

# Could freelance be the future of work?

In the United States, freelancers currently represent 35% of the workforce, 16% in the European Union, and while South African figures are harder to determine, the number is thought to be about 10% and rising.



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Linda Trim, Director of FutureSpace, a joint venture between Investec Property and workplace specialists Giant Leap that offers high end shared working, office on demand, space in Sandton, said: “The data shows that freelancing is on the rise worldwide.

“And that’s partly because of the ‘gig economy’, people working independently for companies like Uber which is a relentlessly evolving phenomenon.”

In OECD countries, studies show that freelancers work chiefly in the services sector (50% of men and 70% of women). The remainder are everything from online assistants to architects, designers and photographers.

A recent study called “A snapshot of today’s on demand workforce” by software firm Xero, showed that the majority of

freelancers in OECD countries are “slashers”, meaning that their contract work supplements another part-time or full-time position.

These additional earnings can vary considerably. Those who spend a few hours a month editing instruction manuals from home may earn a few hundred euros (R3 to R4k) a month. Freelance occupational therapists may pull in ten times that working full-time (R30 to R40k/month).

Said Trim: “Perhaps the most glamorous face of freelancing are the ‘creative classes’ an agile, connected, highly educated and globalised category of workers that specialise in communications, media, design, art and tech, among others sectors.

“They are architects, web designers, bloggers, consultants and the like, whose job it is to stay on top of trends.”

Freelancers constitute a diverse population of workers – their educational backgrounds, motivations, ambitions, needs, and willingness to work differ from one worker to the next.

“In addition to the rise of the gig economy, the search for freedom with income is another huge motivator. Freelancing is increasingly a choice that people make in order to escape the 9-to-5 workday.”

Trim added that many of the clients that have signed up at FutureSpace work for themselves and are developing their business or have worked for big businesses for years and are now independent consultants.

“We have also noticed that many large corporates are hiring freelancers and are wanting to use shared spaces like FutureSpace for specific projects or innovation drives rather than have them in the established where they will be exposed to how things have always been done.”

Trim noted however that full-time, company-based work is still the standard for employment in most countries, including South Africa.

“But with the rise of telecommuting and automation and the unlimited potential of crowdsourcing, it stands to reason that more and more firms will begin running, and even growing, their businesses with considerably fewer employees.

“This does not necessarily mean an increase in unemployment. Instead, it likely means more freelancers, who will form and reform around various projects in constant and evolving networks,” Trim concluded.

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