

# Freelancer Study 2021

## Freelancer Study

Financials, Self-employment,  
Demographics, Outlook, Covid-19



# Forword

After more than a year of the pandemic, several lockdowns and uncertainties regarding the project market situation, freelancers are now largely optimistic about the future. The economic situation is assessed as positive across the board, although the financial situation is stagnating at the previous year's level.

In this exciting year - and for the fifth time in a row - we have published our market study. For the investigation, survey results from 1,731 freelancers – collected from May until July 2021 - were analyzed.

We warmly thank all participants and hope you enjoy reading the study!

---

Thomas Maas

CEO / freelancemap GmbH

# Agenda

1.

## Financials

- Rates
- Income
- Comparison

2.

## Self-employment

- Challenges
- Freelance work

3.

## Demographics

- Origin
- Education
- Industry

4.

## Outlook

- Project market situation
- Market development
- Forecasts

5.

## Covid-19

- Impact of Covid-19 on the freelancer market

# Agenda

1.

## Financials

- Rates
- Income
- Comparison

2.

## Self-employment

- Challenges
- Freelance work

3.

## Demographics

- Origin
- Education
- Industry

4.

## Outlook

- Project market situation
- Market development
- Forecasts

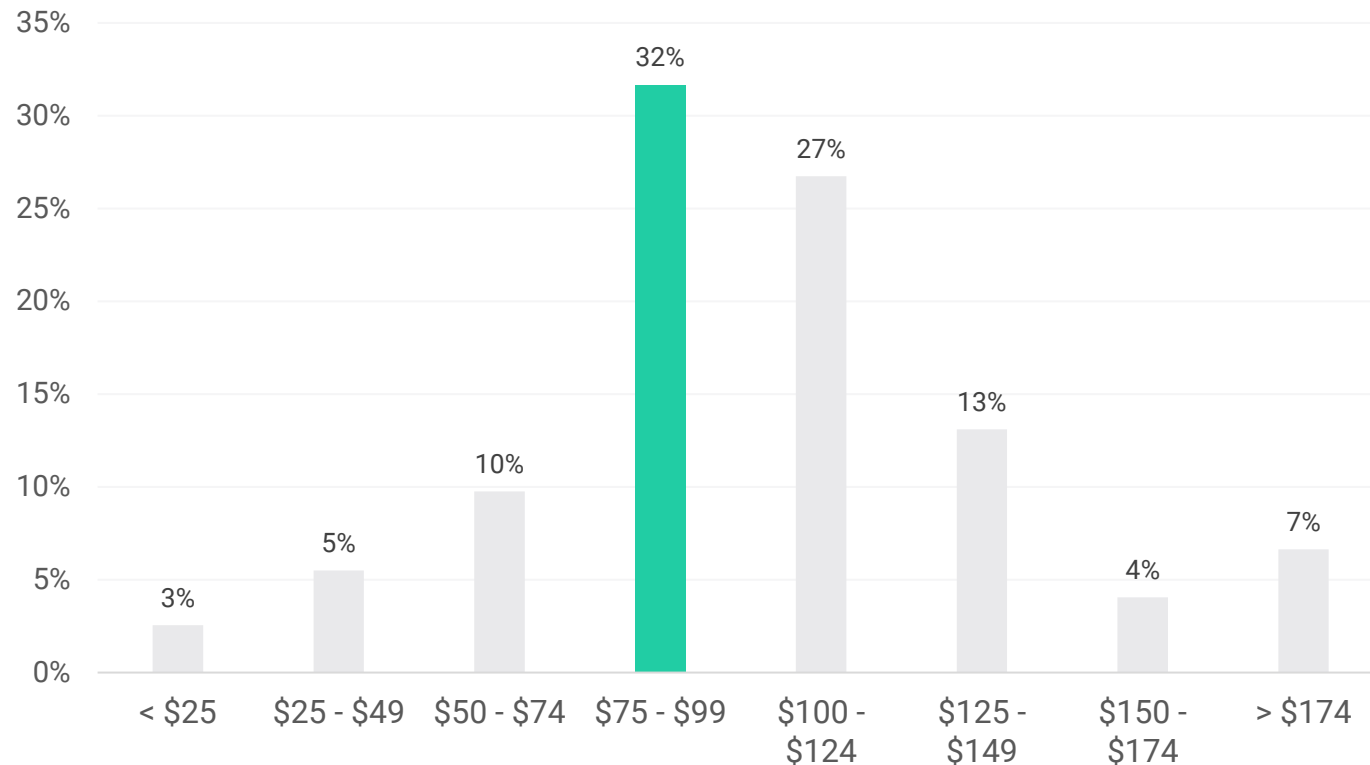
5.

## Covid-19

- Impact of Covid-19 on the freelancer market

# Average hourly rate 2021

What is your hourly rate in USD? (VAT not included)



**Remarkable**

## \$105

is the average hourly rate of  
freelancers in 2021.

---

32% charge between **\$75 and  
\$99 per hour.**

# Start capital

Which financial buffer do you recommend before starting freelancing (USD)?

**\$8,232**

**Start capital**

freelancers have on average  
available before starting freelancing.

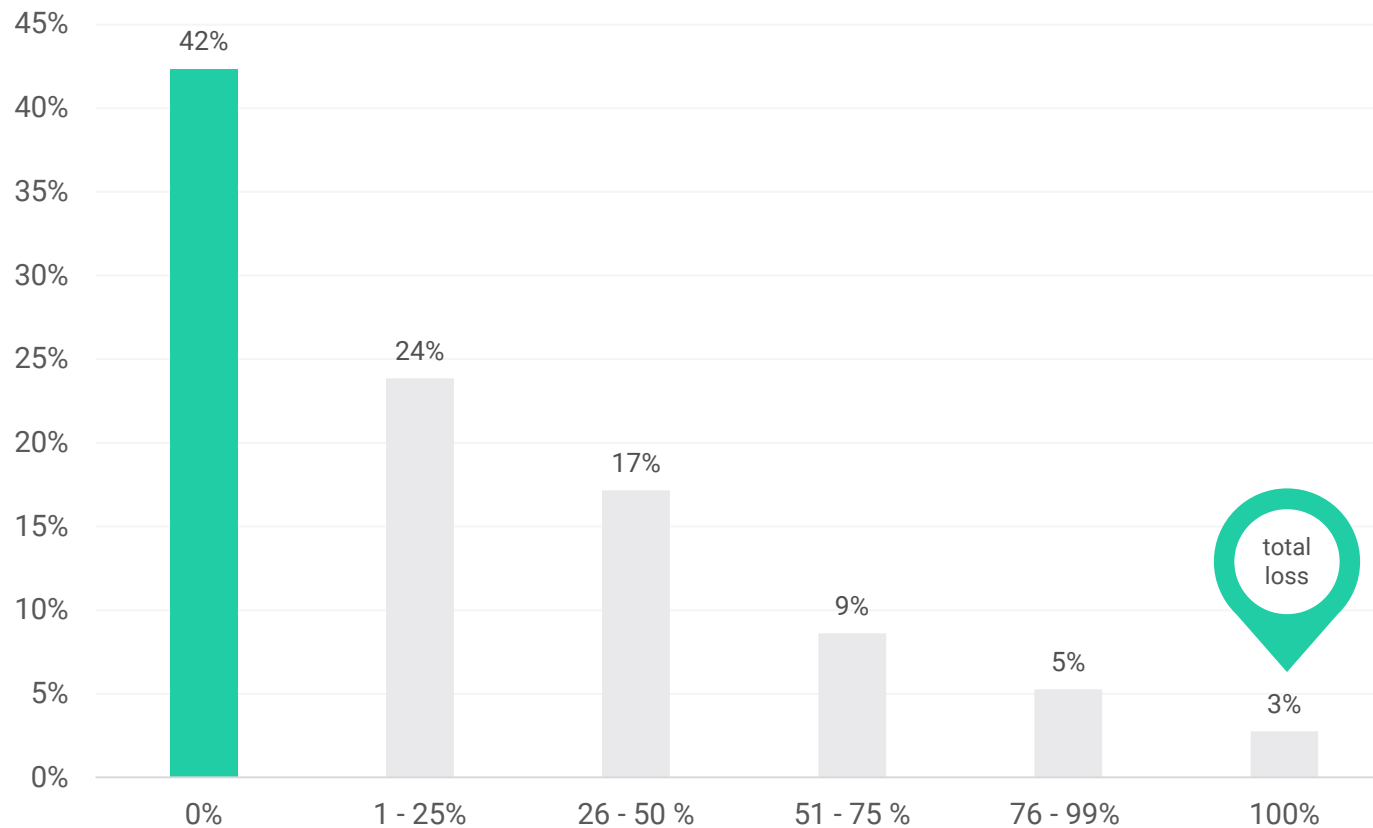
**\$17,640**

**Start capital**

recommend for freelancers to have  
before starting freelancing.

# Loss of revenue

How high is your loss of revenue since the outbreak of the pandemic?



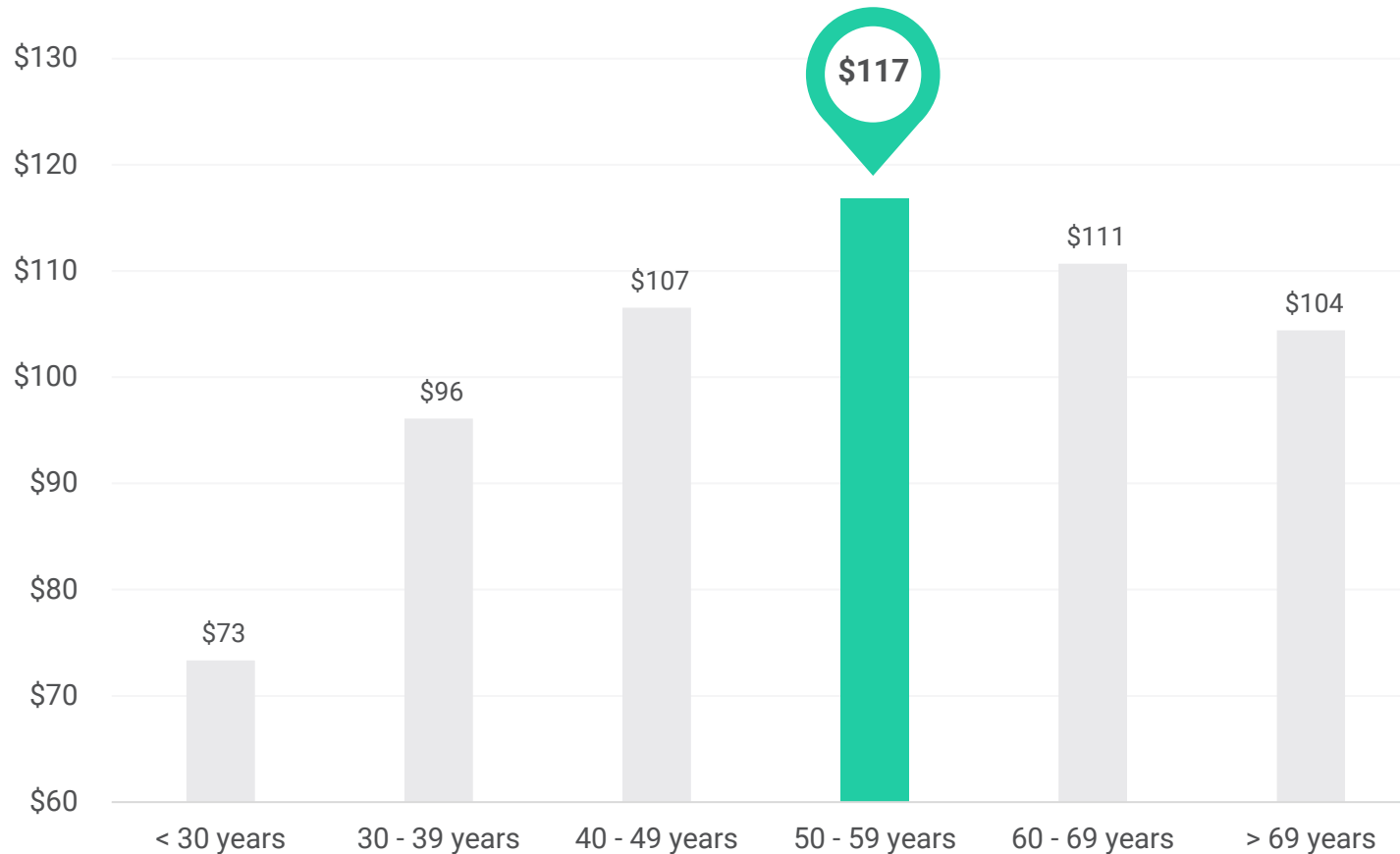
**Remarkable**

**58%**

have had **revenue losses** since the beginning of the pandemic.

**42%** haven't experienced revenue losses.

# Hourly rates by age



## Remarkable

Freelancers **between 50 and 59 years old** charge the highest hourly rate at

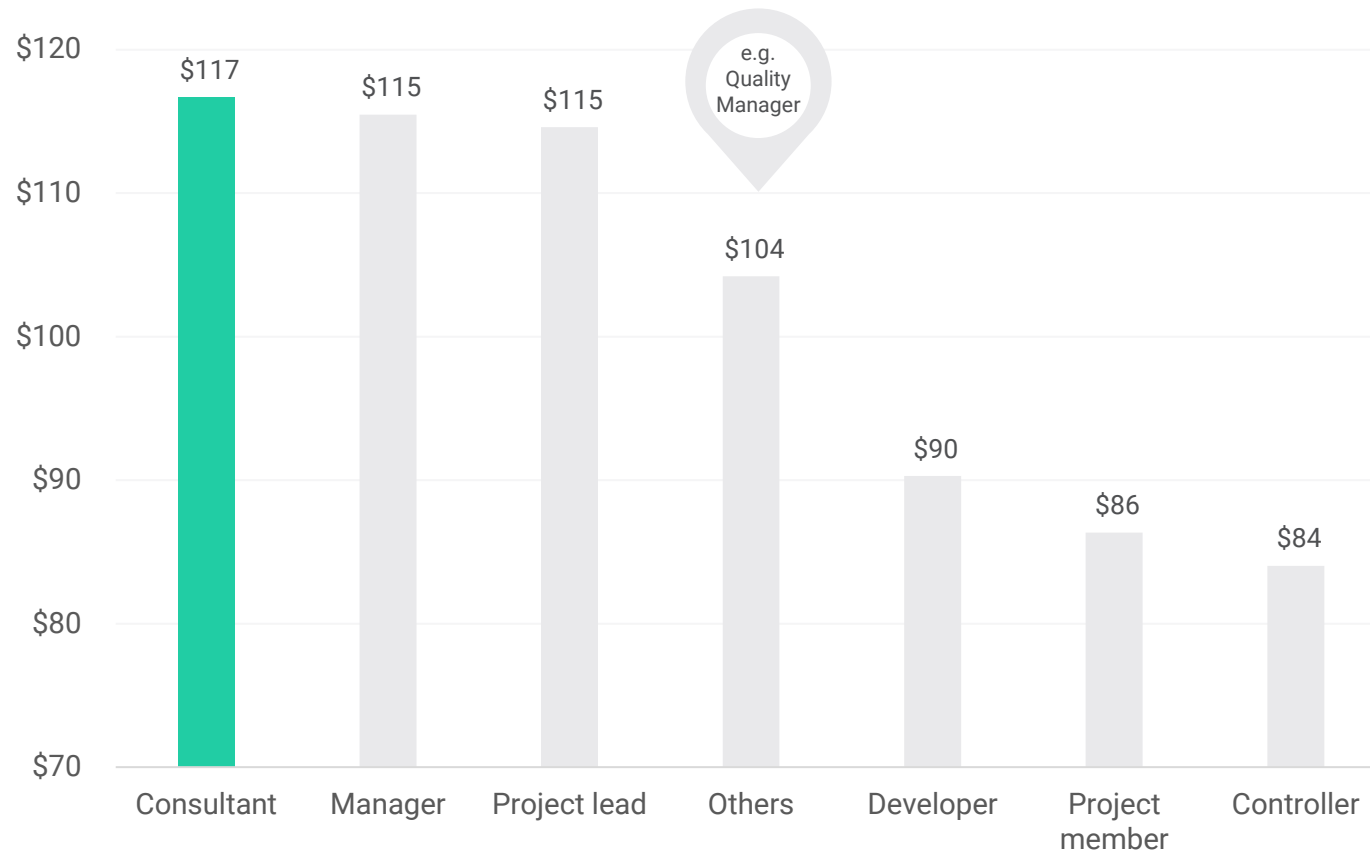
# \$117

followed by those **between 60 and 69 years old** who receive **\$111/hr.**

The youngest freelancers (under 30 years old) receive the lowest rates with **\$73/hr** on average.



# Hourly rates by role



**Remarkable**

**\$117**

is the average hourly rate  
of **consultants**.

**Managers** and **project leads**  
receive **\$115/hour** on average.

# Hourly rates by education level

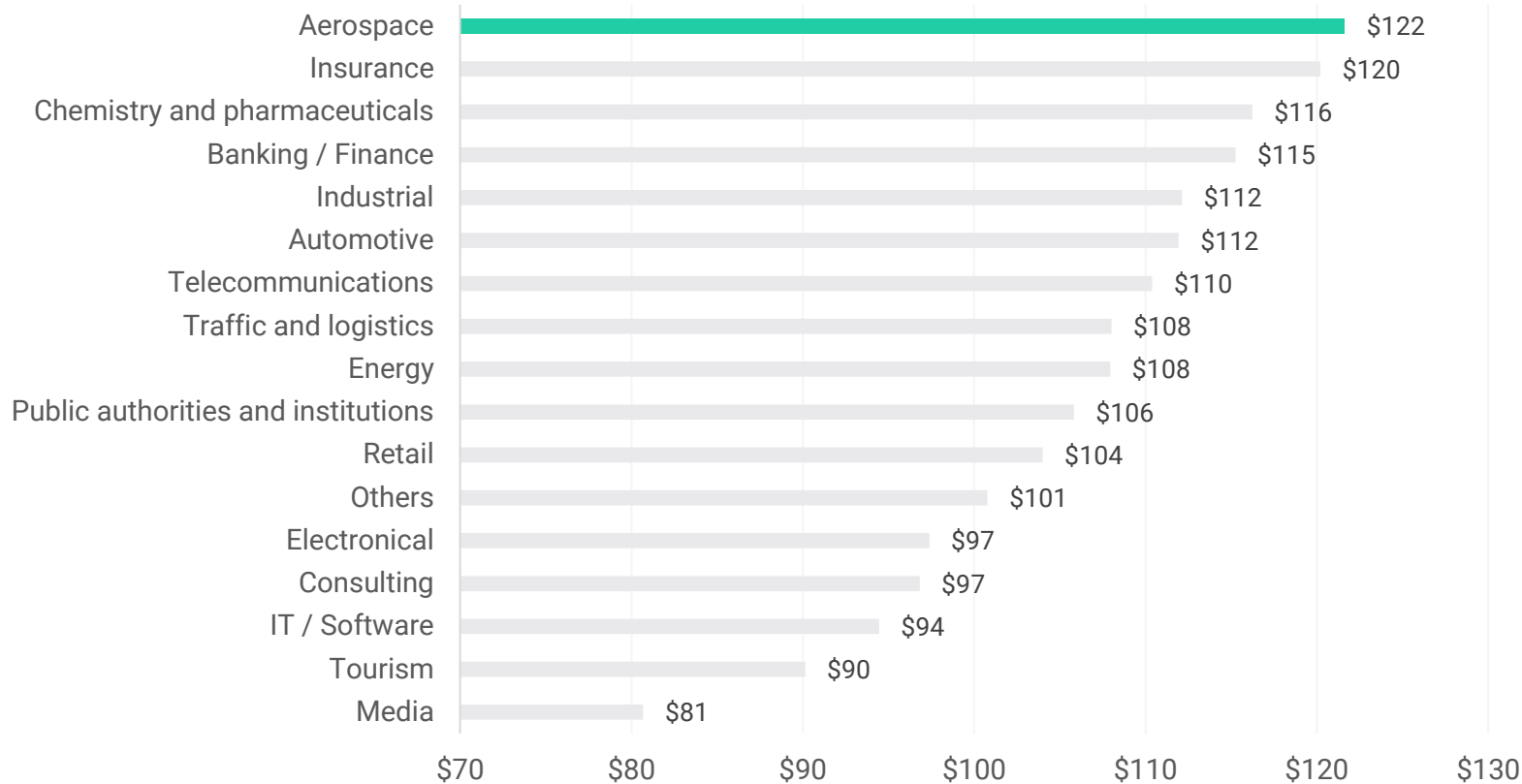


**Remarkable**

**\$107**

is the average hourly rate  
of freelancers with a **university degree**.

