



Ireland's Project Economy 2025

A Barometer of Independent Professionals,
Contractors and Solo Self-Employed in Ireland.



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
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 **CONTRACTING
PLUS**

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A Word From The Project Leaders



Welcome to Ireland's Project Economy 2025, this longitudinal study is now in its fifth year. The report profiles Irish high-skilled independent professionals, also known as professional contractors, freelancers and solo-self employed workers.

Trinity College Dublin and Contracting PLUS are delighted to collaborate on this unique study, which examines the contribution this key cohort have to employment and the economy in Ireland. This is the only report of its kind completed in Ireland and this report has been produced entirely digitally, in line with both companies strong commitment to sustainability.

The focus of our research is to explore the extent and nature of the Independent Professional sector in Ireland and the key challenges it faces. Our survey was carried over late November and early December 2024.

There were 1,514 respondents comprising the main stakeholders of the project economy eco-system including, high skilled independent contractors both full time and part-time, organisations who hire high-skilled independent contractors, as well as recruitment agencies, some employees, unemployed and retired individuals.

In terms of data focused on the independent contractors themselves, for consistency our analysis focused only on full time independent contractors with some further filtering of the sample to remove cases with incomplete and erroneous data, leading to a sample of 841 independent contractors.

The research seeks to provide insights into the contribution of this sector to business and society as well as to better inform this type of worker about best practices, opportunities, threats and relative performance in this highly important sector of Ireland's workforce.

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Foreword



The solo self-employed are a vital yet often overlooked pillar of Ireland's economy. They provide businesses – both indigenous and multinational – with the agility, expertise, and innovation needed to compete and grow. Research shows that businesses leveraging freelance and contract talent not only innovate more effectively but also expand faster, create more jobs, and contribute significantly to tax revenues. This reality needs to be clearly communicated – and finally heard – by all stakeholders.

As companies increasingly embrace a blended workforce, combining full-time employees with self-employed specialists, they gain the flexibility and skills necessary to drive innovation, scale efficiently, and remain competitive in a rapidly evolving market. Without their contribution, many firms would struggle to adapt, expand, or even survive in today's fast-moving business environment. Yet despite the clear economic benefits of independent professionals, government policy continues to create unnecessary obstacles for those who choose this career path.

The Karshan/Domino's case has provided some clarity in distinguishing between employment and self-employment, though there is still room for subjectiveness which can create unnecessary worry for individuals who want to be self-employed and the companies that want to engage them. It remains deeply concerning that three separate government bodies, the Revenue Commissioners, the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), and the Department of Social Protection, can apply the same guidelines and arrive at different conclusions to suit their own agendas.

More alarming still is the lack of engagement with the business community in shaping these policies, despite the direct impact they have on Ireland's economic dynamism. Disparities in tax treatment further undermine the solo self-employed. Unlike employees or larger businesses, self-employed professionals often find themselves unfairly restricted in what they can claim as legitimate expenses. This creates an uneven playing field, punishing those who work independently rather than recognising their role in driving economic growth, job creation, and innovation.

Given Ireland's reliance on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the availability of high-skilled self-employed professionals is more important than ever in attracting multinational investment. Access to a deep and flexible talent pool – including independent professionals – is a key factor for global companies considering Ireland as a base.

At Contracting PLUS, we continue to highlight these inconsistencies and advocate for a fairer approach, one that fully recognises and values the contribution of solo self-employed professionals. While they may not directly hire employees or export goods, their work plays a crucial role in strengthening businesses that do. By providing expertise, flexibility, and innovation, they enable companies to scale, compete internationally, and drive job creation.

This research, conducted by Trinity College Dublin and sponsored by Contracting PLUS, reflects our commitment to supporting self-employed professionals in Ireland and our belief that self-employment is a valid and rewarding career choice. We hope this report sheds light on the realities of independent professional work in Ireland today and sparks a meaningful conversation about how best to support this dynamic and highly skilled workforce.

If you find value in these insights, we encourage you to share them with your network. Change is possible -but only if we work together to make it happen.



Jimmy Sheehan

Managing Director, Contracting PLUS

Executive Summary



The 'Project Economy' is driving economic growth and creating high quality jobs. Welcome to Ireland's project economy 2025. This detailed research report, undertaken by Trinity Business School in collaboration with Contracting Plus, is now in its 5th year and building up a robust insight into the performance of the project economy and high skilled independent contracting.

The project economy comprises dynamic business activities associated with growth, innovation, transformation and entrepreneurship. It encompasses businesses of all sizes from SMEs through to global corporations. A defining characteristic of businesses in the project economy is that they use blended workforces where they supplement employees with a cadre of high skilled independent contractors.

Blended workforces enable businesses to organize dynamic activities – involving change, uncertainty, innovation and disruption – into projects. This approach allows these activities to be managed and led on a focused, agile, flexible and lower risk basis. Project-based organisations are able to amplify their range and depth of expertise compared to businesses utilising an 'employee-only' workforce, as they can draw on unique talent from both within and outside of their organisation. The project economy not only generates high

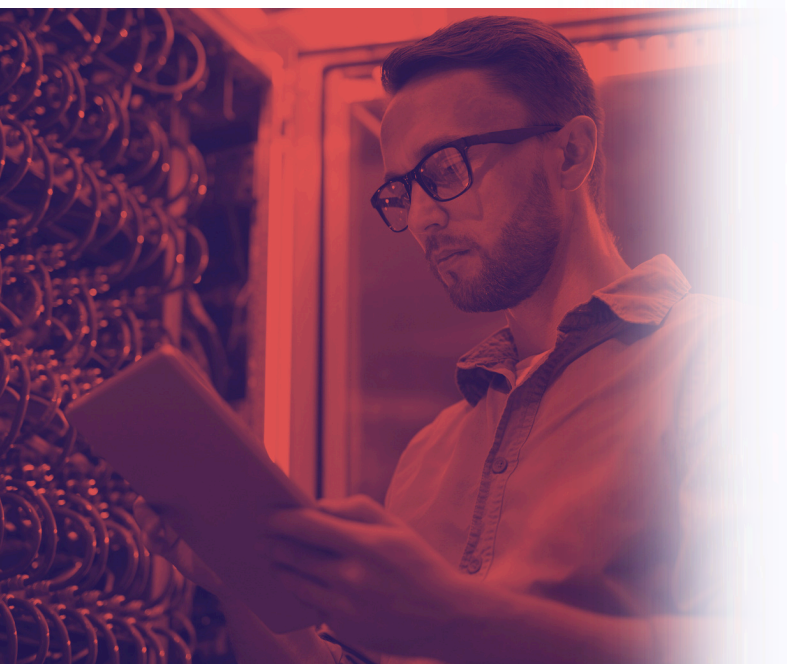
performance businesses but also creates high quality work. Our research shows that high skilled independent contractors working in the project economy earn more and have higher job satisfaction than equivalent employees. This outcome occurs again this year; even with a decline in the earnings of high-skilled independent contractors.

Their total annual earnings have fallen by 7% from €127,164 to €117,978 and average day rates have declined by 3% from €571 to €552. There is some variation in these trends across sectors with earnings rising in ICT, and finance sectors and falling in pharma, engineering and medical locum sectors. There is also gender variation in earnings growth over the last year which we will discuss shortly.

However, high skilled independent contractors (comprised of Standard Occupational Codes, SOCs, 1, 2 and 3), are earning roughly 61% more than equivalent employees (based on latest CSO earnings data). Over 97% of these workers have a university degree or similar level qualification. Typically, they do hi-tech and professional work. They also have an entrepreneurial mindset both in terms of being able to fulfill the entrepreneurial work that they do and also to have the personal resilience to handle a career that is more risky and requires more self-management than employment.

Their economic function is distinct from employees, in that they can provide unique expertise for a limited duration, can be hired quickly and pose minimal long-term risk of costly idle labour for firms, as there is no commitment to hiring them once their role in a project is complete. They provide businesses with an extra dynamic capability to tackle growth and innovative opportunities which involve uncertainty by lowering the risk involved and enhancing the dynamic capability to complete these projects successfully.

As a result, the project economy is a key driver of economic growth and indeed employee job creation. Employees jobs are created in the first instance within projects that would not exist without the option of utilising a blended workforce. Thereafter, employment is created as a result of businesses growing and transforming to exploit opportunities that would be too risky and/or beyond their dynamic capability without the use of project-based blended workforces.



The unique work carried out by high-skilled contractors in the project economy creates a career profile that is different to employees. It's not just that they earn more than employees, 78% voluntarily choose this form of work and have high levels of job satisfaction. Our research finds that high skilled independent contractors generally have higher levels of job satisfaction than employees and that job satisfaction levels increase with age amongst high-skilled independent contractors.

Furthermore, unlike employees, their labour productivity does not appear to depreciate with age over the typical working lifetime. Whereas the life cycle of employment earnings is inverse U-shaped over the typical working career of employees, that of independent contractors in the project economy exhibits an upward sloping linear profile where earnings increase monotonically with age. So here accumulated expertise is valued much more than in employment. High skilled contractors can be quickly and flexibly deployed to projects where their expertise is valued most. More accumulated expertise gives older freelancers a knowledge advantage as well as having lower risk due to a longer track record. These advantages result in older independent contractors earning higher day rates and annual earnings than their younger counterparts.

Moreover, the project economy is based on work involving cutting-edge knowledge and technology so that as long as high skilled contractors stay active, they can continue to upskill through their work. Therefore, they have an opportunity to acquire more expertise than employees who are often confined to limited areas of knowledge with lower levels of innovation. This makes older high skilled contractors with more accumulated expertise the highest earners in the project economy and earning the highest premium on employees.

Overall, this year high skilled independent contractors are earning a weighted average annual income of €114,656 which is 1.6 times the weighted average wage of equivalent employees (weights are based on equivalent shares of workers in SOCs 1, 2 and 3). High skilled freelancers in Standard Occupational Code 1 are earning €150,047 compared to €90,485 earned by those in full-time jobs in similar roles. Similarly, freelancers in SOC 2 earn €113,577, whereas their full-time counterparts make €72,321. For SOC 3, freelancers earn €96,518, significantly higher than the €58,949 earned by those in full-time positions. There has been a significant shift in gender pay dynamics within the contracting sector. For the first time, in the 5-year study female contractors earn a higher average daily rate (€565) than their male counterparts (€548). However, women tend to work fewer days per annum, leading to slightly lower annual earnings when compared to men (€114,705 vs. €119,069). While progress is evident, age-based pay disparities persist, with women aged 30-49 earning more than men in the same age group, but younger and older female contractors still face pay gaps.

Contracting continues to attract more women, particularly younger professionals, due to its flexibility, autonomy, and financial rewards. Women now represent 27% of professional contractors, and 81% voluntarily chose self-employment. These findings indicate that contracting is becoming an increasingly equitable and attractive option for women, offering greater financial independence, work satisfaction and professional growth.

As our survey is focused on high-skilled independent contractors it covers both gig and project economy workers. Our results, unearth some myths about the gig economy. Firstly, in the high skilled sector gig workers are better off than equivalent employees as they earn more and have higher levels of job satisfaction. However, high-skilled independent contractors working in the project economy earn even more and with higher levels of job satisfaction than high-skilled gig workers. In fact, amongst high-skilled workers, the project economy workforce is nearly 7 times larger than the gig economy (75% project, 11% gig and the remainder doing both forms of contract). Furthermore, in terms of combined value of workers earnings the project economy workforce is worth 9 times more than the gig economy. Yet the media and public policy still seem preoccupied with the gig economy when the project economy is far more important both for short and long-term economic performance. Overall, our study highlights the important role of blended workforces and project-based organization for economic growth, business innovation and the creation of high-quality work for both independent contractors and employees.

Blended workforces in combination with project-based organisation is a cornerstone of high-quality work and dynamic economic performance.

Any government or business seeking to enable economic growth and high-quality job creation needs to enable this dynamic economic capability. To do so, policy cannot be a blunt 'one size fits all' approach as the consistent and central finding of our research is the diversity inherent in the project economy: both in terms of economic functions that independent contractors carry out and the extent to which these translate into worker welfare. High skill is a key differentiator. The poor welfare experience of low skilled gig workers contrasts almost in a binary manner with the high job satisfaction and premium earnings of their high-skilled counterparts.

Moreover, the contractual focus on paying for a worker's output or productivity is central to achieve performance from project-based organisation, and this limits scope for discrimination. The economic force of the high skilled project-based blended workforce model is sufficiently strong to overturn axiomatic features of employee-only workforces which discriminate against age and gender as well as demoting contractors to a shadow low quality workforce role. By contrast, older workers are the stars of the project economy. Female high skilled contractors have a much smaller pay gap with men than employees and in 2024 were securing higher day rates than men. High-skilled gig workers earn more than their equivalent high skilled employees.



Professor Andrew Burke

Trinity Business School



Professor Na Fu

Trinity Business School



The Key Highlights



The Project Economy Accelerates Further Ahead of the Gig Economy

Amongst high-skilled workers, freelancers working in the project economy vastly outnumber those working in the gig economy by a ratio of 7 to 1. Furthermore, the earnings of independent contractors in the project economy continue to surpass those of the gig economy and over the last year this gap has grown significantly. In 2024, high-skilled contractors engaged in project-based roles earned an average daily rate of €587, while those working on a task or gig basis had an average daily rate of €442. Annual earnings for project-based contractors averaged €124,823, 32% higher than the €94,498 earned by task-based contractors. This earnings gap has widened significantly from the 11% differential reported for 2023. Project-based work, is centred on innovation and business transformation, drives economic growth and as such provides contractors with valuable insights into business trends. From their perspective, the outlook for the Irish economy looks good for 2025, even though 48% of contractors believe the Trump presidency will have a negative effect on contract work. Project-based contractors, have a confidence index score of +18, while gig-based contractors also show growing optimism in relation to the economy with their score increasing to +12 up from +7 in 2024. In terms of confidence in their own business sectors, both project-based and gig-based high skilled independent contractors expect their business to do better in 2025 than 2024 with confidence index scores of +28 and +16 respectively.

Women In Contracting

Contracting is increasingly popular among women, particularly younger women, with 81% choosing self-employment voluntarily compared to 76% of men. For the first time, **female contractors earn a higher average daily rate €565 than their male counterparts €548**. Female average annual earnings are still lower than male annual earnings as women work fewer days than men per annum. Female average annual earnings were at €114,705 and male average annual earnings were at €119,069, narrowing the gender pay gap in the contracting sector to 3.6%, significantly below the 6.9% gap in the wider Irish labour market. Overall, 84% of women in contracting report high levels of satisfaction, reflecting the sector's appeal for its flexibility, autonomy, and work-life balance.

Greater Participation

Contracting enables greater workforce participation and retention, allowing individuals to remain active in the workforce beyond traditional employment. Among respondents, **10% would retire, 3% would be unemployed, and 7% would emigrate if not contracting**. Contracting helps retain talent within the country, extends productivity, and enhances economic value. It also addresses barriers to traditional employment, such as age, caregiving responsibilities, and limited part-time opportunities, offering individuals a flexible and inclusive pathway to participate in the workforce. The rise in younger contractors signals a shift in the contracting landscape, with 36% of contractors now under 40, up from 28% in 2024 and 24% in 2023. This demonstrates contracting's growing accessibility and appeal to younger professionals.

The Value of Age

The professional contracting sector values age and experience, providing significant opportunities for older professionals often unavailable in traditional employment. **Contractors aged 60 and above report the highest daily rate, highest life satisfaction (94%), and the lowest rates of burnout compared to younger peers.** 10% of older respondents indicated they would retire if not self-employed, emphasising the sector's role in enabling them to work longer, and contribute meaningfully to the economy. Supporting older professionals in self-employment therefore has a valuable economic and social impact.

Financial Goals and Retirement Strategies

Independent professionals prioritise saving for retirement, followed by goals like home ownership, debt repayment, and investment fund building. Other goals include supporting family needs, education, and managing living costs. The majority **73% of respondents intend to fund their retirement using private pensions**, while 33% will use the state pension, other reported strategies include stocks, equity investments, diversified portfolios, and savings, with growing interest in cryptocurrency and property ownership. Some plan to work part-time, invest post-debt, or rely on business ownership or inheritance.

Contractors' Value Creation

This latest survey highlights that high skilled contractors are engaged across mainly dynamic industries, which require blended workforces that are agile and provide wider access to talent beyond that already provided by in-house employees. While clients value contractors for their ability to meet these challenges, barriers such as costs and unclear policies remain. Clients suggested improvements, including **clearer legislation, better communication, and fairer treatment for contractors.** Looking ahead, clients of contractors believe that critical skills like AI, cybersecurity, engineering, and leadership will be essential to achieving organisations' goals, while they expect emerging policies around sustainability, auto-enrolment, and AI will shape future talent needs. Optimism remains strong, with confidence in both the contracting sector and the Irish economy for 2025.

Contractor Pay and Satisfaction Trends

- **A Decrease in Daily Rates and Annual Earnings:** The average daily rate for contractors fell by 3% year-on-year, from €571 in 2024 to €552 in 2025. Annual earnings fell by 5.9% in the project economy from €132,600 in 2023 to €124,832 in 2024 and by 21% in the gig economy, falling from €119,634 in 2023 to €94,498 in 2024. While a significant driver of this decline is due to a larger percentage of younger freelancers in our survey this year (who secure the lowest day rates of all age cohorts), the reduction also indicates a more competitive environment for high skilled freelancers; especially in the gig economy. However, despite these reductions, the average earnings of high-skilled independent contractors is still 61% higher than those of equivalent employees (i.e. those in the same Standard Occupational Code SOC groupings).
- **Gender and Industry Variations:** Female contractors saw an 8% increase in their average daily rate €565 in 2025, while male rates declined by 5% to €548. Contractors in ICT and finance reported increased rates, with finance contractors earning the highest at €695 per day. Meanwhile, contractors in pharma, engineering, and medical locum industries experienced declines, though not across all demographics.
- **Age-Related Pay Trends:** Contractors 60 years and older continue to earn the highest daily rates affirming that the contracting sector values knowledge and experience.
- **High Pay Satisfaction:** Satisfaction with daily pay rate rose across most demographics in 2025, even though the average daily rate has declined slightly.
- **Nuanced Pay Landscape:** While contractors typically earn more than equivalent employees the contracting pay landscape varies significantly by industry, gender, and age.
- **High-skilled contracting is predominantly a career of choice:** Over three quarters (78%) of high skilled independent contractors choose their career out of preference rather than necessity. Earnings (77%) and job autonomy (69%) are the top two factors that motivate people to choose to become a high skilled independent contractor. A total of 97% of contractors have a university degree or equivalent professional qualification.



Recruiters' Strategic Focus on Contract Desks

Recruitment firms are strategically expanding their contract desks, with 48% expecting an increase in contractors on their books and 71% predicting a rise in contract roles in 2025, indicating strong growth potential in the contracting sector. While experienced clients face fewer concerns when hiring contractors, 62% of recruiters believe the government could provide more support, including promoting contracting as a viable employment option and clarifying employment structures, especially in light of the Domino's case.

Contractors Don't Perceive AI as a Competitive Threat

AI tools like ChatGPT and Microsoft CoPilot dominate usage among independent professionals, with emerging tools like Gemini, Claude, and Perplexity gaining traction. While some contractors avoid AI due to industry restrictions or a perceived lack of necessity, many are in the early stages of adoption or planning future implementation. AI is most commonly used for content creation, research, and communication, with moderate usage for technical tasks like coding and data analysis, and less frequent use for creative and design tasks. Contractors believe AI cannot replace human creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence. To complement AI effectively, professionals emphasise the need to develop problem-solving, communication, adaptability, and ethical decision-making skills. Successful integration requires understanding AI's limitations, crafting precise prompts, and applying human judgment to validate outputs. Independent professionals view AI as a powerful tool to enhance, not replace, human work.

The Confidence Index

The 2025 confidence index reveals an overall positive outlook for the Irish economy +17, showing slight improvement from 2024 +16. Contractors are highly optimistic about the future of the contracting sector, with a confidence score of +26, reflecting strong confidence across demographics and industries.

- **By Sector:** Confidence varies significantly by industry. ICT contractors express the highest confidence in the sector +31, while Medical Locum contractors report the lowest +4. Pharma contractors show the highest confidence in the Irish economy +18, while engineering reports the lowest +2.
- **By Gender:** Male contractors exhibit higher confidence in the contracting sector +27 compared to females +25. Similarly, males have greater confidence in the Irish economy +18 than females +13.
- **By Generation:** Millennials are the most optimistic generation about both the contracting sector +28 and the Irish economy +18. Boomers are the least confident, with confidence scores of +22 for the contracting sector and +15 for the economy.
- **Recruiters, Clients, and Contractors:** Recruiters express the highest confidence in the contracting sector +37, followed by clients +27 and contractors +26. For the Irish economy, clients lead with a confidence score of +22, followed by recruiters +19 and contractors +17.

These findings indicate a broadly positive sentiment toward the contracting sector and Irish economy

Upskill to Meet Client Needs

Recruiters emphasise the importance of independent professionals aligning their upskilling efforts with the most in-demand skills to meet client needs in 2025.

- **AI and Data Skills** – Expertise in AI, machine learning, and data analytics to drive digital transformation.
- **Project Management** – Certifications like PMP and Agile, paired with leadership capabilities.
- **Engineering Expertise** – Skills in automation and validation, especially in pharma and med devices.
- **Problem-Solving** – Innovation and critical thinking to tackle complex challenges.
- **IT and Cybersecurity** – Proficiency in cloud technologies and cybersecurity tools.



Contractor Profile

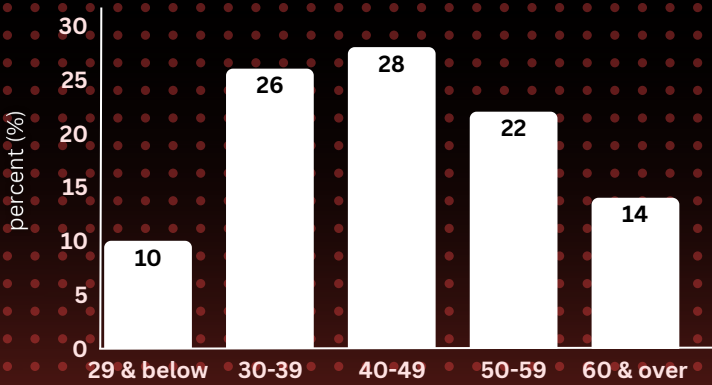


Quote from Respondent

“The Government is either pro-business, or it isn't. It can't have one foot in the door. Pro-business means supporting all size businesses - including one-person businesses. People can be in business on their own account. Stop trying to force people to be employees. The problem isn't how people are working. The problem is Government policy and old school thinking about how people should be working. The Irish Government is sticking its head in the sand and ignoring the voice of the people - we want to work this way.”

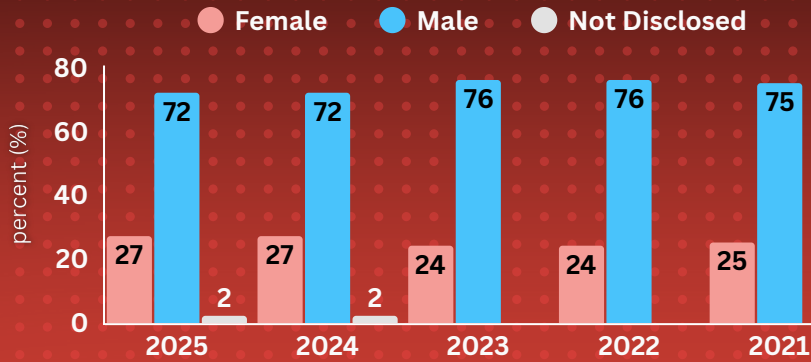
Independent contractors typically engage in two main types of work: gig/task-based work and project-based work.

Gig work is usually short-term, focused on specific tasks, and primarily involves the contractor delivering their individual service without deeper involvement in the organisation. In contrast, project-based work is more sustained and collaborative, with contractors usually working closely alongside employees to achieve broader project goals, (more than their individual contributions). While gig work can sometimes attract negative commentary, this is largely associated with low-skilled, low-paid roles.



Age

The average and median age of respondents is 45, three years younger than in 2024, continuing the downward trend from 2022 when the average age was 49. While 64% of respondents remain over 40 (down from 72% in 2024), this suggests that time and experience are still needed to build the skills required for contracting. However, the rising number of younger contractors signals a shift, 36% are now under 40, up from 28% in 2024 and 24% in 2023, indicating that contracting is becoming more accessible and attractive to younger professionals. With respondents ranging from 22 to 82 years old, it's clear that contracting can be a viable career choice at any age.



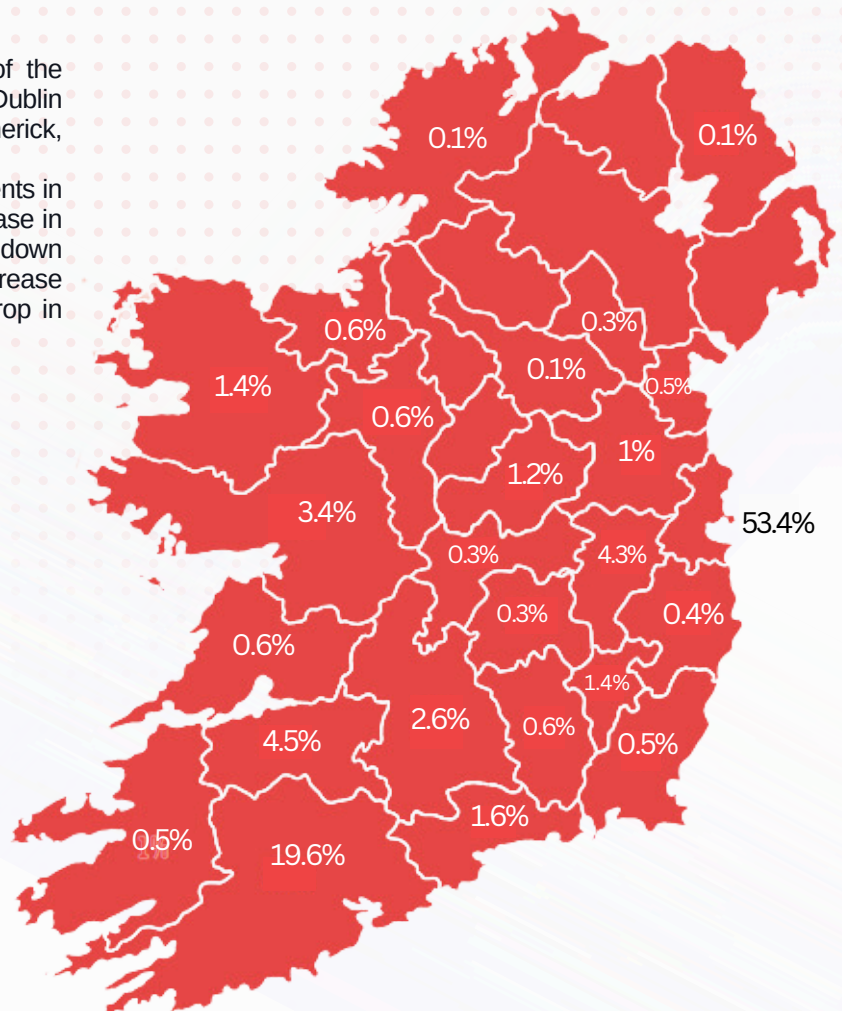
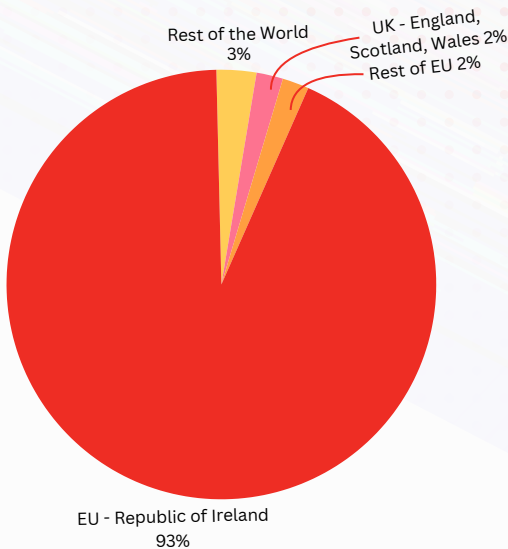
Gender

Women remain underrepresented in the contracting sector, with 27% of respondents identifying as female and 72% as male. This is consistent with 2024 figures. However, this reflects a slight increase from when the research started in 2021, when female participation was 25%. Male contractors continue to dominate the industry, while 2% of respondents chose not to disclose their gender.

Where the Work Happens

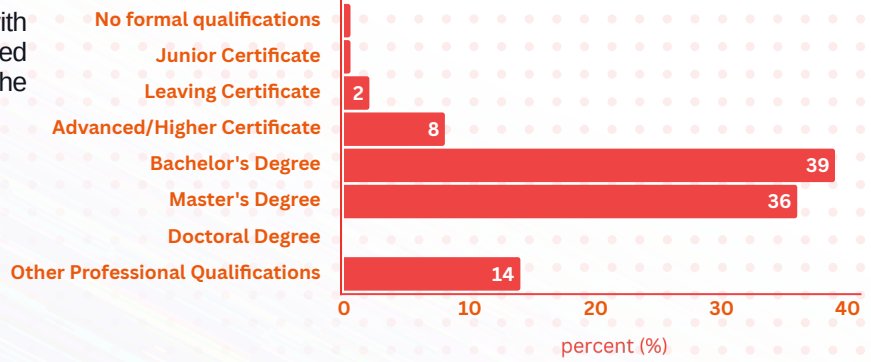
Within Ireland major cities still account for most of the work. The majority of respondents at 73% work in Dublin and Cork, down from 78% in 2024, 4.5% work in Limerick, 4% work in Kildare and 3% in Galway.

93% of respondents are completing their work for clients in the Republic of Ireland. There has been a 5% decrease in international trade in professional contractor service down from 12% in 2024 to 7% in 2025. There's a 3% decrease in those working for clients in the EU and a 2% drop in those working with clients in the rest of the world.



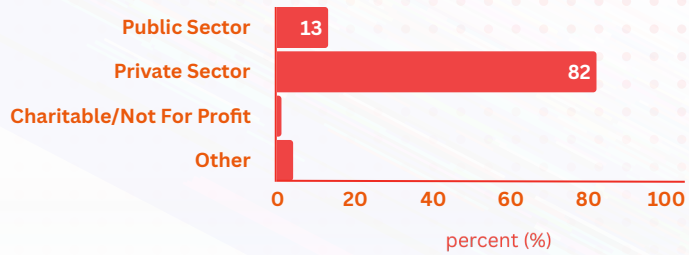
Education

Independent professionals are well educated with almost (97%) of respondents having attained third level qualifications of level 6 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications.



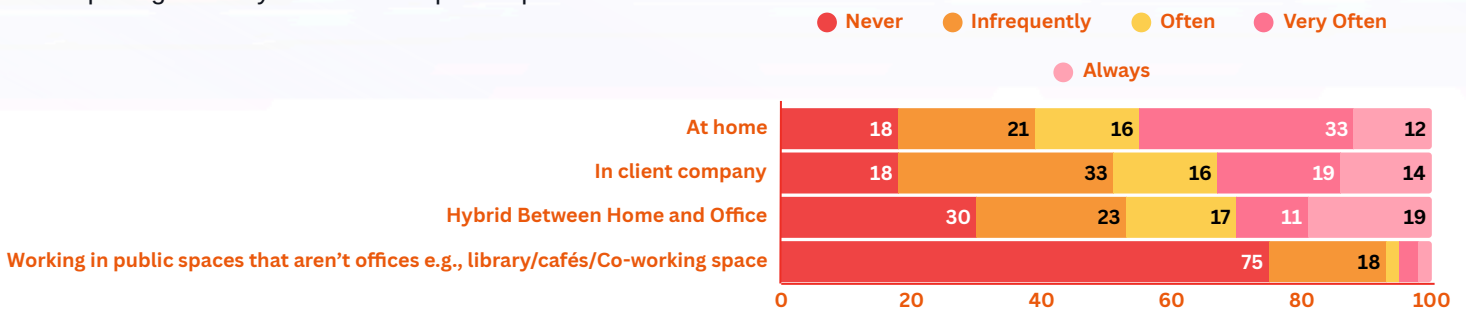
Client Industry

Contractors are present across various industries but are concentrated in key sectors like Pharma, Information & Communication Technology (ICT), and Finance. The majority 82% work within the private sector, a 3% increase from 2024. 73% of contractors reported working with a single client at a time, while 27% engage with multiple clients.



My Office Is

The return to office continues in 2025 with 45% of respondents reporting working from home, (WFH) very often or always, this is down 5% on 2024 report where 50% reported WFH very often or always. 33% reported working in client company very often or always in 2025 up 4% on 2024 report. Just over half 51% of all respondents this year engage in some form of hybrid working, showing that where respondents carry out their work has changed significantly when compared with pre covid working arrangements. Pre covid only (13%) of independent professionals reported working from home with (63%) working in client offices. Participants in 2025 survey reveal that working in public spaces is an unattractive option for contractors, with 75% reporting that they never work in public spaces.



Productivity

As part of the research this year respondents were asked to give some details on how the location of where they do their work affected their productivity.

The feedback from respondents suggests a balanced preference for both working from home (WFH) and working in the office, with many favouring a hybrid approach.

While home reportedly provides a focused, distraction-free environment, the office supports collaboration and relationship-building.

The results suggest that the location that best serves the individuals productivity depends on the type of work being done and the environment's suitability for that task.

Productivity When Working From Home Vs. When In-Office

Working from Home - Advantages

1. Fewer Distractions:

"Best concentration and least interruption when working from home."

2. No Commute, More Time:

"No commute gives me extra hours to focus on work."

3. Customised Workspace:

"I have the correct ergonomic setup at home, making it the most comfortable & productive space."

4. Better Work-Life Balance:

"Working from home gives me flexibility to manage personal and professional tasks."

5. Deep Focus for Complex Tasks:

"Deep work is better at home with no interruptions."

Working from Home - Disadvantages

1. Potential Distractions at Home:

"Home can be challenging with young children."

2. Lack of Social Interaction:

"Working from home can feel isolating."

3. Blurred Work-Life Boundaries:

"It's harder to switch off when working from home."

4. Limited Collaboration:

"Some tasks require being near colleagues for quicker decision-making."

5. Equipment and Connectivity Issues:

"Connectivity is the biggest concern when working away from office."

Working In Office - Advantages

1. Immediate Collaboration:

"Being on-site helps build relationships and speeds up decision-making."

2. Access to Resources:

"Better access to people and equipment on-site."

3. Clear Work-Life Separation:

"The commute creates a mental shift into work mode."

4. Faster Problem-Solving:

"Unscheduled in-office conversations lead to quicker resolutions."

5. Team Synergy and Learning:

"Collaboration with colleagues drives better team outcomes."

Working In Office - Disadvantages

1. Commute Stress and Time Loss:

"Commuting is an exhausting, dangerous waste of time."

2. Office Distractions:

"A lot of distractions in the office from colleagues and meetings."

3. Limited Flexibility:

"Office hours are more rigid, limiting personal flexibility."

4. Hot-Desking Discomfort:

"Hot desk setups aren't optimised for productivity."

5. Noise and Interruptions:

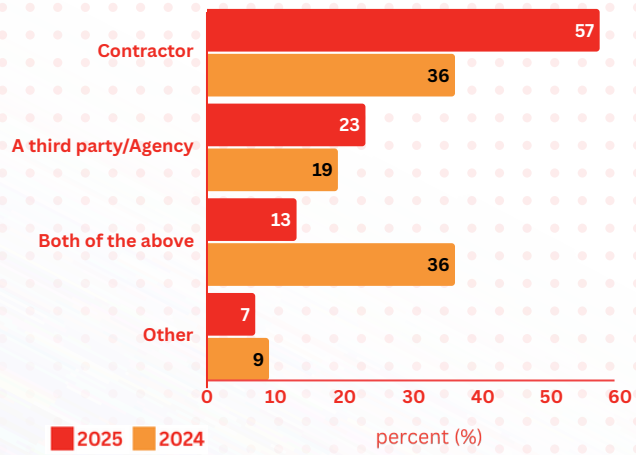
"Background noise and movement in the office affect concentration."

Contracting as a Career

A total of 78% of contractors voluntarily choose to contract. Having a strong network is important to ensure a continuous stream of work with 57% of respondents relying on their own initiative to find new work, up significantly on last year where 36% took the lead in finding their own work. (view data table for detail)

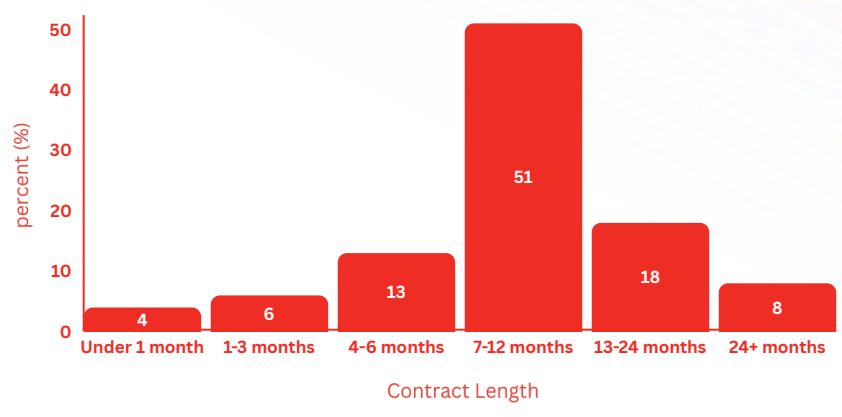
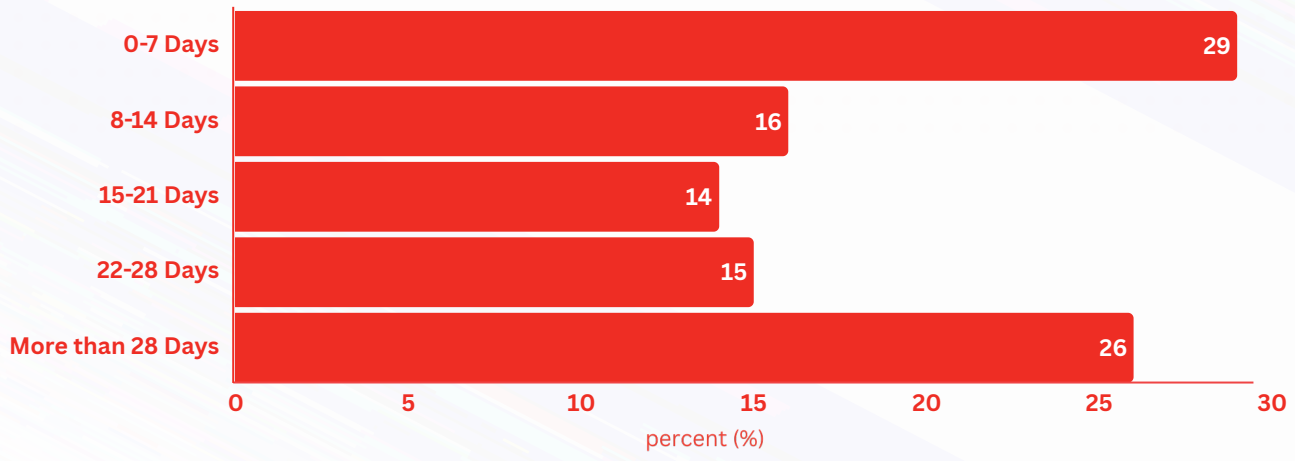
When probed further about how they mostly find their contracts, 15% reported using online job platforms such as Upwork, 30% found new work via social media, e.g. LinkedIn and Indeed, and 41% said they used their personal network and referrals to find new work. 23% rely solely on third parties (such as contract recruiters). 13% of 2025 participants used both approaches.

Who Takes The Lead In Finding New Work



Days to find new contract

The average time respondents spent looking for a new contract was 12 days, 3 days longer than in 2024. In 2021 independent professionals spent 5 weeks looking for work, so over the course of this research there has still been a significant reduction in the length of time contractors spend looking for work. This is likely an indication of more companies utilising a blended workforce model leading to more availability of contract work.



Contract Length

The average contract length is 14 months, the same as last year. Almost half of the sample 51% reported their contract length between 7-12 months. Participants reported contracts between 13-24 months up slightly year on year 18% in 2025 versus 15% in 2024.

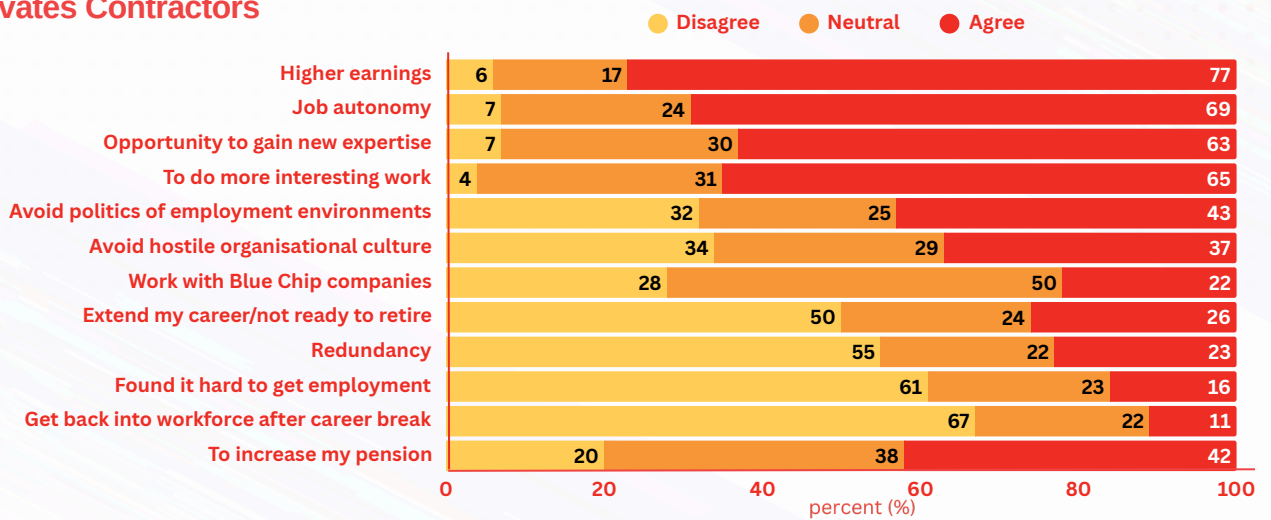
Key Motivators

In 2025 higher earnings and job autonomy remain the key motivations for contractors, with 77% citing higher earnings and 69% citing job autonomy as their main reasons for choosing contract work. 42% were motivated to choose contracting as a way to increase their pension. 23% were motivated to choose contracting following redundancy – this is up 5% from 18% in 2024 report, perhaps reflecting the layoffs seen in 2024 particularly in the tech sector. 11% were motivated to choose contracting to get back into the workforce following a career break.

