



Upwork Study Finds 59 Million Americans Freelancing Amid Turbulent Labor Market

December 8, 2021

Freelancing rates hold steady in the U.S., contributing \$1.3 trillion to the US economy

SAN FRANCISCO--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Dec. 8, 2021-- [Upwork](#) (Nasdaq: UPWK), the world's work marketplace that connects businesses with independent talent, today released the results of "Freelance Forward: 2021," the most comprehensive study of the U.S. independent workforce to date, which found that 59 million Americans performed freelance work in the past 12 months, representing 36% - or more than one-third - of the entire U.S. workforce.

This press release features multimedia. View the full release here: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20211208005266/en/>



Upwork's Freelance Forward: 2021 (Graphic: Business Wire)

In a turbulent job market marked by persistent talent shortages and rising attrition rates, Upwork's study found American freelancers contributed \$1.3 trillion in annual earnings to the U.S.

economy, \$100 million more than in 2020. This growth was driven by an increase in the number of highly skilled, remote freelancers that left full time employment for flexible work alternatives. At the same time, there was a notable decline in temporary workers and a rise in all other types of freelancing combined.

Upwork's eighth annual study surveyed more than 6,000 U.S. workers over the age of 18. To read analysis by Upwork Chief Economist Adam Ozimek in the research report [here](#).

Key findings:

- **Amid a turbulent year, freelancing remains an important part of the U.S. labor market and economy:** Freelancers contributed \$1.3 trillion to the U.S. economy in annual earnings, up \$100 million from 2020.
- **The share of non-temporary freelancers grew to a new high:** The share of workers who are non-temporary freelancers rose from 33.8% to 35.0% from 2020 to 2021.
- **Freelancing is growing among the most educated:** The higher skilled nature of freelancing is clear as 51% of post-grad workers chose freelancing, up 6% since 2020, while the share of freelancing individuals with high school diplomas or less education has declined from 37% in 2020 to 31% this year.
- **Skilled remote freelancing continued to grow in 2021:** 53% of all freelancers provided skilled services such as computer programming, marketing, IT, and business consulting in 2021, up from 50% in 2020.
- **Flexibility and freedom are key motivators for new and existing freelancers:**
 - 68% of new freelancers say that 'Career Ownership' is a top draw, followed by the ability to work remotely at 54%.
 - 78% of skilled remote freelancers cite 'schedule flexibility' as a key reason for freelancing, 73% cite location flexibility, and 73% say freelancing allows them to pursue work they find meaningful.
- **Amid The Great Resignation, more professionals are considering freelance work in the future:** 56% of non-freelancers say they are likely to freelance in the future.
- **The number of freelancers who earn more by freelancing than in their traditional jobs continues to grow:** 44% of freelancers say they earn more freelancing than with a traditional job in 2021, up from 39% in 2020 and 32% in 2019.
- **The future of freelance is bright:** 9 in 10 freelancers believe that the "best days are ahead" for freelancing; two-thirds (67%) say they are optimistic about their career in 2022, compared to 58% of non-freelancers.

"Across the labor market, many professionals have had a realization about work and workplace preferences," said Upwork Chief Economist, Adam Ozimek. "The traditional expectations of in-office, 9-to-5 workplaces have been tested and many professionals are opting for change. Freelancing has remained a stable part of the economy and less of a temporary option for many highly skilled professionals."

"When the pandemic hit, I turned to Upwork to dip my toe into freelancing and quickly had more work than I could handle at a rate that I never thought I could achieve. This year, I will make much more money freelancing than I have ever made in my life in one year in a traditional job," said Marcus Grimm, a marketing automation expert. "In addition to being more lucrative than the traditional roles I've held in the past, freelancing is enabling me to do things like take a three-week vacation with my family and volunteer for organizations that are meaningful to me. I can't imagine ever going back."

About Freelance Forward

To see further insights, please visit www.upwork.com/research/freelance-forward-2021. The study is conducted by independent research firm Edelman Data & Intelligence. 6,000 U.S. working adults over the age of 18 were surveyed for it online between August 27, 2021 – September 29, 2021. Of those, 2,156 were freelancers and 3,844 were non-freelancers. Results were weighted to ensure demographic representation in line with the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2020 Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey and the American Community Survey. The

study has an overall margin of error of $\pm 1.2\%$ at the 95% level of confidence.

About Upwork

Upwork is the world's work marketplace that connects businesses with independent talent. We serve everyone from one-person startups to 30% of the Fortune 100 with a powerful, trust-driven platform that enables companies and freelancers to work together in new ways that unlock their potential. Our talent community earned over \$2.3 billion on Upwork in 2020 across more than 10,000 skills in categories including website & app development, creative & design, customer support, finance & accounting, consulting, and operations. Learn more at www.upwork.com and join us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#).

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Source: Upwork