# Hourly rates by industry



## Remarkable

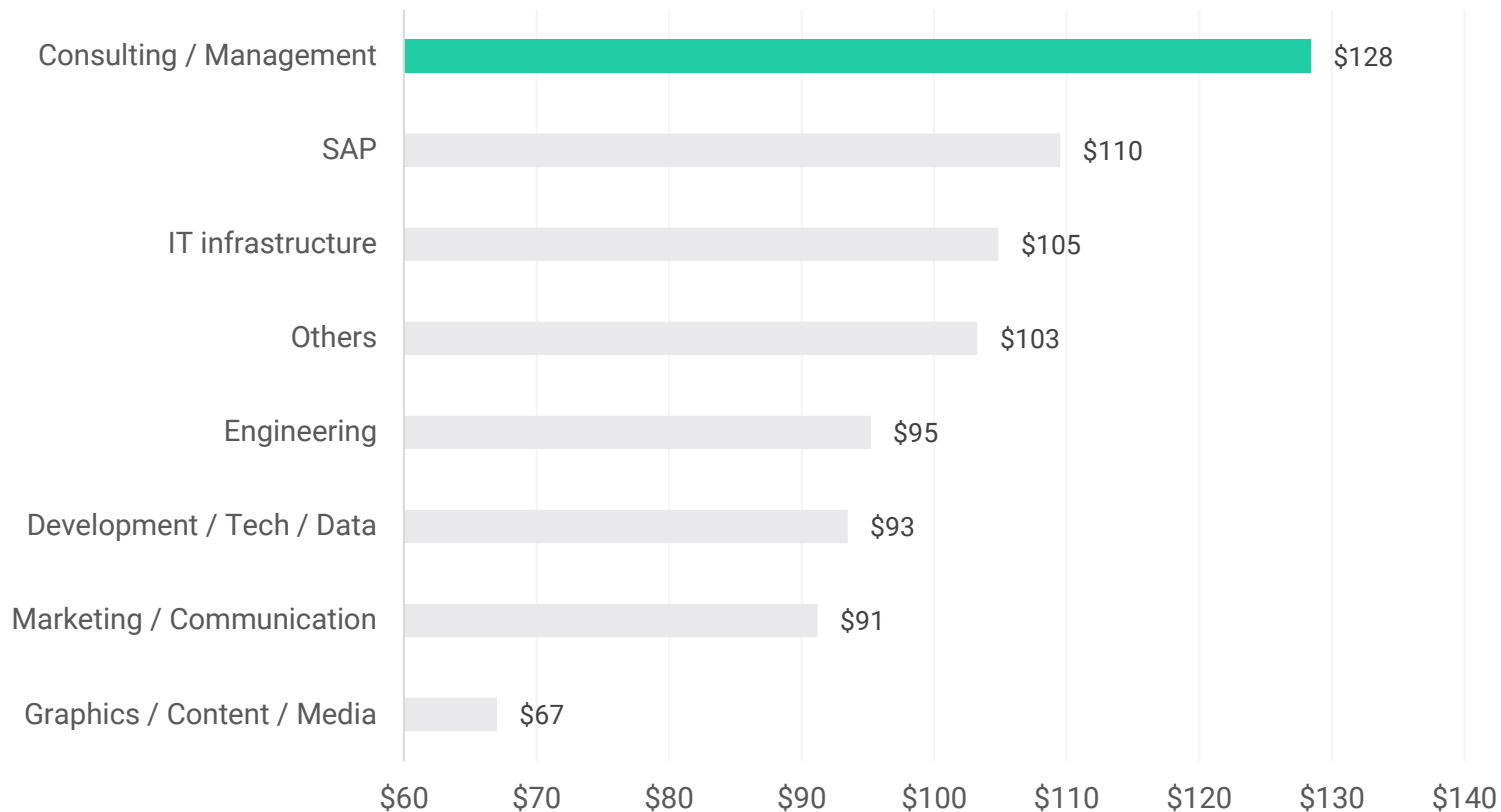
Freelancers working in the **aerospace** industry earn an average hourly rate of

**\$122**

The industries Insurance, Chemistry and Pharma, and Banking/Finance are among the top 5.

The lowest hourly rates are paid in the Media industry.

# Hourly rates by area of expertise



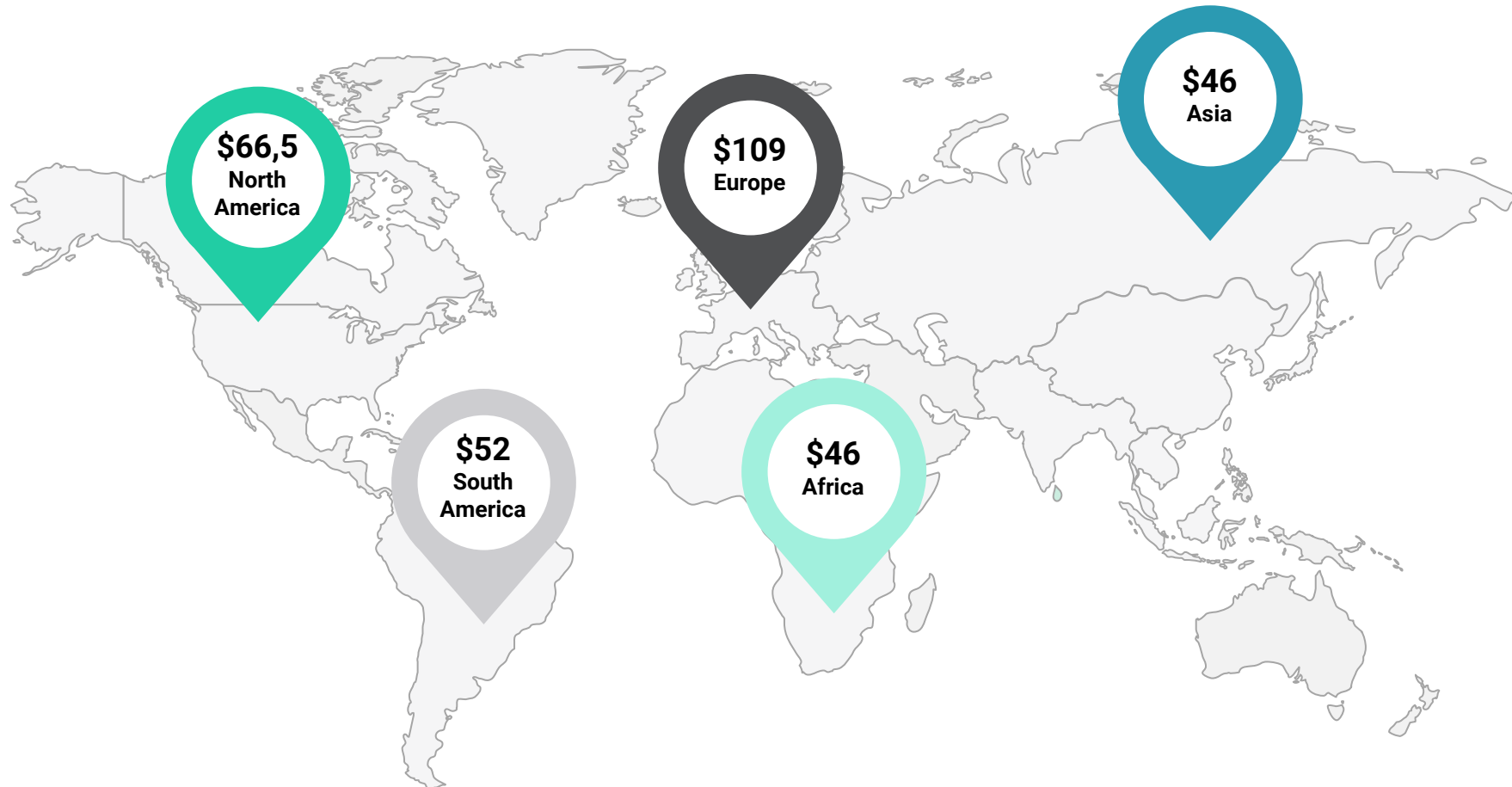
## Remarkable

Freelancers working in the **Consulting / Management** field receive on average

**\$128**

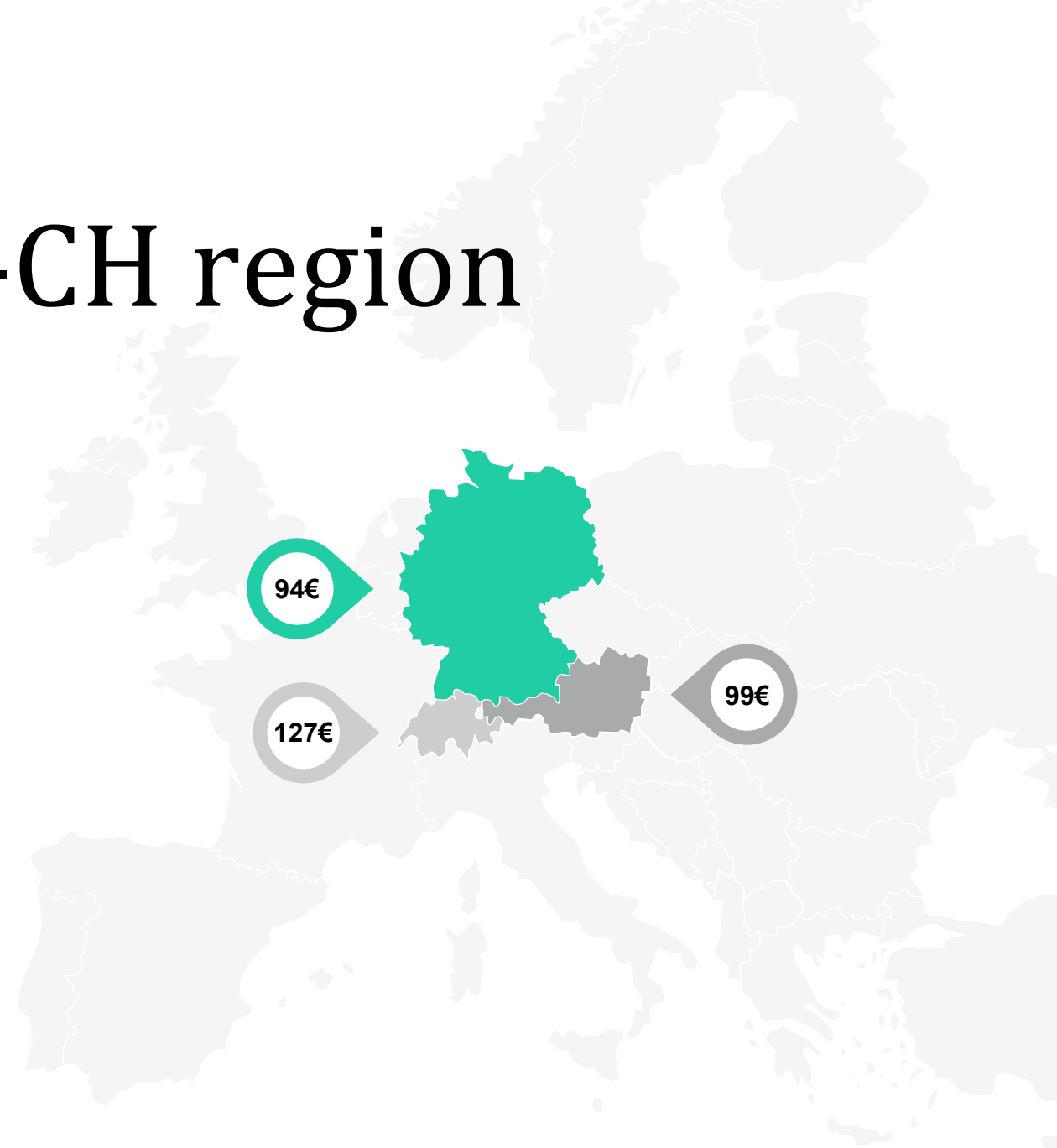
The lowest hourly rates are paid in the Graphics / Content / Media field (\$67).

# Hourly rates by continent



# Hourly rates D-A-CH region

94€	Germany
99€	Austria
127€	Switzerland



# Hourly rates women vs men

Is there a gender gap in the hourly rates for women and men?



**\$94**

**Women**

The average hourly rate for female freelancers is thus \$13 lower than the hourly rate for male colleagues.

---

**\$4,811**

net monthly income

**\$107**

**Men**

The average hourly rate of male freelancers was \$95 in 2019. It increased by about \$12.

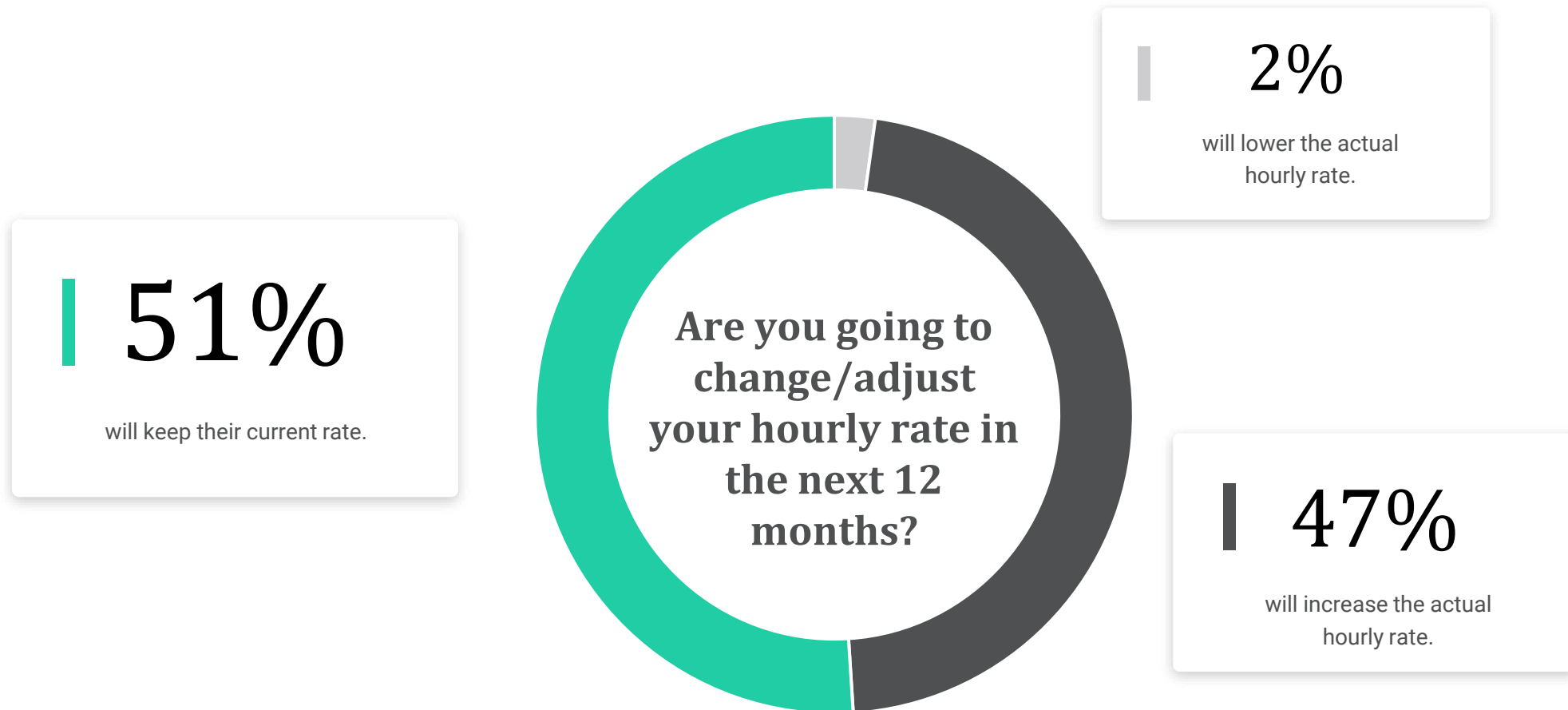
---

**\$7,255**

net monthly income



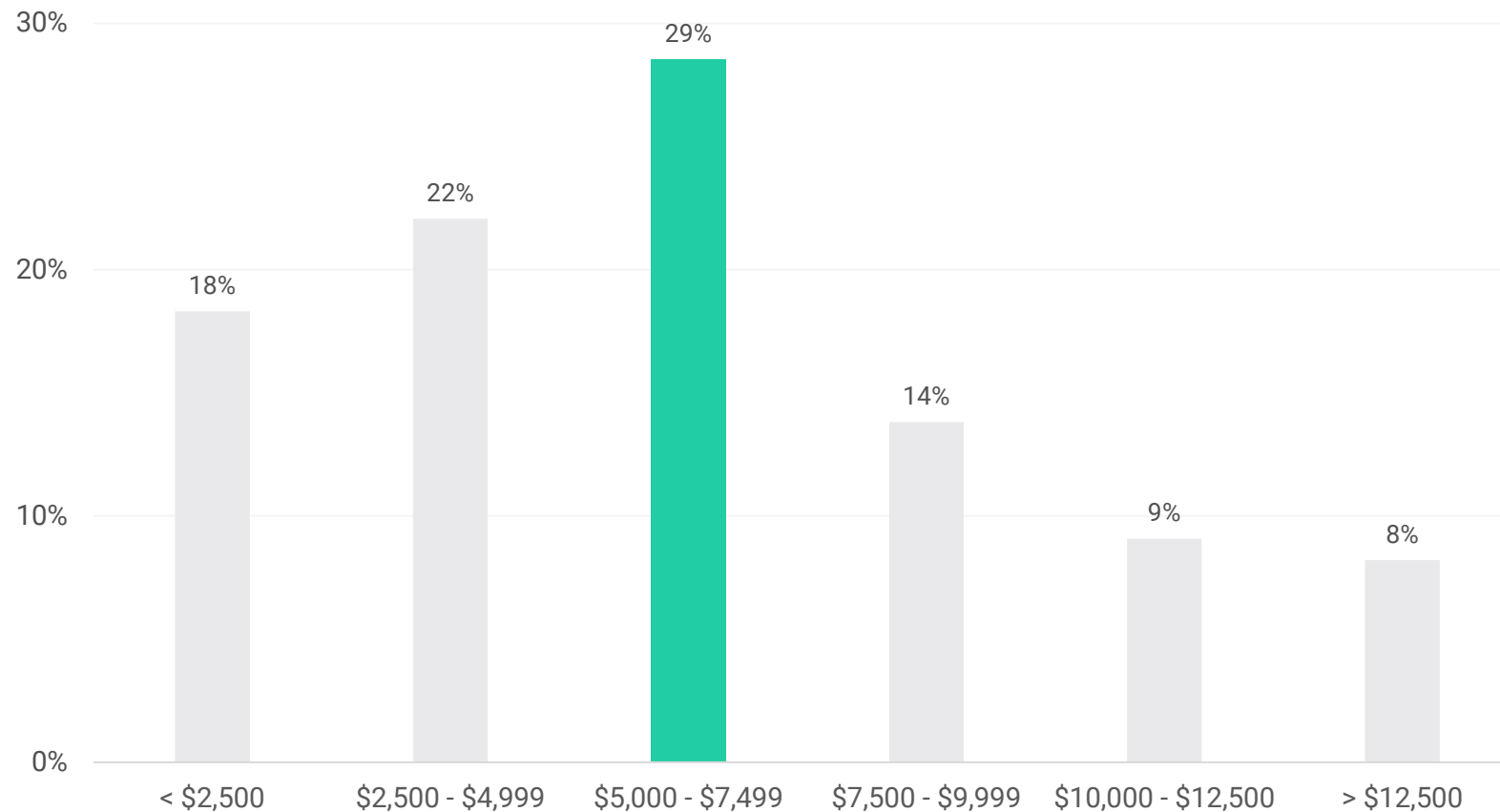
# Hourly rate development





# Monthly income

On average, what is your monthly net freelance income?



