

White Paper

Flexworker

Their motives, aims and needs

UNIVERSITÄT
LUZERN

hr **con** science
FOR
DECISION
MAKERS

A research project with

 **swissstaffing**

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Introduction

Huge trends such as digitization, globalization and acceleration are presenting new opportunities and challenges for both employers and employees. Employers are looking for flexibility in managing human resources in order to remain competitive. This means that an increasing number of people are taking on flexible positions such as temping, on-call work etc. At the same time, workers are also looking for identity, meaning and fulfillment through flexible working conditions and jobs, besides the usual financial gains. What do flexworkers, recruiters and companies need to do to meet these expectations? This report investigates this problem and puts flexworkers in the spotlight. The issue of flexwork is of great practical relevance, as has been shown by the HR Con-Science study. It is on the agenda in research, too, such as at the Center for Human Resource Management (CEHRM) at the University of Lucerne.

As the results of this research project show, flexworkers are happy with many aspects of their work despite, or precisely because of, the flexible working conditions.

They state that they value the opportunities for fulfillment, variety and autonomy. They also report that opportunities simultaneously represent challenges. Some love the regular feedback, others complain about the lack of respect for their work. Some value the flexibility, whereas it is a burden on others due to the need for constant availability.

In contrast to permanent employees, flexworkers bear more personal responsibility for their incoming jobs, financial planning and future career development.

Associations, recruiters, clients and digital platforms play a key role in structuring framework conditions to meet the demands of individualization in the flexwork sector. Research shows that structural support, through a strong intermediary for example, has a positive effect on the well-being and performance of flexworkers, thus potentially creating a win-win situation for flexworkers, recruiters / intermediaries and businesses. This study supports this result by showing that flexworkers – whether temporary or self-employed, full or part time – very much value support from other parties on the job market. A wide-reaching, representative survey would be a valuable supplement in order to bolster these exploratory research results.

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1. Study aim

The world of work is changing. Digitization, automation, globalization and virtualization are leading to a new understanding of work (Perlow & Kelly, 2014). In this respect, we are finding an increasing number of alternative work models that deviate from the traditional Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 model. The way people are employed is also changing. Whereas most employed people used to have a traditional employment contract with a single company, these days there is also an increase in flexible, temporary employment forms (such as temporary work, limited contracts, self-employment, or on-call work). Simultaneously, the boundaries between the work itself, people and the company as an employer are also disappearing due to the increase in flexibility (Spreitzer, Cameron & Garrett, 2017).

In particular, it is clear that new and thus far largely unheeded needs are arising at a personal level in this flexible job market.

As classic human resource management is increasingly falling by the wayside in companies with more flexible work models, individuals are becoming ever more responsible for developing their own careers. On the other hand, flexible ways of working do allow the individual to better adapt their skills to specific work projects and, at the same time, to control their own work-life balance through increased autonomy and flexibility (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). This poses important questions both for researchers and for human resource managers. Although some scientific studies into alternative work models such as temporary work or gig work do already exist, little is known about what motivates individuals to work in these new ways and under what conditions they can successfully and healthily thrive and develop themselves within them (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Kalleberg 2009; Spreitzer et al., 2017).

This is the reason why we use qualitative interviews in this white paper to investigate the motives of flexworkers who are working under flexible employment conditions (e.g. temp workers, self-employed people). We also analyze the challenges and career prospects associated with this way of working.

Profile 1:

Flexworker at Almojob

Flexwork:	Part time for 4 years
Job description:	Student and assistant server
Contract type:	Temporary
Education:	Biology degree and knowledge of serving

What do you see as the benefits of flexwork?

For me, a temporary job is a benefit because I don't always have to work the same job. It means I've been able to get to know a lot of industries, such as event catering, farms and so on. It's very varied and something I wouldn't have if I worked in a permanent position. I also constantly meet new people through a variety of employers. It's exciting and broadens my horizons.

Another benefit is that working a temporary job and studying are a good fit.

I have to be able to work flexibly due to my studies. I can't always work the same amount of hours. Sometimes I'm on vacation and have a lot of time to work. Other times, I have exams and can't work much at all. So I like being able to plan my work flexibly. I wouldn't be able to do this in a permanent position. I can also generally choose where I work. I don't have a car, so the recruitment agency looks specifically for jobs for me where I live.

What do you see as the challenges of flexwork?

One big challenge is dealing with the uncertainty. It's sometimes difficult to predict whether jobs will come in. Someone who relies on regular income should probably not choose this kind of work as there's no guarantee of getting a job.

Another challenge is the flexibility. You have to be flexible when it comes to the employer, but also in terms of working times and locations. If I get a call, I have to be ready to take a job.

Unfortunately, as a temporary worker, I sometimes feel less valued and supported by companies than permanent employees are. Of course, we're only there for a short time but it's a shame if we are made to feel like this since, as a temporary worker, you also have fewer opportunities to advance within a company and build yourself a career.



2. Flexwork: Definitions and basics

Globalization, fast-paced economies and digital transformation are all increasingly changing the employee-employer relationship. An increasing number of workers are now only loosely bound to an employer or sell their services directly on the market (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2018). In the US and the EU15, more than 20 - 30% of workers are already working under flexible employment terms (McKinsey, 2016). Known as flexworkers or independent workers, these people have a high degree of control and autonomy over their work. Payment is usually per project, sale or commission and is generally for a time-limited period (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2018).

swissstaffing, this study's client and an association of recruiters in Switzerland, defines flexworkers as "people who want to work flexibly – whether because they are looking for a way back into work via flexibility or because it represents their personal way of

living" (swissstaffing, 2019). swissstaffing categorizes flexwork using three dimensions of flexibility:

- **Flexibility of working times** (flextime / seasonal work, part time, on-call work)
- **Flexibility of working locations** (telework / virtual working spaces, home offices, coworking spaces)
- **Flexibility of working relationship** (employed consultants / portfolio workers, temps / contractors, self-employed people / freelancers).

According to McKinsey (2016), these workers, i.e. flexworkers, can be divided into four segments (see figure 1). This segment division is done according to the criteria of "decision to work flexibly" (voluntary / involuntary) and "type of income" (main occupation / part time). A comparison of the results of the McKinsey study (2016) in the US and EU-15 countries with the current figures from Switzerland by swissstaffing (2019) shows some discrepancies, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Segmentation of workers in flexible employment relationships

	Main occupation		Part time	
Voluntary Decision	«Free agents»		«Casual earners»	
	McKinsey 30%	swissstaffing 35%	McKinsey 40%	swissstaffing 8%
Involuntary Decision	«Reluctant»		«Financially strapped»	
	McKinsey 14%	swissstaffing 50%	McKinsey 16%	swissstaffing 8%

Source: (McKinsey 2016 and swissstaffing, 2019)

While 70% of participants in the McKinsey study voluntarily chose flexwork, the number is only 43% in the swissstaffing study. This discrepancy can be traced back to the differing target groups in the two studies. The McKinsey study focuses on freelancers, who overwhelmingly see themselves as self-employed. The swissstaffing study, in contrast, focuses solely on temporary workers for whom flexwork often represents their main occupation and is seen as a bridging measure between two permanent positions.

Half of all temporary workers are looking for a permanent position in the long term and see their temporary working experience as a necessary bridging mechanism for getting back into permanent employment.

Further, contractors can be differentiated by their qualification level (low, medium, high).

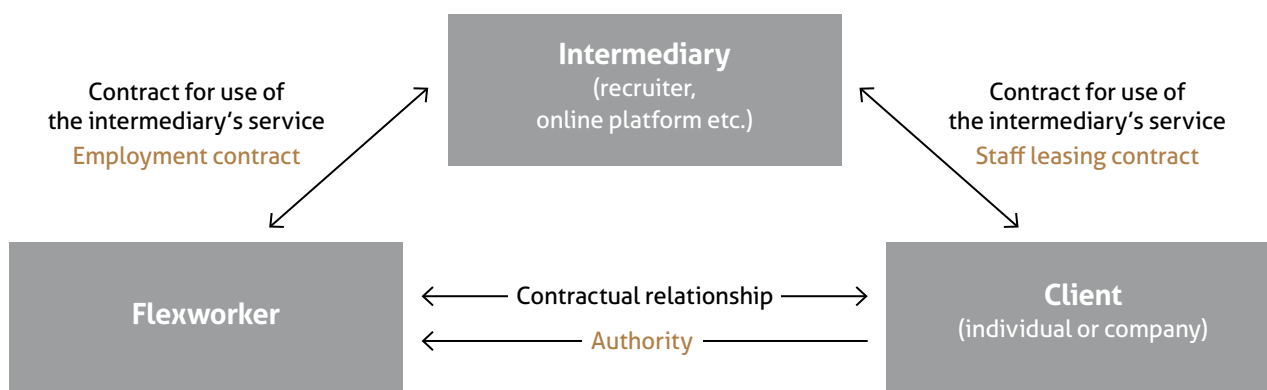
In summary, flexworkers can therefore be divided into the following segments:

- **Willingness** (involuntary decision / voluntary decision)
- **Type of employment** (main occupation / part time)
- **Qualification level** (high / medium / low)

In addition to this flexworker (contractor) categorization, the intermediaries who broker contracts between flexworkers and employers can also be

divided into two categories. On the one hand, traditional recruiters can be intermediaries for temporary work (e.g. HomeInstead, Almojob GmbH, Adecco). A work contract (temporary work contract) is created between the intermediary and the flexworker in this case. On the other hand, the intermediary can be a technology platform (e.g. Uber, Mila) that mainly focuses on brokerage and some extended services in some cases. In this context, there is often no work contract between intermediary and flexworker, only a contract for the use of the intermediary's service. Figure 2 shows the interplay between flexworker, intermediary and employer.

