

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 Italy

Developed by: IDP European Consultants

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Quantitative indicators on freelancing and self-employment in Italy</i>	2
<i>Qualitative indicators on freelancing and self-employment in Italy: skills-gap and need assessments</i>	6
<i>Opportunities: training available and operational tools</i>	9
<i>Challenges</i>	11
<i>Conclusions</i>	13
<i>Bibliography</i>	15

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Introduction

Freelancing in Italy refers to self-employment performed by professionals who offer their services to different companies or individuals, without being bound by a contract of employment. Freelancers can operate in a wide range of industries, including graphic design, writing, programming, consulting, marketing, translation, photography, and many more.

In particular, art. 2222 of the Civil Code defines the self-employed worker as someone who *"undertakes to carry out a work or a service for consideration, with mainly his own work and without subordination to the client"*.

In Italy, freelance work is not yet subject to a specific law, in fact the term has a more conceptual meaning, and it is admitted within it the regulated category of self-employed. For this reason, in the following report, the words "freelancer" and "self-employed" will be used synonymously. In general, total employment in the EU can be broken down into employees and self-employed persons, representing respectively 85,8 % and 14,2 % of total employment in persons.

The importance of the self-employed varies from one EU country to another. In 2023, in terms of people, their share was highest in Greece (27,8 %), Bulgaria (23,9 %) and Italy (22,2 %) and lowest in Sweden (3,1 %), Denmark (5,8 %) and Luxembourg (5,9 %).

In Europe, Italy is the leading country for the number of self-employed workers (in 2022 more than 4 million were registered), and is a growing phenomenon, in fact it is extending not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of the sectors involved.

Quantitative indicators on freelancing and self-employment in Italy

In order to fully understand the landscape of self-employment in Italy, it is essential to examine the evolution of the phenomenon of self-employment in different regions of the country over the years.

The following table, filled by the Ministry of Economics and Finance, provides an historical analysis of the number of new self-employed workers per region. The years 2019, 2021 and 2023 have been taken into account, so that a comparison can be made between the pre-pandemic period, that during the pandemic and the post-pandemic.

Overall, data suggest that despite already growing, the number of new self-employed during the pandemic has skyrocketed and the decrease after the pandemic is minimal (and therefore perhaps insignificant).

Table 1: Evolution of the phenomenon of self-employment in different regions of the country over the years.			
Region	Number of self-employed workers (January - December 2019)	Number of self-employed workers (January - December 2021)	Number of self-employed workers (January - December 2023)
Piemonte	38.781	36.739	33.915
Valle d'Aosta	1.098	1.002	1.094
Lombardia	92.595	105.610	100.009
Bolzano	4.477	4.337	4.471
Trento	4.304	4.345	4.155
Veneto	39.483	48.253	37.644
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	8.271	10.795	8.329
Liguria	13.894	12.758	12.559
Emilia Romagna	36.754	35.055	35.002
Toscana	35.055	32.355	30.276
Umbria	7.849	7.292	6.518
Marche	13.131	12.694	11.205
Lazio	63.830	63.071	55.912
Abruzzo	12.854	11.995	10.446
Molise	2.996	2.861	2.217
Campania	53.891	50.612	44.609
Puglia	36.419	33.154	29.108
Basilicata	4.803	4.649	3.621
Calabria	17.492	16.454	13.559
Sicilia	41.317	38.347	34.063
Sardegna	13.991	13.562	11.789
Tax domicile unknown	2.440	3.545	1.675
TOTAL	545.725	549.485	492.176

Source: Ministry of Economics and Finance

In 2019, during the pre-pandemic period, the number was steadily growing, with 545,700 new self-employed workers and 6.4% increase compared to the previous year. In 2021, however, the number has grown remarkably, in fact there has been an increase of 18.2% compared to the past year.