**Remarkable**

## \$6,884

is the **average net monthly income** of freelancers.

29% have an average monthly net income between \$5,000 and \$7,499.

# Income satisfaction

**66%**

are satisfied with their actual income.

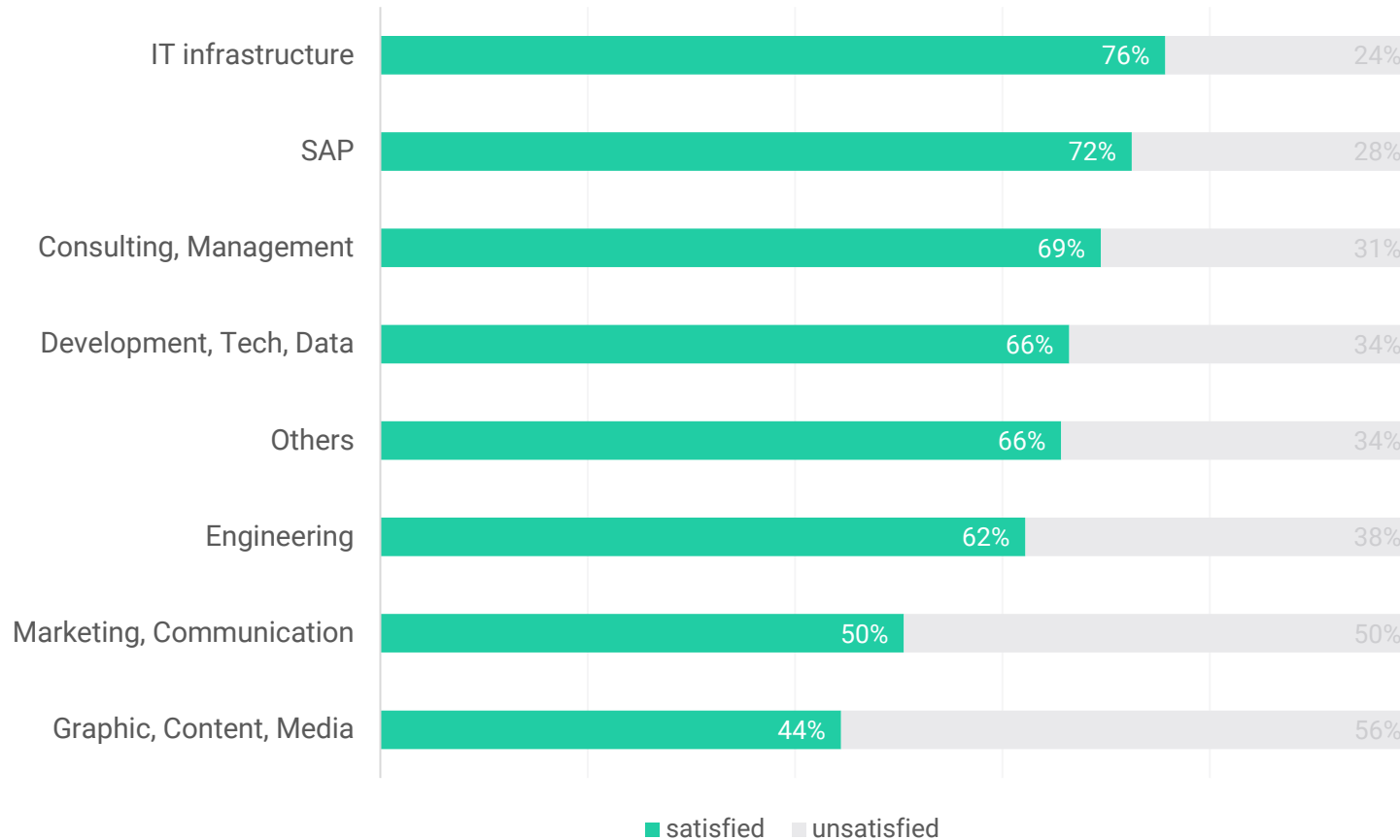


**Are you satisfied  
with your  
income level?**

**34%**

are not satisfied with their actual income.

# Income satisfaction by industry



**Remarkable**

# 63%

is the average income satisfaction.

---

Only **44%** of freelancers working in the **Graphics / Content / Media** sector are satisfied with their income.

# Finances & Income

## Key findings



**\$ 8,232**

Start capital



**\$ 105**

Average hourly rate



**\$ 94 / \$ 107**

Average hourly rate w / m



**\$ 6,884**

Monthly income



**63%**

Income satisfaction



I regularly increase my freelance hourly rate because the more experience I have, the less time I need for specific tasks. In order to earn accordingly to my experience, I adjust my hourly rate. In this way I can guarantee transparency for my customers.

---

Laura Grocholl  
Video producer

# Agenda

1.

## Financials

- Rates
- Income
- Comparison

2.

## Self-employment

- Challenges
- Freelance work

3.

## Demographics

- Origin
- Education
- Industry

4.

## Outlook

- Project market situation
- Market development
- Forecasts

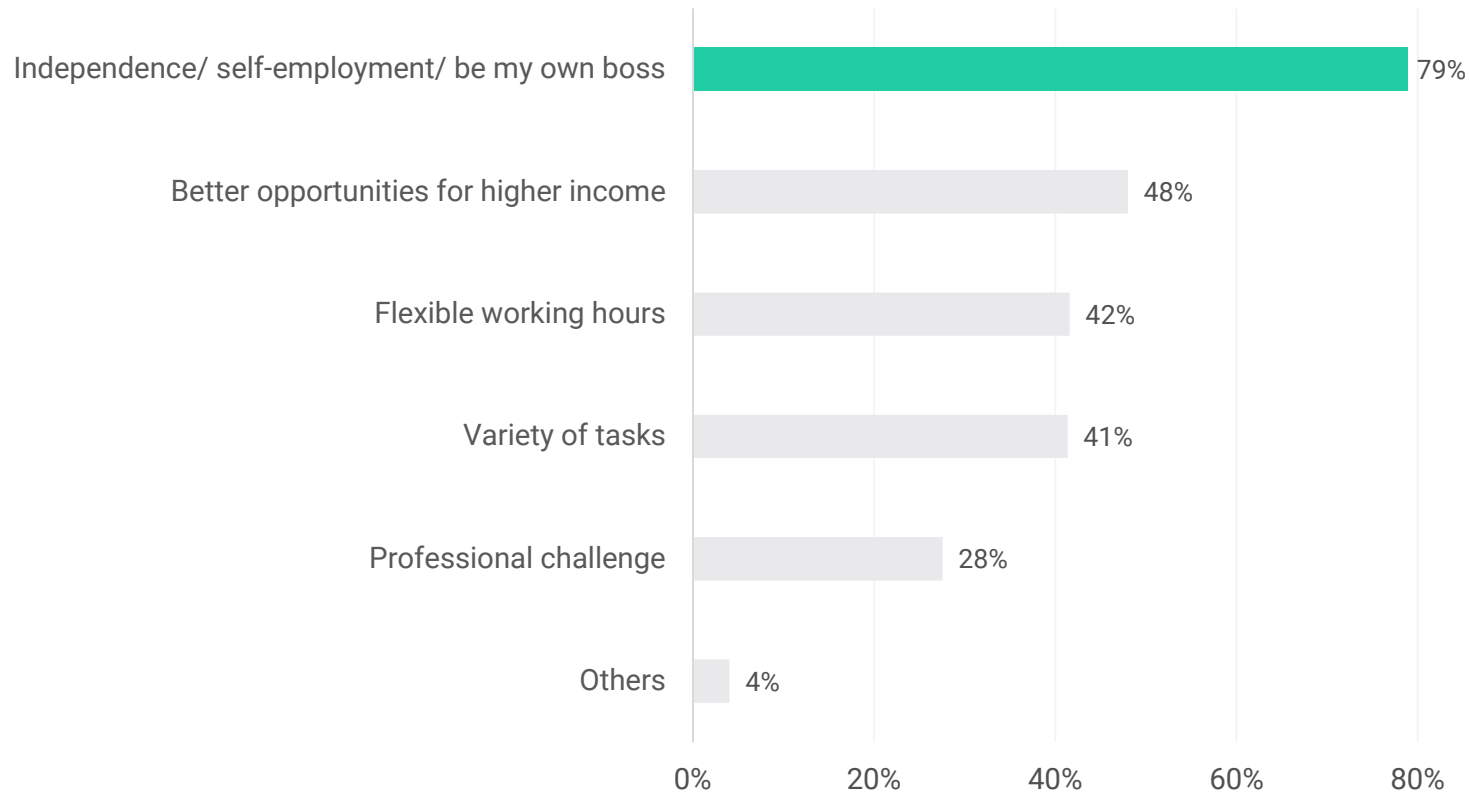
5.

## Covid-19

- Impact of Covid-19 on the freelancer market

# Reasons to go freelance

What reasons made you decide to start freelancing?



**Remarkable**

**79%**

chose the opportunity to **be their own boss** as the reason for making the leap.

Better opportunities for getting a **higher income** was voted by **48%**.

# Freelancer facts

Work experience and starting age



12 years

of work experience on average is gained by freelancers before going freelance.

36 years old

is the **average age** of freelancers when taking the leap.

11 years

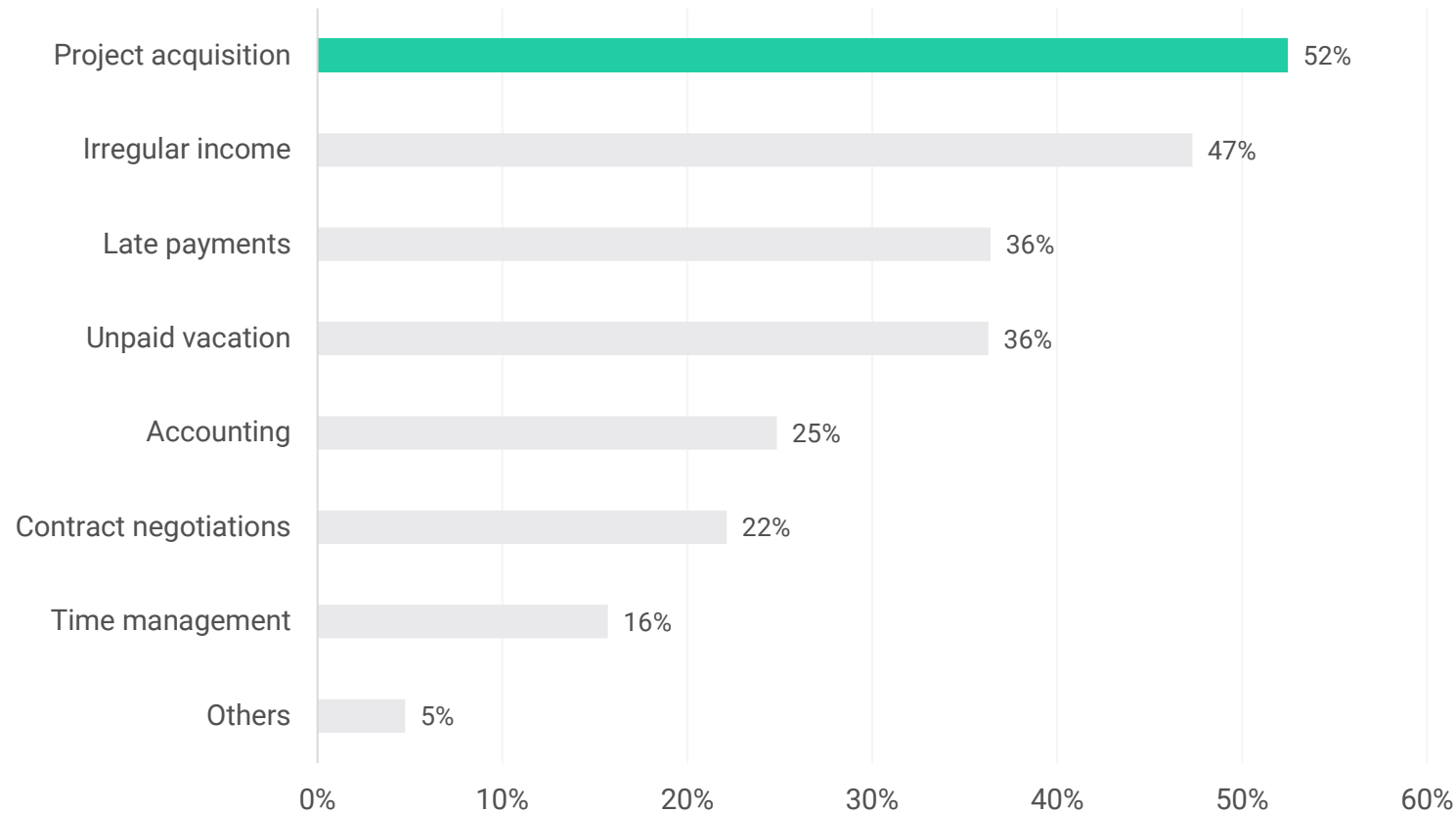
on average have freelancers already been self-employed.





# Freelance challenges

What are the major challenges freelancers face?



**Remarkable**

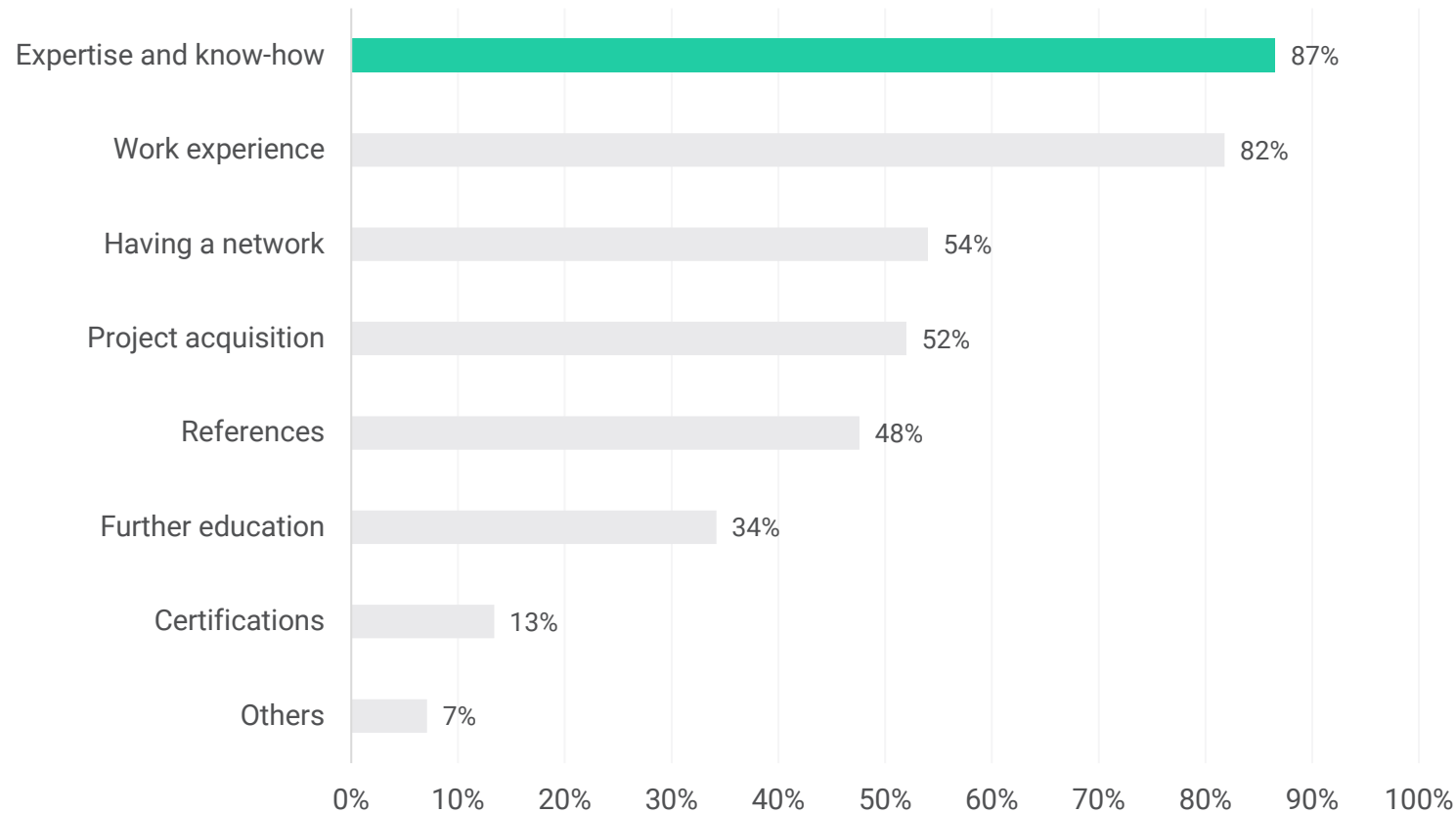
**52%**

agreed that **finding new projects** was the biggest challenge for freelancers.

Having irregular income was the second biggest challenge (47%), followed by getting paid late (36%).

# Successful freelancer

What is particularly important for freelancers to be successful?



## Remarkable

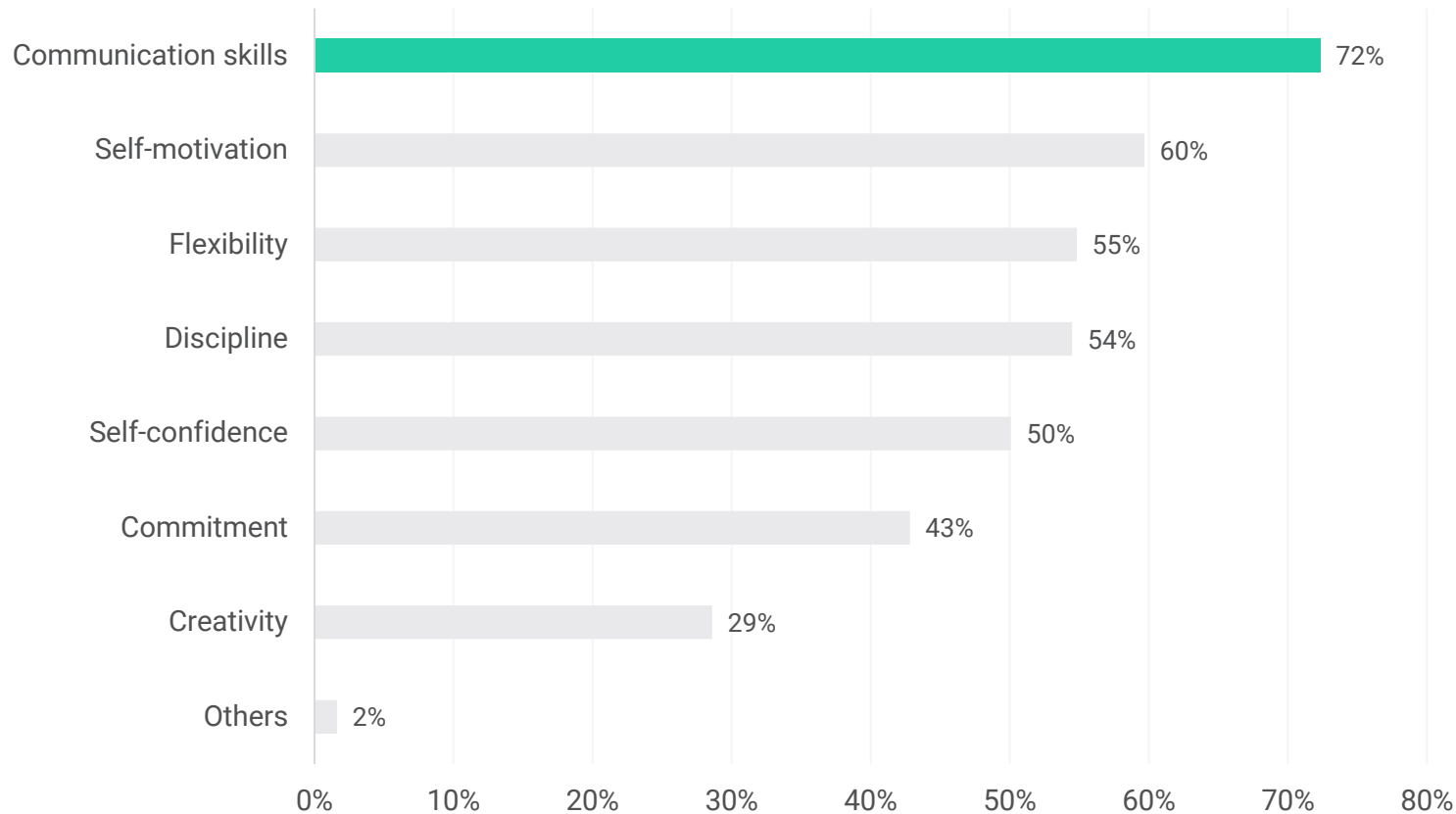
Having expertise and know-how is the most important thing to succeed as a freelancer according to

87%

Having relevant work experience (82%) and a good network (54%) follow.

