

Digital Nomads

August 2024

Nomading
Normalizes
in 2024

MBO partners®



Digital Nomads:

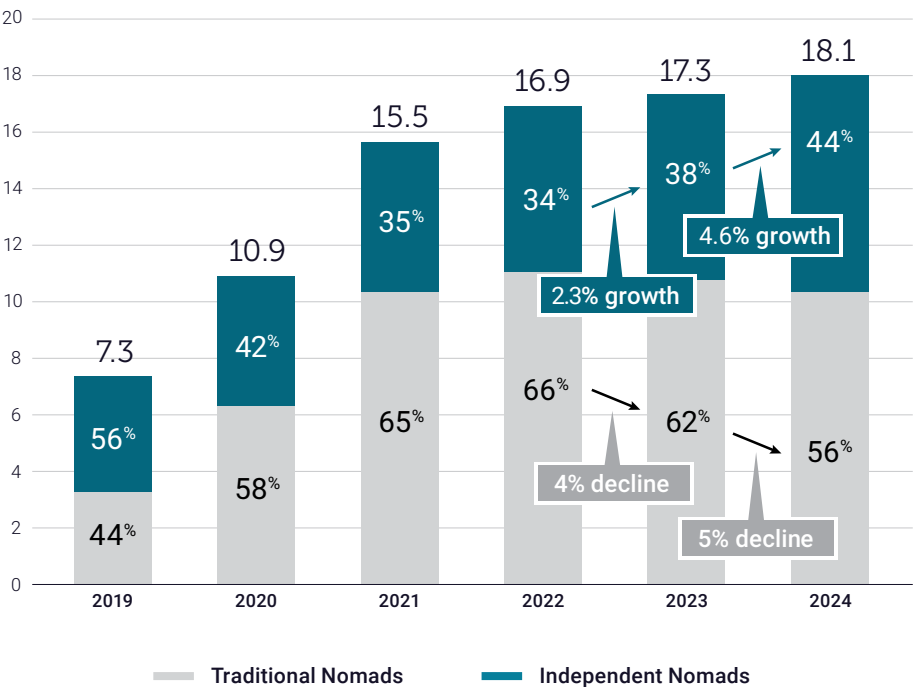
Digital nomads choose to combine working remotely and traveling for various reasons and lengths of time. This may be for years or shorter “workcations” lasting from weeks to months. Some travel the globe, but many never cross borders, choosing to live and work in a single country or city. They are united by their passion for travel, desire for adventure, and interest in new cultures.

More than One in Ten Workers is Now a Digital Nomad

The MBO Partners 2024 State of Independence found that 18.1 million American workers currently describe themselves as digital nomads, an increase of 4.7% year over year. **While the rate of increase for digital nomads has leveled from its pandemic-induced skyrocketing during 2020 and 2021, the total number of digital nomads has still grown more than 147% since 2019, now reaching 11% of the U.S. workforce overall.**

This level of steady growth reflects a new normal for the number of American digital nomads, as well as an increased entrance of digital nomads to the working mainstream.

Share of Digital Nomads by Worker Type
(in millions, % = share by worker type)



One key growth driver is that organizations hiring digital nomads have discovered that this is a win-win proposition. They can attract and retain top talent who are motivated by this way of life, and workers work when and where they want.



