

# Online freelancing in India: what current and potential workers say

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# **ABOUT LIRNEASIA**

# Countries that we engage with -the emerging Asia Pacific



# A think tank, working on INFRASTRUCTURE

- Our mission:
  - *“Catalyzing policy change through research to improve people’s lives in the emerging Asia Pacific by facilitating their use of hard and soft infrastructures through the use of knowledge, information and technology.”*

# Objective: to complement supply side, to gain insights

- To complement the supply-side study (previously shown)
- To understand the phenomenon of online freelancing in India from the workers' point of view
  - To identify the nature of online freelancing
  - To look into the factors that enable online freelancing
  - To understand the barriers / constraints to involve in this type of work
- As part of a 3 country study (India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar)
  - Only India results discussed

# Qualitative Methodology: 301 respondents interviewed via focus group discussions and in-depth interviews

- 57 focus groups; 18 in-depth interviews
- Focus on an age group most likely to do this type of work
  - Men and women 16-40
- 151 current online free lancers + 150 potential online free lancers
- Current free lancers = those with freelancing as a primary source of income or supplementary source of income
- In the eight population centers
  - Urban: Pune, Bangalore, Mumbai, Delhi
  - Semi urban: Kumbalgotu (Bangalore), Thane (Mumbai), Kalyan (Mumbai), Bhayandar (Mumbai)
- Subject recruited using multiple approaches
  - Purposive sampling (posting on Facebook, Truelancer and Freelancer)
  - Snowballing

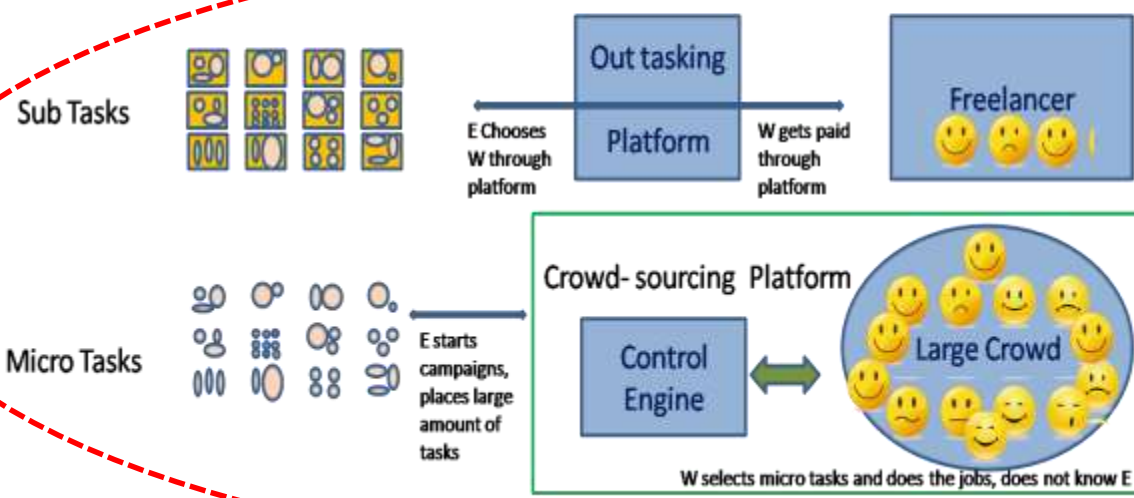
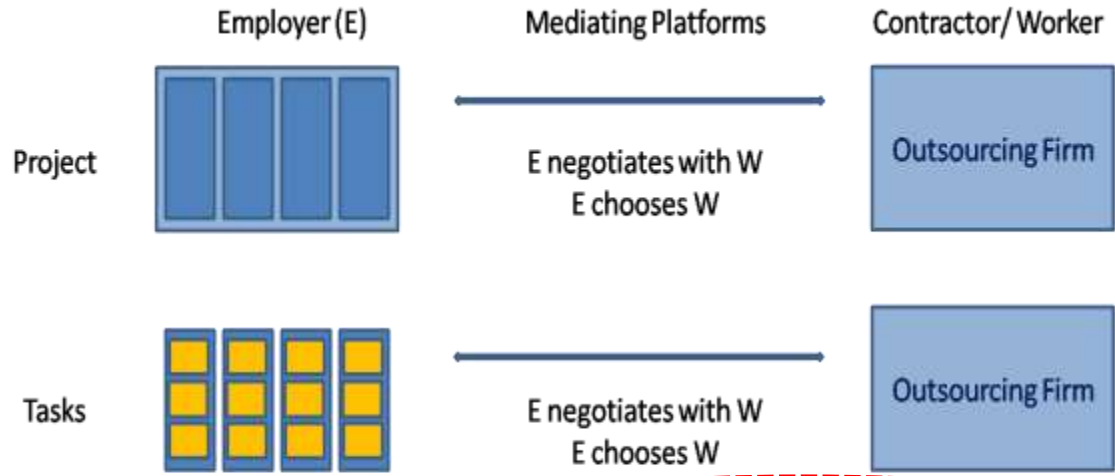
# Sample Composition: 301 current and potential workers

