

# Freelancers in Ukraine: characteristics and principles of their activity

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**Abstract.** In the article the main results of a survey conducted by the authors in Ukraine were considered. Some results of the survey have been compared with data of similar surveys that have been conducted abroad. The basic characteristics of average statistical Ukrainian freelancer, including the e-lancers distribution by gender, level of education, and the distance between their residence and the nearest big city have been considered. Also, according to the survey, the distribution of Ukrainian freelancers by types of activities and gender has been done. The structure of Ukrainian freelancers by the way of freelance combination with other types of activities has been determined. Distribution of working hours by gender of Ukrainian freelancers has been done.

**Key words:** freelancer, freelance, online job boards, the market of freelance services.

## INTRODUCTION

A significant increase is noticed every year in the number of freelancers, who are logged and working actively both in Ukrainian and in the global online freelance job boards, and that allows to conclude that the number of Ukrainian freelancers is growing. However, freelancing, as a form of business in Ukraine, is still not researched by scientists in a proper way. Also freelancers are not considered in Ukrainian legislation and statistics.

It is necessary to conduct a sociological research of Ukrainian freelancers for more objective freelance market evaluation and analyzing. Especially to which category of the population is prone to freelance, belongs barriers to which freelancers front at efficient work and what is the level of development of Ukrainian business.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Similar researches have been conducted on the best known online freelance job boards. Freelancers from all over the world, and also from Ukraine, took part in these

surveys [1]. But the amount of Ukrainian freelancers in these surveys is too low. One of such global surveys of freelancers activity has been conducted by Amanda Heckwith and online job board “Freelance Switch Jobs” [5]. Another one has been conducted by scientists of the State University - Higher School of Economics and online job board “Free-lance.ru” headed by Russian scientists D. Stebkov and A. Shevchuk. They interrogated Russian speaking freelancers from such countries and regions: Russia (76%), Ukraine (15%), Belarus (3.4%), and Kazakhstan, Moldova, Central Asia, the Baltic countries etc. (less than 2% of respondents from each country) [19, 20].

## THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this paper is to analyze the data collected from survey of Ukrainian freelancers with the purpose to determine the average statistical freelancer and the principles of his activity in Ukraine.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Therefore, we propose to make a "portrait" of Ukrainian freelancer. According to the data of freelancers survey that we have conducted in Ukraine, the gender structure of freelancers is somewhat different from the results of similar international surveys. As we can see from the Figure 1 only 36.5% of freelancers in Ukraine are men, and 63.5% are women, in Russia that index is 67% and 33% respectively [3, 19]. One of the leading international online freelance job boards “Elance” (there are registered over than 2.5 million freelancers from over than 170 countries) consists of 58% of registered men freelancers and 42% - women [13, 14, 15, 16].

We have developed a questionnaire and conducted a survey of Ukrainian freelancers using existing methods of sociological research [4, 8, 18, 19, 21].

These differences in structure may be caused by the fact that freelance began to develop in Ukraine recently, and later comparing to the developed countries such as USA, Canada and some countries of the EU [8]. Freelancing is a comfortable type of activity, especially for women, who are on maternity leave, caring for children and have no opportunity to work in the office. Women are more prone to risk and experiments unlike men who are looking for stable income, and are less interested in distance employment. In our opinion, that are women who may try and evaluate all the advantages of freelancing in Ukraine, but eventually the proportion of men in the structure of freelancers may be higher, especially after the legalization and determination of the legal rules of freelancing as a form of business in Ukrainian law.

As we can see from Figure 2: 74.8% of Ukrainian freelancers are young people aged between 18 and 30 years old. They are prospective young people who want to work, tend to self-improvement and search for the alternative ways of their own income sources forming.

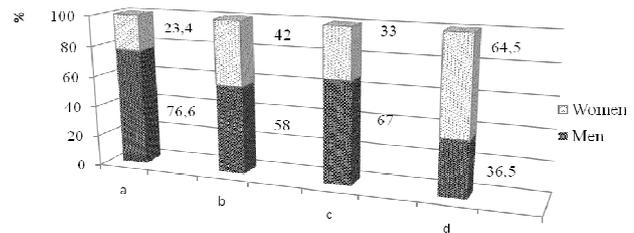
The amount of freelancers of the oldest age is lower because freelancing is a modern type activity that demands from freelancer self-development, skills improvement and quick reaction to any changes in the freelance services market. It also requires the use of modern software and various communication facilities to provide working process, the searching of the projects, and communication with customers in order to remain competitive in the international freelance services market.