The rapid expansion can be partly attributed to the negative effects of the pandemic on the industrial sector, in particular on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This led to an increase in redundancies and an arrest in recruitment processes. As a result, self-employment emerged as a possible option for individuals who lost their jobs or were unable to find work elsewhere.

Another contributing factor to this trend may be the pandemic promotion of digital working solutions, such as smart working. This change has not only raised awareness of the benefits of achieving a better work-life balance through remote working but has also the uptake of types of work that rely on digital technologies, such as freelancers.

While digitization and freelancing are distinct concepts, they are interconnected in such a way that advances in digitization often coincide with the growth of freelance opportunities. Indeed, increasing digitalization has made tools and platforms more accessible that allow people to work independently.

For example, freelance online platforms, that connect professionals from various industries with customers around the world, have become widespread. Numerous communication platforms have also spread, allowing freelancers to collaborate effectively via chat, video chat or email. Marketing tools have also proliferated, used by freelancers to promote their work and services.

However, another aspect to consider is that the pandemic forced many people to stay at home, especially youth and unemployed, and therefore they could exploit their free time to increase the entrepreneurial mindset.

During the post-pandemic period, in 2023, there was a slight decrease of 1.9% in the number of new self-employed workers compared to the previous year. In fact, new registrations were 492,176. This may reflect a partial return to economic normality after the acute phase of the pandemic.

As regards geographical distribution, in 2019, approximately 44% of new freelancers were in the North, 22% in the Centre, and 33.7% in the South and Islands. Despite the pandemic, distribution remained similar in 2021, with about 47% in the North, 21% in the Centre, and 31.2% in the South and Islands. This landscape persisted in 2023, with 48.2% in the North, 21.1% in the Centre, and 30.4% in the South and Islands.

These gaps, especially those between North and South Italy, are reflected in the historical divergence between the two areas of the country. The division between North and South Italy has historical roots that date back to at least the 19th century. Italy joined as a political nation, but economic and social disparities between the northern and southern regions persisted.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, Northern Italy experienced rapid industrial and commercial development. On the contrary, Southern Italy continued to be dominated by an agricultural economy, in a situation of widespread poverty, poor education, underdeveloped infrastructure and lack of economic opportunities.

With the unification of Italy, the southern economy has been the victim of a forced inclusion in the economic mechanisms of the North. In fact, the economy of the North has absorbed that of the South, without taking into account the differences that there were both at a cultural and economic level.

The disparity had numerous negative effects on the entire country. These included migratory flows from the South to the North in search of jobs and opportunities and the deterioration of economic and social conditions in the southern regions.

The North-South division has also influenced entrepreneurship and business development in Italy. The North, with its strong industrial and commercial base, has traditionally offered more opportunities for entrepreneurs, with access to financial resources, wider markets and a more favourable business environment.

Conversely, in Southern Italy, where economic conditions are often more difficult and resources more limited, entrepreneurs may face additional challenges, such as lack of access to credit, inadequate infrastructure and a smaller and less dynamic local market.

Even the percentage change of new self-employed persons compared to the previous year, show the discrepancy between the different areas of Italy. Indeed, all three years the largest increases were recorded in Northern regions.

In 2019, provinces of Bolzano (+11.9%), Lombardy (+11.6%) and Piedmont (+11%).

In 2021, Friuli V.G. (+48.4%), Lombardy (+37.7%), and in Veneto (+29%).

In 2023, Valle d'Aosta (+6.2%), Lombardy (+5.3%) and in the Autonomous Province of Bolzano (+4.3%) there were the largest increases.

It can be noted that Lombardy is always among the regions with the strongest percentage change. It is the wealthiest region and the economic powerhouse of the country; its capital city is Milan and constitutes the major financial and commercial centre.

Another interesting aspect of the phenomenon of freelancing in Italy, could be the widespread gender gap that exists within this sector. Still with reference to the years 2019, 2021 and 2023, the percentage of male subjects among the new self-employed workers during pre-pandemic period was 62.6%. The situation of inequality has not changed during the pandemic, in fact 62.2% were men, and the percentage remained unchanged after the pandemic period.