Respondent's Additional Motivations for Choosing Contracting...

- “Greater flexibility and work-life balance”
- “Preference for remote work over returning to the office, avoiding commuting”
- “Avoidance of performance reviews and rigid evaluation systems”
- “Motivation to generate personal wealth rather than contributing to corporate profits”
- “Advantageous tax benefits”
- “Better work environment for mental health”
- “Accommodation for personal or neurodiverse needs”
- “Balancing work with caregiving duties”
- “Counter age discrimination”
- “Turning personal interests into a career”

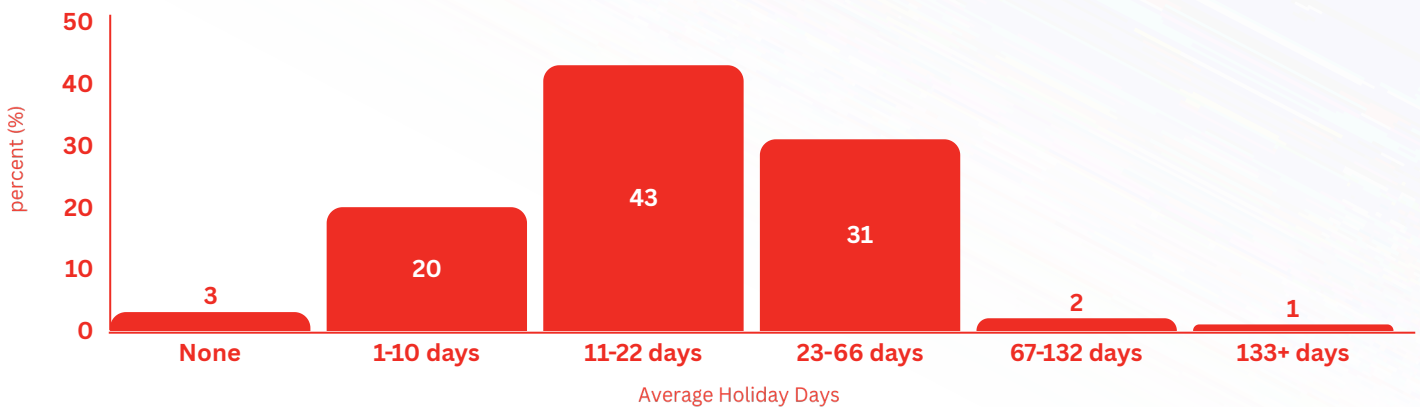
What Motivates Contractors



Holidays

The average holidays taken were reported as 21 days in 2025 down one day since last year. 66% of respondents reported taking less than 23 days holidays in the year. The opportunity cost of taking holidays may well be the reason that almost two thirds of contractors take less than 23 days annual leave, as contractors generally do not receive any holiday pay benefit.

Percentage of Holiday Days Taken



Average Holiday Days

2024
22 days

2023
24 days

2022
21 days

2021
17 days

Daily Rate

Contractors typically earn higher pay than permanent employees in similar roles. This higher rate compensates for the perceived lower job security and the lack of employee benefits like sick pay, holiday pay, and social welfare support that contractors do not receive. Employers are willing to pay this premium in exchange for the flexibility, specialised skills, and immediate results contractors provide.

For the first time in the five-year history of this report, the average daily rate for contractors fell by 3% year-on-year, from €571 in 2024 to €552 in 2025. While we are seeing a slight drop in the overall average daily rate the contracting pay landscape varies significantly by industry, gender, and age.

Average Daily Rate by Age



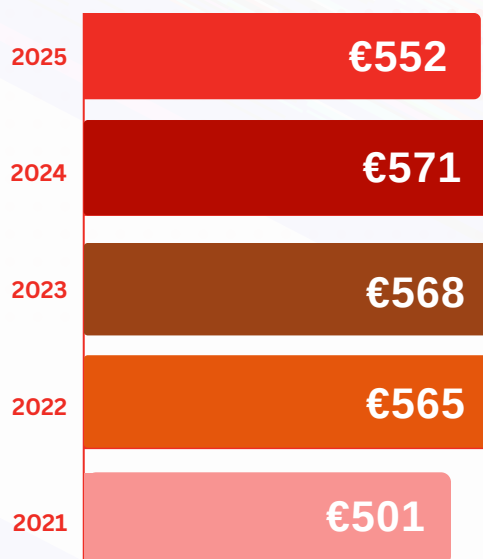
Several factors could contribute to daily rate decrease;

The average daily rate has decreased by 3% year-on-year, now standing at €552. This drop is partly explained by the changing age profile of the contracting sector; an increase in the number of younger contractors who are typically paid less than older counterparts, combined with reports of rate reductions in some sectors likely driven by increased availability of contractors following lay offs in some of the big tech companies last year.

While we are seeing a slight drop in the overall average daily rate in 2025 this does not apply to all age groups. Younger contractors (29 and under) experienced the largest decrease in average daily rates, down 8% from 2024 to 2025, while those aged 60 and older saw a 5% decline. However, all other age groups reported increases in their average daily rate.

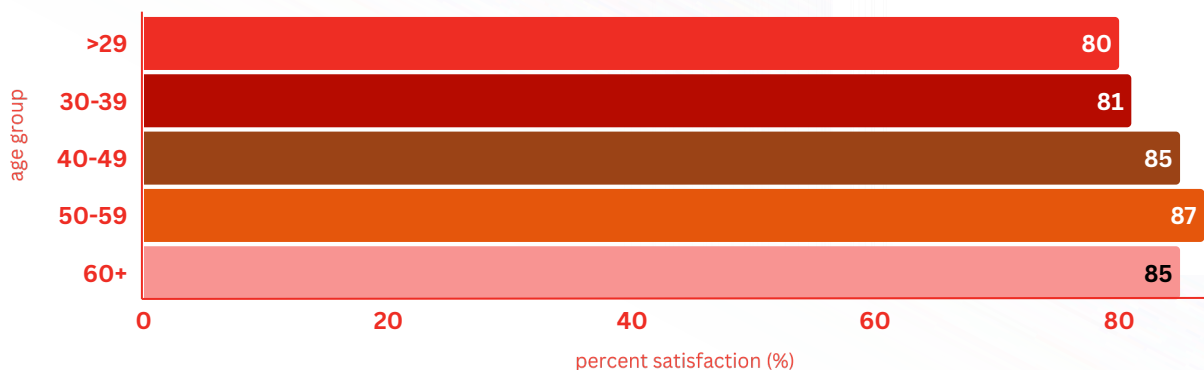
Contractors in the ICT and finance sectors have also reported increases. In contrast, those in the pharma, engineering, and medical locum industries experienced an average daily rate decline, however it should be noted that this average daily rate drop does not apply to all age groups or genders in those industries.

Average Daily Rates



Satisfaction with Daily Rate

Contractors across all sectors and genders report significantly higher satisfaction with their rate of pay in 2025 compared to 2024. The percentage of contractors reporting satisfaction has risen for all age groups except those aged 29 or younger, their percentage reported satisfaction rate remains the same at 80% year on year.



Average Daily Rate by Industry

The daily rate varies significantly by industry. Of the key industries in the contracting sector, those working in the finance sector report the highest daily rates at €695 against the average daily rate of €552.

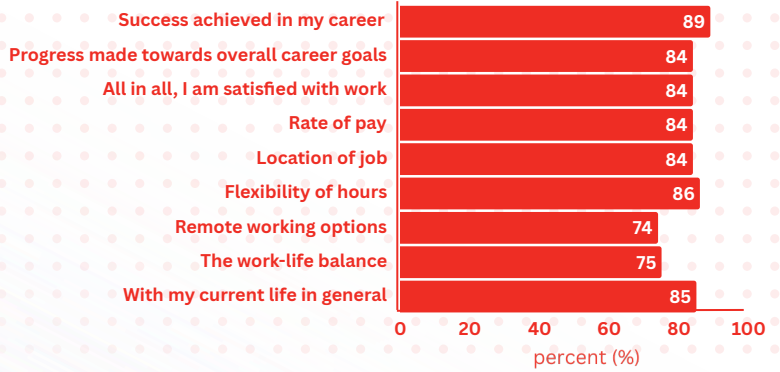
	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICE	-	€375	€275	-	-
ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT SERVICE	€425	€605	€825	€339	€450
AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHING	€463	€485	€453	€527	€447
CONSTRUCTION	€583	€598	€676	€732	€459
CREATIVE, ART, ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION	€387	€524	€413	€522	€525
EDUCATION	€505	€616	€402	€1,186	€515
ELECTRICITY, GAS, STEAM AND AIR CONDITIONING SUPPLY	€698	€619	€473	€557	€564
ENGINEERING AND TECHNICAL ACTIVITIES	€542	€545	€543	€565	€460
FINANCE	€519	€661	€633	€598	€589
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	€695	€532	€540	€568	€529
INSURANCE	€631	€767	€620	€591	€544
LIFE SCIENCES	€632	€581	€561	€582	€488
MANUFACTURING	€529	€599	€516	€638	€510.00
MARKETING AND DESIGN	€585	€630	€353	€617	€366
MEDICAL DEVICE	€452	€498	€493	€451	€429
MEDICAL LOCUM	€397	€522	€670	€597	€475
MINING AND QUARRYING	€474	€0	€0	€560	€0
OTHER HUMAN HEALTH AND SOCIAL WORK ACTIVITIES	€200	€612	€898	€434	€459
OTHER SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITIES	€500	€389	€690	€288	€0
OTHER SERVICE ACTIVITIES	€632	€560	€413	€728	€699
PHARMA	€486	€496	€527	€509	€452
PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES (E.G., LEGAL, MANAGEMENT CONSULTANCY, ADVERTISING, ETC.)	€873	€725	€767	€702	€733
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEFENCE (COMPULSORY SOCIAL SECURITY)	€611	€654.00	€586	€762	€615
REAL ESTATE	-	€300	€400	€738	€0
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	€635	€549	€581	€576	€0
TRANSPORT AND STORAGE	€596	€606	€625	€552	€559
WATER SUPPLY, SEWERAGE, WASTE MANAGEMENT AND REMEDIATION	€454	€715	€590	€531	€527
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE (INCLUDING SALES OF CLOTHING, FOOTWEAR AND TEXTILES, REPAIR OF MOTOR VEHICLES AND MOTORCYCLES)	€625	€456	€650	€580	€480

Contractors Are Happy

Its official contractors are happy! 84% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their current life in general. Contractors also expressed satisfaction with their work. In the survey, contractors were asked about their level of satisfaction with some key elements of their job and working life. The flexibility of hours gained the highest satisfaction from the contractors 86%, followed by the current life in general 85%, location of the job 84%, rate of pay 84%, overall work satisfaction 84%, remote working options 74% and work-life balance 75%. 2025 report sees most of the factors contributing to life and work satisfaction increase from 2024 results most notably an 18% rise in the percentage of respondents expressing satisfaction with the rate of pay and a 9% increase in the percentage expressing satisfaction with their current life in general.

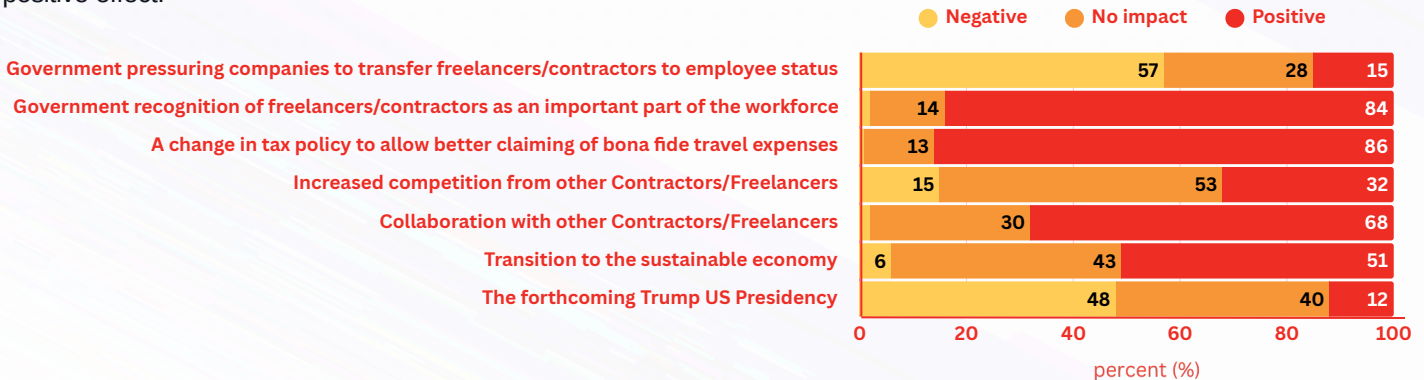
Overall, the contractors were satisfied with their career, whereby 89% of respondents reported that they are satisfied with the success they had achieved in their career and 84% are satisfied with the progress they had made towards meeting their overall career goals. The well-being of contractors is relatively good, with just 22% of respondents reported loneliness, and 13% reported burnout, both down slightly from 2024.

Career Satisfaction



Factors Influencing Contract Work

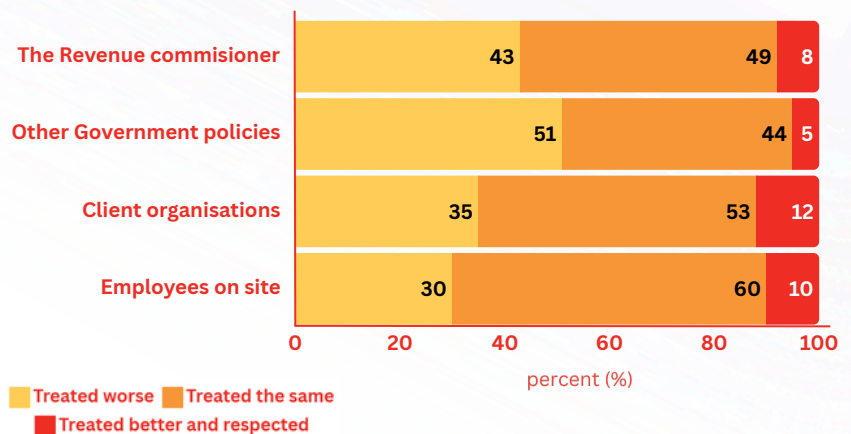
Contractors shared their views on how various local and global socioeconomic factors affect their contract work, they were asked to indicate whether these factors impacts were positive, negative, or neutral. In 2025 the majority 84% of respondents believe that greater recognition of contractors as an important part of the workforce would positively affect their contract work, along with 86% who believe that changes to tax policy relating to the claiming of travel expenses would also have a positive impact. Almost half 48% of all respondents believe that the Trump presidency will have a negative impact on their contract work, while 57% believe that Irish government pressuring companies to transfer contractors/ freelancers to employee status will affect their contract work negatively. Contractors remain positive about collaboration with others with 68% believing that collaboration has a positive impact on their contract work, and 85% agree competition from other contractors has a neutral or positive effect.



How Are Contractors Treated

Contractors were asked how they perceive the treatment of self-employed workers compared to employees by the Government, client companies, and on-site employees. The results show that 43% of contractors believe the self-employed are treated worse than employees by Revenue, and over half of the respondents 51% feel they are treated worse by the Government. In contrast, 65% of contractors believe client companies treat self-employed workers the same or better than employees, and 70% feel they are treated equal or better by employees on-site.

How do you believe self-employed people are treated by...



Artificial Intelligence At Work

This year's survey aimed to identify the most commonly used AI tools among independent professionals, uncover what the main use cases for these tools, and gain understanding as to how independent professionals see AI enhancing human work. It also explored which specific human skills independent professionals consider essential for effectively complementing AI.

ChatGPT and Microsoft CoPilot dominate AI tool usage among independent professionals. Tools like Gemini, Claude, and Perplexity are gaining traction, indicating diverse preferences for generative AI. Niche tools are selectively used for specialised functions, while some respondents reported avoiding AI due to industry restrictions or expressed a perceived lack of necessity to use AI tools. Other respondents reported being in the early stages of AI adoption or planning future implementation.

The top 10 areas where independent professionals use AI tools covers a wide range of functions, though usage frequency varies. AI is most commonly used for content creation, research, and communication. There is moderate use for technical tasks like coding and data analysis, while use for creative and design-related tasks is less common. Although administrative support is reported less frequently, it is emerging as a growing area for AI adoption.

Top 10 use cases for AI:

1. Content Creation and Editing
2. Research and Information Gathering
3. Project Management and Planning
4. Technical Support and Coding
5. Communication and Collaboration
6. Data Analysis and Reporting
7. Creative Design and Media Production
8. Learning and Upskilling
9. Administrative Support
10. Idea Generation and Brainstorming

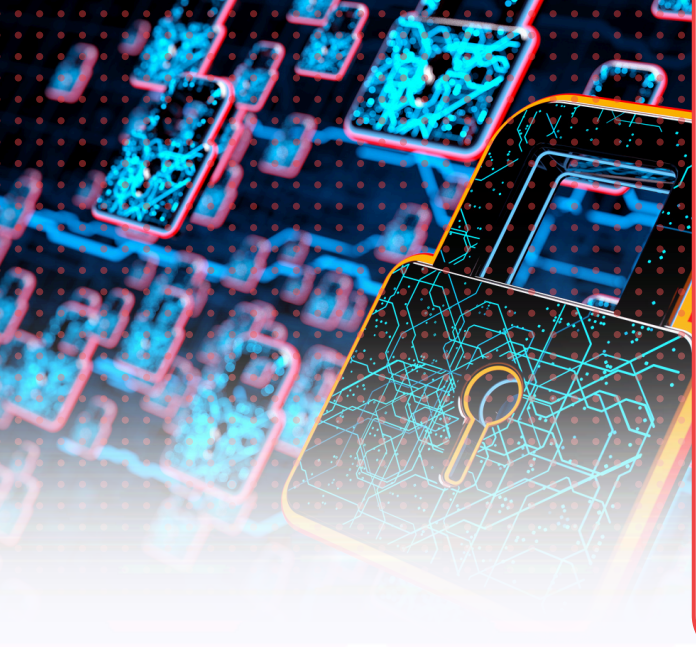
Top 10 AI Tools Used By Contractors

1. ChatGPT (OpenAI)
2. MidJourney
3. Microsoft CoPilot (including GitHub CoPilot)
4. Bing Co-Pilot
5. Google Gemini
6. Automation Tools (Apple AI, AWS, HubSpot AI)
7. Claude (Anthropic)
8. Otter.ai
9. Perplexity AI
10. InVideo AI

AI Enhances Human Work

Independent professionals were asked about the ways in which AI enhances human work. It is evident that independent professionals consider AI to have many benefits in supporting the work that they do. Respondents reported AI enhancing human work as it:

- Increases Efficiency and Productivity
- Supports Creativity and Idea Generation
- Improves Communication and Clarity
- Facilitates Decision-Making
- Enhances Learning and Upskilling
- Boosts Project Management and Planning
- Promotes Innovation
- Supports Emotional and Strategic Thinking



Essential skills for humans required to complement AI effectively.

Respondents were asked their opinion on what specific human skills they felt were essential to complement AI effectively. The responses highlight that while independent professionals agree that AI significantly enhances human work by automating repetitive tasks, increasing efficiency, and providing quick access to information, it cannot replace human creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence. To maximise the benefits of AI, respondents believe that humans must develop skills in problem-solving, communication, adaptability, and ethical decision-making. Success in integrating AI effectively depends on understanding its limitations, crafting precise prompts, and applying human judgment to validate and refine AI-generated outcomes.

Intentions to Upskill

Contractors are generally at the forefront of innovation and transformative projects so their insights into technical skills that they intend to acquire should indicate which future skills will be valued and sought after by industry. The list of technical skills that contractors have said they intend to acquire in the next 12 months show that AI and automation, project management, and cloud computing are the leading areas of upskilling interest.

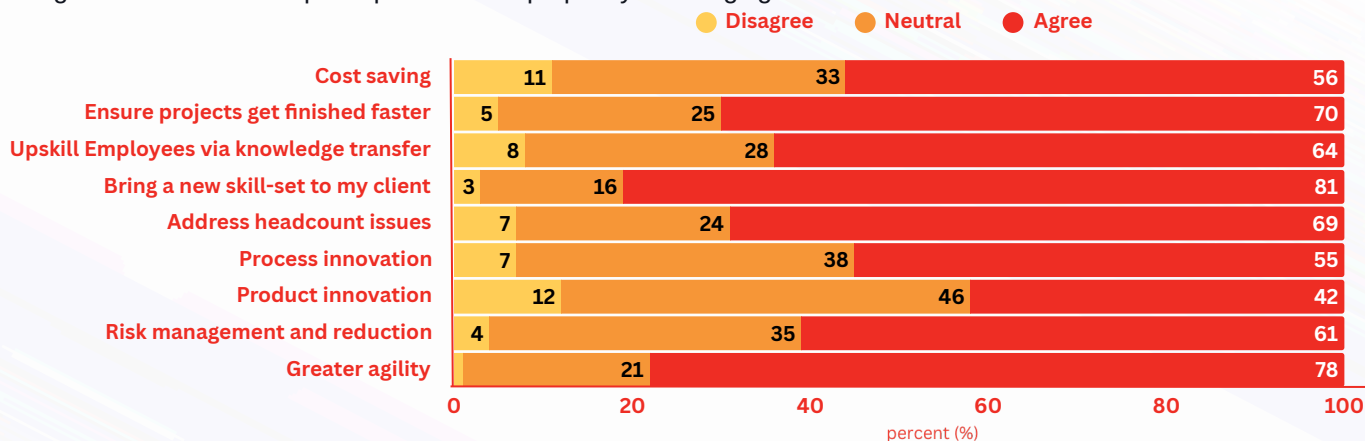
This is closely followed by a growing interest in coaching and mentoring to enhance team performance and personal growth. Communication skills and creative thinking are also widely recognised as essential for fostering innovation and effective collaboration. Others reported their intention to strengthen their emotional intelligence through counselling and psychotherapy training.

Skills in data analytics, software development, and cybersecurity continue to be recognised as valuable. Upskilling in engineering, digital marketing, and business management highlights that independent professionals focus on enhancing both their technical expertise and their strategic leadership capabilities. When asked about which human skills they intend to upskill in over the next 12 months, they report leadership and management as the top priority for development.

Respondents were asked about any other areas they intend to upskill in over the next 12 months. The most frequently reported areas for upskilling fall into leadership and management, technology and digital skills, followed by industry-specific qualifications. Entrepreneurial ambitions and creative pursuits also feature, the range of answers provided reflects the fact that independent professionals have a diverse approach to career and personal development.

The Benefits For Client Companies

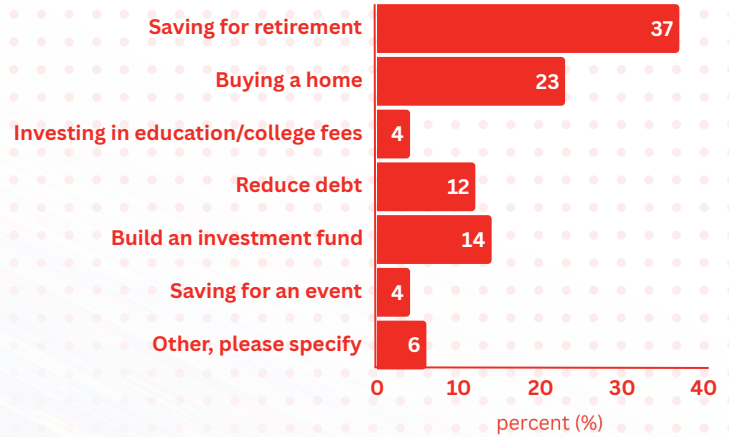
Contractors were asked about the benefits client companies gain from engaging their services. Of those surveyed, 81% agreed they provide new skill sets, 78% believed they make companies more agile, and 70% said they help complete projects faster. 69% felt that companies benefited from the ability to address headcount challenges. 64% said the benefits included upskilling employees and knowledge transfer, 56% said cost savings, 55% agreed the benefits included process innovation, with 42% saying companies benefited from product innovation as a result of engaging contractors. Reported benefits also include contractors bringing fresh perspectives, new energy, and unbiased insights that enhance decision-making, as well as providing greater access to a global talent pool. It's easy to understand why more companies are engaging with contractors, the benefits they bring are valuable and help companies to adapt quickly to changing demands.



Financial goals in next 5 year

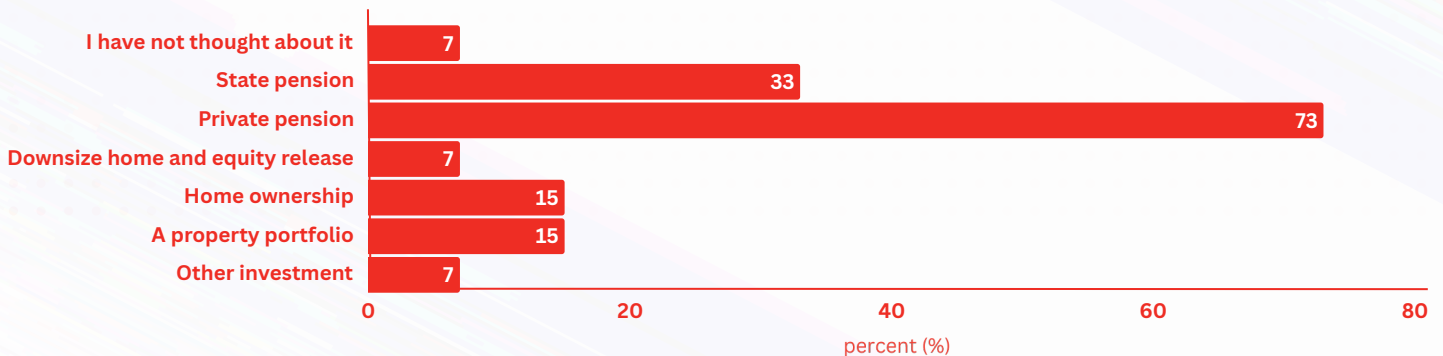
The most common financial goals expressed by independent professionals is saving for retirement, followed by saving to buy a home, paying off debt and building an investment fund. 4% of respondents said their goals included saving for an event, with a further 4% saving for education and college fees.

Other financial goals reported include; paying off mortgages, saving for travel and home improvements, retirement planning, supporting family needs, especially children's education. A smaller portion of respondents had financial goals relating to career growth, creating financial freedom, contributing to charity, and creating passive income streams, while some are just focused on basic survival due to rising living costs. However, a few respondents expressed having no specific financial goals.



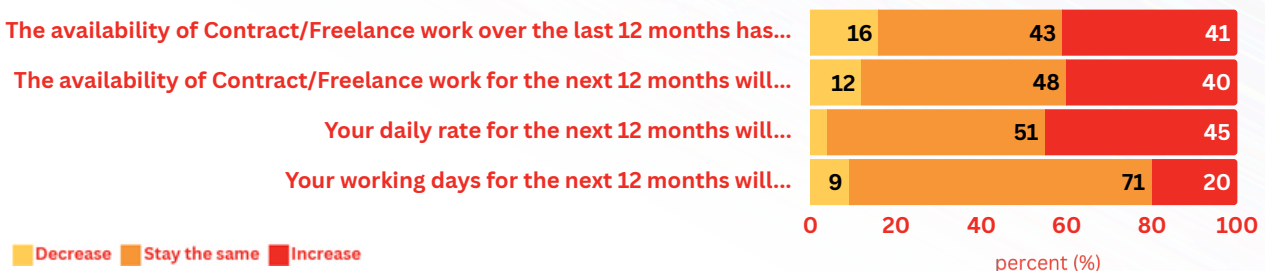
How do you intend to fund your retirement?

73% of contractors intend to fund their retirement using a private pension, while 33% will use the state pension. Other reported strategies for funding retirement among respondents is through shares, stocks, and equity investments. This is closely followed by investment funds and diversified portfolios. Traditional methods like savings also remain significant. Emerging strategies include cryptocurrency investments and property ownership. Some respondents plan to continue working part-time or rely on private funds and business ownership, while a few mention inheritance or express plans to invest in the future after clearing debts.

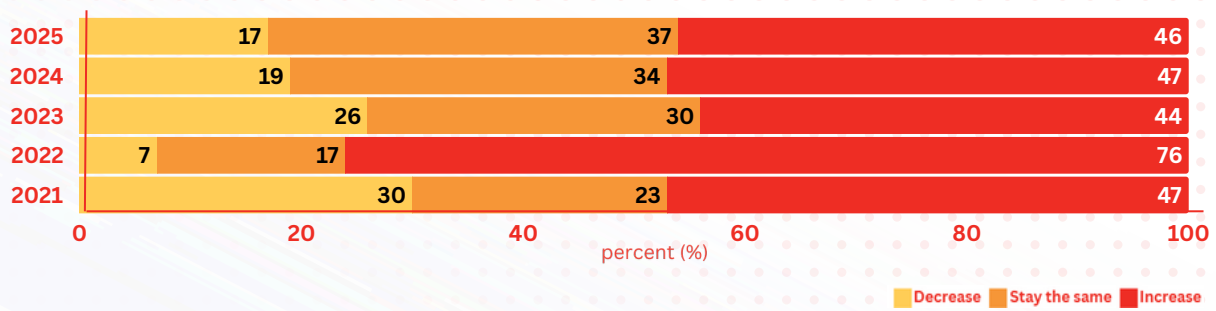


Looking To The Future

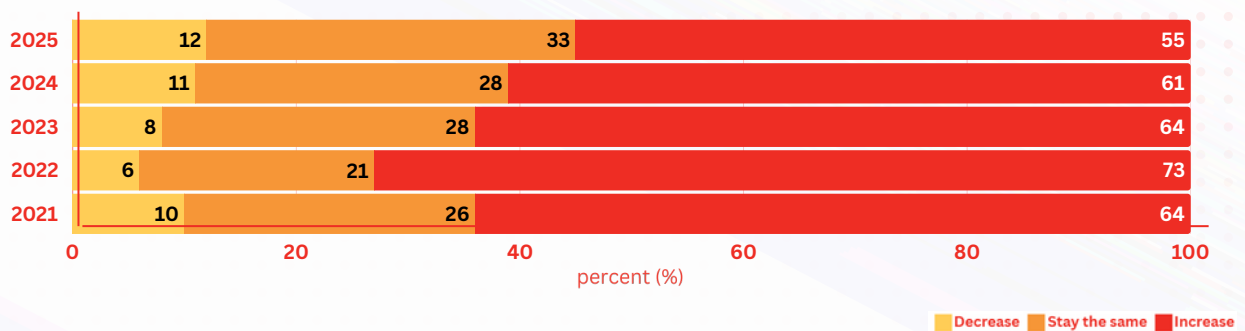
88% of independent contractors expect the availability of contract work over the next 12 months to stay the same or increase, 96% expect their daily rate to increase or stay the same and 91% of respondents expect their working days for the next 12 months to remain the same or increase. 46% expect the economy in 2025 to outperform the economy in 2024, with 37% expecting it to perform about the same. The longer term outlook for the contracting sector is also very positive with 88% of respondents expecting it to remain the same or increase in the next 3 to 5 years.



Compared to the previous year do you expect the performance of the Irish Economy to...



Do you think the Contracting Sector in the next 3 to 5 years will...



Confidence Index

Throughout this report, you will see references to the 'Confidence Index'. This index measures participants' confidence across several areas based on their responses to multiple key questions. These questions were similar in nature but presented in different ways to ensure accuracy. The average of these responses is used to calculate the Confidence Index. A score of zero reflects a completely neutral outlook. A positive score (up to a maximum of 100) indicates a positive outlook, while a negative score signals unfavourable or pessimistic views about the economic or business future.

Confidence in the Irish Economy

When asked about the performance of the Irish economy in 2025, 46% (47% in 2024) of contractors believed it would increase compared to 2024; 37% (34% in 2024) believed that it would stay the same and 17% (19% in 2024) believed it would decrease. The confidence index was +17 up slightly on the confidence index of +16 reported in 2024.

The Performance of The Contracting Sector

When specifically asked about the performance of the contracting sector in Ireland in 2025, More than half 55% of contractors believed the contracting sector would increase, slightly less than the 61% who believed the sector would increase in 2024. 33% (28% in 2024) believed it would stay the same and 12% (11% in 2024) thought that it would decrease. The confidence index was +26 down slightly on the 2024 index reported of +30.

The Irish Economy Confidence Index

2025	+16
2024	+16
2023	+10
2022	+38
2021	+7

The Contracting Sector Confidence Index

2025	+30
2024	+30
2023	+31
2022	+37
2021	+30



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

CONTRACTING
PLUS

Project Economy



"I have worked with most of my clients on multiple occasions and on multiple projects. You are recognised as part of the workforce albeit someone who comes and goes depending on the project."

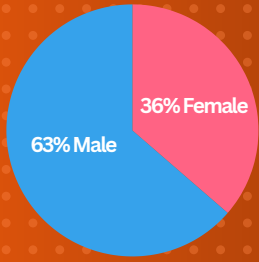
Quote from Respondent

The project economy typically entails the more dynamic and higher value-added component of the overall economy involving activities such as innovation, scaling of business, new ventures and the adoption of new technologies. These encompass both corporate enterprise as well as entrepreneurial start-up and scaling by SMEs.

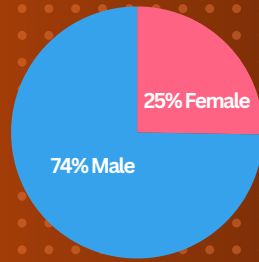
Our survey is predominantly drawn from high-skilled contractors. 94% of the participants in our survey are in managerial, professional, high-tech and associated professional occupations, or categorized as Standard Occupational Classifications (SOCs) 1-3. As the survey is focused on high-skilled independent contractors it covers both gig and project economy workers. The high skilled sector gig workers are better off than equivalent employees as they earn more and have higher levels of job satisfaction. However, high-skilled independent contractors working in the project economy earn even more and with higher levels of job satisfaction than high-skilled gig workers. The project economy workforce is nearly 7 times larger than the gig economy (75% project, 11% gig with the remainder doing both forms of contract). In terms of combined value of workers earnings the project economy workforce is worth 9 times more than the gig economy.

Amongst high skilled contractors in managerial, professional, high-tech and associated professional occupations, those who are engaged on a project basis are paid roughly €587 down from €597 per day in 2024, a slight drop year on year, while high-skilled contractors hired on a task/gig basis are earning €442 per day versus €535 per day in 2024 a drop of 17% year on year. In terms of annual earnings, those working in the Project Economy earned an average of €124,823 per annum, while those working on an ad-hoc task or gig basis average earnings came in at €94,498 per annum in 2025.

Task/Gig-based Contractor



Project-Based Contractor



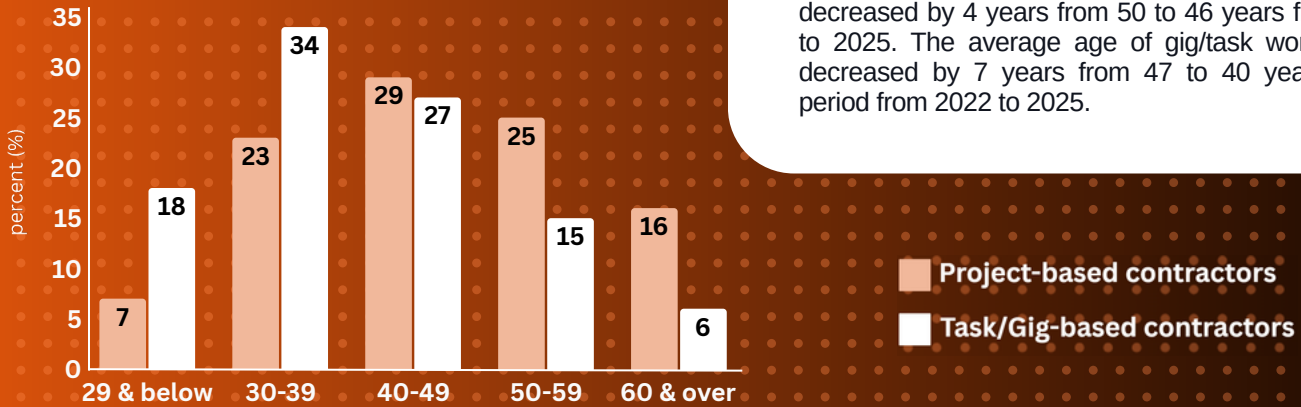
Gender

The project-based contractor is predominately male (74%) while task/gig sector has a higher percentage of females (36%). There has been a slight increase in the percentage of females engaging in both project and gig/task work in 2025 compared to 2024.

Age

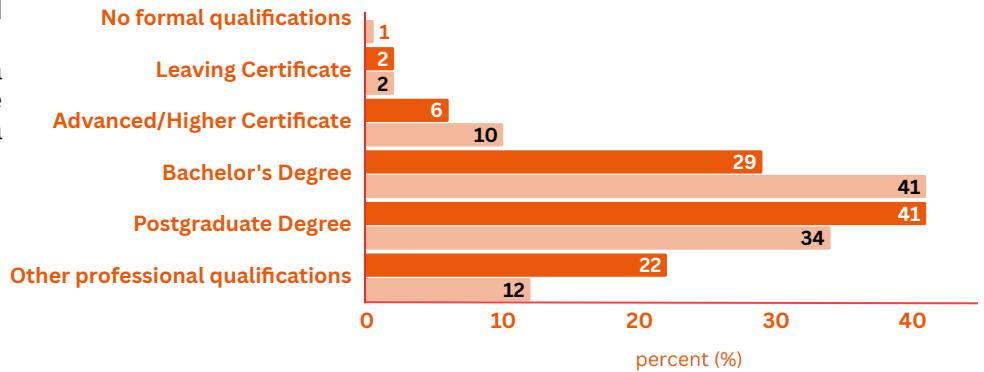
Contractors in project-based work tend to be older than those completing gig/ task-based work. 41% of project contractors are 50 years of age or older, whereas only 21% of gig/task workers are aged 50 or older. The average age of project workers has decreased by 4 years from 50 to 46 years from 2022 to 2025. The average age of gig/task workers has decreased by 7 years from 47 to 40 years in the period from 2022 to 2025.

Age



Education

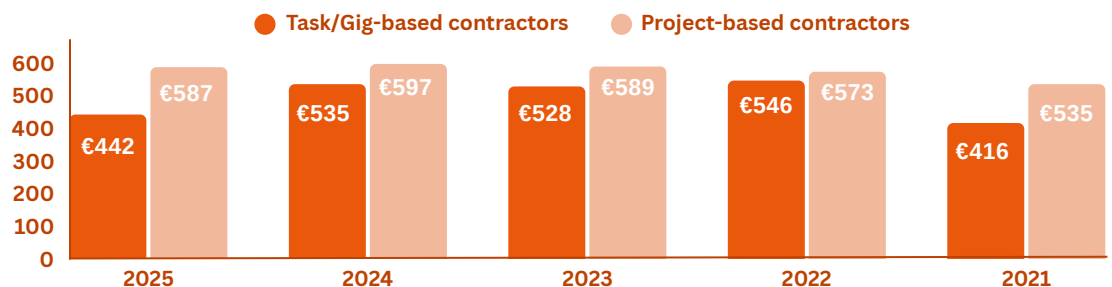
Both project-based contractors and gig/task workers are highly educated, with 75% of project workers having a bachelor's or postgraduate degree and 70% of gig workers having a bachelor's or postgraduate degree.



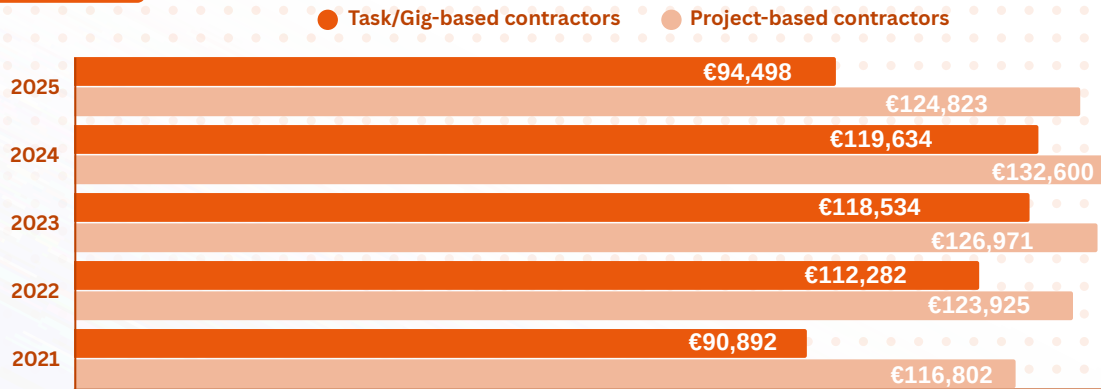
What Professional Contractors are Earning

In terms of annual earnings, independent professionals working in the Project Economy earn an average of €124,823 per annum, 32% more than similarly skilled professionals working on an ad-hoc task or gig basis whose average earnings came in at €94,498 per annum in 2025. The difference in average annual earnings has increased significantly since 2024 when the reported differential was just 11%.

Daily Rates



Annual Earnings



Job Satisfaction

Contractors working on projects reported higher satisfaction across seven key aspects of their job and working life compared to those in gig/task-based roles. 87% of project-based contractors expressed satisfaction with their life in general, compared to 77% of gig/task workers. Both groups reported an increase in life satisfaction in 2025 compared to 2024. 91% of project contractors were satisfied with their career success, compared to 82% of gig/task contractors.

Satisfaction with pay rates also improved significantly. In 2025, 86% of project workers were satisfied with their pay, up from 70% in 2024. Similarly, gig/task workers' pay satisfaction rose from 62% in 2024 to 80% in 2025. However, satisfaction with remote work options declined for gig/task contractors, dropping from 49% in 2024 to 43% in 2025. In contrast, 80% of project contractors remained satisfied with their remote work options.