Also it should be noted that the most of freelancers are university graduates: 55.7% - have master's or specialist's degree, 20% - bachelor's degree and 1% are PhD (candidates or doctors degree) and only 13% of respondents have comprehensive secondary education, 6.1% - have specialization for a certain technical areas and 4.3% - have incomplete high education (Fig. 3).

Considering that 23.5% of respondents currently combined their freelancing activity with studying in universities, the process of getting the first or second education and improving their skills, we can conclude that the Ukrainian freelancers are highly skilled and competitive workers on the global freelance services market.

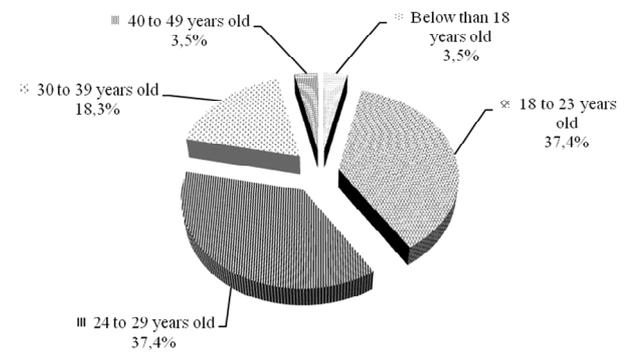
Foreign freelancers choose small towns for living as it is less expensive in smaller towns and villages working as freelancer is more often not limited geographically.

It is likely that Ukrainian freelancers eventually will live away from the big cities. It will have an influence on the reduction of urbanization level. Permanent increase in the number of the urban population relatively to rural is the reason of many economical, social and environmental problems [9]. Development of freelancing will have a positive influence on the process of urbanization in Ukraine.

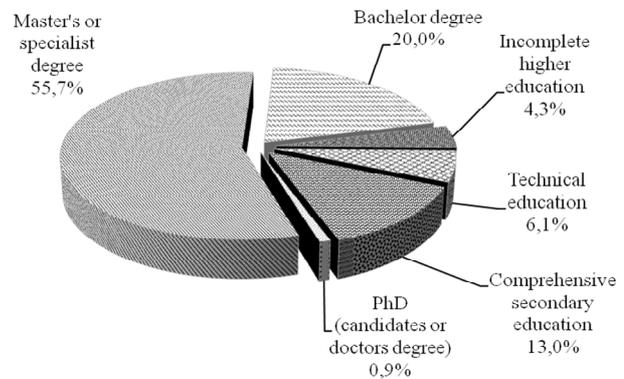


a –Freelance Switch Global Freelancer Survey [5];  
 b - Research of online job board “Elnance” [14];  
 c – “The first Russian freelancers census” [20];  
 d - The survey of Ukrainian freelancers, conducted by author.

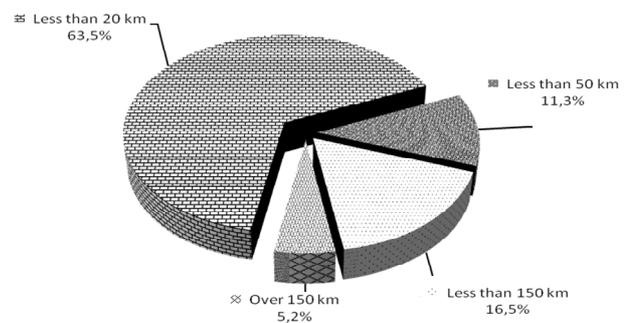
**Fig. 1.** Comparison of research data about freelancers’ gender distribution



**Fig. 2.** The structure of Ukrainian freelancers by age



**Fig. 3.** The distribution of adolescents in Ukraine online job boards by the level of education



**Fig. 4.** The structure of distance from the freelancers’ residence to the nearest big city

In Table 1 it is considered the distribution of Ukrainian freelancers by the types of work and gender. Thus, the most common specialization among Ukrainian freelancers is working with texts: copywriting and journalism.

In this area there is employed 34.8% of respondents, among them are: 82.5% of women and 17.5% of men. Among all women-freelancers 45.2% choose this specialization considering it as a main. Among the men the first place is taking by programming, serving of computers and networks – 21.4%, Internet advertising, developing and support of web sites - 19%. The least of all are men, who work with translations of foreign texts - only 4.8% and in management - 2.4%. Due to the results of this research we can argue that in Ukraine there are activities, where classic freelancers also work. They cannot do their jobs distantly, but they may use Internet only for customers searching. For example, welding and of radio electronic devices service is provided by 0.9% of respondents respectively.