So, despite the pandemic, there has been no significant change in the gender gap between the new self-employed in Italy. The proportion of men among the new self-employed remained consistently high both before, during and after the pandemic, showing persistent gender inequality in the freelance sector. The legacy of a patriarchal mentality, which has seen throughout history only women wives and mothers, is certainly an accomplice to this gender gap.

Nowadays, despite Article 3 of the Italian Constitution proclaims equality before the law, without distinction of sex, in reality has not yet achieved an equality of the female figure with the male. In Italian society there are still gender stereotypes, that have an influence on career choices. For example, the idea that some sectors (such as technology, engineering, finance) are more suitable for men than women.

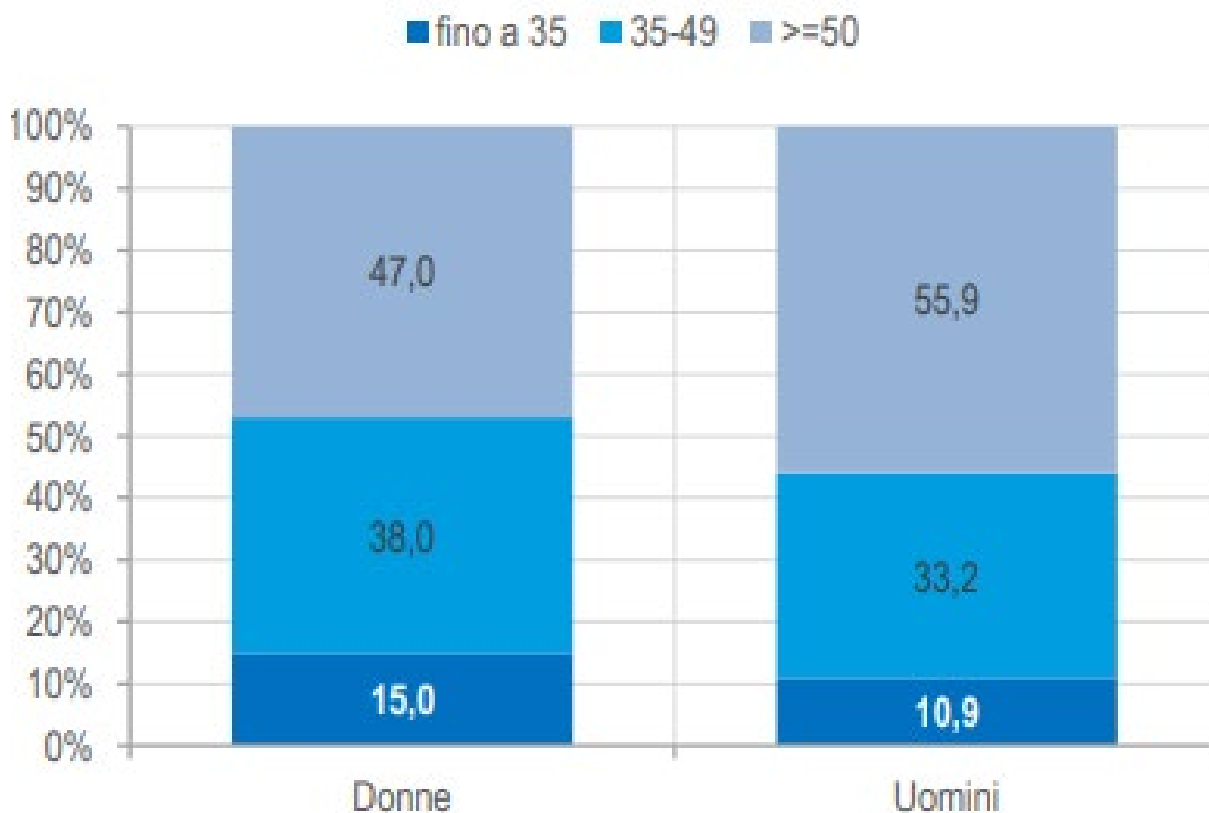
Moreover, in many Italian families, there is still a traditional division of work, with women often responsible for household chores and child care. This makes it difficult to coincide between work and private/family life. Also, in the field of work, one of the most common obstacles is wage inequality, as pay is sometimes lower than male colleagues, despite equal qualifications and experience.