Figure 2: The interplay between flexworker, intermediary and employer



Flexworker self-employed
Flexworker temporary

Due to the various types of flexwork, the study participants in this white paper are categorized into three different flexwork types:

- **Type 1:** Flexworkers who find and carry out their temp contracts via a traditional recruiter (e.g. Randstad, Kelly Services, Almojob)
- **Type 2:** Flexworkers who find and sometimes also carry out their contracts via a technology-based online job platform (e.g. ADIA, Coople, Uber)
- **Type 3:** Flexworkers who acquire their contracts via their own networks (e.g. self-employed people)

Profile 2: Self-Employed Style Consultant

Flexwork:	Part time for 10 years
Job description:	Personal shopper and style consultant
Contract type:	Self-employed
Education:	Trained as a hairdresser, then high school and trade school, further training to become a personal assistant, and residence and further training in fashion in Milan (Italy)

What are three reasons why you became self-employed?

I wanted to do something I have a talent for and where I can play to my strengths. Something meaningful that fits in with my values.

I also enjoy doing something alongside my office work, something where I call the shots. I realized very quickly that this flexibility really suits me.

As a self-employed style consultant, I am my own boss. I can do anything, or nothing. It's a balancing act. I do have to do everything under my own steam, but that means I can design things the way I like them. This is how I've managed to make my hobby my career and gained more flexibility.

What do you see as the challenges of this flexible way of working?

Bearing all the responsibility alone is one of the biggest challenges. Being self-employed, I have to do everything myself: Marketing, accounting, client acquisition, finances. You have to cover everything yourself, whereas other businesses often have specialists for each department. You might not be equally good at everything. But, in the long term, you get a handle on it and find a balance. The great freedom that comes with self-employment doesn't necessarily make your working life simple, but it is very exciting.

However, the recipe for success is taking responsibility.

The same goes for financial issues. If you have no jobs, you have no money. There's always volatility in job volumes, sometimes I have more inquiries, sometimes fewer. You have to be able to endure this volatility. My office job definitely means I can relax a little when it comes to my financial situation, but contingencies still remain an issue. I didn't do much in the way of contingency planning at the start. I was always just happy that something was coming in at all. But thinking about contingencies early on is really important, even if the issue isn't all that attractive.

3. Study design

3.1. Survey

We conducted interviews with 31 people in order to thoroughly investigate the question of motivation, the challenges and the career prospects of flexworkers (March-September 2019). This qualitative research approach allows for an exploratory kind of investigation. By asking open questions of the study participants, we were able to gain insight into the

personal views of different people working in a flexible job environment.

The interviews followed a pre-defined, structured procedure that allowed for a comparison of the various statements. The interview structure contained the topics: Motivation, opportunities and challenges, resources and career.

Topic	Key questions
Motives	What are the motives behind flexworkers opting for this kind of work?
Opportunities and challenges	What opportunities and challenges come with flexwork from the individual's point of view?
Resources	What resources are crucial for flexworkers to be successful and happy? What are the prerequisites for thriving quickly and successfully under this work model?
Career	How do flexworkers see their careers?

3.2. Sample

The interview partners were selected using four different criteria: Access via existing contacts, distribution across different types of flexible working (employees via traditional recruiters, online job

platforms and self-employed), distribution across various sectors and language regions in Switzerland (German and French). Figure 3 and appendix 1 provide an overview of the study participants.

Figure 3: Overview of study participants

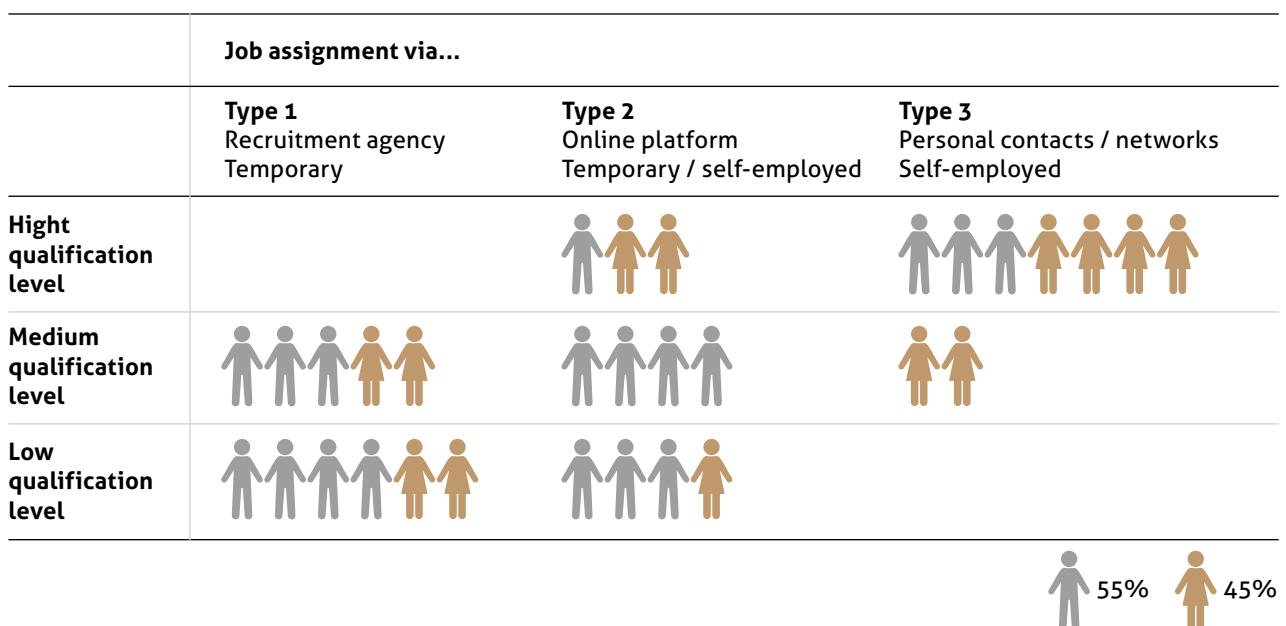
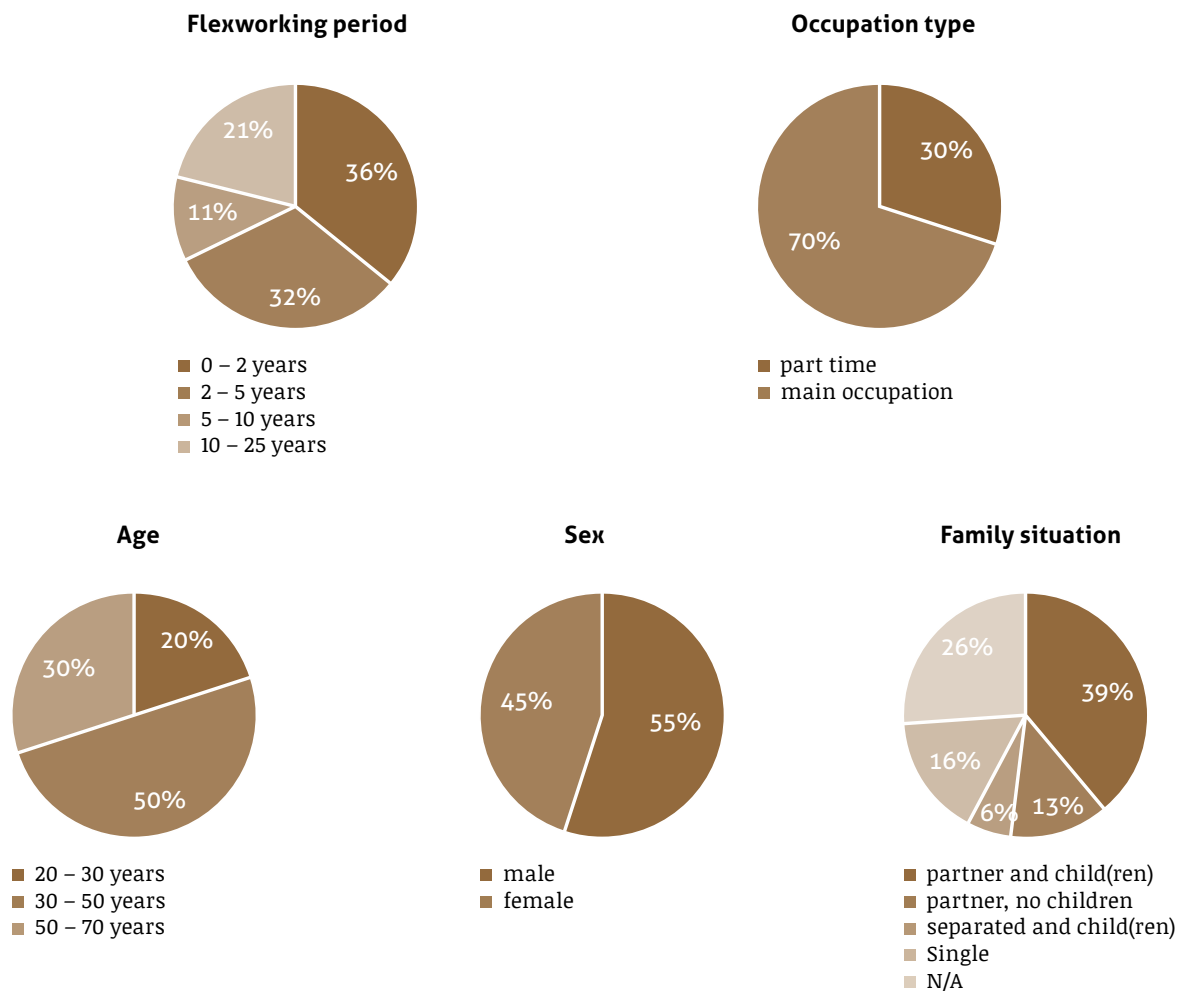