A total of 57 Focus Group Discussions and 18 In Depth Interviews

	Gender		Socio Economic Classification (SEC)					Location					
	Male	Female	A	B	C	D	E	Bangalore	Bangalore semi urban	Pune	Delhi	Mumbai	Mumbai semi urban
Current (%)	70.9	29.1	54.3	23.8	11.9	6	4	16		11	14	35	24
Potential (%)	49	51	6	12	38	23	21	33	31	36			

	Education					
	Below 10 standard	10 standard	12 standard	Diploma	Graduation	Post graduation
Current (%)		1	7	3	66	23
Potential (%)	2	2	1	24	8	8

# “Platform jobs”: divided in Sub Task and Micro Tasks



- Guru
- Freelancer
- Upwork
- AMT
- Hansa Cheetah
- DigitizeIndia.gov.in
- Peopleperhour
- Fiverr
- Frapp
- MSSDS



# Respondents found work on global platforms, local platforms and social media. Through web sites and apps

Platforms dedicated for Indians (i.e. in local language)	“Global” Platforms (in English)	Microwork platforms And Apps	Social media, chat applications and Google groups
UrbanClap Sulekha Indiefolio Just Dial	99designs Upwork Freelance INDIA.com Freelancer Guru Peopleperhour Truelancer Behance Uber Freelancer iwriter Fiverr iFreelance Translators Café Contentmart	Ews.myneta.info (National elections watch) Hansa Cheetah (App) Market vista (App) Maharashtra state skill development society (MSSDS) Skill development initiative scheme (SDI) Frapp	Facebook Instagram LinkedIn WhatsApp Tech India (Google group) Instagram Youtube (Google AdSense)

# Profile of current freelancer sample: mostly young males, living at home, graduates

## FAMILY

Most respondents lived with their parents.

## AGE

Most freelancers fall into the age bracket of 21-25 years.

## ONLINE FREELANCERS

## EDUCATION

Most freelancers were graduates- 66%

## SEC

Mostly from SEC A, & C. Found D and E with difficulty

## GENDER

Most freelancers were male - 70%

# Friends, colleagues and self search introduced Indian freelancers to online platforms

“**One of my friends** was working in BPO. But after that he started his own business. He registered to Freelancer.com and he shared with me. You can do it. If you are jobless, you can do this. Even on a weekend. This is how I came upon freelancing”.

*R21, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

“.....At that point, **my colleague referred me**, saying it will help you a lot. You’ll be engaged with the skills and knowledge that you have”

*R30, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

“I was looking for the permanent job. I tried at various places. My daughter was very small and I was getting bored. **One day my friend came and she asked me** what I was doing. I told her I’m doing nothing and asked her if there is any work that I can do sitting at home. She told me that she is doing something like this”.

*R61, Female, Micro-worker, Mumbai*

“Like in school I was in Facebook and **my brother referred me to one app** called *frapp* app so I thought let’s give it a try”

*R91, Male, Micro-worker, Mumbai*

# Most freelancers use the skills that they acquired from their formal training to work online

My drawing is good and I am an artist. So I started with this work

*R34, Male, Platform freelancer, Pune, following an animation course*

My typing speed is good and so I liked this job. I started liking it. My subject was IT in the 12th standard and so it was not difficult for me at all

*R37, Male, Platform freelancer, Pune, IT student*

I completed Tally course 1.5 years ago from IT way. After that I joined this portal