An important data, which represents an exception to the general situation, regards the gender gap between the entrepreneurs, who are a category of self-employed workers, that not only manages their own business but also takes on the responsibility of organizing and operating it. There is a significant gender gap among entrepreneurs in Italy, which varies according to age.

While females represent a higher percentage of entrepreneurs under the age of 50, males dominate the entrepreneurial landscape among those aged 50 and above. As the following table, according to ISTAT, the Italian National Statistical Institute, in 2021, 15% of female entrepreneurs were under 35, 38% of them were aged between 35 and 49, and 47% were over 50. Instead, the

percentage of male entrepreneurs was 10,9% among under 35, 33,2% among entrepreneurs aged between 35 and 49, and 55,9% among over 50.

Exhibit 1



Source: ISTAT, Entrepreneurs by gender and age group, 2021

In the past, the number of women was low, because cultural barriers were still very strong, and they had fewer opportunities to enter the business world.

However, nowadays, the situation is changing. Young women entrepreneurs are a component of the cultural and social change, that we are experiencing.

From the context analysed, it is clear which age group should be addressed in order to ensure gender equality. It would be an excellent starting point to intervene at the level of policy, so that the equality that exists between young entrepreneurs and young entrepreneurs, can also be found among the over 50.

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

Government policies play a fundamental role in shaping the landscape of freelance work in Italy. As mentioned in the introduction, there are no specific rules for freelancers in Italy, but reference is made to the current legislation for self-employment. Originally, no special protection was provided for the self-employed.

The evolution of the labour market, and in particular the development of self-employment, without specific regulation, has led to the absence of guarantees both in terms of employment and social security, which have had an unacceptable effect on the position of this category of workers.

In 2017, the legislator intervened with Law n. 81, defined the "Jobs Act of self-employment", a measure that recognized a range of rights regarding the contractual relationship, the protection of paternity and motherhood.

Clearly, the legislator's intervention focused on those aspects which were most damaging to the self-employed. The measures introduced by the Jobs Act were aimed at improving and simplifying the tax and administrative system. The most important reform was the one that introduced guidance and support through employment centres.

The employment centres are organizations or facilities that provides services and resources to help individuals find employment or improve their job prospects. For example, they provide advice to help people identify their skills, interests and career goals. This can include tips on how to improve your curriculum or prepare for job interviews. They also provide job advertisements from companies, which can be consulted by job seekers through the employment centre's website or through other communication channels.

Some employment centres offer targeted assistance to specific groups, such as unemployed young people, people with disabilities, immigrants, or people seeking a new job opportunity after a period of inactivity. Among the range of services offered to the freelancers, there is the opportunity to access training courses. The objective is to equip freelancers with all fundamental skills, so not only the technical ones needed to manage a company, but also leadership skills, critical thinking, and strategic vision.

It is worth noting that these courses cover a wide range of areas of interest, including business management, strategic marketing, sales techniques, personnel management and mindset. The focus of the training courses on the aforementioned topics underscores the essential skills aspiring freelancers should acquire.

Consequently, we can identify several competency gaps, revealing disparities between the skills individuals currently possess and those necessary for success as freelance workers:

- **Specific professional skills**, refers to a situation where an individual does not have the knowledge, skills or experience necessary to effectively perform certain tasks or roles in a specific field. These skills can be technical, such as the ability to use certain software or tools, or soft skills, such as effective communication or time management skills.
- **Time management and organization**. Time Management refers to the ability to plan, organize, and control one's time efficiently to maximize productivity and achieve desired goals. This involves identifying priority tasks, setting realistic goals, planning a work schedule, allocating time appropriately to each task, and managing any interruptions or distractions.