Figure 4 shows the demographics of the study participants. The sample of study participants consisted of 31 people aged between 20 and 67, of which 45% were female and 55% male. For the majority, flexwork was their main occupation (70%) and they had been working this way for less than five years (36% for 0 - 2 years, 32% for 2 - 5 years). However,

around a fifth of the study participants (21%) had been flexworkers for more than 10 years. Around three quarters of the study participants provided information about their family situation. Most of them live with their partners and child(ren) (39%) or with their partners and no children (13%).

Figure 4: Demographics for the study participants



Profile 3: Flexworker at Uber

Flexwork: Part time for 3 years
Job description: Uber driver
Contract type: Platform / self-employed
Education: Retired. Originally trained as a chef in Sweden, worked in sales and founded a natural cosmetics import company

What made you decide to become a flexworker?

After taking early retirement and having a year at leisure, I found myself increasingly missing social contact with other people. I can now more than meet this need with Uber rides. I have such wonderful and memorable experiences with my Uber customers, as well as exciting discussions. For example, I found my best friend again after 45 years, Japanese Uber customers invited me to play the alphorn in Japan, and so on. People sometimes cry in my car because they appreciate being able to talk to someone again. It's very moving.

What resources are important for flexwork?

The way I see it, it's important for an Uber driver to be interested in people.

You need to be interested in people and like communicating, then you'll get good reviews.



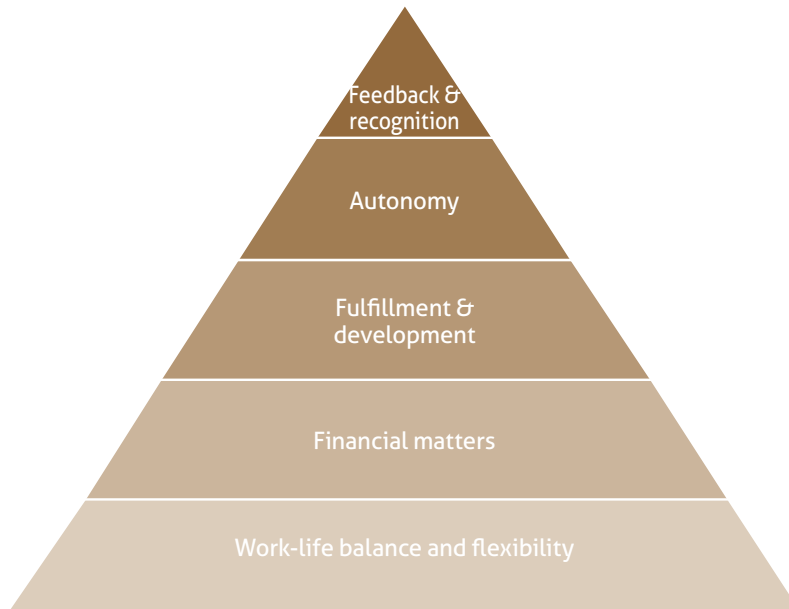
4. Results

4.1. Motives for flexwork

The motives behind the decision to opt for this way of working are many and various. In the following chapter, we intend to show and clarify the motivating reasons most frequently stated by the study

participants. To do this, we have collated the statements of the individuals into clusters. The clusters are arranged in a motive pyramid (figure 5). The most-stated motives for flexwork form the base of the pyramid here.

Figure 5: Flexwork motive pyramid



- **Work-life balance / flexibility**

Work-life balance and the concomitant flexibility are some of the main reasons why someone opts for flexwork. The study participants who obtain their jobs via a temp agency (type 1) or an online job platform (type 2) in particular state flexibility in terms of time and location as their main motivation. The high level of flexibility allows them to juggle their work with their personal obligations such as childcare, parental care or study. Hourly employment allows them to flexibly add in longer breaks during the working day, for example to care for dependents around midday (e.g. interview 3.5, 3.7). For students, the high level of time flexibility in a temp job is a primary motivation for flexworking. They cannot always work for the same amount of time due to exam periods during their studies, which would usually preclude them from working in a permanent position (e.g. interview 1.3). Flexworking enables students to plan their jobs flexibly, i.e. working less during exam periods and then more again after the exams.

The groups of people who can do their work digitally from anywhere, in particular, value the geographical flexibility of flexwork. For example,

a digital nomad was able to take her family abroad for several weeks during the school holidays and still do her work whilst there (see interview 3.2).

- **Financial matters**

Financial reasons are also a key motive for flexworking for the majority of the study participants. For example, in this way, self-employed people can obtain jobs via an online platform in addition to their usual work, allowing them to bridge financial gaps (e.g. interview 2.5, 2.1). In addition, people who have not sought work for longer periods for health or family reasons can use jobs acquired via traditional recruiters or online job platforms to regain a foothold in the job market and secure their financial independence (e.g. interview 3.5, 3.4).

- **Fulfillment / development**

Study participants name fulfillment and their own career development as another motive for flexworking. Many flexworkers – especially those who acquire their jobs via online platforms – prefer plenty of variety in their work. Some of the participants see a permanent position in a single company as monotonous. Various temporary jobs in

different firms give them an insight into different sectors and occupations, allowing them to develop themselves further (e.g. interview 1.4, 1.6).

Even some people with a permanent position make the conscious decision to do flexwork Part time in the hopes of gaining balance and a change from their everyday work through temporary jobs.

For example, one sales rep employee offers his technical manual skills on the online job platform Lawoon so that he can do some physical work every now and again in addition to his sales work (e.g. interview 2.3). Flexworking also serves some study participants as a spring board for their careers. For people who have gained certain skills (e.g. in care provision) privately over the years but who, due to a lack of diploma, cannot work in a permanent position within their desired career (e.g. in a hospital), flexwork gives them the opportunity to still do this work in a flexible way. Flexible care provision jobs acquired via an intermediary thus allow the person in question to take their first steps into this sector (e.g. interview 1.5, 1.7).

- **Autonomy**

Autonomy is a key motive for self-employed people (type 3). Flexworkers of the other two types also rate autonomy as important. In comparison to permanent employees, flexworkers have more freedom and feel more equal to their clients. According to the interviewees, flexworkers can work more autonomously by declining some jobs or clients. As outsiders, they can also be more open about what isn't working in a business (e.g. interview 3.6, 3.1). Autonomy also allows flexworkers to take certain breaks after a challenging job so that they can recharge their batteries (e.g. interview 2.7, 3.6).

- **Recognition**

Some study participants report that the recognition they receive as a flexworker is a key reason for working in this way. Whereas permanent employees usually receive feedback on their work once a year in their annual appraisals, flexworkers usually get direct feedback after every assignment. Online job platforms in particular provide a mutual evaluation by both client and worker after every assignment. If the assignment was a

success, the flexworker receives direct recognition, which has a motivational effect (e.g. interview 2.7, 2.9, 2.10). Retired people also report that, after leaving the world of work, they missed the recognition that they had previously obtained through their career. They were able to meet their need for recognition again by re-entering the working world as flexworkers (e.g. interview 2.10, 2.9).

Profile 4:

Flexworker at Home Instead

Flexwork:	Main occupation for 4 years
Job description:	CAREGiver
Contract type:	Temporary
Education:	Hairdresser, SRC nursing assistant course

What are three reasons why you work in a flexible way?

What are three reasons why you work in a flexible way? The main reason I work at Home Instead is the great flexibility. I can say when, how much and in which region I want to work. Due to health problems, I am glad that I can do temp work 40% of the time. That wouldn't be possible everywhere.

I am also flexible with training courses, which I can always do internally at Home Instead.

I've always loved social contact, from my hair-dressing days. Now, with my nursing assistant training at the Swiss Red Cross and working for Home Instead, I am once again faced with the challenge. I build relationships with the people I take care of. For example, I looked after the same client for more than three years. I became almost a part of his family. The boundaries were one of the biggest challenges, but I was successful in taking the best care of this client while maintaining a professional distance. The work at Home Instead also boosts my self confidence.

I took care of and looked after my parents and my aunt for years. They have now passed away, but I can now apply the amazing experience I gained during that time to my work with Home Instead.

What resources are important for working flexibly?

