

AVTE

AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATORS' WORKING CONDITIONS

A SURVEY

2022-2023



PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

- Almost exclusively freelancers (95%)
- Established professionals, having on average about 10 years' experience.
- Highly educated people with a majority (68%) at Master's Degree level or higher
- Audiovisual translation specialists, with audiovisual translation making up an average of 70% of their income

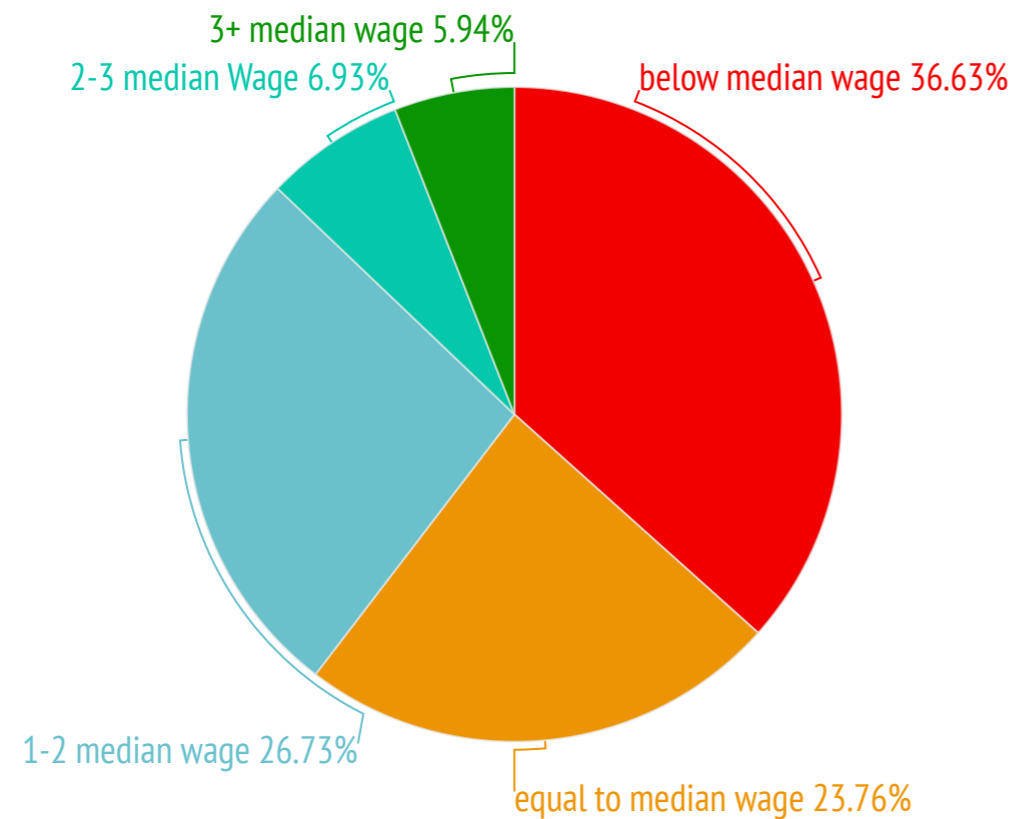
1,966
PARTICIPANTS

FROM 35

EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

INCOME 1

INCOME COMPARED TO MEDIAN WAGE



61%

of European audiovisual translators
have an income
equal to or below the median wage
of their country

We asked participants to calculate their income, assuming they work **35-40 hours a week**, including time off and holiday and all non-creative parts of the job (administrative tasks, accounting, correspondance with clients, prospecting new clients...)

Audiovisual translation is a craft requiring higher education or/and years of experience, command of at least one foreign language and excellent proficiency in one's own language, creativity, good general knowledge to be able to adapt to any given subject, but also being able to master one's own bookkeeping, and have skills in client research.

The average income for this level of competence is typically the salary of a middle manager, hence at least 1-2 times the median wage of their country.

But we found a clear discrepancy between audiovisual translators' required skills and their level of income, when they provide a standard week's work.

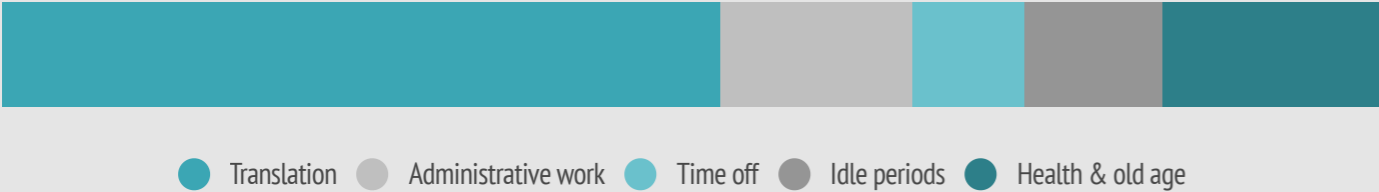
So obviously, audiovisual translators' will compensate their lack of income with a heavier load of work.

We tried to further evaluate this trend with a further question, focused on the load of work.

INCOME 2

FAIR FEE

Audiovisual translators' fee must cover everything below.



A fair fee allows you to translate 1 runtime hour over one week, covering all of the above.

BASIC NEEDS

245 (4 hours)
runtime minutes translated on average monthly

needed just to cover household expenditure: food, clothing, housing (rent), energy, transport, durable goods (notably cars), health costs, leisure...

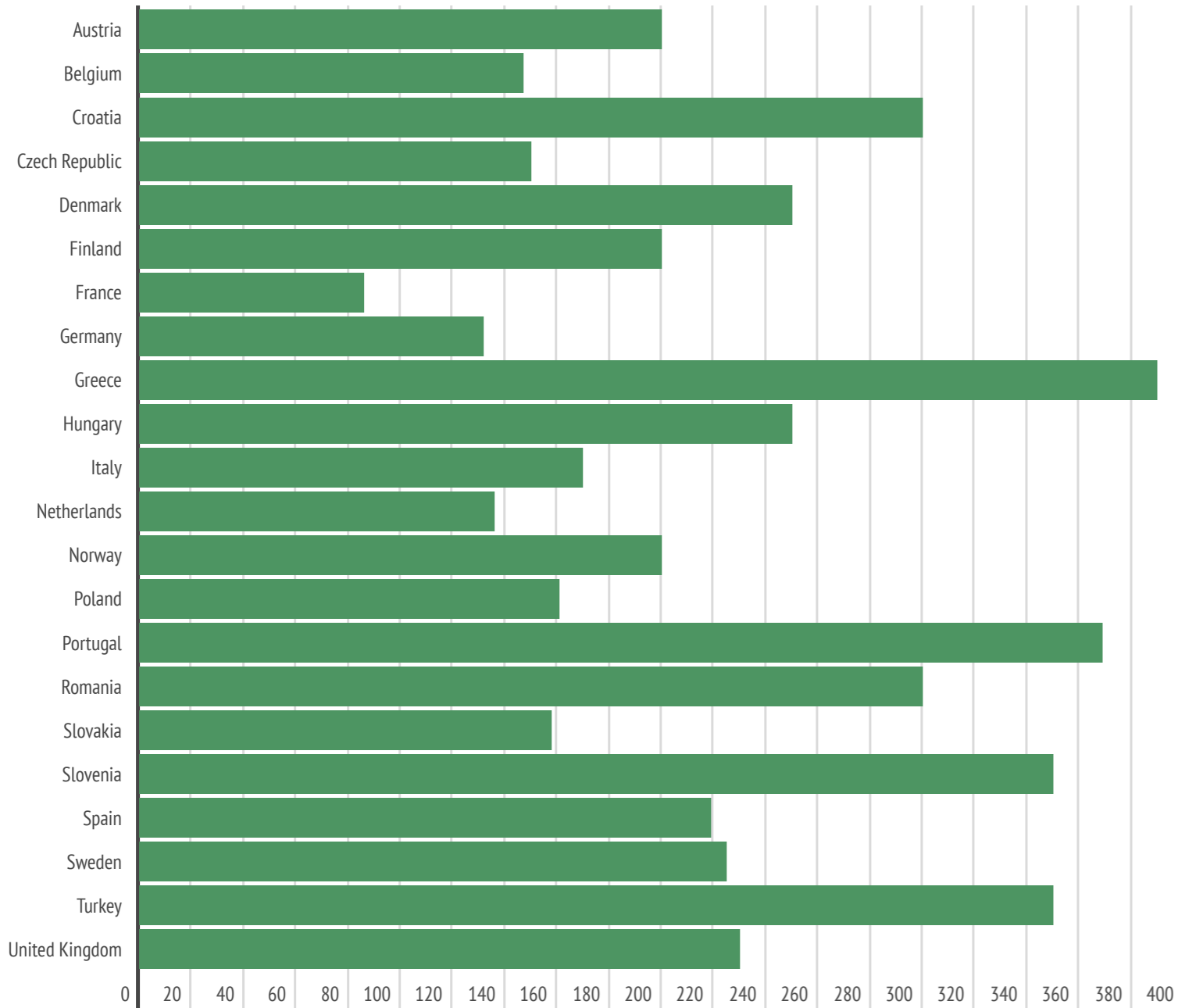
In some countries like Greece, Portugal, Turkey, this amount exceeds 350 minutes (5 hours 50 min).