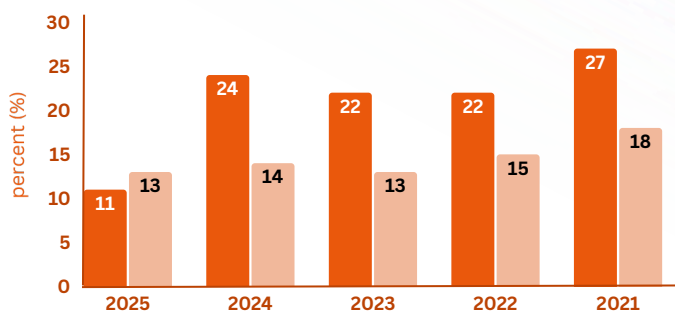


Wellbeing

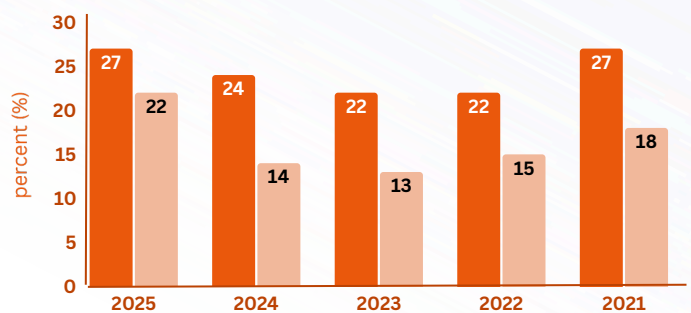
Overall well-being remains high for both groups, though burnout rates differ slightly. Burnout among project workers was 13% in 2025, slightly higher than the 11% reported by gig/task contractors. However, burnout rates for both groups have declined, with gig/task workers showing a more significant drop from 24% in 2024 to 11% in 2025.

Feelings of loneliness were more common among gig/task workers, with 27% reporting loneliness in 2025, up from 24% in 2024. In comparison, 22% of project-based contractors reported experiencing loneliness.

Experience Burnout



Experience Loneliness



Confidence Index

Business Confidence Index

Both groups of contractors remain positive in outlook towards the contracting sector in the next 3-5 years. Project-based contractors have a confidence index score of +28 down from +33 in 2024, while task/gig-based contractors have a score of +16 down from +17 in 2024. While both scores have dropped the project-based workers are more positive about the future of the contracting sector than the task/gig workers.

Looking to the Future - Irish Economy 2025

Project-based work typically focuses on innovation and business transformation, key drivers of economic growth. As a result, independent professional contractors involved in this high-skilled, project-driven work gain early insight into business expansion and emerging trends. This makes their perspective on the economy particularly valuable.

In 2025, project-based contractors remain confident in Ireland's economic performance, reflected in a positive confidence index score of +18. Task and gig-based contractors are also optimistic, with a confidence index score of +12, up from +7 in 2024.

The Contracting Sector Confidence Index

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Project-Based Contractors	+28	+33	+34	+34	+33
Task/Gig-Based Contractors	+16	+17	+22	+38	+20

The Irish Economy Confidence Index

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Project-Based Contractors	+18	+19	+13	+31	+12
Task/Gig-Based Contractors	+12	+7	-9	+40	-14

Women in Contracting



"I am taking on work that I enjoy and am free to manage my own workload. Better work / life balance as I am available for my children but also able to participate in the workforce and make a valuable contribution in my sector."

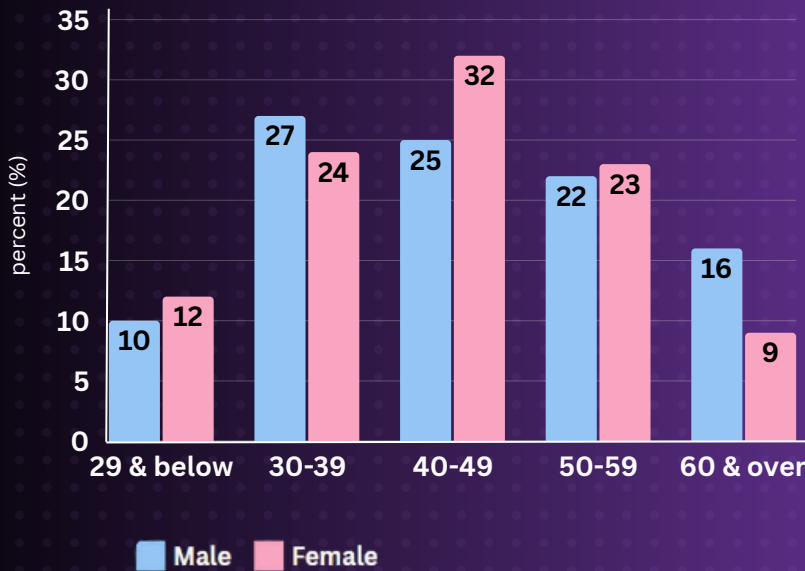
Quote from Respondent

In 2025, professional contracting in Ireland continues to be male dominated; however, for the second consecutive year, women now represent more than a quarter 27% of professional contractors. Despite this progress, gender representation remains uneven across industries. Female participation in the medical locum sector is higher than average at 44%, but women are still underrepresented in most of the other major contracting sectors.

For the first time in this five-year study, the average daily rate for female contractors is higher than that of male contractors, however female annual earnings remain lower than male annual earnings (€114, 705 v's €119,069), this is due to the fact that women work fewer days than men in a year. The gender pay gap within the contracting sector has narrowed to 3.6%, significantly lower than the 6.9% gender pay gap in the wider Irish labour market, (CSO 2023). This increased earning potential may be drawing more women into the contracting field. Contracting is becoming increasingly popular among women, particularly younger women. Results show 12% of female contractors were aged 29 or younger, compared to 10% of male contractors. The average age of female contractors is 44, slightly younger than the male average of 45. The benefits of contracting such as flexibility and higher pay rates are key factors in attracting women, offering them the opportunity to engage in meaningful work while maintaining a better work-life balance than traditional employment.

The 2025 results reveal that 84% of women in the contracting sector are satisfied with their overall life. 81% of female contractors chose self-employment voluntarily, compared to 76% of their male counterparts. This highlights the growing appeal of contracting for women, offering greater autonomy, flexibility, and work-life balance.

Women remain optimistic about the future of the contracting sector over the next 3 to 5 years, with a confidence index score of +27 and about the Irish economy with a confidence index score of +13.



Age by Gender

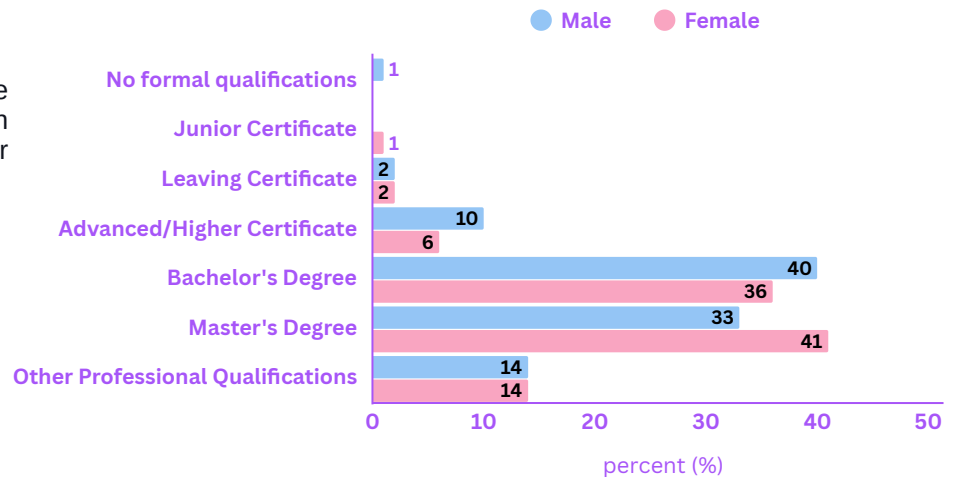
The report reveals that 36% of female contractors are now under 40 years old, marking a 6% increase from the previous year. There has also been a 4% rise in the number of female contractors aged 40–49. However, the data shows a 10% decline in female contractors aged 50 and older.

Average Age By Year



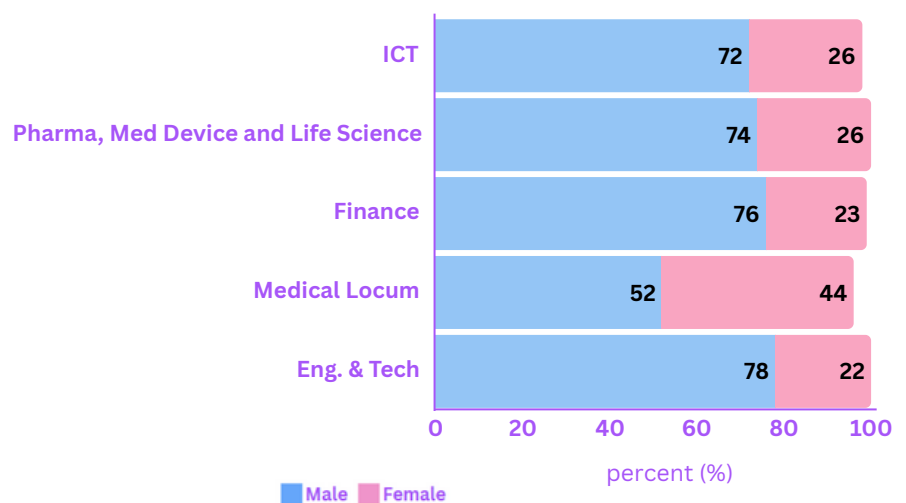
Education

Both male and female contractors are highly educated with 97% of both genders having a third level education or equivalent professional qualification.



Industry Split by Gender

The survey revealed that while industries, such as medical locums, have a higher-than-average proportion of female contractors at 44%, women are still underrepresented in most of the other major contracting sectors (Pharma 26%, ICT 26%, medical devices 25%, life sciences 25%, finance 23% and engineering 22%). The medical device sector has seen the largest increase in the number of female contractors over the past year up from 14% in 2020 to 25% in 2025. Engineering and ICT sectors have also seen an increase in the percentage of female contractors up 4% and 2% respectively year on year.

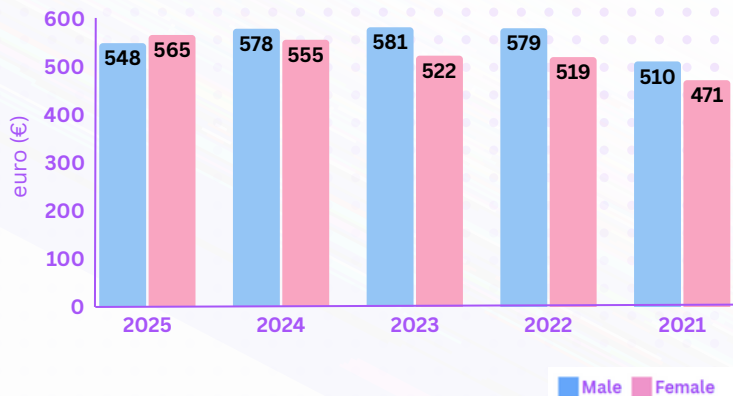


Contractor Earnings

For the first time since the start of this report five years ago women in independent professional roles are out-earning their male counterparts. The average daily rate for females was €565 while the average daily rate for males was €548. The daily rate for male contractors fell by €30 from €578 in 2024 to €548 in 2025, while the daily rate for females increased by €10 in the same period.

However, it not all good news our survey shows that the age of the female contractor will also have an impact on her average daily rate. Women aged between 30-49 years have a higher daily pay rate than males of a similar age, however younger and older women are paid less than their counterparts, while female contractors aged 50-59 years earn the same daily rate as male contractors.

Average Daily Rate By Gender



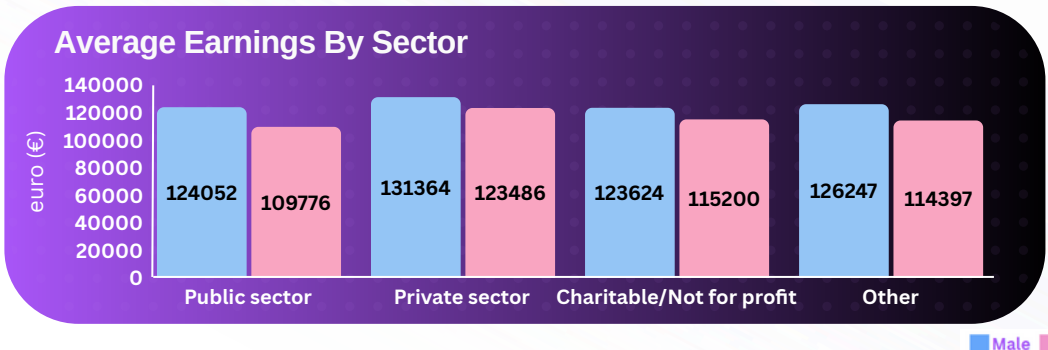
Annual Earnings

Female average annual earnings were at €114,705 and male average annual earnings were at €119,069. This reflects a drop in average annual earnings of 6% for female contractors and 8% for male contractors since 2024 report. Women work less days per annum than men which explains why their annual earnings are lower despite the fact that their average daily rate is higher.

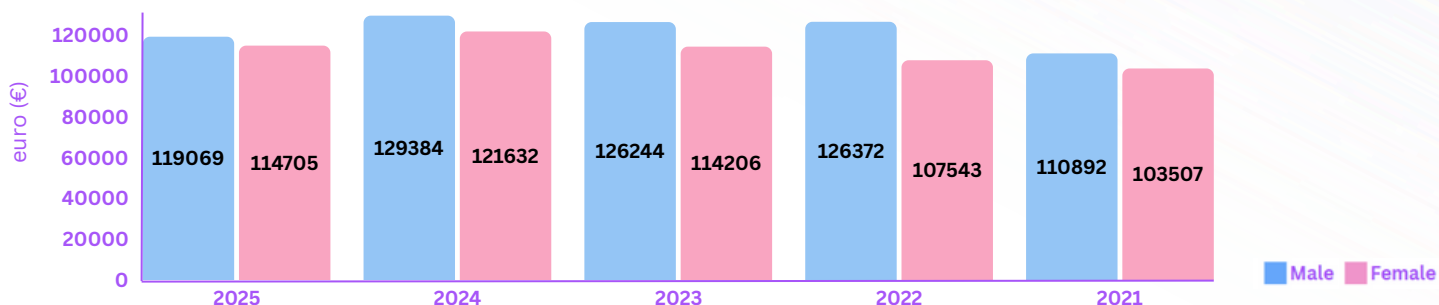
In terms of average annual earnings this year's survey findings show more progress has been made in the reduction of the gender pay gap in the contracting sector. The gender pay gap has moved from 15% in 2022, to 9.5% in 2023 to 6% in 2024 to this year where the gap is reduced to 3.6%! According to the CSO 2023 data, Ireland's labour market gender pay gap was 6.9%. The fact that a smaller gender pay gap exists in the contracting sector compared to the Irish labour market, suggests that people are finally being paid for their skills, expertise and experience regardless of gender.

Average Female Annual Earnings **€114,705**

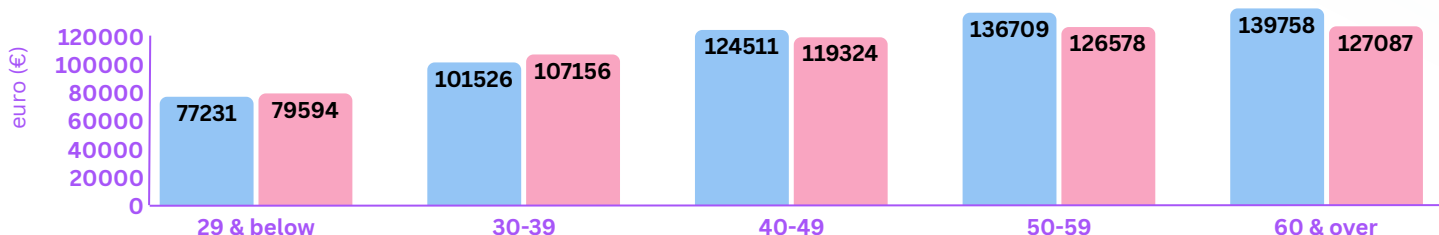
Average Male Annual Earnings **€119,069**



Annual Earnings By Gender



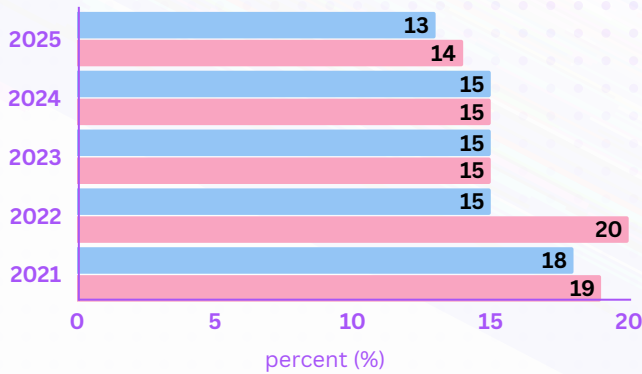
Annual Earnings By Age



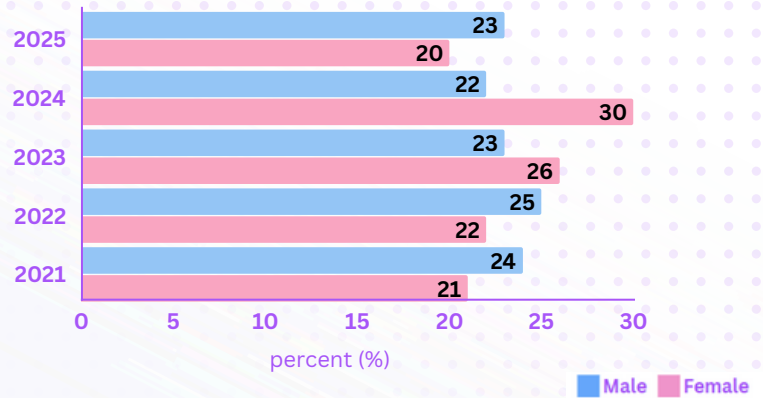
Wellbeing

Both female and male contractors show relatively high levels of well-being, which is indicated by the low levels of perceived loneliness at 20% for female and 23% for male contractors. Loneliness has decreased for females from 30% in 2024 and increased slightly for men from 22% in 2024. Both males and females report low levels of burnout, with females experiencing slightly higher burnout levels at 14% compared to males at 13%.

Experience Burnout



Experience Loneliness



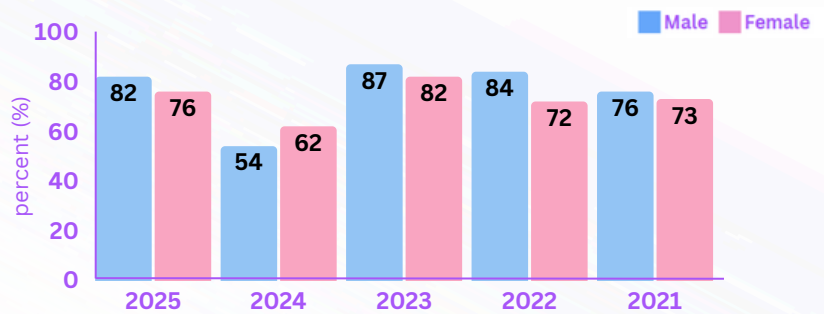
Career Satisfaction

The survey results show that 81% of women choose to become contractors. 87% report that they are satisfied with the success they have achieved in their career. 84% are satisfied with their life in general. Female contractors reported satisfaction levels higher than their male counterparts around 5 key elements of their working life. Female contractors are more satisfied than males with the rate of pay, 86% versus 83%, the location of their job 87% versus 82%, the flexibility of hours 89% versus 85%, the remote working options 78% versus 73%, and their work-life balance 81% versus 73%. 76% of female participants intend to continue working as contractors in the future, up from 62% in 2024 report.



Intention to Stay Contracting

In 2025, the majority of both male and female contractors expressed a strong intention to continue working as independent professionals, with figures showing a significant increase since 2024. The percentage of female contractors planning to remain in contracting rose from 62% in 2024 to 76% in 2025, while male contractors saw an even sharper rise from 54% in 2024 to 82% in 2025.



Reason to Become Self-Employed

The data also highlights that more women are voluntarily choosing self-employment, with 81% of female contractors making this choice in 2025 compared to 76% of male contractors.

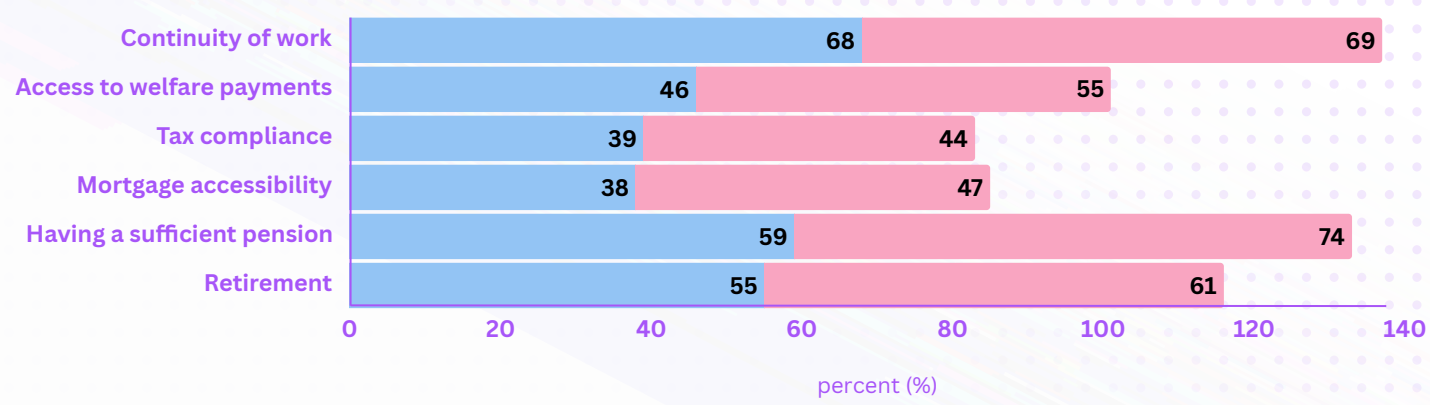
These findings suggest a growing confidence in contracting as a career choice, particularly among men, whose intent to continue has increased significantly.

81% of Women Voluntarily Choose to be Contractor 19% of Women Involuntarily (necessity driven)

76% of Men Voluntarily Choose to be Contractor 24% of Men Involuntarily (necessity driven)

Contractors greatest concerns about independent working?

Female contractor's biggest concern about independent working is around having a sufficient pension, whereas male contractor's primary concern is around the continuity of work.



Confidence Index

Both male and female contractors remain optimistic about the future of the contracting sector over the next 3 to 5 years, with closely aligned confidence levels. Female contractors reported a confidence index of +27, while male contractors recorded a slightly lower score of +25. However, confidence in the sector has declined for both genders compared to 2024, when females had a confidence index of +33 and males scored +28.

Regarding the performance of the Irish economy, female contractors expressed a positive but reduced confidence level, with a score of +13 in 2025, down from +20 in 2024. In contrast, male contractors showed increased confidence in the economy, rising to +18 in 2025 from +15 in 2024.

The Contracting Sector Confidence Index

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Male	+25	+28	+30	+38	+30
Female	+27	+33	+32	+37	+30

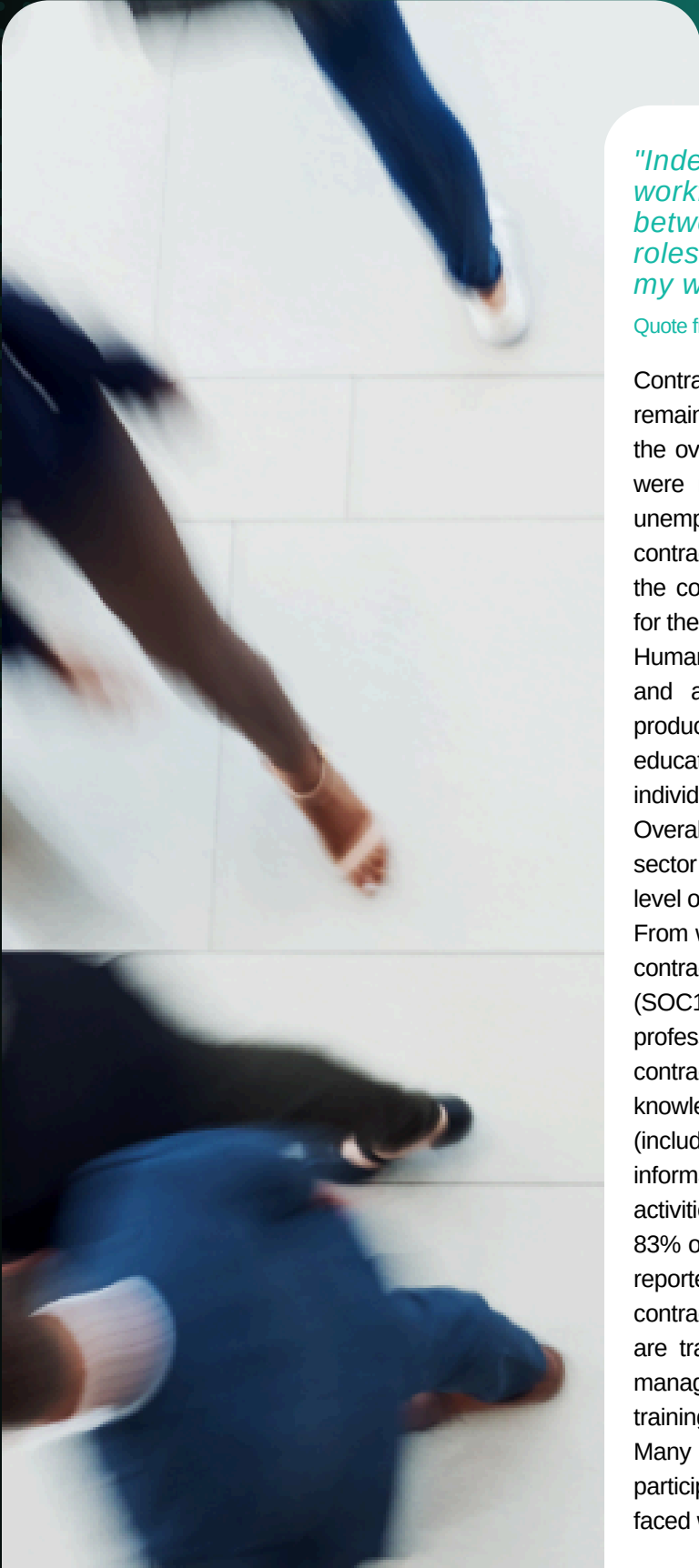
The Irish Economy Confidence Index

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Male	+18	+15	+12	+39	+10
Female	+13	+20	+3	+37	-87





Human Capital



"Independent working allows me to participate in the workforce through multiple avenues, crossing between multiple industries and working in multiple roles, improving overall fulfilment and satisfaction of my work."

Quote from Respondent

Contracting offers many the opportunity to both participate and remain in the workforce beyond regular employment thus increasing the overall human capital. 10% of respondents reported that if they were not contracting, they would retire, 3% said they would be unemployed and 7% of respondents said they would emigrate if not contracting, thus contracting offers the opportunity to keep talent in the country, extend productivity and increase economic value both for the contractors themselves and for society in general.

Human capital refers to the collective skills, knowledge, experience, and abilities possessed by individuals that contribute to their productivity and economic value in a workforce. It encompasses education, training, wellbeing, and talents that enhance an individual's or organisation's capacity to achieve economic goals. Overall, the findings from this research show that the contracting sector consists of a skilled, educated workforce that has a very high level of human capital.

From work occupation analysis, 94% of contractors were high skilled contractors. Specifically, 19% were managers, directors and senior (SOC1); 69% were professionals (SOC2); and 6% were associate professionals and technician (SOC3). The major industries that contractors work in are predominantly professional service and knowledge-intensive sectors. The largest segment is pharma (including Life sciences and medical devices) 39%, followed by information technology 12%, finance 12%, engineering and technical activities 7%, and medical locum 3%.

83% of contractors reported their experience is in demand, and 55% reported that they think it would be easy for them to secure another contract. 82% believe the skills they are learning in their current role are transferable to other jobs in the future. 81% report that they manage their own skills development, with just 36% receiving training and development support from their client companies.

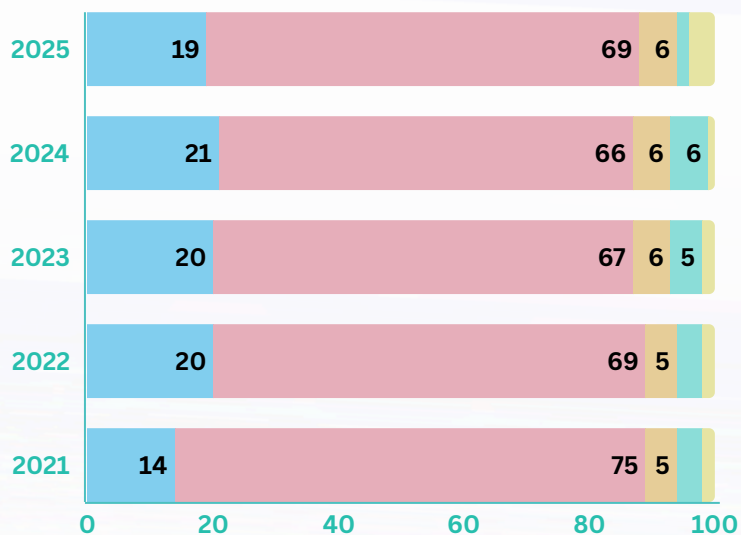
Many respondents agreed that contracting allowed them to participate in the workforce and helped them overcome barriers they faced when it came to securing traditional employment.



Respondents reported that contracting helped overcome barriers related to age, caregiving responsibilities, and lack of part-time roles.

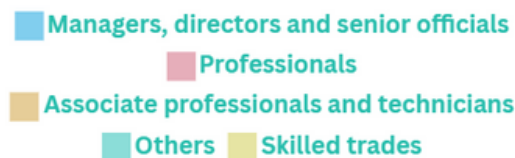
- "Age is a significant barrier to being offered full-time employment"
- "I have a high-needs child, which makes full-time work difficult. Freelancing offers companies help when they need it."
- "Following redundancy, working self-employed/consultancy basis opened more doors and provided more opportunity"

Contracting empowers individuals with freedom, flexibility, and diverse opportunities. It enables people to remain in the country in the workforce, to tailor their work to fit their lifestyle, avoid restrictive corporate environments, and engage in meaningful work without the limitations of traditional employment.



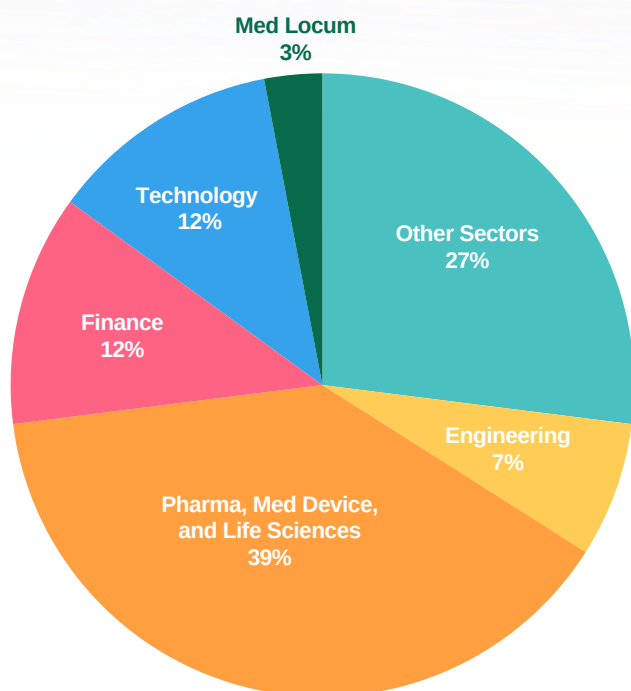
Occupation

94% of the sample were high-skilled contractors. Specifically, 19% were managers, directors and senior officials (SOC1) a slight reduction from 2024, when 21% were (SOC1); 69% were professionals (SOC2) up from 66% in 2024; and 6% were associate professionals and technicians (SOC3) as was the case in 2024. For the first year since the research began in 2021, we have seen a drop in the percentage of contractors classified as (SOC1).



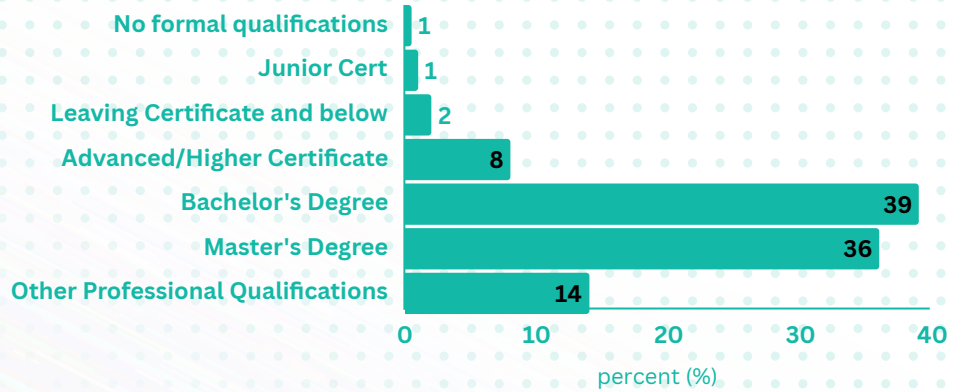
Industry Breakdown

The key sectors where professional contractors work have remained consistent over the four years of the research. The pharma, med device and life science sector has seen an increase of 13% in the numbers of contractors working in the sector since the research began.



Education

According to the “Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2024” from the CSO, 56% of people aged 25-64 years old have a third level qualification in Ireland. The education level of the professional contracting sector is, therefore, higher than the average levels in Ireland.



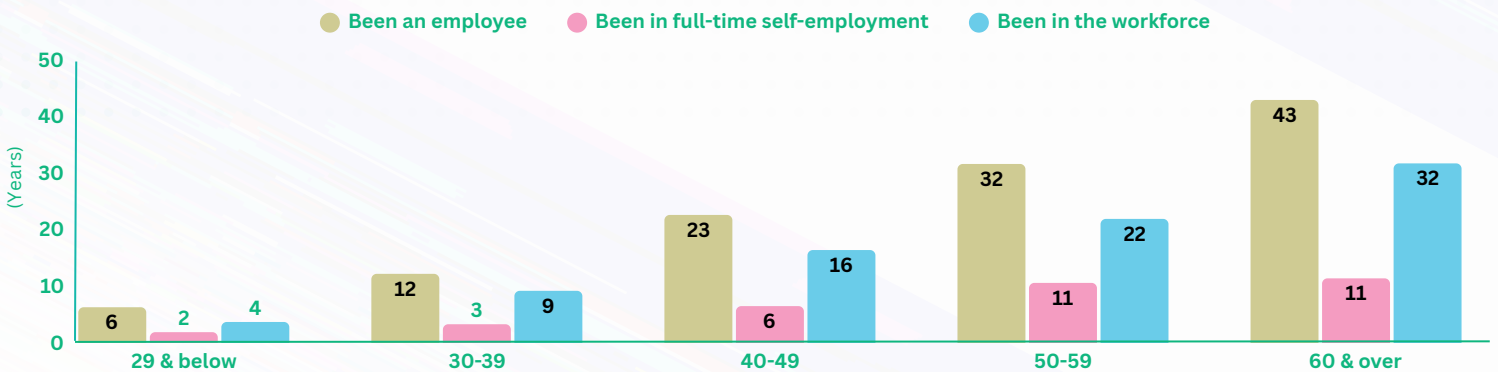
Working Experience

The average working experience (including both full-time self-employment and full-time employee) was 23 years, ranging from under 1 year (several months) to 58 years. Contractors have a very positive outlook in 2025 with 83% of contractors agreeing that their experience is in demand on the labour market. The results show 55% of respondents feel it will be easy for them to find another contracting role, which shows that they are feeling positive about the strength of the contracting sector.

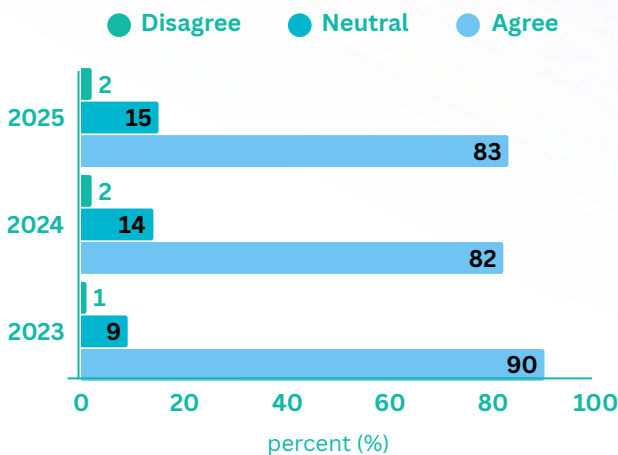
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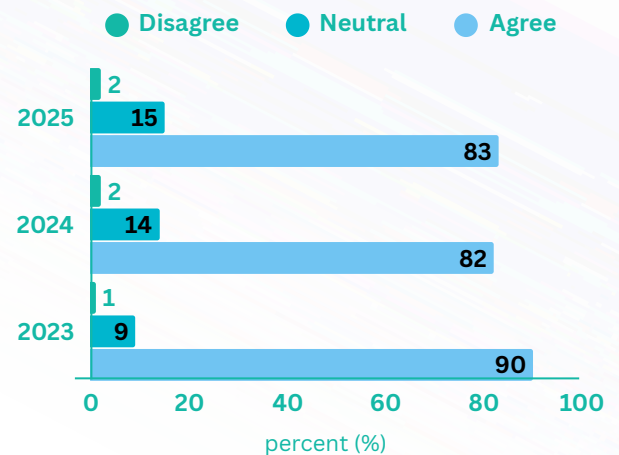
Average Work Experience by Years



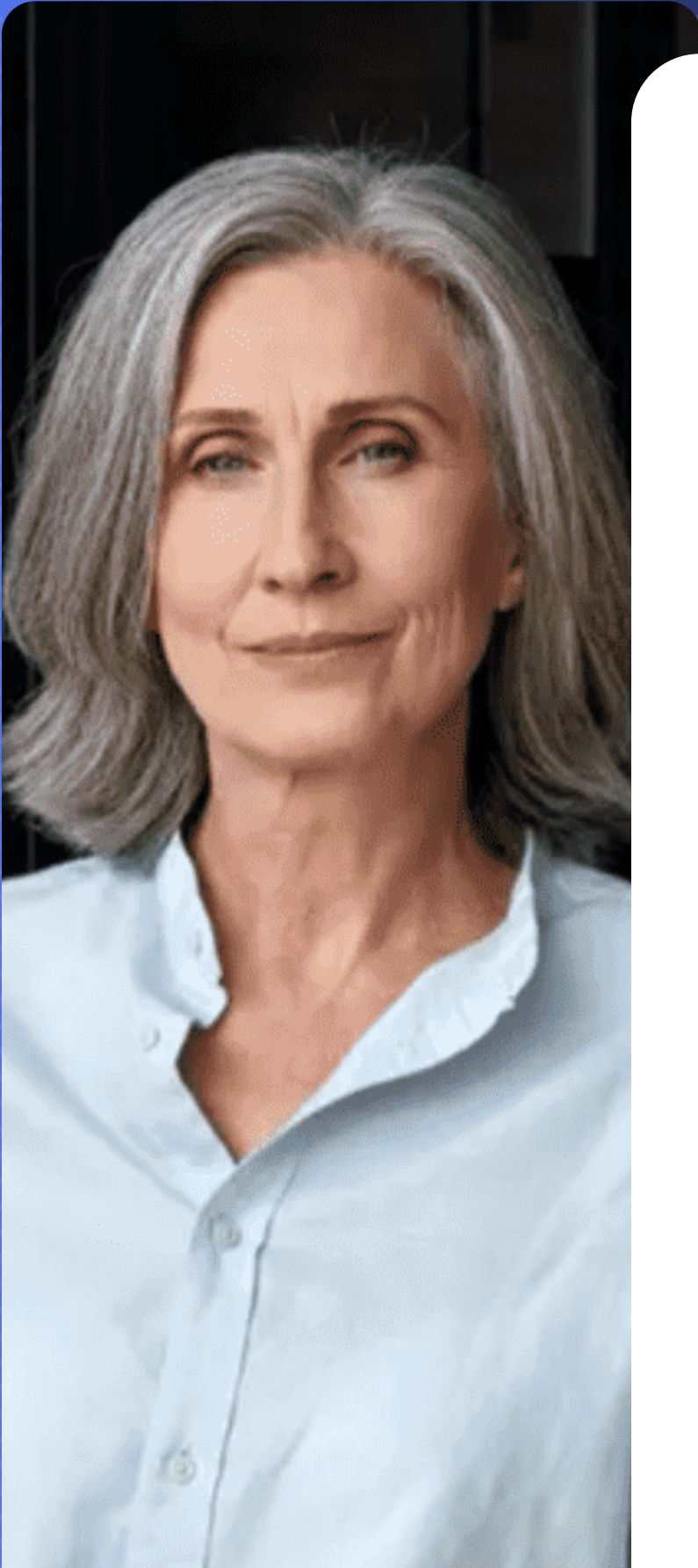
My experience is in demand on the labour market



It is easy for me to find another contract



Value of Age



"I can share my 30 years' experience with others and still be learning myself."