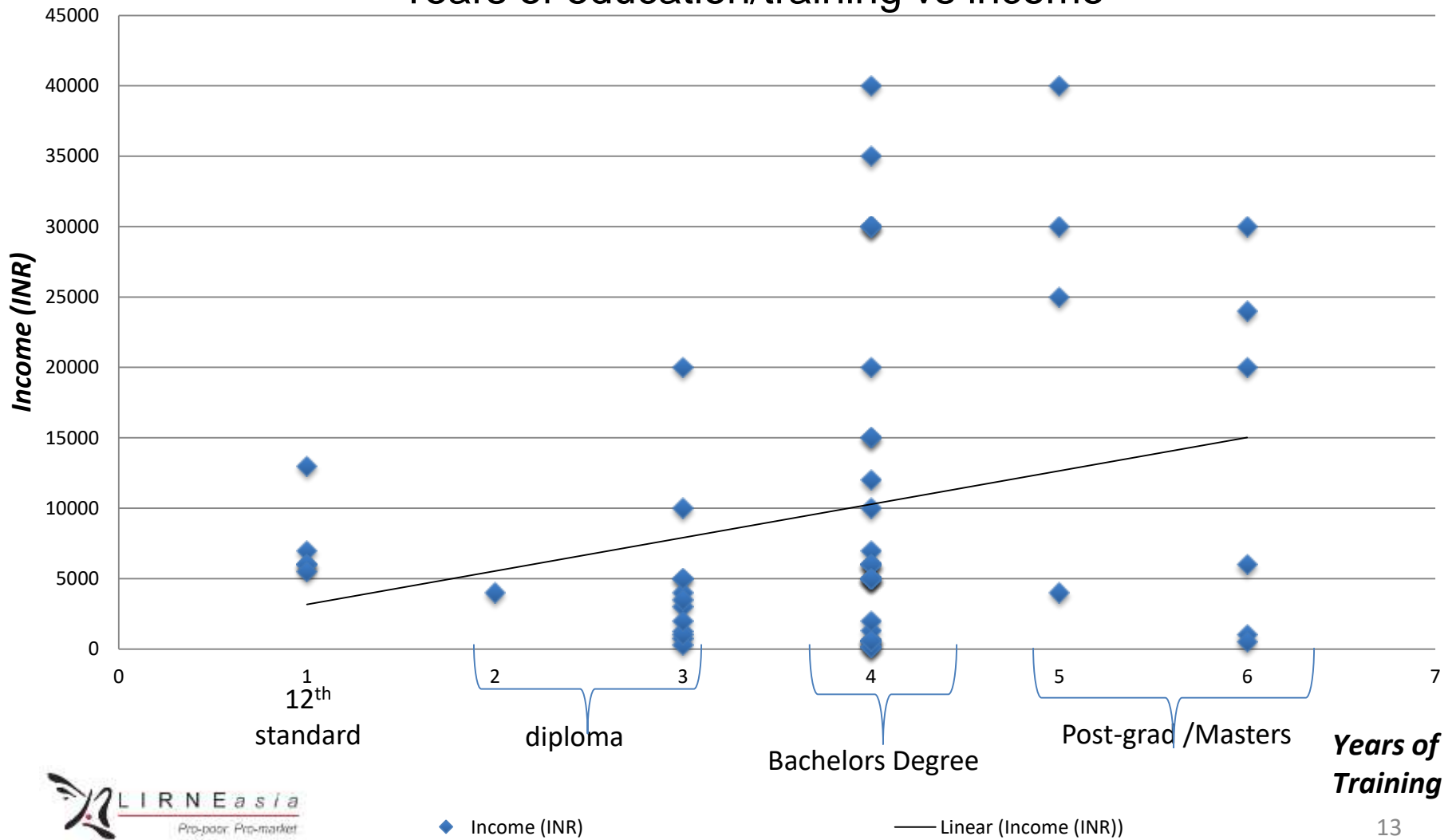
*R111, Male, Micro-worker, Mumbai, Trained in accounting software*

Initially I had put technical writer or a blog writer and all that stuff and the job on the sites were of technical writing

*IDI2, Female, Platform freelancer, Bangalore, Bachelor of Technology*

# A range of income, specially for those with a bachelors degree

Years of education/training vs income



# Seen as work done in free time, as part-time work, or as a way to start on your own business

Basically, to engage yourself in your free time or your weekends or whenever the time permits

*R30, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

**It is like a part time job.** We can search easily through websites and the pay is very good

*R45, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

You don't want to take up a regular job and do yes sir. **Regular job can sometimes be frustrating. It's like marriage. You don't want to do that. you want to be a boss of your own. Without too much of investment.**

**You want to start on your own**

*R23, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

# For the already employed, under-employed and unemployed, it is a way to earn some much-needed extra income

When I used to work in Thane then I had to spend around INR 50 – 70 rupees as my travelling expenses. I used to get INR 4000 rupees as my salary. More than half of my salary went on my travelling expenses. But still I used to work there because it does not look good for a young boy to sit at home jobless in our society. So I worked there. I met one of my office clients there who told me about this work. He told me that I was wasting my time at that office. He asked me to go to him and learn this work and do it on my own

*R78, Male, Social media freelancer, Mumbai*

I am married. I have two little boys. Then I have a degree in commerce. It's a B.Com degree. I also have a job as an admin manager for an IT company which is my regular job. It has Saturday weekend off. Also in that context I have picked up freelancing activity as well.