NETFLIX
SUBSCRIPTION

2.8

runtime minutes translated on average to pay for one's country Netflix basic subscription

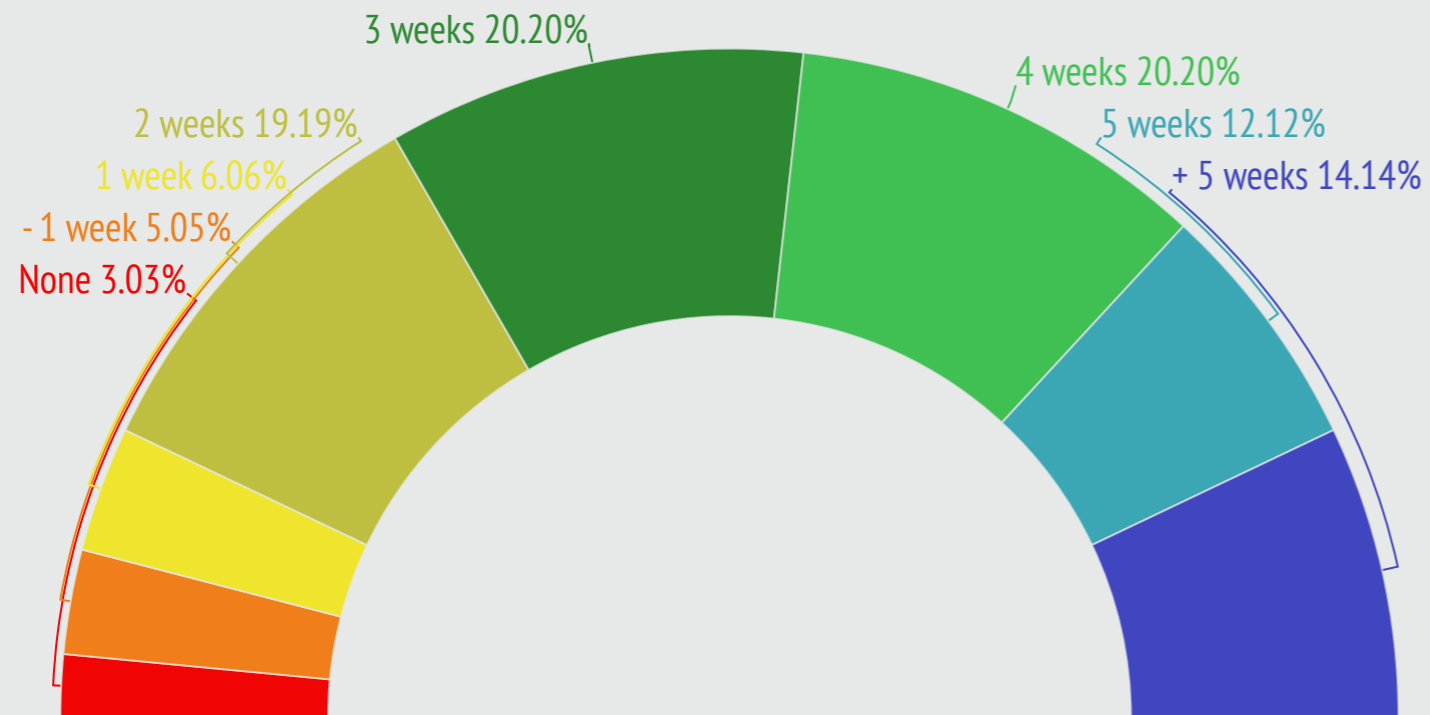
DETAIL: HOW MANY MINUTES DO YOU TYPICALLY HAVE TO TRANSLATE TO COVER THE NET MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE FOR ONE ADULT IN YOUR COUNTRY?



Interestingly, discrepancies from one country to another do not exactly match the cost of living (for instance, Spain and Sweden are the same, i.e. you're not better off in "richer countries")

TIME OFF

The tendency to compensate the lack of income with a heavier load of work seems to be confirmed by the general trend to work long hours and take very little time off.

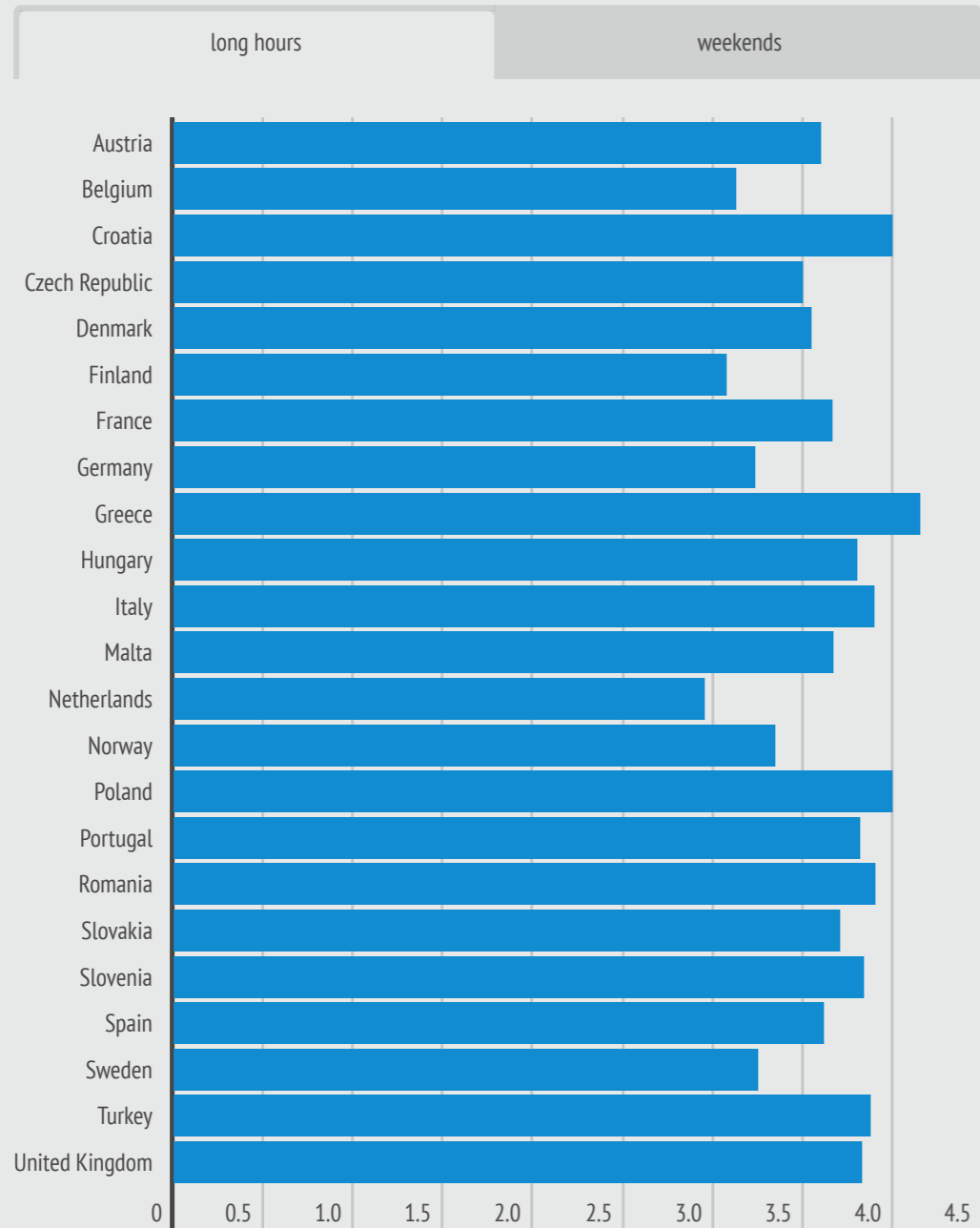


53% of audiovisual translators take less than 3 weeks' holiday a year

The European average is 21 days of *paid holiday* + 12 public holidays.

Reminder: audiovisual translators don't get paid holidays or public holidays

WORKING WEEKENDS AND LONG HOURS



0 = never to 5 = always

Audiovisual translators in general often say they are expected to work at weekends by their clients, which may affect their family life, work-life balance, and their overall well-being.

The diagram illustrates that working weekends and long hours are quite common across the board.

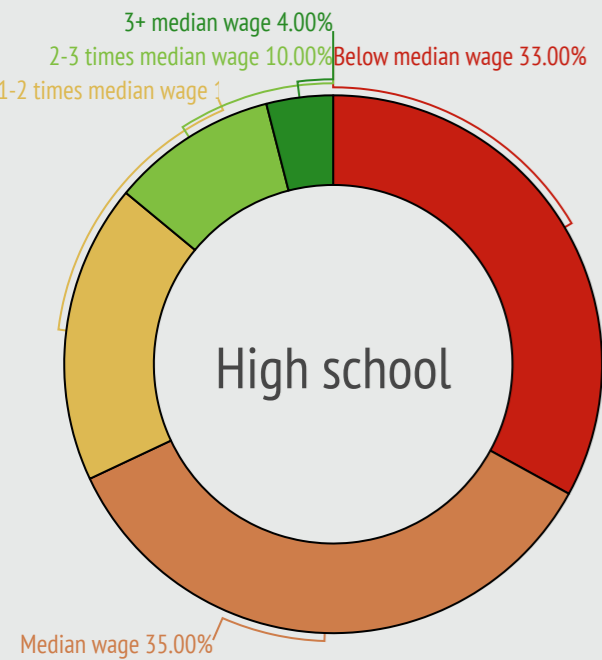
We wanted to know which segment of audiovisual translators are better off.