Organization refers to the ability to organize and structure activities, resources, and information effectively to optimize efficiency and productivity. This includes creating filing

systems and information management systems, maintaining a tidy and clean work environment, establishing clear procedures and processes for performing specific tasks, and coordinating activities with others efficiently.

- **Communication skills.** Freelancers must be able to communicate clearly with their clients. Communication skills are essential during the contract negotiation phase with clients. Freelancers need to be able to persuasively communicate the value of their services, establish clear contract terms, and agree on prices and conditions that are satisfactory to both them and the client.

In addition, to attract new clients and maintain a steady flow of work, freelancers must be able to effectively communicate the value of their services. This may include creating a professional website, writing persuasive proposals, and actively networking to promote their business.

- **Financial management.** Freelancers need to be able to establish a budget and plan their finances effectively. Determining the prices for their services is an essential part of financial management for freelancers. They need to accurately assess the value of their services, consider operational and living costs, as well as industry competition to set prices that are competitive yet profitable.

Freelancers must effectively manage the invoicing process and ensure timely payments for their services. This includes preparing and sending accurate and detailed invoices, monitoring outstanding payments, and addressing issues related to late or missing payments. It is important for freelancers to understand the tax aspects of their work and ensure compliance with relevant tax laws and regulations.

This includes registering with relevant tax authorities, paying taxes in a timely and accurate manner, as well as maintaining accurate financial records for tax purposes. Freelancers should be able to manage their finances to plan for the future. This may include implementing savings strategies to weather lean periods or financial emergencies, as well as exploring investment opportunities to grow their wealth over time.

- **Personal marketing and self-promotion,** indeed aspiring freelancers should develop skills in personal marketing, including creating a professional portfolio, managing social media, networking, and participating in industry events.
- **Resilience and adaptability.** Resilience refers to the ability to face and overcome difficulties, setbacks, and adversities that may arise in the course of freelance work. Freelancers need to be able to manage failure, criticism, and stressful moments without being discouraged. This may include the ability to maintain a positive outlook, adapt to changing circumstances, and find creative ways to solve problems.

Adaptability refers to the ability to quickly adjust to changes and new situations. Freelancers need to be able to adapt to new projects, clients, technologies, and work methodologies flexibly and effectively. This may require the ability to learn new skills quickly, adopt new approaches, and remain open to change. Resilience and adaptability can foster personal and professional growth for freelancers. Facing challenges and adapting to changes can help freelancers develop new skills, enhance their problem-solving abilities, and become stronger and more resilient in the long run.

In summary, the identified skills gap represents a significant challenge for the country's future socio-economic development. The lack of key competences could limit innovation, competitiveness and productivity in the sector, thereby undermining long-term economic growth. It is therefore essential that public and private sector actors take effective measures to reduce this gap by

investing in vocational training, education and skills development to ensure a future for self-employment.

Opportunities: training available and operational tools

To date, there have not been many public sector interventions in support of training for freelancers. One possible explanation could be the innovativeness of this profession, which in fact does not yet have its own legislation, as mentioned above. On the contrary, for the private sector, we can think of a mosaic of all the different training courses offered by the agencies.

