

FREELANCER

Fostering future and current entrepreneurs' soft skills and self-employability through market adapted training

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Task 2 of Work Package 2:

Mapping and stock taking of Entrepreneurship challenges for aspiring freelancers

Country Snapshot Spain

Developed by: Internet Web Solutions - IWS

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Introduction

According to Baitenizov & Patlasov (2016), freelancing in the modern economy can be defined as an activity of independent high-qualified professionals who work in different projects on a fee basis outside the permanent staff of a company and independently sell their services on a market, mainly through modern information and communication technologies. This definition, adopted by the FREELANCER consortium, provides a framework for understanding the difference between a self-employed person and a freelance worker.

In Spain, there is no difference in law or taxation between the profiles of autonomous worker and freelance, but both fall under the category of self-employed worker. Therefore, all freelancers are self-employed, but not all self-employed are freelancers (N26, 2023). For this reason, official statistical data in Spain do not differentiate between the two profiles (they focus directly on the self-employed people), making it difficult to obtain quantitative information on the freelancing phenomenon.

Although in the eyes of the law both profiles are equal, there is a social differentiation:

- Freelancers offer services to other companies on their own account, sporadically, without an employment contract between the two parties, and their activity is usually focused on services related to new technologies or the digital world.
- On the other hand, the autonomous worker is a professional who is self-employed and independent, carrying out an economic activity and may have employees under their charge. This type of profile includes more traditional professions, such as plumbers, electricians, gardeners, etc.

Despite the lack of specific official data on the subject of freelancing, thanks to reports such as that of Boston Consulting Group & Malt (2020), we know that in Spain, during the decade of 2010, freelancing has experienced an increase of more than 40%, and already counts more than 753,000 freelancers.

The same report indicates that this is a result of the increased competitiveness and digitalisation of the market, which has led to companies having new needs related to hiring the type of independent services offered by freelancers.

At the same time, it is not only new business needs that have driven the growth in the number of freelancers, but also new ways of conceiving work. This has led to a new trend in the Spanish labour market: full-time job resignations have increased considerably, and in 2022 reached a peak of more than 70,000, a trend that continues to rise (Benedito, 2023).

According to Gonzalo Bernardos, Professor of Economics at the University of Barcelona, there are three main motivations for leaving a job: a salary, boss or greater flexibility (Benedito, 2023). In contrast, freelancing allows workers to choose their own prices, the clients they work for, work from anywhere at any time, and have greater command of their time (Fontana, 2023), which allows us to appreciate the relationship between the tendency to quit stable jobs and that of a greater increase in freelancing.

Once in situation, on the following pages, the report will cover all the essential information necessary to understand the state of freelancing in Spain, including the quantitative and qualitative indicators of freelancing and self-employment in Spain, as well as the opportunities available and the challenges that freelancers have to face in this digital era.

Quantitative indicators on freelancing and self-employment in Spain

In Spain, since there is no differentiation between self-employed and freelancer, and in the eyes of the Social Security they represent the same figure, there are no detailed official statistics on freelancing. For this reason, when carrying out the research, the concept and figure of the freelancer has been considered:

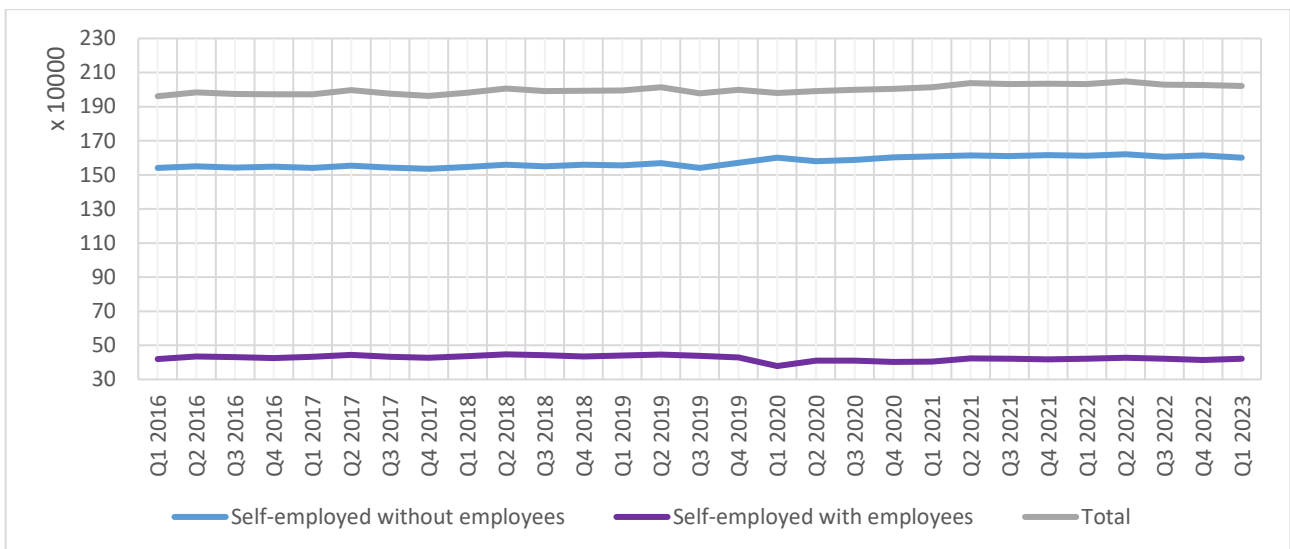
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Therefore, we deduce that freelancers: (1) have no employees in charge, and (2) work in specific sectors related to technologies. Given that statistics on the number of employees in Spain do exist, it is possible to make some estimation by means of interpretation.

To check the historical evolution of the phenomenon, we can see in Figure 1 that the self-employed without employees represent a majority that, historically, has remained stable. In the graph we can see how, in the first quarters of 2020, with the COVID-19 crisis, the number of self-employed w/o employees increased, and the number of self-employed w/ employees decreased. This leads to two possible scenarios:

- (A) The number of freelancers increased due to the opportunity to work remotely because of the COVID-19 restrictions.
- (B) Due to the crisis, employers had to lay off their employees, increasing the number of self-employed w/o employees.

Exhibit 1. Historical evolution of self-employed people in Spain

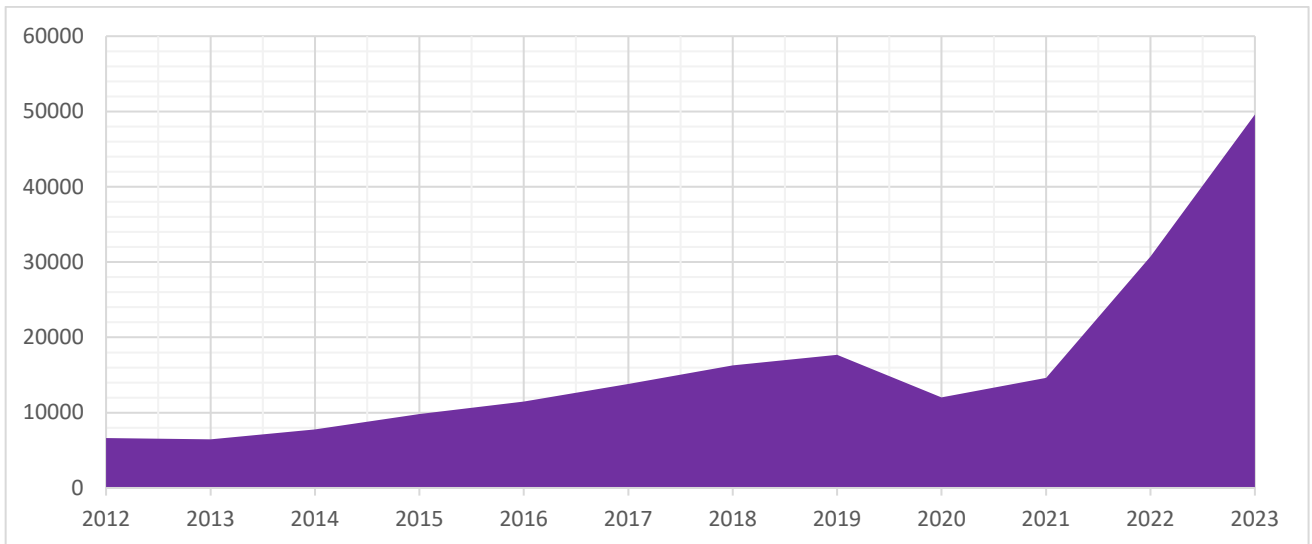


Source: MITES, 2023 (own elaboration)

Thanks to this graph, we also know that in the first quarter of 2023, there were 2,020,919 self-employed people in Spain, 79% of whom had no employees, which is the predominant trend in self-employment in Spain. Also, after the pandemic, an upward trend has started in the number of employees with indefinite contracts who have resigned from their jobs, something that could be related to new trends in ways of working. Figure 2 shows this phenomenon graphically.