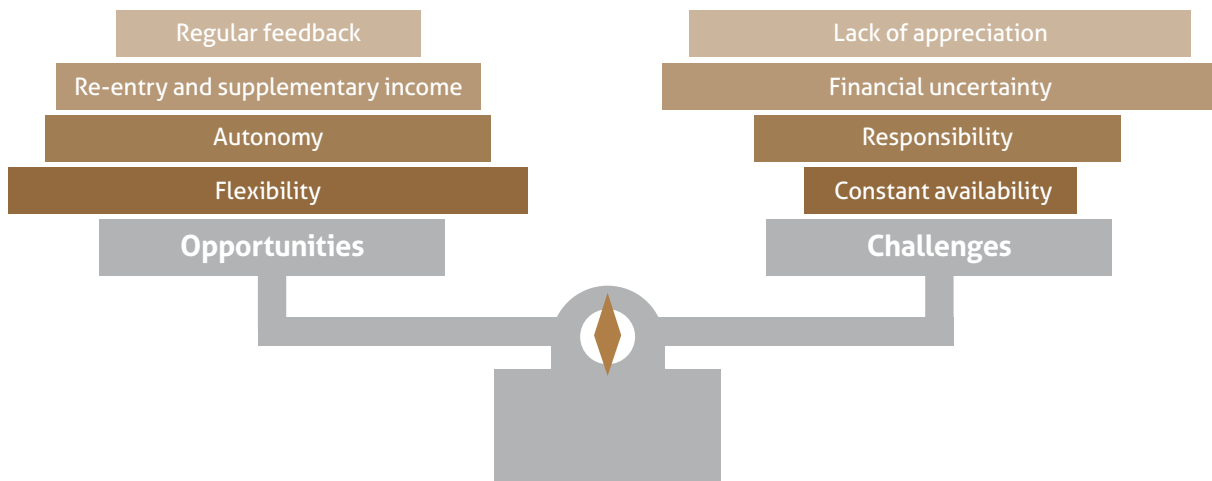
If you work at Home Instead, you have to be flexible and able to quickly adapt to new situations. Each client's needs are different. You need a lot of finesse to be with clients in their everyday lives, especially when something isn't going so well anymore. If a client's health deteriorates over several months, I as a CAREGiver can rely on support from Home Instead and have a discussion with the client advisor to look for new solutions.

4.2. The opportunities and challenges of flexwork

Our second step was to ask the study participants what they thought the opportunities and challenges of flexwork are. Many study participants also see the motives noted in chapter 4.1 as opportunities. Figure 6 summarizes the study participants' statements and shows that the opportunities (such as the high degree

of flexibility) simultaneously represent challenges (such as when flexibility also means constant availability). This chapter is intended to clarify these two sides, the opportunities and challenges of flexwork, and demonstrate where flexworkers should seek a balance.

Figure 6: The opportunities and challenges of flexwork



- **Flexibility vs constant availability**

The study participants see one of the biggest opportunities of flexwork as being the high level of flexibility (in terms of working times and locations), which enables a good work-life balance. Flexworkers – especially those who work via recruiters (type 1) or online job platforms (type 2) – make use of this opportunity to work during their studies, to juggle work with looking after children or parents, or to enjoy leisure time and the pursuit of other projects. Although the flexibility and work-life balance is held in great regard, it is also a key point of the challenges of flexwork. When someone has great flexibility in choosing the time and places they work, they also have to make active use of this choice. The environment creates an expectation that one is always available. One is also tempted to be in constant readiness in case a job comes in.

The boundary between work time and leisure time, for example in the evenings, at weekends or during holidays, is therefore a real issue for many flexworkers.

This boundary is difficult, however, because waiting times for an assignment may be very short due to the flexible nature of the work. Clients expect immediate availability, meaning that an inquiry needs a rapid reply and rapid willingness to take on the job (e.g. interview 3.7, 3.1).

- **High level of autonomy vs high level of responsibility**

The high level of autonomy is another key opportunity of flexwork. The study participants mentioned that, thanks to the flexible way they work, they can change their clients at any time if they are not enjoying an assignment. This leads to a large amount of freedom in determining their working environments and what they do within it. Self-employed flexworkers (type 3) in particular value the benefits of autonomous working. On the other hand, a high level of autonomy and self-direction also means that flexworkers have to shoulder the entire burden. This includes, for example, the fact that self-employed people have to perform many functions for which there would usually be several specialists in a company (e.g. interview 3.10). These functions include marketing activities, accounting and finance. These are often issues that have nothing to do with the core business and are therefore often seen as a burden. In order to

have autonomy, you also have to bear all the responsibility.

- **Re-entry and supplementary income vs financial uncertainty**

Flexworkers who work via a recruiter (type 1) or an online platform (type 2) see the financial side as an opportunity in two ways: as a good sideline and as a way of getting (back) into work through a temporary job. At the same time, the financial situation poses one of the greatest challenges for all flexworkers, including self-employed people. Flexworkers have no predictable, regular income due to their flexible employment conditions, unlike those in a permanent position. This uncertainty in financial planning brings investments (such as purchasing a car or home) into question and makes long-term life planning difficult in general. Financial institutes have also rated the credit-worthiness of flexworkers unfavorably, and payable social insurance contributions can be a large financial burden. Work levels are not predictable, which means that the funds for paying into insurance and pensions and for purchases and other outgoings are less secure (e.g. interview 1.10, 3.9).

Overall, this means that the financial situation for flexworkers is a major challenge and a major uncertainty factor.

- **Regular feedback vs lack of appreciation**

For flexworkers, recognition and appreciation of their work and chosen way of working is an important issue. Regular discussions with clients or customers and intermediaries are a chance for flexworkers to get regular feedback. This means they can evaluate their performance and continually improve and develop themselves. At the same time, the permanent feedback also represents a major challenge. Flexworkers are dependent on positive client feedback to obtain further assignments. This makes them vulnerable and can lead to dependent relationships. If employers place a high value on customer evaluations and customers, for example, never give the highest marks when evaluating services on principle or want to use this opportunity to negotiate a better price, then ultimately flexworkers are the ones who lose out (e.g. interview 2.5).

The fact that temporary work is sometimes connected with negative images, meaning that there is low societal recognition for this way of working, is another challenge.

One study participant explains that he does not like to describe himself as a temp. He is more able to portray his work in a better light by using other descriptions such as “gig worker” or “freelancer” (e.g. interview 2.7). The description “temp” can also lead to a two-class system within a company. Temps in certain companies receive a different email address with the label “external”, or wear a different colored access badge or different colored work clothing (e.g. interview 1.1, 1.8). This leads to those affected feeling excluded and less valued by their employer and the staff. This lack of recognition and appreciation in companies and society is a burden for many flexworkers.

Profile 5:

Interim Manager at Brainforce

Flexwork:	Main occupation for 12 years
Job description:	Interim manager
Contract type:	Temporary
Education:	Economics degree

What do you see as the benefits of flexwork?

I have been working as an interim manager for a while now because it means that I am on an equal level with my client. That wouldn't be the case as a permanent employee. This is just a psychological reason, but it's also very valuable for me and my clients because I can have more impact this way.

As a self-employed interim manager, I can do the projects I enjoy and for as long as I can effectively make a long-lasting impact. I don't, for example, negotiate a notice period. If the client and I think that the job is done, I leave. I work on a daily fee basis.

Coming into a business as an outsider, you have more distance from the company. This means I can often address the things that are not working.

I am not dependent, like I would be as a permanent employee. This means I can talk about the sore points from a politically neutral position and develop solutions with the people involved.

What do you see as the challenges of working in this flexible way?

As a permanently employed manager, you have some very demanding times, but also quiet periods. You don't have that as an interim manager. You have to account for your work on a daily basis. If you have a quiet period, then you can't really relax because you don't know when the next job will come in.

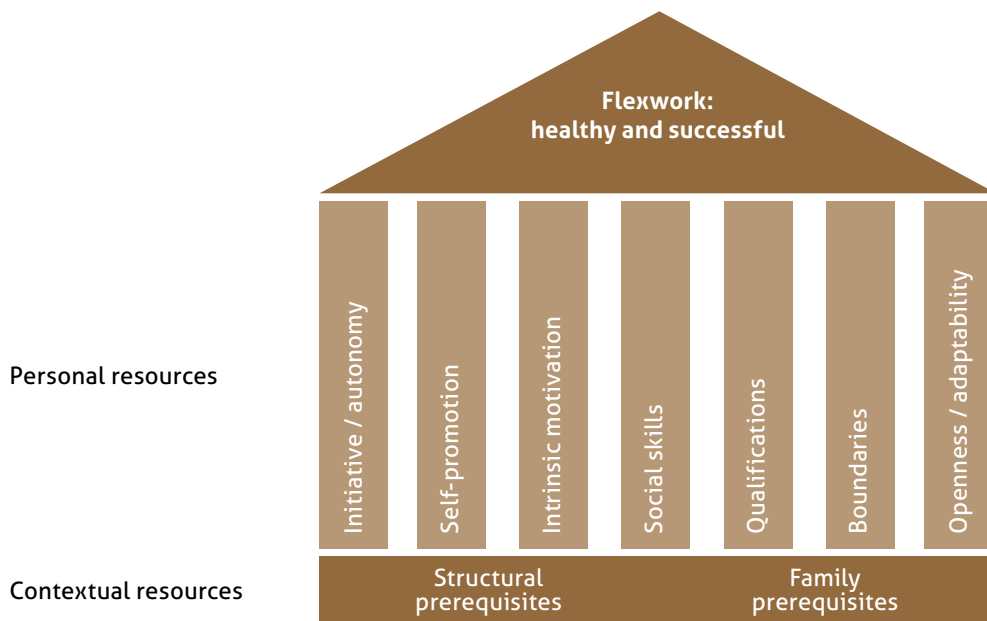


4.3. The resources and prerequisites for flexwork

The following section is about which resources are key for flexworkers to be able to work successfully and to be satisfied with this flexible way of working. What prerequisites are required in order to be able

to quickly and successfully thrive under this work model? The answers from the inter-views described below are divided into contextual and personal resources (figure 7) and summa-rized in figure 8.

