DIGITAL EMPLOYMENT OF UKRAINE IN THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR MARKET

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Abstract: The article aims to study the peculiarities of the development of digital employment and competitive advantages of Ukraine in the international labor market in the information and network economy. The study used a causal approach to reveal the cause-and-effect relationship between the development of digital employment in Ukraine in the global economic space and the national economy; a systematic approach that allowed analyzing the structure of digital employment and the dynamics of its components in recent years, a comparative analysis to compare the level of digital employment in Ukraine and Central and Eastern Europe, etc. The main forms of digital employment are systematized, which include outsourcing, freelancing, and crowdsourcing. The reasons and features of the development of Internet employment in Ukraine are analyzed. The dynamics of changes in digital employment, the number of completed projects, the total income of performers, etc. are analyzed. The evolution of forms of freelancing and outsourcing is revealed. Horizontal and pyramidal outsourcing are characterized. It is established that outsourcing of service support and business processes is becoming widespread. The role of IT services exports in the structure of Ukrainian outsourcing has been clarified. The participation of Ukrainians in crowdsourcing is revealed. Opportunities and threats to the development of digital employment in the national and global economy are analyzed.

Keywords: Crowdsourcing, Digital employment, Freelance, IT services export, Outsourcing.

1 Introduction

In a post-industrial economy, the social welfare of the population and the economic prosperity of national economies increasingly depend on the competitive advantages of countries in international markets.

Back in the early 1990s, Deutsche Bank experts argued that Ukraine had one of the greatest resource potentials among the republics of the USSR, which would allow it to take a worthy place in the global economy. However, during the period of Ukraine's independence, this was only partially realized in practice. Thus, over the past ten years, Ukraine has not changed significantly and even slightly worsened its position in the ranking of the Global Competitiveness Index, sowing in 2012-2013 -73rd , 2014-2015 - 76th , 2016-2017 and 2019-2020 -85th places among almost 130 countries of the world [11]. According to this Index in 2019, Ukraine lags far behind many post-socialist countries: the Czech Republic (32nd place), Poland (37th place), Slovakia (42nd place), the Russian Federation (43rd place), Hungary (47th place), Bulgaria (49th place), Romania (51st place) and others [2], which is primarily due to the deterioration of the indicators "Macroeconomic Stability", "Financial System", "Institutions". Despite this, rather high indicators of the national economy in the sub-indices "Qualification" and "Ability to innovate" on the contrary indicate the significant potential of Ukraine to strengthen its position in the international economic space.

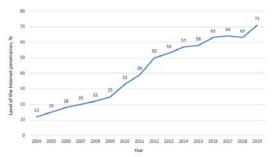
During the years of independence, Ukraine has managed to strengthen its position as one of the largest exporters of agricultural products. Currently, domestic producers are important suppliers of cereals, oilseeds, honey to the world commodity market [18]. Although the priority areas of domestic exports have changed significantly during this time, the structure of the latter has hardly changed (the share of agricultural products continues to account for almost half of Ukraine's total exports [8]). However, today the main transformations, in our opinion, are taking place in the resource markets. Ukraine's role in international labor markets is undergoing significant transformations under the influence of the spread of the information and network economy. In this regard, the study of the peculiarities of the development of digital employment and competitive advantages of Ukraine in the international labor market is relevant and timely.

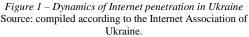
2 Materials and Methods

The study used a causal approach to reveal the cause-and-effect relationships between the development of digital employment in Ukraine in the global economic space and the national economy; a systematic approach that allowed analyzing the structure of digital employment and the dynamics of its components in recent years, a comparative analysis to compare the level of digital employment in Ukraine and Central and Eastern Europe, etc.

3 Results

The rapid spread of the Internet and smart technologies in Ukraine occurred after the global economic crisis of 2008-2009 [28].