As this line of work requires high education, acquired either through study, years of experience or both, we correlated the level of income with various factors to try and see:

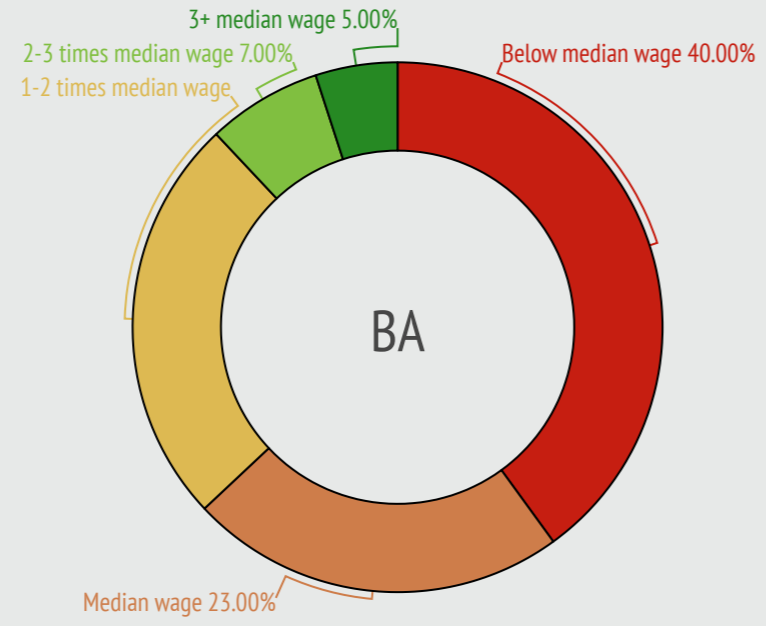
- if the level of education**
 - or the years of experience**
- have an impact on the income.**

We focused on the last two sets of income level (equal to or below the median wage of one's country), to show that, whether through education or years of experience, a majority of AVT don't reach the level of income in line with their skills.

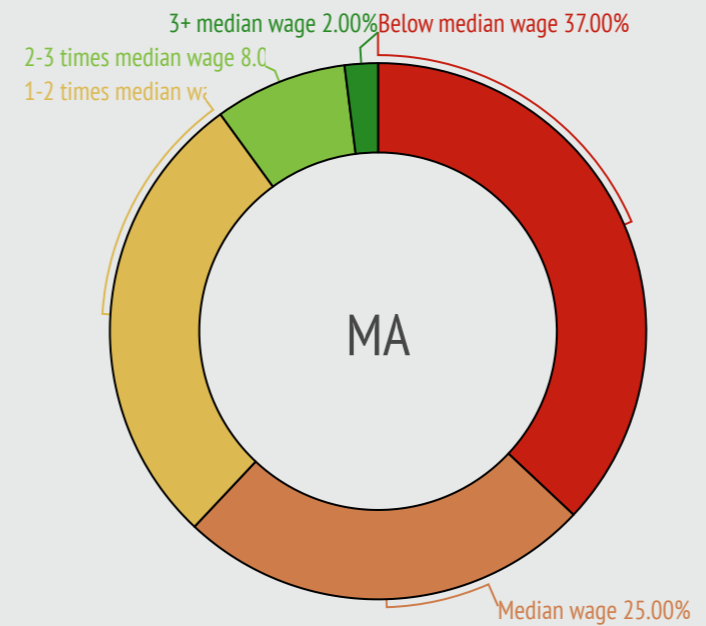
INCOME COMPARISON PER LEVEL OF EDUCATION



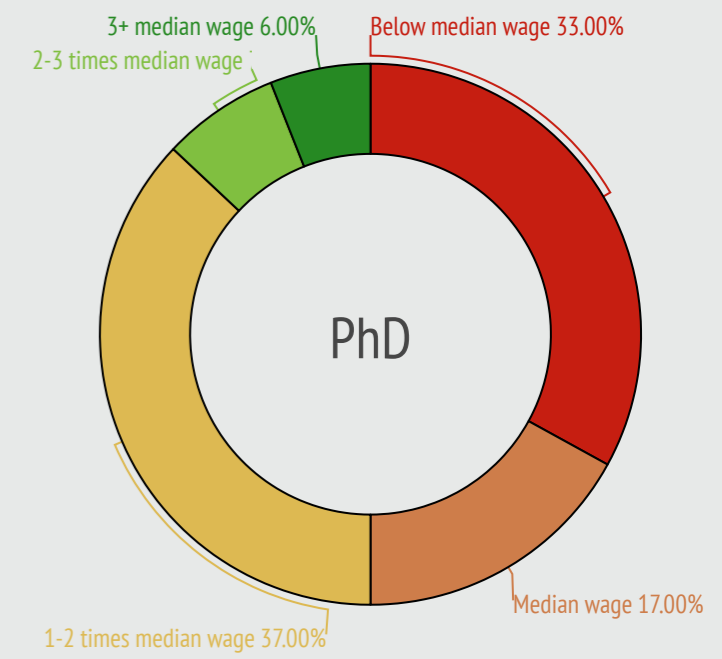
68% equal to or below the median wage of their country



63% equal to or below the median wage of their country



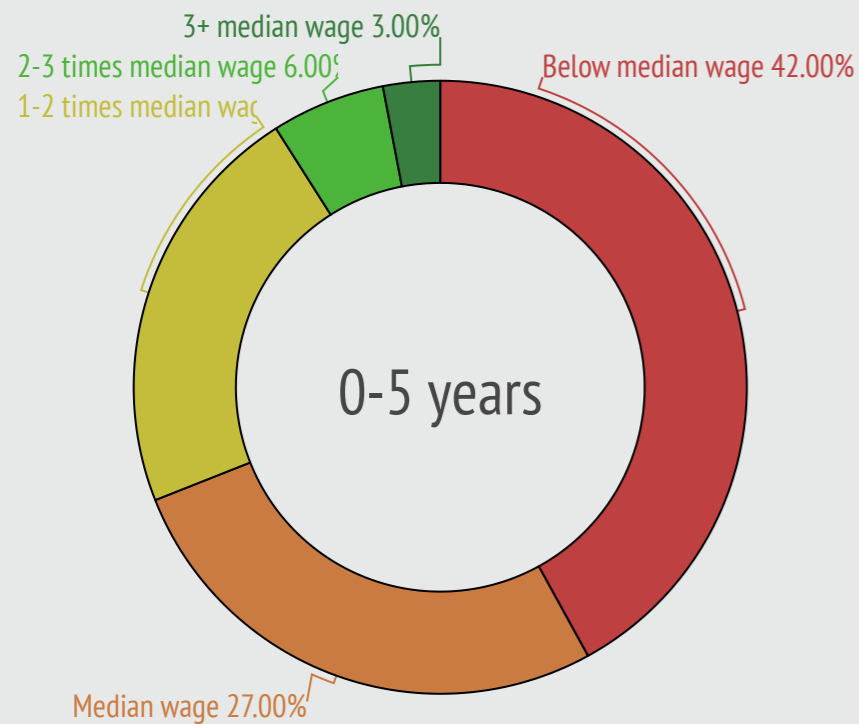
62% equal to or below the median wage of their country



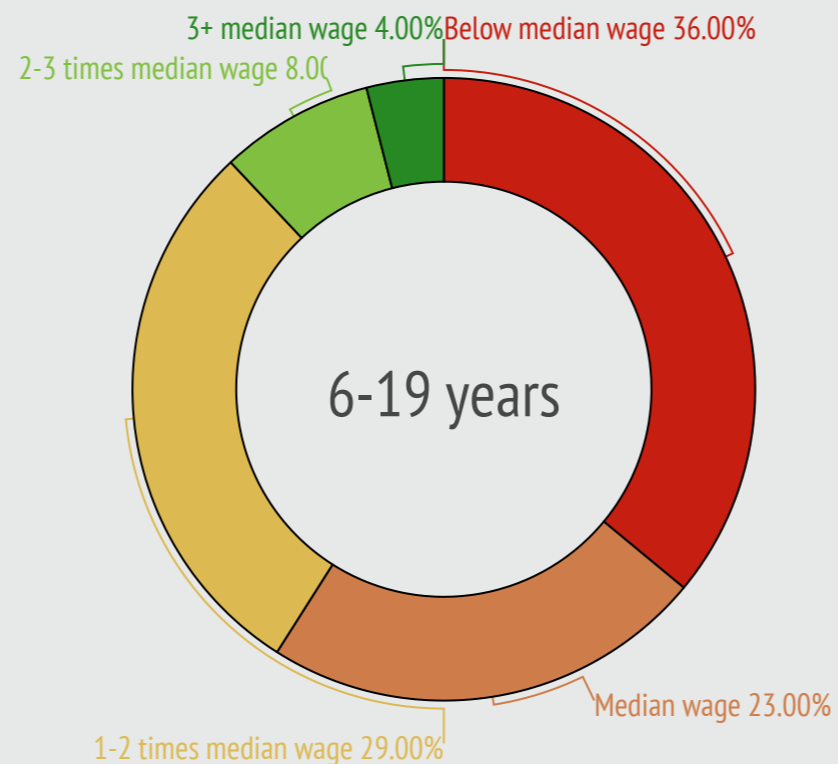
50% equal to or below the median wage of their country

There is no statistically significant difference between the incomes of respondents depending on their level of education on a general level.