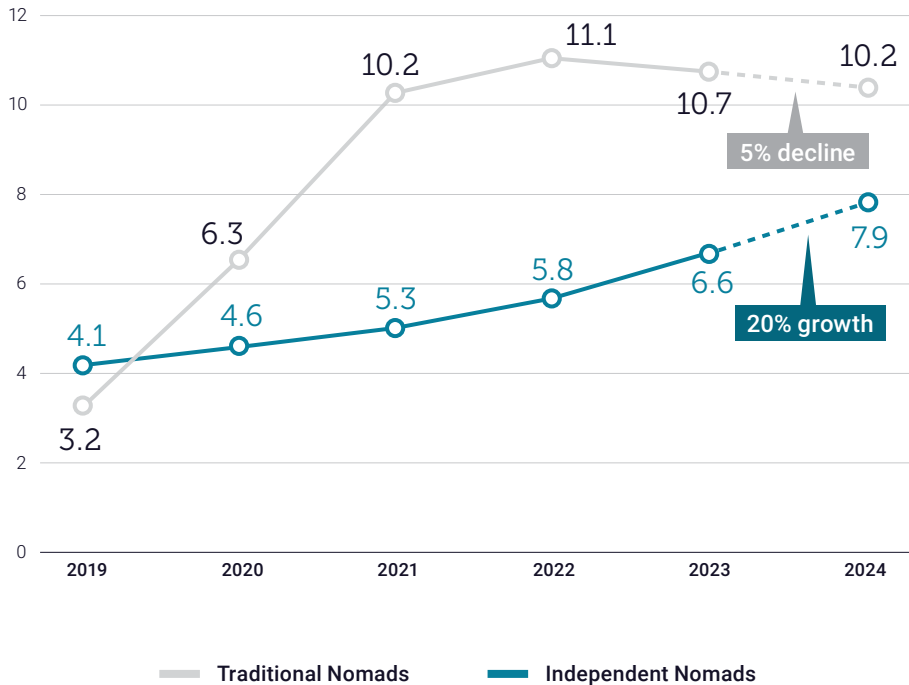
Tethered Nomads:

Back to Office Means Traditional Workers Decline and Independent Nomads Continue to Grow

The COVID-19 pandemic has had the single most significant impact on the growth and makeup of digital nomads. Traditional employees were unleashed from their offices, and many took to the road to embrace their newfound freedom. In fact, since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the number of digital nomads with traditional jobs has more than tripled.

However, for the second year in a row, the number of American digital nomads with traditional jobs decreased, falling by 5% in 2024 after a decrease of 4% in 2023.

Traditional Job Nomads (in millions)



Although companies have significantly increased their employees' work location flexibility, most traditional jobholders are expected to be in the office at least occasionally instead of being fully remote. According to [WFH Research](#), only 20% of American traditional jobholders who can work fully remotely report doing so. These return-to-office policies are the main reason for the decline in digital nomads with traditional jobs.

The thrill of nomading keeps many with traditional jobs on the road, at least part-time. Instead of globetrotting, these “tethered nomads” stay within reach of their offices so they can return as required.

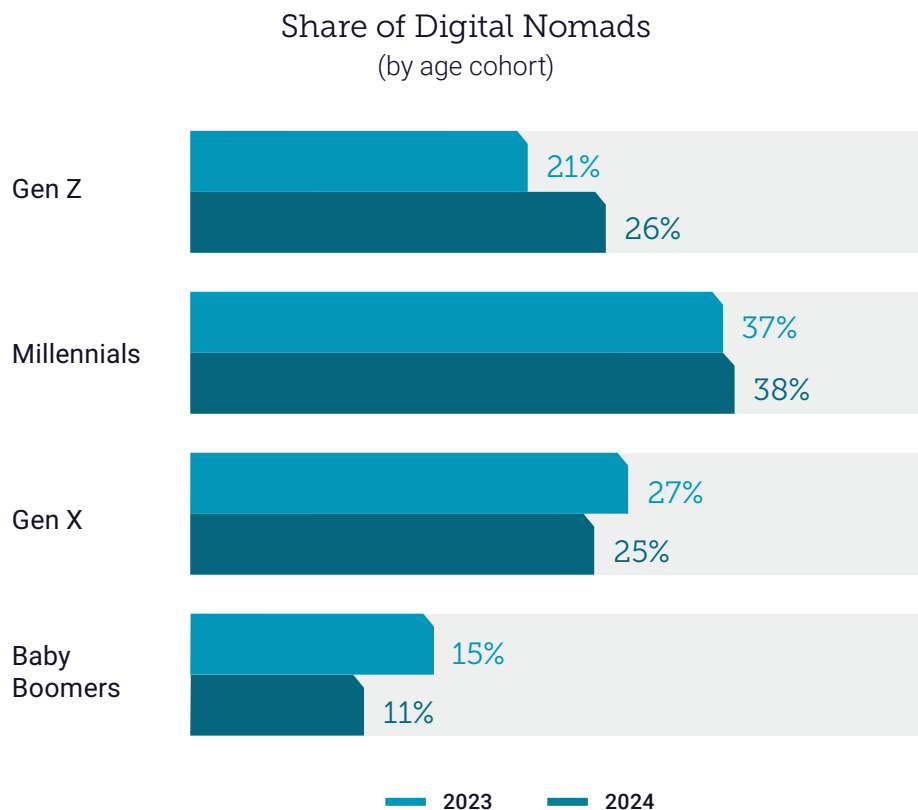
The strong growth in the number of independent workers who work as digital nomads also illustrates the continued strength of the trend overall. Independent workers are their own bosses, which gives them much greater control over when and where they work than nomads with traditional jobs. In 2024, more independent workers took advantage of this control to become digital nomads, increasing the total independent nomad population by 20%.