# Soft skills for freelancers

What are the most relevant soft skills for freelancers?



**Remarkable**

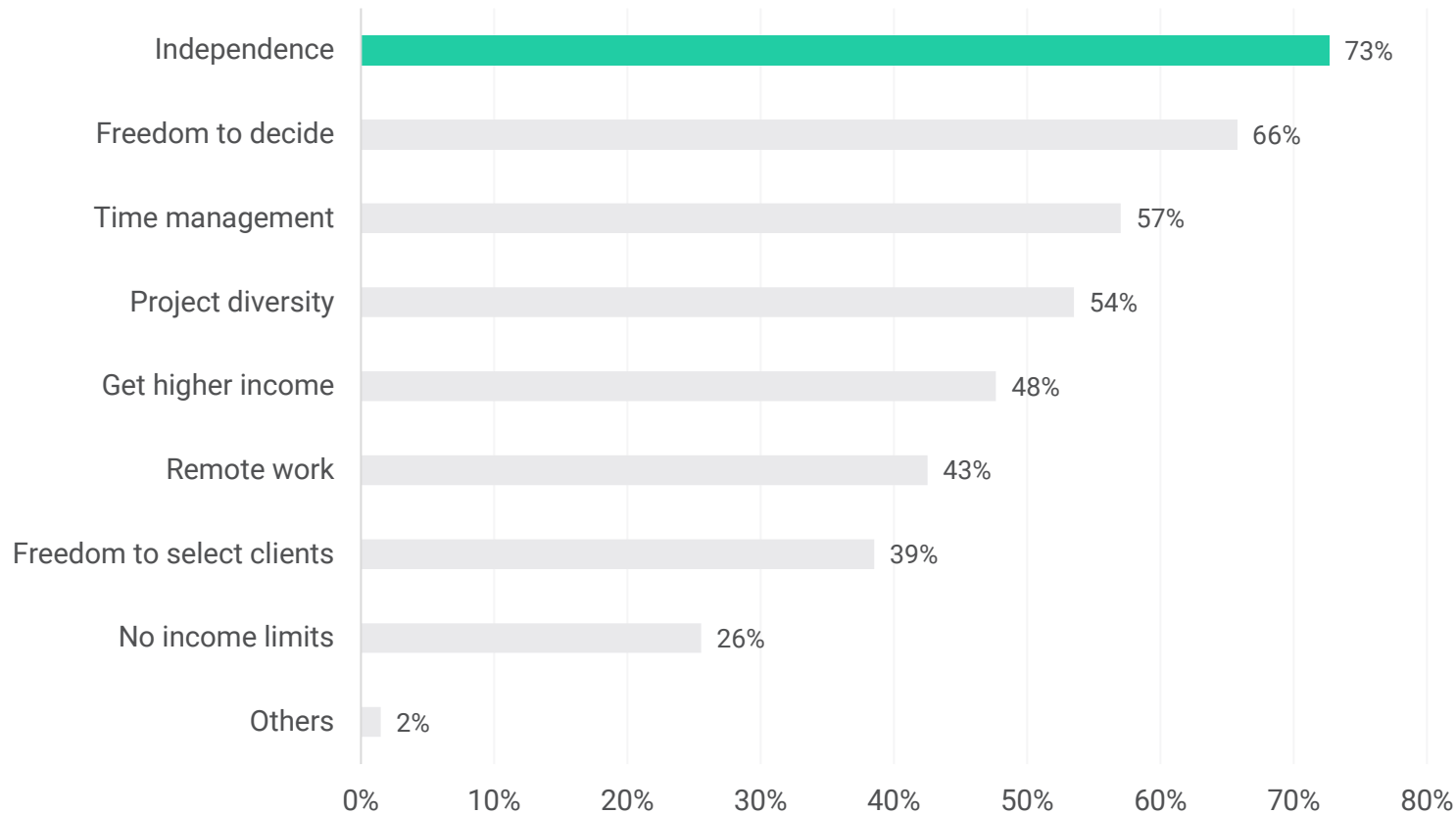
**72%**

consider having great **communication skills** as the most relevant soft skill for freelancers.

Self-motivation, flexibility, discipline and self-confidence are also seen as important soft skills that a freelancer should have.

# Benefits of freelancing

What are the main benefits of freelancing?



**Remarkable**

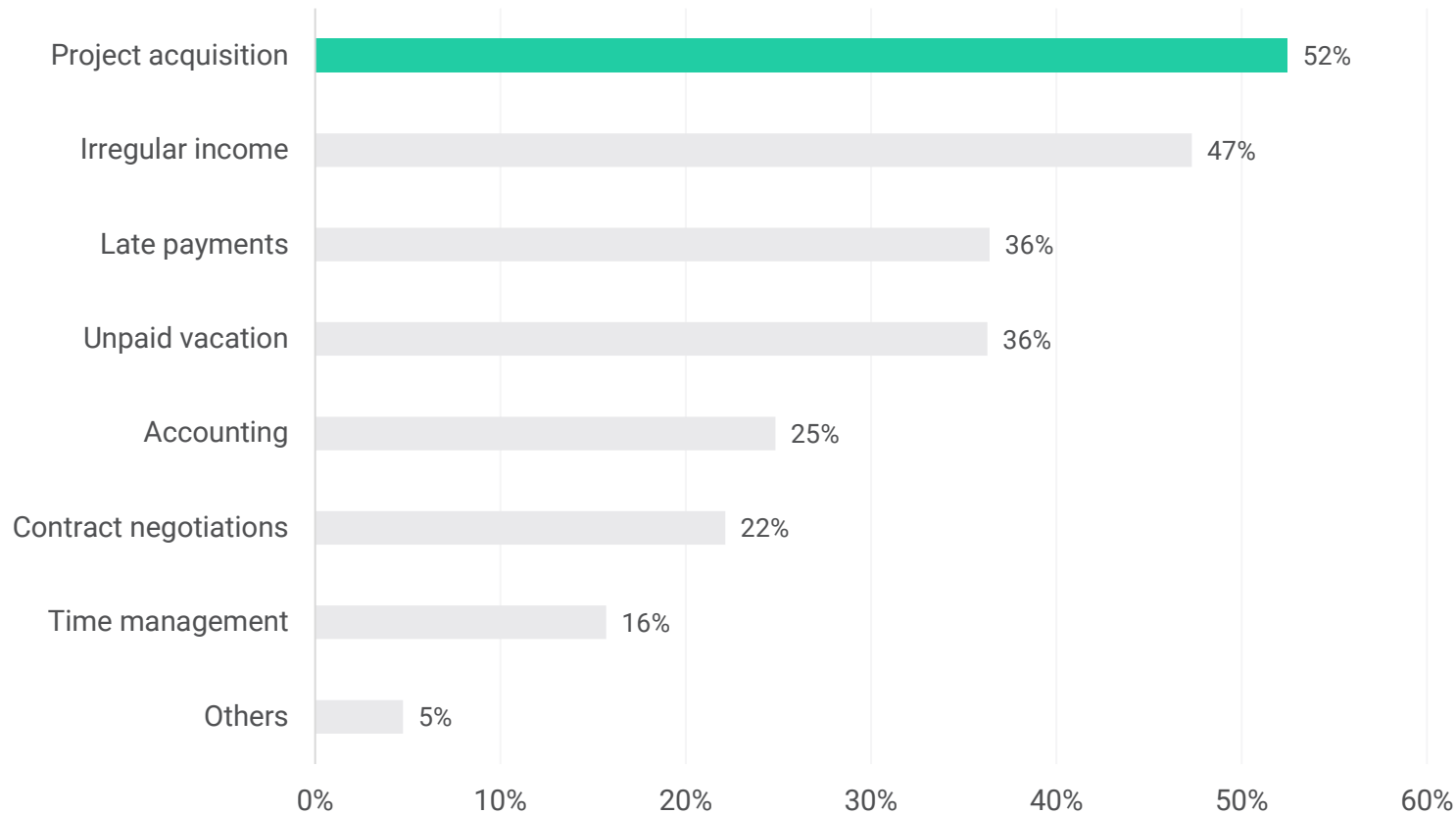
**73%**

consider **independence** the main benefit of freelancing

Remote work is important only for 43%.

# Disadvantages of freelancing

What are the main disadvantages of freelancing?



**Remarkable**

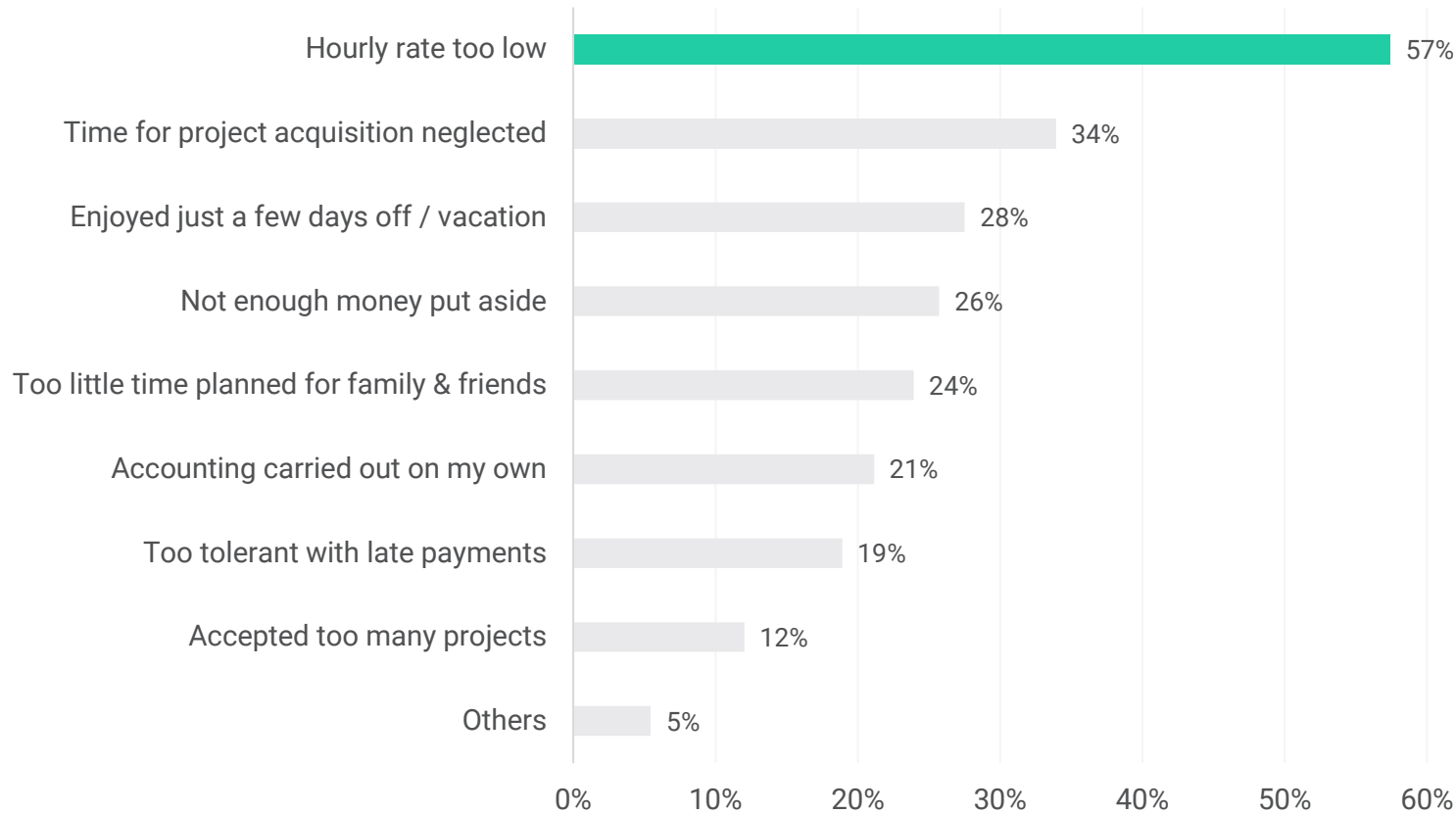
**52%**

reported **project acquisition** as the main disadvantage of freelancing.

Irregular income is a disadvantage for 47%.

# Beginner mistakes

Which mistakes did you make more often at the beginning of your freelancer career?



**Remarkable**

**57%**

of freelancers cited **charging way too low rates** as their main mistake at the beginning of their career.

Underestimation of time for project acquisition is at second place (34%).

# Freelancer facts

Working hours and holidays



**25 days**  
of vacation do freelancers take  
on average per year.

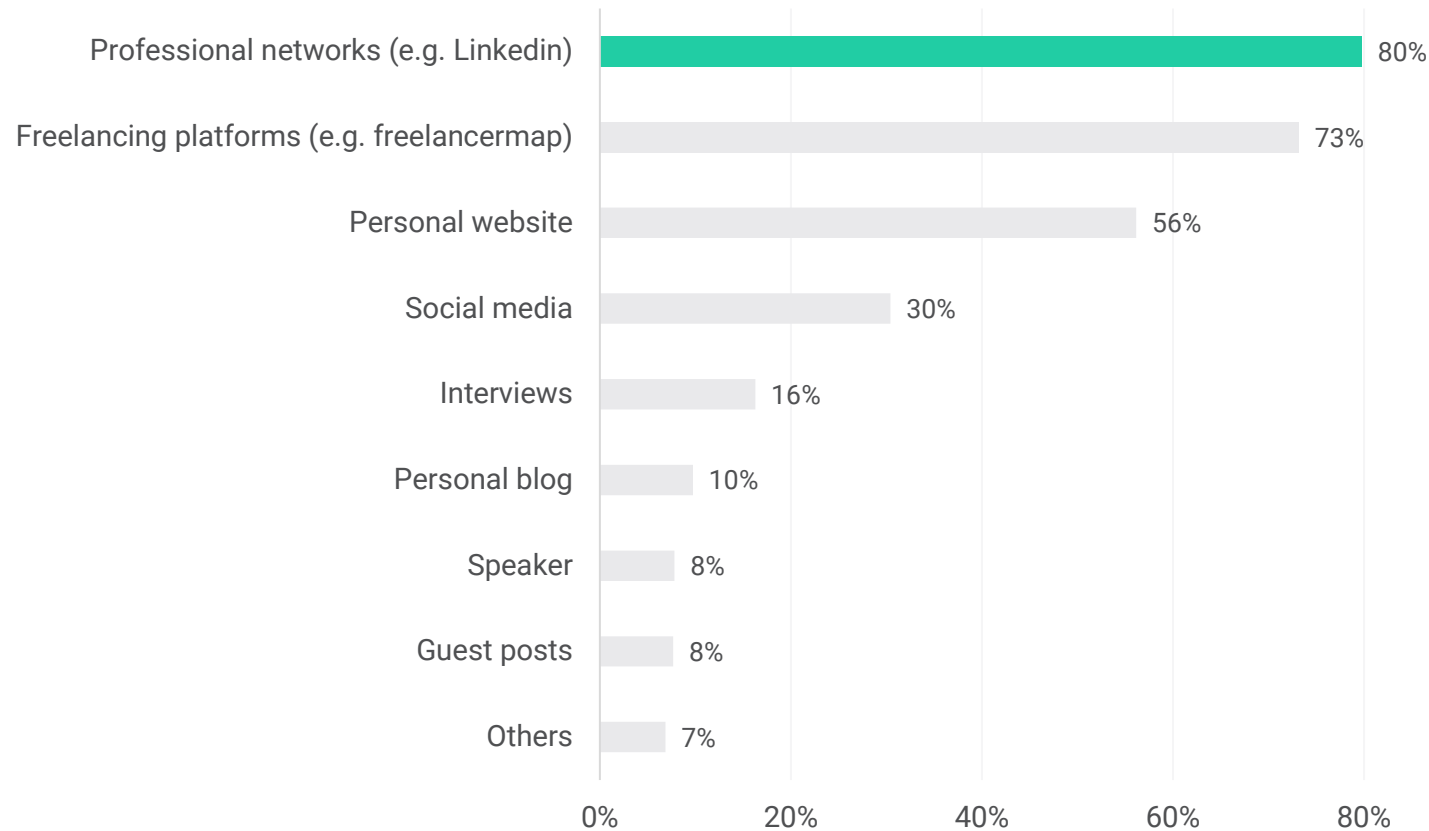
**45 hours**  
are freelancers working for on  
average every week.

**9 projects**  
are completed by freelancers on  
average every year.



# Self-marketing

How do you market your freelancing services?



**Remarkable**

80%

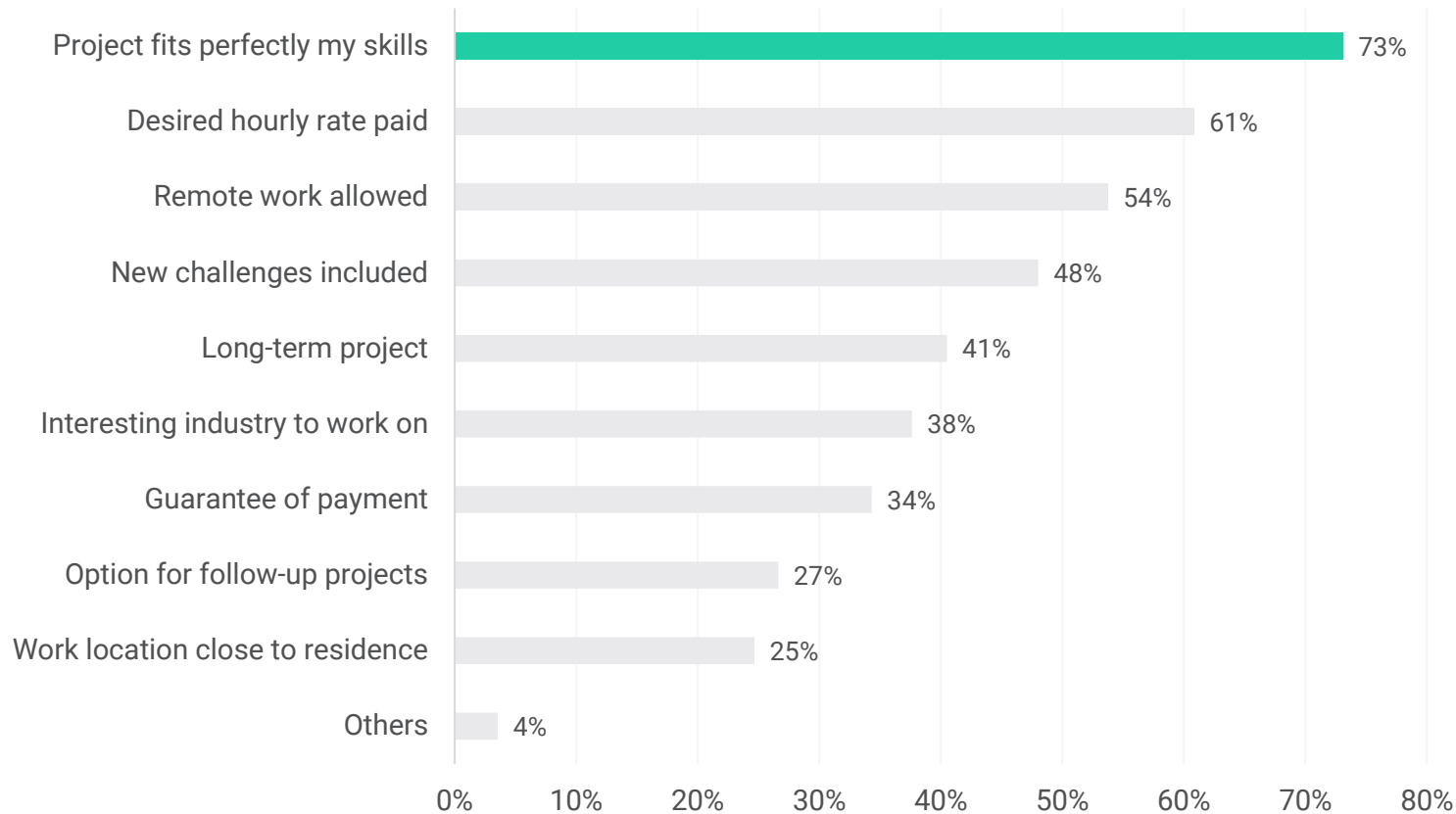
of freelancers say they use **professional networks** to market their services.