As the survey was conducted with the use of online questionnaire, perhaps the amount of classic freelancers shown by the results of our research is lower than it actually is, and there are more types of work they perform. However, due to the dynamic development of computer technologies, that creates conditions for freelance services market development, there is noticed a gradual increase in the amount of possible types of activities and services, that can be provided remotely. Such a trend will increase the part of e-lancers in the whole structure of freelancers.

It should be mentioned that 40% of Ukrainian freelancers evaluate freelance as the main source of income and do not combine it with other types of emp-

loyment. Rest of freelancers combine freelance with working at other organizations, getting higher education, maternity leave, and nearly 2% of respondents have a business and employees (Fig. 5). So freelance is such a flexible type of activity that can be combined with any other work or used as a way to create a primary source of income.

Such a high level of flexibility significantly reduces the freelance services market entering barriers. An employee has the opportunity to combine freelance with a previous type of employment and also create client database and get some experience that will be shown on the online job boards in the form freelancer rating. As a result, freelancers will have evidences to decide whether freelance may be a main type of activity and income source. Accordingly, it will affect the amount of potential freelancers among the unemployed and employed and that will reduce the level of unemployment in the country.

Thus, from Fig. 6 we can conclude that most freelancers use an opportunity to choose working hours themselves, and do not work as most employees with standard working hours from 9 am to 6 pm. Consequently Ukrainian freelancers usually work in the evening. Specifically about 50% of freelancers work from 6 pm to 9 pm, more than 56% - from 9 pm to midnight. Also, 24.3% of freelancers prefer to work at night, in the period from midnight till 3 am, 11.3% - from 3 am till 6 am and from 6 am till 9 am accordingly. So, freelancers activity increases in the evening and only 35-49% of freelancers work according to the same schedule as most employees with standard working hours.

**Table 1.** The distribution of Ukrainian freelancers by the types of work and gender

Types of works		Gender		Men		Women		Total	
		Qty, units	%	Qty, units	%	Qty, units	%	Qty, units	%
Working with texts: copywriting, journalism	Qty, units	7	16,7	33	45,2	40	34,8		
	%	17,5		82,5		100,0			
Online advertising, design and websites support	Qty, units	8	19,0	3	4,1	11	9,6		
	%	72,7		27,3		100,0			
Dealing with graphics, design, illustration	Qty, units	6	14,3	10	13,7	16	13,9		
	%	37,5		62,5		100,0			
Programming, computers and networks service	Qty, units	9	21,4	1	1,4	10	8,7		
	%	90,0		10,0		100,0			
Translations of foreign texts	Qty, units	2	4,8	13	17,8	15	13,0		
	%	13,3		86,7		100,0			
Management	Qty, units	1	2,4	2	2,7	3	2,6		
	%	33,3		66,7		100,0			
Other:	Qty, units	2	4,8	1	1,4	3	2,6		
	%	66,7		33,3		100,0			
Service of radio electronic devices	Qty, units	1	2,4	0	0,0	1	0,9		
	%	100,0		0,0		100,0			
Welding	Qty, units	1	2,4	0	0,0	1	0,9		
	%	100,0		0,0		100,0			
Several areas of activity	Qty, units	0	0,0	1	1,4	1	0,9		
	%	0,0		100,0		100,0			
No answer	Qty, units	7	16,7	10	13,7	17	14,8		
	%	41,2		58,8		100,0			
Total	Qty, units	42	100,0	73	100,0	115	100,0		
	%	36,5		63,5		100,0			

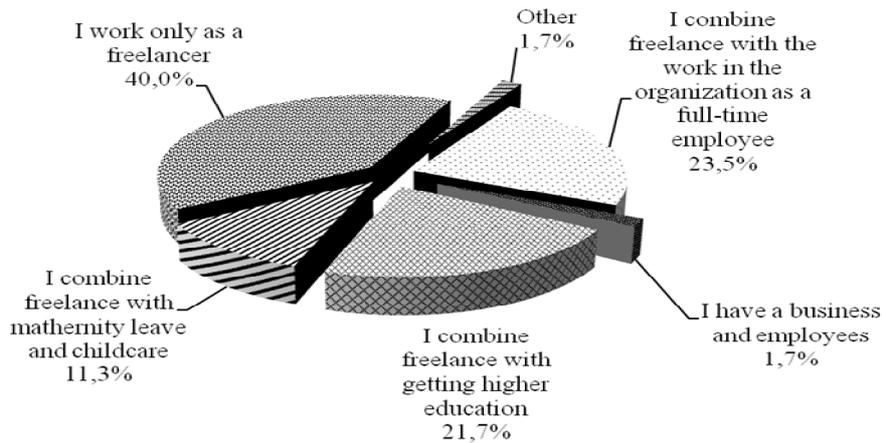


Fig. 5. The structure of freelancers divided by the way of combining freelancing with other types of activities