According to Gonzalo Bernardos, Professor of Economics at the University of Barcelona, there are three main motivations for leaving a job, which are salary, the boss and the search for greater flexibility (Benedito, 2023). While salary could be one of the main causes, since Spain has precarious salaries compared to other European Union countries, the other two factors are of particular interest for understanding the phenomenon of freelancing, since this modality allows people to work in a flexible way, favouring work-life balance, and without being supervised by a boss.

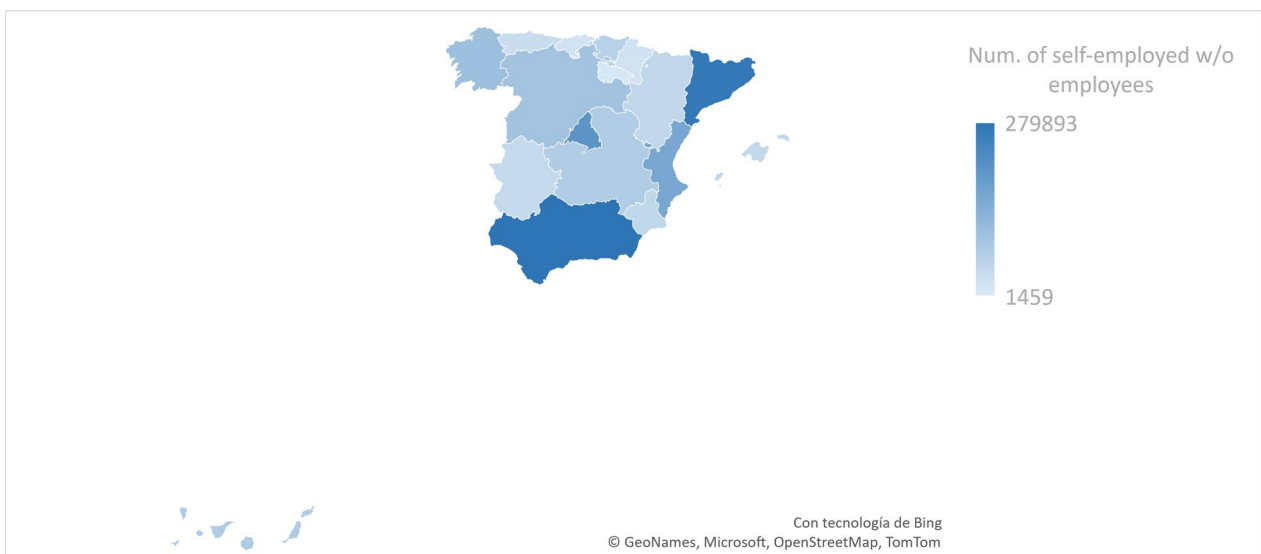
Exhibit 2. Number of affiliates with indefinite contracts who leave their company due to voluntary resignation between January and June



Source: Benedito, 2023 (own elaboration)

Regarding the geographical distribution of the number of self-employed without employees in Spain, the following graph shows that there is a higher number in Madrid, Catalonia and Andalusia. Although considering the size of each region, we could say that Madrid, the capital of Spain, has the highest concentration. Meanwhile, in regions with more rural areas, such as Extremadura, Castile-La Mancha or Castile and León, the number is low in comparison. Therefore, there are more entrepreneurs in the big cities.

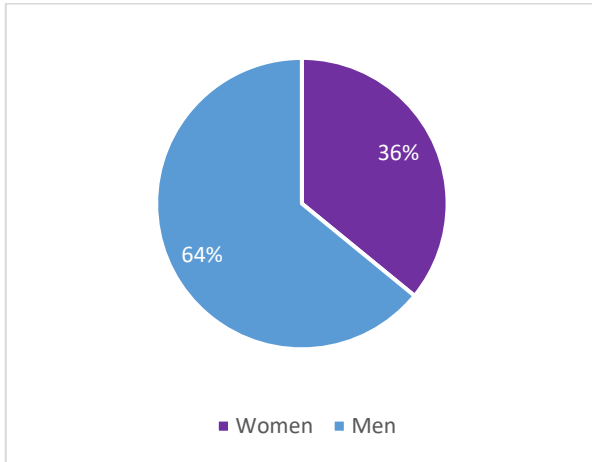
Exhibit 3. Geographical distribution of self-employed without employees in Spain