7 out of 10 surveyed freelancers use platforms such as freelancemap for their self-marketing.



# Accepting a project

What makes a project "the perfect project"?



**Remarkable**

**73%**

of freelancers decide whether or not to accept a project based on the **required skills**.

Having the desired hourly rate and remote work being allowed are also 2 important factors when it comes to accepting a project.

# Team

**49%**

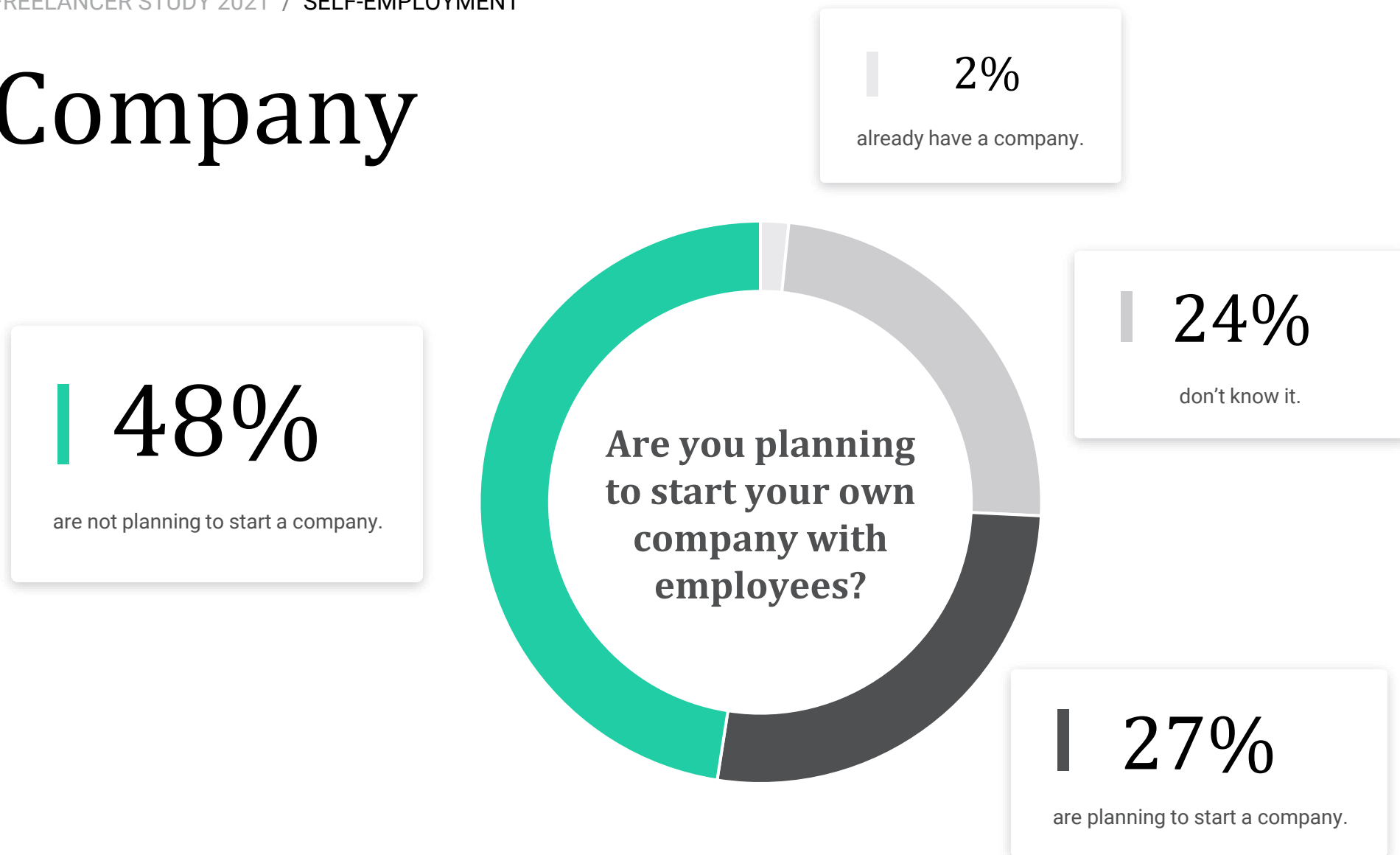
are working with other freelancers.



**51%**

are not working with other freelancers.

# Company



# Working life

## Key findings



**12 years**  
work experience



**11 years**  
freelancing



**45 hours**  
per week



**9 projects**  
per year



**25 days**  
vacation

# Agenda

1.

## Financials

- Rates
- Income
- Comparison

2.

## Self-employment

- Challenges
- Freelance work

3.

## Demographics

- Origin
- Education
- Industry

4.

## Outlook

- Project market situation
- Market development
- Forecasts

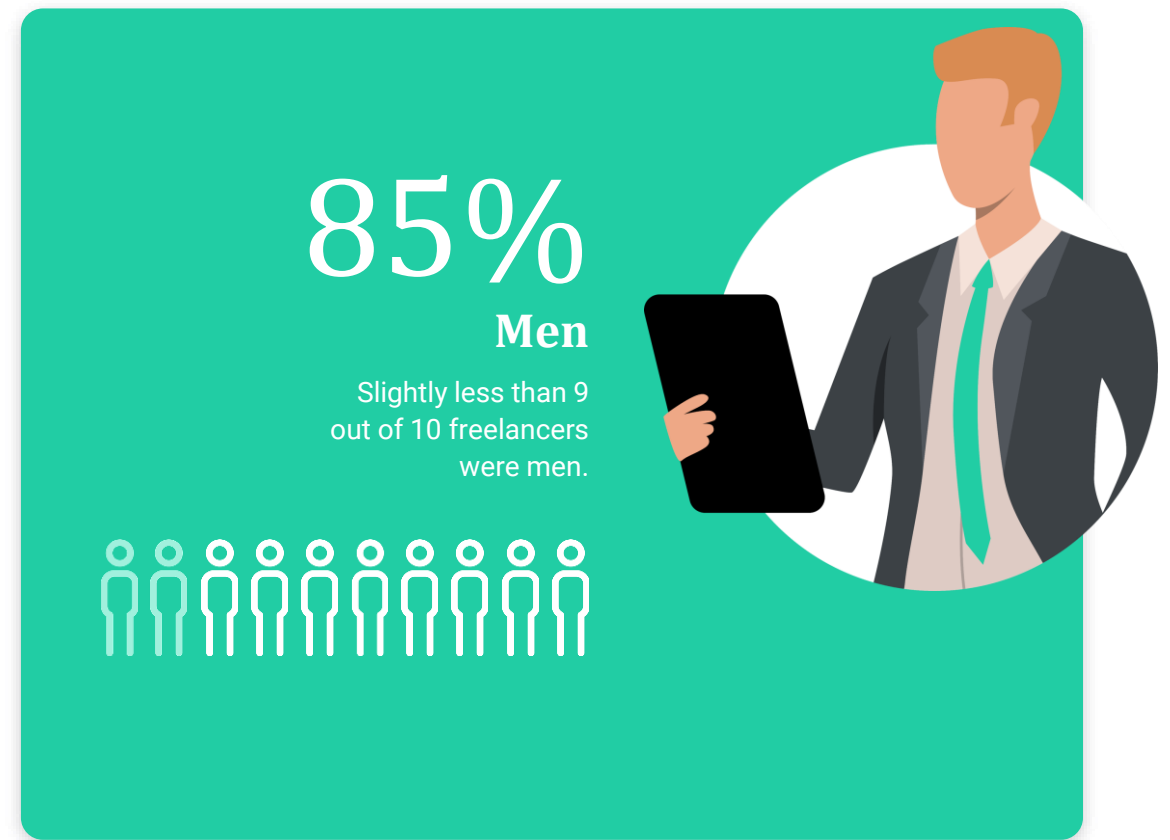
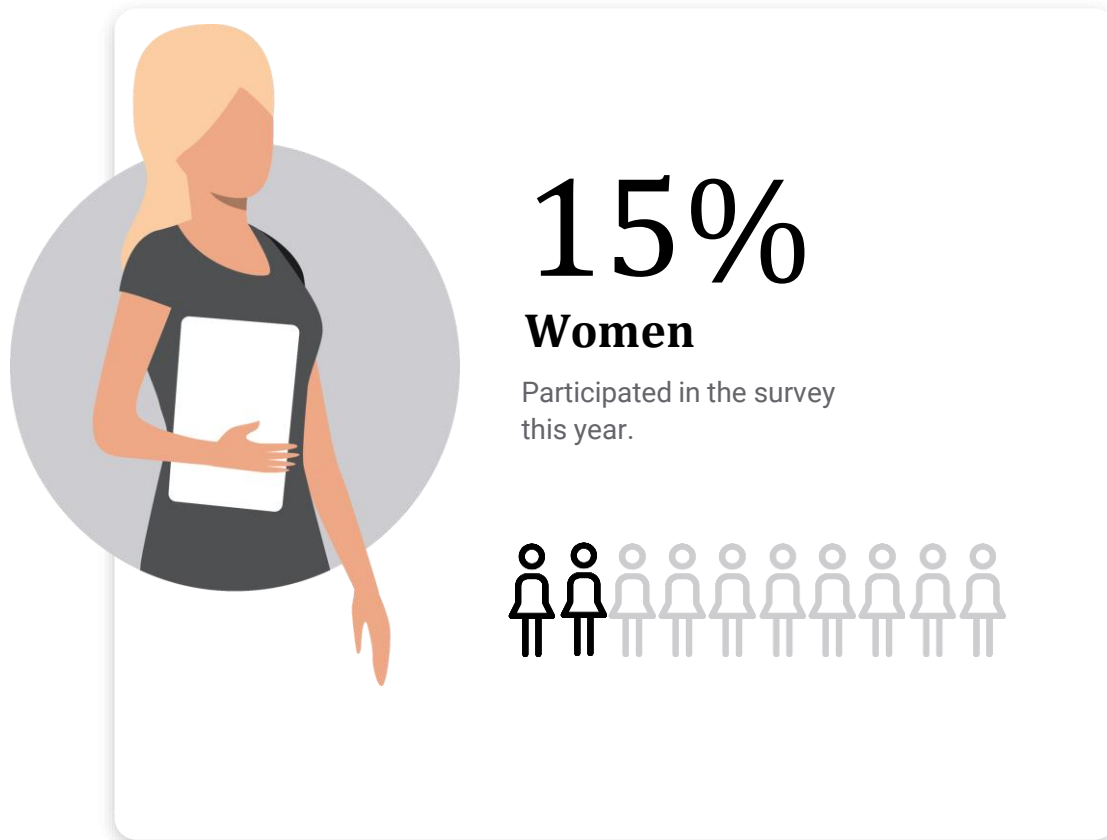
5.

## Covid-19

- Impact of Covid-19 on the freelancer market

# Gender distribution

What is the relationship between female and male freelancers?



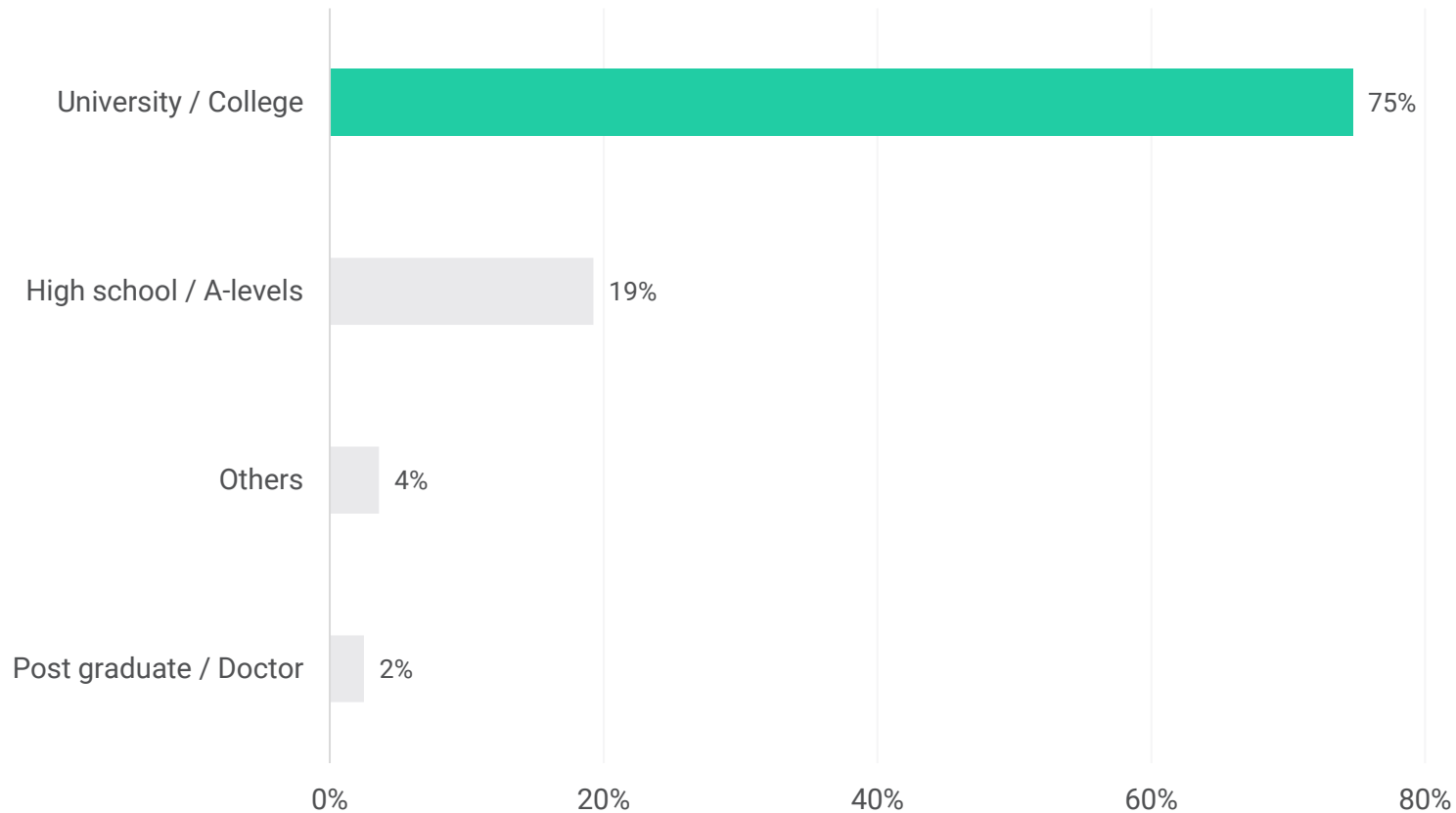
# Freelancer location

Where do freelancers live and work?



# Education

What is your highest educational level?



**Remarkable**

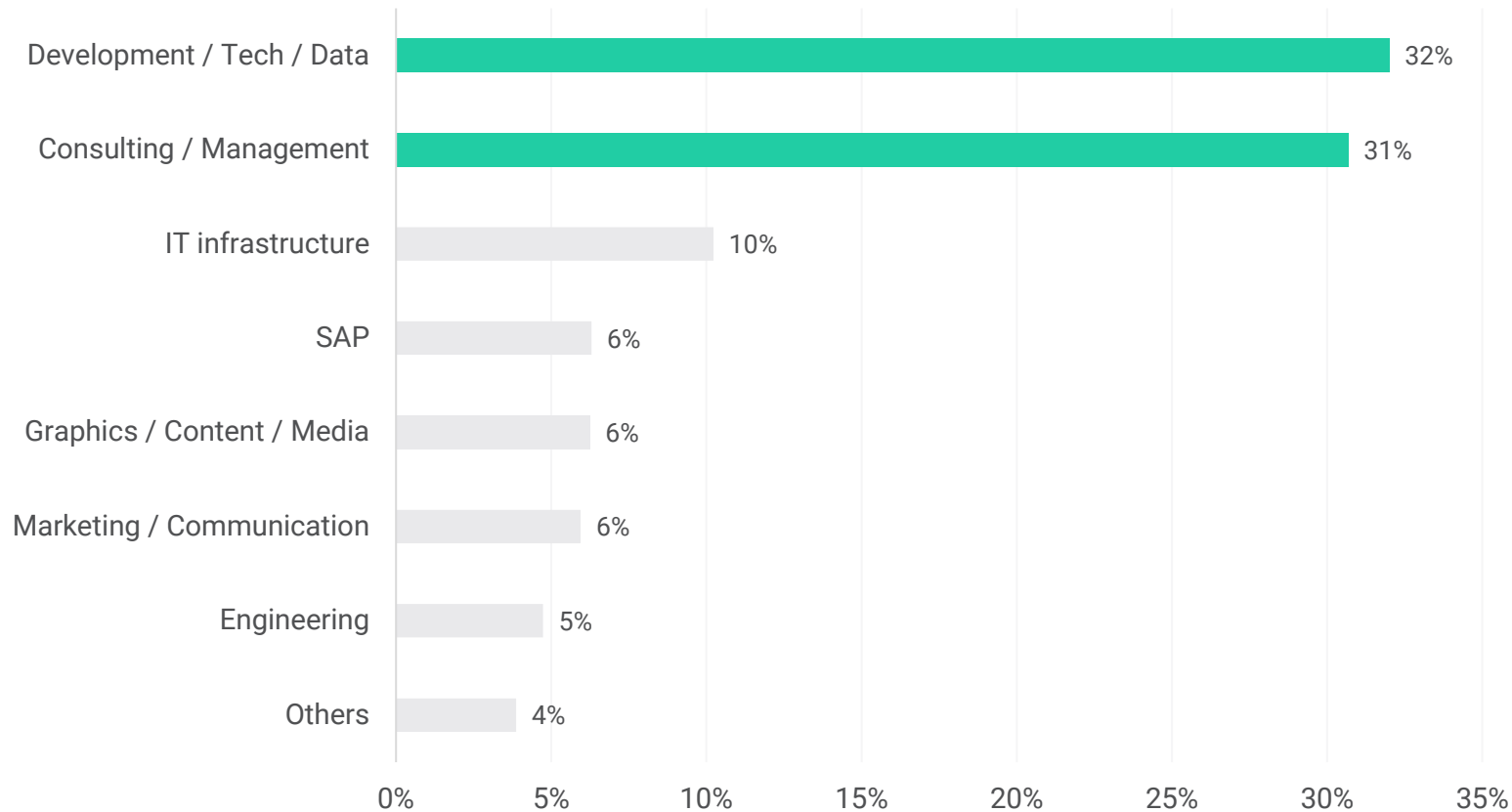
**75%**

of freelancers completed a **college degree**  
or attended **university** of applied sciences.



# Area of expertise

What is your area of expertise?