Meet the Nomads:

They Skew Young & Male, with African American Nomads on the Rise

Consistent with prior year study results, younger generations, Gen Z (26%) and Millennials (38%), continue to comprise most digital nomads (64%). The rapid increase in Gen Z digital nomads (born 1997-2012) is the primary driver. In 2019, the oldest Gen Zers were just 22, and very few were digital nomads. In fact, Gen Z's 2019 share of digital nomads was less than 1%.

But over the past five years, Gen Z has aged into the workforce and proven to be an active travel generation. Because of this, in 2024 about one in four digital nomads are Gen Zers. We expect Gen Z's share of digital nomads to continue to increase. Gen Z is still aging into the workforce, and as they age, they will have more income and greater work opportunities to become digital nomads.





Older cohorts’— Gen Xers (born 1965-1980) and Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)— share decreased in 2024. The main reason for the decline is that aging Baby Boomers are leaving the workforce, and while many are still traveling, not working while traveling means they no longer meet our digital nomad definition.

But even with the decline in baby boomer nomads, almost one in seven (14%) of American digital nomads are 55 or older, indicating an interest in the trend at all ends of the age spectrum.

Men continue to comprise a larger share of digital nomads than women. In 2024, 59% of the digital nomads surveyed reported they were men, with 40% reporting female and 1% nonbinary. This is consistent with the study results from prior years. Over half (57%) of all digital nomads are married or living with their partner.

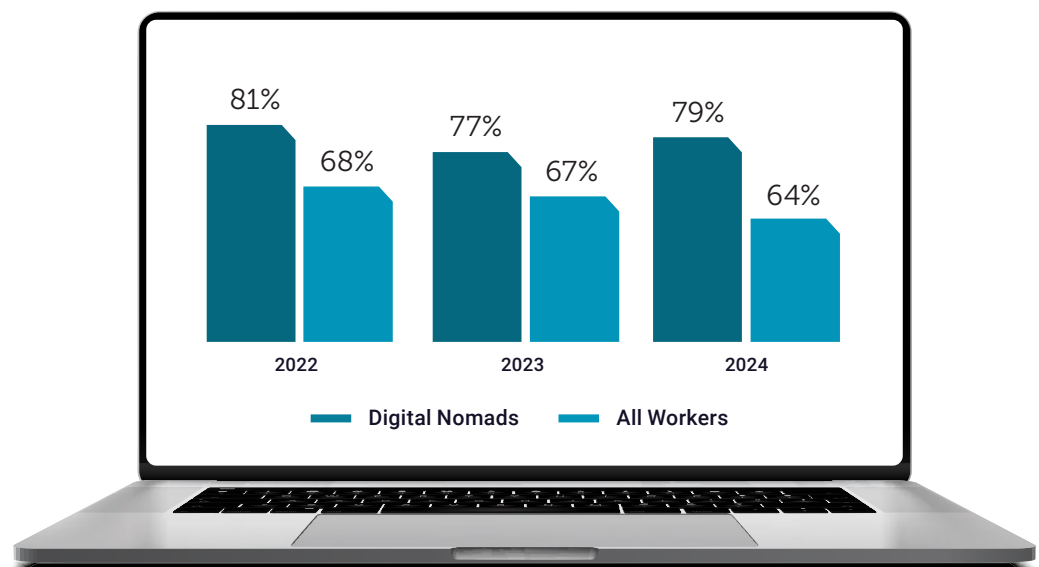
The racial makeup of digital nomads in 2024 is 67% white, 21% African American, 11% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and 1% from another background (respondents could provide multiple answers to this question). The African American share of digital nomads increased to 21% from 18% in 2023, and from 13% in 2020.