Source: MITES, 2023 (own elaboration)

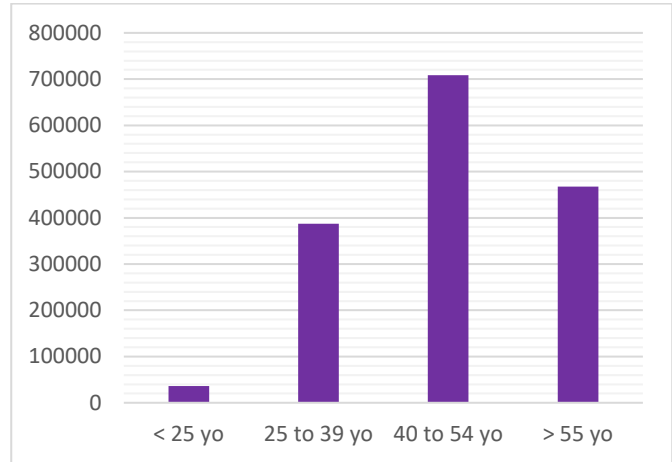
With regard to generational and gender connotations, Figures 4 and 5 show that, in the number of self-employed without employees, men (64%) and people aged between 40 and 54 (44%) predominate by far. The very low percentage of women, and especially the percentage of young people under 25 years of age, which is less than 3%, is therefore remarkable.

Exhibit 4. Self-employed w/o employees by gender



Source: MITES, 2023 (own elaboration)

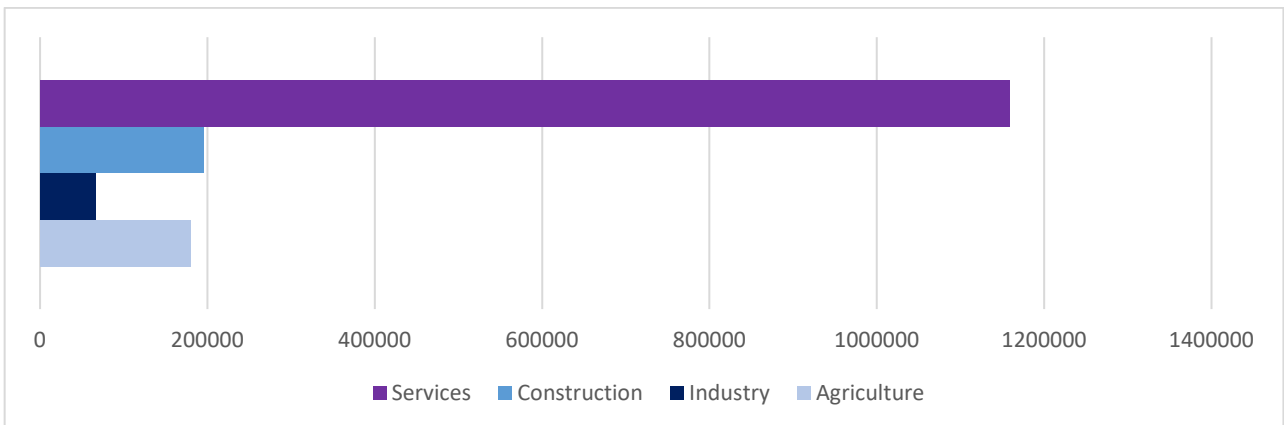
Exhibit 5. Self-employed w/o employees by age



Source: MITES, 2023 (own elaboration)

Finally, another relevant statistic when analysing the profile of the self-employed without employees in Spain is the sector in which they operate. This shows that 72% are in the service sector.

Exhibit 6. Number of self-employed w/o employees by activity sector



Source: MITES, 2023

Considering that the nature of the freelancer is to work in activities related to new information technologies, arts, finance, etc.,, the number of freelancers without employees working in specific sub-sectors has been extracted from the same statistics of Spanish Social Security:

- Information and communications: 45,223 (2.8% of self-employed w/o employees)
- Financial and insurance activities: 34,610 (2.2% of self-employed w/o employees)

- Professional, scientific and technical activities: 171,917 (10.7% of self-employed w/o employees)
- Administrative and support service activities: 71,538 (4.5% of self-employed w/o employees)
- Arts, entertainment and recreation: 50,517 (3.2% of self-employed w/o employees)
- Sum: 373,805 (23.4% of self-employed w/o employees)

This sum is not the actual number of freelancers, as it is possible that not all of them are registered with Social Security because their income does not exceed the minimum wage, or that they work in other ways, for example by combining subordinate employment with freelancing, among others. However, it is an estimate and a way to analyse their profile.