Figure 7: Resources for successful and healthy flexworking



Contextual resources

Contextual resources are resources that have to be present in the environment in order for the flexwork model to work. This includes:

- **Family prerequisites**

Support from the family is stated as a key prerequisite for flexworking. Some of the study participants state that, for example, they can only do on-call work because they are relatively unattached and do not have any obligations towards children (e.g. interview 2.5, 2.1). Other respondents feel that having a strong family in the background is an important prerequisite for flexwork. For example, interim managers are very absorbed by their work during an interim assignments and have little time to take care of any household tasks (such as housework, childcare etc.) (e.g. interview 3.6, 3.1). Family situations are also a key factor for flexworkers when it comes to resources.

- **Structural prerequisites**

A professional intermediary represents a key structural prerequisite for flexworkers working via a recruiter (type 1) or an online job platform (type 2). An interim manager, for example, describes how his job broker frees up around 20 – 30% of the time he'd usually need for the acquisition of new projects / mandates (e.g. interview 3.6). Associations of flexworkers, like the Association of Digital Nomads, are also seen as helpful when it comes to solving problems (e.g. taxes/health insurance when working abroad) (e.g. interview 3.2). These are places where you can draw on the experience of other flexworkers.

Personal resources

Personal resources are prerequisites that are within a person's sphere of influence. The study participants stated the following resources as being ones that supported them in their flexwork:

- **Initiative / independence**

Flexworking needs a certain amount of initiative and independence. For example, one of the basics of self-employment is that you independently seek information about pensions and obtain the correct insurance (e.g. interview 3.3, 3.2). Independent action is expected of a flexworker. If, for example, someone is contracted to do lawn mowing, the client expects that no further explanations or inductions are required (e.g. interview 2.3).

As a flexworker, you have to be able to understand, independently organize and complete your work.

- **Openness / adaptability**

As their clients change regularly, flexworkers have to be able to quickly adapt to new conditions. Temporary workers (type 1) in particular report that an important prerequisite for their work is an openness to new situations and fast adaptability (e.g. interview 1.5, 1.7).

- **Qualifications**

Different qualifications are required depending on the work a flexworker does. It is important to have good general knowledge so that you can apply it depending on the situation. For example, an IT supporter for an online job platform reports that his customers' questions often go beyond the original assignment and that this makes good general IT knowledge a big advantage (e.g. interview 2.5).

- **Social skills**

Another key prerequisite for successful flexworking is dealing with various employers and customers (e.g. interview 2.10, 1.5, 1.7). Respondents report that, for example, being interested in people is important as you are often in contact with different personalities due to the ever-changing assignments. For temporary assignments, a certain sensitivity to the client is needed because the working relationship is easily severed again (e.g. interview 2.7, 3.5).

Social skills therefore help flexworkers overcome challenges with clients and customers.

- **Intrinsic motivation**

Being intrinsically motivated means enjoying the work itself. This is a key prerequisite for being happy and successful as a flexworker. Flexworkers who have no specific professional qualifications can in particular make themselves stand out to their clients with their intrinsic work motivation (e.g. interview 1.8, 1.7). Even people doing part time flexwork need a high level of intrinsic motivation to perform flexible jobs (such as lawn mowing jobs at weekends) alongside their permanent positions (e.g. interview 2.3, 2.5).

- **Self-promotion**

Flexworkers who get their jobs via online job platforms (type 2) in particular talk about self-promotion as an important personal characteristic (e.g. interview 2.7, 2.8). It plays a key role in how a flexworker sells themselves to the client during their assignment. It is often decisive in whether they are booked again for the next assignment (e.g. interview 2.8).

- **Boundaries and stress-resistance**

All types of flexworkers see stress-resistance and the ability to compartmentalize work as a key resource. Life as a flexworker can be challenging and hectic due to the changing and sometimes very intensive assignments. Therefore, it is a great advantage for flexworkers to know their boundaries and what their optimum stress level is. Sticking to your boundaries and not being constantly available, or even turning down an assignment every so often, helps flexworkers to stay healthy and productive (e.g. interview 3.3, 3.6).

Figure 8: Overview of resource with examples

	Job assignment via...		
	Traditional recruiter Temporary (Type 1)	Online platform Temporary / self-employed (Type 2)	Personal contacts and networks Self-employed (Type 3)
Contextual resources			Family support: A strong family in the background helps with coordinating flexible assignments
	Structural prerequisites: A strong intermediary is a big help in job assignment		
Personal resources			Initiative in completing jobs and independence in terms of pensions are important
	Openness towards new situations and fast adaptability help with the changing employers / clients		
		Good qualifications and deep background knowledge are helpful with changing client needs	
	Social skills when dealing with employers and clients help as the working relationship is easily severed		
	Intrinsic motivation can partially compensate for lack of qualifications		
		Self-promotion: how flex-workers sell themselves during a gig plays a key role for further assignments	

Note: The colors from dark gold (high) to light gold (low) show the level of importance of the resource in each category. The texts show where each key focus is.

4.4. Flexwork as a career model

After the study participants had told us about their motives, flexworking's opportunities and challenges and the resources needed for this way of working, the question was raised of whether the study participants could imagine making a career out of flexwork. Is this even possible? And do flexworkers want a career? The following section and figure 9 provide an overview of the answers.

- **Flexwork as a bridging solution**

Regardless of whether the study participants became flexworkers voluntarily or through unfortunate circumstances, they see this way of working as a means to gain experience in new companies or a new role, to establish networks, to make new contacts and to build a reputation for themselves.

Figure 9: Potential flexwork careers

Flexwork as a bridging solution	Flexwork career goal	Permanent employment as a career goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexwork alongside studies or training • Gain experience with flexwork • Establish networks and contacts with flexwork • Build a reputation through flexwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal is to work in a flexible way • Flexwork as a sideline • Flexwork during a certain life phase (retirement, travel) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal is to work in a permanent position (some part time) • Dilemma: security vs flexibility and autonomy

In general, two different career goals are identifiable: the goal of “flexwork” and the goal of “permanent position”.

- **Flexwork career goal**

People with flexwork as a career goal want to use this flexible way of working during a certain life phase in which they want more flexibility, such as during their studies, after retirement or before and after more extensive travels. Flexwork can also be a goal that is pursued as a sideline and not as a main occupation. Unsurprisingly, self-employed (type 3) study participants in particular state “flexwork” as a career goal.

- **Permanent employment as a career goal**

People with permanent employment as a career goal use flexwork as a bridging solution to a permanent position or as a way to get to know employers who take them on in a permanent position after a temporary assignment. Some study participants mention that they would like to have a permanent position in the long run, which would give them a certain measure of job security, but that they fear they would have to once again give up some of the autonomy and flexibility that they experience and have come to value as part of their

current flexworking situation. Study participants with temporary assignments (type 1) in particular gave “permanent position” as their career goal.

Many study participants have the impression that it is also possible to forge some kind of career with flexwork. However, not all of them plan to have such a career.

Profiel 6: Flexworker at Randstad

Flexwork:	Main occupation for more than 30 years
Job description:	Auxiliary metal worker
Contract type:	Temporary
Education:	No training

What are the reasons you became a flexworker?

The main reason I do temp work is my family. My wife lives with our children in the US. She is self-employed there. However, she couldn't work here as she doesn't have the necessary permits and training to do her job here. That's why I work here in Switzerland for 6-7 months in the summer and then return to my family in the US. I couldn't do that as a permanent employee.

Since I haven't completed any training, it's very important for me to have a job so that I can earn a living.

I also need the money to be able to afford to travel to my family.

What challenges do you see in flexwork?

For me, it's a big challenge to be away from my family for more than half a year. I'm always thinking about them and wondering how they are.

Another challenge is that people sometimes don't respect temp workers. Sometimes they give all the work to the temps. The employees think you can do anything with temps as we are not permanently employed. I have experienced this previously, but never in my current job – they are good people.



5. Overall conclusions

Flexwork is on-trend. An increasing number of working people are only committing themselves to one company for a certain period, or are offering their services directly via online job platforms or private networks. This white paper used qualitative interviews to identify the motivations, opportunities and challenges of flexworkers.

The motives behind someone choosing flexwork are many and varied, differing not only by life circumstances and phase, but also by flexworker type. For some study participants, for example, flexwork is an opportunity to enter working life during or after their studies. Other participants opt for flexwork to gain a foothold in the job market after a longer break from working. Yet more participants choose flexwork as a sideline in order to make extra money or in order to realize their own projects and business ideas alongside a permanent position.