At the present stage of social development, the level of Internet penetration in Ukraine is already 71% [21] and continues to grow due to the "smartphoneization" of the population. Only in 2019, this figure increased by 8% compared to the previous year. In addition, Ukraine is characterized by a relatively low cost of using the Internet. As of early 2020, it was about \$6 USD per month [2], which is much lower than in other countries: Turkey (USD 30.09), Czech Republic (USD 23.57), Slovakia (USD 20.45), Bulgaria USD 13.88), Belarus (USD 12.96), Hungary (USD 10.32), Moldova (USD 9.66), and others.

Today, almost all young people are actively using the Internet and mobile applications. A significant breakthrough in the use of the latest information technologies is also characteristic of economic agents aged 30-60, which generates new opportunities for digital employment and lays the foundations for changing Ukraine's place in the international labor market.

In addition, over the past three years, almost a third of Ukrainians have been looking for work. The most economically vulnerable in this social group was young people under 30 years. According to annual survey by the European Business Association, more than half of employed Ukrainians are dissatisfied with their work [25] and real income (this is confirmed by the high level of labor emigration of Ukrainians abroad). According to the R&B Group, every tenth Ukrainian works at an additional job [17]. In general, the spread of information technology encourages Ukrainians to use digital employment opportunities.

Digital employment is actively developing in many European countries. Among them, the leaders are Estonia, Luxembourg,

Finland, and Sweden. In Ukraine, too, there is a rapid expansion of digital employment and an increase in the volume of Internet services provided for customers abroad. In this regard, freelance and outsourcing are becoming new forms of Ukraine's participation in the international labor market.

The Ukrainian freelance market has been developing dynamically since 2006 [29]. Ukrainians work on foreign and national freelance sites. Among the national best known are Freelancehunt.com, Weblancer.net, Freelance.ua, Kabanchik.ua, Proffstore; Russian ones Freelance.ru, FL.ru, Kwork.ru; American and European Fiverr, Upwork, Freelancer.com, EnvatoStudio, PeoplePerHour, Toptal, Guru.com, DesignCrowd, DesignContest, TaskRabbit, crowdSPRING, Nexxt, Hireable.com, WriterAccess, 99Designs, Catalant, Designhill, Skyword, Bark, Gigster, etc. As one can see, the number of foreign sites for freelancers is much larger than in Ukraine. In addition, they offer a larger selection of projects and higher remuneration, so Ukrainian specialists work more often on abroad platforms than on similar Ukrainian platforms. Beginners in the freelance market, as a rule, start their activities on Ukrainian and Russian freelance exchanges due to the lack of language barriers and the desire to gain experience and improve the skills needed to compete on foreign platforms [15, 16, 20]. According to Payoneer, which is one of the most common payment systems among freelancers, the most promising markets for remote work are in Western Europe and the United States [19]. In 2018, half of all global freelancers worked for European clients in the global dimension, and two thirds of freelancers worked on North American market.

In recent years, the Ukrainian freelance has shown positive dynamics in terms of changes in the total income of contractors, the number of proposed and implemented projects, the persons involved in their implementation, and so on. During 2006-2011, freelancers from Ukraine received \$38 million, while in 2012 32, in 2013 50, in 2014 61, in 2015 55, in 2016 65 million US dollars respectively [10]. In total, during 2012-2017, freelancers received \$262 million [19]. In 2018, Ukraine ranked first in Europe and fourth in the world in terms of total freelance income, second only to India, the United States, and the Philippines. According to the managers of the world-famous freelance exchange Upwork (former name Elance-oDesk), which unites about 14 million employers and freelancers from around the world, by 2025, more than half of the economically active population of Ukraine will become freelancers [26]. Currently, this is also facilitated by the spread of the Covid-2019 pandemic, as many employees began to actively look for work in the Internet environment.