*R23, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

One fine day, I quit the job and I was searching for a job. At that time, I couldn't get any job. So I started this and I was earning money. So I thought see, instead of being jobless. You are doing freelancing

*R21, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

# For students, an attractive way to earn pocket money

Part time; I work two to three hours a day

*R33, Male, Student, Platform freelancer, Pune*

We are kids now and we need personal time as well and we don't get that much paid to do it full time

*R58, Male, Student, Platform freelancer, Mumbai*

During my college, while I was doing my Bachelors. Since I went to Designing school, I could see a lot of children, even my batch mates and seniors who'd do freelancing on the site for money

*IDI9, Female, Social media freelancer, Delhi*



# Most worked from home, some worked from co working spaces and cafes (coffee + Internet)

I have a laptop so I do the work at home

*R107, Male, Platform freelancer, Mumbai*

Yes and we all worked from home, sometimes from friends home.

*R57, Male, Platform freelancer, Mumbai*

Mostly in home but also Café Coffee Day

*R15, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

I'm working through cyber café

*R98, Male, Micro-worker, Mumbai*

Okay I wake up at 8 o'clock, then go to do my freelance work in a location in Tilak Road. I am there from 10 am to 7 pm

*R7, Male, Platform freelancer, Pune*

# Working from home was the only option for some



Name: Anish (not real name), 31 years

Location: Mumbai

Occupation: Micro-worker

Physically disabled

- 12<sup>th</sup> standard
- Work comes through myneta.info
- Spends around 5-6 hours/day
- Earns INR 5,000- 6,000

**“My physical condition was very bad so I was not able to do 12th, then I did typing course. I have speed of 60 words per minute..... I can’t go very far but there also I started getting some problem, I can’t travel much so I sat at home and started working from home”**

# For many women, ability to work from home gave them a sense of independence



- Tulsi (not real name), 35 years, mother of 2, Mumbai
- Occupation: Home-maker and micro-worker
- Formerly: employed in CA firm
- Education: Bachelor in Commerce

*"You get that satisfaction of doing something and earning. You feel that you have some knowledge. Although I cannot go out and earn, I can take care of my family responsibility along with it"*

- Monthly income: IND 1000-1500/month via Market Vista + GBP 5/month via Tech India.
- Spends her income on her personal needs & her children.

## More examples..

- “This is my money. I take clothes for myself and kids”
  - *IDI6, Female, Micro-worker, Mumbai*
- I am not asking a single penny from my parents and I am looking after my expenses so that is fine
  - *R69, Female, Social media freelancer, Mumbai*

# Government-provided platform work also help many, specially women working from home

“As we are getting good projects online I feel I can earn good amount of money by working from my home. My husband is having a good knowledge about such freelancing projects and he bought many projects for me. Initially I started working on such projects but after that any projects were given by the government itself”

- *R118, Female, Micro-worker on MSSDS, Mumbai*

- Works for Maharashtra State Skill Development Society (MSSDS)
- Introduced many women from her village to do MSSDS work