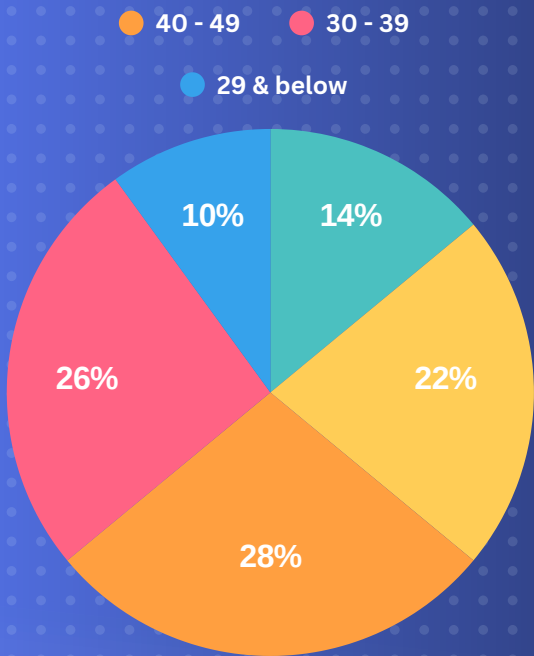
Quote from Respondent

In the professional contracting sector, age and experience are highly valued, offering opportunities for older professionals that may not be readily available in traditional employment.

At a time when ageism can present challenges for older employees in the workforce, older contractors are being recognised for the experience and expertise that comes with age. Independent professionals enter and exit the workforce nearly a decade later than employees, and this extended career span often leads to substantial financial rewards. Daily rates consistently rise with age, with contractors aged 60 and over earning the highest daily rates.

The advantages of age go beyond earnings, 94% of contractors aged 60 and above report being satisfied with their lives in general, and 95% are satisfied with the success they have achieved in their career. Older contractors also report higher levels of well-being, reporting the lowest rates of burnout compared to their younger counterparts. These findings highlight that professional contracting offers significant benefits for older, high-skilled professionals who may feel overlooked or undervalued in traditional employment.

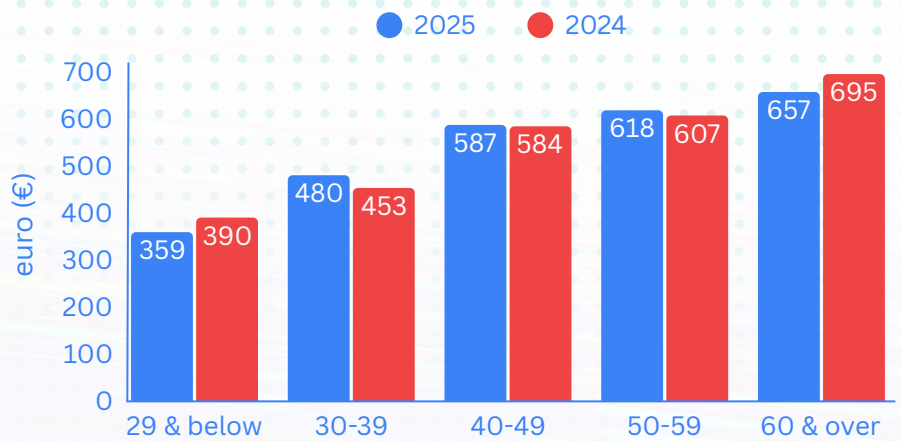
This data highlights the untapped potential of professionals over 60, who continue to contribute meaningfully to the economy at a time when many are prematurely pushed into retirement. By embracing this experienced workforce, businesses and society alike can benefit from their invaluable expertise and insights. This year in the survey respondents were asked what they would do if they were not self-employed, 10% of respondents said they would retire. By offering more support and encouragement to pursue self-employment, we will enable this important workforce to work longer on their own terms, mentor younger generations, and continue making meaningful contributions to Ireland's economy.



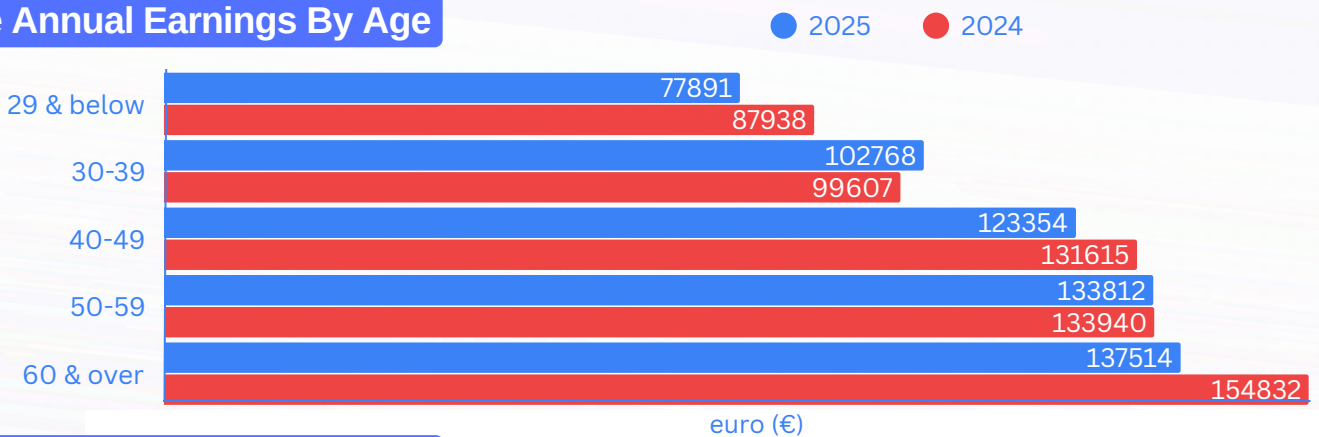
In 2025, the average age of contractors is 45, with 65% aged 40 or older, highlighting that experience remains a key factor in self-employment. However, contracting is becoming increasingly attractive to younger professionals. The percentage of contractors aged 29 or younger has risen from 7% in 2024 to 10% in 2025, indicating a growing interest from the next generation.

Average Daily Rate By Age

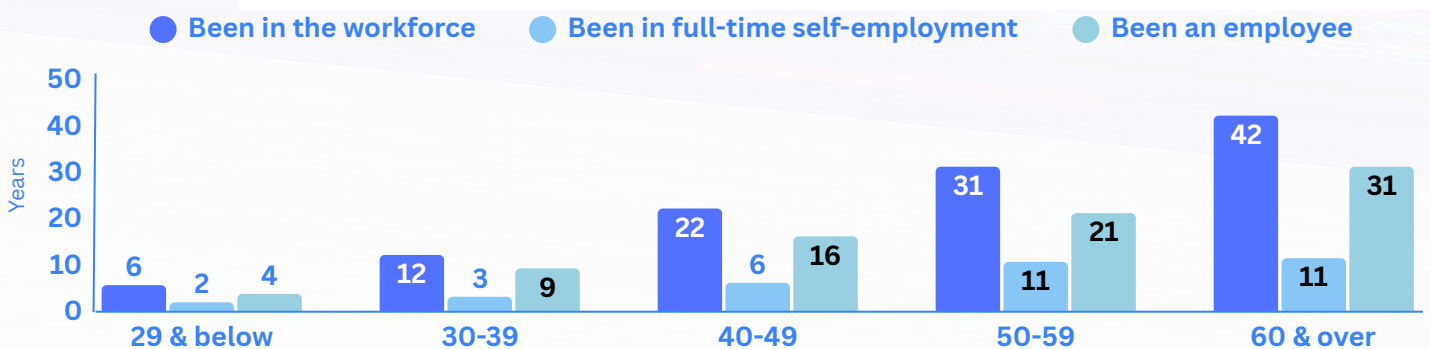
Daily rates in the contracting sector increase significantly with age, underlining the high value placed on experience. Contractors aged 50 and over earn an average daily rate that is 34% higher than that of contractors aged 49 and younger. This highlights the premium placed on skills, expertise, and industry knowledge that come with years of experience in the sector.



Average Annual Earnings By Age



Work Experience By Age in Years



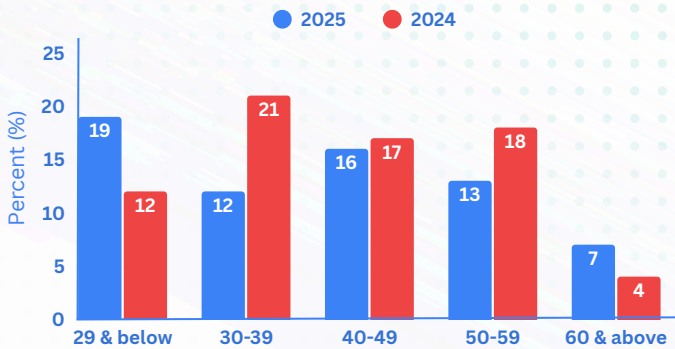
95% of contractors 60 years and over expressed satisfaction with the success achieved in their career



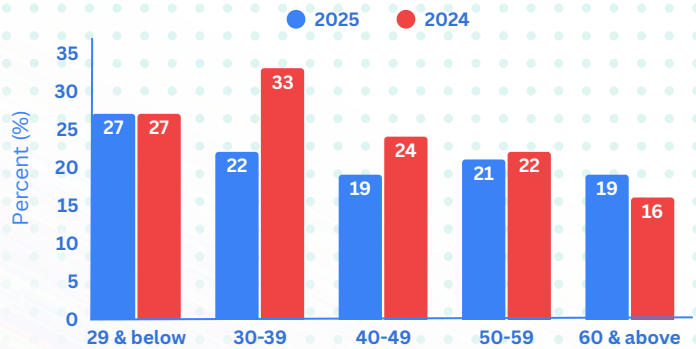
Wellbeing

Older contractors experience high levels of wellbeing, reporting the significantly lower level of burnout at just 7% compared to all other age groups and only 19% experience loneliness.

Experience Burnout

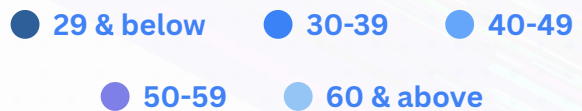


Experience Loneliness



Career Satisfaction

95% of contractors over 60 are satisfied with the success they have achieved in their career, and 94% of them express satisfaction with their life in general. An overwhelming majority also expressed satisfaction with other life and work related factors including the flexibility of hours at 92%, Location of the job at 87%, Remote working options at 87%, Work/ life balance at 87%, and Rate of pay at 85%.



	29 & below	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 & above
The success I have achieved in my career	86	87	90	86	95
Progress made towards overall career goals	85	85	82	80	90
Rate of pay	80	81	85	87	85
Location of job	64	84	86	86	87
Flexibility of hours	78	82	88	87	92
Remote working options	53	64	79	81	87
The work-life balance	64	71	74	77	87

Percent (%)

Confidence Index

Contractors 60 and over have a positive outlook towards the future of the contracting sector for the next 3-5 years, with a reported confidence index score of +23, this is slightly below the 2024 confidence score of +26. When asked about the future performance of the Irish economy in 2025, contractors aged 60 and above were also positive, resulting in a confidence index score of +15.

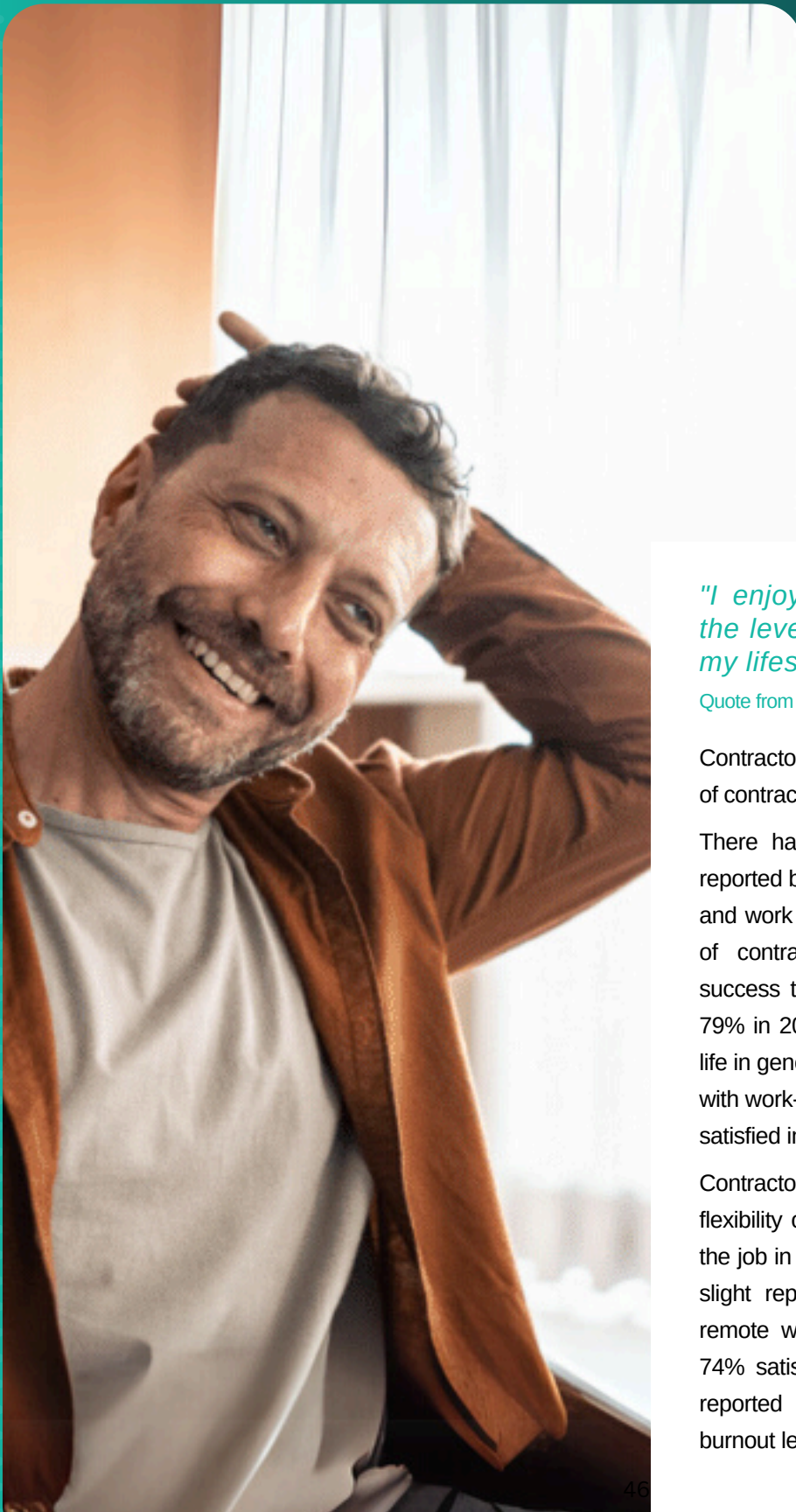
The Contracting Sector Confidence Index

	29 & BELOW	30 – 39	40 – 49	50 – 59	60 & ABOVE
2025	+23	+27	+28	+24	+23
2024	+42	+30	+34	26	+26
2023	+50	+29	+30	31	+29
2022	+38	+41	+41	+38	+32
2021	+3	+4	+1	+11	+21

The Irish Economy Confidence Index

	29 & BELOW	30 – 39	40 – 49	50 – 59	60 & ABOVE
2025	+18	+17	+19	+14	+15
2024	+29	+19	+14	+14	+17
2023	+20	+5	+6	+11	+13
2022	26	34	38	41	41
2021	27	29	30	30	32

Contractors Are Happy



"I enjoy being able to pick and choose the level of participation in roles that suit my lifestyle and expertise."

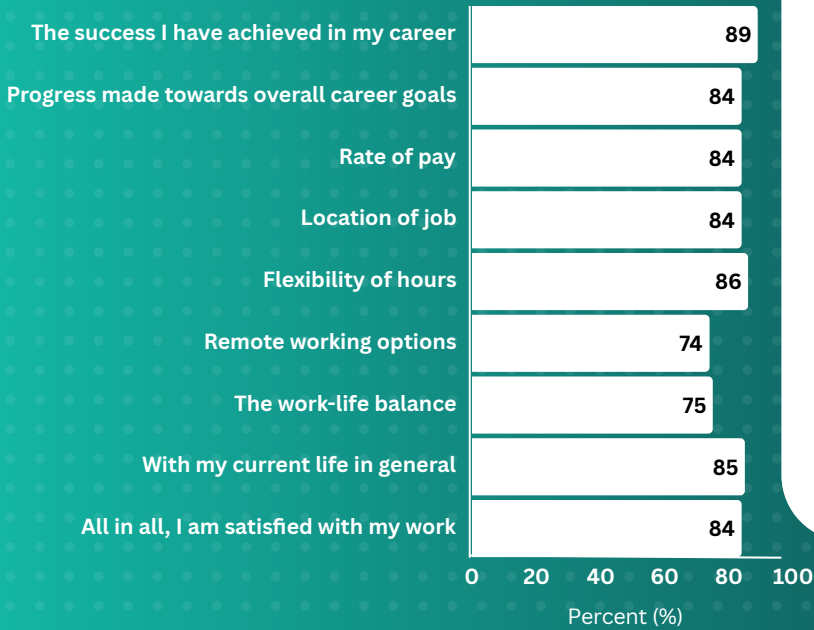
Quote from Respondent

Contractors are happy! 2025 results show the mood of contractors is good.

There has been an increase in satisfaction levels reported by contractors across most factors in their life and work when compared with the 2024 report. 89% of contractors reported being satisfied with the success they have achieved in their career up from 79% in 2024. 85% reported being satisfied with their life in general up from 76% in 2024. Satisfaction levels with work-life balance have increased from 68% being satisfied in 2024 to 75% satisfied in 2025.

Contractors are more satisfied with the rate of pay, the flexibility of hours, the work itself, and the location of the job in 2025 when compared with 2024. There is a slight reported decrease in satisfaction levels with remote working options down from 76% satisfied to 74% satisfied. There has also been an increase in reported wellbeing, with reports of loneliness and burnout less in 2025 compared to 2024.

Career Satisfaction



How Contractors Feel About Their Work

Overall, contractors are satisfied with their work. In the survey, contractors were asked about their level of satisfaction with some key elements of their job and working life.

The flexibility of hours gained the highest satisfaction from the contractors at 86%, followed by the current life in general at 85%, location of the job, rate of pay, and overall work satisfaction all at 84%, remote working options at 74% and work-life balance at 75%.

89% of respondents reported that they are satisfied with the success they had achieved in their career and 84% are satisfied with the progress they had made towards meeting their overall career goals.

89%

Satisfied with the success they have achieved in their career

85%

Satisfied with their current life in general

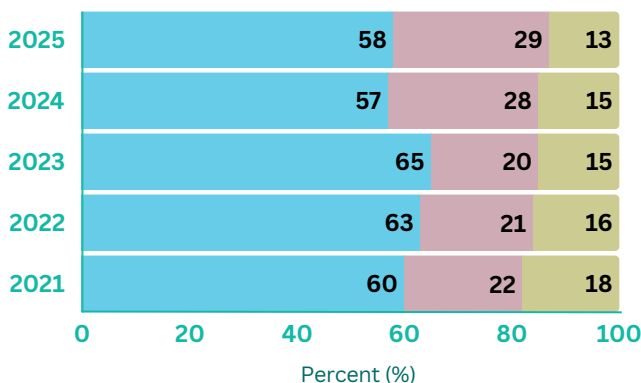
84%

Satisfied with the progress they have made in reaching their career goal.

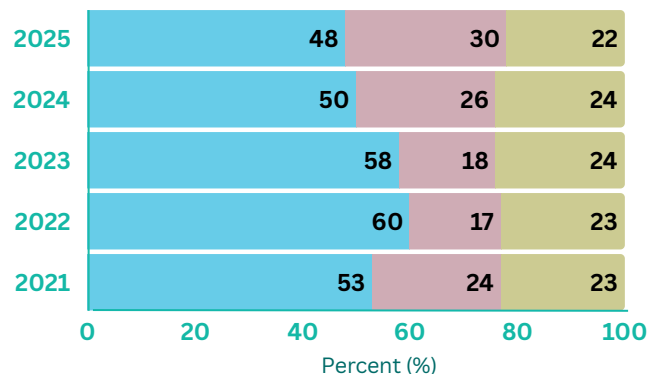
Contractors Well-Being

Professional contractors still express high levels of wellbeing with only 22% experiencing loneliness – a decrease on 2024 when 24% of contractors reported experiencing loneliness. Just 13% of contractors experienced burnout also down since 2024 when 15% of contractors reported experiencing burnout.

Experience Burnout



Experience Loneliness



Disagree Neutral Agree

Generations of Contractors



"I think increased dissatisfaction and disillusionment of working for corporate organisations (especially US headquartered ones), will have an impact on their ability to hire. I am 47 and most people my age do not want to work for any organisation. We enjoy our 'trade' whether it be accounting, marketing, design or sales. But we are tired of office politics, mismanagement, toxic work cultures and the ever-incessant chase of the dollar above all other ethical, moral or socially conscious behaviour. Large organisations will therefore strive to automate as much as possible using AI tools to offset this loss of talent. And it will be more and more difficult for Gen Z to gain the experience they need to do well in their career as older employees leave."

Quote from Respondent

The workforce in Ireland today comprises four distinct generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Each group is at a unique stage in its professional journey, shaped by age, life experiences, and priorities. Baby Boomers (aged 61-79) are largely transitioning into retirement, although many continue to contribute valuable expertise in the contracting sector. Generation X (aged 46-60) is stepping into leadership and consulting roles, leveraging their experience. Millennials (aged 31-45) now form the largest segment of the workforce, actively driving the economy forward, while Generation Z (aged 15-30) is entering the professional arena with fresh perspectives and digital fluency.

These generational distinctions bring with them a wide variety of values and motivations. Some individuals are advancing in their careers, others are balancing family life, and many are reassessing their priorities as they approach retirement. This diversity in life stages and motivations creates a workforce with differing needs and expectations, posing challenges for traditional employment models. However, the flexibility and adaptability of contracting uniquely position it to accommodate the values of each generation.

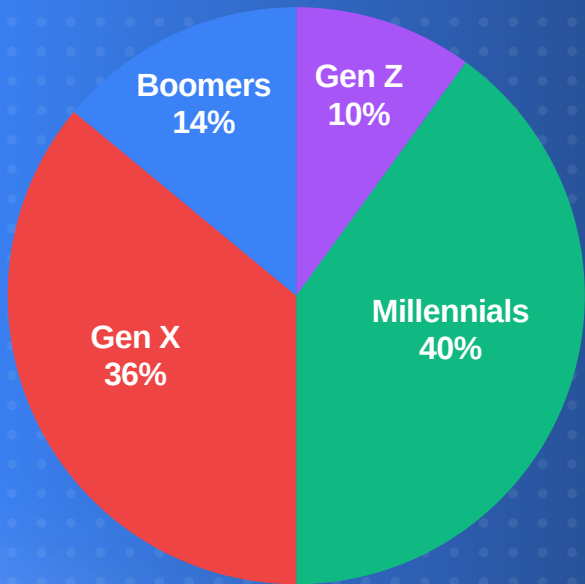
Contracting enables individuals to focus on what matters most to them, whether it's flexibility, higher earnings, or personal fulfilment. Contracting not only addresses the workforce's varying needs but also facilitates the inclusion of diverse perspectives and skill sets, facilitating innovation, creative problem-solving, and adaptability, which are crucial in today's dynamic business landscape.

A recent Deloitte Ireland survey highlights that Millennials and Gen Z are prioritising work-life balance and flexible working arrangements. These preferences align closely with the benefits offered by the contracting sector, making it an increasingly attractive option for younger generations. As Gen Z becomes more established in the workforce, contracting can play a critical role in meeting their expectations and shaping the future of work.

Breakdown of Contractors by Generation

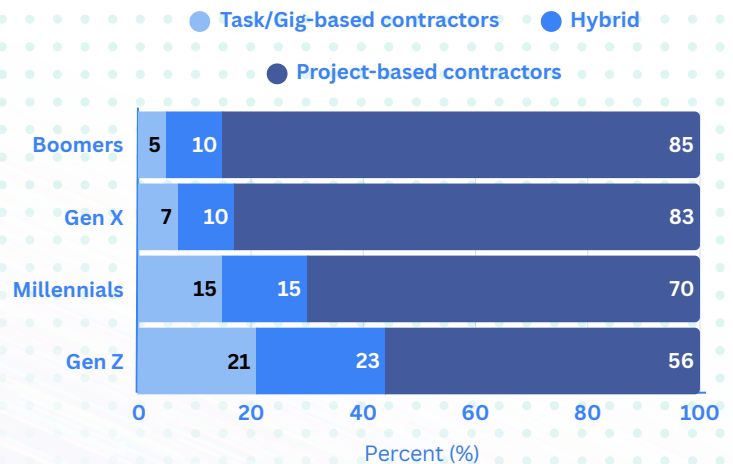
Contractors historically tend to be older, this makes sense as it's takes time to build a valuable skill set and gather experience. In 2025 Boomers (1946-1964), currently aged between 61 years and 79 years are starting to transition out of the contracting sector and in to retirement, explaining the drop from 19% of respondents in 2024 to 14% in 2025. Gen X and Millennials make up the largest cohorts of contractors. Gen X (1965-1979) currently aged between 46 years and 60 years make up 36% of independent professional in 2025. While Millennials (1980-1994) currently aged between 31 years and 45 years make up 40% of independent professionals in this year's survey. Gen Z (1995-2010) currently aged between 15 years and 30 years are starting to make their mark in the contracting centre with 10% representation this year compared to 5% in 2024.

Boomers: 1946 – 1964
Gen X: 1965 – 1979
Millennials: 1980 – 1994
Gen Z: 1995 – 2010



Project/Gig Economy Split

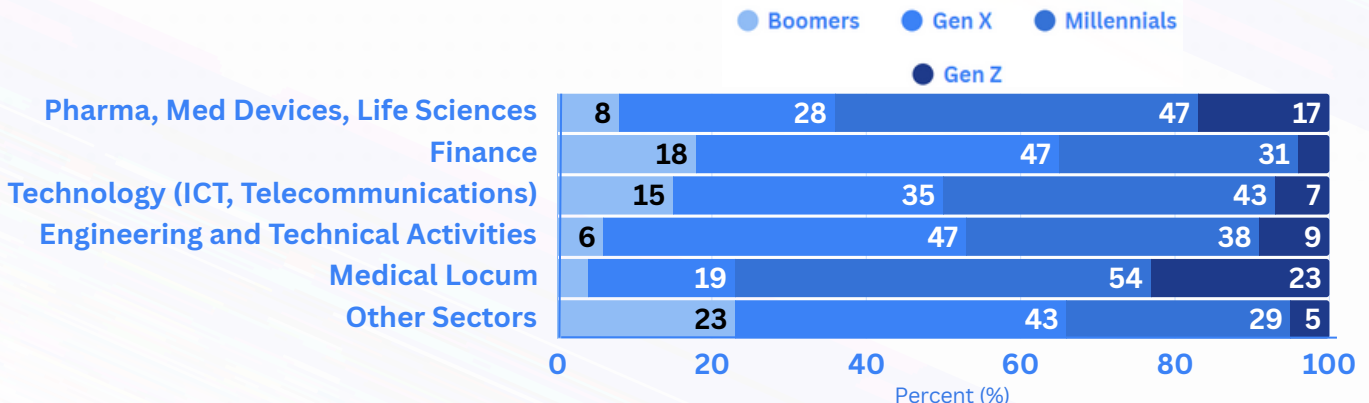
This report classifies contractors into two distinct groups those who are project-based and those who gig/task based. 75% of respondents engage in the project economy with 11% engaged in the gig /task economy, with others working in hybrid mode. Millennials at 15% and Gen Z at 21% are overrepresented in the task/gig economy. Gen X, 83% and Boomers 85% are more prevalent in the project-based economy. Millennials and Gen Z are seen at a higher percentage in the hybrid model which may be explained by a period of transition from employment to self-employment, before fully committing to self-employment.



Industry Breakdown By Generation

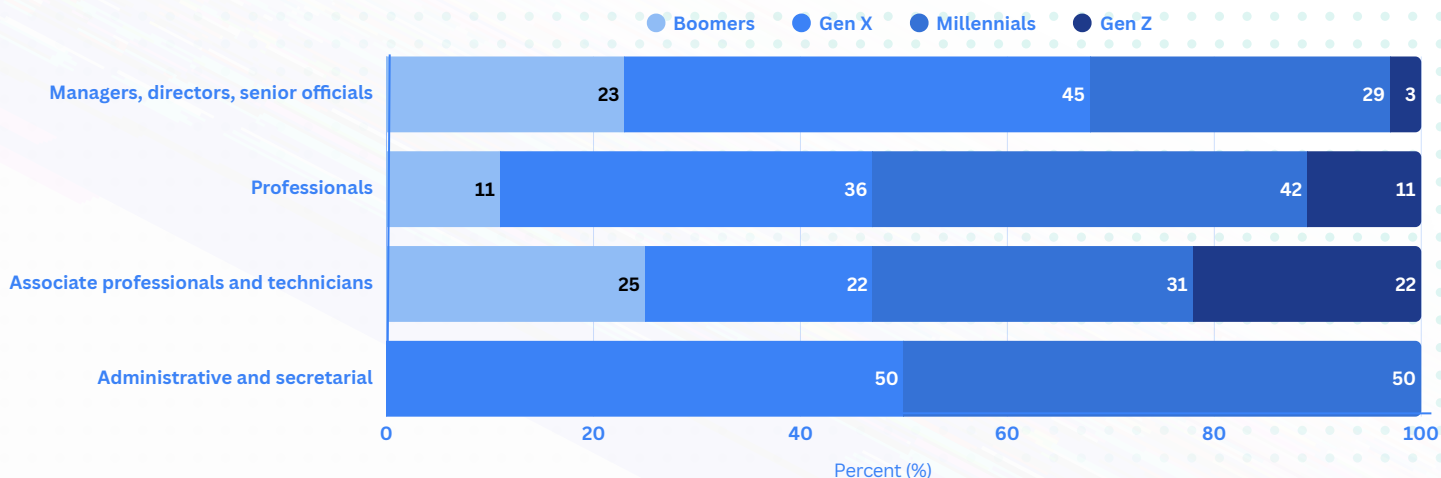
All generations are represented in industries throughout the economy but at different levels depending on industry type. When we look at the key contracting sectors Boomers are found at a high level in the tech and finance sectors. Gen X primarily in the financial services and engineering industries, while maintaining a strong presence in the tech sector. Millennials highly represented in the Medical Locum and Pharma, Life Sciences and Medical Device industries. Gen Z mainly operating in the Medical Locum and Pharma sectors. This is unsurprising as greater experience, and expertise would usually be required to engage in project-based roles in Technical and Services industries.

We can also see the type of work being done varies significantly by generation. 23% of all managers, directors and senior officials are Boomers, 45% are Gen X, 29% are Millennials and just 3% of Gen Z have these higher level roles. The percentage of Gen X and Millennials is also significantly higher than Gen Z when we look at professional, specialist, occupations. It's fair to say that this is to be expected again as a certain amount of experience and expertise is needed to do this type of work.

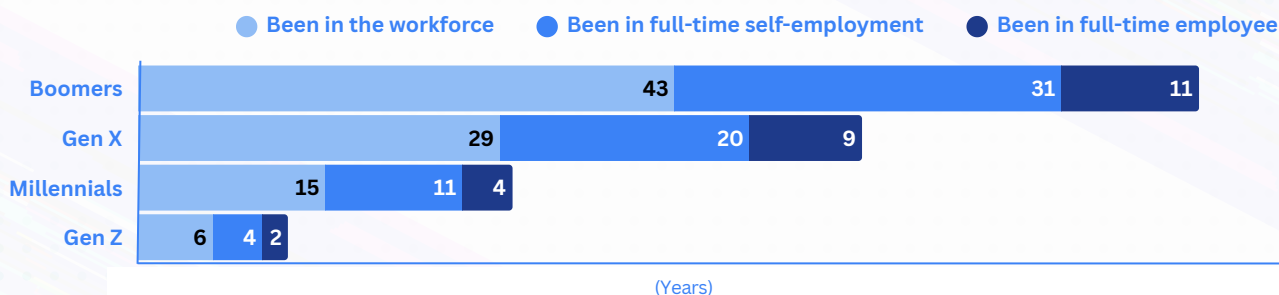


Occupation By Generation

We can also see the type of work being done varies significantly by generation. 31% of all managers, directors and senior officials are Boomers, 50% are Gen X, 19% are Millennials and Gen Z are not represented in these roles. The percentage of Boomers, Gen X and Millennials is also significantly higher than Gen Z when we look at professional or specialist occupations (categorised using Standard Occupational Classifications (SOCs) 1-3).



Work Experience By Generation



Average Days Looking for Work

The average time all respondents spent looking for a new contract was 12 days up from 9 days in 2024. Millennials and Gen Z spent less time than the average contractor looking for work, Millennials 11 days and Gen Z's 9 days. Boomers had the longest average days looking for work at 16 days.

Boomers
16 days

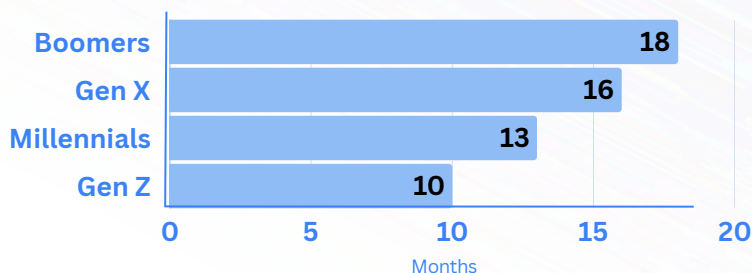
Gen X
13 days

Millennials
11 days

Gen Z
9 days

Contract Length

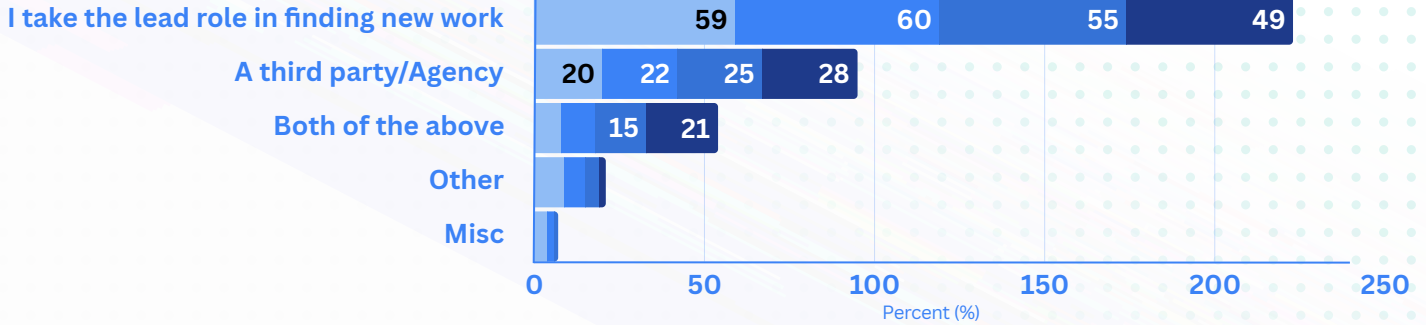
The average contract length is 14 months, however generational differences apply to contract length. Boomers and Gen X have above average contract lengths at 18 months and 16 months respectively, Millennials average contract length is 13 months, Gen Z have the shortest average contract length at 10 months.



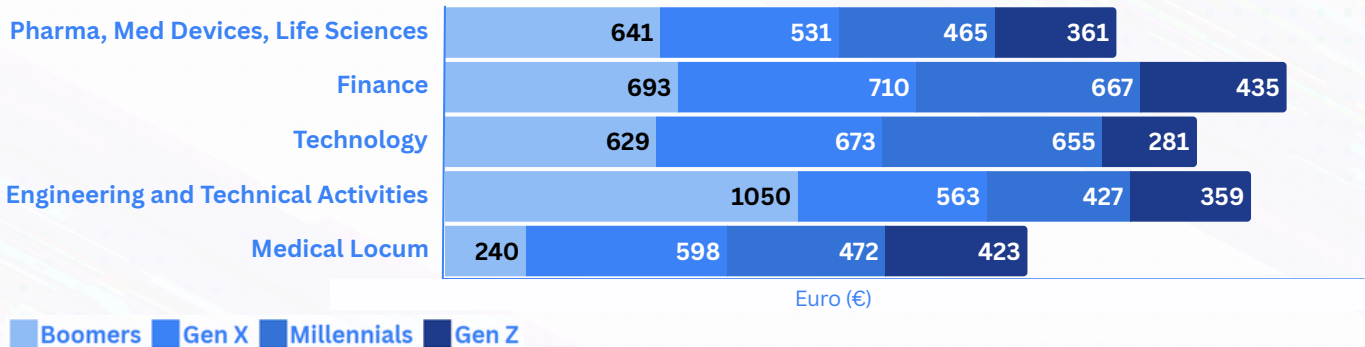
How Contractors Find Their Work

The method used by contractors to find their contracting work has shifted over the past year with more than half of Boomers, Gen X's and Millennials taking the lead role in finding work. 49% of Gen Z also reported taking the lead in finding new work up from 2% in 2024. Having a good personal network continues to be an important factor to ensure a continuous stream of work.

● Boomers ● Gen X ● Millennials ● Gen Z



Daily Rates By Generation



Average Annual Earnings



Boomers
Average Daily Rate **€654**

Gen X
Average Daily Rate **€611**

Millennials
Average Daily Rate **€512**

Gen Z
Average Daily Rate **€359**

Daily Rates By Generation

The average daily rate earned by the different generational groups varies. The value of age is evidenced where Boomers earn on average 45% more than Gen Z's, it should be noted that industry sector plays a role, as well as the seniority of work being done.

Boomers have an average daily of €654, Gen X have an average of €611, Millennials average daily rate is €512, and Gen Z's is €359. Millennials are the only generation who have seen an increase in average daily rate in 2025 up 6% from €483 in 2024 to €512 in 2025.

Average Holiday Days Taken

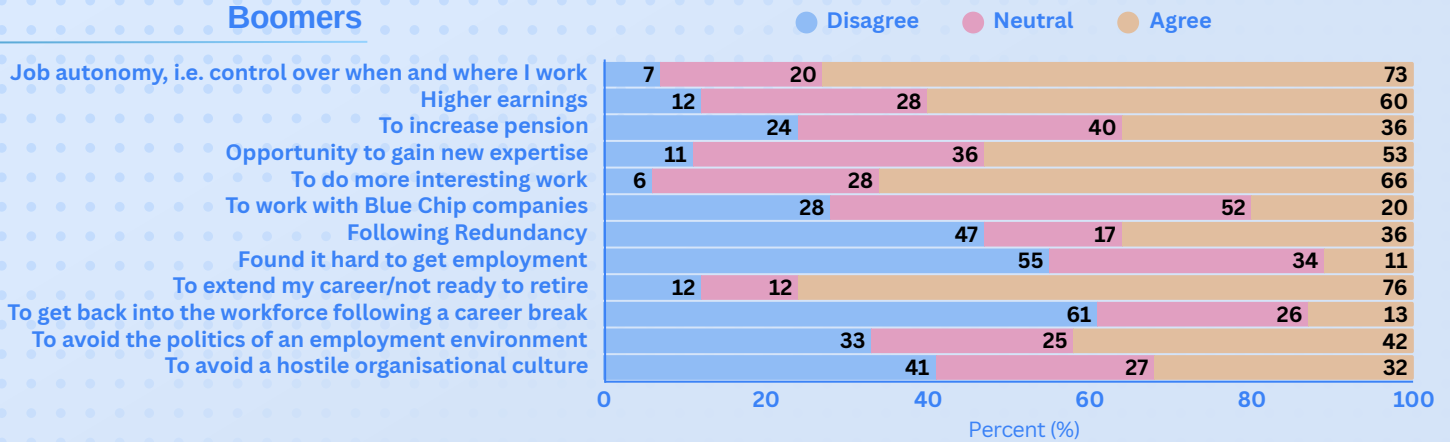


In 2025 data from all respondents showed the average holidays taken was 21 days per year, with 66% of all contractors reported taking less than 23 days of holiday in a year. Boomers take the highest number of holidays across the generations at 26 days per year with millennials taking the least days at 20 days per year.

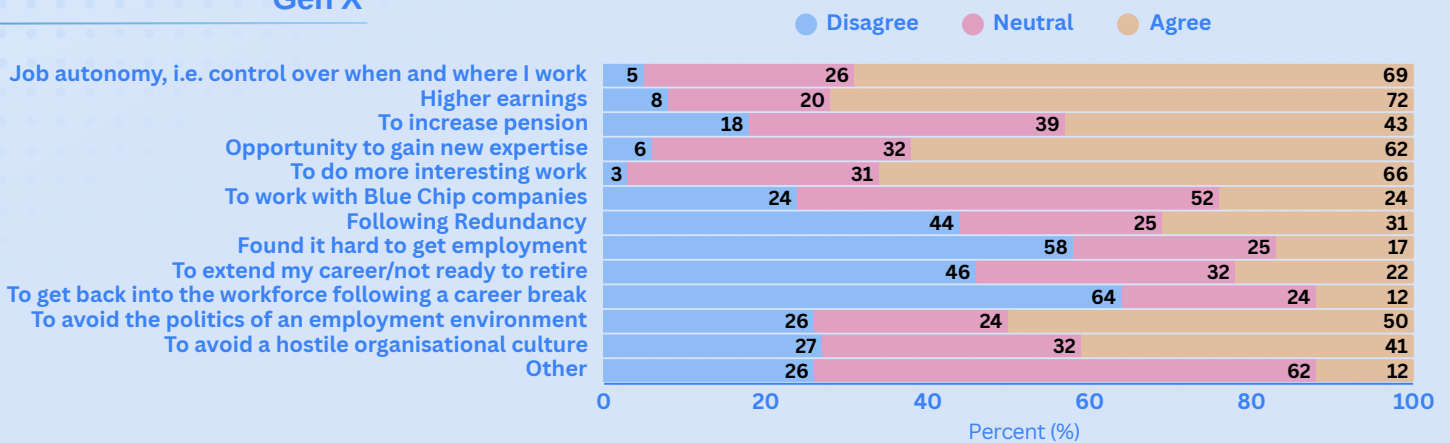
Motivation By Generation

The motivational factors influencing a contractor are different depending on the generational group the contractor belongs to. Boomers are motivated by the ability to extend their career with many of them not ready to retire, Job autonomy is also important to this group. Gen x are motivated by the ability to earn higher income and by job autonomy, and the opportunity to do more interesting work. Millennials are motivated by higher income, job autonomy and the opportunity to gain new experience. Gen Z report higher earnings, the opportunity to gain new experience, and the ability to do more interesting work as the highest motivational factors for choosing a contracting career.