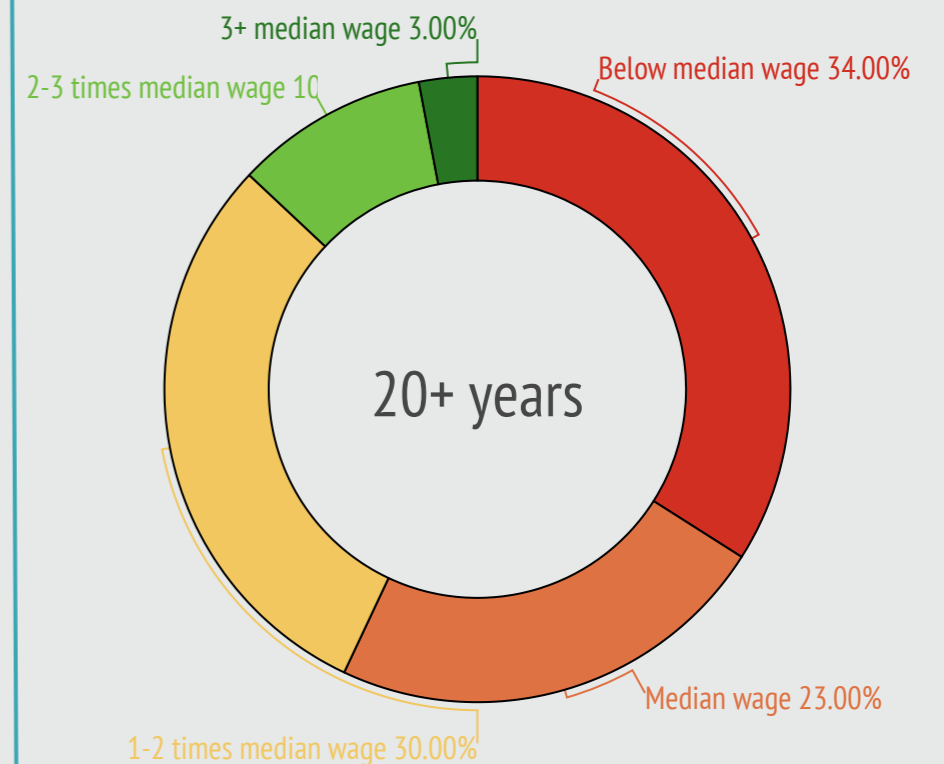
COMPARING INCOME WITH YEARS OF EXPERIENCE



69% equal to or below the median wage of their country



59% equal to or below the median wage of their country



57% equal to or below the median wage of their country

The first five years are the most difficult, because of inexperience and unfamiliarity with the market conditions.

There is no significant rise in income after those 5 critical years. There is no financial reward for experience.

Conclusion 1: if the level of income is not statistically different depending on education or experience, it means beginners and seasoned professionals typically get the same rate.

Conclusion 2: AVT is a creative line of work and talent is a thing, but translation is also a craft. If one gets the same rate whether being inexperienced or a seasoned translator, it means rates are not correlated with the quality of the result.

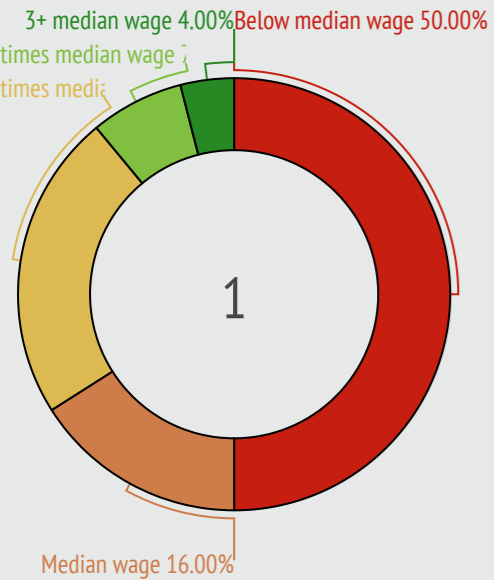
If neither a higher level of education or years of experience qualify significantly for higher rates, are there any other factors which would improve income?

Let's look at:

- The number of clients**
- Working for end clients vs intermediaries**
- Working for international intermediaries vs local intermediaries**

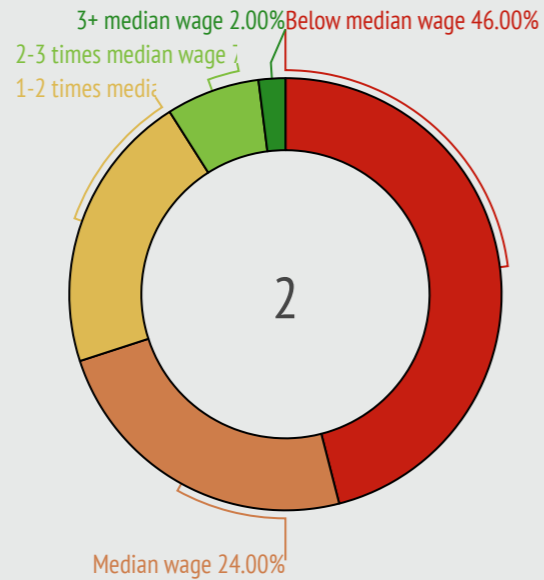
COMPARING INCOME WITH NUMBER OF CLIENTS

1 client



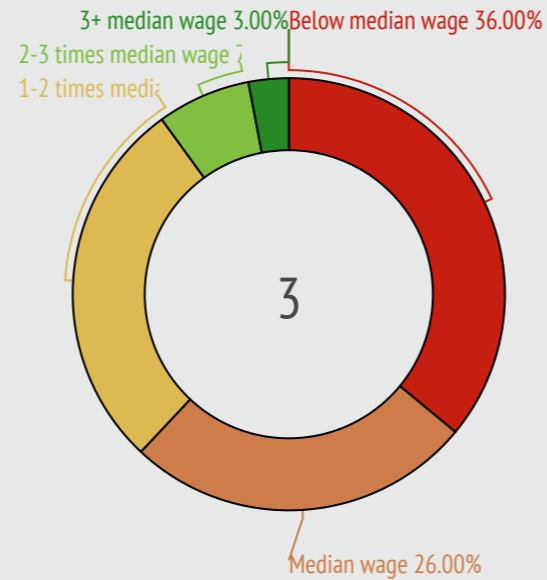
66% equal to or below the median wage of their country

2 clients



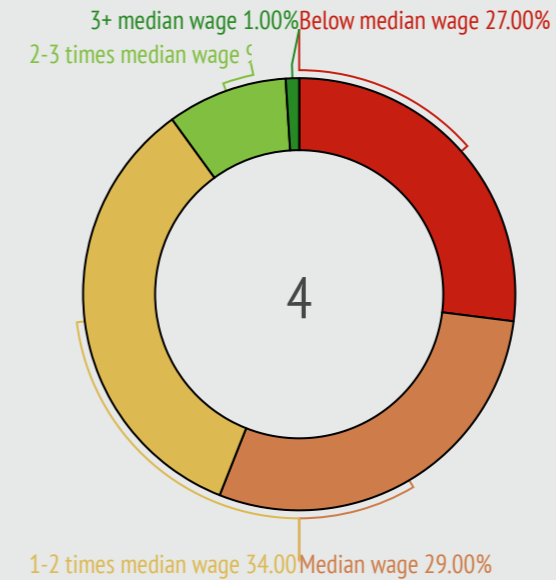
70% equal to or below the median wage of their country

3 clients



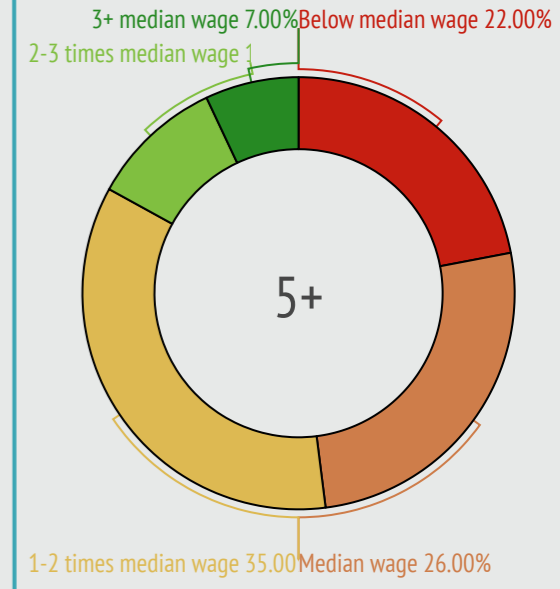
62% equal to or below the median wage of their country

4 clients



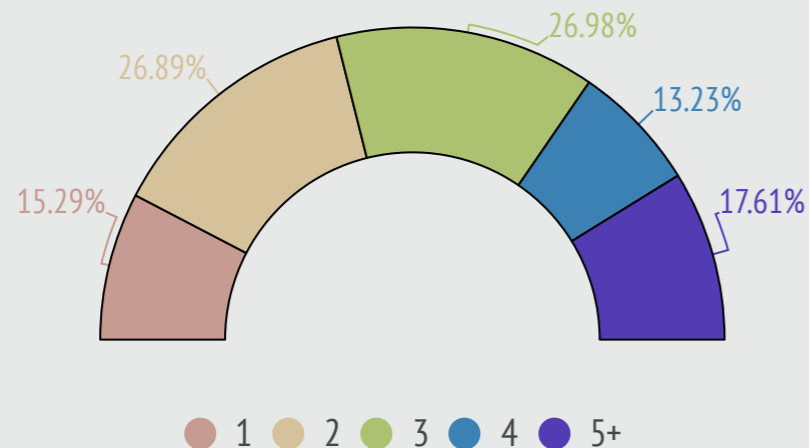
56% equal to or below the median wage of their country

5 clients +



48% equal to or below the median wage of their country

Percentage of number of clients



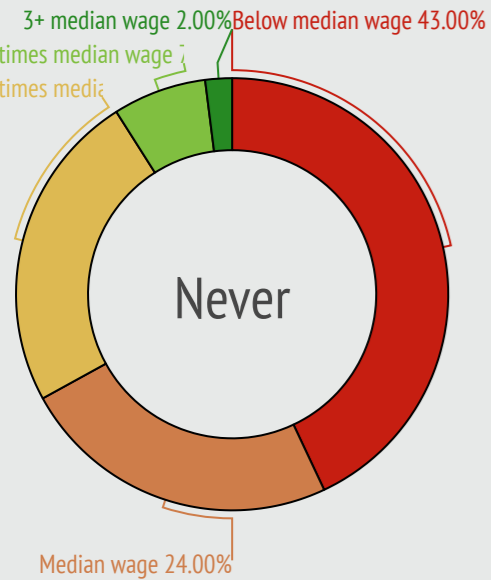
There is a statistically significant difference in income of respondents depending on how many clients they are working with

The more clients you have, the more you earn

Few clients means more precarity

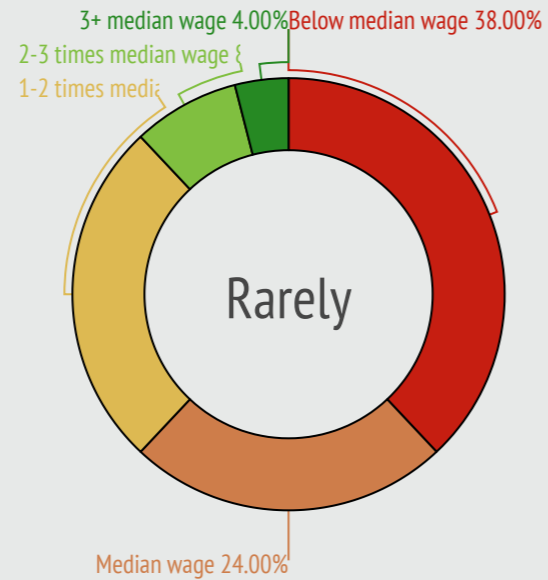
INCOME COMPARISON - DO YOU WORK FOR END CLIENTS?