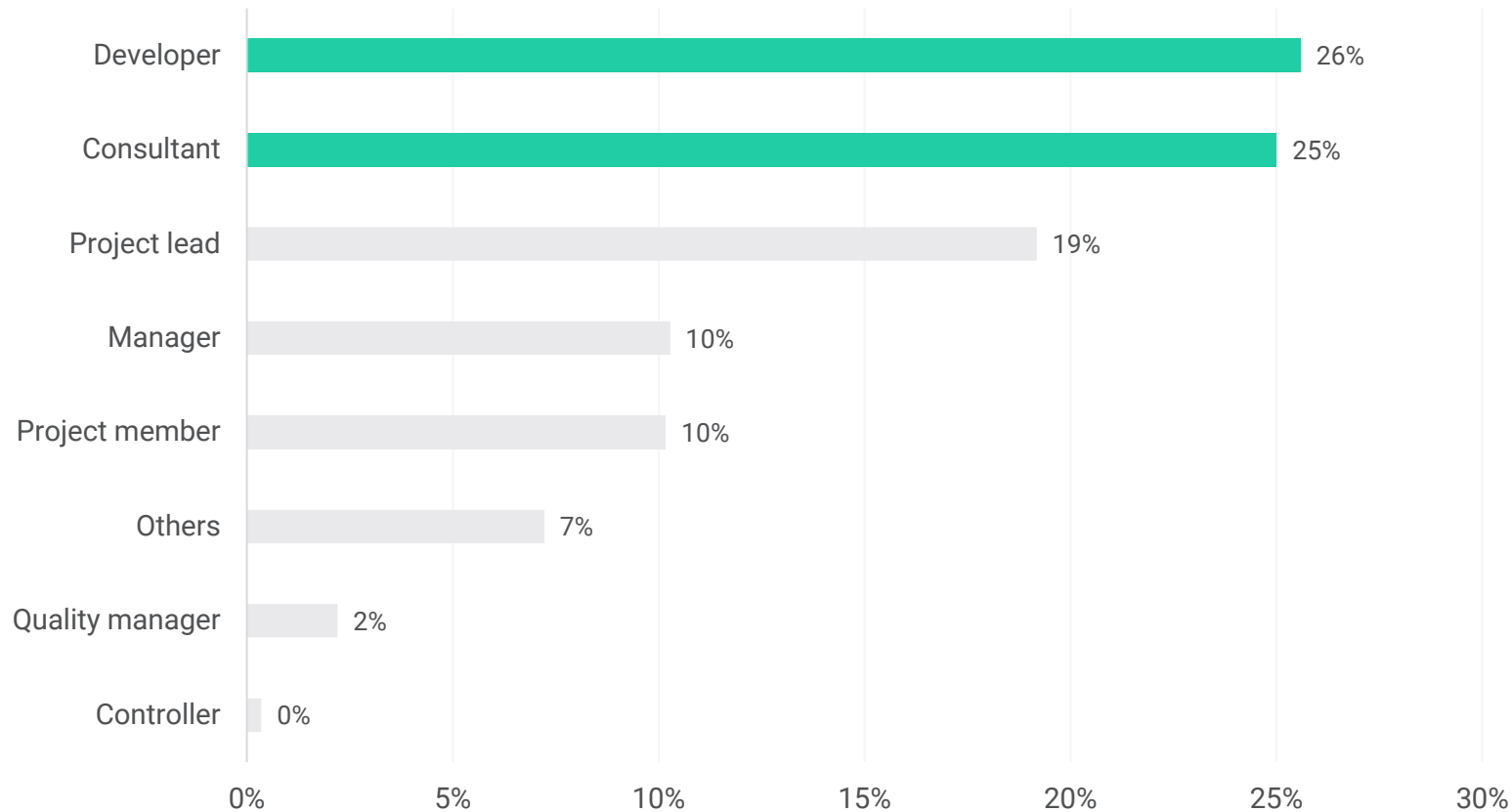
**Remarkable**

**63%**

of the surveyed freelancers are working in the **Development / Tech / Data** or **Consulting / Management** sector.

# Role on projects

What was your position in the last (or current) project?



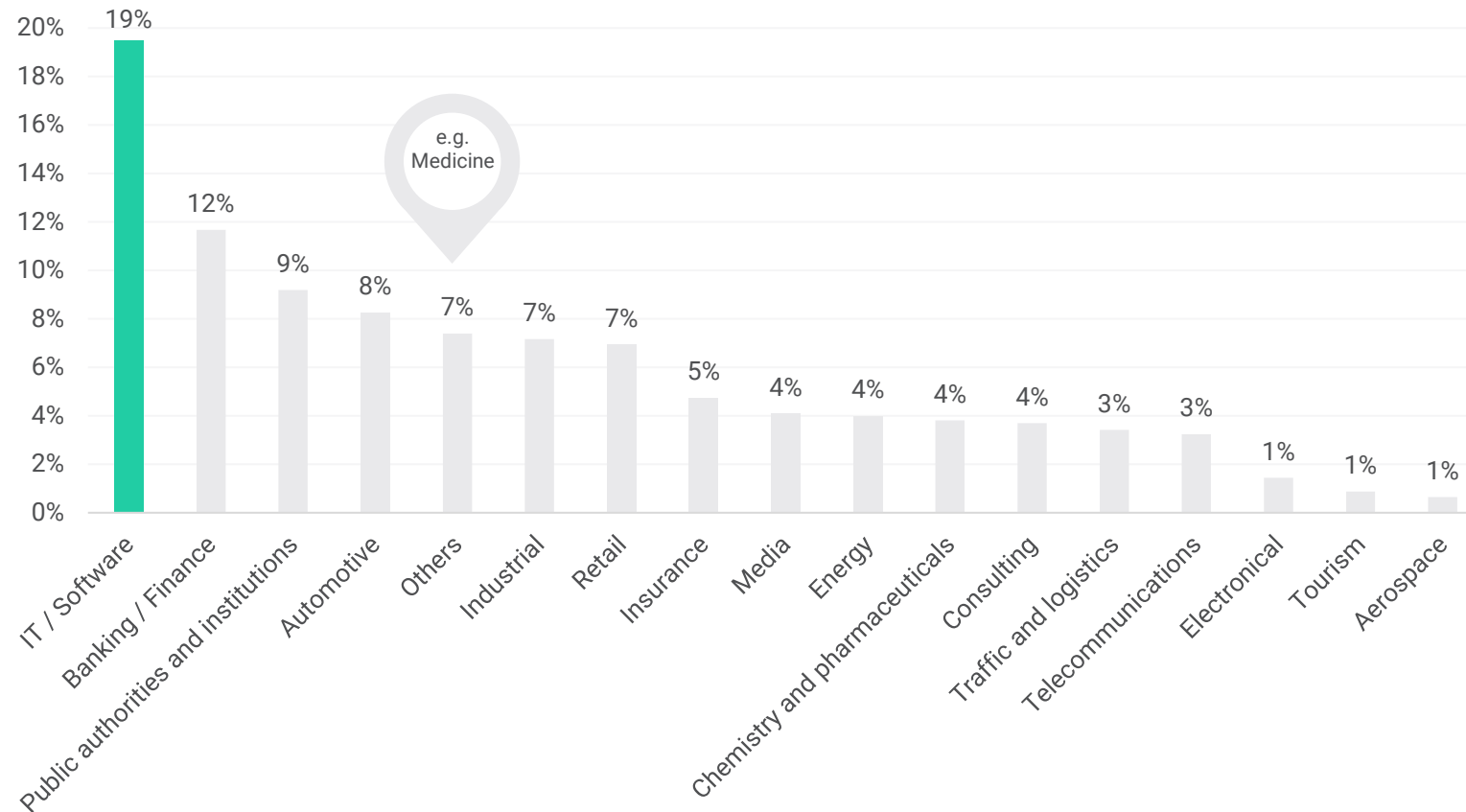
**Remarkable**

**51%**

of the interviewed freelancers are  
**developers or consultants.**

# Industry

In which field was your last (or current) project?



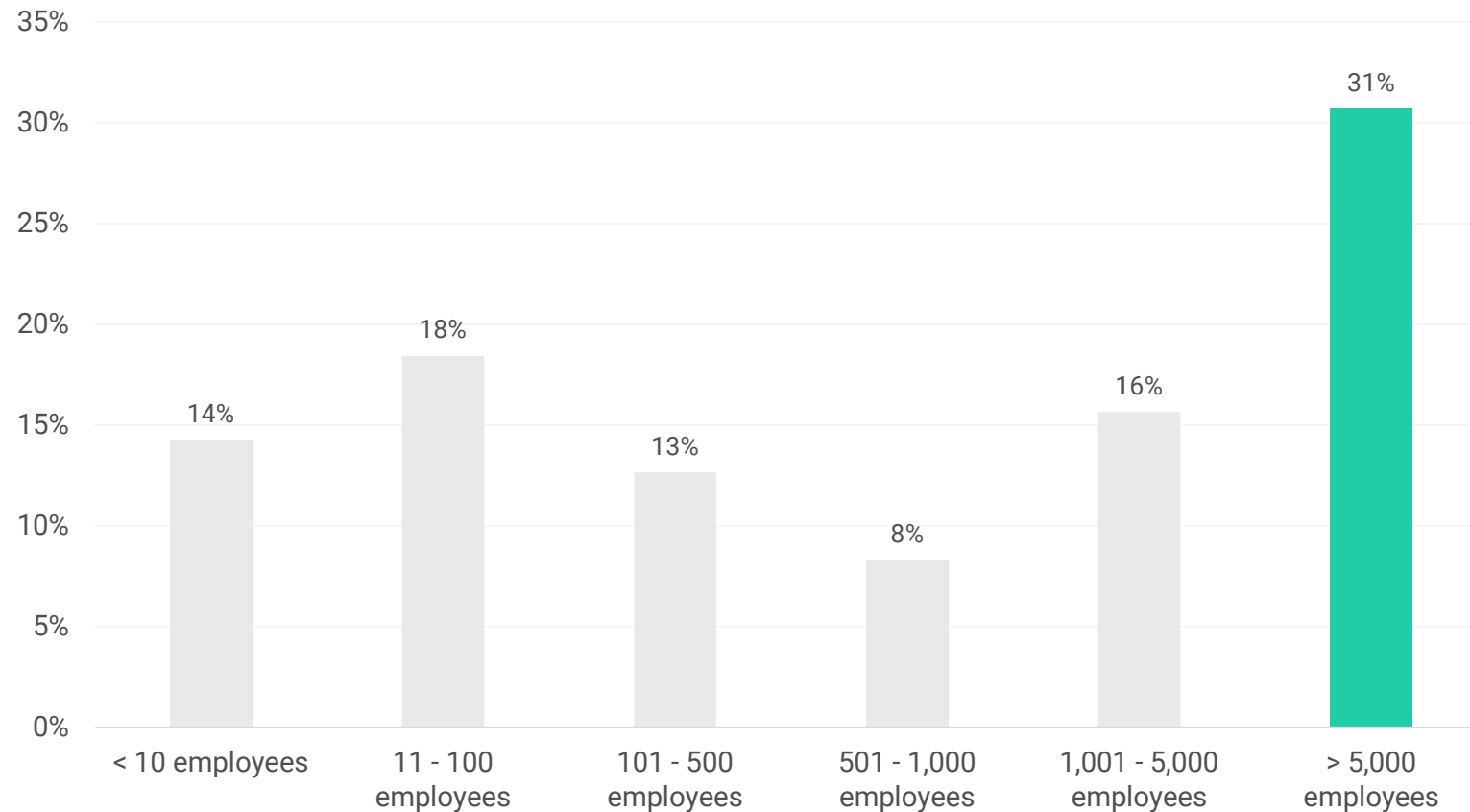
**Remarkable**

19%

are working in the **IT / Software** industry.

# Company size

What was the company size on your last (or current) project?



**Remarkable**

**31%**

are working in companies with **more than 5,000 employees.**

# Retirement

How much money do you put aside each month for your retirement (USD)?

Retirement savings

\$1,251

is the average monthly saving of  
freelancers for their future retirement.

**Remarkable**

On average, freelancers will retire  
at the age of

64 years old

# Demographics

## Key findings



**15% / 85%**

Women / Men



**46** years old

Age



**\$1,251**

Retirement savings



**75%**

University graduates



**64** years old

Retirement age



Freelancers make an indispensable contribution to the economy and society. Where others see problems, they see opportunities. They stand for service and diversity in our communities, educate themselves independently, anticipate the (knowledge) needs of the future, are innovation drivers in companies and protect them from operational blindness.

They take responsibility not only at work, but also for the community. Founders and self-employed therefore deserve political support, fair framework conditions and legal security.

---

Dr. Andreas Lutz  
CEO VGSD

# Agenda

1.

## Financials

- Rates
- Income
- Comparison

2.

## Self-employment

- Challenges
- Freelance work

3.

## Demographics

- Origin
- Education
- Industry

4.

## Outlook

- Project market situation
- Market development
- Forecasts

5.

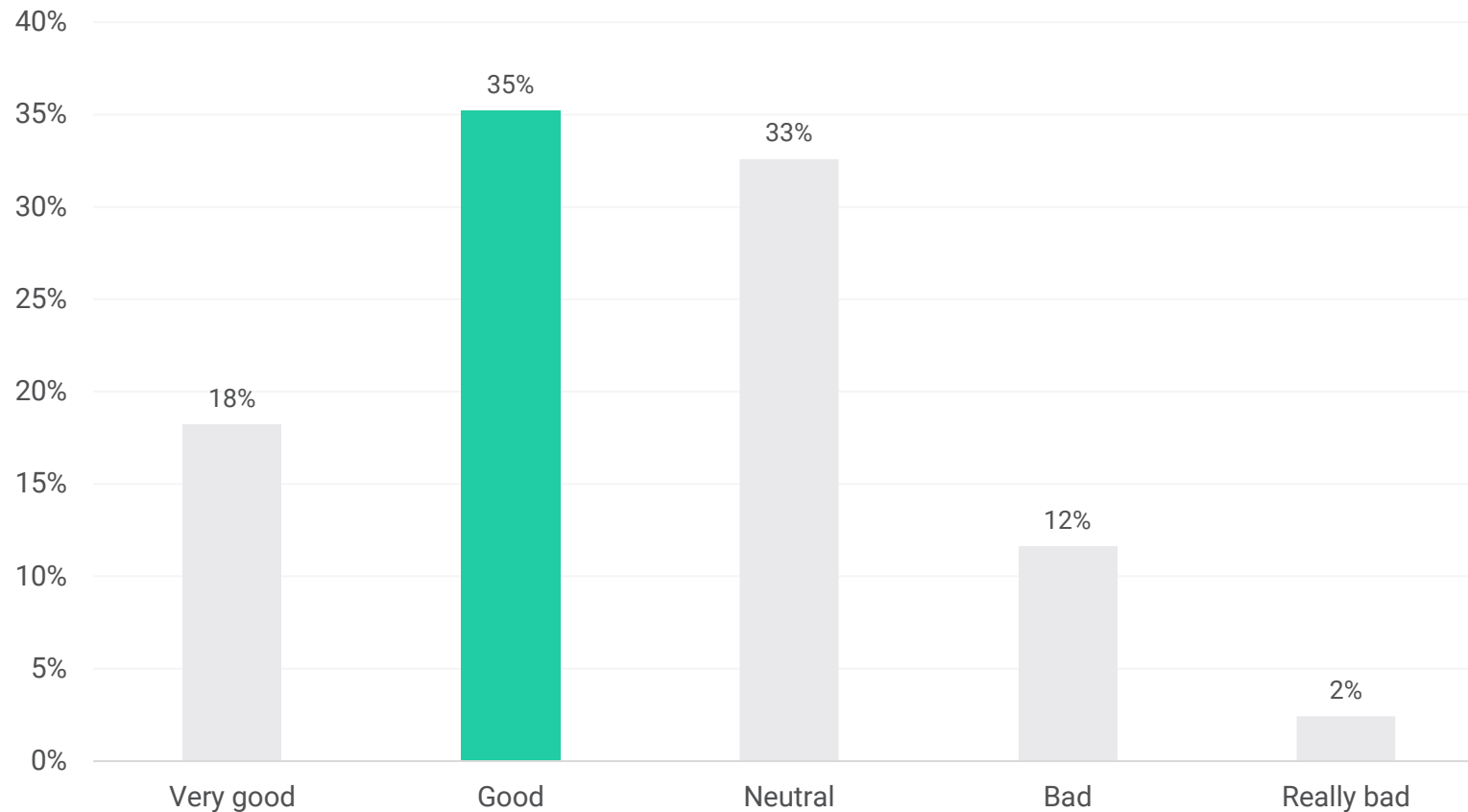
## Covid-19

- Impact of Covid-19 on the freelancer market



# Project market situation

How would you rate the actual project market situation?



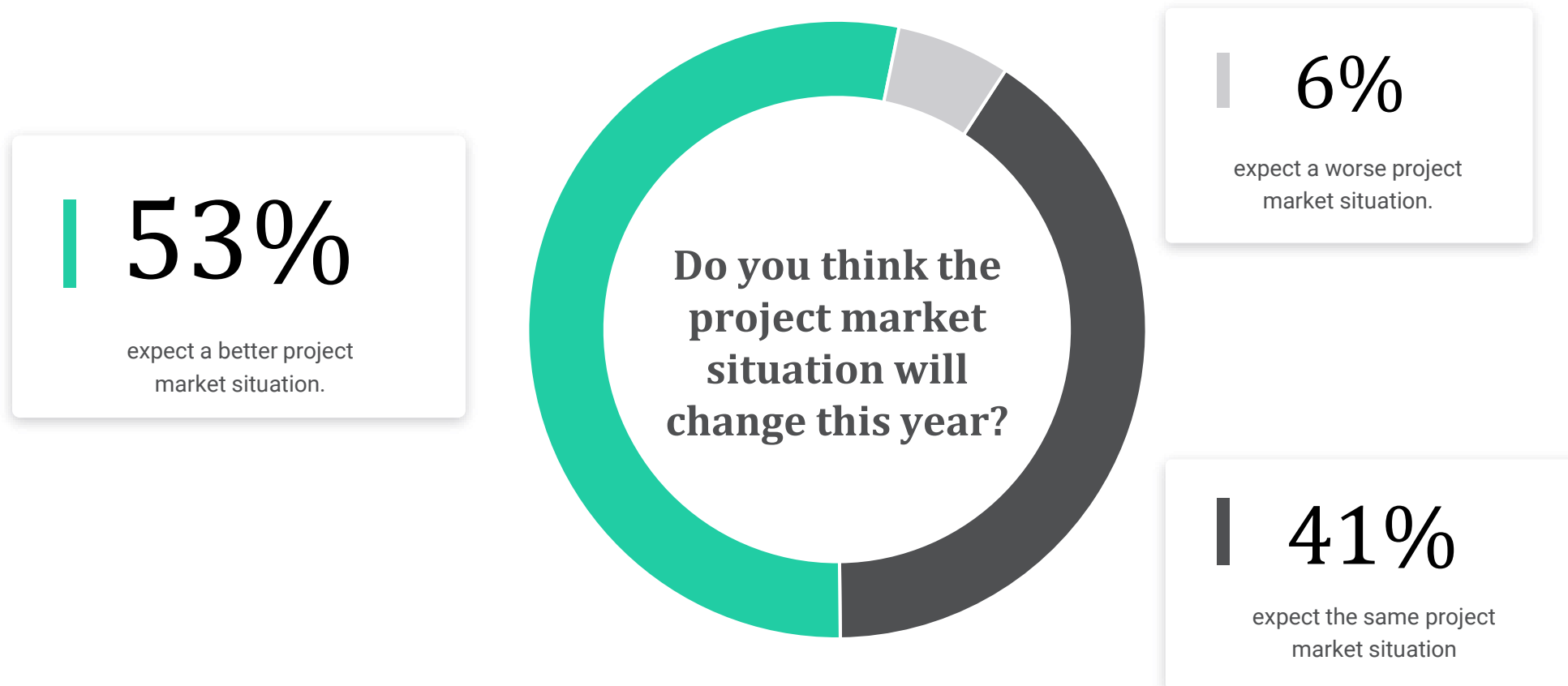
**Remarkable**

**53%**

rate the actual project market situation as  
(very) **good**.

