working dynamic, showing freelancers you value their contributions, motivating freelancers to do even better work, and, most importantly, setting a positive foundation for stronger project collaborations in the future.

[Find a freelancer](#)



About Malt

Founded in 2013 by Vincent Huguet (Co-CEO) and Hugo Lassiège, with Alexandre Fretti as Co-CEO, Malt is the leading freelance marketplace in Europe. Over 70,000 companies of all sizes find the external talent they need in Malt's community of more than 700,000 freelancers. With the 2022 acquisition of Comatch, a marketplace specializing in independent consultants, Malt is now present in 9 countries and regions (Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the Nordics, Spain, Switzerland, the UAE, and the UK). Investments from Eurazeo, Goldman Sachs Asset Management, Serena, Isai and BPI Large Ventures highlight the support for and confidence in Malt's vision.

Malt's mission is to create a world where everyone, whether freelancers or companies, is free to choose the best people to work with—a world where success is powered by the unique combination of the right people, the right team, and the right projects.

“Our European survey confirms that skills are now more important than status. In this context, the lines between freelancing and permanent employment continue to blur with the emergence of hybrid super teams. Freelancers are top talents thanks to their own training and demonstrate a commitment to their customers in the same way that a full-time employee does to their company. At Malt, we are convinced that these two worlds are now destined to coexist fully for the greater benefit of all.”



Alexandre Fretti

Co-CEO of Malt

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