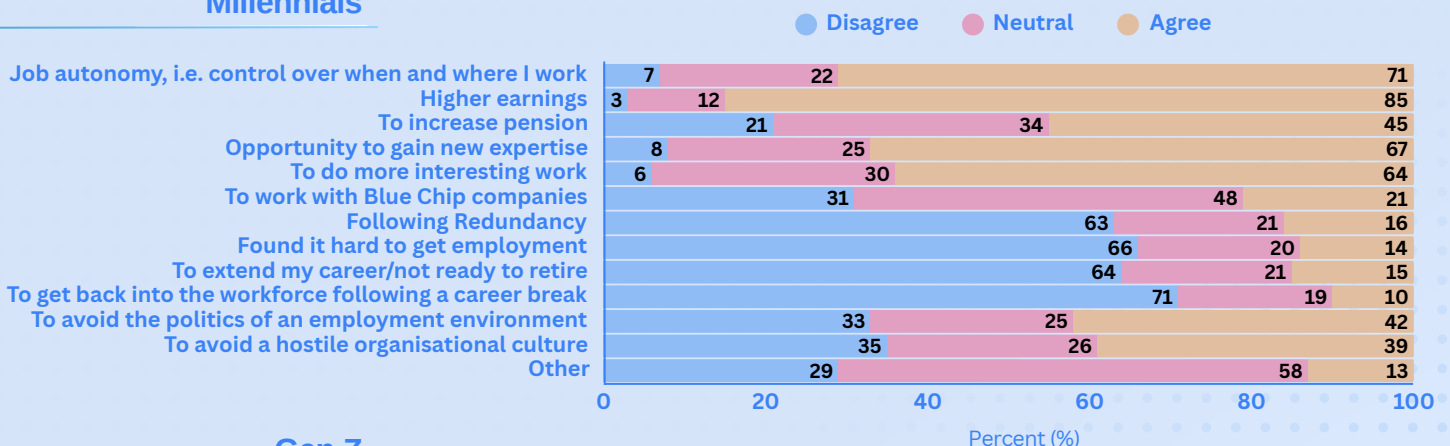
Boomers



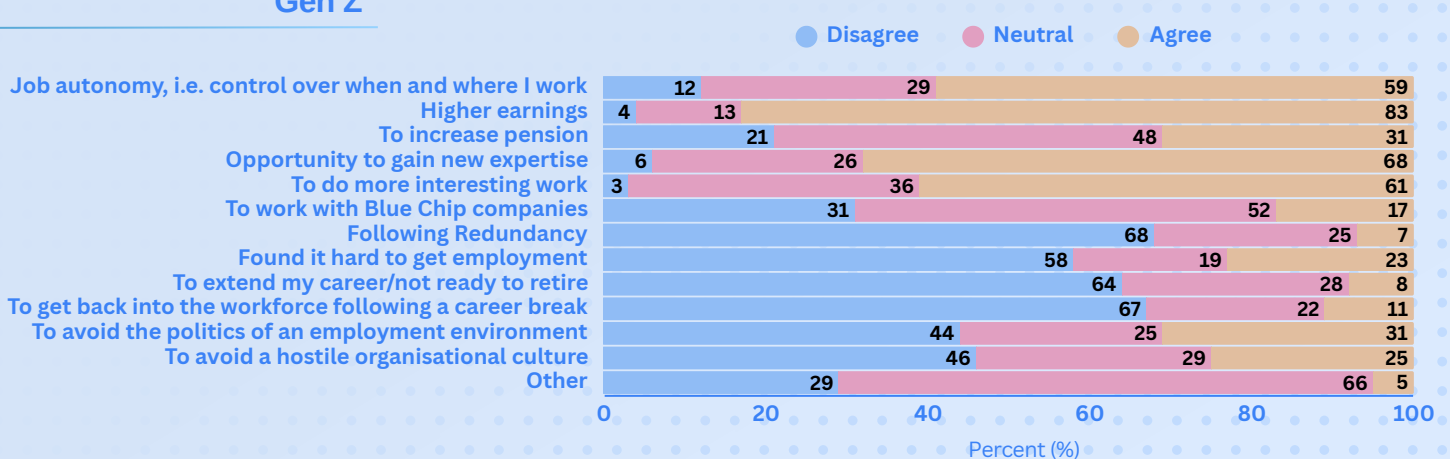
Gen X



Millennials



Gen Z



Satisfaction With Work By Generation

Contractors in each group were asked a number of questions about their satisfaction levels around 7 key elements of their working life, including the rate of pay, location of the job, flexibility of the hours, remote working options, work-life balance and their life in general. All generations are highly satisfied with their lives in general, Boomers reported the highest level of satisfaction at 94%. All generations reported a significant increase in their satisfaction levels with the rate of pay. Boomers 85% up from 62% in 2024, Gen X 88% up from 68% in 2024, Millennials 81% up from 66% in 2024 and Gen Z 80% up from 76% in 2024.

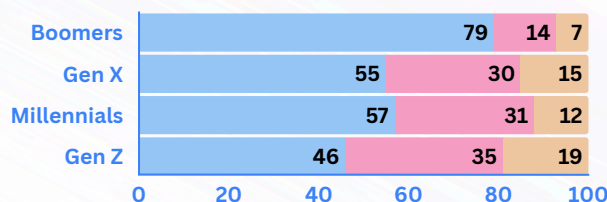
Only 53% of Gen Z were satisfied with the remote work options, significantly lower than the average satisfaction level expressed by all contractors, this may reflect the type of work they do, which in 2025 is primarily in the medical locum and pharma sectors where attendance at a client premises may be required. Gen Z were also least satisfied with their work life balance. All generational cohorts express high satisfaction with the success they have achieved in their career. Boomers, reported the highest satisfaction levels towards meeting their career goals with 90% agreeing they are satisfied.



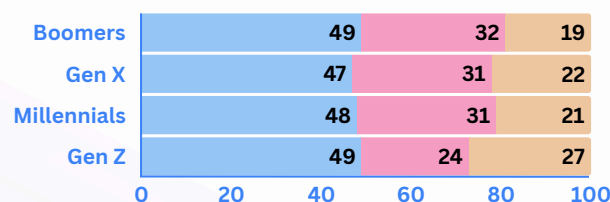
Contractors Well-Being

Well-being is high across the generations, with Boomers experiencing the lowest levels of both loneliness and burnout and Gen Z experiencing the highest levels of both loneliness and burnout. Gen Z experience lower levels of loneliness in 2025 compared to 2024 down from 30% reporting loneliness in 2024 to 27% in 2025. However, this generation is experiencing higher levels of burnout in 2025 than in 2024, from 13% in 2024 to 19% in 2025.

Experience Burnout



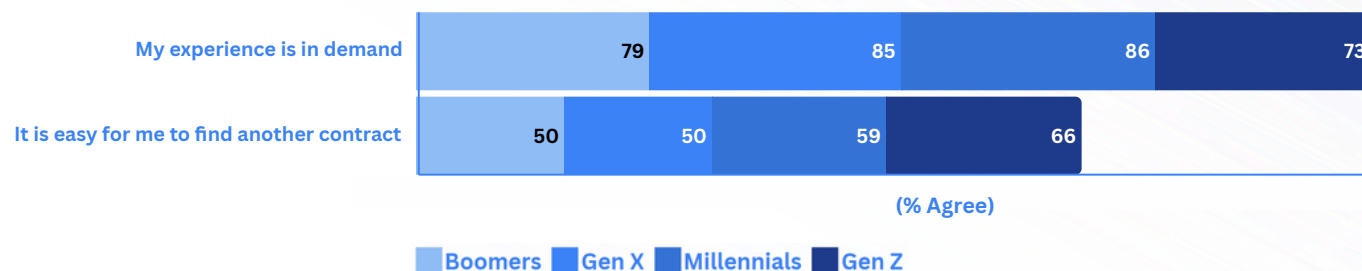
Experience Loneliness



Employability By Generation

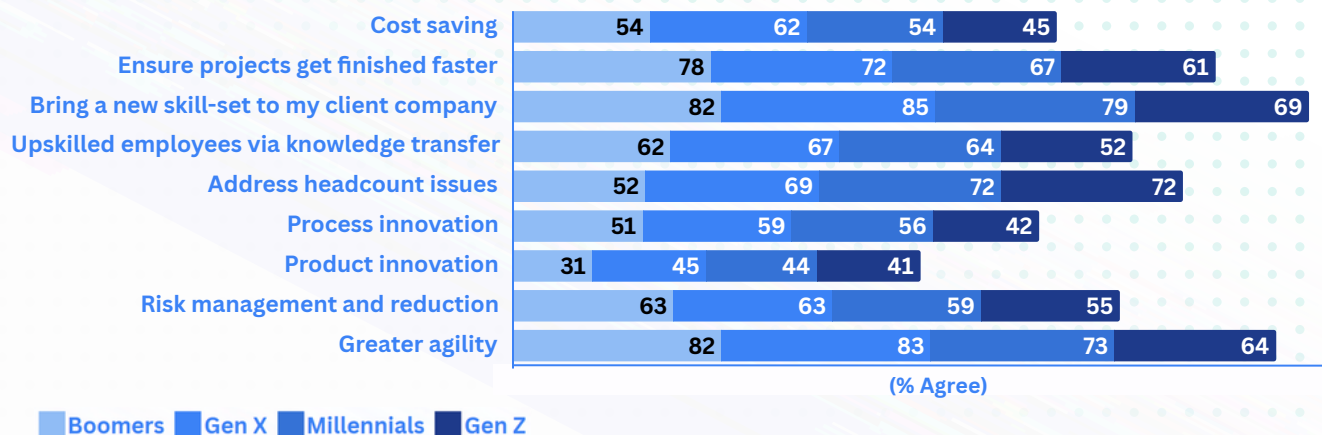
There is a high level of agreement across all generations that their experience is in demand on the labour market, Boomers at 79%, Gen X at 85%, Millennials at 86%, and Gen Z at 73%.

50% of both Boomers and Gen X agreed that it would be easy to find another contract, Millennials are more positive about the ease at which they would find another contract at 59% with Gen Z the most positive about the ease of finding another contract at 66%.



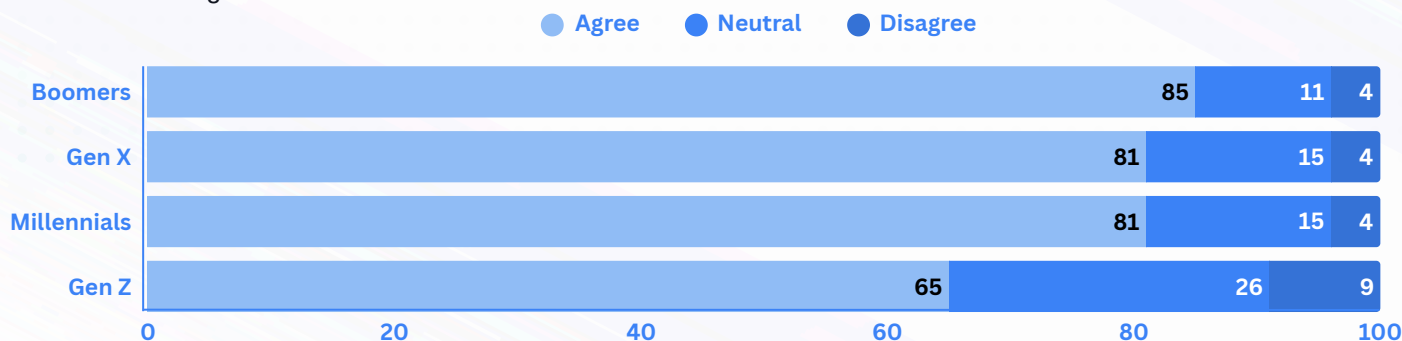
Benefits To Clients By Generation

Boomers, Gen X and Millennials identify similar benefits that their clients get from engaging contractors, bringing a new skill set to the company, greater agility, making sure projects get finished faster. Gen Z highlight addressing headcount issues as the biggest benefit they bring to clients. Some other benefits highlighted were a fresh perspective, flexibility in terms of timelines and costs and focus; dedicated attention on specific projects that may not have priority internally.



Intention to stay by generation

85% of Boomers expect to continue contracting in the future clearly indicating the attractiveness of contracting work to this cohort. 81% of both Gen X and Millennials expressed their intention to stay contracting, while 65% of Gen Z intend to stay in the contracting sector.



Confidence Index

All generations were positive about both the performance of the Irish economy in 2025 and about the contracting sector in the next 3 to 5 years. Millennials were most confident about the contracting sector with a confidence index score of +28, Millennials and Gen z were the most optimistic about the performance of the Irish economy in 2025 compared to 2024, both having a confidence index score of +18.

The Irish Economy Confidence Index

BOOMERS	+15
GEN X	+15
MILLENNIALS	+18
GEN Z	+18

The Contracting Sector Confidence Index

BOOMERS	+22
GEN X	+25
MILLENNIALS	+28
GEN Z	+23



Pharma, Life Sciences, and Medical Device

“Independent contractors in pharmaceutical industry tend to have better skill sets as a result of working with more companies, vs an employee who is used to a particular set of standards when working in one company for a long time.”

Quote from Respondent

Ireland is recognised as powerhouse for pharmaceutical, medical devices, and life sciences sectors

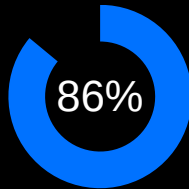
The sector accounts for more than 60% of the country's exports and ranks Ireland as the world's third-largest exporter in this sector. ([IDA Ireland](#)).

Ireland is home to nine of the world's top pharmaceutical companies and the sector employs 40,000 people. With several major companies announcing plans to hire at scale in 2025 ([Irish Independent](#)), roles such as production operators, regulatory compliance, project engineers and development scientists are experiencing increased demand ([Hays](#)).

The industry's dynamic and ever-changing landscape makes it a prime sector for professional contractors, their expertise and skills allow companies to upscale and engage new skills at short notice keeping companies agile, innovative and setting them up for growth.

Pharma Contractors Are Highly Satisfied With Their Career Success!

86% satisfied with their success



Average Contract Length

The Average length of contract in the Pharma sector is just over a year long at 15 months!

Average Daily Rate in Pharma

€486

Pharma Gender Split

73
Men

25
Women

0
Undisclosed



Medical Device

Ireland is the second-largest exporter of medical devices in Europe and a top 10 exporter globally ([Enterprise Ireland](#)). The Medical Device sector generates over €12.6 billion in annual exports and employs over 50,000 people ([Meet In Ireland](#)).

With increasing developments in technology and the use of AI, the medical device sector is changing with focus shifting to new trends such as, digital health, telemedicine and remote patient monitoring, advanced therapies and sustainability ([Medical Devices](#)). The flexibility and scalability of contracting has been an invaluable asset for this fast-paced sector. New opportunities exist for contractors in the sector, especially for those with specialised skills in software development, clinical trials, and regulatory affairs ([Mason Alexander](#)).

Med Device Contractors Are Getting Younger

6% Increase In Contractors
Aged 22-30 years



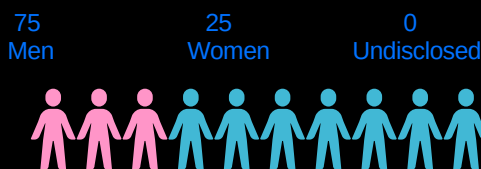
Contracting In The Medical Device Sector

The flexibility and scalability of contracting has been an invaluable asset for this fast-paced sector. New opportunities exist for contractors in the sector, especially for those with specialised skills in software development, clinical trials, and regulatory affairs ([Mason Alexander](#)).

Average Daily Rate in Med Device

€397

Med Device Gender Split



Life Sciences

Ireland encompasses over 300 MedTech companies, contributing more than €13 billion annually to Ireland's exports, accounting for 8% of the nation's total exports ([IDA Ireland](#)). Ireland is a leader in the life sciences industry with 19 of the top 20 global pharma companies and 18 of the top 20 global medical device companies present in Ireland ([NSE](#)). Regions like Cork and Galway have become key centres for these industries, cultivating a dynamic environment of innovation and collaboration.

Recent trends for this sector indicate an increase in research and development investments, with companies focusing on innovative advanced technologies such as AI and data analytics to provide a competitive edge. These developments highlight Ireland's pivotal role in the global life sciences landscape, with the sector projected to reach €730 billion by 2025 ([Oxford Global Resources](#)).

39% of the respondents work in the Pharma, Med Device and Life Science industries, which is reflective of the size of the sector and the work practices of this industry in Ireland. This figure is up 3% since 2024 reflecting steady growth in the sector. 96% of all work takes place in the private sector with just 3% taking place in the public sector.

Life Science Contractors Are Getting Younger

10% Increase In Contractors
Aged 29 & Below



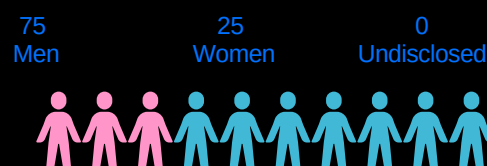
Average Contract Length

Recent trends for this sector indicate an increase in research and development investments, with companies focusing on innovative advanced technologies such as AI and data analytics to provide a competitive edge.

Average Daily Rate in Life Science

€529

Life Science Gender Split



Pharma

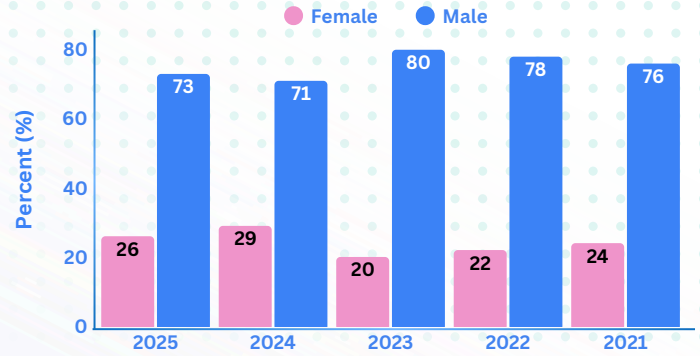
Male contractors in the pharma sector make up 73%, with female contractors at 26%. This reflects a 3% drop in female contractors in the sector over the last year.

Average Contract Length **15 Months**

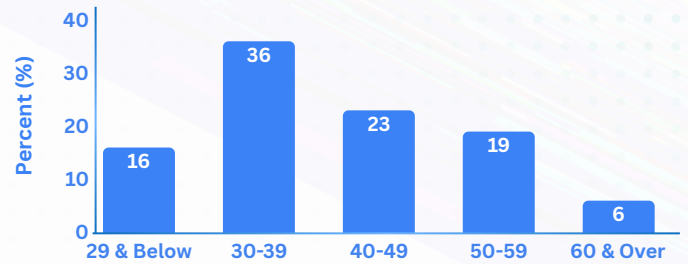
Average Daily Rate



Gender



Age Profile



Life Science

Male contractors account for 75% of all contractors in the life science sector.

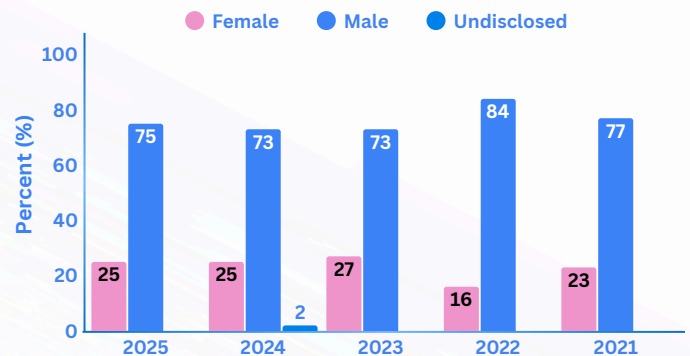
The life science sector has the highest percentage of older contractors with 15% 60 years or older. The average daily rate for life science has seen a drop in 2025 to €529 from €581 in 2024. This reflects a 9% drop-in average daily rate in the life science sector.

Average Contract Length **15 Months**

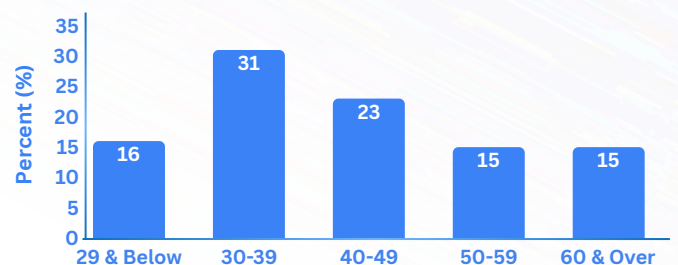
Average Daily Rate



Gender



Age Profile

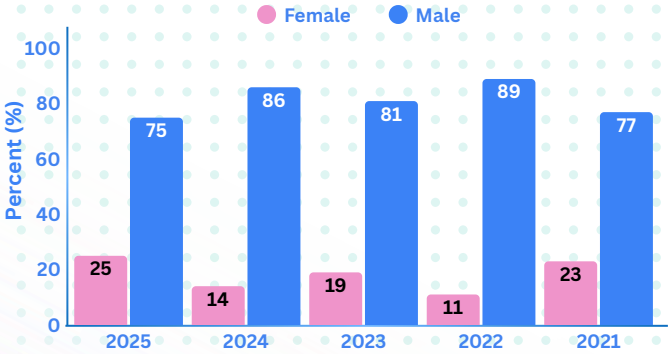


Med Device

The med device sector has seen a significant rise in the percentage of female contractors from 2024 to 2025 up 11% from 14% in 2024 to 25% in 2025. The med device sector has the highest percentage of younger contractors with 23% 29 years or below.

The average daily rate in the med device sector has seen a drop in 2025 from €498 in 2024 to €397 in 2025. This significant drop of 20% in the medical device sector can be explained by the changes in the make-up of that sector. There has been a 11% increase in the number of female contractors engaged in the sector and a 6% increase in the number of contractors under 30 years.

Gender

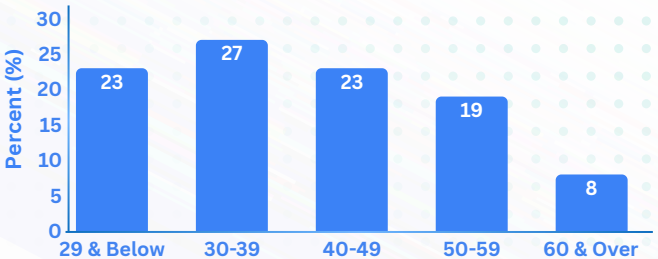


Average Contract Length **13 Months**

Average Daily Rate



Age Profile



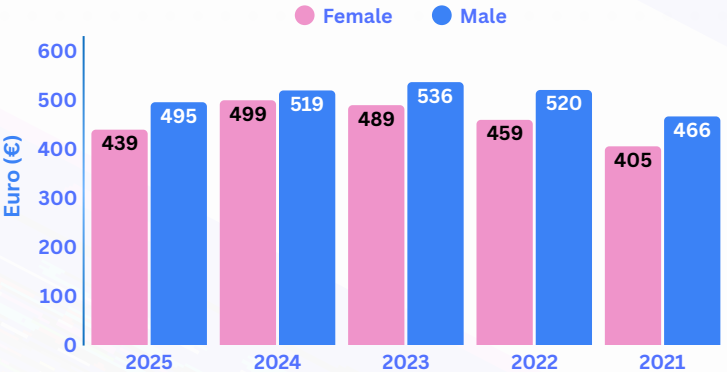
Pharma, Life Sci & Med Device Daily Rates

The average daily rates in pharma, life science and med device sectors have all seen a drop in 2025. Pharma's average daily rate in 2024 was €496, the average daily rate in 2025 is €486. Med device has dropped from €498 in 2024 to €397 in 2025, and the average daily rate in the life science sector has dropped from €581 in 2024 to €529 in 2025.

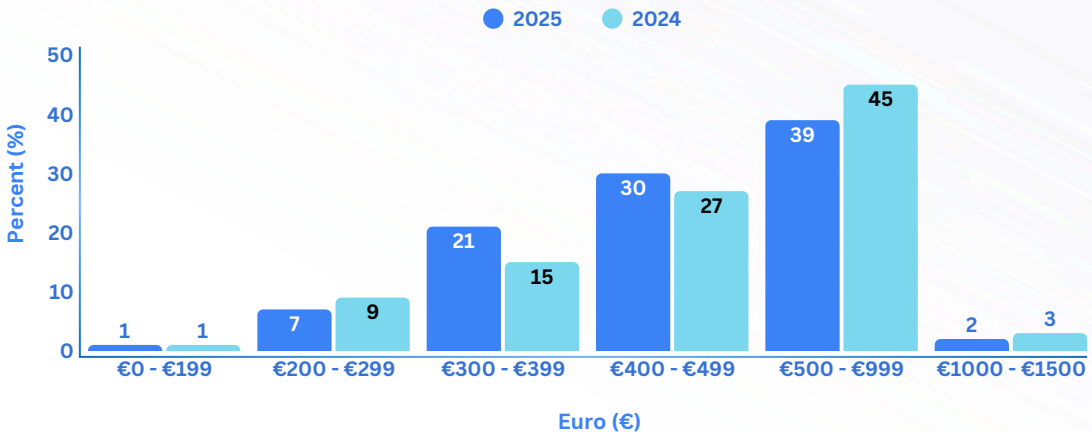
This reflects a drop of 2% in the average daily rate for the pharma sector, a significant drop of 20% in the medical device sector, and a 9% drop in the average daily rate for the life science sector.

While the average daily rate has dropped in 2025 it should be noted that more than half (51%) of respondents across the three sectors had average daily rates between €300 and €499 in 2025, whereas in 2024 42% of respondents had an average daily rate between €300 and €499.

Avg. Daily Rates by Gender



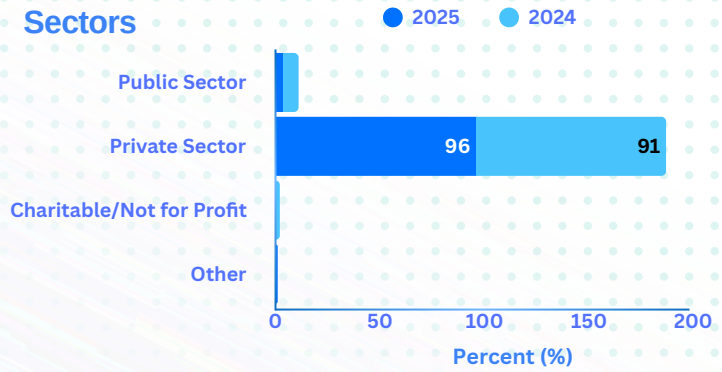
Daily Rates By Year



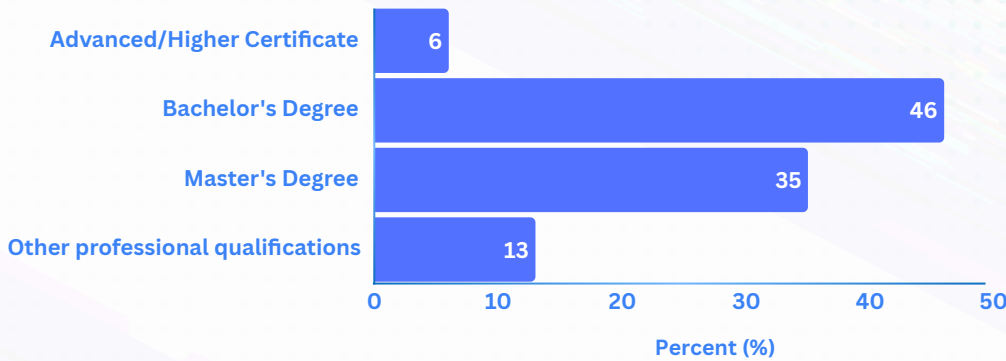
Education & Sector

100% of those contracting in the pharma sector have achieved level 6 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications. 81% have a Bachelor or a Master degree. 96% of Pharma, Life Sciences & Med Device contractors work in the private sector. This has increased by 5% since 2024.

Sectors

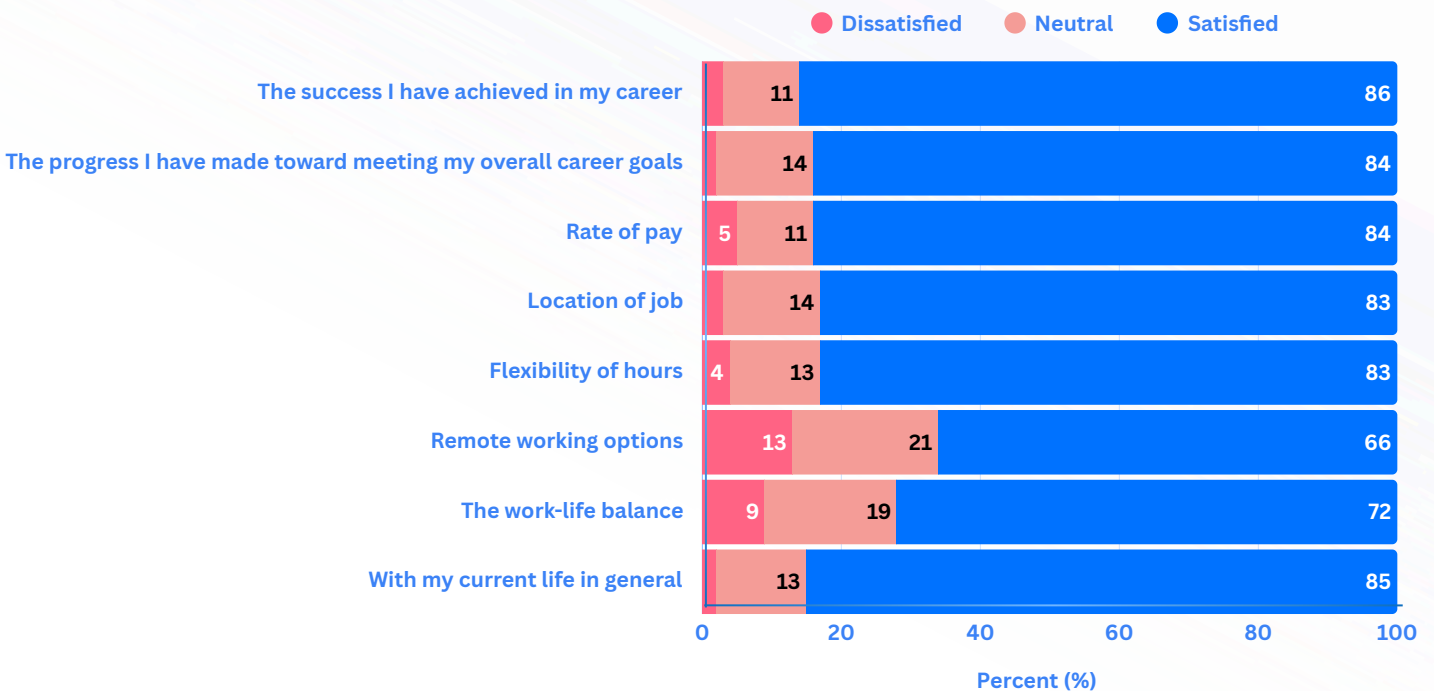


Education



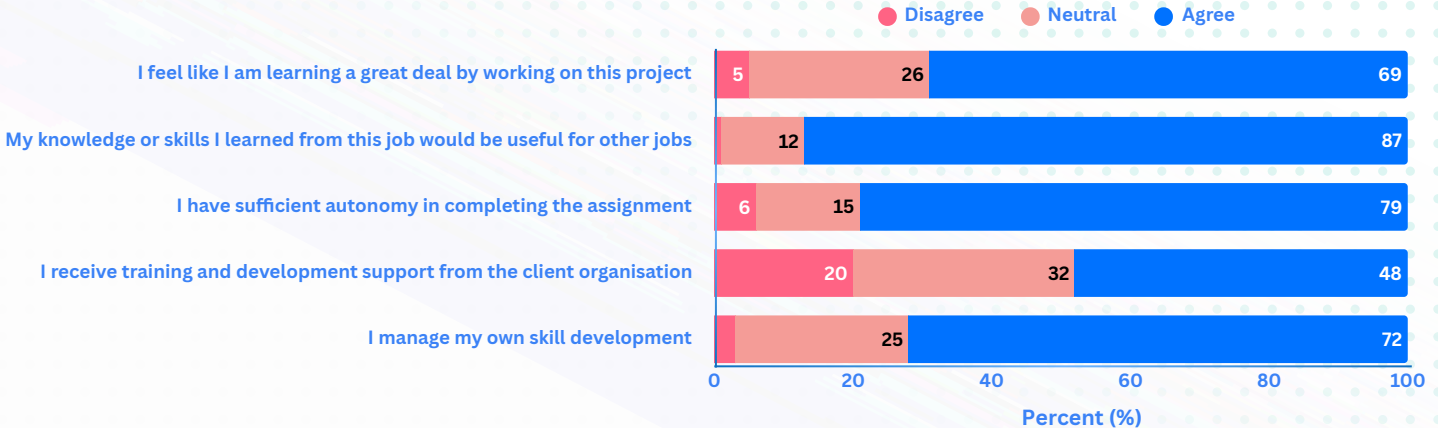
How Pharma, Life Science & Med Device Contractors Feel About Their Work

86% of contractors working in the pharma sector reported being satisfied with the success they have achieved in their career to date. 85% were satisfied with their life in general. Contractors were asked about their level of satisfaction with key elements of their working lives. Pharma contractors are more satisfied in 2025 with most factors of their working life in 2025 compared to 2024. 66% expressed satisfaction with remote working options in 2025, down from 73% in 2024. Pharma contractors' report high satisfaction levels across the other factors such as the flexibility of hours 83%, location of job 83%, rate of pay 84%, and work-life balance 72%.



The Future and Finding Work

Unsurprisingly 87% of pharma contractors believe their skills are both useful and transferable. 79% agree they have sufficient autonomy to carry out their role and 69% agree they are learning by working on their current project. Pharma contractors are feeling optimistic about the availability of contract roles in the future with more than half of the respondents (54%) expecting the availability of contract roles to increase in the next 12 months. This indicates a high level of confidence in the belief of the stability of the pharma sector by those involved in it. While 84% of Pharma contractors expressed satisfaction with their current rate of pay, 51% expect their rate of pay to increase in the next 12 months. Pharma contractors are also optimistic about the Irish economy with 48% expecting the economy to perform better this year than in 2024.



Pharma Contractors Thoughts On The Future



Confidence Index

Confidence in the contracting sector in the next 3 to 5 years differs depending on the discipline the contractors are involved in. It is, in the main, very positive. Pharma contractors have a confidence index score of +23. Life Science sector has a confidence index score of +28. Medical device sector has the highest confidence index score of +33.

It's fair to say that contractors are confident that the contracting sector in the next 3 -5 years will be in a strong position. Contractors are also optimistic in their outlook on the performance of the Irish economy. Again the Medical Device sector has the highest confidence index score in the performance of the Irish economy, with a score of +21, they are a lot more optimistic about the Irish economy in 2025 compared to 2024 when the reported confidence index score was just +9. The outlook of pharma and life science contractors is also positive with scores of +18 and +20 respectively.

	Pharma	Life Science	Medical Devices
The Irish Economy Confidence Index	+18	+21	+20
The Contracting Sector Confidence Index	+23	+33	+28

Technology



"Contracting has broadened my horizons in terms of what expertise I can improve and grow but also who I can meet to grow my network."

Quote from Respondent

Ireland is rapidly solidifying its position as a European hub for technological innovation and enterprise.

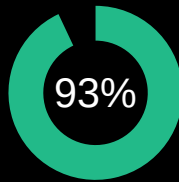
With over 106,000 people working in ICT and over 2,200 tech start-ups employing approx. 50,000 people ([CSO](#), [Scale Ireland](#)). The market is estimated at €20.74 billion for 2024 and is expected to reach €30.9 billion by 2029. ([Mordor Intelligence](#)). Our latest report highlights key trends shaping the ICT sector and provides understanding of the possible challenges and opportunities in 2025 for contractors in Ireland. A promising opportunity for 2025 within ICT is cybersecurity with a 10% growth trajectory forecast by Cyber Ireland ([Enterprise Ireland](#)).

Cyber Ireland indicates that the demand for cybersecurity professionals will more than double by 2030, with an additional 10,000 roles required to meet this growth.

To better understand the dynamics shaping the future, this year's Ireland's Project Economy findings offer valuable insights into the sector's performance in 2025, as well as the motivations and expectations of its workforce.

ICT Contractors Are Happy With Their Career Success!

93% Happy With The Success They Have Achieved



Understanding the Future of ICT

Professional ICT Contractors are optimistic - with 88% expecting the contracting market in the ICT sector to remain stable or grow over the next 3-5 years.

ICT Average Daily Rate

€632

2025 has seen a substantial increase in ICT daily rates of 22% from 2024!

Gender Split

72 Men 26 Women 2 Undisclosed



Average Age

2025
46 yrs

2024
43 yrs

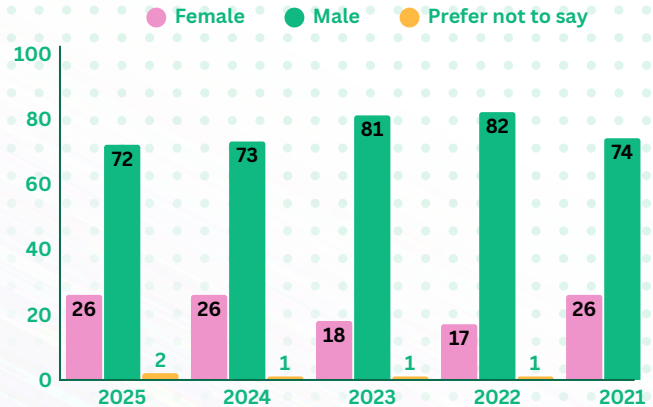
2023
51 yrs

2022
50 yrs

2021
48 yrs

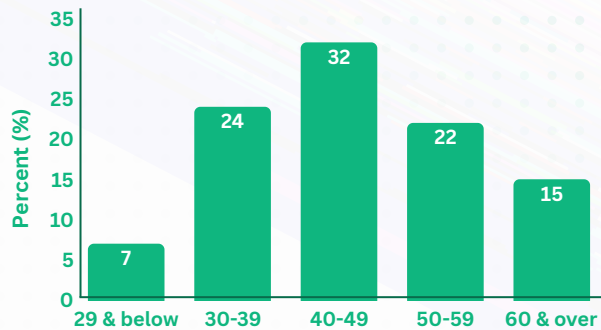
Gender

The gender profile in the technology sector in 2025 remains similar to that of 2024. Females account for 27% of total independent professionals so are represented proportionally in the ICT sector.



Age

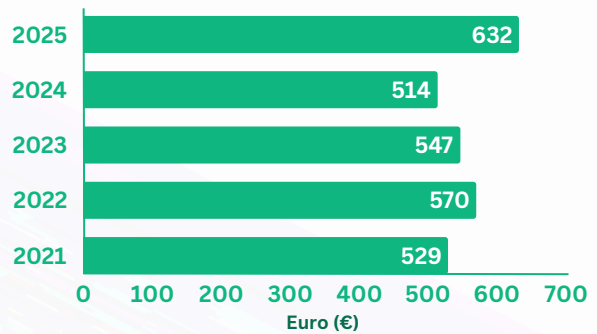
The average age in 2025 in the ICT sector is 46 years, up from 43 years in 2024. The percentage of contractors 29 and under has dropped by 3% while the percentage of contractors 60 years and over has increased by 7% highlighting the fact that experience is still highly valued in the ICT sector.



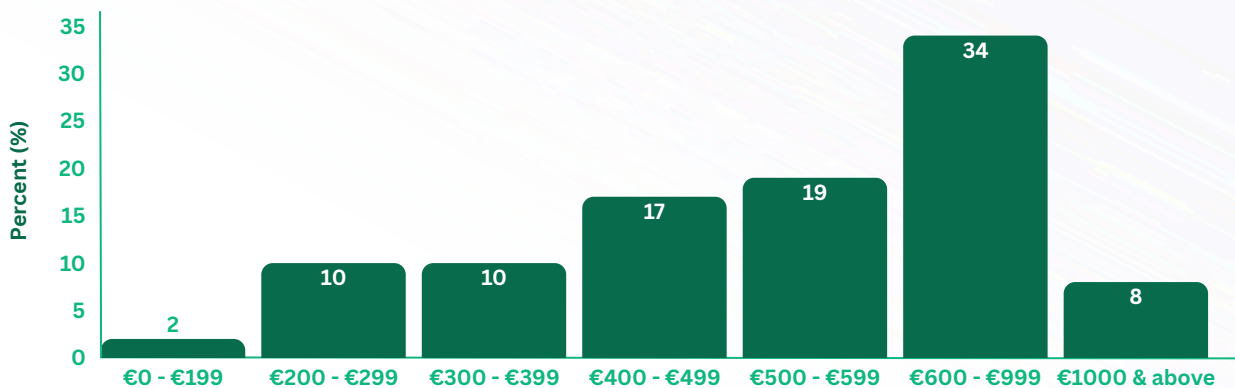
Daily Rate

The average daily rate in the ICT sector has seen a significant increase in 2025, rising to €632 from €514 in 2024, a substantial 22% increase. This growth stands out, especially considering that the average daily rate across all major contracting sectors in 2025 has decreased compared to 2024. 61% of ICT contractors now earn an average daily rate of €500 or more, compared to 48% in 2024.