Qualitative indicators on freelancing and self-employment in Spain: skills-gap and need assessments

In Spain, as mentioned above, there is no distinction in law between a self-employed worker and a freelancer, as both are governed by the same legislation. In particular, in Spain, there is no difference in law or taxation between the profiles of autonomous worker and freelance, but both fall under the category of self-employed worker. Therefore, all freelancers are self-employed, but not all self-employed are freelancers (N26, 2023).

Specifically, self-employed workers are governed primarily by two basic laws: the Self-Employment Statute Law, and Law 6/2017, of 24 October, on Urgent Reforms of Self-Employment. In addition, they have legislation regulating collective rights, TRADE, occupational health and social security (BOE, 2024). In order to be self-employed in the eyes of the law, it is necessary to register with the Tax Agency and the Social Security.

However, although it is compulsory to register with the Tax Agency whenever an economic activity is carried out, there are two exceptions in the Social Security system: (1) that the income does not exceed the Minimum Interprofessional Wage, and (2) that the activity is not recurrent over time, but is carried out sporadically (TaxScouts, 2023).

To close the analysis of the political priorities in the field, we can also mention the existence of some aid and incentives available to entrepreneurs and self-employed workers from the Spanish Government, specifically social security reductions and bonuses, regional aid, among others (SEPE, 2024).

Taking this as the qualitative framework of freelancing in Spain, which for now coincides with that of the self-employed, and also knowing the quantitative indicators, we can create a qualitative profile of the freelancer in Spain, supported by studies and reports such as those of Malt and Boston Consulting Group.

The average freelancer in Spain is male and 40 years old, Spanish, lives in Madrid or Catalonia, has a university education, and has no interest in returning to traditional work. They spend on average 43 hours a week on their work, of which 5.5 hours are for individual training, and work from home. Among their training hours, most make use of traditional learning methods, followed by digital learning platforms (BCG & Malt, 2020).

Among the sectors in which freelancers work are, among others, technology, data, communication, marketing, art, design, business consulting and support functions. In Spain, the professions of backend and frontend developer, graphic design and digital marketing consultancy are particularly prominent (Malt & BCG, 2024).

These professions are very contemporary and require constant skills updates, something inherent to the freelancer's profile. For this reason, we also know the reasons that lead freelancers to learn new skills, the most outstanding in Spain being personal restlessness, the increase in the skills of other freelancers, the changing needs of the client, and new market trends (Malt & BCG, 2024).

Understanding the qualitative profile of freelancers, and the challenges and difficulties they face (see page 9, "Challenges"), it is possible to get a picture of the main skills that freelancers in Spain lack, mainly related to communication, financial management, client management, commercial skills, among others.

Specifically, according to EntreComp and DigComp, it is possible to consider the following as key skills and competences for freelancing:

- **EntreComp:** spotting opportunities, creativity, vision, valuing ideas, self-awareness and self-efficacy, mobilising resources, financial and economic literacy, mobilising others, planning and management, coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk.
- **DigComp:** interacting, sharing and collaborating through digital technologies, managing digital identity, developing digital content, protecting devices, protecting health and well-being, creatively using digital technologies, identifying digital competence gaps.

In summary, the training areas and their respective contents of interest to nurture the digital and business readiness of freelancers, are:

- **Managing project:** identifying and articulating business opportunities, creating a business plan, effective (digital) marketing strategies, digital tools for management and collaboration, communication.
- **Managing time:** balancing work and life, techniques for effective time management, planning, prioritization.
- **Managing clients:** customer service, client management, negotiation, networking, communication with clients, attracting new clients.
- **Basics of finance:** financial planning and management, budgeting, forecasting, managing cash flow.
- **Managing yourself:** freelancer mindset, initiative, building and managing online presence, self-awareness and self-efficacy, creativity, coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk, identification of own digital and soft skills gaps.