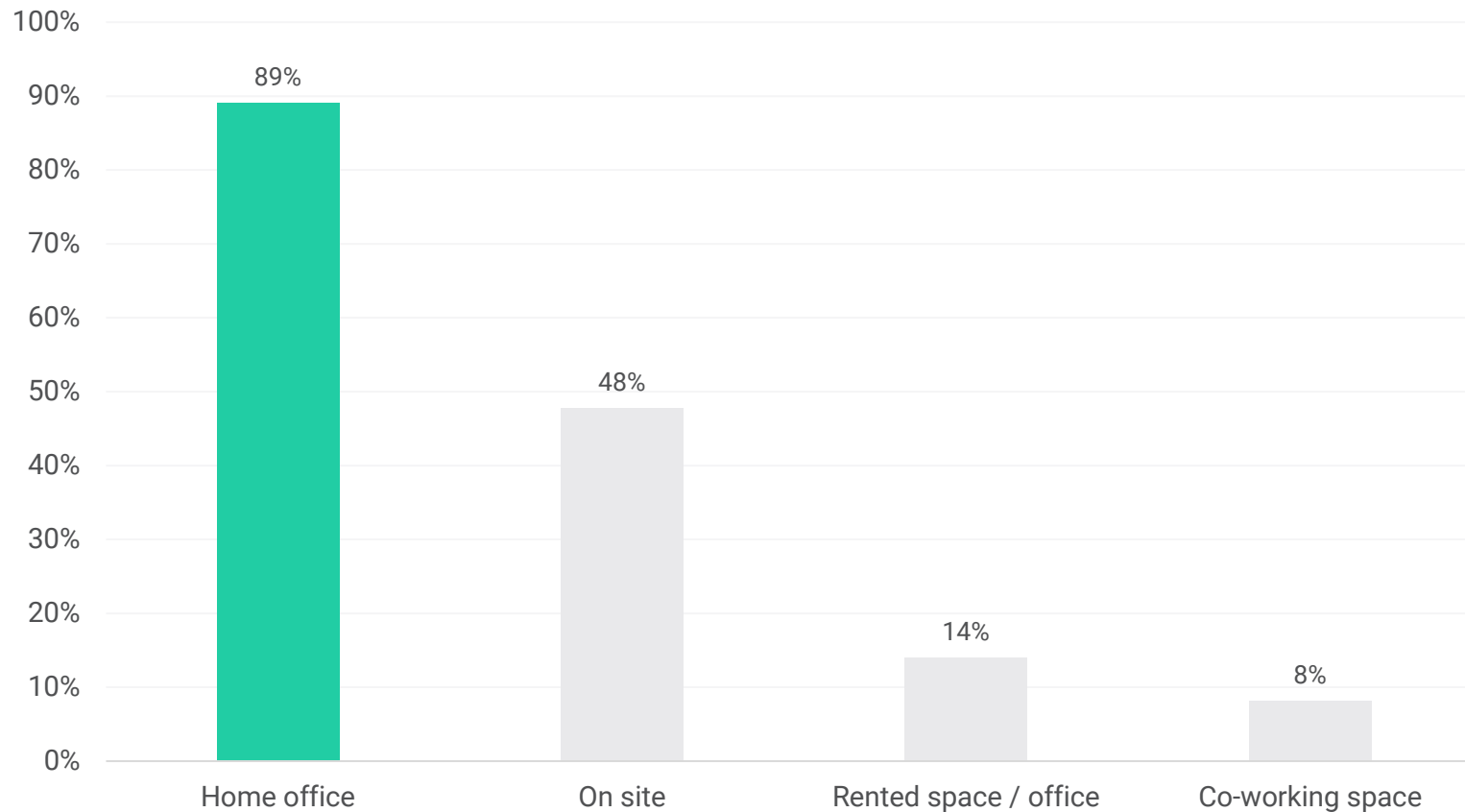
14% rate it as (really) bad.

# Project market situation



# Workplace

Where do you normally work?



**Remarkable**

89%

are working **remotely** from home.

Almost half of the freelancers (48%)  
work also in a company on site.

# Freelancing in the future

89%

want to keep working  
on a freelance basis.

Do you want to  
continue working  
as a freelancer?

6%

are not sure since the  
beginning of the pandemic.

2%

would switch to full-time employment if  
they received an appropriate salary.

2%

don't want to continue  
working as a freelancer.

# Freelancer again?

89%

would start their freelance business again.

If you could start over, would you still choose to be a freelancer?

9%

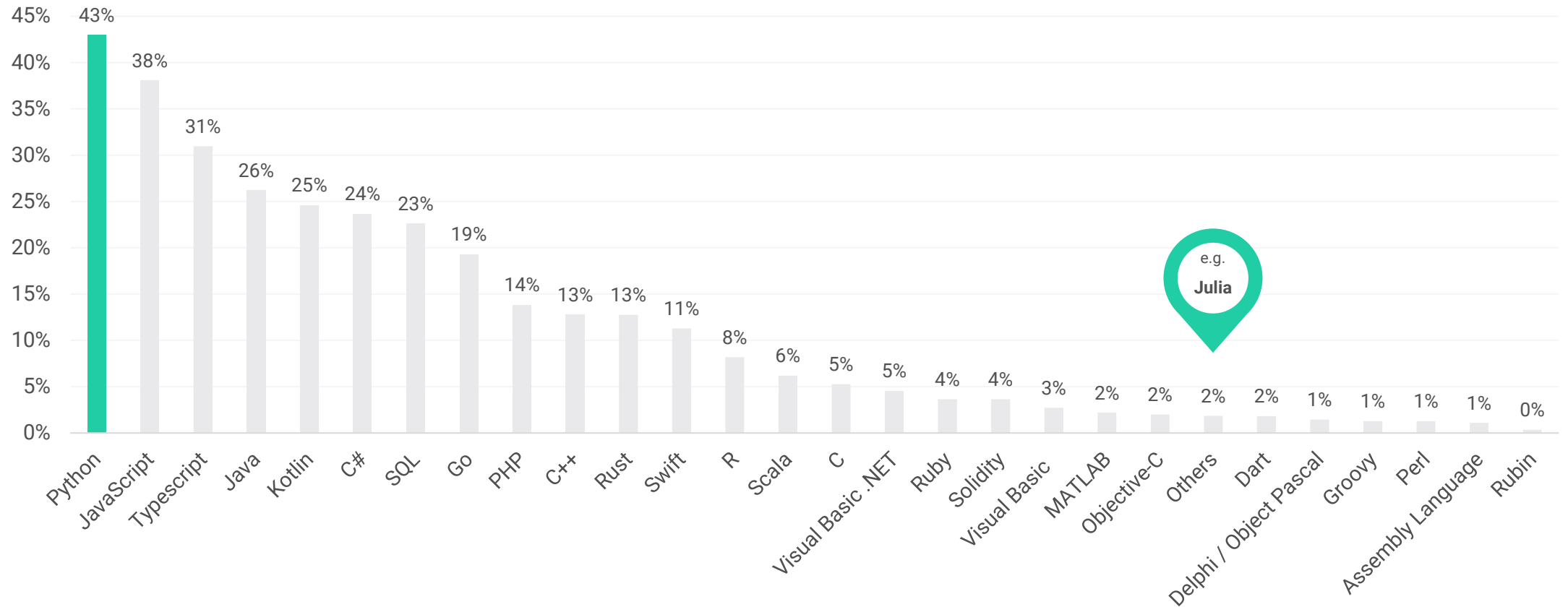
are not sure if they would start over again.

2%

won't choose to become a freelancer again.

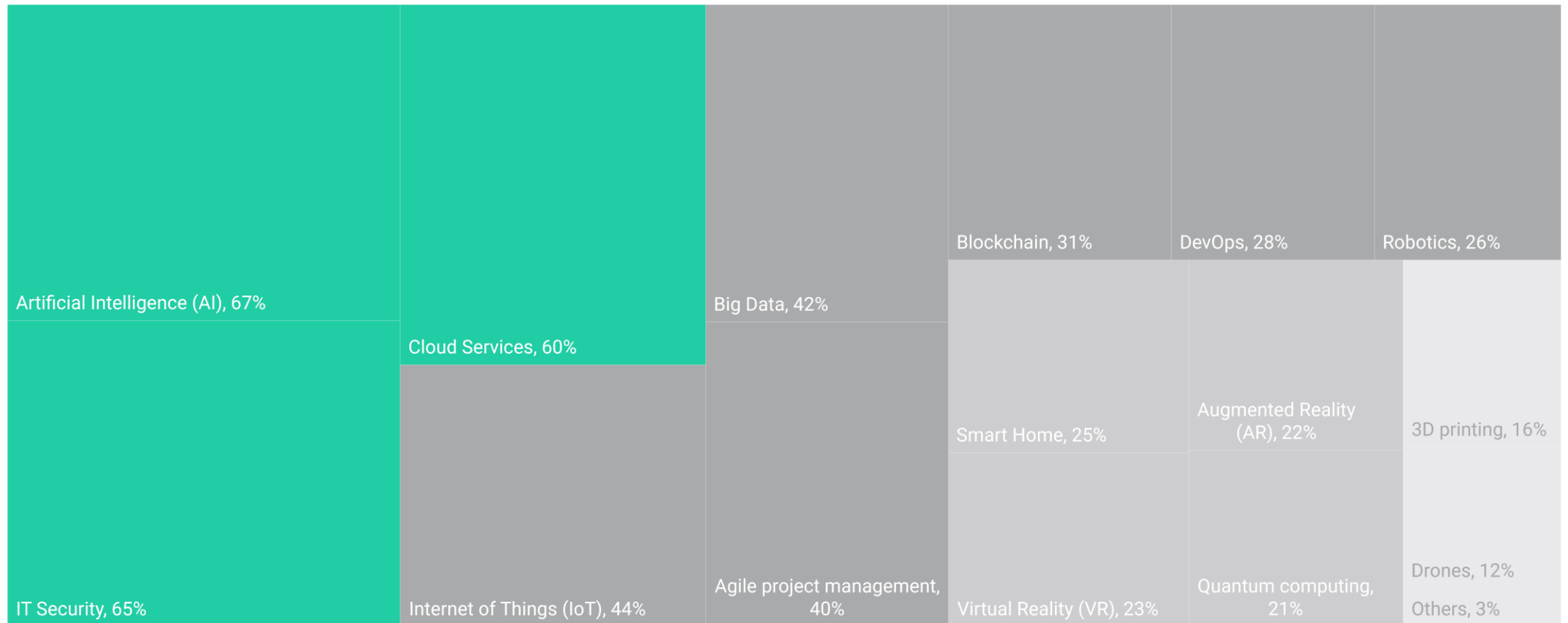
# Programming languages

In your opinion, which programming languages will become more important in the future?



# Relevant industries

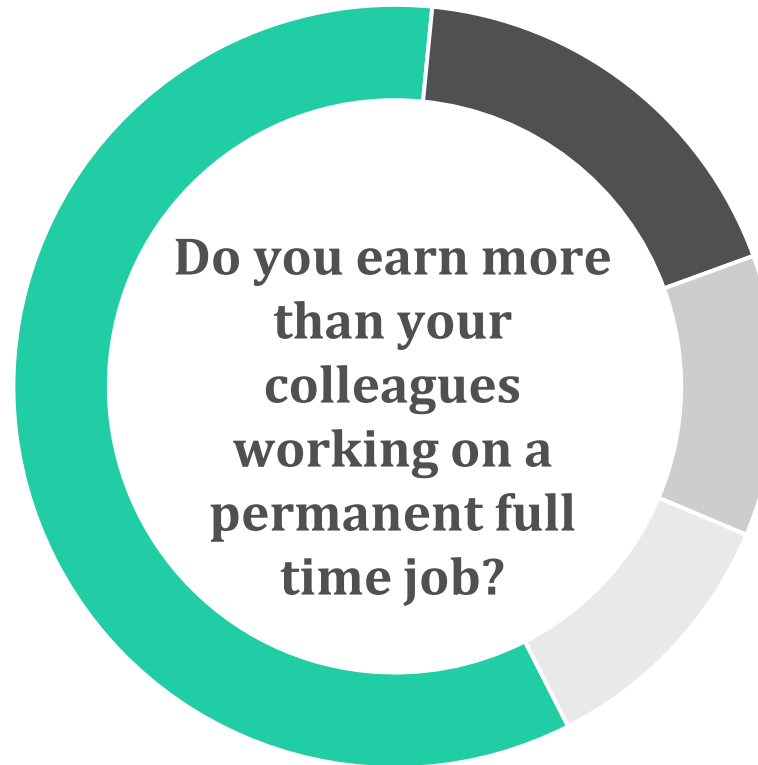
In your opinion, which of the following IT industries will see a marked rise in the future?



# Freelancing vs. employment

59%

say they earn more than their counterparts working full-time.



18%

don't know if they get more or less than other full-time employees.

12%

think they are earning less.

11%

consider they are earning probably the same.



# Agenda

1.

## Financials

- Rates
- Income
- Comparison

2.

## Self-employment

- Challenges
- Freelance work

3.

## Demographics

- Origin
- Education
- Industry

4.

## Outlook

- Project market situation
- Market development
- Forecasts

5.

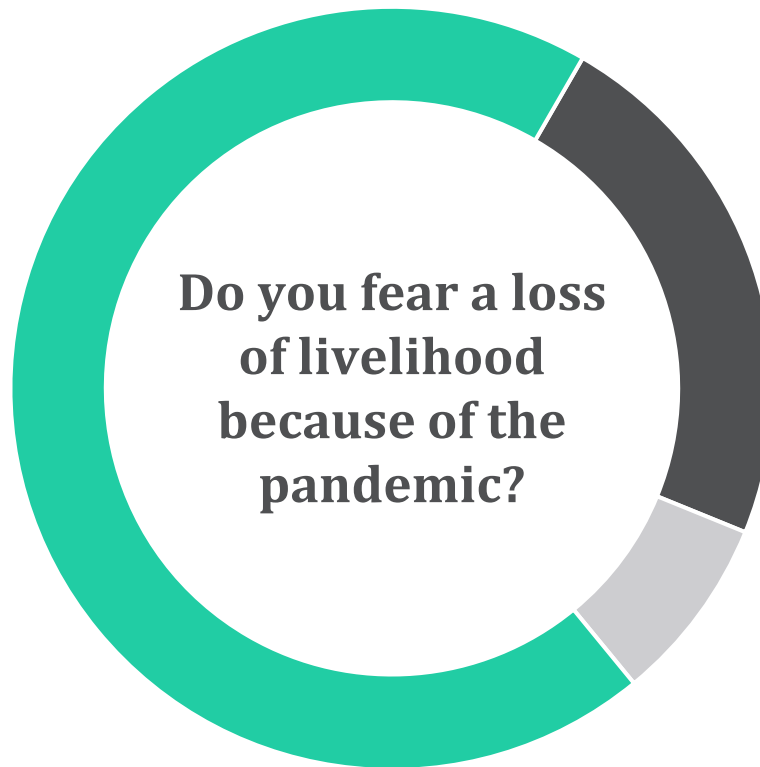
## Covid-19

- Impact of Covid-19 on the freelancer market

# Loss of livelihood

69%

don't fear a loss of livelihood.



23%

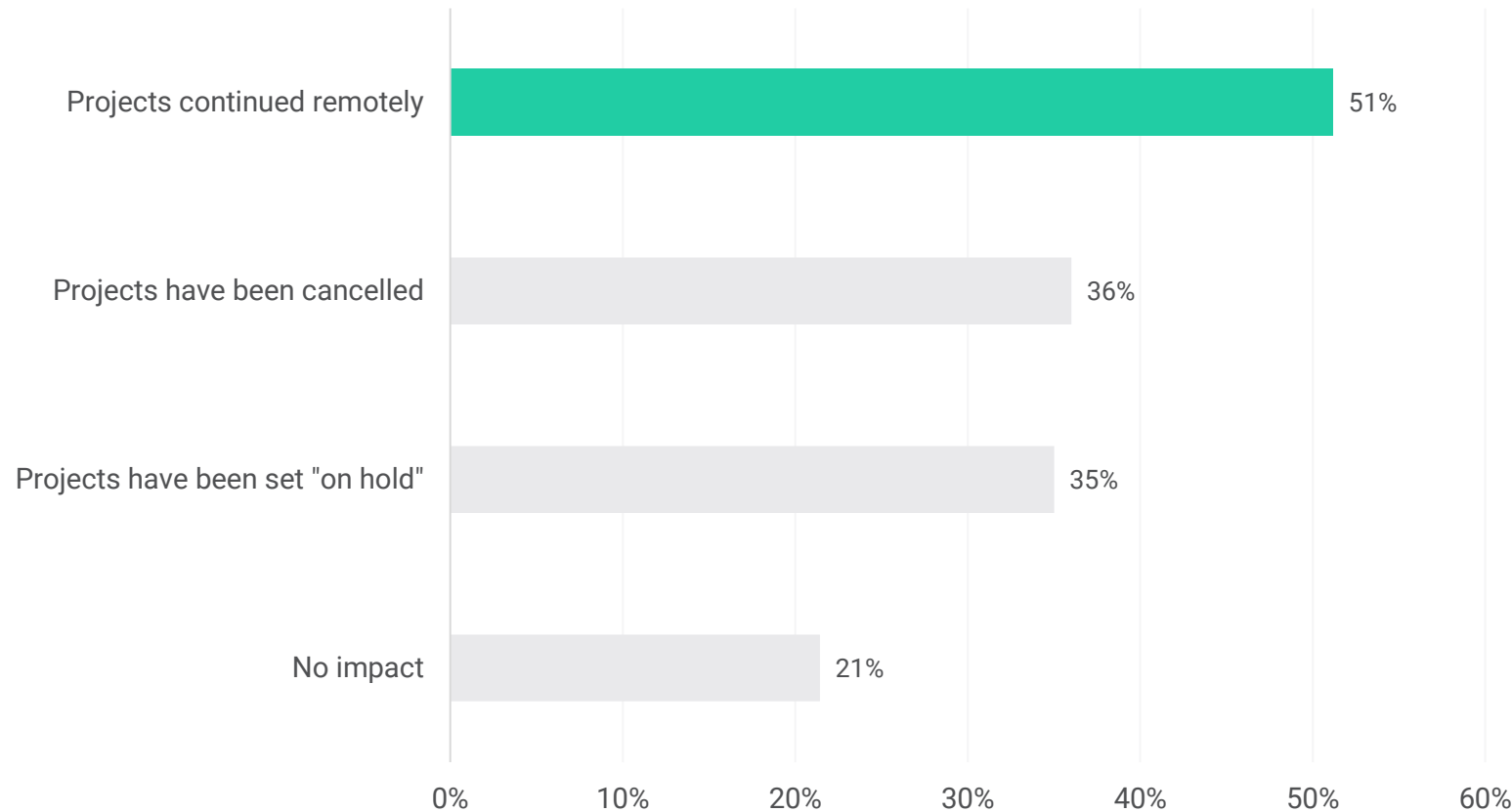
don't know it.

8%

fear a loss of livelihood.

# Impact on projects

What impact has the pandemic had on your projects?