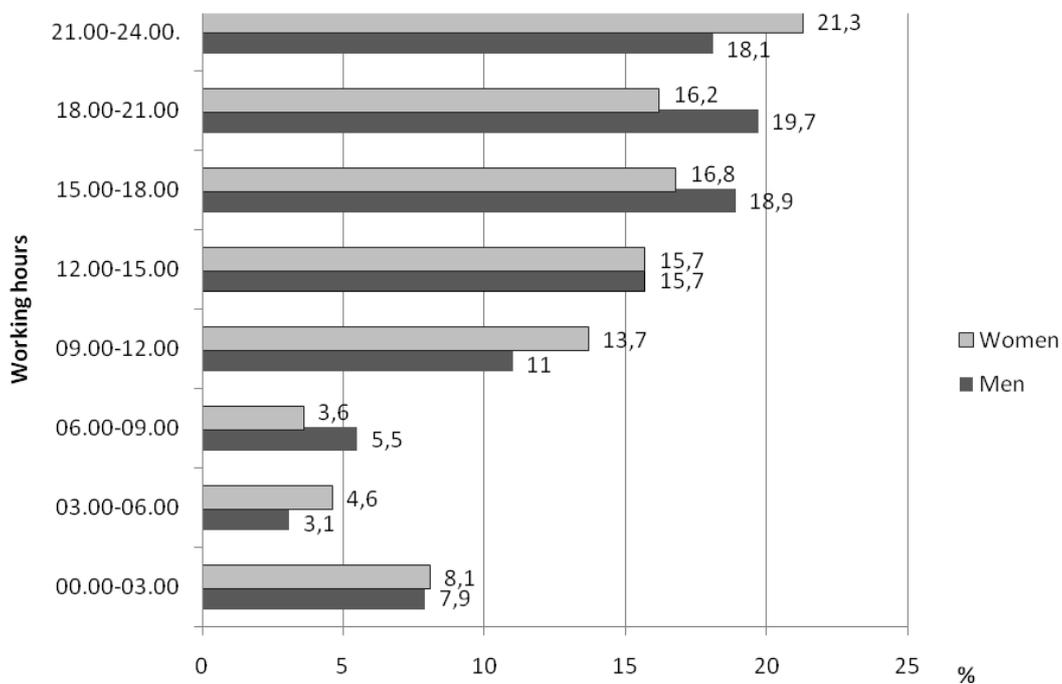


Fig. 6. The working time distribution of Ukrainian freelancers according to gender

According to gender distribution there is observed such a trend: the least amount of women work in the morning in the period from 6 am to 9 am, then their working activity gradually increases during the daytime and it's highest level (21.3%) is observed in the period from 9 pm till midnight. The least amount of men work in the period from 3 am to 6 am (3.6%), and then their working activity increases and reaches its highest level in the period from 6 pm to 9 pm (19.7%). Due to the flexible work schedule and the possibility of using the services of freelancers who live and work in different time zones the continuous work of a certain projects can be achieved. In some activities it is really advisable. As an example the attraction of freelancers who work with customers in online stores, those who are call-center

operators, or those who work over complex projects, that demand the activity of several freelancers who take turns, working on parts of the project. Thus it is possible to achieve maximum reduction of project terms.

CONCLUSIONS

So, average statistical Ukrainian freelancer is a female, aged between 18 and 30 years and living in a big city. She has completed high education and is a qualified employee on the global market. Freelancing is the main source of income for average statistical Ukrainian freelancer, who does not combine freelance with other types of employment. Basic type of activity is working with texts: copywriting, journalism etc. Her schedule is flexible, so freelancer usually work in the afternoon and

in the evening (from 3 pm till midnight) using all the advantages of this flexibility.

Skills and education of Ukrainian freelancers is high enough but the cost of services is lower comparatively to their colleagues in developed countries. That's why the further development of this type of activity will possibly reduce the level of unemployment in Ukraine and increase standards of living. However, there should be hold some legislative changes in order to create favorable conditions for freelance development in Ukraine and also there should be improved the management of this activity.

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