Opportunities: training available and operational tools

Listed below are some free training opportunities for the self-employed available in Spain:

- **Acelera PYME:** A government programme with different types of resources for MSMEs, such as training pills, infographs, interviews, case studies, monographs etc. Available at <https://www.acelerapyme.gob.es/formacion>.
- **EOI Training for MSMEs:** A wide range of training for MSMEs provided by the School of Industrial Organisation, both in face to face, hybrid and online format. Available at <https://www.eoi.es/es/empresas/pymes>
- **FUNDAE:** Training offer provided by the Spanish State Foundation for Employment Training (FUNDAE), aimed at covering different types of public (workers, self-employed, etc.) and topics. Available at <https://digitalizateplus.fundae.es/buscador>.
- **Plataforma PYME.** The Government of Spain makes available on the Plataforma PYME website a series of free digital tools available to manage business activity and foster business growth. Although this is a platform aimed at SMEs, most of the tools are compatible with freelancers and individual entrepreneurs. Available at <https://plataformapyme.es/es-es/herramientas-digitales/>.

On the other hand, here are some platforms with opportunities for freelancers that are operational and available in Spain (Gaterud, 2022):

- **Fiverr:** global platform for established and experienced freelancers. Available at <https://es.fiverr.com/>.
- **Upwork:** global platform for freelancers with a specialised profile. Available at <https://www.upwork.com/>.
- **Freelancer:** global platform with simple operation. Available in <https://www.freelancer.com/>.
- **Malt:** platform operating in some EU countries, such as Spain, France, Belgium or Germany, for freelancers who are duly registered and up to date with their legal obligations. Available at <https://www.malt.es/>.
- **Dribbble:** global platform for freelancers involved in graphic design, product design or interface design activities, with the possibility to open an online shop for digital resources. Available at <https://dribbble.com/>.
- **Toptal:** global platform for freelancers with extensive work experience and specialised profiles. Available at <https://www.toptal.com/>.

Finally, the following are two case studies relevant to the project's thematic area:

Case study 1: Laura, creator of the Freelancer Calculator

Laura López is a woman from Bizcaia (Basque Country, Spain) with a vocation for graphic design, and a lot of initiative and entrepreneurial restlessness since her early youth. Her story begins in 2011, when she became unemployed and decided to dedicate herself fully to the field of graphic design, working on small projects as a freelance, combining it with internships in agencies.

Two years later, she decided to become a freelancer and dedicate herself to freelance work full time. Due to the difficulty of setting prices as a freelancer, in 2013 she launched a free application,

the [Freelance Calculator](#), a non-profit project that came to solve her own problems and those of other freelancers. This free application allows you to know in minutes the hourly rate that a freelancer should set to be profitable and to analyse if their rate is adequate or if they are losing money.

However, Laura's story does not end here, because due to stress, in 2015 she decided to take a break and reconvert her business to help other freelance designers, creating her own blog, training, offering consultancy and even free resources for other freelance designers.

Currently, she has already published two books and her career continues in the field of training and business advice to other freelance designers. Her blog was even winner of the Bitácoras Award for the best Marketing blog oriented to the freelance designer profile.

Laura is a success story of an entrepreneur who has managed to adapt to change and overcome adversity, applying all the lessons learned from both successes and failures to become an established freelancer.

Sources:

<https://ayudatpymes.com/gestron/laura-lopez-calculadora-freelance/>

<https://www.lauralofer.com/>

Case study 2: “Empezar a emprender”, a 4-stage programme for entrepreneurship

“Empezar a emprender” (Starting entrepreneurship) is a programme developed by Andalucía Emprende, a public foundation attached to the regional government of Andalusia, in Spain. This programme aims to boost entrepreneurial vocation and help materialise business ideas, and even support startups and innovative and technological companies. Although this programme is aimed at entrepreneurs, it is fully compatible with freelancers, as their legal profile coincides with that of freelancers in Spain.

This is a complete incubation programme for all stages of a business, through a 4-stage pathway:

- “I want to start a business”: at this stage, participants are provided with access to decision-making resources, training pills, and initiatives that test their skills and abilities to transform their idea into a successful business, such as hackathons and entrepreneurship camps.
- “I have an idea”: through agile methodologies, facilitates the launch of projects in two sessions during the year, with a duration of five weeks and 20 participants per edition. In this phase, training, group mentoring and thematic workshops are provided.
- “I have a new business”: this stage focuses on businesses between zero and three years old since their creation. There are two modalities, “Young company”, for the early detection of businesses with innovative potential, and “Young startup”, for the early detection of startups with innovative potential and scalable business model through disruptive technologies.
- “Consolidated company”: finally, this stage focuses on companies more than three years old that already have their product on the market but want to systematise the way in which they incorporate innovative ideas into their portfolio.