Never



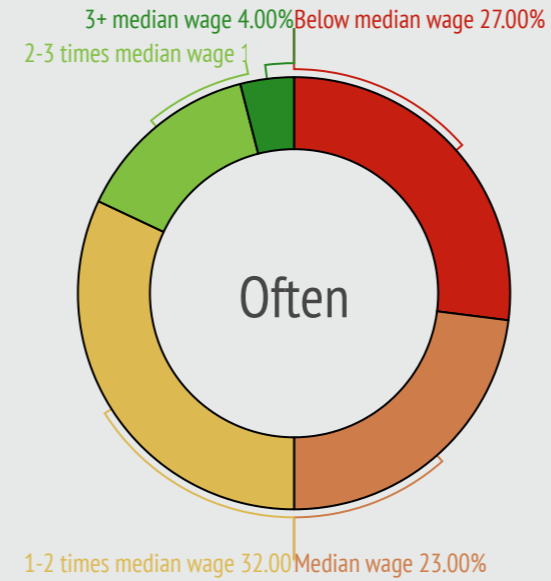
67% equal to or below the median wage of their country

Rarely



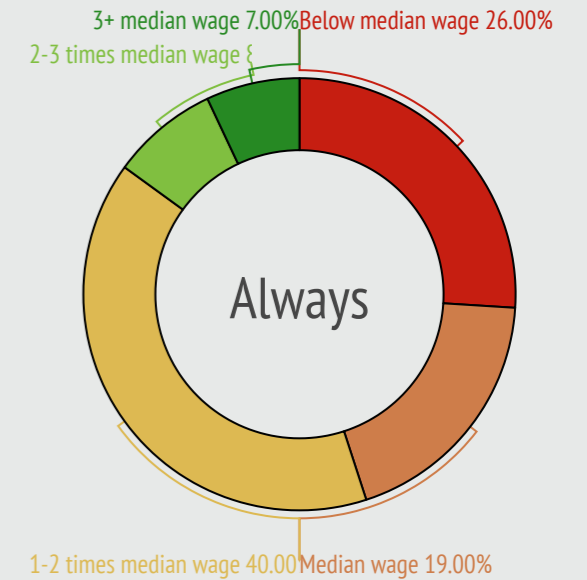
62% equal to or below the median wage of their country

Often



50% equal to or below the median wage of their country

Always



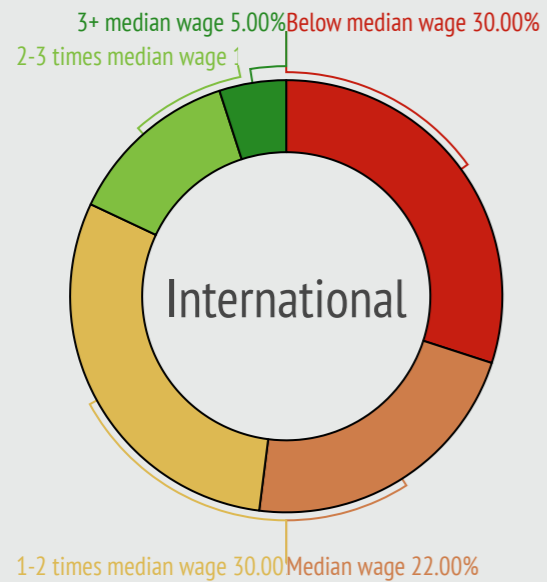
45% equal to or below the median wage of their country

There is a statistically significant difference in income of respondents depending on how often they work for end clients.

Those who never work with end clients are more likely to be in lower-income categories than those who work with end clients more frequently.

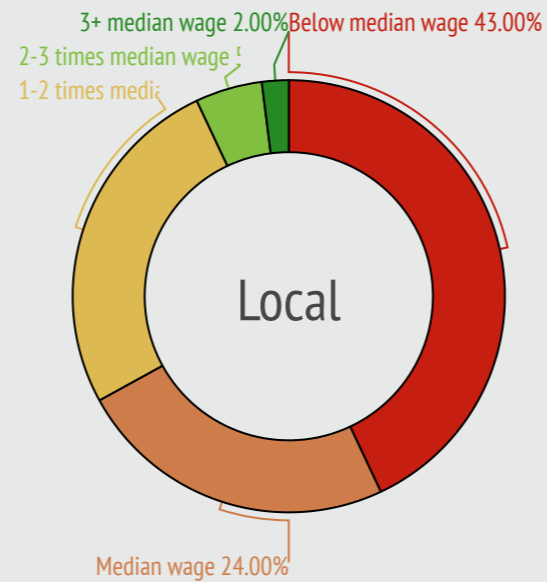
INCOME COMPARISON - LOCAL OR INTERNATIONAL INTERMEDIARIES?

Mainly international



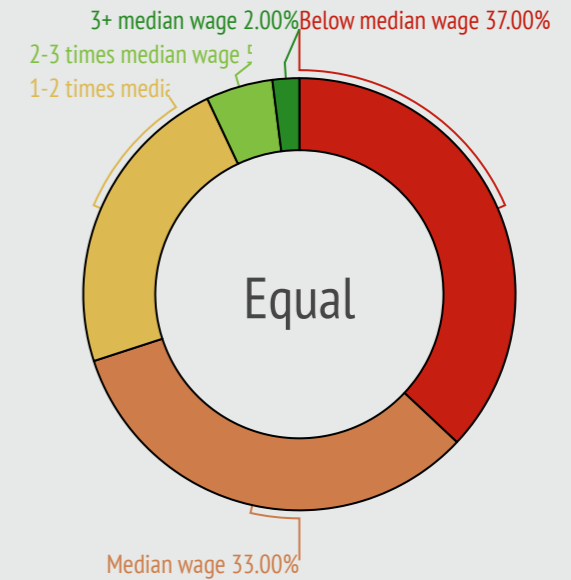
52% equal to or below the median wage of their country

Mainly local



67% equal to or below the median wage of their country

Equal proportion



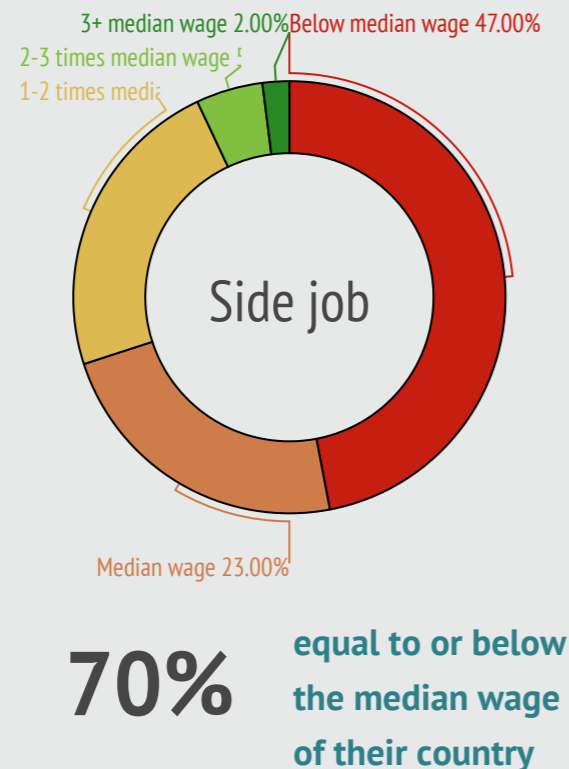
70% equal to or below the median wage of their country

There is a statistically significant difference in income between respondents depending on the type of clients they work for.

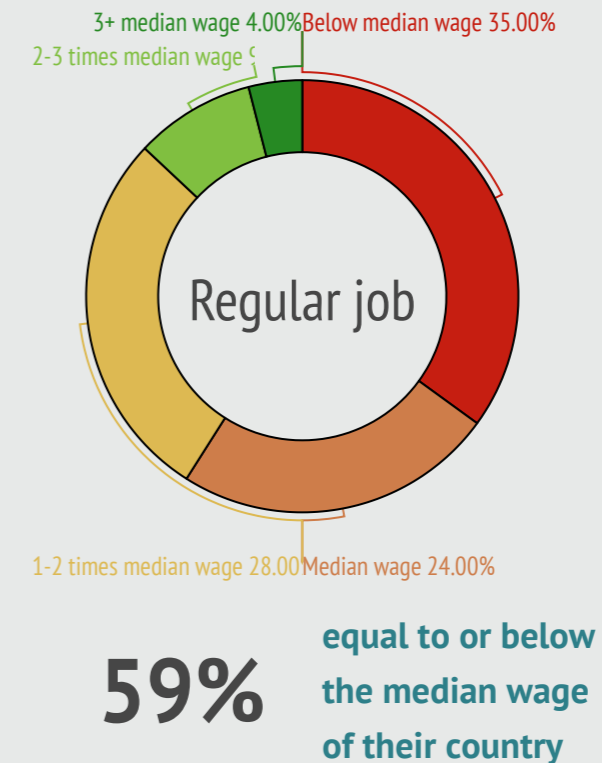
Those who work with exclusively international clients are more represented in the categories of higher income than those who work with local or equally local and international clients.