Name: Rumani

Age: 28 years

Location: Mumbai

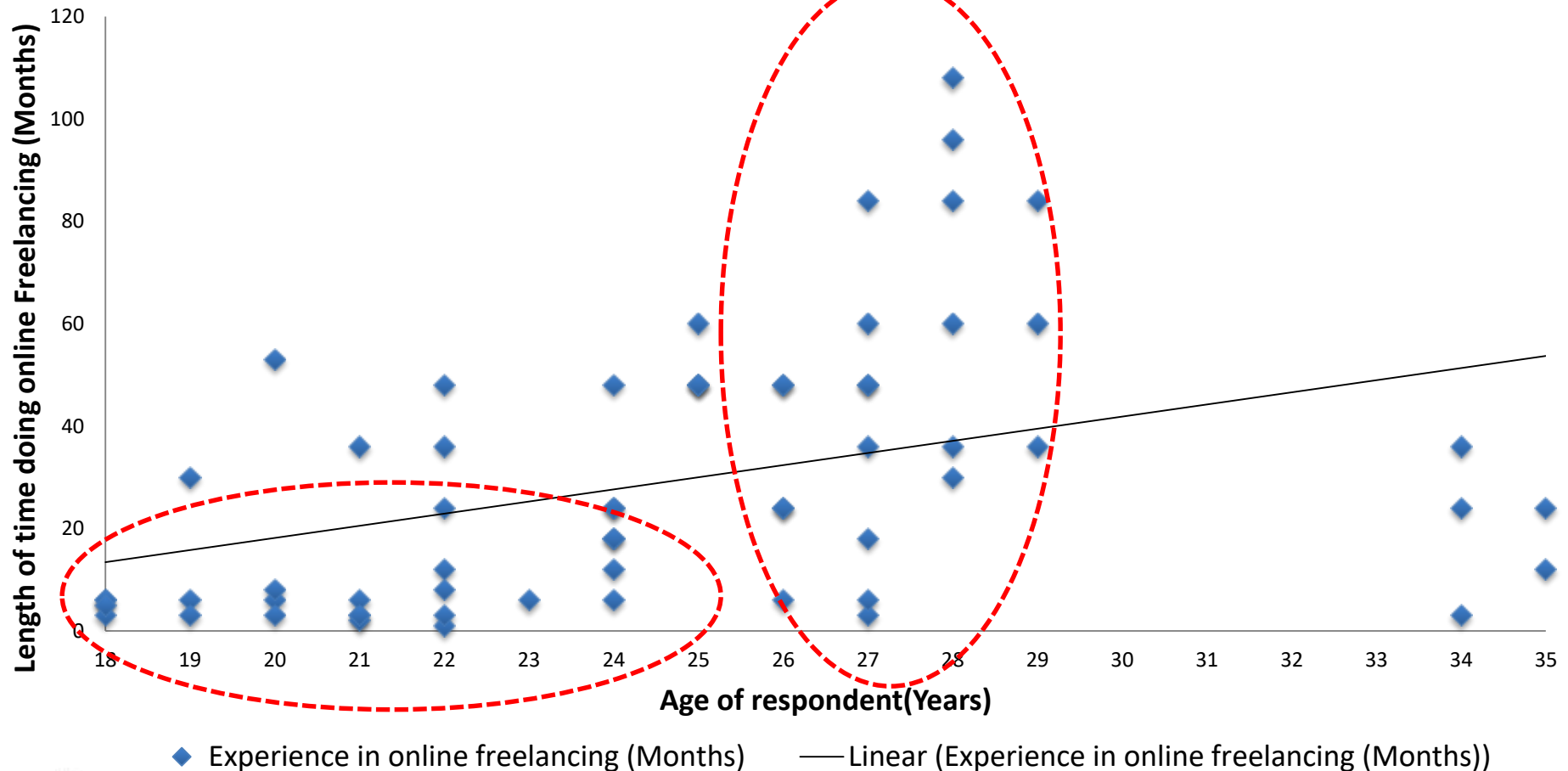
Occupation: Micro-worker

- Bachelor of Education
- Work comes through Maharashtra State Skill Development Society Website
- Spends around 5-6 hours/day
- Earns INR 15,000/month

“We can support our family from the amount we earn.. I would like to be an idol for my children.. **By seeing me work hard they would feel that their mother is not socially backward”**

# Many respondents had been doing online freelancing experience of more than one year

Time spent online freelancing (in Months) vs Age of respondent (years)



# A range of work: data entry, website design, digital content creation, product reviews, professional services

**I do data entry. If there is a novel in PDF format, I will convert to MS Word.** Buyers even have some data in excel sheets which needs to be added to a certain format. I do that sort of formatting work too

*R32, Male, Platform Freelancer, Bangalore*

**I design websites.** When customers approach me over the platform I show them my previous designs. If they are happy with my designs I work with them

*R53, Male, Platform freelancer, Mumbai*

They get the **research done online** for example the questionnaire uploaded and they get the research done online

*R110, Male, Platform freelancer, Delhi*



I do **brand promotion**. I have to send the promoters at the location and I stay at home. I hire people who want to earn money. I want people who have good communication skill. They should abide by the terms and conditions.

*R19, Male, Platform Freelancer, Bangalore*

In platforms, **clients asks us to go to some places and record videos**. First we do this work for the client and later we upload these videos on YouTube. I'm a part of a bike rider gang. We are a team of 20 people. We just go to the location requested by the client, film and upload it.

*R24, Male, Platform Freelancer, Bangalore*

**I do accounting**. There are two types of work that I get. I get bunch of invoices and all where I have to do is total up all the invoices and match to the purchase. That will be one sort of work. Another sort of work would be matching your accounts to your trial balance and making sure the same amount reflects on trial balance.