The share of freelancers in the structure of the labor force in Ukraine is constantly growing. According to the Ukrainian exchange Freelancehunt, if in 2014 there were 60 thousand, in 2015 110 thousand, in March 2016 125 thousand performers from Ukraine, in 2017, 220 thousand were already registered on this platform, and in 2018 320 thousand people [7]. Their income has tripled. 2016 was a turning point for the development of Ukrainian freelance. As a result of the adoption of Law No. 4496, which abolished administrative barriers to the export of services, the process of legalization of freelance and withdrawal of funds received abroad in Ukraine was simplified. This helped increase the economic activity of Ukrainian freelancers abroad. In 2014, 31,000 new freelancers from Ukraine were registered at Upwork. Almost the same figure was reached in the first half of 2015 and was tripled the following year [26], which indicates a rapid growth of the share of Ukrainian freelancers in the global labor market. However, today in Ukraine the number of freelancers is much smaller than abroad. For example, according to a survey conducted by research firm Edelman Berland, a third of the economically active population of the United States were freelancers (according to Forbes almost 54 million Americans) [30]. In Ukraine, their share is much smaller, but it is changing dynamically.

The highest regional activity is characteristic of freelancers living in the capital and regional centers of Ukraine, namely: Dnipro, Zaporizhia, Kyiv, Lviv, Odessa, Kharkiv, and others. A significant proportion of them are young people and people under the age of fifty. It should be noted that abroad the freelance market employs mainly young people and people under the age of 50, but the United States is characterized by a fairly high share (over a third) of older freelancers, who usually receive much higher income than their young competitors. The most common orders among Ukrainian freelancers on the world's freelance platforms were the development of mobile applications, the creation of websites, much less copywriting services, translation, sales and marketing, engineering, and more. According to the Ukrainian freelance exchange Frelancehunt, on their platform, most professionals offer their services in the field of design (25%), copywriting (23%), services (22%), programming (22%), promotion (6%), audio and video processing (5%) [7]. Of these, the most high-paid area of activity is programming. At the present stage, the list of skills and technologies that are most in demand by customers in the global freelance platforms includes PHP, JavaScript, HTML5, Android, IOS Python, Rubi-on-Rails, AngularJS and more. At the same time, new professions are emerging: social network administrator, web analyst, visualizer, creative designer, etc.

According to Upwork, freelancers from around the world earn about \$1 trillion on a freelance basis for the year [26]. Over the past five years, the earnings of freelancers from Ukraine have also doubled due to the high quality of services and improved skills.

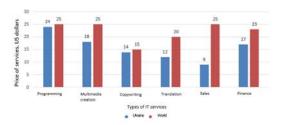


Figure 2 – Hourly rates of freelancers in Ukraine and around the world Source: built according to Payoneer.

The services of lawyers, designers, content managers, and marketers are highly valued at the world's freelance exchanges. More than half of freelancers, including those from Ukraine, work at least 30 hours a week. Freelancers find their orders not only through international or domestic freelance platforms, but also through social networks – primarily, Facebook and Linkedin.

Until recently, Ukrainian freelancers were more focused on the Ukrainian and Russian labor markets. This was due to a number of factors, including insufficient knowledge of English and the widespread use of Russian payment systems Web Money and Yandex.Money. However, after the prohibition on the use of the latter, the Ukrainian freelance reoriented to the Western market. In addition, in 2019, Ukraine was included in the list of countries with an average level of English language proficiency [5], which confirms the gradual reduction of the language barrier for Ukrainian professionals in the international labor market.

Currently, Ukrainians most often carry out projects of customers from the United States and Western Europe. Ukraine attracts foreign customers with a large number of skilled workers and their high level of technical training. In 2017-2018, Ukraine ranked 27th out of 137 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index in terms of the quality of mathematics and science education [24]. The value of Ukrainian freelancers is evidenced by the fact that in 2015 the regional office of Upwork in Ukraine was opened. One of its tasks was to expand the mechanisms and scope of involvement of Ukrainians in the development of IT projects presented on their platform. In addition, the regional manager of Upwork announced the organization's intentions to create a closed group of highly qualified IT developers to fulfill the largest foreign orders worth at least 5 thousand US dollars [26].

With the spread of the pandemic, the development of freelance is becoming a global trend and currently in Ukraine there is an acceleration of its pace of development. Thus, only in the first quarter of 2020, the volume of transactions and the number of services of Ukrainian freelancers on foreign platforms increased by 27% compared to the previous year [4]. Currently, Ukraine continues to be among the top 5 countries in terms of income of freelancers, which has a positive impact on Ukraine's image in the international labor market.