Private training courses for freelancers share several common characteristics. Here are some common elements often found in such courses:

- **Flexibility:** Private training courses for freelancers are often designed to be flexible and adaptable to students' needs. They may be offered online or in a blended format, allowing students to access course materials and participate in lessons based on their availability and pace.
- **Relevant to freelance work:** These training courses focus on topics and skills directly relevant to freelance work, such as developing specific technical skills, business management, personal promotion, and professional networking.
- **Practical approach:** Private courses for freelancers often take a practical, hands-on approach, allowing students to acquire knowledge and skills that can be directly applied in their work. This may include practical projects, case studies, exercises, and simulations of real-world situations.
- **Personalized support:** These courses often offer personalized support to students, either through individual tutoring sessions or via online forums or support groups where students can share experiences, ask questions, and receive feedback from instructors and peers.
- **Continuous updates:** Given the rapid changes in the freelance work landscape and technology, private training courses tend to be regularly updated to reflect the latest trends, tools, and best practices in the industry.
- **Networking opportunities:** Some private training courses for freelancers provide networking opportunities, allowing students to connect with other industry professionals, potential clients, or collaborators and expand their professional network.

Although there are no specific courses for freelancers promoted by public bodies, courses are available, aimed at the category of aspiring entrepreneurs. For example, the School for Entrepreneurs, promoted by Confindustria, and Luiss Business School. Which are respectively the main association representing companies in Italy and a high-profile management school located in Rome.

This course aims to promote the creation and development of new businesses. In particular, the objectives of the programmes are:

- Recognize the centrality of the role of the entrepreneur
- Highlighting the cultural dimension of doing business
- Encouraging the emergence of new entrepreneurs.

The program is aimed at managers, employees, young professionals, non-employed managers working in Italian companies and, in general, all those who want to get involved in doing business. Another example is Sni-Servizio Nuove Imprese, launched by Unioncamere, the Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Crafts and Agriculture. It is a platform dedicated to all aspiring entrepreneurs in Italy, with the aim of facilitating the process of starting new businesses.

Having taken stock of the training situation, it is also important to refer to what are the freelance professions that will emerge in the future. In fact, it is important for training to be geared to meeting the needs of these job profiles, in order to combine the demand and supply of skills. On this subject, research has been carried out by FORMAZIONE24H, which is the professional association dedicated to freelancers and the self-employed.

The experts have drawn up a list with the 10 freelance professions destined to emerge in 2024:

- **Social Seller:** It allows you to establish authentic connections with potential customers through social media and develop trusted relationships that ultimately result in sales.
- **Influencer:** a profession that does not mention its attractiveness, but that requires skills to be kept up to date. An influencer must obviously know how to offer quality content to his audience, but also know the marketing strategies and data analysis.
- **Family Mediator:** Family mediation is a procedure by which spouses wishing to terminate the civil effects of marriage can reach an agreement, or a series of agreements, on the various aspects resulting from separation, such as the custody of children, the maintenance or assignment of the family home.
- **Disability manager:** the world of work must increasingly focus on inclusion and in this perspective the figure of the disability manager is fundamental. This professional is actively committed to removing barriers and creating an environment that fosters full participation and equality for all.
- **Digital marketing specialist:** He is a highly specialized professional in the field of digital marketing. This figure has a wide range of skills that allow him to plan, implement and manage effective online marketing strategies to promote products, services or brands.
- **Coach:** An excellent coach demonstrates genuine empathy and practice active listening, creating an environment where customers feel understood and supported. It possesses advanced communication skills to convey complex concepts clearly and helps define clear goals and develop realistic action plans to achieve them.
- **Teacher:** giving life to unique visual messages through signs (bright and not) both external and internal. This is the task of the teacher.
- **HSE advisor:** for companies the safety of their workers must be a priority. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to rely on an expert HSE advisor able to ensure the safety and protection of workers in different environments.
- **Sign translator:** a required figure in school, legal, health and more. The interpreter and translator of sign language is able to provide high quality services in many fields, ranging from translation activities in conferences and conferences to the work of interpreter for cinema, theatre and various texts.
- **AI experts:** artificial intelligence is increasingly part of everyday life and the demand for industry experts is growing. Skills are required in different areas ranging from algorithm development, data analysis, and consulting.

It is therefore clear that the freelancer figure will emerge in many areas. This means that the phenomenon is growing, not only from the numerical point of view, but also in reference to all the working categories in which it is developing and will develop.