*R42, Male, Platform Freelancer, Bangalore*

**Often, no standard price. For example, payments for typing ranged from INR 2 – 5 per page even on the same platform in the same region.**

It depends on the pages you do; for one page we get INR 2.

*R33, Male, Platform freelancer, Pune (Guru)*

For 25 pages at 3 rupees per page, I had received only INR 200-300

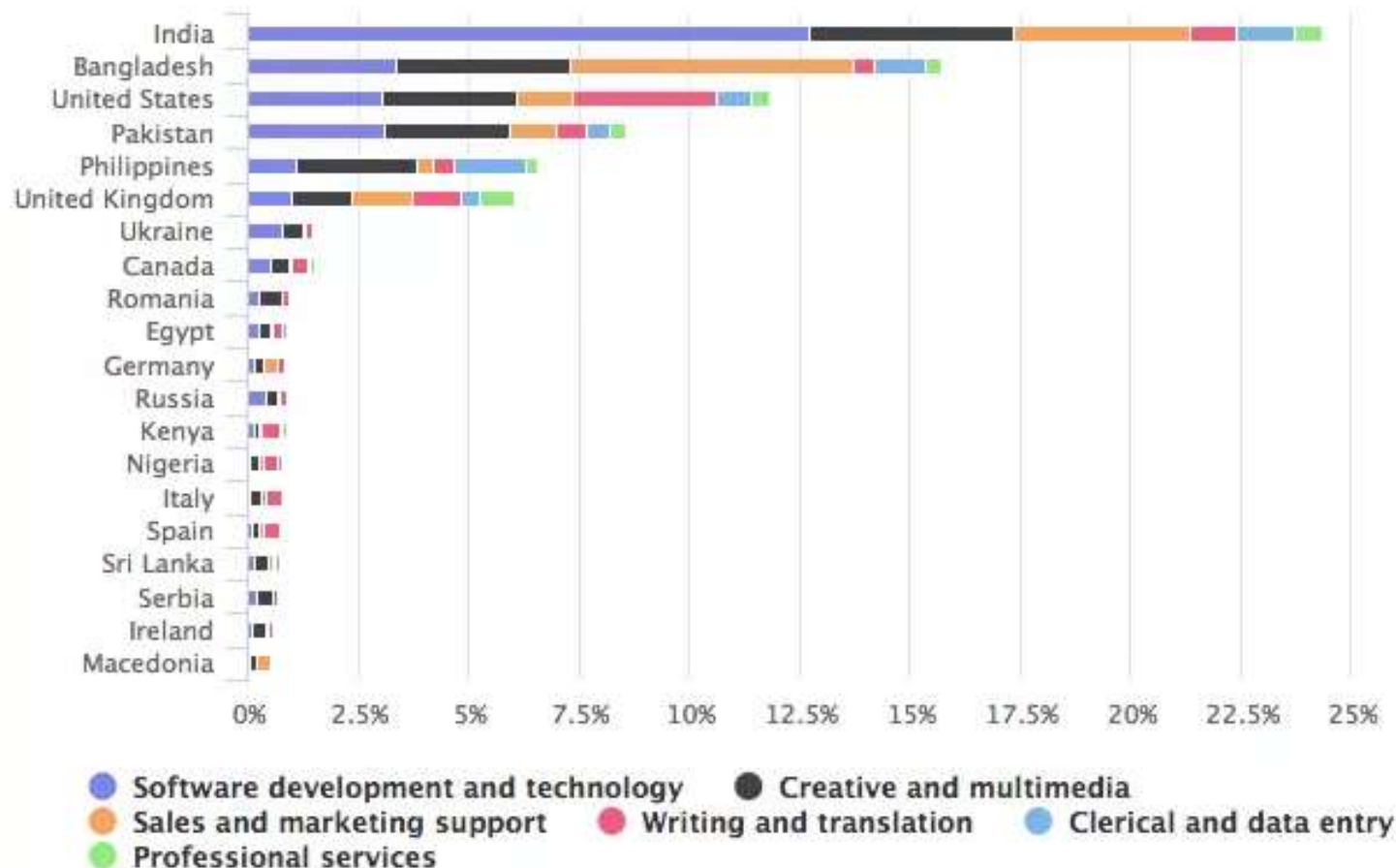
*R6, Female, Platform freelancer, Pune (Upwork)*