The great work-life balance this way of working provides through its high level of flexibility in terms of time and location is of primary importance for flexworkers.

We find this need for flexibility in designing their work structure across all flexwork types. While flexibility is a primary motive for flexworkers, it also represents a major opportunity and at the same time, shows that the opportunities and challenges of flexwork are often very closely related. While the high level of flexibility allows plenty of room for work-life balance on the one hand, flexworkers are battling the problem of constant availability on the other.

A second important motive and opportunity is the autonomy and fulfillment gained through this work. Working autonomously is highly important, especially for self-employed people and those working through online job platforms. For these flexworkers, the challenge lies in taking responsibility for their own pension planning and career development, which goes hand in hand with autonomous working. Some interviews show that there is some ambiguity and uncertainty in this area. Flexworkers have to approach this issue with a varying level of independence depending on the intermediary and sector. Financial insecurity is always inherent in the lack of continuity within flexwork, which influences planning for the future and for further training.

Appreciation and the lack of societal recognition of this flexible way of working is one of flexwork's major challenges.

Temporary ways of working are still usually considered inferior. The emergence of new names for this type of work (e.g. gig workers, freelancers etc.), the increasing need for flexibility from workers' perspective, and the increased participation of non-workers (e.g. mothers, students, retired people) in working life's perspective mean that respect for flexwork is growing. Appreciation from clients is an important factor here. From the interviews, we see that issues such as training opportunities, management tasks and other further development opportunities are at the forefront. Depending on their underlying situations, flexwork helps the respondents develop their careers in different ways: Bridging a life phase (e.g. studies), reentering the workplace after a break (e.g. maternity leave or longer travels) or getting to know a potential employer or a new sector for a future permanent position.

A good intermediary who advocates for the flexworkers appears to be an important contextual prerequisite for successful and satisfying flexwork.

Flexworkers also see personal resources such as independence and openness to new situations as extremely helpful in managing the constantly changing working conditions. The interviews carried out as part of this study provide an insight into the motivation of flexworkers and reveal the opportunities and challenges of this way of working. This white paper focused on reaching as wide a range of different flexworkers as possible in order to identify key issues in an exploratory way. A nuanced look at the different types of flexworkers, however, indicates that flexworkers' motives and needs vary. These differ depending on the flexworker's type (e.g. temporary work, self-employed), individual resources (e.g. openness to new things, need for security or fulfillment) and life situation and phase (e.g. studies, parental leave, retirement), even if the overarching issues are the same. A deeper quantitative study with a larger sample could provide further findings here.

We would like to thank all study participants who gave us an insight into their lives as flexworkers.

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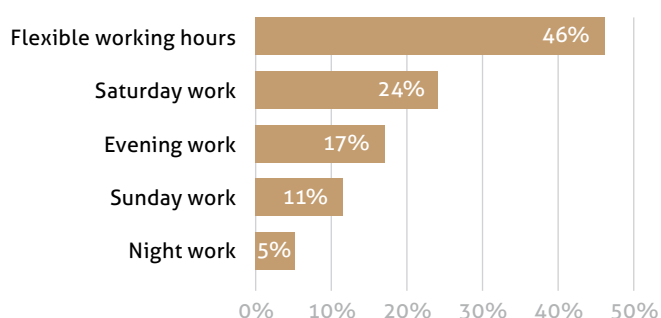
Flexwork in Switzerland – A Reality and a Topic for the Future

Flexwork is a reality, not a marginal phenomenon. swissstaffing, the industry association for staff leasing companies, differentiates between three types of flexibility: flexworkers are free to choose their working hours, place of work and type of work. The figures are impressive: 46% of the Swiss working population have flexible working hours, 33% work from home and 23% have flexible employment contracts. The boundaries of the time, location and contractual elements of work are becoming ever more blurred. Furthermore, the increased levels of agility and flexibility seen in various forms in the

economy and the working world are trends that are going to continue, even after the coronavirus crisis. However, employees' need for flexibility and autonomy is increasingly coming into conflict with employment law and collective bargaining agreements. Modern solutions are required to carry this new reality forward into the future. In swissstaffing's view, this future must include flexibility paired with social security.

Dr. Marius Osterfeld, Economist, swissstaffing

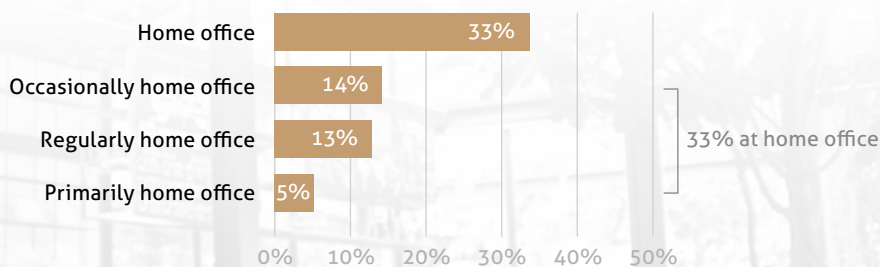
Time Flexibility



Note: 46% of the working population have flexible working hours – 24% work on Saturdays, 17% work in the evenings, 11% work on Sundays and 5% work nights.

Source: BFS (2019)

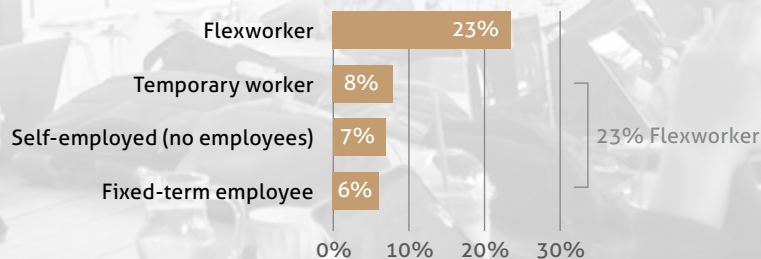
Location Flexibility



Note: 33% of the working population worked from home in 2019 – 14% occasionally, 13% regularly and 5% primarily.

Source: BFS (2019)

Contract Type



Anmerkung: 23% of the working population were already flexworkers in 2018 – 8% as temporary workers, 7% as self-employed workers with no employees, and 6% as fixed-term employees.

Source: BFS, Seco (2018), own calculations

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Appendix 1: Interview overview

Interview	Type	Flexwork occupation	Sex	Age	Main occupation / part time
1.1	1	Logistics	male	20	Main occupation
1.2	1	Printer assembly	male	22	Part time
1.3	1	Assistant server	female	22	Part time
1.4	1	Production worker	male	37	Main occupation
1.5	1	Care assistant	female	60	Main occupation
1.6	1	Mechanic	male	61	Main occupation
1.7	1	Care assistant	female	40	Main occupation
1.8	1	Auxiliary metal construction worker	male	42	Main occupation
1.9	1	Document controller	female	49	Main occupation
1.10	1	Catering worker	male	50	Main occupation
2.1	2	IT support	male	25	Part time
2.2	2	Painter	female	29	Main occupation
2.3	2	Allrounder	male	30	Part time
2.4	2	Accountancy admin	female	32	Main occupation
2.5	2	IT support	male	34	Part time
2.6	2	Digital Biomarker Operational Study Manager Associate	female	34	Main occupation
2.7	2	Catering / server	male	35	Main occupation
2.8	2	Cook / chef	male	42	Main occupation
2.9	2	Chauffeur	male	60	Main occupation
2.10	2	Chauffeur	male	65	Part time
2.11	2	Painter	male	67	Part time
3.1	3	Interim manager	male	67	Main occupation
3.2	3	Graphic designer and software trainer	female	47	Main occupation
3.3	3	Architect	female	33	Main occupation
3.4	3	HR business partner	female	40	Part time
3.5	3	ICT process manager	female	59	Main occupation
3.6	3	Interim manager	male	59	Main occupation
3.7	3	Midwife	female	49	Main occupation
3.8	3	Senior Clinical Operations Manager	male	52	Main occupation
3.9	3	Editor / author	female	40	Main occupation
3.10	3	Personal shopper / style consultant	female	47	Part time

Profile 7:

Flexworker at Coople

Flexwork:	Main occupation for some years
Job description:	Catering / server at 5-star level
Contract type:	Platform / temporary
Education:	Hotel specialist in Germany / hotel management school

What do you see as the benefits of flexwork?

If I have a bad experience, I can leave the client and don't have to work for them again after that job. Permanent employees are more stuck in an unpleasant situation.

You don't get very much feedback as a permanent employee. You usually get an annual review once a year. As a flexworker, you get direct feedback after every gig – you're evaluated.

At Coople, I can review the client and they review me. That's recognition that motivates me.

At Coople, I can say that I need a break before my next job to recuperate. I want to offer my guests something but I can't perform a perfect show day in, day out. That's why I sometimes need a little more free time than would be possible in a permanent position, like maybe three days, in order to rest. At Coople, I can simply make it so.

What are the challenges?

When people ask you what you do and you say temp work, they look at you oddly. It's the same when I say I'm a waiter. But if I say I'm a freelancer or a gig worker, it sounds a lot better. But especially with new terms like gig work, it's crucial that the word has the right branding. It's important that a word has a good image.



Profile 8:

Flexworker at Manpower

Flexwork:	Main occupation (paid hourly) for 10 years
Job description:	Document controller
Contract type:	Temporary
Education:	Business school, PC user SIZ course

What are three reasons why you decided to work flexibly?