**Remarkable**

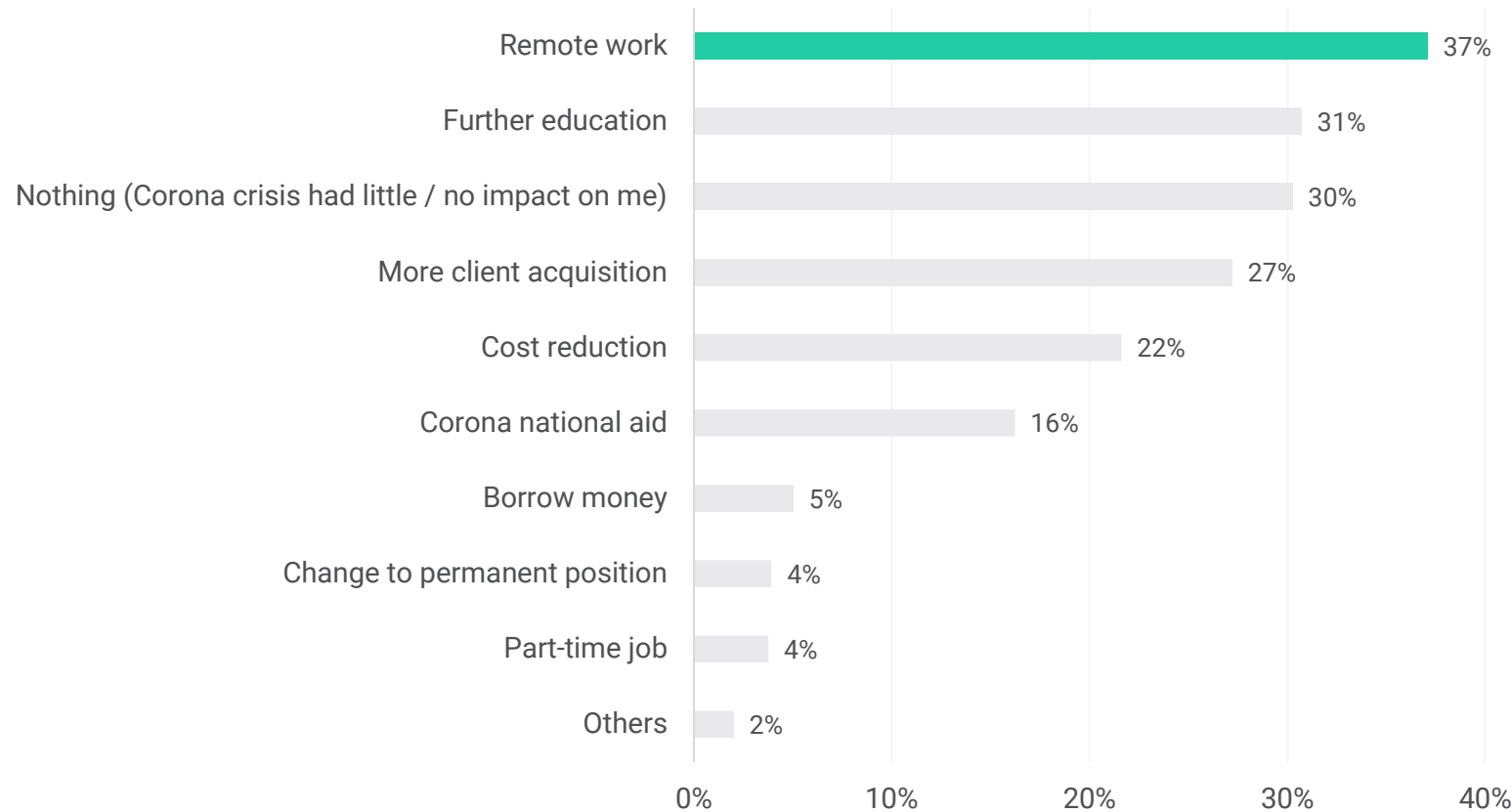
**51%**

of the interviewed freelancers continue to  
**work on their projects remotely.**

21% claim the pandemic is not having any  
impact on their projects.

# Impact on project

What measures have you taken to cope with the effects of the corona crisis?



**Remarkable**

**37%**

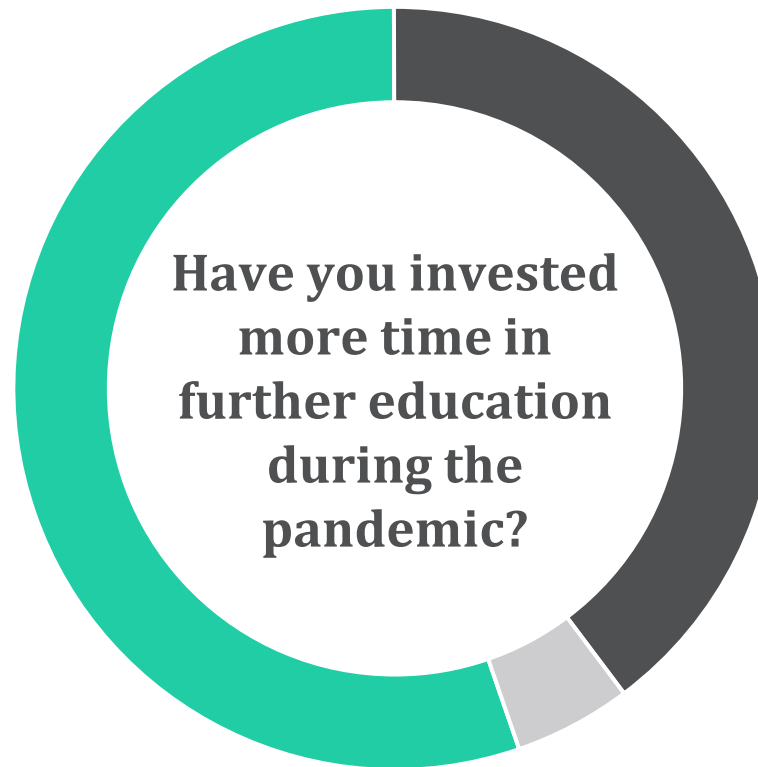
of the freelancers are looking for  
**remote projects.**

Only 16% take state aid.

# Further education

56%

have invested more time in further education during the pandemic.



Have you invested more time in further education during the pandemic?

40%

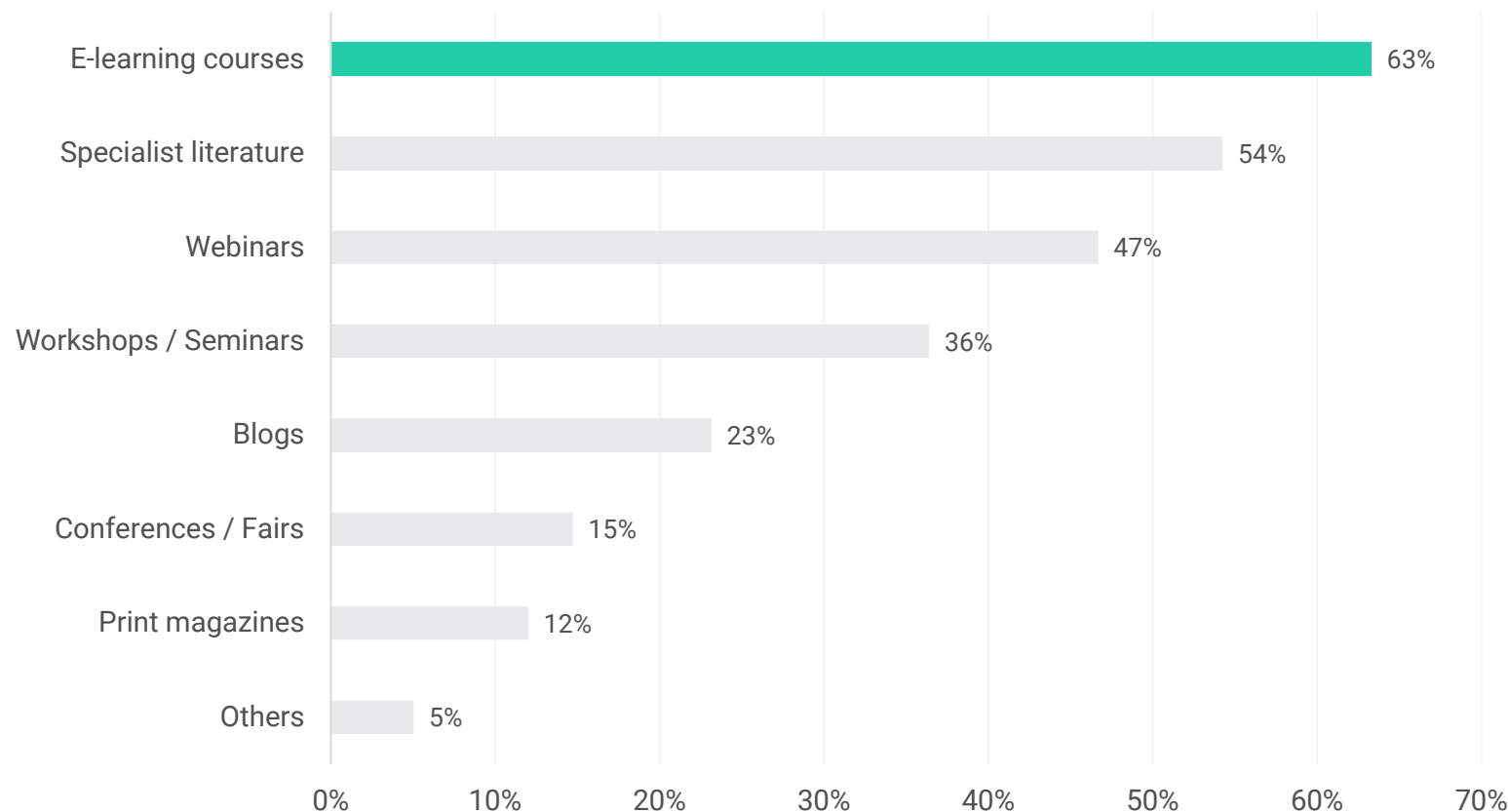
haven't invested time in further education.

5%

don't know if they have invested time.

# Further education

Which methods do you use for further education?



**Remarkable**

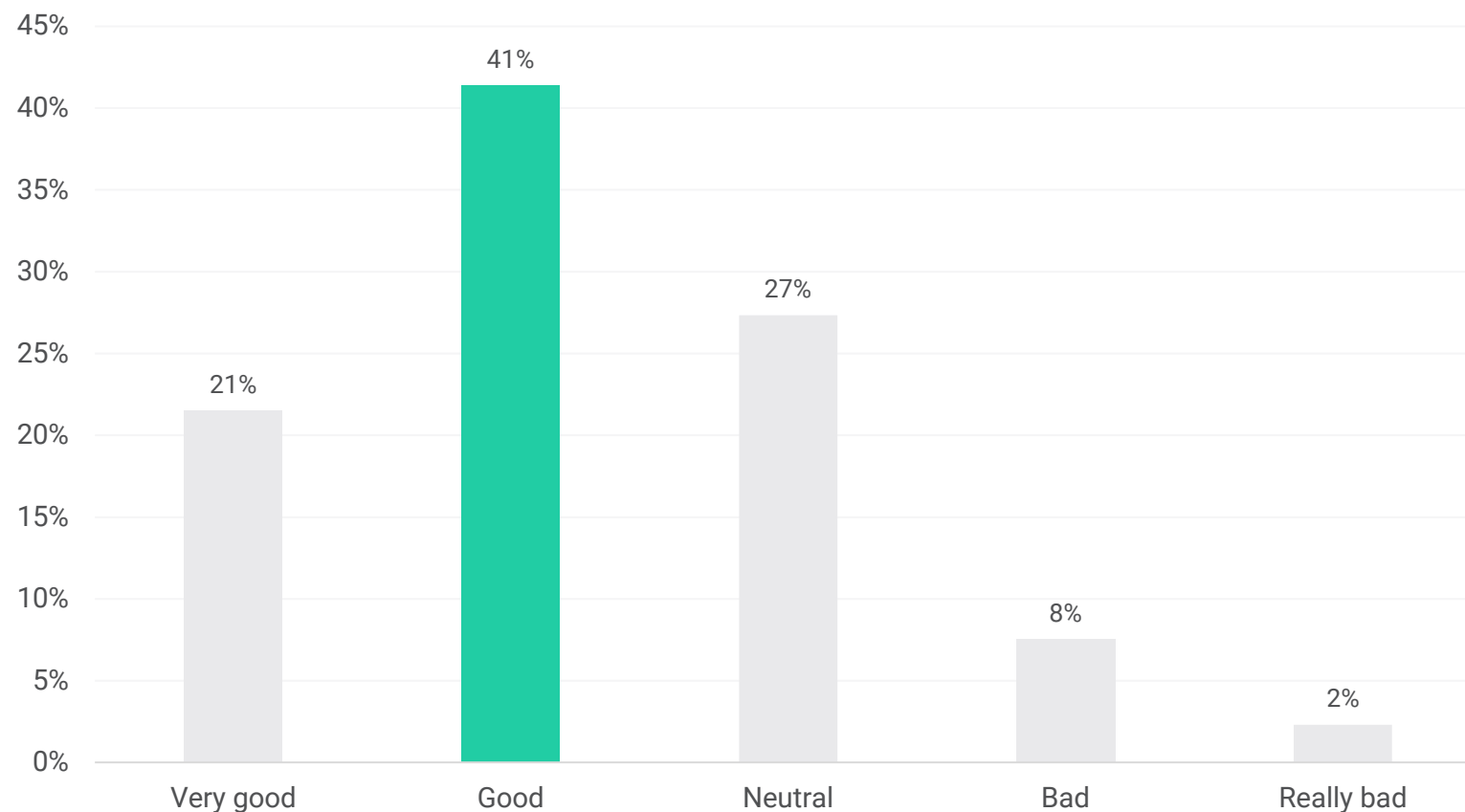
**63%**

of the freelancers use **e-learning courses** for further education.

Only 15% are attending conferences and visiting fairs.

# Economic situation

How would you assess your economic situation?



**Remarkable**

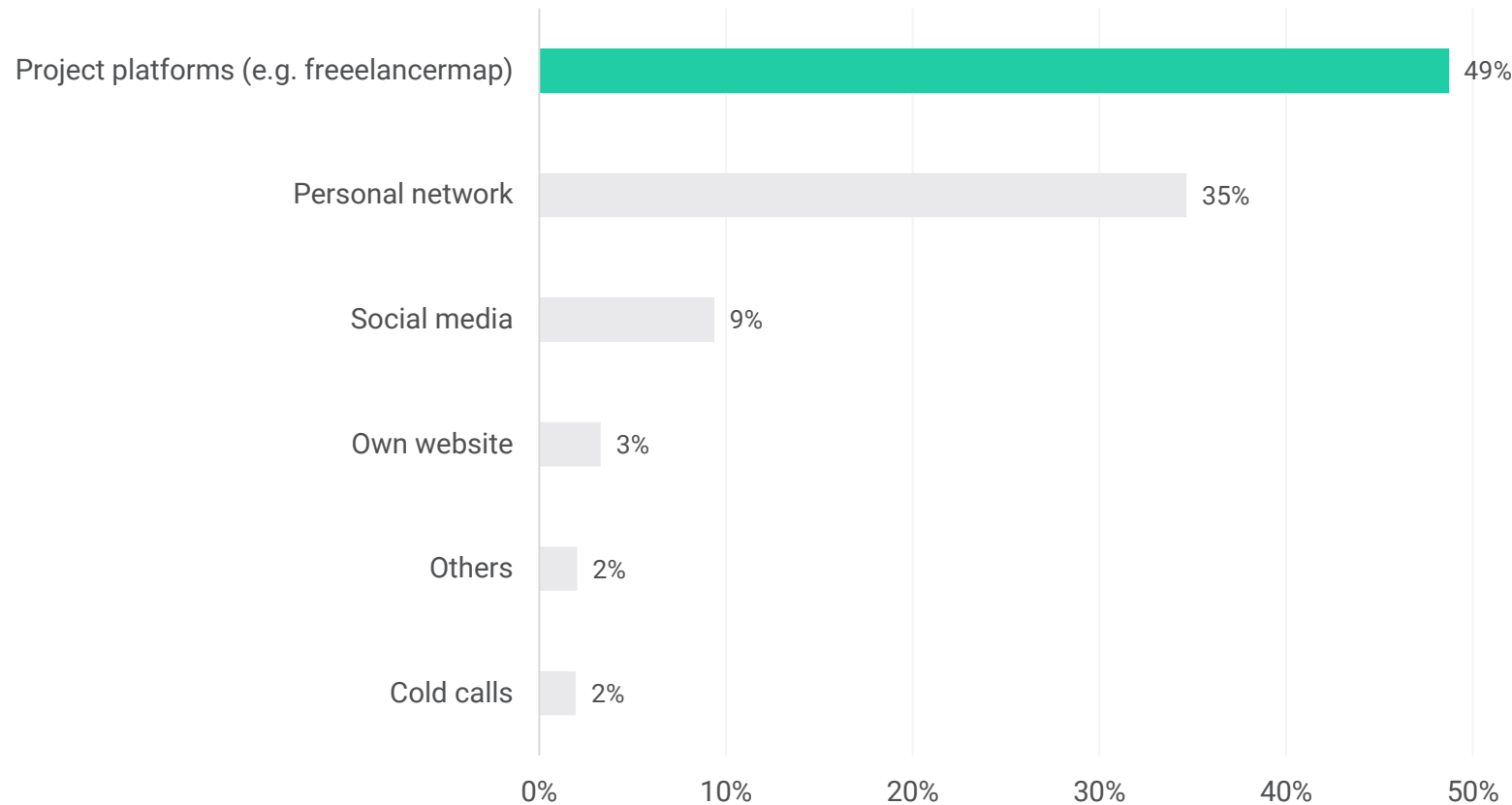
**62%**

of the interviewed freelancers assess their economic situation as (very) **good**.

Only 10% assess it as (really) bad.

# Project acquisition

Which channel is working best for projects acquisition during the pandemic?



**Remarkable**

**49%**

Are using **project platforms** in order to acquire new projects.

Personal network is a promising channel for 35%.





# Freelancermap

© Copyright 2021

All contents included in this report in particular texts, photographs and graphics, are protected by copyright. Unless otherwise expressly indicated, the copyright is held by Freelancermap GmbH, Pretzfelder Straße 7-11, 90425 Nuremberg, Germany.

All rights including duplication, publication, editing and translation are reserved. Any use of these copyrighted contents is strictly prohibited.

Content may be used for reporting, naming the author - freelancermap as the source.

Nuremberg, October 2021

Pretzfelder Straße 7-11  
90425 Nuremberg  
Germany

[info@freelancermap.com](mailto:info@freelancermap.com)

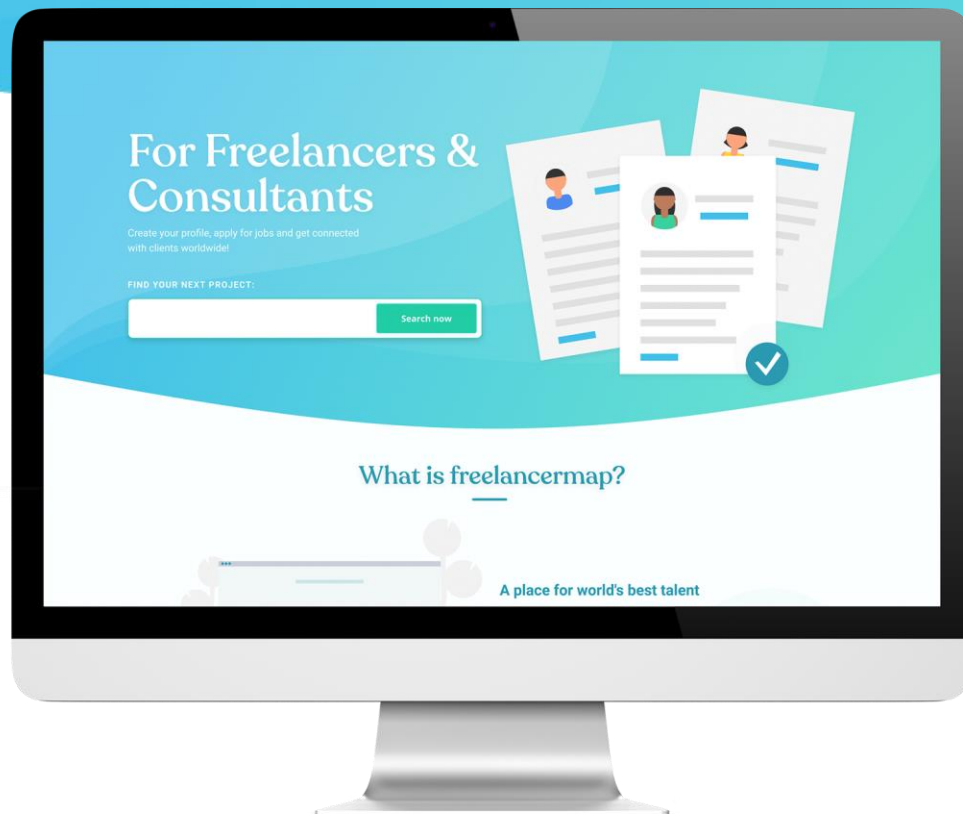
+49 911 3409 83 270

[freelancermap.com](https://freelancermap.com)

[Data privacy](#)

# Freelancermap

The open marketplace for freelancers, consultants and agencies



freelancermap launched in Germany in 2005 as an open marketplace for **experienced professionals and experts** within the IT field.

Since 2012 we've been connecting freelancers and companies outside of Germany too. We make sure experts and clients find each other **without commission fees**.

[freelancermap.com](https://freelancermap.com)