SIDE JOB VS REGULAR JOB

AVT makes less than 50% of revenue



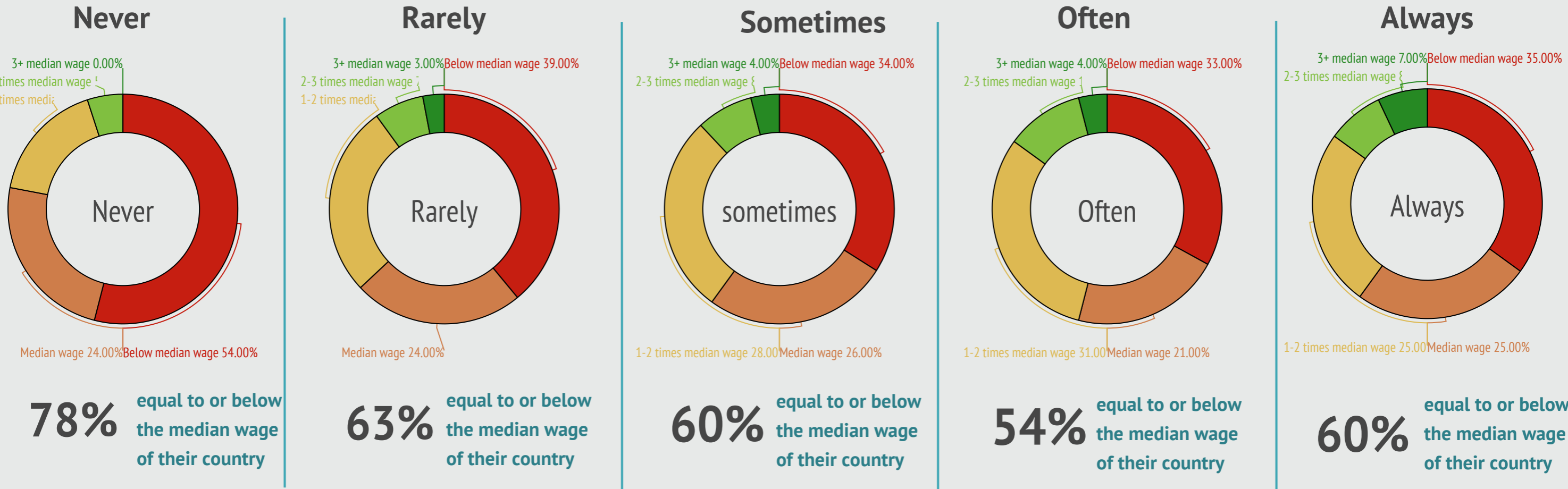
AVT makes more than 50% of revenue



There is a statistically significant difference between the income of respondents depending on whether AV translating is their side job and makes up less than 50% of their revenue, or it is their regular job and makes up more than 50% of their revenue.

- This shows that people who translate as a side job *may* accept lower rates, not knowing what a decent rate is, or not needing a decent rate.
- Lack of regulation creates an ever filling pool of non-professionals entering and getting out of the trade, not having time to acquire sufficient skills, knowledge of the AVT sector, therefore worsening the process of de-professionalisation.

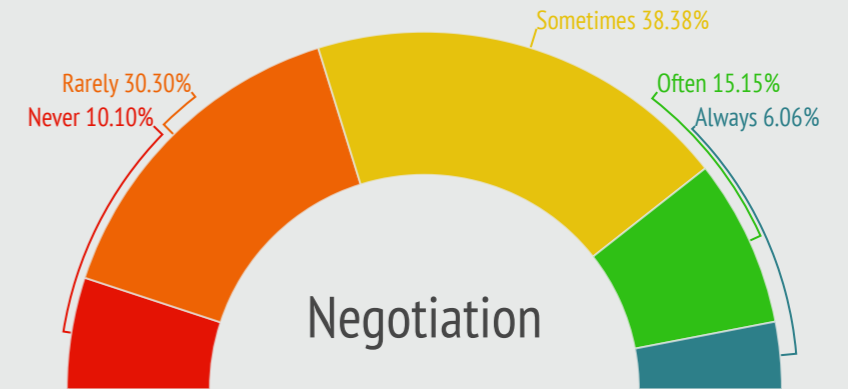
INCOME COMPARISON - HOW OFTEN DO YOU NEGOTIATE YOUR RATES?



The more often they negotiate their rate, the higher the income if compared with the median income in their country.

A proactive approach on the part of the freelancer accounts for better rates.

78% of people negotiate only sometimes, rarely or never.



Since we are legally considered as individual companies, **WE** should be the ones setting our rates, in reality, it is the opposite: we found that AV translators rarely negotiate which means our clients are setting the rates.

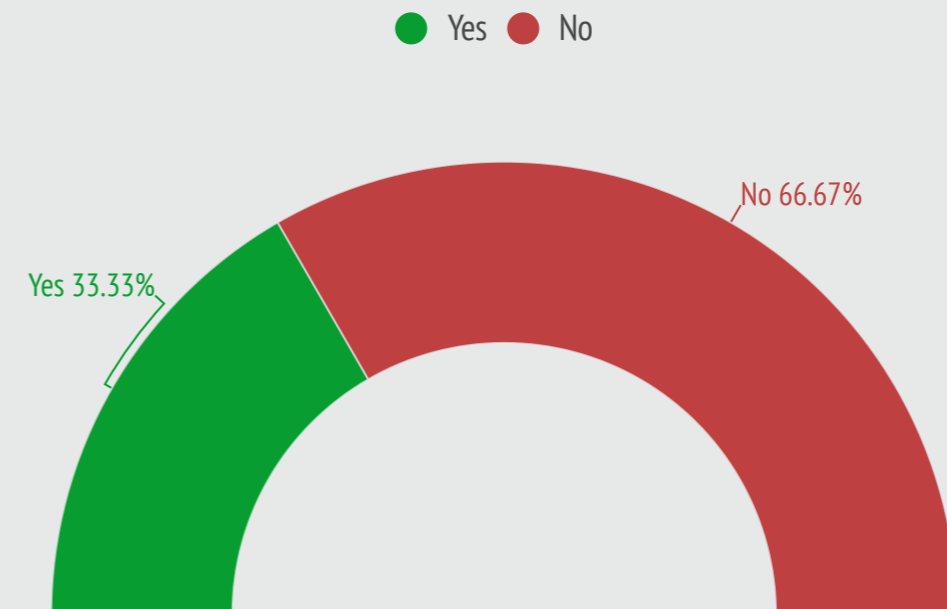
Clearly this shows an unbalanced distribution of power between the actors on the market, possibly even disguised employment. It advocates for collective action of freelancers through unions.

NON-TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES

How many hours do you spend performing non-translation activities (bookkeeping, finding new clients, issuing invoice, communicating with clients etc.)?

On average in Europe, audiovisual translators spend **3h45mn** performing non-translation activities

Non-translation activity is often overlooked by audiovisual translators themselves, as the answers to the question show: "When you calculate the rate required to make a decent living, do you include administrative work and time off in it?"



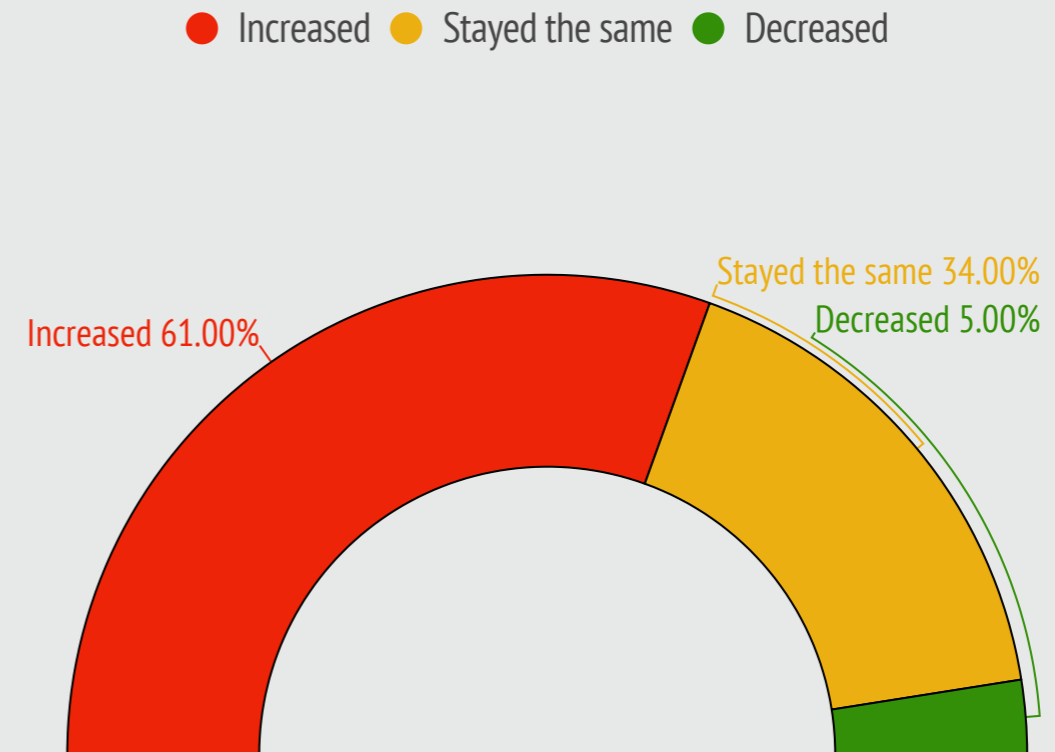
"FREE" WORK

Audiovisual translation typically includes activities related to translation projects, performed to the benefit of the client but not paid. Among other tasks, this includes filling KNP's and online charts and adjusting subtitles.