For 100 pages I got INR 500; this was the deal

*R37, Male, Platform freelancer, Pune (Freelancer)*

# India is the largest supplier of labour on top global online freelancing platforms

Online Labor Index top occupation by country, 1-6 July 2017



Type of work	Examples of type of work	Average earnings per month	Earning per job	Platforms used
Professional services	Project management Accounting Social media consultant	USD 15- 230	USD 0.15 per sq.ft for interior designing	Facebook, Frapp, Instagram
Clerical and data entry	Translation Transcription Formatting documents Audio transcription	USD 15- 90	USD 0.1- 0.77 per word USD 6 per 1 hour audio	Translators café, Guru, Fiverr, Upwork, Freelancer
Creative and multimedia	Photography Video production Video editing	USD 107-184	USD 8- 77 per logo USD 60 per short film USD 150-300 per photo shoot	Behance, 99design
Sales and marketing support	Search engine optimization Ad posting Event promotion	USD 77- 230	USD 1.5 per 10 app referrals	Frapp, Facebook groups, Whatsapp
Software development and technology	Mobile development Software development Web development App development	USD 77- 230	USD 46- 122 per website	Upwork, Freelancer, Fiverr
Writing and translation	Copywriting Creative writing Technical writing Translation	USD 15- 90	USD 0.03 per word	Guru, Fiverr, Upwork, Freelancer

# Extra income not the only benefit. Traditional and soft-skills improved by working online

Yes, obviously you have to directly deal with the client so we have to deal with them properly

*R13, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

How to do it in proper time, that helps us if you are going for an interview, he will get a job, it will help us to manage our time. There will be essence of work, during freelancing we are like in a habit complete the project in point of time. So that way they help us

*R15, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

It gives you some idea like how you go ahead and complete this project

*R26, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

Professionalism is a learning process. Each client has their own flavor. Whatever job they are going to provide you, has its own flavor

*R32, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

We gain technical knowledge and we are updated regularly

*R113, Female, Micro-worker, Mumbai*

It is very good. My typing speed has increased a lot and my experience of work has also increased

*R37, Male, Platform freelancer, Pune*

# **CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

# Challenge 1: Getting the first job. Buyers prefer workers who have already sold work. Platform design re-inforce via rating systems

Initial 6 months it was extremely difficult for me because irrespective how good my designing skills was I had to go through a lot of trial and error which would not have happened if I had joined an industry because they would provide some training and guidance

*R46, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

Getting first time job is very tough. It may take even up to 2 months to get the first job

*R11, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

I was freelancing for the last 6 months but my first month was very bad but I have been doing good for the last 5 months.

*R58, Male, Platform freelancer, Mumbai*

# Worker bid low and try to keep their ratings high to get work

There will be ratings from the client and then we have to say how much we like to be paid. If your budget of INR 500, so the lower you bid, there is a higher chance you'd get the job

*R12, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

Initially we have to go for the low bidding. Because high bidding won't give you a job

## Possible solution seen among Sri Lankan workers:

- Workers get their friends to post a job, they do it, and the friend ranks them
- Freelancer "meet-ups" and networking events key to increased awareness

*Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

the experience or background. Like  
tly go for the consumer reviews

*Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*



## Challenge 2: Late payments or non-payments for work done via platforms. Often, worker has little recourse

Yes I got few works but they pay you online so you sometimes get late payments

*R74, Male, Social media freelancer, Mumbai*

Yes. They are always very flaky. You do not know whether you will get paid or not. There is a lot of competition

### **Possible solutions (being proposed by German trade union) include:**

- Change platform code of conduct
- E.g. Default is buyer has to pay unless explanation is given;
- Mandatory dispute resolution system
- Buyers kicked out platform if repeated non-payment

*7, Female, Platform freelancer, Mumbai*

...t get the money from the clients. They

*134, Female, Platform freelancer, Delhi*

# Challenge 3: Power cuts affected the delivery of work on time

Everything is about power. I thought Bangalore is a good City but it is worse than Delhi. In Delhi I was staying for more than 2 years and I have never seen a power issue. I face much irritation because if I have a meeting with a client and I face a power cut then definitely I will lose the client

*R16, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

In Mumbai electricity is not an issue, but when I was in Jodhpur I used to face power problem and so that time I used to face problems in online work but in Bombay there is no power failure and so it's good, power is there for 24 hours and so one can work whenever one has time

