

7. SWEDEN¹

The research looks at all those who work on a self-employed basis in the sectors of the professions and the arts. In Sweden, only 46 professionals responded to the questionnaire. With the minimum threshold of 100 not having been reached, we drew up a report that summarises the following considerations for Sweden: socio-demographic characteristics, economic-professional characteristics, expectations and perceived needs of the workers in question.

Socio-demographic profile

The sample group shows a significantly imbalanced distribution in terms of gender, age and sector: more than 60% are women, and the average age is high, with 12 of the 46 cases being over 60. As for professional sector, almost all the respondents are concentrated in a single one, with most being journalists or photographers who belong to the industry union SJF, which was involved in the national case study, while only 3 work in other sectors. As was observed in other countries as well, the professionals engage in multiple activities (an average of 2.4). This is explained both by the increased overlapping of core skills between the different professions and the need to arrive at a level of income sufficient to live on.

Economic-professional profile

In terms of types of contractual arrangements, the legal status of all the respondents is independent (self-employed, lone entrepreneur, partnership), with two that also work with LMIs and 4 through temporary agencies.

Before becoming freelance, many of those interviewed (39 out of 46) had experience with salaried employment; only 5 became independent workers right after their studies, initiating their activities only in the last 3 years. The majority have worked as freelancers for a lengthy period (>10 years).

The reasons they chose to work independently included a desire for self-fulfilment, the quality of the work and the chance to organise their time flexibly, in order to balance both work and family life. At the same time, a significant number (14 out of 46) were obliged to work independently by clients, though they wound up appreciating the chance for self-fulfilment and flexibility offered by independent work. As for their effective level of independence, the respondents decide how to organise their work (place and time) and are not subject to close control by their clients. Given a choice between being independent or salaried employees, almost all of them (40 out of 46) prefer being independent.

When income is analysed, the situation appears problematic, as only 13 of the professionals have annual pre-tax income of more than 30,000 euro. But for many, freelance employment is not the lone source of working income: almost half of those interviewed (19 out of 46) have another job under a set-term and/or ongoing contract of salaried employment. And 35 of those interviewed also draw on

¹ This chapter was written by Cristina Zanni.

other sources of income, though only for 16 of them are these sources constant, consisting mainly of income from pensions or salaried employment. The respondents who have no other source of income state that what they earn is not enough to live on. To deal with their uncertain economic situation, they need to receive support from their partner and/or draw on their savings.

It is interesting note that low income is not traceable to a lack of work: (i) the respondents receive brief but frequent assignments, managing to work with continuity (only 6 of them work less than 9 months of the year); (ii) their average work week is 38 hours; during peak periods of work, or in order to complete a project, they may work at night or on weekends. Questioned as to what hours they would prefer, the respondents expressed satisfaction with the current situation, with only 5 saying they would like to work more, while the others were divided between those who are satisfied and those who would like to work less.

For the most part, they work on the domestic market. They frequently take part in large-scale projects, dividing up the work with other colleagues in networks established specifically for the occasion, with geometries that vary.

A close look at use of IT marketplaces shows that, for the most part, the respondents do not use such platforms to find new work, a function that is served by existing clients, word-of-mouth and network of colleagues.

Problems and expectatons

In terms of what problems they perceive as most serious, the respondents highlight the difficulties caused by the current crisis of the publishing sector, which had serious repercussions, lowering prices and reducing the amount of work available, as was also shown by the Country-Case study of 2017: «(...) there has not been enough outsourced work to provide “enough” work for all freelance journalists. In addition to this, there has also been a constant influx of new journalism graduates to the labour market (Werne 2016). This development has led to a labour market for journalism where there are many sellers looking for work but only a few buyers having work to offer. The result is that there is currently a buyers’ market for journalism in Sweden, which has resulted in downward pressure, especially on freelance fees”»).

In terms of social-security safeguards, the respondents perceive their situations as decidedly insecure, with roughly half taking out private insurance to deal with the risks.

REPRESENTATION

As already noted, almost all the respondents belong to the journalists union. When asked what they see as the most important factors in choosing an organisation to represent them, the majority give priority to a focus on freelancers. Other major considerations include: the organisation’s independence from the political sphere, its ability to mobilise over specific issues and the services offered (in particular, administrative consulting, training and networking with colleagues). They declare themselves satisfied, all things considered, with the support they receive from their own organisation of representation. However, when asked who would best be able represent freelancers, the majority

of the sample group said that their ideal would be a coalition of the different organisations that currently exist, from unions to professional associations. Finally, even though they feel that the political and institutional spheres do not listen to them enough, they believe that the attention paid to freelancers has increased in recent years.