The development of domestic outsourcing is also important in changing the role of Ukraine in the world labor market. The Ukrainian IT outsourcing market is one of the most dynamic in Central and Eastern Europe due to the large number of qualified specialists and relatively low wage rates. According to the global ranking of outsourcing attractiveness of countries, which since 2004 is formed every two years by the international company A.T. Kearney, in 2018 Ukraine became the third country with the highest growth rate of this type of employment, which allowed it to rise rapidly by 17 positions in this ranking [13]. The outsourcing potential of each country is assessed by four indicators: financial attractiveness (through analysis of tax rates, regulatory policy, infrastructure costs), skills and accessibility of labor market involvement, the availability of favorable business, and digital environment for outsourcing operations. If in 2018, in this ranking Ukraine took 24th place, in 2019 20th place [13].

According to a report by the international organization GSA, 70% of the surveyed largest firms in the world economy plan to make extensive use of outsourcing, and for 30% it is already the main source of human resources involved in production [6]. Technavio analysts predict that, by 2022, the value of outsourcing contracts will be about \$400 billion [23]. In this context, the development of outsourcing is a promising direction in the structure of international employment.

There are different models of outsourcing: horizontal (American), pyramidal (Japanese), mixed. In contrast to the horizontal model, which uses a large number of performers, the pyramid model provides for longer cooperation with performers and the possibility of creating sectoral and intersectoral clusters. In practice, a combination of pyramidal and horizontal models is observed in Ukraine.

After the global recession, the global outsourcing market is developing unevenly. In 2010 it was estimated at 93.1, in 2011 95, in 2012 99.1, in 2013 82.9, in 2014 104, 6, in 2015 88.9, 2016 76.9, 2017 88.9 billion US dollars accordingly. This is due to the temporary involvement of specialists to perform design work (43% of manufacturing companies involve external workers on non-permanent basis); increasing demand for outsourcing in times of crisis; the presence of a large number of small outsourcing companies; attracting specialists from other countries through emigration, etc. However, according to World Bank reports, the outsourcing market is expected to grow by about 6-10% annually. The main drivers of increasing this segment of the international labor market will continue to be the development of cloud services and artificial intelligence, which require the involvement of additional specialists. This creates significant opportunities for remote work and involvement of third-party contractors, connecting them to a single system with the ability to control and coordinate production processes and more.

Currently in Ukraine, as well as abroad, there is an evolution of outsourcing, when the hiring of individual employees on a contractual basis is replaced by outsourcing of service support and business processes. Their feature is that the customer company enters into a contract not with one person, but with a company that provides a range of services. According to the International Association IAOP, the best outsourcing companies in the world in 2018 included 18 companies with offices in Ukraine. In particular, SoftServe, Ciklum, Infopulse, ELEKS, Sigma Software, Intellias, Miratech, N-iX, Innovecs, AMC Bridge, Softengi, Program-Ace, and others were included in the top 100 of The 2018 Global Outsourcing among national employers. Their offices are located in Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv; the number of staff is 1000-3000 employees. As one can see, outsourcing centers are located in large cities and are small companies.

Globally, the largest outsourcing 'customers' are the United States, Japan, and the EU. Ukrainian performers mainly cooperate with the business of the USA, the Eurozone, and Israel.

The largest share in the structure of Ukrainian outsourcing is occupied by the export of IT services.

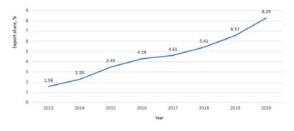


Figure 3 – Dynamics of changes in the share of IT services in exports

Source: built according to the National Bank of Ukraine.

In general, 90% of all IT services in Ukraine are outsourced to other countries. In terms of growth in this segment in the world, Ukraine is second only to India. National income from this type of economic activity is estimated at about \$2.5 billion annually [9]. According to Accenture, this area of outsourcing is the most promising in the global economy. According to the Global Sourcing Association, by 2025, the demand for the services of automation experts, technical architects, designers, etc. will continue to grow [14]. It is expected that in the next decade, 80% of all jobs will require STEM skills (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). In this, Ukraine has significant competitive advantages.