Challenges

As previously analysed, the development of the freelancing phenomenon goes hand in hand with the development of digitalization. But this is not the only factor that has influenced its spread, in fact, there are many advantages that freelancer work offers, which make it attractive.

Among these, we can mention for example flexibility, indeed, a freelancer can choose his working hours and manage his agenda according to personal needs; freedom, because he has complete control over the projects he accepts, the clients he works with and the kind of work he does; and, variety, considering the opportunity to work on a wide range of projects and with a variety of clients.

Another characteristic of freelance work is the presence of numerous challenges, which while for some may be a negative aspect, for others is an opportunity to grow and get involved. These challenges can be distinguished according to their nature, in fact some concern endogenous factors, therefore intrinsic to the system, others concern external, structural factors.

In the first category, we can place the most common challenges among Italian freelancers, which are the following:

- **Uncertainty about future work:** Freelancers often face the challenge of not knowing when or where their next job will come from. This uncertainty can lead to anxiety or nervousness as they navigate the unpredictable nature of their workload and income streams. Without the security of a steady job, freelancers must constantly hustle and network to find new opportunities, which can be mentally and emotionally taxing.
- **Fluctuating income cycles:** Freelancers experience fluctuating income cycles, with periods of feast and famine. During busy times, they may have more work than they can handle, while during slow periods, they may struggle to find enough projects to sustain themselves financially. This inconsistency in income can make budgeting and financial planning challenging, leading to stress and financial insecurity.
- **Burnout and fatigue:** The flexibility of freelancing can often blur the boundaries between work and personal life, making it easy for freelancers to overwork themselves. Constantly striving to grow their business and meet client demands can result in burnout and fatigue, leading to physical and mental exhaustion. This can have detrimental effects on freelancers' well-being, personal relationships, and overall quality of life.
- **Client payment issues:** Freelancers frequently encounter challenges related to client payments, such as late payments or non-payment altogether. Dependence on timely payments to cover expenses and sustain their livelihood can create significant financial stress and strain. Additionally, navigating payment disputes or chasing down unpaid invoices can be time-consuming and frustrating, diverting attention away from productive work.
- **Loneliness and isolation:** Freelancing can be a solitary endeavour, with many freelancers working alone from home or in remote locations. This isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness and disconnect from the professional community. While some freelancers may enjoy the independence and autonomy that comes with working solo, others may struggle with feelings of loneliness and isolation, impacting their mental health and overall well-being. Finding ways to stay connected with peers, whether through networking events, online communities, or coworking spaces, is essential for combating feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Such factors are obstacles especially for novice freelancers and can be overcome with training and experience. In fact, the experience is fundamental to know yourself and learn to manage your anxieties, insecurity and for example the feeling of loneliness; on the other hand, training is the key to learn how to manage your business, relationships with clients and all the various aspects of the work. At the national level, from the point of view of training there are gaps, in the sense that there is no immediate contact between the University and the world of work.

It is a problem that affects the entire educational system, in fact already in schools, education is very theoretical. In 2003, the "Moratti Reform" (Ministerial Decree No. 53/2003) introduced the alternation of school-work, a teaching methodology in which students support a period of theoretical training in class with one of practical experience at a company. In 2015, it was renamed PCTO (Pathways for Transversal Skills and Guidance) and has become obligatory.

This project aims to bring the world of school closer to that of work by contributing to the orientation of students and, at the same time, making them acquire their experiences and skills. There is a potential not experienced, it is clear that we are already working in the direction of eliminating gaps, but more should be done.

The training gaps are also accompanied by other challenges at the structural level, which are mainly bureaucracy and the tax system. As regards bureaucracy, is an obstacle it is often complex and fragmentary.

Self-employed workers must interact with different public bodies to obtain the various permits and licenses necessary for their activity. In addition, the bureaucratic process can be slow, with long waiting times for the approval of documents.