I started looking for a position after losing my job. In this situation, I'd actually had enough of working, but I had to do something and that's why I applied to Manpower. I already knew about Manpower from other earlier assignments. To start with, I had another shorter assignment of six months. But then my contract was extended. Now I've been at the same firm for seven years.

I don't work eight hours every day at my current job. Sometimes there's nothing, sometimes 12 hours. I definitely don't want to sit around in an office doing nothing, so if I have nothing to do, I go home. It's very doable when you're paid hourly. This gives me flexibility. If I'm ill, I stay home and don't have to feel guilty. I only want to work 5-6 hour days at most anyway, or maybe a little less. When I come home from work, I can kick back and relax. I am single and have to do everything myself – housekeeping, laundry, admin and so on. It all used to be very stressful.

I can work from home and on the train. Fridays are always home office days, and then I can do both the laundry and my job with no commute.

What do you see as the challenges of this flexible way of working?

*I am only paid if I actually work.
That requires self-discipline.*

Especially when your employer makes no demands, except for the deadline and quality standards. We temps may also have different employment conditions than permanent employees. Like vacations for example: I only get four weeks of vacation, permanent employees get five weeks. Permanent employees get their computer glasses paid for, I have to buy my own. I also don't get any company fringe benefits as I was hired via Manpower. But none of this is so bad. We have a great, cheap canteen to make up for it.

Profile 9:

Flexworker at Lawoon

Flexwork:	Part time
Job description:	All-rounder (e.g. removals, vehicle painting, gardening)
Contract type:	Platform / self-employed
Education:	Trained vehicle painter

What do you see as the benefits of flexwork?

I see the assignments from Lawoon as a kind of balance and a change from my job as a sales rep. I used to do a lot of physical work as a vehicle painter. I miss that now I'm a sales rep. As an all-rounder at Lawoon, I can do physical work and burn off some energy. I love it. At Lawoon, you can do lots of things, including helping other people do something they can't or can no longer do themselves. For example, an older lady was recently overjoyed that I came to help her with the gardening. She walked around with me but couldn't actually mow the lawn anymore. To be honest, I would have done that for her for free.

What resources and prerequisites are important for flexworking?

You have to love what you do and be motivated to be a part time flexworker.

If you only go lawn mowing on a Saturday to earn money, it's probably not that attractive to you and you'll take a lot longer to do the job.

If you accept an assignment as a flexworker, you have to understand your work and do it independently. If an older lady asks me to mow the lawn, I can't be constantly asking her how to do something. She expects me to come and independently mow the lawn.

Profile 10:

Contractor at CTC resourcing

Flexwork: Main occupation for 10 years
Job description: Senior Clinical Operations Manager
Contract type: Temporary
Education: Degree in molecular biology and pharmacology

What made you become a flexworker?

I wanted to work in an international environment. There were very few permanent jobs in the pharma sector, however, which is why I decided to start out in this new environment with a temporary contract. Later on, I decided to stick with this way of working as it offers me great flexibility.

It means you can change companies or job much more easily if you want to experience something new work-wise or if something isn't right.

What do you see as the benefits of this flexible way of working?

I feel free thanks to this way of working. It allows me to take breaks, as I have never been afraid of not being able to find a new job. I have often taken breaks of several months after finishing a contract. I value the flexibility to change jobs more easily.

You don't have to fill out any application forms, since the recruitment agency takes care of all the administrative tasks of job hunting. And if you work with the same agency for a few years, they get to know you so well that they can find the ideal jobs for you.



Profile 11: Digital Nomad

Flexwork: Self-employed as main occupation for 20 years
Job description: Graphic designer and software trainer
Contract type: Self-employed
Education: Graphic designer / IT

What do you see as the benefits of flexworking?

As a digital nomad, I can work from anywhere in the world. That's my main reason for working like this. My setup lets me work from anywhere with a computer. When my two children were still little, I mainly worked from home. But in the holidays, for example, we were all able to go to Thailand for four weeks – I worked for two of those weeks, which I couldn't have done as a permanent employee. Now my kids are over 20 years old, I often go abroad for a few weeks and work from there. When the kids were still young, I sometimes took fewer jobs. I now work full time and sometimes even more than 100%.

Being able to control my work volume and number of jobs is another reason I work in this way.

As a flexworker, what opportunities do you have to network? Where do you get information and support?

The Digitale Nomaden association is an important contextual resource for me. If you're out and about with a digital setup, you're always working alone. So it's good to know you can meet others. The talk within the Digitale Nomaden Schweiz association is sometimes about small issues, but ones that impact all digital nomads equally. Like what happens with taxes and health insurance if you're constantly on the move? We try to overcome obstacles together. We try to make ourselves visible and to negotiate special agreements with health insurers for our association and so on.



Profile 12:

Flexworker at smartstaff

Flexwork:	Main occupation for six months
Job description:	Painter
Contract type:	Platform / temporary
Education:	Trained painter

What reasons made you decide to work flexibly?

When I was training, a lot of my peers moved to temp work because it was difficult to find a permanent position.

So one thing led to another. I came back from a long trip and had no more money. My boss suggested I could join him as a temp. It's really common in construction, especially in the main summer season.

What challenges do you see in flexworking and what have you learned?

You can't take a day off. As soon as you do, you earn nothing. Other people who have changed jobs a lot also say that you always have to start from scratch when you change companies. I have learned to deal with these consequences. If I want to take a day off, I have no money. I'm the kind of person who needs to relax once in a while. But that means I have to plan well. If, for example, I want to take two weeks' vacation, I have to plan for only earning half my usual monthly wage.



Profile 13: Flexworker at Hotelis

Flexwork: Main occupation for 3.5 years
Job description: Catering worker
Contract type: Temporary
Education: Trained as a chef, then attended hotel school

What made you decide to work flexibly?

I was jobless for a while and wanted to find a way back into working. So it wasn't a conscious decision, it arose from this situation and was intended to be a temporary thing until I found a permanent position.

What opportunities do you see in flexworking?

In job terms, I can choose the work and the gigs I want to do. You always get to know new clients and people.

There's a positive pressure to constantly adjust to new conditions and people and to put your best foot forward.

Personally, I very much enjoy the flexibility. I am able to choose my assignments so that they fit in with my family's needs. I am married with two children. I don't accept any jobs on certain days because I need to take my son or daughter somewhere.



Profile 14: Flexworker at Adia

Flexwork:	Main occupation for almost 3 years
Job description:	Cook and chef
Contract type:	Platform / temporary
Education:	Trained chef

What are three reasons why you became self-employed?

First, the work-life balance – I have a child. That's one key reason why I like flexworking. It's easier to juggle my career and family.

The second reason is the variety. I worked at a community restaurant for a long time, but it became the same thing over and over again every day. With Adia, I can discover new things and stay flexible.

A new job always means getting to know new people.

The third reason is the appreciation: it's motivating when you are appreciated by your employer. I always get feedback in my current job and can also evaluate the employer. That means that the employer's motivation is high, too.

What resources are important for flexwork?

As a flexworker, you have to be able to organize yourself well and be independent. I travel a lot on public transport. If you are well organized, you don't necessarily need a car.

I have to bring my own clothing and knives with me to my assignments. That's an investment. The clothing and materials also have to be in pristine condition. I am responsible for this myself.

Another resource is definitely self-promotion. Self-promotion helps you to get good gigs. For example, my CV is on the Adia platform and further training helps me to get good jobs.



Profile 15:

Flexworker at Kelly Services

Flexwork:	Main occupation for 3.5 years
Job description:	Mechanic
Contract type:	Temporary
Education:	Trained mechanic

What do you see as the benefits of flexworking?

As I work at various companies through temping, I get to know various ways of working. I have done so many different things and learned so much that I can make use of myself. For example, when we built a barn at home, we didn't need a builder. I was able to do it myself. This has certain benefits.

I also have a lot of flexibility. I can decide for myself whether a job looks good and whether I want to work in the afternoons. Of course, time is money, but there is also the freedom to go to the doctor or visit people in the community and so on.

I got into temping through being jobless. This kind of working allows me to present myself to various companies. I can show them what I can do and maybe one day I'll get a permanent position. Or at least I'll gain experience.

What resources are important for flexwork?

You have to be mentally stable and be able to withstand a lot.

Sometimes you are treated worse than permanent employees and have to perform better.

But you have to work and earn money. The permanent employees go home and the temps stay on. You can't make a single complaint. If you don't like it, you can go. That's something you just have to know as a temp. You can't let things slide. Then you'll just be gone. There are fantastic people and then there are those who treat you like dirt. You simply have to grow a thick skin and not take everything personally. Then everything will be fine. That's what I had to learn.



Flexworkers in the exceptional Covid-19 situation

Follow-up survey

1. Aim of the follow-up survey

The novel coronavirus, classified as a pandemic in March 2020, has abruptly changed working conditions for billions of people around the world.

This exceptional situation has posed challenges for many flexworkers in Switzerland, but has also provided opportunities.

For some, their order books have emptied overnight, while for others, this change in circumstances has led to a huge increase in jobs. In order to gain an overview of the current flexworking circumstances, we again contacted the flexworkers we interviewed in 2019 for another short interview in April and May 2020.