At the same time, crowdsourcing is becoming widespread in the international labor market as a form of participation of Ukrainians in the world economic space. As part of business crowdsourcing, Ukrainians are most actively involved in the work of foreign platforms. For example, a significant number of Ukrainians are registered on digital micro-stock platforms, where high-quality photos and videos are posted within the C2C economic model. The most popular among digital platforms are Shaterstock, AdobeStock, iStockphoto, Fotolia, Dreamstime, Bigstock. At the same time, Ukrainian Depositphotos [3] (although officially headquartered in Florida, USA), established in 2009, is one of the five largest photobanks in the world and represents one of the most famous Ukrainian projects in the West [27]. In less than four years, the number of files exceeded 10 million, making Depositphotos the fastest growing photobank in the world. By 2019, more than 80 million of photo and video content had been posted on Depositphotos.

Today, the national economy has the fastest growing number of IT professionals in Europe. It is expected that by 2025 the Ukrainian IT engineering workforce will almost double, which will allow Ukraine to compete successfully with other countries in the global economy.

4 Discussion

The development of new forms of Ukraine's participation in the international labor market also generates significant socioeconomic effects in the national economy. First, the expansion of freelance and outsourcing contributes to the growth of exports of IT services, GDP, GNI and filling the State budget. Thus, according to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, in 2019 the export of IT services increased by 15% compared to the previous year and amounted to about 2 billion US dollars [27], and in 2020, despite the reduction of total exports of Ukraine, it exceeded the mark of 5 billion US dollars for the first time. USA [27]. Secondly, it contributes to lower unemployment and higher incomes, which has a positive impact on consumption and investment in the national economy. Third, the development of freelance and outsourcing leads to an increase in the number of entrepreneurs and the spread of social norms of responsible economic behavior, and so on. Fourth, it reduces the flight of human capital and the emigration of young people abroad, which is strategically important from the standpoint of ensuring the stability of the pension system and the development of public control over public authorities and so on.

In the context of the spread of information and network economy, the development of freelance, outsourcing, crowdsourcing is a natural and inevitable process. In the context of globalization, new employment opportunities are opening up, as a result of which work ethic is being formed, the importance of soft skills that have been underestimated over the past few years is growing, there is a departure from traditional labor relations regulation, and so on. At the same time, Ukraine is confidently shaping the image of a country with a high level of digital employment.

5 Conclusion

In a post-industrial economy, the importance of countries' competitive advantages in international commodity markets and resource markets is growing. The rapid development of information and communication technologies, digitalization of business processes, the search for new sources of income in the context of the spread of Covid-2019 led to the development of digital employment in the national economy. Ukraine's role in the international labor market is undergoing significant transformations under the influence of the spread of the information and network economy.

The development of new forms of economic participation of Ukraine in the international labor market generates significant socio-economic effects in the national economy: increasing exports of IT services, GDP, GNI, filling the state budget, reducing unemployment, increasing incomes, which has a positive impact on consumption and investing in the national economy. The development of freelancing and outsourcing leads to an increase in the number of entrepreneurs and the spread of social norms of responsible economic behavior, reduces the flight of human capital, emigration of young people abroad, and more. The spread of the information and network economy is leading to the transformation of the international resource market, resulting in new opportunities for Ukraine to strengthen its competitive advantage in global markets. The development of freelancing, outsourcing, and crowdfunding in the national economy as new forms of participation in the global economic space can change Ukraine's role in international labor and capital markets and form a positive image of Ukraine as one of the leaders in service consulting and active participant in innovative investment.

The spread of the information and network economy is leading to the transformation of the international resource market, resulting in new opportunities for Ukraine to strengthen its competitive advantage in global markets. The development of freelancing, outsourcing and crowdfunding in the national economy as new forms of participation in the global economic space can change Ukraine's role in international labor and capital markets and form a positive image of Ukraine as one of the leaders in service consulting and active participant in innovative investment.

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