Avg. Daily Rates

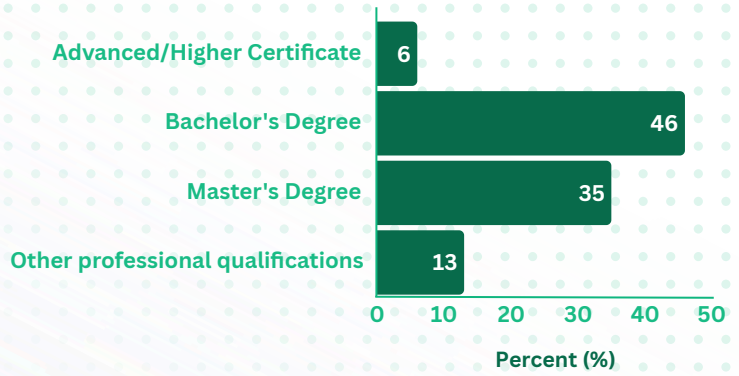


Daily Rates



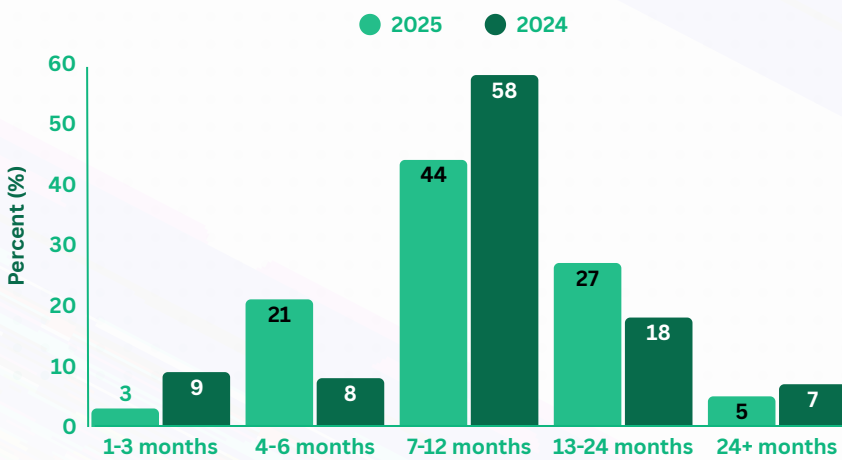
Education

The education profile has changed in the ICT sector with 16% of contractors in 2025 reporting to have an advanced certificate or higher certificate up from 4% in 2024, this may reflect the introduction of new technologies in the sector resulting in the need to upskill in new areas. There has also been a drop in the number of contractors holding a bachelor's degree down 14% in 2025 when compared to 2024. Perhaps suggesting that universities have not been able to pivot fast enough for emerging technologies.



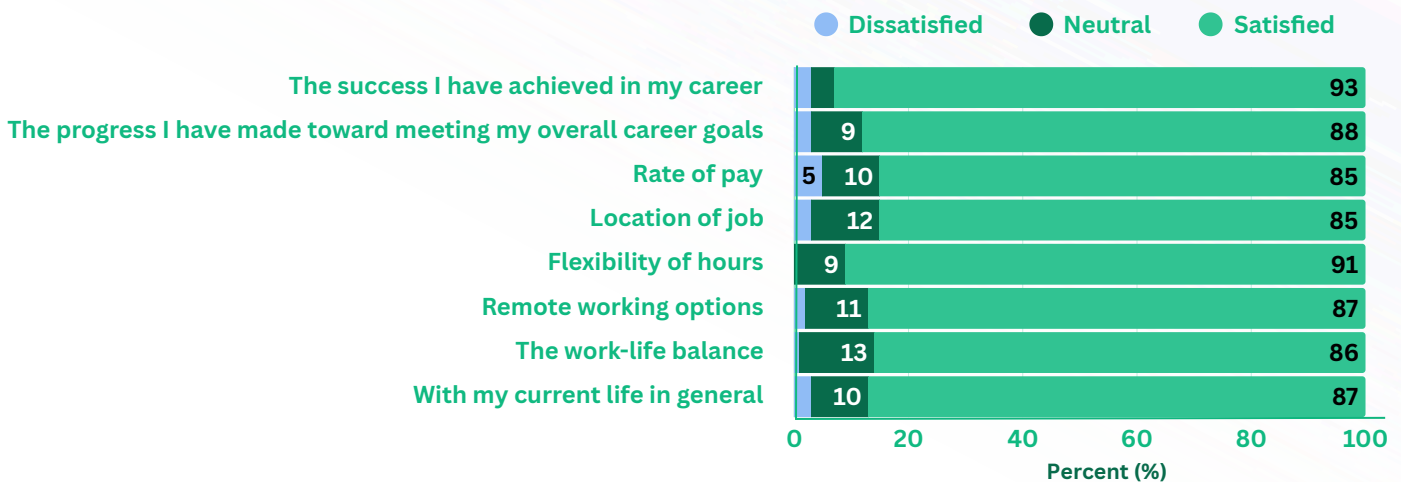
Contract Length

The average contract length remains at 15 months. There has been a reduction in the number of shorter-term contracts (6 months and under) at 24% in 2025 as against 32% in 2024. There has also been a reported 5% increase in the number of contracts that are 13 months or more this year.



How ICT Contractors Feel About Their Work

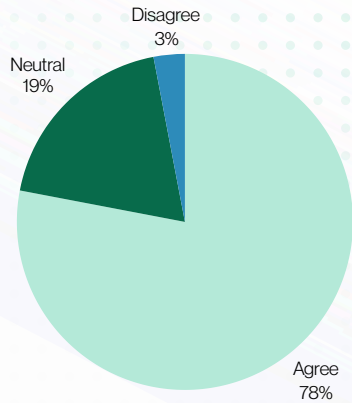
93% of ICT contractors are happy with the success they have achieved in their career and 87% are satisfied with their life in general. 91% reported that they were satisfied with the flexibility of the hours, 87% were satisfied with the remote working options available to them, 86% of respondents reported being satisfied with their work life balance, and 85% are satisfied with both the rate of pay and the location of the job. ICT contractors were more satisfied across all of the of the work and life factors evaluated in 2025 than in 2024.



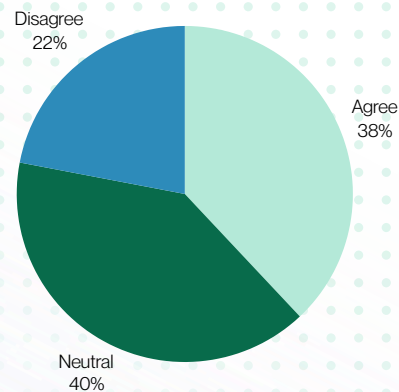
Employability

78% of ICT contractors agree that their experience is in demand, down from 90% in 2024. 38% agree that it will be easy for them to find a new contract down from 66% in 2024. These employability results are the lowest reported since 2021 and are surprising as ICT contractors express a high level of confidence in the contracting sector for 2025.

My experience is in demand on the labour market...

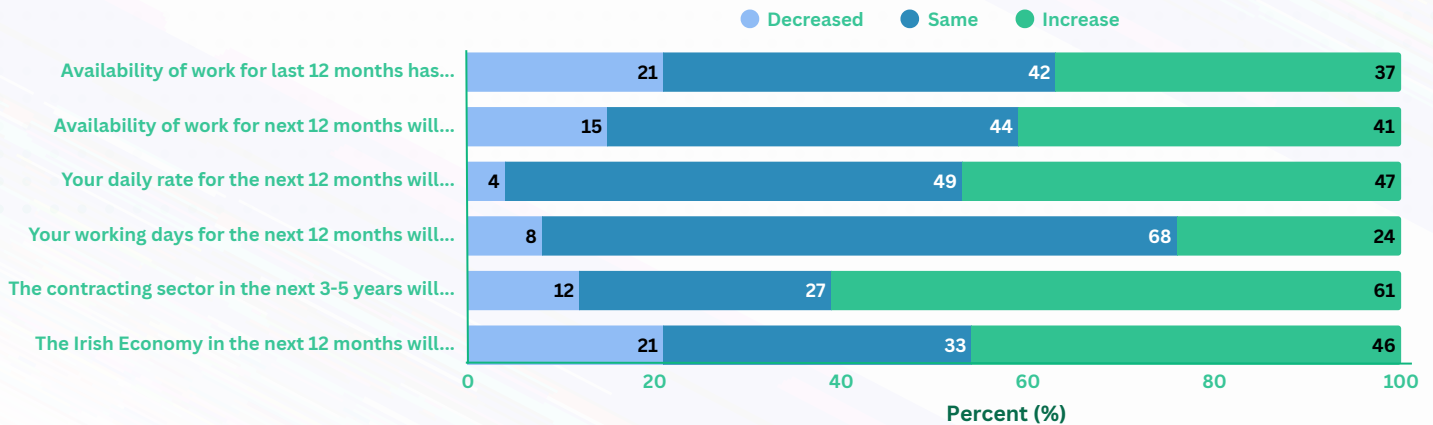


It is easy for me to find another contract...



Future Expectations

The ICT sector continues to be an ideal environment for professional contractors. With project-based work as standard, rapidly changing business needs, and a high demand for specialised skills, companies often rely on subject matter experts to deliver projects or enhance the capabilities of their internal teams. Professional contractors in this sector are optimistic, with 88% of contractors expecting the contracting market to remain stable or grow over the next 3-5 years, and 79% anticipating the performance of the Irish economy to stay the same or improve this year.



Confidence Index

ICT contractors are reporting a positive outlook with a confidence index score of +31 relating to the contracting sector in the next 3-5 years. They also had a positive confidence index score of +14 for the performance of the Irish Economy in 2025.

The Irish Economy Confidence Index

2025	+14
2024	+18
2023	+11
2022	+43
2021	+16

The Contracting Sector Confidence Index

2025	+31
2024	+29
2023	+35
2022	+41
2021	+35

Finance

"Sales or Business Development jobs in my field tend to be clustered around major financial centres (NYC, London, Dublin, etc.) so my current role allows me to live away from those centres but still participate in the industry in a very active manner suited to my particular strengths."

Quote from Respondent



The financial services sector in Ireland is a powerhouse for growth.

Ireland is now home to over 430 internationally focused financial services companies, collectively employing more than 50,000 people. Among these are 17 of the top 20 global banks and 11 of the world's 15 largest insurance companies. Demand for contractors in the finance sector is growing rapidly, particularly in specialised areas such as fintech, cybersecurity, and regulatory compliance ([IDA Ireland](#)).

As the industry evolves, the integration of AI into routine tasks has heightened the need for advisory and strategic professionals, driving salaries higher in these roles. Overall, salaries in the finance sector remained stable through 2024, but high-demand roles experienced pay increases of 10–11%. For example, compliance officers saw salary growth of 7–13% due to increased demand. According to [Matrix Recruitment](#), professionals in areas like tax, data analytics, and consultancy are in particularly short supply heading into 2025.

A report from [EY](#) forecasts that employment in financial services could grow by 34% by 2028, potentially increasing the workforce to 168,000. Similarly, the Federation of International Banks in Ireland (FIBI) reports a positive outlook, with over 40% of its member firms expecting to expand their workforce in 2024. Additionally, the Irish government has prioritised the finance sector's growth through initiatives such as [the Investment Limited Partnerships Act](#), part of the "Ireland for Finance" strategy first launched in 2019.

The latest iteration of this strategy, published in October 2022, aims to add 5,000 jobs in the sector by 2026, focusing on sustainable finance, fintech, and digital financial services. While the sector's growth prospects are overwhelmingly positive, it is not without challenges. The industry remains vulnerable to global economic shocks, financial crises, and regulatory changes, which can affect its stability and growth.

Finance Contractors Earn Almost 26% More Per Day Than Other Sectors!

26%
Higher!



What Finance Contractors Think About The Future

Finance contractors have a positive attitude towards the contracting sector with 87% of participants stating they think the sector will perform the same or increase in the next 3-5 years.

Finance Average Daily Rates

€695

10% of Finance Contractors Earn €1,000 or more per day.

Gender Split

76
Men

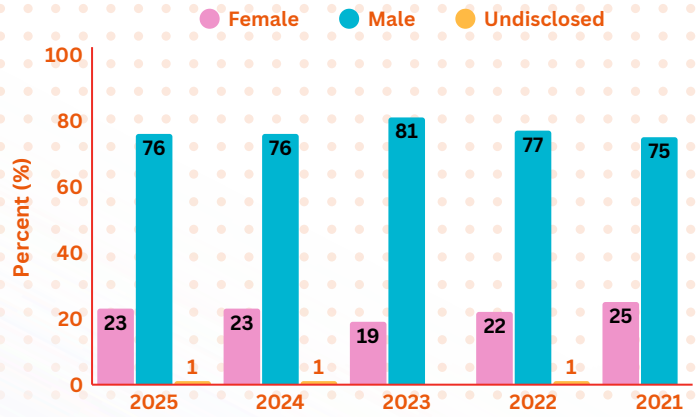
23
Women

1
Undisclosed



Gender

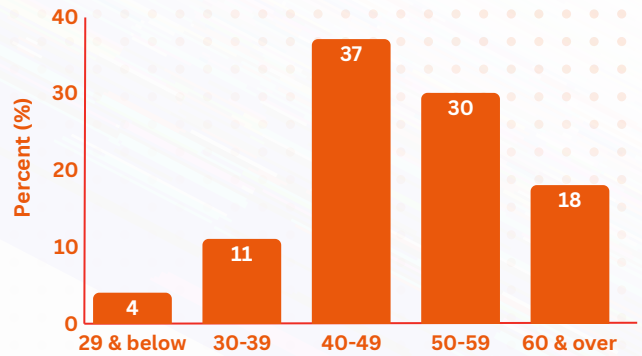
The finance sector is made up of 76% males and 23% females. The gender split has remained unchanged since 2024.



Age

In 2025, the average age of a contractor in the finance sector is 49 years, a year younger than 2024. More than a third (37%) of all finance contractors are between 40 and 49 years.

Average Age **49** Years

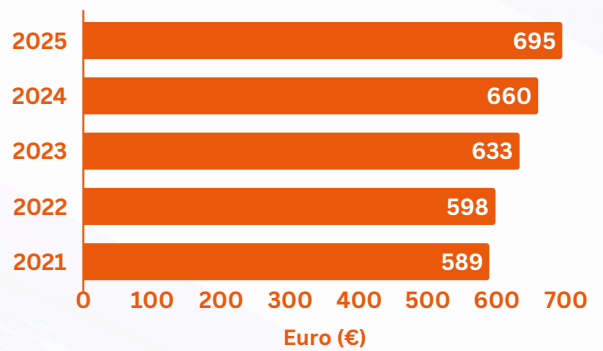


Daily Rate

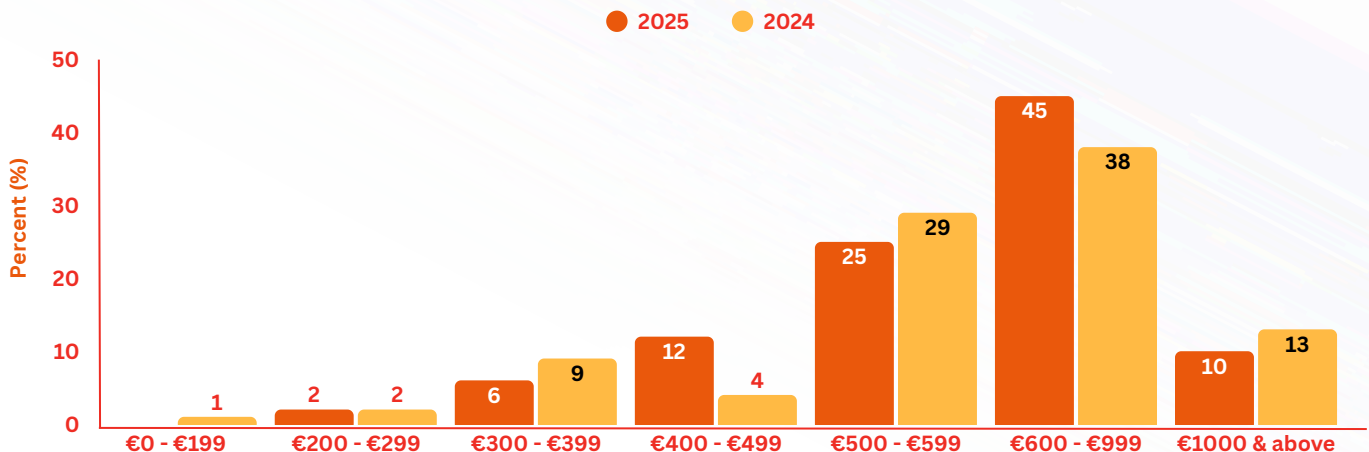
The average daily rate in the finance sector in 2025 is €695, almost 26% higher than the average daily rate across all contracting sectors, making contracting in the financial sector a very lucrative career. 80% of contractors in the finance sector earn €500 or more, with 10% earning €1,000 or more per day.

Sector **84%** work in the private sector

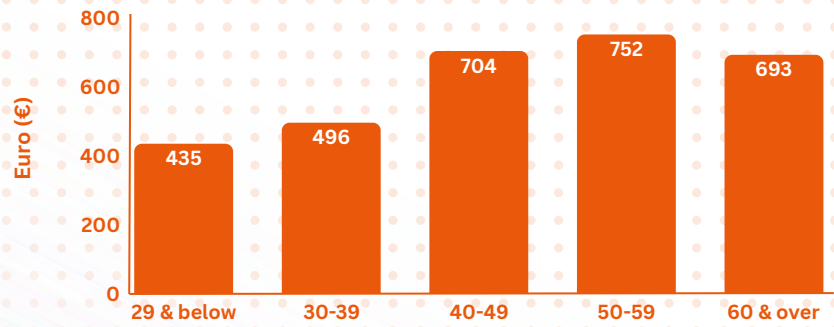
Avg. Daily Rates by Year



Daily Rates By Year



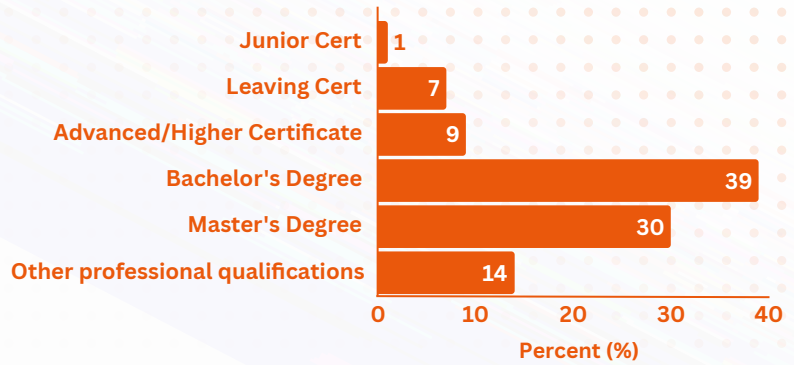
Daily Rates by Age Group



Education

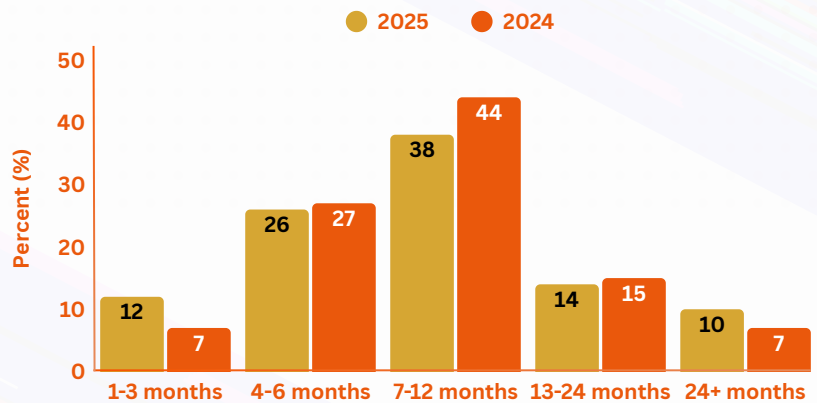
99% of finance sector respondents in 2025 hold at least a Level 6 qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications.

The percentage of those with bachelor's degrees has risen to 39% (up from 32% in 2024), 30% hold master's degrees (down from 34% in 2024). Meanwhile, the number of respondents with 'other professional qualifications' has declined from 18% in 2024 to 14% in 2025.



Contract Length

The average contract length is 14 months. 38% of contracts are between 7-12 months, which is down from 44% in 2024. 38% of contract are less than 6 months. 24% of contracts are 13 months or longer in 2025.



Average Contract Lengths

2025
14 months

2024
12 months

2023
13 months

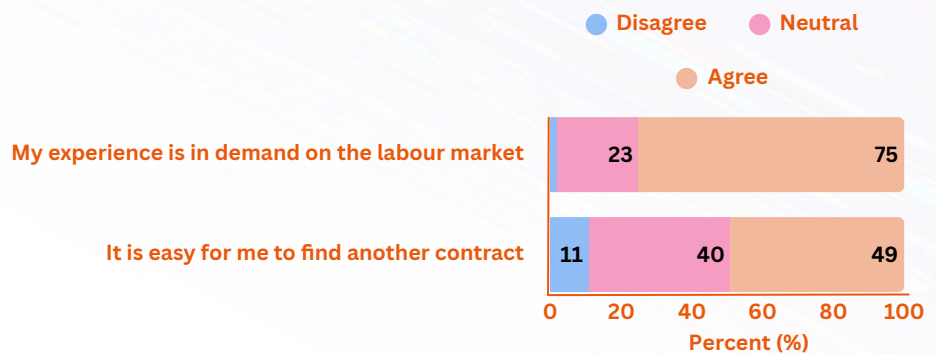
2022
13 months

2021
13 months

Employability

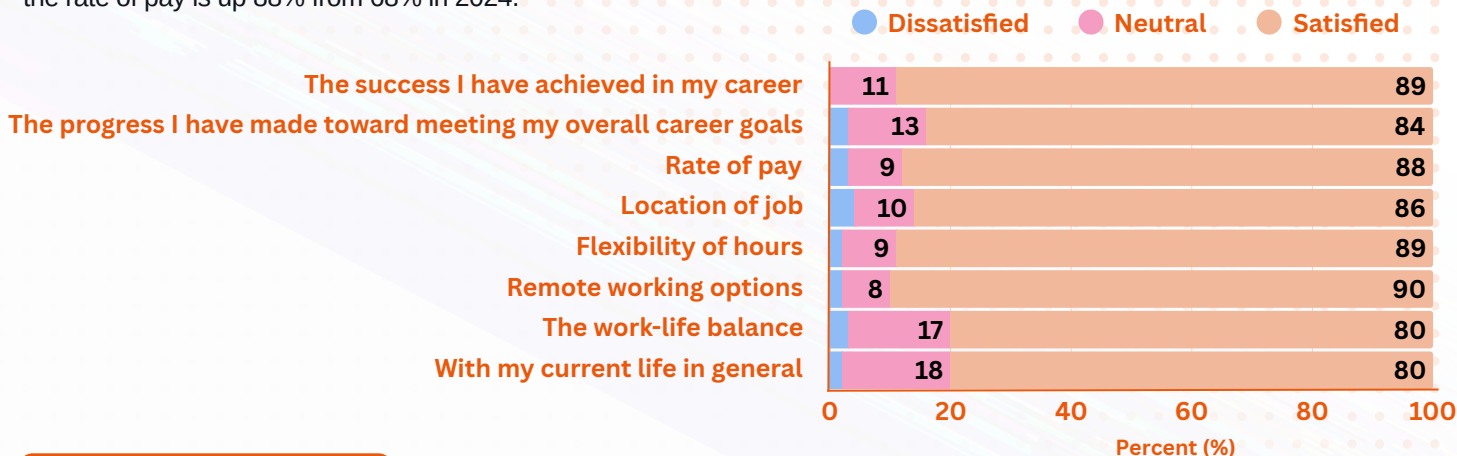
75% of finance contractors agree that their experience is in demand on the labour market which is down from 84% in 2024.

49% agree that it will be easy to find another contract role up from 47% in 2024.



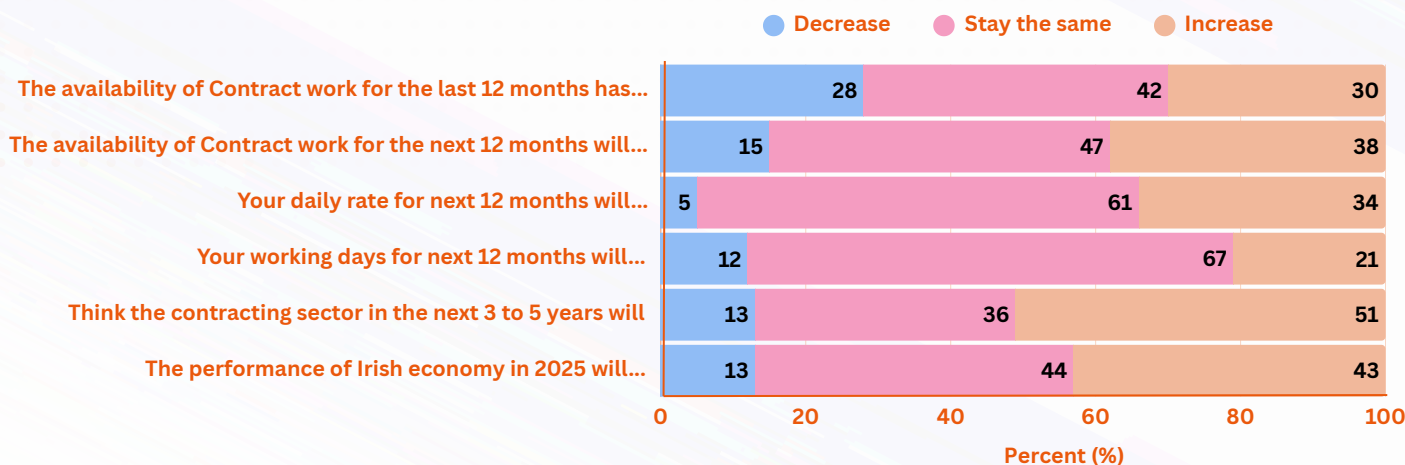
How Finance Contractors Feel About Their Work

The majority (89%) of contractors are satisfied with the progress they have made in their career. Finance contractors were asked about their satisfaction with 7 key areas of their working lives. Finance contractors remain satisfied about their working lives, with 80% satisfied with their lives in general and with their work life balance. 90% are satisfied with remote working options, 86% are satisfied with the location of the job, 89% reported being satisfied with flexibility of hours. Satisfaction with the rate of pay is up 88% from 68% in 2024.



Future Expectations

Finance contractors have a positive attitude towards the contracting sector with 87% of participants stating they think the sector will remain static or increase in the next 3-5 years. 43% of respondents believe that the Irish economy will perform better in 2025 compared to 2024. 13% of contractors believe the contracting sector will decrease in the next 3-5 years, while 13% of finance contractors also expect the Irish economy to perform worse this year than last.



Confidence Index

Those working in the finance sector are optimistic about both the contracting sector and the Irish economy. In 2025 the confidence index score in relation to the performance of the contracting sector in the next 3-5 years is +22. The confidence index score in relation to the performance of the Irish economy in 2025 is +16.

The Irish Economy Confidence Index

2025	+16
2024	+10
2023	+6
2022	+40
2021	+7

The Contracting Sector Confidence Index

2025	+22
2024	+24
2023	+34
2022	+40
2021	+37

Engineering



"I like the job autonomy, and I appreciate the 'downtime' between projects as a way to focus on other personal activities or projects."

Quote from Respondent

With more than 10,800 businesses and more than 50,000 employees, Ireland's engineering sector is an essential component of Ireland's economy ([Ibec](#)).

As of 2025, the Consultant Engineering Services industry alone is valued at €6.9 billion, with a compound annual growth rate of 4.7% since 2019 ([Ibis](#)).

Government incentives and greater investment in research and development have led to a considerable emphasis on sustainability and innovation in recent trends. With €3 billion allotted in Ireland's 2025 budget for infrastructure projects, mainly in the water and transportation sectors, there will be an increase in demand for those who are highly skilled in this sector ([Irish Times](#)).

As Ireland establishes itself as a hub for innovation and sustainability, the engineering industry continues to offer significant opportunities for employment and career progression, driving positive impacts on Ireland's project economy. With strong government support and a focus on sustainable development, the engineering sector is poised for further growth in 2025.

Engineer Contractors Are Currently In High-Demand!

90% Agree That Their Experience Is In Demand



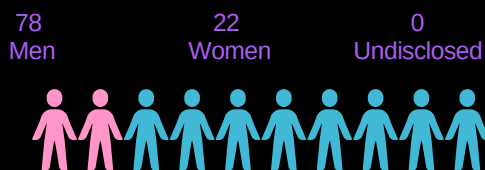
Efforts to address the underrepresentation of women STEM - yielding results!

From this year's report we can see that the percentage of women contracting in the engineering sector has increased from 7% in 2021 to 22% in 2025!

Average Daily Rate in Engineering

€519

Gender Split



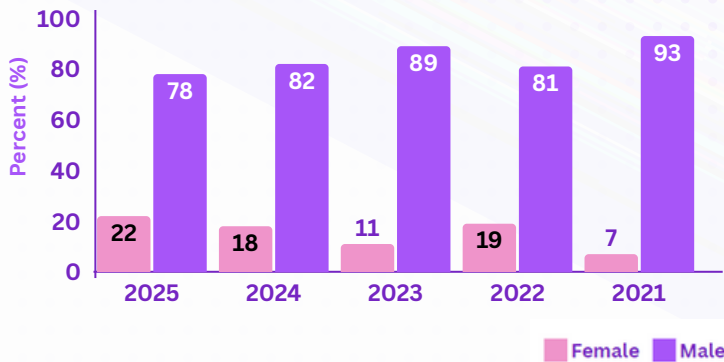
Gender

Women in STEM make up just 12% of engineering professionals in Ireland. Efforts to address the low level of female engagement in the sector include initiatives like Engineers Ireland's STEPS programme, as well as increased diversity and inclusion strategies implemented by end clients. These initiatives appear to be yielding results, with a marked growth in the number of women contracting in the engineering sector. The percentage of women contracting in the engineering sector has been increasing from 7% in 2021 to 22% in 2025.

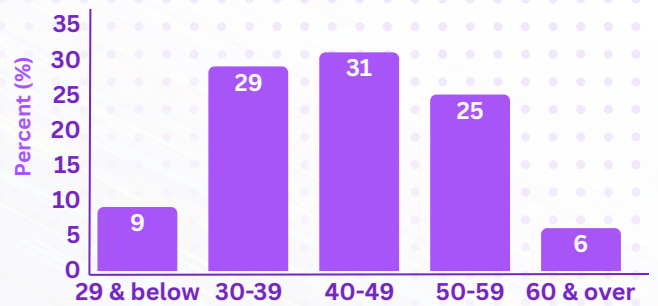
Age

The average age of contractors in the engineering sector is 43 years, slightly younger than the average age of all contractors which is 45 years. The percentage of contractors under 39 years has increased by 10% since 2024, showing that contractors are entering the sector younger than previously reported. 69% of contractors in 2025 were under 50 whereas only 46% were under 50 years in 2024.

Gender

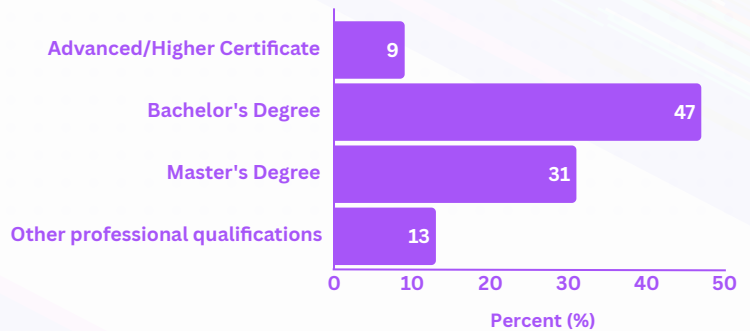


Age



Education

All engineering sector respondents in 2025 hold at least a Level 6 qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications. The percentage of those with bachelor's degrees has risen to 47% (up from 32% in 2024), while 31% hold master's degrees (up from 27% in 2024). Meanwhile, the number of respondents with 'other professional qualifications' has declined from 20% in 2024 to 13% in 2025.



Average Age

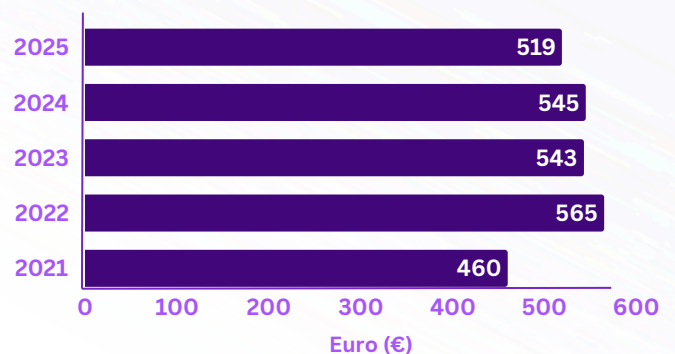


Daily Rate

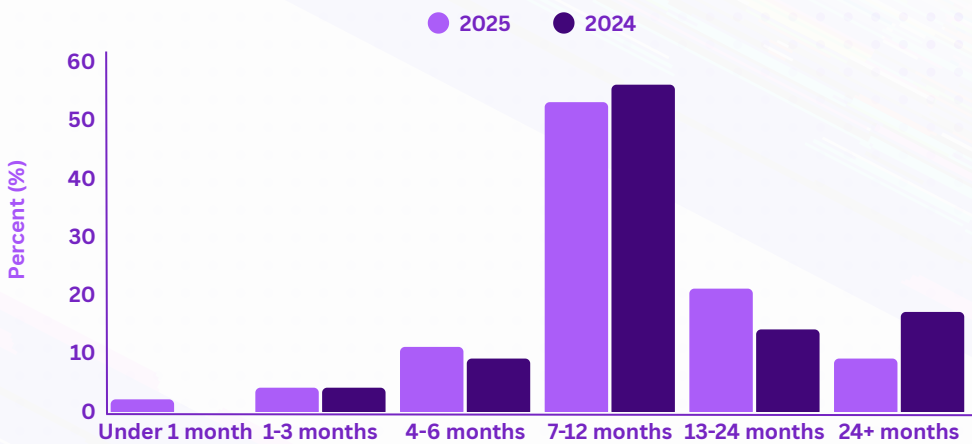
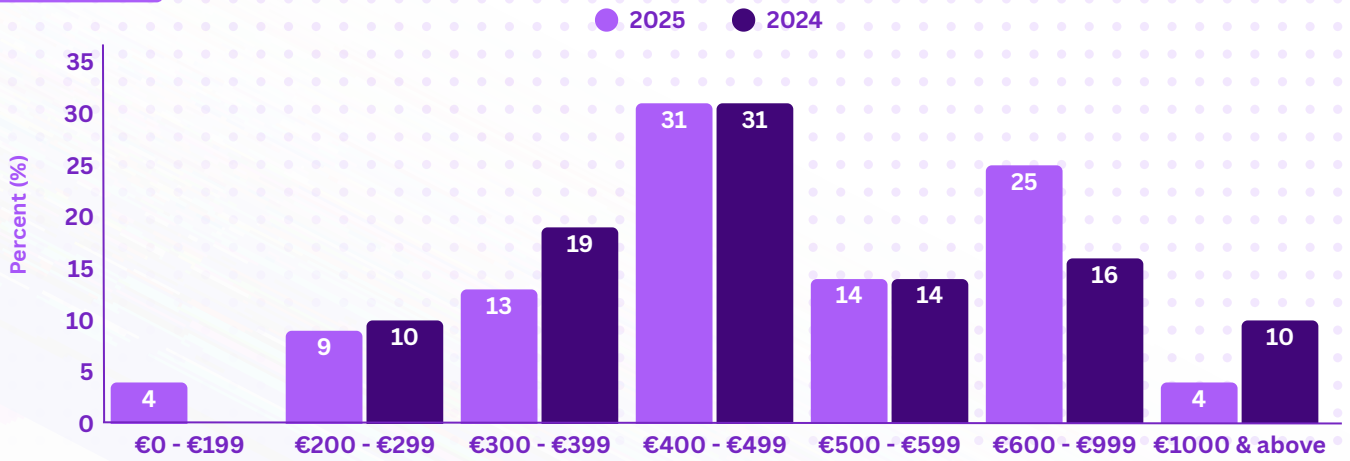
The daily rate has seen a drop this year, from €545 in 2024 to €519 in 2025. This drop can be explained by the increase in the percentage of contractors whose daily rate is less than €200 up from 0% in 2024 to 4% in 2025. Another contributor is the change in the percentage of contractors whose daily rate is more than €1,000 – which has dropped to 4% in 2025 down from 10% in 2024. However, 43% of contractors in the engineering sector have a daily rate of €500 or more, this is up from 40% in 2024.

Average **€519**
Daily Rate
Per Day

Avg. Daily Rates



Daily Rate



Contract Length

The average contract length is 15 months. 53% of contracts are between 7-12 months. There has been a 5% increase in shorter-term contracts that are less than 6 months. There has also been a rise in contracts between 13 and 24 months this year at 7%, while contracts of 24 months or more have decreased by 8%.

Average Contract Lengths

2024
15 months

2024
18 months

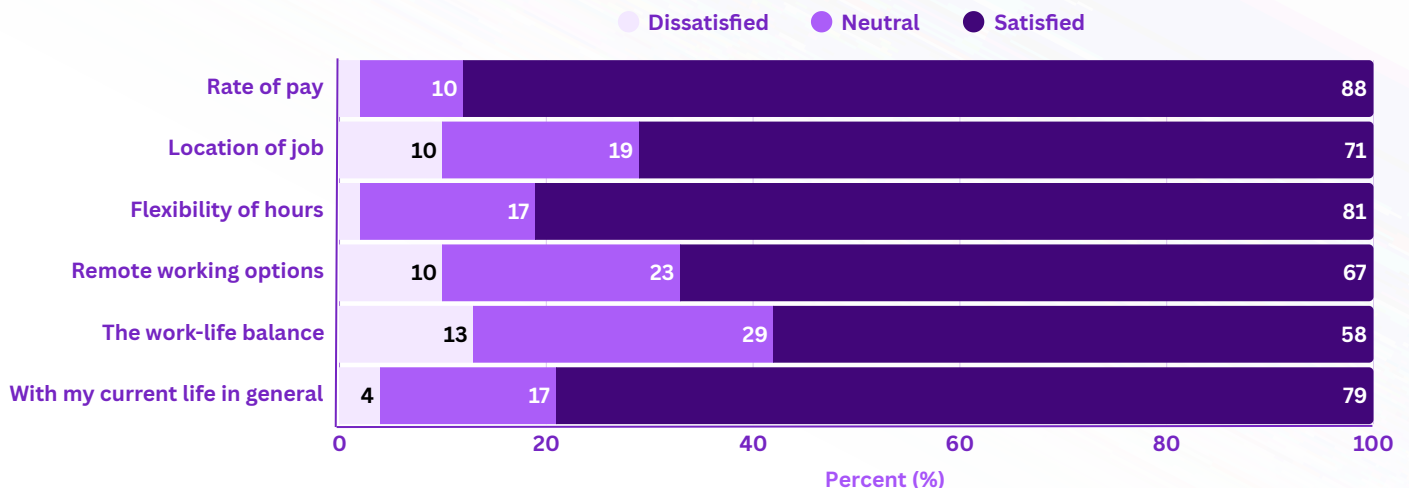
2023
17 months

2022
17 months

2021
20 months

How Engineering and Technical Contractors Feel About Their Work

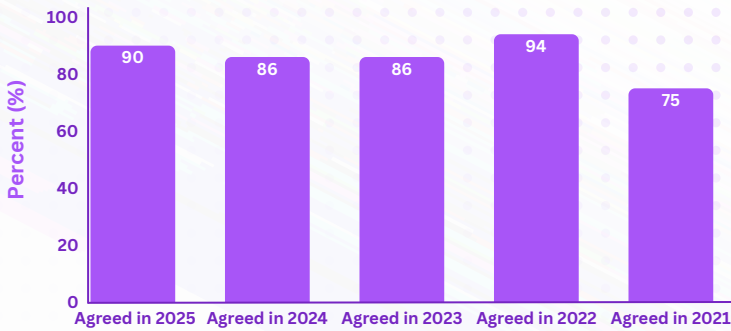
75% of engineering contractors in 2025 are satisfied with their life in general. Engineering contractors were asked about their satisfaction with 7 key areas of their working lives. Overall engineering contractors remain satisfied about their working lives, they are most satisfied with the rate of pay at 88%, followed by flexibility of hours at 81%, the location of the job at 71%, and remote working options at 67%. The lowest satisfaction score was work life balance at 58% – this factor also received the lowest satisfaction rating from engineering contractors in 2023 at 71%.



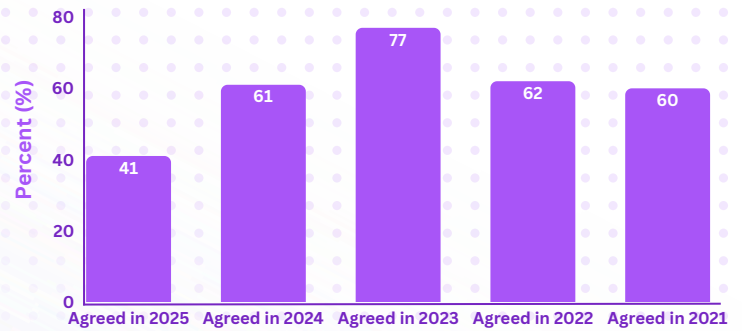
Employability

90% of engineering contractors agree that their experience is in demand in the labour market, only 41% agreed it would be easy to find another contract.

My experience is in demand on the labour market...

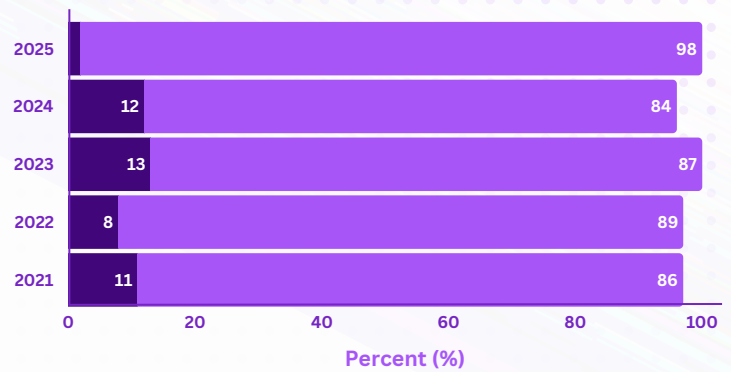


It is easy for me to find another contract...



Sector

98% of engineering contracts are in the private sector with just 2% in the public sector which is down 10% since 2024.



Future Expectations

Engineering contractors have a positive attitude towards the contracting sector with over half (55%) of participants stating they think the contracting sector will increase in the next 3-5 years. 30% of respondents believe that the Irish economy will perform better in 2025 compared to 2024. Just 7% of contractors believe the contracting sector will decrease in the next 3-5 years, while 30% of engineering contractors expect the Irish economy to perform worse this year than last.