Translators evaluate this amounts to an average weekly time of **1h56**

Far from being an anomaly or exception, AV translators see this as a **growing trend**.

Do you feel that, over the last 5 years, your clients' demands have:



Note: on average, non-translation activities + free work amount to **5h42** more than **14%** of a 40-hour working week.

As these activities are often mixed with translation work, and translators rarely keep track of these, there is a stronger chance this average is **underestimated** rather than overestimated.

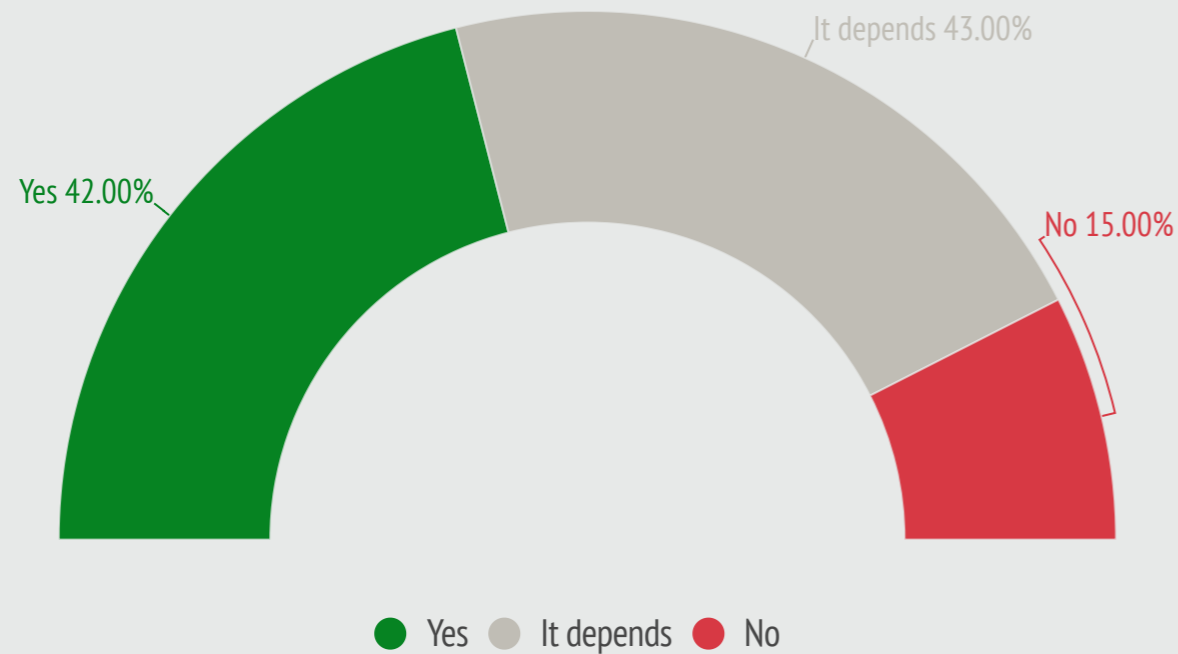
How can there be such a thing as "free work"? In commercial relationships, audiovisual translators are always the weakest party, being isolated individuals set against companies.

CONTRACT

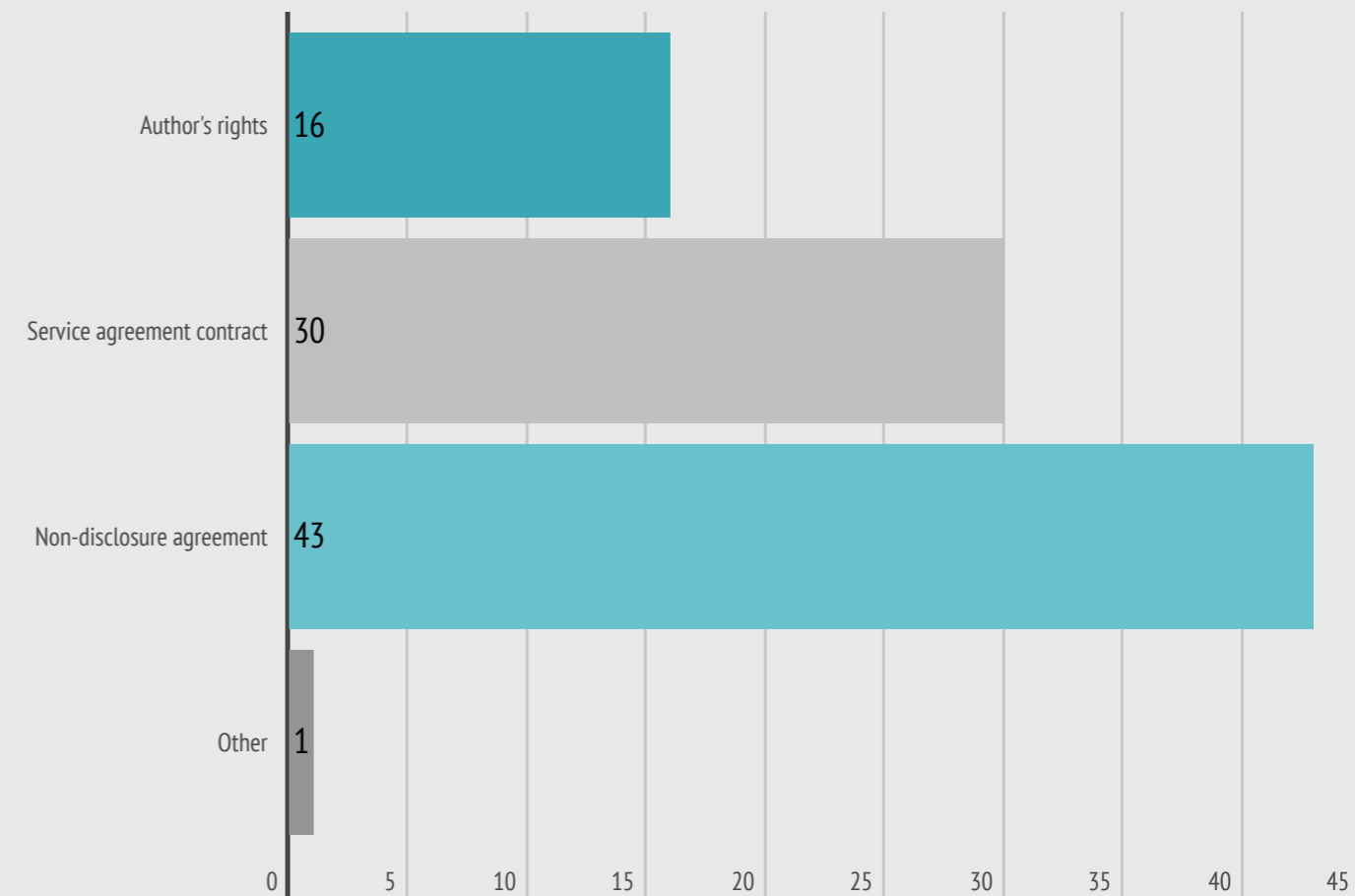
Working with a freelancer entails a clear working frame, specifying what is expected from both parts, for instance, what type of documents or files each party should provide and when. In order to allow the two parties to be protected, this type of relation calls for a contract.

Legally, AVT are authors and translation is creative work. Therefore contracts should be necessary to stipulate who the created work belongs to, and what terms it is to be exploited on.

Do you sign any contract with your client?



If yes, what type of contract?



Depending on the client, the situations vary greatly. But these figures and the great variety of answers we got in the "others" section show that:

- a contract is **not** the norm.
- types of "service" contracts vary greatly
- freelancers sometimes don't have a clear idea what they are signing. For instance, an NDA is not a contract as such but an asymmetrical agreement, protecting the interest of the client but not that of the translator.

The fact that the question itself leads to confusing an NDA with a proper contract clearly shows the lack of normative tools to regulate this field.

UNEMPLOYMENT SCHEME

Not surprisingly, as a vast majority of AVT are freelancers, **64%** of them say they don't have access to any unemployment scheme.

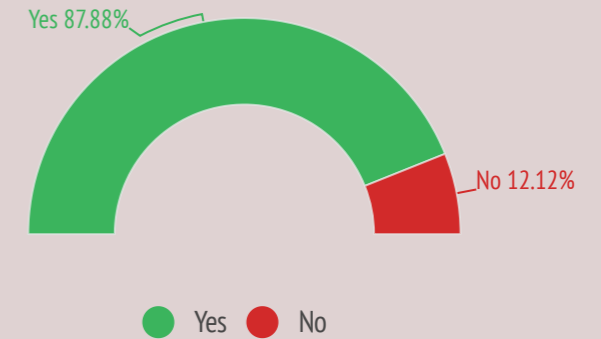
Interestingly, **22.29%** of respondents replied "**I don't know**", meaning almost a quarter of audiovisual translators are not fully aware of what their status is and don't know whether this status qualifies for such social rights.

This further establishes the need for higher rates, since freelancers need to create a backup fund for the periods when they do not have enough work, or cannot work due to illness.