*R94, Female, Platform freelancer, Mumbai*

Power can go at any time. I seriously doubt that there is another city like Pune that has this kind of power cuts. On Thursday it is certain that the light will not be there. Sometimes it is gone for the whole day. Then I have to use the UPS or the battery backup or go to a relative's house. When the battery drains out then there are no options, I cannot work. Then I tell my clients that I don't have power in my area and they laugh about this. All these are third world problems. Local people know this and understand. They say Ok Thursday, right

*R8, Male, Platform freelancer, Pune*

## Challenge 4: Slow Internet was also an issue to deliver their work online

If the Internet speed is good then it's good enough for us to work but if you are using your own resources then until and unless you have good Internet connection at your home, it's always a barrier. I'm facing problems with my Internet. My Internet speed is low

*R39, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

### **Possible solution:**

Specific packages that give guaranteed UPLOAD speeds (instead of typically guaranteed/focus on download speeds)

- Freelancers are often content creators

problem, I can't deliver the my work

*al media freelancer, Mumbai*

# Challenge 5: Most families of freelancers don't accept this type of work as work

My family is little scared

*R8, Male, Platform freelancer, Pune*

They think that I do not have a fixed income. This is something very new for them. This is something that they are not used to. They are not comfortable with this

*R7, Male, Platform freelancer, Pune*

They are just worried about stability. If they see you stable as a freelancer, they will be happy. If they see you with a job then they will be happy.

*R137, Male, Social media freelancer, Delhi*

They think mostly about fraud

*R59, Male, Platform freelancer, Mumbai*

Now family members scold as to why we are sitting at home

*R107, Male, Platform freelancer, Mumbai*

## ...but some females are encouraged by their families to work online

They are happy that we are not going out and working from home

*R66, Female, Micro-worker, Mumbai*

My family is proud of me because I'm studying and side-by-side I'm even working. So my parents are very proud of me and they feel that I would be able to achieve something good in the future and they never think that I'm doing a very small job

*R113, Female, Micro-worker, Mumbai*

They like it. I mean they know that I am working as a writer. So, they are okay with that. They know I get paid so it's fine

*IDI7, Female, Platform freelancer, Delhi*

# Challenge 6: Inability to prove employment status & income → inability to access formal financial services

Now, we have to provide the salary slip for loans. So stability is an issue. Because it is not fixed, there are a lot of ups and downs

*R71, Male, Platform freelancer, Mumbai*

No company does an agreement for freelancing. They think it's not necessary. I have met many people who do full time freelancing but they don't get loans. They are earning good amount of money in freelancing but they are not able to get the loan and companies don't consider freelancing as a job. If I have done a freelancing work for 1 year and if I want to apply for any kind of job, I will not get that job

## Possible suggested solution

- Define/create a new employment category?
- Cash-flow based lending if freelancer can show income from platform coming into account?
- Platforms mandated to provide proof of earnings over time, upon request?

*R136, Male, Social media freelancer, Delhi*

...re job gets a loan and everything. People like

*R67, Male, Platform freelancer, Mumbai*

...e frank you might be even earning INR 50,000  
...ome only. If you are getting INR 50,000 you  
...djust but freelancers also must be considered  
...he traditional system

*R7, Male, Platform freelancer, Pune*

# Challenge 7: The race to bottom due to increased labor supply

Not only the 8 people here in this discussion are working online, There are millions of people who are doing this freelancing job so there is much of competition

*R18, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

The whole problem comes to bidding part only. The competition is too much, too much means it is huge. People bid for lower prices and some people do it for free

*R16, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

It is a bit difficult to get the order. It's more of competition. We have to quote a very low price. Till we come to that level. Then it's very easy. Because they know the job, they will stick to us and we will stick to them. And they know that we will deliver the job

*R22, Male, Platform freelancer, Bangalore*

Lot of competition and by the time you go there and logged in, though you are a registered user by the time you get to know there is work to be done there are already thousands of people who would have responded to it. There are a lot of challenges now. I may be the 1059<sup>th</sup> guy and the client would not be bothered to look into someone who has just responded

*R28, Male, Social media freelancer, Bangalore*

There is always competition because even college kids they do freelancing as well. Just to make a few extra bucks. But these college kids, I am sorry, they don't have half the level of education that I have. So, they are happy to work for 1 paisa per word or something like that

*IDI7, Female, Social media freelancer, Delhi*

### **Possible solution**

- Increase the “stickiness” of jobs by getting Indian firms/Indian govt. organizations to put work online (in local languages).
- Long term: winners are those who are constantly keeping up with skills, trends. Therefore students need to “learn how to learn”

with freelancers from other competition there. They can work for an hour and it's a challenge

*Female, Platform freelancer, Pune*