Do you think the availability of Contract/Freelance work for the last 12 months has...

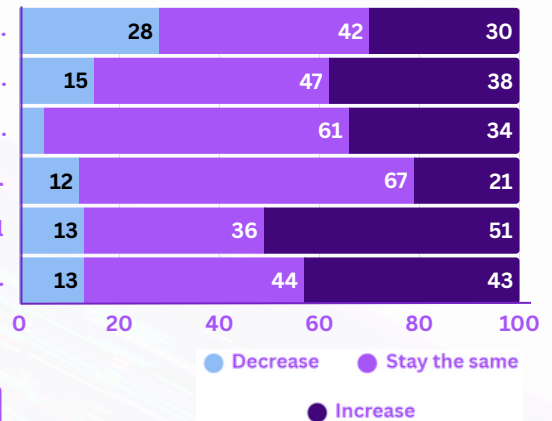
Do you think the availability of Contract/Freelance work for the next 12 months will...

Do you think your daily rate for the next 12 months will...

Do you think your working days for the next 12 months will...

Do you think the contracting sector in the next 3 to 5 years will...

Do you think the performance of Irish economy in 2025 will...



Confidence Index

Those working in the engineering and technical activities sector are optimistic about both the contracting sector and the Irish economy. In 2025, the confidence index score in relation to the performance of the contracting sector in the next 3-5 years is +29. The confidence index score in relation to the performance of the Irish economy in 2024 is +2.

The Irish Economy Confidence Index

2025	+2
2024	+9
2023	+8
2022	+35
2021	+2

The Contracting Sector Confidence Index

2025	+29
2024	+28
2023	+27
2022	+40
2021	+25

Medical Locum

"I enjoy the flexibility that contracting work gives me. In general, it's less political, and when you want a change, it's easy to move. Provided you do a good job, it's normally easy to go back to previous clients."

Quote from Respondent



The role of locum doctors and pharmacists in Ireland is undergoing significant transformation

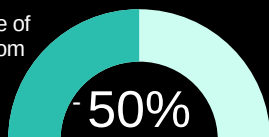
shaped by technological advancements, shifting demographics between urban and rural areas, and the increasing demands on the healthcare system. It is expected that both the medical and pharmacy locum sectors are poised for growth in the coming years. This expansion is driven by Ireland's ongoing healthcare workforce shortages and the growing preference among professionals for flexible work arrangements. As the population ages and the need for healthcare services escalates, locum work will remain an indispensable component of the healthcare landscape.

In the medical locum sector, a large portion of healthcare staffing, particularly in hospitals and GP practices, depends on locum doctors. These professionals play a crucial role in addressing staffing needs across a range of specialties, including paediatrics, geriatrics, and mental health services. Locum doctors provide essential support to ensure continuity of care in a healthcare system under pressure.

Although the locum pharmacy sector is smaller in scale, it is vital to the smooth operation of community pharmacies. Community pharmacies frequently rely on locum pharmacists to address staffing gaps. A survey conducted by the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) revealed that many community pharmacies employ locum staff regularly, with temporary coverage often exceeding 30% of staffing needs during peak times. Together, these locum sectors form a critical part of Ireland's healthcare framework, with independent professionals ensuring the delivery of essential services.

The Medical Locum Contractor Landscape is Changing

50% reduction in the percentage of contractors 50 years or older from 2024 to 2025



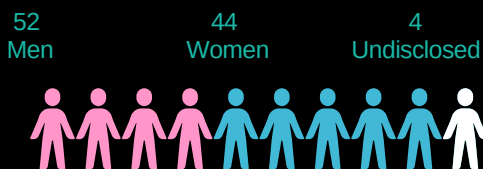
The Shortest Contract Length

A feature of medical locum work is shorter contract lengths compared to other sectors. This is very evident this year with 79% of all contracts 6 months or less.

Average Daily Rate

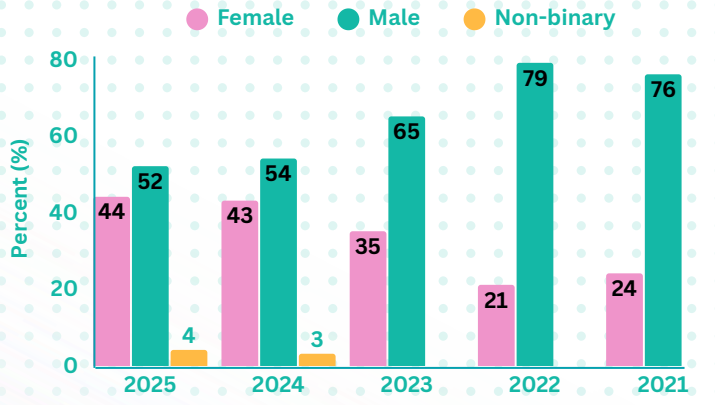
€474

Gender Split



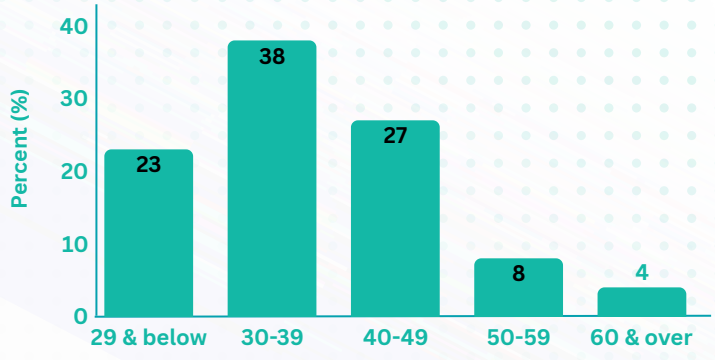
Gender

The medical locum sector is the only sector where the percentage of female independent professionals is well above the average. In 2025 medical locum sector results show 44% female contractors work in the sector, whereas the average across all other major contracting sectors is 27%.

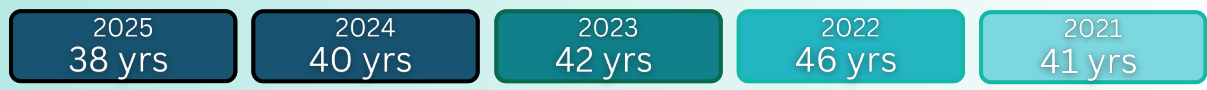


Age

The average age in the medical locum sector continues to fall. The average age in 2025 is 38 years down from 40 years in 2024. There has been a 50% reduction in the percentage of contractors 50 years or older working in the sector from 2024 to 2025.



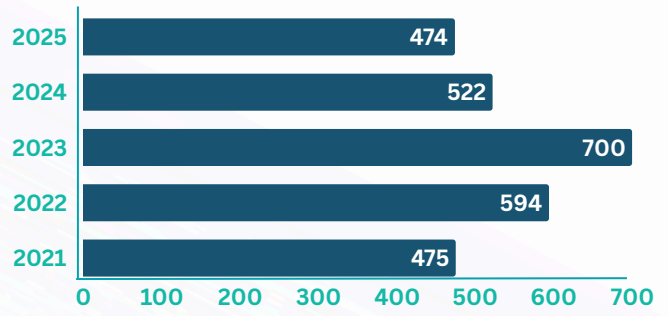
Average Age



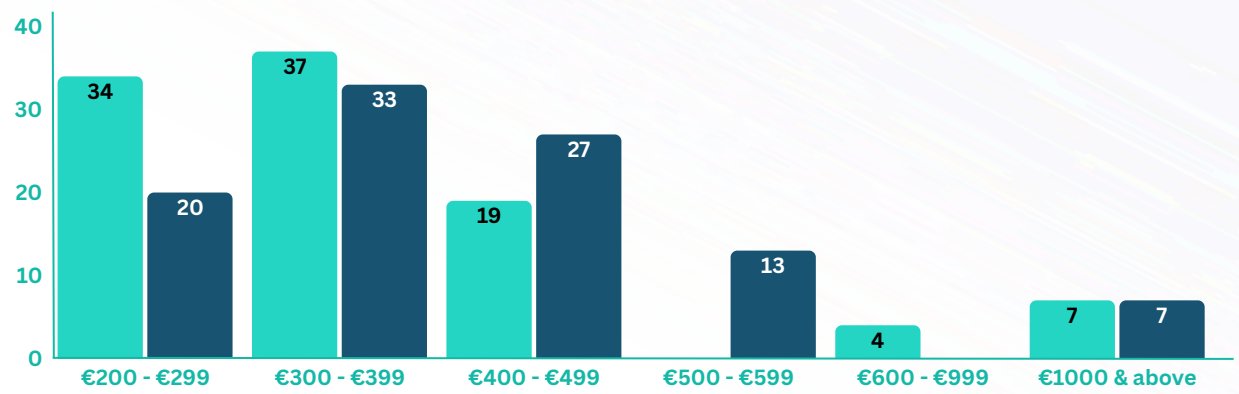
Daily Rate

The average daily rate has dropped from €522 in 2024 to €474 in 2025. 71% of contractors in the medical locum sector have an average daily rate less than €500. 34% have an average daily rate between €200 and €399.

Avg. Daily Rates by Year

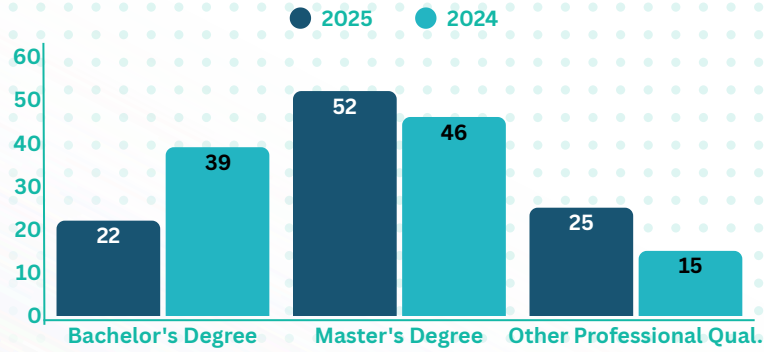


Daily Rates By Year



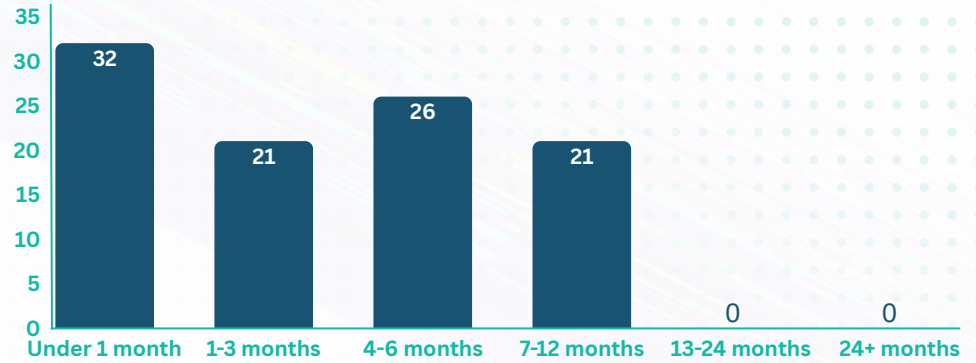
Education

All respondents working in the medical locum sector hold a level 6 or higher qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications. 52% hold masters degree qualifications. The number of respondents holding 'other professional qualifications' has risen from 15% in 2024 to 26% in 2025.

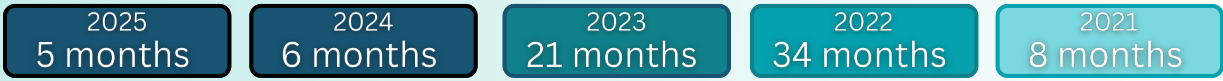


Contract Length

A feature of medical locum work is shorter contract lengths compared to other sectors, this is very evident this year with 79% of all contracts 6 months or less and the remaining 21% of contracts 12 months or less. Contractors operating in this sector experienced a huge difference in the length of their contracts during Covid-19 pandemic.

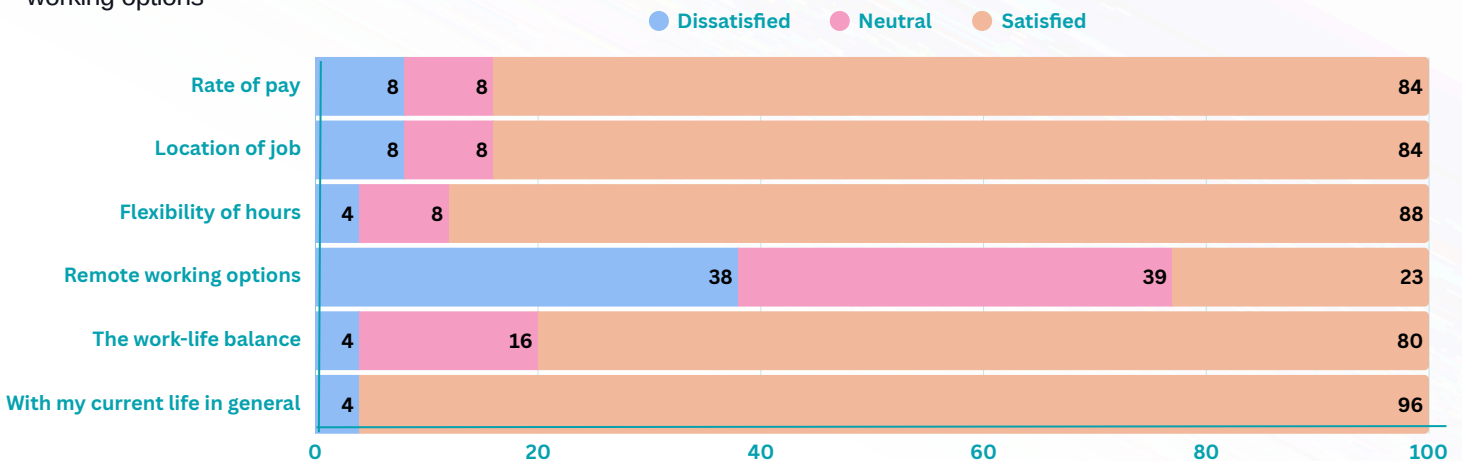


Average Contract Lengths



How Medical Locums Feel About Their Work

96% of medical Locums are satisfied with their life in general, the highest rating in relation to their lives in general since the research began 5 years ago. The 2025 satisfaction scores have increased for the rate of pay 84% up from 70% in 2024, location of the job up from 70% in 2024 to 84% in 2025, and work life balance is up from 67% in 2024 to 80% in 2025. The satisfaction rating for the flexibility of hours decreased from 93% in 2024 to 88% in 2025. Remote working options still scores lowest in terms of satisfaction ratings with only 23% of medical locums satisfied. As many locums need to be physically present in a hospital, practice or pharmacy to work, it is no surprise that they have an low satisfaction rating for remote working options

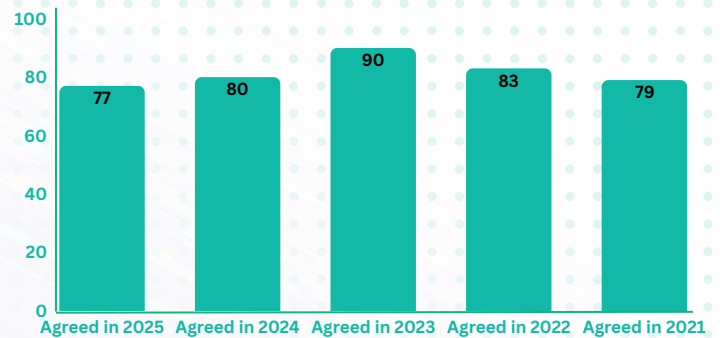
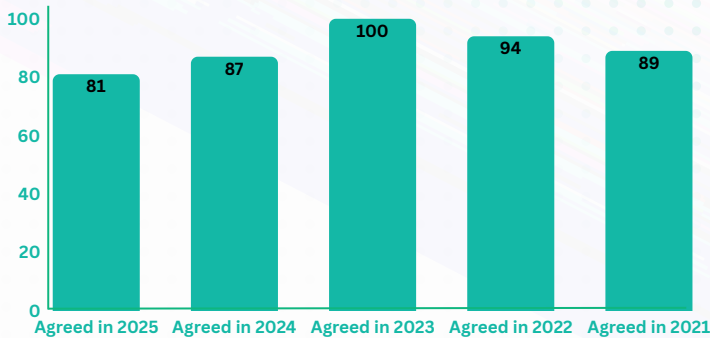


Employability

Medical locums are confident that their experience is in demand on the labour market, with 81% of respondents in agreement with that statement. 77% of respondents also agree that it would be easy for them to find another contract.

My experience is in demand on the labour market...

It is easy for me to find another contract...



Future Expectations

73% of participants agreed that the availability of contract work in the next 12 months would be the same or increase. 81% expect the daily rate to stay the same or increase. 70% expect the contracting sector to stay the same or increase in the next 3-5 years. 73% of respondents also think that the Irish economy will perform the same or better in 2025 compared with 2024.

● Decrease ● Stay the same ● Increase

The availability of Contract work for the last 12 months has...



The availability of Contract work for the next 12 months will...



Your daily rate for the next 12 months will...



Your working days for the next 12 months will...



The contracting sector in the next 3 to 5 years will



The performance of Irish economy in 2025 will...



0 20 40 60 80 100

Confidence Index

Medical Locums are confident about both the future of the contracting sector and the future performance of the Irish economy. They have a confidence index score of +4 for the contracting sector in the next 3-5 years, and a score of +8 for the performance of the Irish economy in 2025.

The Irish Economy Confidence Index

2025	+8
2024	+3
2023	-11
2022	+44
2021	+2

The Contracting Sector Confidence Index

2025	+4
2024	+5
2023	-3
2022	+13
2021	+25

Confidence Index



"I have been working independently for 18 years and have always found I've been able to generate work."

Quote from Respondent

Throughout this report you will see reference made to the 'Confidence Index.' The confidence the participants have in several areas was expressed through the way they answered a number of key questions almost identical in nature but presented in different ways. The average weighting of these answers is then used to calculate the confidence index.

A confidence index of zero would indicate that there was a totally neutral feeling by the respondents. A positive figure represents a positive outlook, with the scale maxing at 100, while a negative score indicates the feeling of unfavourable negative feelings towards the economic or business future. The confidence index score relating to the performance of the Irish Economy varies depending on the age profile of the contractors and the industry the contractors operate in.

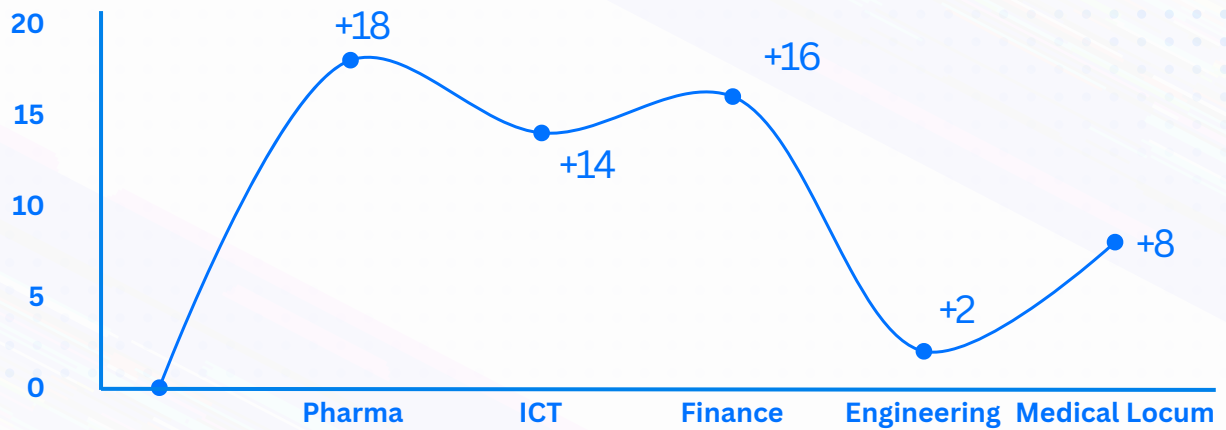
Confidence Index

The overall outlook for the Irish economy in 2025 is positive with a confidence index score of +17 an improvement compared to the confidence index score for 2024 which was +16. The confidence index score relating to the performance of the Irish Economy varies depending on the gender, the age profile of the contractor and the industry they operate in.

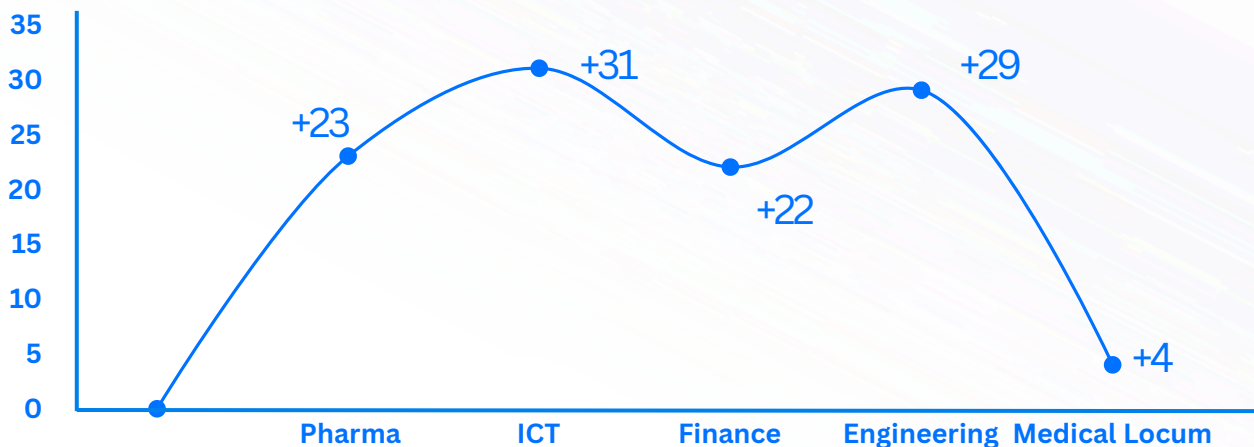
When it comes to the performance of the Irish Economy by industry sector engineering has the lowest confidence index score of +2 and Pharma contractors report the highest confidence in the Irish Economy with an index score of +18.

Contractors are generally very positive about the future of the contracting sector in the next 3 -5 years with a confidence index score of +26. The degree of positivity and subsequently the value of confidence index scores changes by gender and by industry. ICT contractors have the highest confidence index score at +31, and Medical Locum have the lowest at +4. Male contractors have a higher confidence index score at +27 compared to females at +25

Irish Economy By Industry



Contracting Sector By Industry



Generations

Millennials are the most optimistic about the contracting sector in the next 3-5 years with a confidence index score of +28, Boomers are the least +22. Millennials and Gen Z both have the highest confidence index score for the Irish economy at +18. Boomers and Gen X report the same confidence index score of +15 in the Irish economy, Boomers confidence index score in 2025 is lower than 2024, where Gen X confidence index score in 2025 is higher than 2024.

Contracting Sector in the Next 3-5 Years



The Performance of the Irish Economy in 2025

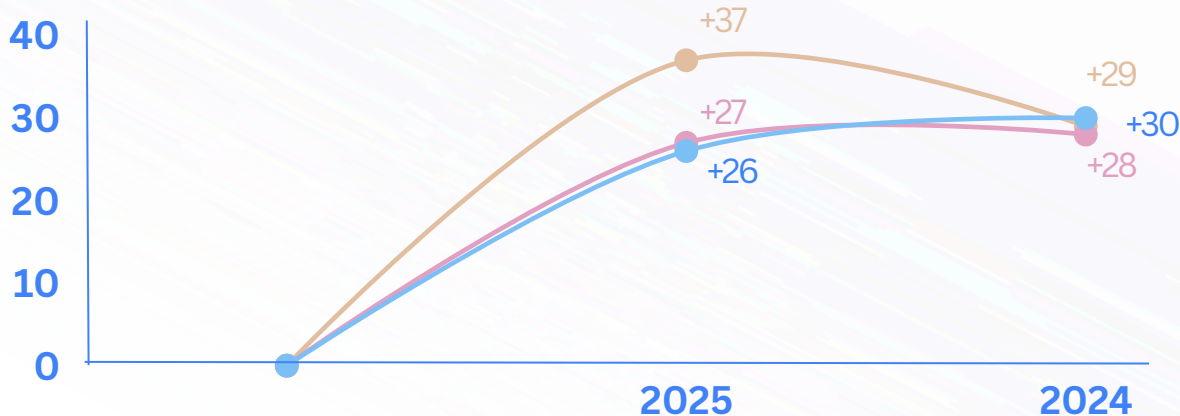


Confidence Index for Contractors, Recruiters, and Clients

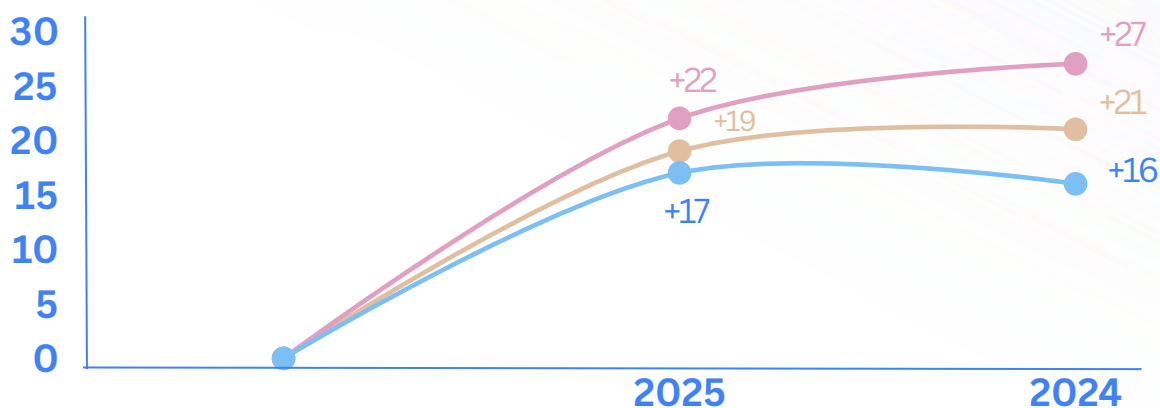
Client companies have a more positive outlook on the performance of the Irish Economy in 2024 at +27, when compared to recruiters at +21 and contractors at +16. The contractor outlook for the Irish economy in 2024 is positive with a confidence index score of +17, an improvement compared to the confidence index score for 2024 of +16.

With regard to the performance of the contracting sector in the next 3-5 years, recruiters have the highest confidence index score of +37, clients also very positive with a score of +27 with contractors also positive with a score of +26. Project economy contractors have a confidence index score of +28 and a confidence index score of +18 in relation to the Irish economy, as they are at the forefront of innovation and have insights into future work, it is safe to say that both contracting and the Irish economy look strong.

Contracting Sector



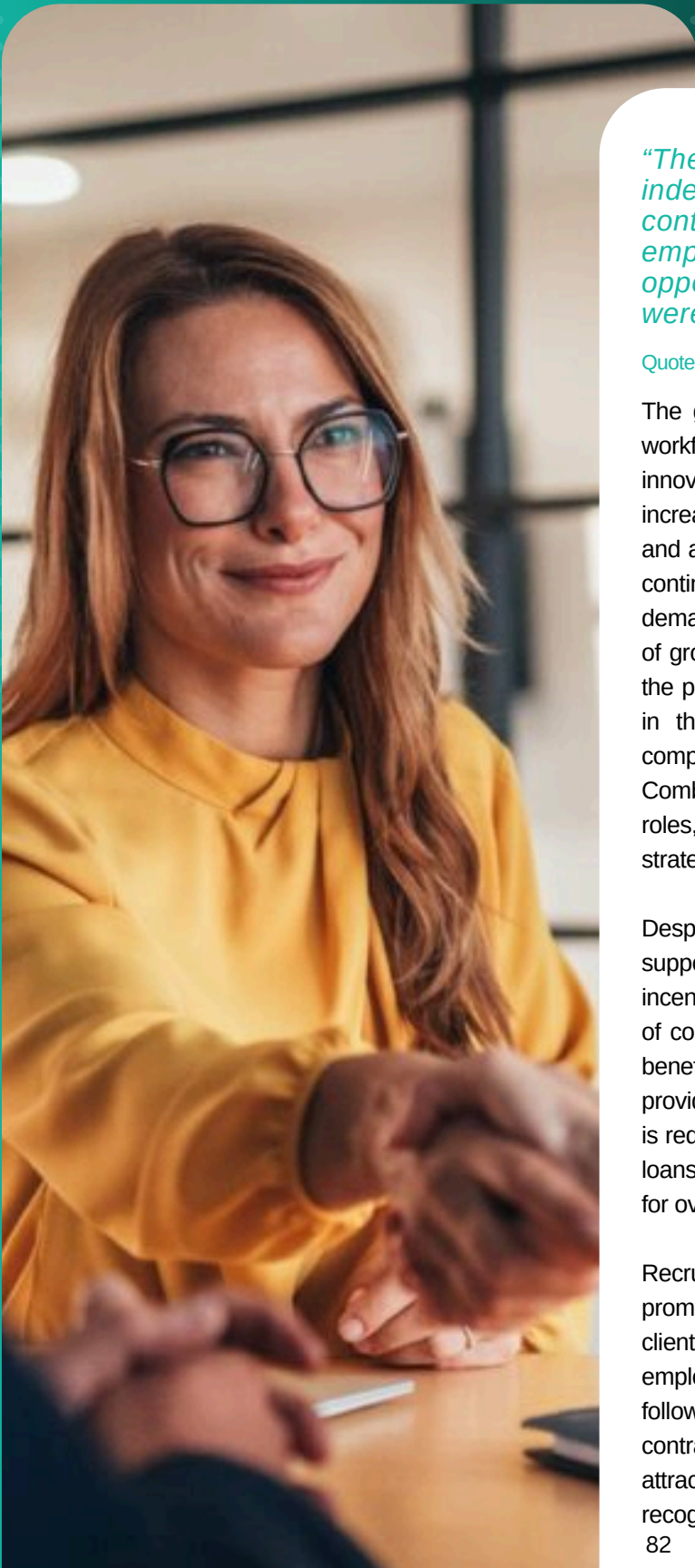
Irish Economy



■ Recruiters
 ■ Clients
 ■ All Contractors



What The Recruiters Say



“The government is not doing enough to support independent professionals; self-employed contractors are seen as a bit of a risk re employment types. There could be more opportunities for professional contractors if there were fewer potential risks to employers.”

Quote from Respondent

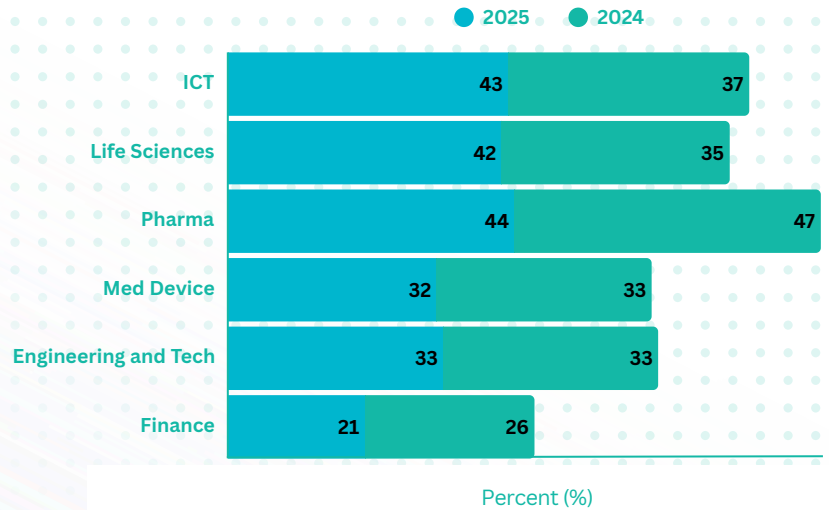
The growth of the contracting sector in Ireland reflects a shift in workforce dynamics, driven by increasing demands for flexibility, innovation, and evolving business needs. Organisations are increasingly relying on contractors to meet specialised requirements and adapt to changing market conditions. This trend is expected to continue into 2025, with recruiters predicting steady or increased demand for roles across the major contracting sectors. Key drivers of growth in the contracting sector include increased investment in the pharmaceutical and medical device industries, expanded hiring in the medical locum sector, and a growing appreciation by companies of the advantages of engaging a contingent workforce. Combine this with the rising interest from candidates in contractor roles, and it’s clear there are financial opportunities for recruiters strategically focused on this space.

Despite this growth, recruiters believe the government could better support independent professionals. They advocate for improved tax incentives and more allowable business expenses to offset the risks of contracting. Improved social protections, such as broader PRSI benefits for sickness, parental leave, and retirement, would also provide greater security for contractors. Better access to mortgages is required with many independent workers still struggling to secure loans. Recruiters also highlighted inefficiencies in visa processing for overseas workers, which can delay placements.

Recruiters also emphasised the need for the government to promote contracting as a viable employment option. Educating client companies on the benefits of contracting and clarifying employment structures is increasingly important, especially following the implications of the Domino’s case. The availability of contractors is a benefit to global companies, and helps Ireland attract foreign direct investment (FDI), the government should recognise this more openly.

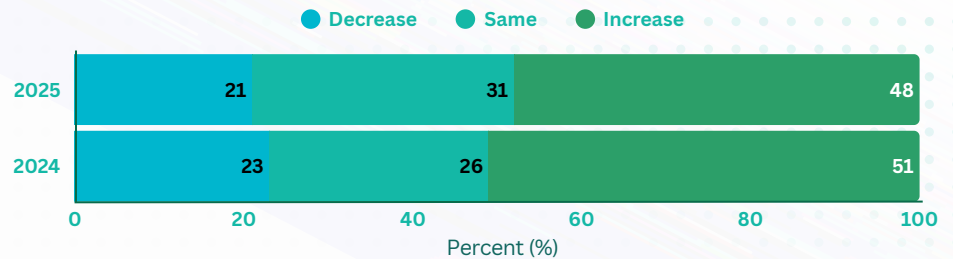
Industry Breakdown

Over half of all contract roles are concentrated in five key industries: Information Technology, Life Sciences, Pharmaceuticals, Medical Devices, and Finance. ICT roles have risen from 37% in 2024 to 43% in 2025. This growth may be attributed to the significant redundancies at the end of 2023, which saw many skilled workers exit ICT businesses. To complete projects, many organisations likely re-engaged key contractors. 2025 results also show a rise in contractors within the life sciences sector, likely driven by increased investment and the initiation of new projects.



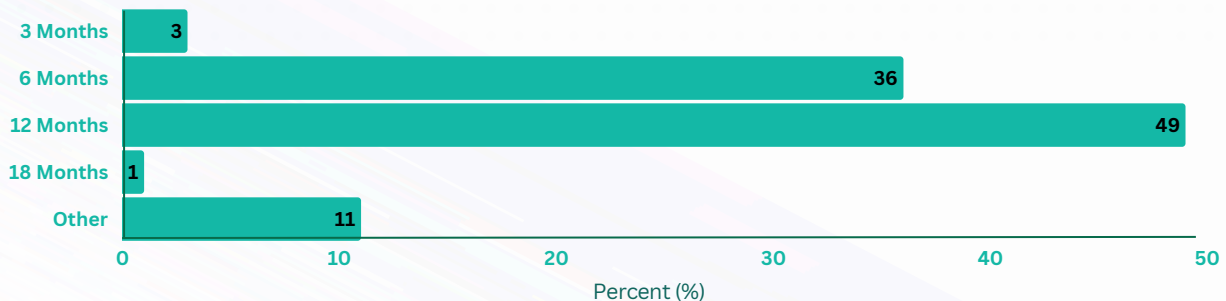
Contract desk

Recruiters were asked whether the number of contractors on their books had decreased increased or stayed the same. The majority, 79% reported that the number remained the same or had increased in 2025, up slightly on 2024 figure of 77%.



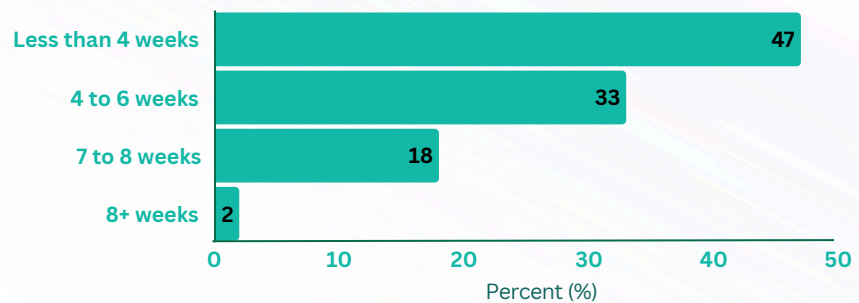
Average length of contracts offered

Contract lengths being offered to candidates remain similar in 2025 when compared to 2024. 36% of contracts offered were between 6 and 12 months, and just under half 49% of contracts offered were between 12 and 18 months. In 2025 contractors across all industries reported their average contract length to be 14 months.



Contract Roles

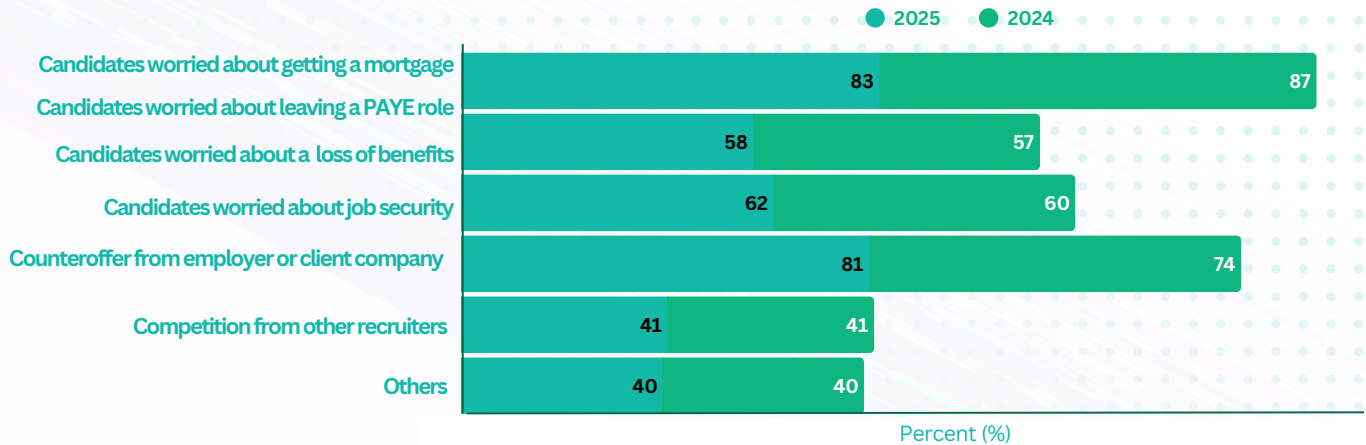
80% of contract roles are reportedly filled with 6 weeks. 18% of contract roles in 2025 took 7 to 8 weeks to fill, up from 9% in 2024. Recruiters reported client indecision as a factor increasing the time it takes to get contractors started. 40% of contractors placed are new to contracting.



When you fill a contract role, what percentage of the candidates have never contracted before? **40%**

Challenges for recruiters when placing contractors

Contractors continue to express the same concerns to recruiters when presented with a contract opportunity. There has been a drop in the percentage of candidates who are worried about getting a mortgage down from 87% in 2024 to 83% in 2025. Specialised mortgage brokers for contractors have an increased presence in the market, the drop in concern reported by respondents may be a sign that contractors feel they have a greater chance of getting their mortgage approved with the assistance of these brokers.



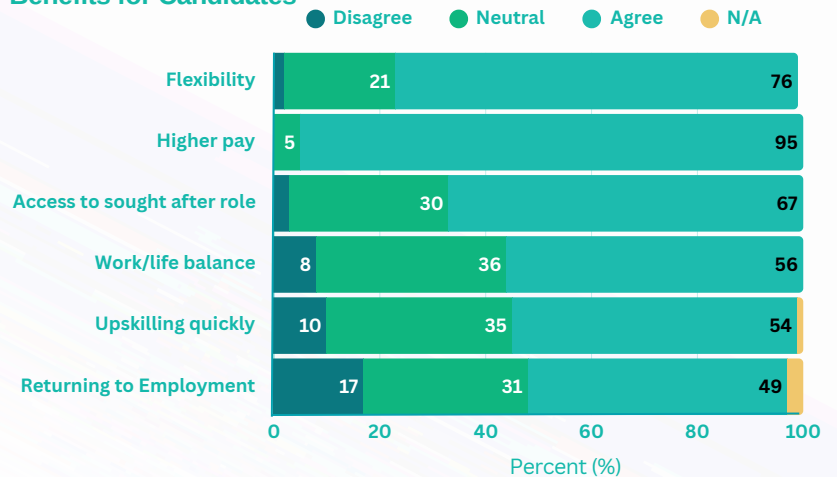
Other challenges highlighted by recruiters when trying to place contractors...

- Low daily rates: that did not reflect the costs and risks undertaken by the contractor
- Access to affordable housing: particularly to those relocating
- Visa processing: slow and inflexible, frustrating for global talent
- Short-term contracts: candidates preferred to have contracts longer than 6 months
- Lack of flexible working arrangements: certain roles required candidates on site
- Lack of education about contracting: clients not understanding the contracting model
- Client hiring process: slow decision making

Benefits of Contracting

95% of recruiters see the key benefits of contracting to contractors as higher pay – with 76% agreeing that flexibility was also a key benefit. 97% of recruiters saw access to skills as the key benefit to client companies, 95% agreed that contracting benefits companies as an alternative to hiring when there is a hiring freeze in place, there is a 10% increase in the number of recruiters who report this benefit in 2025 when compared to 2024, indicating perhaps that companies in 2024 faced more restrictions in hiring talent last year. 91% of recruiters agree that engaging contractors led to faster completion of projects.