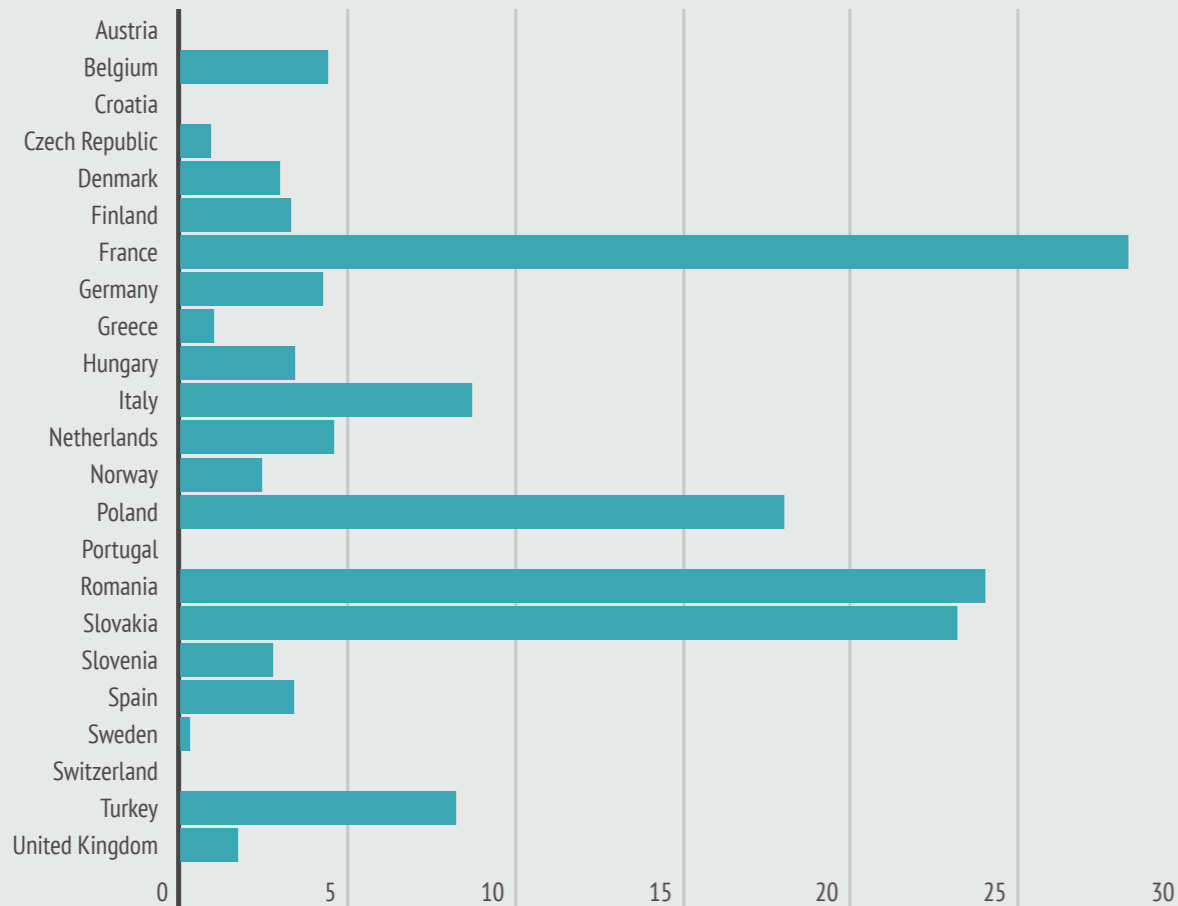
AUTHORS' RIGHTS

The Berne convention recognizes creative translators as authors as they create so-called works of the mind.

Are you familiar with the concept of author's rights?

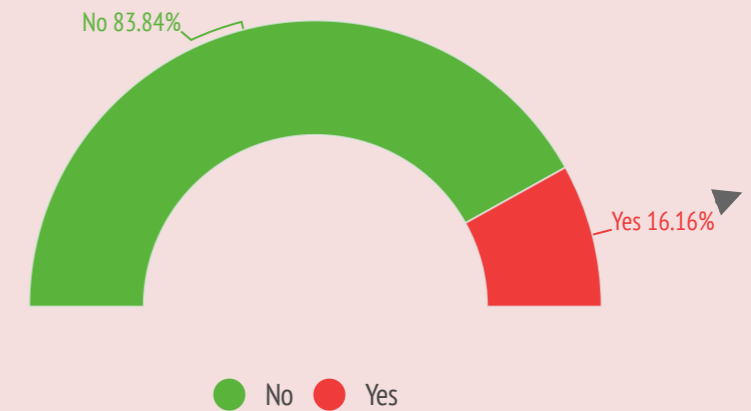


What percentage of your yearly income comes from royalties or author's rights?



There are vast differences across European countries
From 0% to almost 30% on average.

Do you usually sign an author's rights contract?

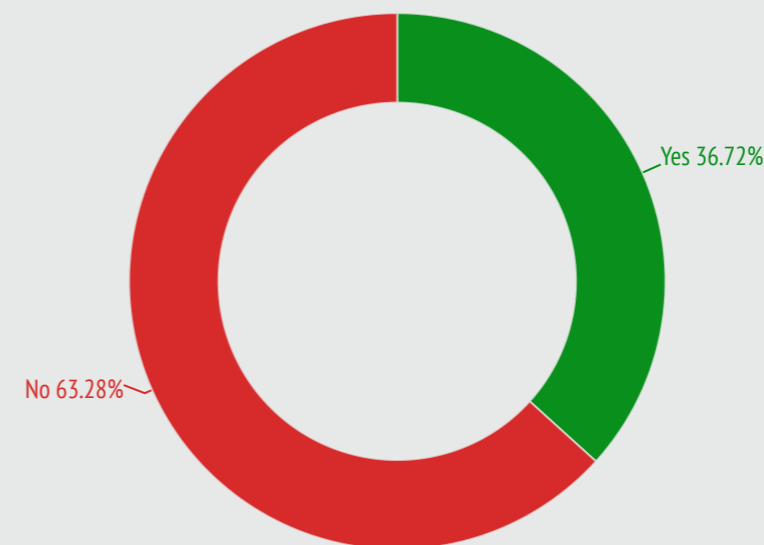


REPRESENTING AV TRANSLATORS - THE POWER OF ORGANISATIONS

Are you a member of your national audiovisual translators' organisation?



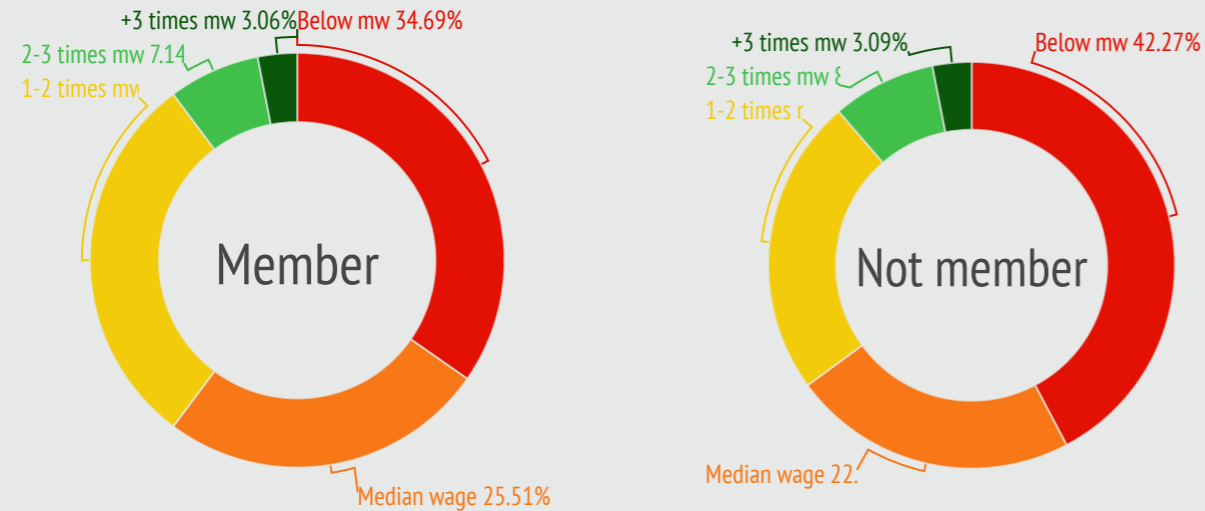
Are you a member of a union?



Although AVTE's survey was disseminated through AVT organisations, it reached a much wider freelancer population, as shown in the pies: the majority of the survey participants don't belong to AVT organisations. We can conclude that the results we got are relevant for the whole market.

BEING A MEMBER OF AN ORGANISATION - WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Income comparison



There is a statistically significant difference in income between people who are members of national organizations and those who are not. Those who are not members of the national organizations are slightly less prominent in the categories of higher income.

Greater awareness

- 93% of members of audiovisual translators' organisations know about author's right vs 80% of non-members.
- Minimal difference when it comes to unemployment scheme.

The results are not conclusive regarding a tendency to negotiate, or satisfaction with the trade

SATISFACTION / RECOMMENDATION

How satisfied are you with the working conditions within the field of AVT?

On a scale from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) average = 2.64

Would you recommend this profession to newcomers or students?

On a scale from 0 (definitely not) to 5 (definitely yes) average = 2.81

People are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. They wouldn't recommend or highly recommend. Despite the working conditions, they are willing to make it work and not give up on their profession. They're ready to make efforts to improve the working conditions.

AVTE thanks all the people who made this survey possible!

Kristijan Nikolić, Mirjana Tonkovic, Jana Kiralj

Petra Matic, Jean-François Cornu, Estelle Renard