This programme has already successfully completed its first edition in 2022, and is now running its second edition in 2024, whose rules can be found [here](#).

Sources:

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<https://www.andaluciaemprende.es/programas/empezar-a-emprender/>

Challenges

Freelancers face numerous challenges in their activity, due to the initially unstable nature of freelance work. Thanks to BCG & Malt's report (2020), we first learn about some of the main challenges that Spanish freelancers face on a daily basis:

- Negotiating with clients.
- Access to health assurance.
- Getting paid quickly.
- Maintaining good client relationships in the long term.
- Access to housing.

Furthermore, thanks to BCG & Malt's report (2024), we know the main obstacles that freelancers face for a successful collaboration with clients:

- Unrealistic expectations.
- Lack of communication.
- Inadequate briefing.
- Rigid or unclear internal processes on the part of clients.
- Constant changes in delivery dates.
- Highly controlling corporate culture.

On the other hand, the obstacles and challenges are not only operational, as described above, but go beyond that and relate to the context in which they operate, in particular:

- **Financial instability**, as income can be irregular due to the varying frequency and size of projects freelancers undertake with their clients.
- **Competition and market saturation**, as depending on the sector there may be a large number of freelancers competing for the same jobs, making it difficult to stand out and gain clients. In this case, it is essential to promote the development of skills and personal branding.
- **Isolation and lack of networking**, as unlike traditional work environments, freelancers work independently.
- **Lack of a legal framework** that specifically protects the freelancer profile. In Spain, freelancers operate under the same legal assumption as traditional freelancers, which can make it difficult to move into freelance work.
- **Lack of consideration of the specific profile of the freelancer**, which is reflected in the scarcity of specific statistics, freelance rates for freelancers, support plans or training.
- **Access to training opportunities**, as although there are numerous online resources and training programmes, these are not specifically focused on the freelancer profile, and the search for such training alone can mean a waste of time that is unacceptable for the freelancer, who prioritises work-life balance and time flexibility.
- **Lack of VET training**, both formal and non-formal, specifically for entrepreneurs and freelancers.
- **Need for constant updating of skills**, especially in technological or creative areas where it is crucial to keep up with the latest trends and technologies, which implies a significant investment in time and resources.

- **Global competition/hyper-competition**, as freelancers, due to their delocalised and flexible nature, compete against professionals from all over the world. It is therefore necessary to be prepared not only for local competition, but also for international competition.

Conclusions

The definition of freelancer adopted by FREELANCER consortium is: *freelancing in the modern economy can be defined as an activity of independent high-qualified professionals who work in different projects on a fee basis outside the permanent staff of a company and independently sell their services on a market, mainly through modern information and communication technologies* (Baitenizov & Patlasov, 2016).

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Among the sectors in which freelancers work are, among others, technology, data, communication, marketing, art, design, business consulting and support functions. In Spain, the professions of backend and frontend developer, graphic design and digital marketing consultancy are particularly prominent (Malt & BCG, 2024).

Among the challenges faced by freelancers in Spain were: negotiating with clients, access to health assurance, getting paid quickly, maintaining relationships with clients in the long term, access to housing, obstacles of communication with clients, lack of specific training, etc.

Companies are shifting the strategic focus from resource gaps to skill gaps when hiring freelancers (Malt & BCG, 2024). Relationships between clients and freelancers go beyond short projects to become longer-term collaborations (BCG & Malt, 2024). Large companies are creating hybrid super-team policies to combine freelance and in-house talent (BCG & Malt, 2024).

As a final conclusion, we can say that freelancing is a modality of work that is still growing in Spain, and it is not a consolidated modality like traditional entrepreneurship, as shown by the lack of consideration of this profile by governmental and labour institutions.

However, there are already many entrepreneurs who have joined this trend, being one of the modalities of the future of work, due to the character that business activity is taking in recent years, focused on new disruptive technologies. In this context, the FREELANCER Project is a very valuable instrument to compensate for the lack of specific training in this field, serving as a turning point for the participants who benefit from its results.

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