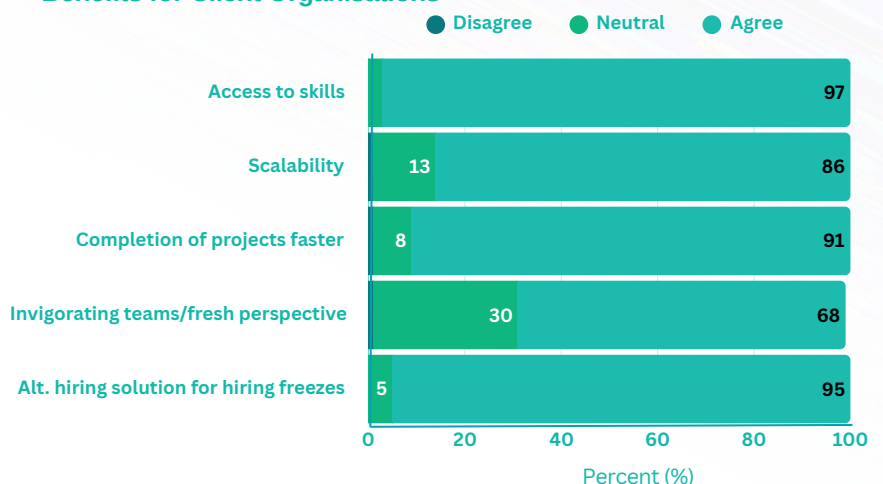
Benefits for Candidates



Benefits for Client Organisations

97% of recruiters saw access to skills as the key benefit to client companies, 95% agreed that contracting benefits companies as an alternative to hiring when there is a hiring freeze in place, there is a 10% increase in the number of recruiters who report this benefit in 2025 when compared to 2024, indicating perhaps that companies in 2024 faced more restrictions in hiring talent last year. 91% of recruiters agree that engaging contractors led to faster completion of projects. Other benefits reported for client companies include flexibility in tenure, easier termination of contracts if budgets are exhausted or performance is unsatisfactory, financial benefits, a reduction in costs associated with employing FTE, quicker turnaround in filling roles and a faster recruitment process.

Benefits for Client Organisations





Roles In High Demand

Based on recruiters' feedback, here is a list of the top 10 most in-demand roles over the next 12 months. These roles reflect high demand in tech, healthcare, engineering, and financial sectors, driven by advancements in technology and industry-specific needs.

1. **AI, Data, and Machine Learning Specialists** (e.g., AI engineers, data-driven IT roles, data analytics, digital transformation).
2. **Cybersecurity Experts** (e.g., IT security, network security, cybersecurity roles).
3. **Automation and Validation Engineers** (e.g., automation, commissioning engineers, validation engineers).
4. **Project Managers and Process Engineers** (e.g., project managers, process engineers, program managers).
5. **Software Developers and Engineers** (e.g., software development, software architecture, Java, Angular).
6. **Compliance and Governance Professionals** (e.g., risk management, regulatory compliance, quality assurance).
7. **Engineering Roles in Manufacturing and Biopharma** (e.g., mechanical engineers, chemical engineers, equipment engineers).
8. **Healthcare Professionals** (e.g., consultant doctors, emergency doctors, GPs).
9. **Finance and Accounting Specialists** (e.g., financial contractors, qualified accountants, CFOs).
10. **Supply Chain and ERP Specialists** (e.g., supply chain management, SAP/ERP implementation experts).

Upskilling

Recruiters advise independent professionals to upskill in the following areas based on current client needs;

- AI and Machine Learning (e.g., AI skills, short courses in AI, emerging AI tools).
- Automation and Validation (e.g., validation experience, CQV/CSV, pharma/med device experience).
- Cloud Technologies (e.g., AWS, Azure certifications, cloud upskilling).
- Cybersecurity (e.g., IT security, cyber certifications like CompTIA, emerging security tools).
- Project Management Certifications (e.g., PMP, Prince2, Agile, Scrum, Lean Six Sigma).
- Compliance and Regulatory Knowledge (e.g., GMP experience, pharma compliance, biologics validation).
- Data Analytics and Digital Transformation (e.g., data analytics in manufacturing, digital transformation tools).
- Stakeholder Management and Leadership (e.g., managing matrix teams, stakeholder engagement).
- Soft Skills and Communication (e.g., systems management, communication, risk management).
- Industry-Specific Experience (e.g., financial services, life sciences).

Focusing on these areas will align contractor skills with the most in-demand trends and client needs.

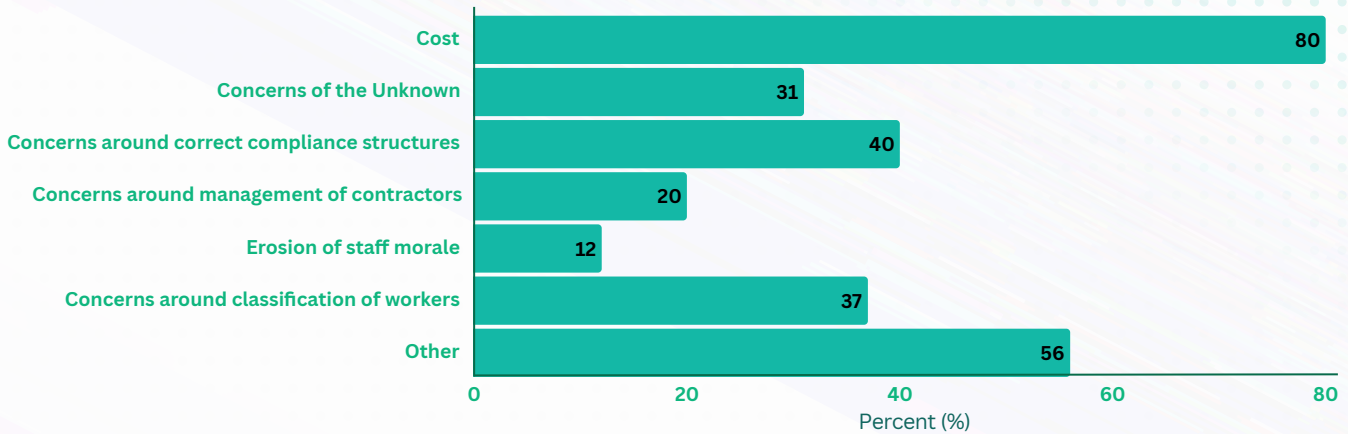
Barriers to recruiting contractors from Clients

80% recruiters report their clients primary concern when engaging contractors is cost related. 40% also reported that their clients had concerns around compliance up 10% on 2024, possibly because of the dominoes case.

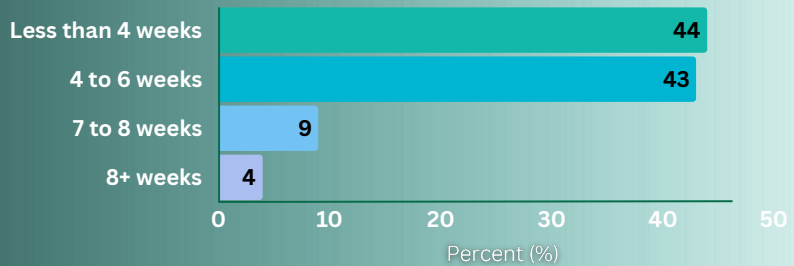
Other client concerns:

- Loss of Skills: Concern about losing expertise when contractors leave after their contract ends.
- Contractor Longevity: Worries about contractors leaving prematurely or before the project is completed.
- Management Challenges: Difficulties in managing contractors, particularly remote workers.
- Reliability: Concerns about contractors' dependability and commitment.

However, recruiters reported that experienced clients hiring contractors generally have fewer concerns as they understand the process well.



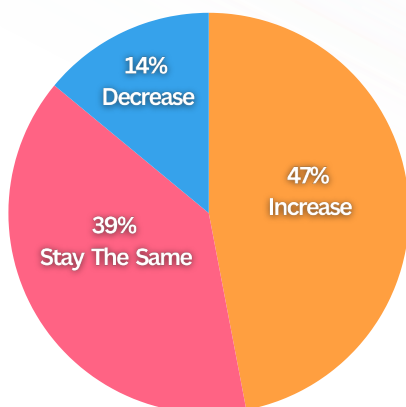
How long does it take to fill a contract role from the point where you're instructed by the client to the start of the contract?



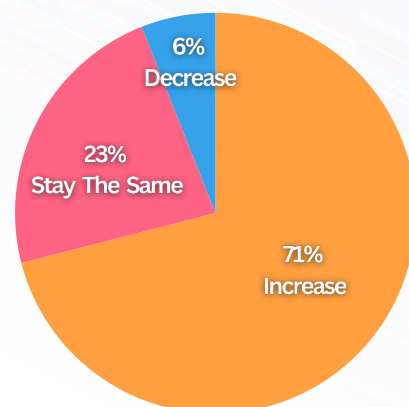
Future Expectations

Recruiters are positive about both the performance of the Irish economy over the next 12 months and the number of roles that will be available over the next 12 months. 47% believe that the Irish economy in 2025 will outperform the economy in 2024, and 71% of respondents believe that the number of contract roles will increase over the next 12 months

The Performance of The Irish Economy Over the Next 12 months



The number of contract roles over the next 12 months



What The Recruiters Say

We asked recruiters for their own statements on the contracting industry and here is what they had to say...

"They need to offer more incentive around tax / pay / mortgage relief to give self-employed more confidence"

"Revenue in Ireland needs more engagement and experience to allow transparent, smooth increase in contractors !!"

"Offer grants to support upskilling"

"Keep the information flowing. Lack of communication can turn contractors off for example at contract renewal/extension times."

"Increased information around tax breaks and mortgages."

"Government need to work on a lot of areas including tax and housing. Travel infrastructure also limits Cork and Kerry based contractors commuting to Limerick which is a hub of activity."

"Generally promote the idea, that it works out for so many Engineers, it should be discussed at the highest level (Politics)"

"Increase awareness and acceptance of contracting work and self-employed contracting. Perhaps a 3rd employment type status so that the contractor is still protected as well as the employer (particularly where the contractor has a self-employed contract but their daily work is dictated by the client)."

"I think it would be helpful if the government and clients provided clearer guidelines and protections around contract terms. They could also improve access to affordable health insurance and retirement plans for independent workers."

"Increase supports for all contract workers so there is less of a stigma or perception of contract being less secure and no option to get a mortgage."

"Improve access to social benefits for contractors. Provide more guidance and training on compliance with contractor-specific tax regulations. Provide tax relief for professional development courses and certifications in high-demand areas like cybersecurity, AI, and cloud technologies."

"Develop frameworks for portable benefits such as retirement plans, health insurance, and paid leave that can be carried across contracts. Offer tax breaks to encourage training, professional development, and investment in tools or technology by independent workers."

"Be more inclusive to non-EU candidates who want to set up contracting businesses in Ireland."

"Contracting is on the increase. more and more senior professionals are looking for a better work to life balance but maintain income."

"A lot of contract roles are not advertised so the size of the market is understated to people who haven't contracted before. So maybe a contract only jobs board would help."

What The Clients Say



“As AI usage grows, talent with expertise in AI ethics, responsible AI, and compliance with emerging regulations will be crucial to ensure ethical development and deployment of AI systems”

Quote from Respondent

The 2025 survey results reveal a dynamic and growing demand for professional contractors across a diverse range of industries in Ireland. Multinational companies make up 67% of client organisations, with 23% being domestic. 78% of these companies have over 500 employees, while 22% have 50 employees or fewer, showing the relevance of contractors to businesses of all sizes. More than a quarter (28%) of companies engage 1-30 contractors at any time, while a third engage 200 or more contractors at any one time. This demonstrates that regardless of size or scope, Irish companies value contractors as an essential component of their workforce.

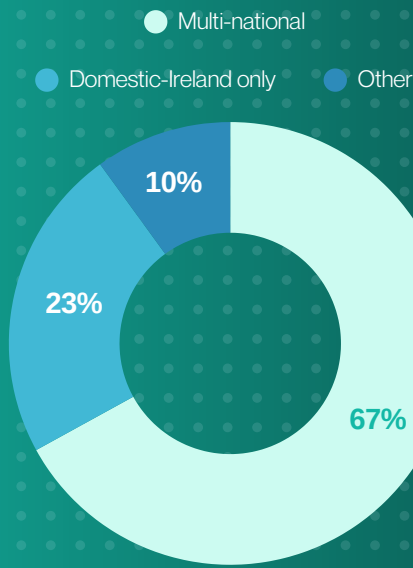
Client companies cite numerous benefits of engaging contractors, including the ability to progress projects quickly, access specialised skills on demand, and maintain agility in response to shifting market conditions. 77% of contractors in these companies are (SOC2) professionals, such as IT specialists, engineers, accountants, analysts, and doctors. The Pharma sector leads in contractor engagement, representing 30% of the market.

Demand for contract roles is being driven by two primary factors: a lack of skills in-house and the need for agility. Clients are increasingly recognising the value of contractors in meeting these challenges, and agencies are encouraging more companies to engage with contractors. However, some barriers exist to hiring contractors: costs being the key barrier reported this year. Clients suggested ways in which concerns/barriers to engaging contractors could be overcome, including clearer policies and legislation around contracting, enhanced communication, education and training about the contracting industry, and fairer treatment, and better financial security for contractors.

Looking ahead, client companies have identified critical skills required to achieve their organisational goals. These include expertise in technology, particularly AI and cybersecurity, engineering capabilities, leadership, and innovative problem-solving. Emerging policies, such as those on sustainability, auto-enrolment, and AI, are also expected to influence the types of talent companies need.

Optimism about the future is high, with companies expressing confidence in both the contracting sector and the Irish economy. Confidence index scores are positive, standing at +27 for the contracting sector and +22 for the economy, reflecting a strong outlook for 2025 and beyond.

Client Company

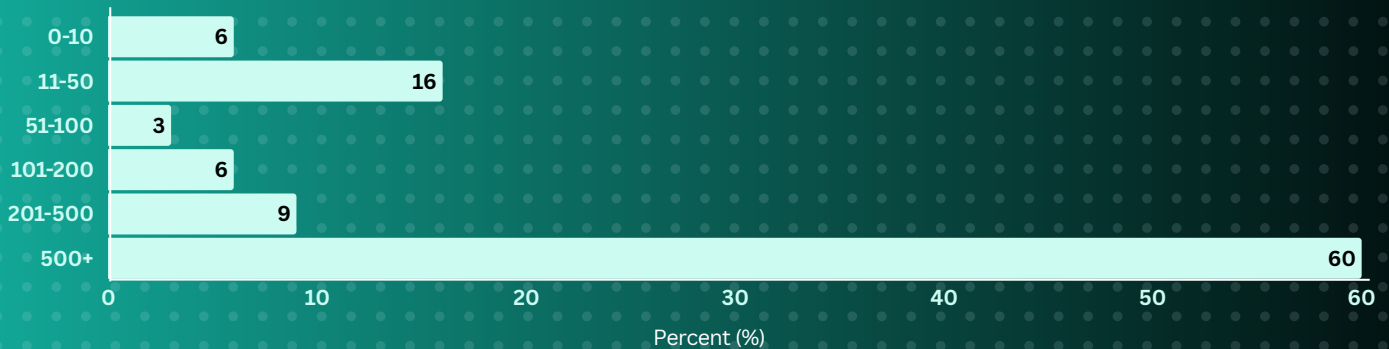


Clients Industry Profile

67% of client companies participating in the survey this year were multinationals and 23% were domestic Irish companies. 16% of companies had between 11 and 50 employees up from 11% last year, with 60% of companies involved in the survey having 500 employees or more.

Companies engaging contractors are spread across all the major contracting industries. Pharma is once against the largest industry represented at 30% up 10% on 2024, likely a reflection of increased investment in new plants and projects by major companies in the sector. ICT up from 8% in 2024 to 13% in 2025 perhaps signalling the increased requirements by companies to re-engage contractors to complete projects following the large number of redundancies in 2023.

Company Size

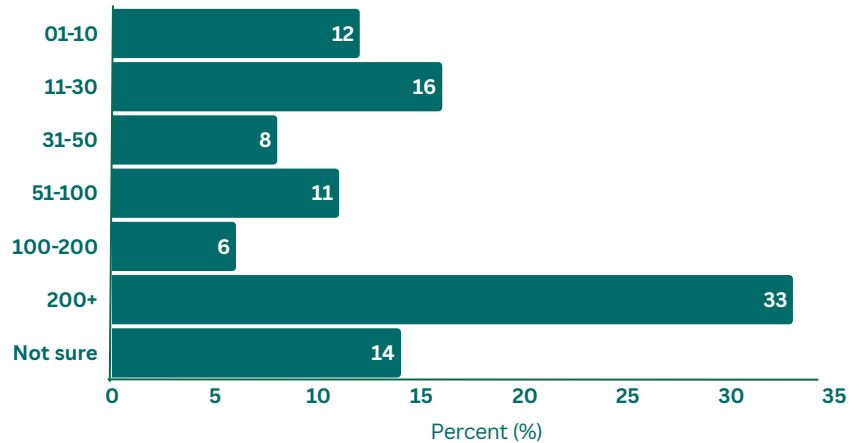


Engaging contractors

33% of companies reported engaging more than 200 contractors at any one time, 16% engage between 11 and 30 contractors at one time, 12% engage between 1 and 10 contractors and 11% engage between 51 and 100 contractors at any one time.

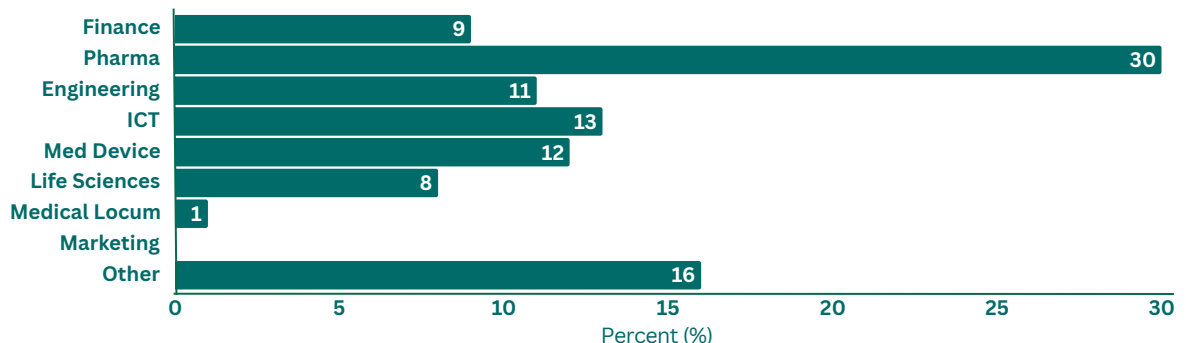
44% of companies expect to engage the same number of contractors this year as last, with 46% expecting the numbers of contractors they will engage to increase in the next 12 months.

Number of Contractors Actively Engaged At Any One Time



Industry Breakdown

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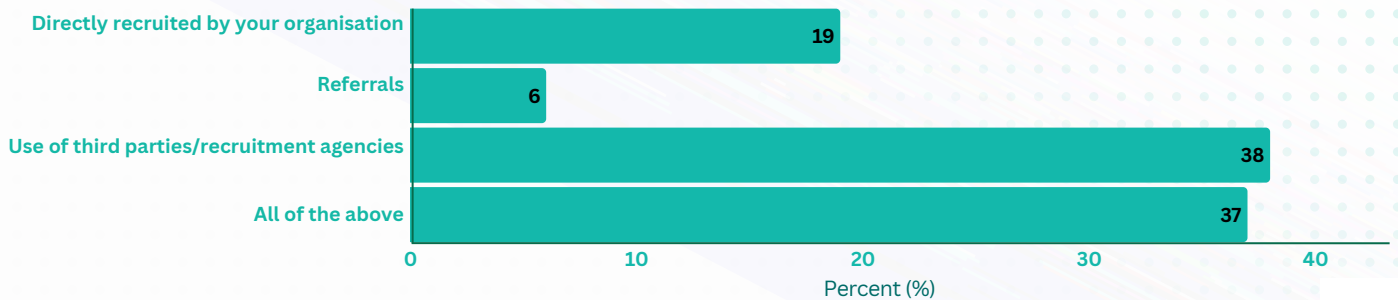


Contract Recruitment

Companies use various methods to find and recruit contractors. 38% use third parties such as recruitment companies to recruit on their behalf, 19% recruit directly and 6% use a referral process to assist in recruitment. 37% of companies use a combination of approaches to recruit their contractors. Contractors are engaged across all functions in client organisations, 20% as Managers, directors and senior officials (SOC1)

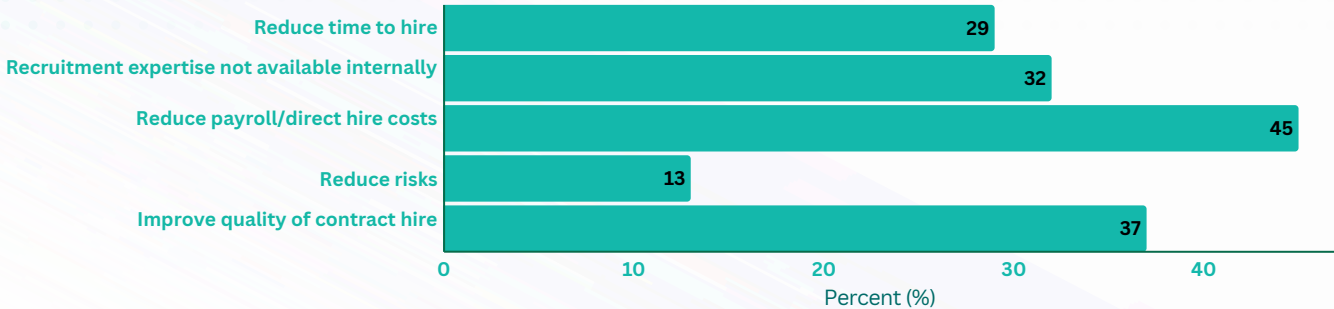
77% as Professionals (e.g., IT specialists, engineers, accountants, analysts, scientists, doctors, etc.) (SOC2) and 30% as Associate professionals and technicians (e.g., counsellors, paramedics, graphic designers, quality assurance technicians, etc.) (SOC3)

How are Contractors in Your Organisations Initially Engaged?



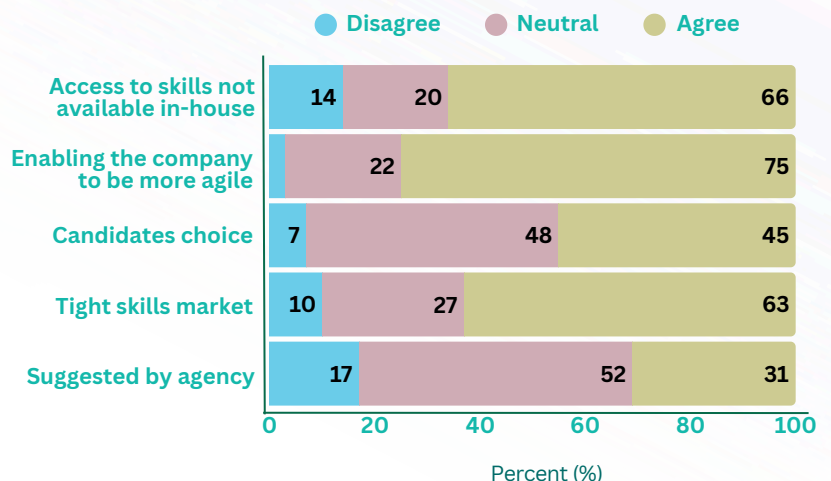
Why Companies Use Recruitment Agencies

Clients use recruitment companies to recruit contractors for a number of key reasons, 46% of clients use recruiters to reduce the time to hire, 35% use them to reduce hiring costs. There has been a huge increase in the number of companies who reported using recruiters to reduce risks they associate with hiring contractors up from 13% in 2024 to 35% in 2025.



Criteria Driving Demand For Contract Roles

In 2025 the highest reported factors that are driving demand for contract roles include lack of skills in house, and to enable the company to be more agile. More agencies are suggesting that their clients could engage contractors up from 13 % in 2024 to 26% in 2025 this would tie in with the agency results where we have seen a strategic move reported by agencies to focus more on growing their contract desk.



The Biggest Concerns Or Barriers To Engaging Contractors

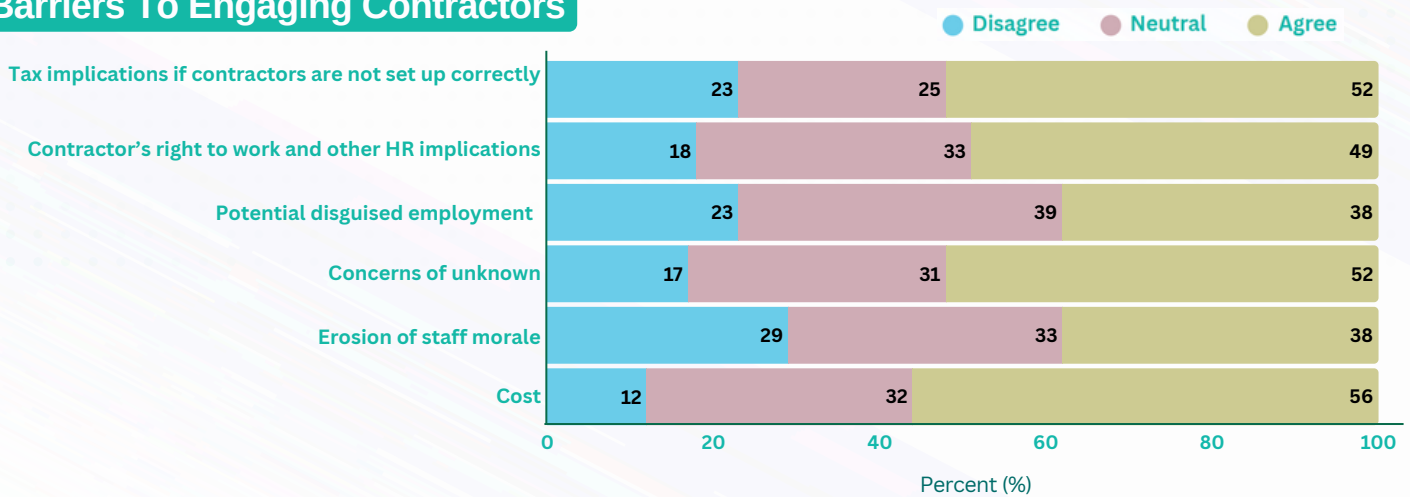
A number of barriers and concerns exist for companies when engaging contractors, 58% agree that the biggest barrier is cost, 53% reference contractors right to work and other HR implications, 52% concerns of the unknown and 49% report tax implications if contractors are not set up correctly. Cost concerns may always be a factor for clients, but other concerns could be addressed if there was greater clarity from government in terms of legislation, education and information around contracting.

Client companies were also asked what they thought could be done to reduce the concerns they have or the barriers they face when engaging contractors. They highlighted a number of areas where improvement could be made, their suggestions included establishing clearer policies, enhancing communication, and delivering more education and training about contracting, this combined with fair treatment and providing greater financial security for contractors would make engaging contractors easier for them.

Improve the following areas to increase engagement of contractors by clients:

- Policies and legislation
- Communication and transparency
- Training, education and awareness
- Fair treatment
- Enhanced financial and contractual security for contractors
- Reassurance and promoting the benefits of contracting

Barriers To Engaging Contractors



Key Skills

Client companies were asked to identify the skills they find hardest to access in the current market. They highlighted both a shortage of specific skills and a lack of experience in applying these skills in real-world scenarios. Their feedback is summarised as follows:

1. AI and Automation Expertise - Including specialised AI expertise, automation engineering, and process controls.
2. Engineering Talent - Particularly experienced engineers with real-world site experience and specialised engineering fields such as BMS control, healthcare engineering, and automation.
3. ICT and Technology Skills - Including SAP, ICT infrastructure support, and niche technologies like Kubernetes.
4. Sales and Communication Skills - Quality sales professionals capable of building pipelines and individuals with strong communication and information-sharing abilities.
5. Specialised Science and Technical Knowledge - Including expertise in fields like CSV (Computer System Validation) and specialised sciences with a quality and practical mindset.



Skills Required to Meet Future Goals

Respondents were then asked to identify the key skills they think would be needed to achieve their goals in the coming years. Their responses highlighted the increasing importance of technology (with a strong emphasis on AI), engineering expertise, leadership capabilities, and innovative problem-solving to meet future organisational objectives.

Top 5 Skills

1. AI and Data-Driven Skills
2. Project Management and Leadership
3. Engineering and Technical Expertise
4. Problem-Solving and Innovation
5. IT and Cybersecurity Skills

New policies and the impact on talent

Companies reported new policies such as sustainability, auto-enrolment and AI will have an impact on the talent they require.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): AI emerged as a dominant theme. Several companies reported the need for expertise in AI ethics, compliance, and responsible AI usage.

Sustainability: Companies highlighted the increasing importance of sustainability policies, but did not identify any associated skills which would be required.

Regulatory Changes: Stricter regulations in areas such as data protection, compliance, and governance are expected to increase the needs for more skills in those areas.

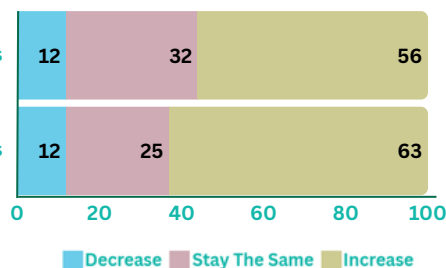
Auto-Enrolment: The introduction of auto-enrolment policies is likely to create additional compliance and administrative roles.

Future Expectations

Clients are optimistic about the future of both the performance of the Irish economy and the contracting sector over the next 12 months. 48% expect the Irish economy in 2025 to outperform 2024 and 53% expect the number of contract roles to increase over the next 12 months. The confidence index scores are positive +27 in relation to the contracting sector and +22 in relation to the performance of the Irish economy in 2025.

Performance of Irish Economy next 3-5 years

Contracting sector over next 12 months



Confidence Index

The Performance of the Irish Economy

2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
+19	+27	-5	+50	+13

The Number of Contract Roles in the Next 12 Months

2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
+37	+28	+8	+46	+25

What the Clients Say

We asked clients for their own statements on the contracting industry and here is what they had to say...

"There should be more support for remote workers and coworking hubs"

"I think Mortgages was the biggest thing for contracting and since this has now been addressed I feel this will help a lot in increasing Contractors."

"Information on contracting, the options. Not to fear a leap from a comfortable salary role that you think may be safer!"

"Have less transparency about contractors' pay, as Full Time Employees might get jealous and annoyed by much higher earnings by contractors."

"Contractors must receive more support from government around tax breaks and social welfare support when the economy turns."

"More open communication on the use of contractors and their expertise being brought to the industry."

"Need clearer legislation/regulations around the employment status and taxation requirements for contractors acting as daily rate contractors on a limited company basis."

"Provide reassurance to those considering contracting/contractors of why it is a good option."

Messages To The Government

Respondents were invited to share their suggestions for how the government could better support independent professionals in the project economy.

Here are some of their comments.

"Realise our worth to the organisations and economy."

"The government should extend tax relief measures and increase the number of items eligible for tax deductions to reduce the financial burden on independent workers and contractors. Additionally, lowering corporate tax rates, particularly for small companies and start-ups, would foster growth and innovation. These steps would provide critical support to professional independent workers, enabling them to thrive and contribute more effectively to the economy."

"The Government should offer additional tax efficient ways of extracting wealth from a Limited Company such as €2000 per year bonus and dividend."

"Simplified Taxation and Administration: Introduce clearer guidelines and resources on tax obligations for contractors. Simplify the process for VAT registration and returns. Provide tax credits or incentives for professional development and upskilling. Enhanced Social Protections: Offer access to affordable healthcare and pension schemes tailored for independent workers. Expand eligibility for social welfare benefits, such as illness benefit, during periods without contracts. Fair Contracting Practices: Promote standardised, fair contracts to prevent exploitative terms. Encourage timely payment practices by client organisations with penalties for delays. Access to Professional Resources: Provide free or subsidised access to co-working spaces, training, and networking opportunities. Facilitate workshops on legal rights, taxation, and marketing for contractors. Recognition and Advocacy: Form government-backed advisory boards for independent workers to voice their needs. Recognise contracting as a key contributor to economic growth in policymaking. Encourage Flexible Work Models: Incentivise businesses to engage contractors for hybrid and remote work arrangements. Support skill-sharing platforms and marketplaces to connect contractors with opportunities. These steps would improve the sustainability and attractiveness

"To better support contracting work and independent professionals in Ireland, streamlining tax processes would reduce administrative burdens, making compliance simpler and more efficient. Enhancing access to training and upskilling opportunities could help contractors stay competitive and adapt to evolving industries. Introducing affordable healthcare options and tailored social benefits would provide security to independent workers. Improved government policies and incentives to encourage contracting as a viable career option could also enhance its appeal. These measures would strengthen the contracting ecosystem in Ireland."

"The government can offer more funding opportunities for independent workers who have innovative ideas and great potential, making funding and grant support more available and at the same time fostering healthy competition and creating spaces for collaborative projects, collaboration between contractors and full-time employees for exchange of ideas and experience. It would be highly beneficial!"

"It would be great if we could maintain our contractor status rather than employee for clients, as a pharmacist to be able to claim travel expenses would be beneficial also. I would love to remain as I am, but I fear I'll be forced into an employee role sooner rather than later."

"There should be more allowances for travel claim expenses. I currently drive to Dublin every 4 weeks from Cork, and spend about €80 on petrol, and have to put myself up in accommodation overnight if I'm needed for more than own day, but I'm not allowed claim it as its considered "commuting" even though it was agreed with my client company I could work fully remote because they could not find anyone with my skillset in Dublin."

"Parental leave should be applied to contractors as well."

More job security for contractors ,more paid leaves and maternity/ paternity leaves should be provided."

"Reduce tax rate on income for the people who take the risks, allow entrepreneurs to take the artist level tax designation- why not as they too are creatives!"

"Revenue need to loosen restrictions around claiming legitimate business expenses, especially travel and hotel costs."

"There needs to be an equivalent social welfare support eco system, in order for more people to take the leap into self-employment, in order for the gig economy to thrive and to enhance their contribution to GNP of our economy. When there is fear for our people to take the leap, it may stagnate an under-developed part of our economy."

"I think welfare payments are crucial just to have some small cash income when no work is forthcoming, we're still paying our PRSI and USC to be out of work or not paid on top of getting no sick pay or holiday pay but still contributing to society is poor."

"Self-employed contractors need Government support for the provision of Job Seekers Allowance when between Contracts."

More Government Incentives. Seems to be less and less encouragement every year by increasing tax and decreasing incentives. Much more could be done to inform newly setup ltd companies to ensure the directors are fully aware of what incentives are available to them."

"Simplify the whole process of operating as a limited company."

"There could be some payment relief for freelancers who are using shared office spaces - to encourage the knowledge economy and sharing of resources..."

"Additional tax credits and more incentives e.g. grants/access to free training to up skill/maintain knowledge levels."

"It is very difficult to find out about how to set up as a contractor, particularly the various options for being tax compliant... and the government websites are clunky and difficult to navigate."

"The government could assist with the on-going PI insurance crises that is currently monopolising fire safety engineering in Ireland."

"Greater effort should be applied to the eradication of 'bogus' contract working arrangements. This would help minimise the numbers that find themselves in that situation. If effective, they would have a greater opportunity to obtain stable, appropriately remunerated positions within the relevant employment and taxation legislation. This would afford certain protections to them, their employers, and other stakeholders."

Skillnet for contractors or networking opportunities where contractors can come together to upskill together, help each other to find next opportunities or collaborate..."

"Something like an ombudsman or lobby group, union etc to highlight issues for contractors."

"Improved access to social benefits for contractors. Provide more guidance and training on compliance with contractor-specific tax regulations. Provide tax relief for professional development courses and certifications in high-demand areas like cybersecurity, AI, and cloud technologies."

"Support and encourage independent workers as they are very scarce and crucial for the Irish Economy. For example, it's really hard to get a mortgage/loan for a self-employed compared to employed person even though the self-employed makes more. This results to young professionals emigrating abroad. I am also considering this. We all want to stay in our home country..."

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"Greater effort should be applied to the eradication of 'bogus' contract working arrangements. This would help minimise the numbers that find themselves in that situation. If effective, they would have a greater opportunity to obtain stable, appropriately remunerated positions within the relevant employment and taxation legislation. This would afford certain protections to them, their employers, and other stakeholders."

"Governmentally it would be great to access up to date, correct regulatory information on contractor tax, from setting up as a sole trader or company and the advantages and disadvantages."

"Support and encourage independent workers as they are very scarce and crucial for the Irish Economy. For example, it's really hard to get a mortgage/loan for a self-employed compared to employed person even though the self-employed makes more. This results to young professionals emigrating abroad. I am also considering this. We all want to stay in our home country..."

"The gig economy is an erosion of workers' rights and there should be a clear distinction between high value contractors and gig economy workers."

"Increase awareness and acceptance of contracting work and self-employed contracting. Perhaps a 3rd employment type status so that the contractor is still protected as well as the employer..."

"Mortgage availability for independent individuals within our sector. Our average salary is greater than the average working professional in Ireland but a lot more complicated to obtain a mortgage because we are not full time within the pharmaceutical and biologics industry. Inflation within our country needs to be reviewed by our government and what can be done to stem this issue and make it realistic for either buy or build their dream home and be able to provide for their families."

Author Biographies

ANDREW BURKE

CHAIR OF BUSINESS STUDIES AT TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Professor Andrew Burke is Chair of Business Studies at Trinity College Dublin. He served two terms as Dean during 2015-2023 when Trinity Business School tripled in size and secured Triple Accreditation (AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS) placing the School in the top 1% of business schools in the world. He is also a Fellow of Trinity College Dublin and has served on the Board of the University and Audit Committee. He has also served on the Governing Body of UCD. He was Bettany Chair and the Founding Director of the Bettany Centre for Entrepreneurship at Cranfield School of Management, UK.

He was Chairperson of the Centre for Research on Self-Employment (CRSE) in London from 2014-2020. He has held visiting professorships at UCLA in 2002 and 2012 and was a Research Professor at the Max Planck Institute of Economics, Germany. He is widely published in top ranked international journals including the Harvard Business Review, and the Journal of Management Studies. His work has been presented at the EU Commission, World Trade Organization, HM's Treasury, UK Houses of Commons and Lords as well as through media such as Forbes Magazine, the Financial Times, RTE and BBC television and radio. He graduated with a D.Phil (Oxford University), MSc (London School of Economics), MA (NUI) and an honorary MA (Dubl.). He is an executive coach and holds a Certificate in Executive Coaching from the



University of California, Berkeley. He is a former President and Ents Officer of UCD Students' Union hosting bands such as the Pogues, Dr Feelgood, the Damned, Frankie Goes to Hollywood, the Human League and Wilko Johnson during his time in these roles. During his student days he played in a number of indie bands which were commercially unsuccessful but enjoyable experiences for the band, if not the audience!

NA FU

CHAIR OF RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP AT TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Professor Na Fu is Chair of Responsible Leadership at Trinity College Dublin, a professor in Human Resource Management and Co-Director of Trinity Centre for Digital Business and Analytics at Trinity Business School. She is the Founder and Director for the award winning MSC in Human Resource Management program, a Fellow of Trinity, and an Academic Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

Professor Fu's research focuses on strategic human resource management, professional service firms, people analytics and digital transformation where she has published extensively in high impact international journals. As a recipient of multi-awards in research and teaching, Professor Fu is passionate about helping organisations to achieve their employee's full potential in all aspects. She has led a number of research projects in both the private and public sectors around people management relevant to organisational growth and innovation.

Professor Fu's work benefits to the economy and society beyond academia. Insights derived from her research have been directly applied



by professional bodies including the Great Place to Work and the CIPD. Professor Fu is a respected and sought-after speaker, giving keynote talks at industry events, serving as judge for industry awards, and publishing industry reports to inform policy makers.



HITESH KAPOOR

RESEARCH ASSISTANT AND PHD SCHOLAR

Hitesh Kapoor is a doctoral student at Trinity Business School in the field of Entrepreneurship and holder of the prestigious Eric Flamholtz Scholarship award. He is involved in studying the role of freelancers in the modern business world and how freelancers enable businesses in their growth and scalability. He is also interested in discovering how the use of freelancers in business changes the perception of various stakeholders about the business.

Prior to his doctoral studies, Hitesh completed his postgraduate degree in Marketing and Strategic Innovation & Entrepreneurship from IMT, Ghaziabad, India. He has also been involved in a research project with the Ministry of Finance, India, on Digital Transformation. He has gained extensive experience in Marketing, Leadership, and Operations through his professional career. Hitesh is now focused on conducting quality research in the emerging blended workforce model, where the typical workforce is complemented with freelancers, contractors, and AI.



JIMMY SHEEHAN

MANAGING DIRECTOR OF CONTRACTING PLUS

Jimmy Sheehan is Managing Director of Contracting Plus, a forward-thinking firm dedicated to empowering self-employed professionals through comprehensive accounting, tax, and financial services. With a mission to simplify the complexities of financial management for contractors, freelancers, and other self-employed individuals, Jimmy leads the company with a focus on growth, innovation, and client success.

A seasoned accountant with an entrepreneurial background in business development, Jimmy brings over two decades of experience in scaling businesses and implementing innovative solutions that enhance operational efficiency and client satisfaction. His expertise lies in crafting tailored strategies that address the unique challenges faced by self-employed professionals, helping them to not only meet their financial obligations but also to thrive in competitive markets.

His professional journey is marked by a proactive approach to leveraging technology, which has positioned Contracting Plus as a trusted partner for self-employed professionals seeking reliable and innovative advice in the areas of tax, accounting and financial services.



GERALDINE PENNEY

MARKETING MANAGER OF CONTRACTING PLUS

Geraldine Penney is the Marketing Manager at Contracting PLUS, where she focuses on promoting and communicating the value of self-employment to all stakeholders. Her proactive approach positions Contracting PLUS as a trusted partner for self-employed professionals.

Geraldine's professional journey is enriched by her experience running her own business, working in SMEs, and multinational corporations.

This diverse background gives her a deep understanding of the dynamics of self-employment and corporate responsibilities, allowing her to communicate with all stakeholders effectively and seamlessly.

Her notable achievements include winning an international Direct Mail Marketing Award for Bioferrin USA (Glanbia) and the Accenture Global Innovation Award for developing and launching Ireland's first grocery Click & Collect business with Superquinn.

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Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
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