The bureaucratic formalities to become freelance in Italy include first open the VAT number (a series of 11 numbers that identifies the holder), at the Revenue Agency, which is a non-economic public body with the task of finding the financial resources for the functioning of the State. It is also necessary to enrol in the INPS (National Social Security Institute), choose the tax system, request any discounts and purchase the software for electronic invoicing.

The other major structural problem is the fiscal system. The Italian tax system is known for its complexity, with a myriad of laws, regulations and provisions that can be difficult to understand and manage for the freelancers, especially for those who do not have specific tax training. In addition, the tax burden for freelancers can be very high, including personal income tax (IRPEF) and mandatory social security contributions.

The elimination of these challenges requires legislative action to streamline and reduce bureaucracy, so that it is simpler and no longer an obstacle. The starting point for removing these obstacles could be legislative action to streamline and reduce bureaucracy, so as to make it easier for those who want to enter the world of freelancing.

Conclusions

In conclusion, there is a significant increase in the number of new self-employed during the pandemic, this growth is due to several factors such as the negative impact of the pandemic on traditional employment, the promotion of digital working solutions and the availability of platforms and tools for freelancers.

The geographical distribution of the new self-employed in the different regions of Italy shows the disparity between North and South, while on the gender gap there are persistent inequalities in self-employment, attributable to cultural barriers, gender stereotypes and traditional divisions of work within Italian society. In addition, the exploration of age distribution of female and male entrepreneurs' sheds light on the changing business landscape in Italy and the need for targeted policies to promote gender equality.

As for government policies, in the absence of specific regulations for freelancers, the legislation is based on the laws in force for self-employment. In the past, the self-employed did not enjoy particular protections, but in 2017 Law No. 81, known as the "Jobs Act of Self-employment", was introduced, which recognized a number of rights.

The measures introduced by the Jobs Act aimed to improve and simplify the tax and administrative system, with particular attention to the creation of employment centres. These centres provide a range of services and resources to help people find work or improve their employment prospects.

There are also several skill gaps that self-employed people might encounter, including specific professional skills, time and organization management, communication, financial management, personal marketing, resilience and adaptability. So, it is important that public and private invest in vocational training, education and skills development to reduce the skills gap and ensure a sustainable future for self-employment in Italy.

There is a lack of public intervention aimed at training freelancers, in contrast to the wide offer of private courses. These courses have common features, such as flexibility, relevance to freelance work, practical approach, personalized support, continuous updates and networking opportunities. Although there are no specific courses for freelancers promoted by public bodies, there are programs aimed at aspiring entrepreneurs, such as the School for Entrepreneurs of Confindustria and the Luiss Business School. These courses promote the creation and development of new businesses, targeting managers, professionals, and anyone who wants to take up business.

In addition, the 10 freelance professions destined to emerge in 2024, such as the Social Seller, the Influencer, the Family Mediator, the Disability Manager, the Digital Marketing Specialist, the Coach, the Teacher, HSE Consultant, Sign Language Interpreter and Artificial Intelligence Experts highlight the growing importance of freelance work in different areas and sectors.

Freelance work is growing not only numerically, but also in terms of the variety of sectors and professions involved, highlighting the need for appropriate policies and training interventions to support this emerging trend.

Finally, considering the advantages and challenges of freelance work in Italy, it is important to underline the centrality of training, and the difficulties related to bureaucracy and the tax system. Among the advantages of freelance work are flexibility, freedom and variety of projects. However, freelancers face challenges such as uncertainty about future work, fluctuating income cycles, burnout, customer payment problems, and loneliness.

Training is essential to overcome these challenges, but there are gaps in the educational system and in the relationship between school and work. Bureaucracy and the tax system further complicate the lives of freelancers, requiring complex procedures and high tax burdens. Legislative

actions to simplify bureaucracy and reduce the tax burden could encourage the development of freelance work in Italy.

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