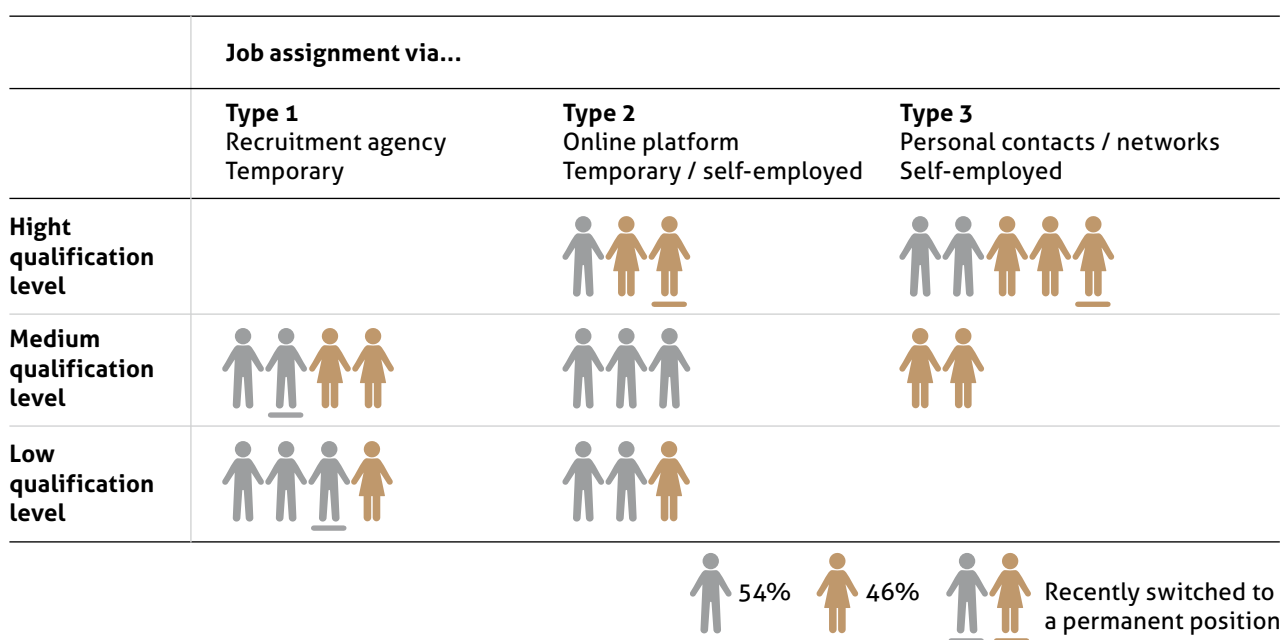
2. Methodology

24 of the original 31 flexworkers interviewed provided information on their current circumstances. The short interviews of around 10-15 minutes were based on a structured interview guide and included two open, exploratory questions on their current work situation:

- 1) What does your work situation as a flexworker look like in the current exceptional circumstances?
- 2) What do you see as the opportunities and / or challenges of flexworking in the current exceptional circumstances?

The interviewees fit into the three types of flexwork shown in figure 1. Four people had recently switched to a permanent position and three of the flexworkers are no longer with the same intermediary, but still work as flexworkers.

Figure 1: Overview of the short interview participants



3. Results

3.1. Work situation in the exceptional Covid-19 circumstances

The flexworkers interviewed have all been impacted in their own way by the pandemic and its effects on everyday working life. The **type of flexible work** (flexwork type), the **industry** and their **personal (health) circumstances** have all played a role. While staffing levels are currently too low in certain industries (e.g. healthcare), business has completely collapsed in other sectors (e.g. restaurants). And flexworkers who are in an at-risk group due to their age or state of health have a different experience again of the current situation. Upon analysis of the flexworkers' statements in terms of the three different flexworker types, the following picture emerges:

Type 1: Flexworkers hired via a recruiter are currently experiencing a wide range of situations depending on their industry. Flexworkers in the health and construction industries report a stable situation. These industries usually employ many foreign workers. The closed borders mean plenty of work for the flexworkers currently working here. Furthermore, one flexworker at Home Instead cannot currently undertake any care work as she is herself in an at-risk group. Other industries, such as technical support for example, have outright collapsed. Access to buildings and clients is limited, which makes installing technical devices impossible. Services with no customer contact have remained stable while maintaining social distancing and hygiene rules (masks and disinfectants), or by moving to working from home.

Type 2: Flexworkers who obtain their jobs via online job brokerage platforms mostly report major declines in job volumes. The type-2 flexworkers interviewed primarily work in the restaurant, computer and IT support and services with customer contact industries. Uber drivers, for example, report turnover volumes four times lower than normal. IT support staff at Mila are hardly ever booked at the moment as the majority of their customers are in the Covid-19 at-risk group. One flexworker in the catering trade has switched industries and sought out a job in personal protection. Other flexworkers who obtained additional income via online job brokerage platforms are now primarily concentrating on their main job due to lack of demand. Only those flexworkers who have no direct customer contact and can work from home report a stable order book.

Type 3: Flexworkers who acquire their jobs via their own networks have widely varying experiences of the current situation. Services and consulting in IT and management (e.g. interim management) are currently in great demand. Companies need support with digitization and restructuring. Services with customer contact such as personal shopping have largely collapsed due to social distancing and closed stores. One self-employed architect reports that her current commission situation is good, but that there is also great uncertainty about whether investments will still be made in buildings in the future if the economic situation continues to worsen. The uncertain development of orders in the future is a concern for all self-employed people alike.

Safety concept for coronavirus protection measures
Flexworkers report that intermediaries are taking very different approaches to communicating protective measures against the coronavirus. Recruiters (type 1) are working closely with the client companies. They themselves can only provide a limited assessment of the working environment. This means that client companies are providing the information on occupational health and safety. The range is just as broad with online job brokerage platforms (type 2). Some intermediaries provide no information at all, others brief their flexworkers with new information on a weekly basis. As a result, depending on the platform, flexworkers are uncertain who is responsible for safety guidelines, or they are concerned about not being able to properly carry out the safety guidelines. Flexworkers (type 3) are independently responsible for complying with protective measures and applying them to their work. Where possible, they have moved to working from home, are avoiding close contact when meeting in person and are following the distancing rules and recommendations on hygiene measures from the Federal Office for Public Health. Without an intermediary, it is crucial for them to gain information from suitable channels – via the FOPH website for example – and to derive specific measures for their business from there.

3.2. The opportunities in this exceptional situation

Positive effects thanks to the acceleration of digitization

Flexworkers from the service sector also view the crisis as an opportunity as it has triggered an acceleration of digitization. Working from home is a positive experience. It saves time (no commute or meetings), improves health (flexibility to take walks and for one's own eating habits) and causes less everyday working stress overall.

More personal customer relations

Flexworkers report that their relations with their customers have become more personal.

Private spheres are playing a major role in the current situation. You see the other person's living room and ask after their family at every virtual meeting. This automatically creates more closeness.

Innovative ideas

The current situation has created more jobs for flexworkers. Currently, for example, there is high demand for virtual IT support and delivery services. Certain intermediaries are developing innovative ideas due to the crisis. Uber, for example, has launched a new booking app for hospital workers. This means that hospital workers can ride to work and back at a more favorable rate. This cheaper rate has been made possible as Uber is financing a portion of the ride costs as a thank-you to hospital staff. Uber drivers are receiving their normal margins and also gaining extra rides due to this idea.

3.3. The challenges of this exceptional situation

Belonging to an at-risk group

Various companies have said that flexworkers in an at-risk group should stay at home. This is a concern for flexworkers. Some fear that they may lose their jobs if this situation continues.

More competition and age discrimination

Due to the increasing unemployment numbers, flexworkers expect greater competition from additional flexworkers seeking a job via online job brokerage platforms. Examples of people switching from the restaurant trade to personal protection or passenger transport show that flexworkers are seeking new opportunities. Older flexworkers are also concerned that they will no longer find jobs on the market due to their age amid this increased competition.

Uncertain economic and financial situation

Uncertainty about the development of the economy and of jobs is causing concerns. Some flexworkers mentioned that they are dependent on economic activity to have work.

Flexworkers working in sectors where jobs have collapsed perceive the financial situation as a huge challenge.

The situation is difficult, especially for flexworkers who obtain jobs via online job brokerage platforms and for the self-employed, as they cannot apply for any short-time work benefits. Flexworkers who have taken out credit during this period in order to bridge gaps between jobs are grappling with the fear of not being able to pay it back. Various flexworkers are also worried that restructuring and downsizing measures will hit flexworkers first.

4. Overall conclusion

The exceptional coronavirus situation is affecting flexworking in all kinds of industries. There are industry-specific differences in terms of the opportunities and challenges, and a general uncertainty due to the development of the economic situation. Where intermediaries have a strong presence (type 1) or are absent (type 3), protection concepts are in place or clearly delegated to the client or flexworkers. Where the presence of intermediaries is less strong, there is a lot of uncertainty and uneasiness about the protection concepts. This leads to additional workloads and demonstrates a vulnerability in this flexwork type.

On the other hand, the innovative ideas of intermediaries and flexworkers demonstrate the great ability to adapt and change in flexwork.

This is a major strength, especially in times of crisis.

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