Digital Nomads are Highly Satisfied

On average, digital nomads are more satisfied with their work than most other workers. This is a consistent finding throughout MBO's studies and held true again in 2024. In line with prior years, 79% of digital nomads reported being highly satisfied, and 12% reported being satisfied with their work. Few (4%) reported being dissatisfied.

Workers Reporting They Are Highly Satisfied with Their Work



A key reason for this high level of satisfaction is that regardless of how much money they make, most digital nomads are satisfied with their earnings.

About four out of five (79%) report either being very satisfied (41%) or satisfied (38%) with their income, which is higher than the income satisfaction reported by other workers. One reason is that digital nomads focus more on the journey and less on earnings. In interviews, digital nomads often say they're satisfied with their income if they earn enough to support their travels, even if their reported earnings are low.

Because digital nomads are a mix of full-timers (64%) and part-timers (36%), and many only do it for part of a year, their income varies widely. One in six digital nomads (17%) report that their household income is less than \$25,000 annually. However, 46% say their household income is \$75,000 or more.

The number of high earners is due to many digital nomads working in technology related fields where talent shortages are common, and their skills are in demand.

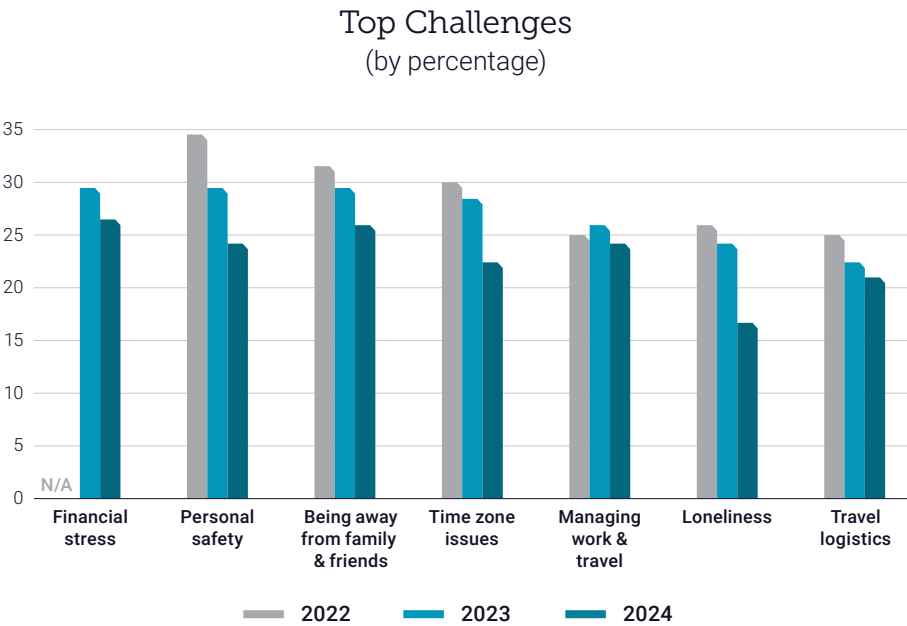
To help stretch their income, many digital nomads work from places with relatively low living costs, while having employers in higher-wage countries. Combining low-cost living with higher expat income, they can take advantage of income/living cost "geo-arbitrage." This enables lower-income digital nomads to fund their travels and spend less time working to support themselves and more time enjoying their adventures.

Digital nomad satisfaction levels are also high due to the benefits of this work and lifestyle. Unsurprisingly, being able to travel when and where they want is the top benefit of being a nomad. Other benefits include a better work/life balance than a traditional lifestyle, experiencing new cultures, and meeting new people. Both traditional jobholders and independent digital nomad workers report liking the work/life flexibility and autonomy associated with being a digital nomad. Digital nomads are also confident about the future. Eight in ten (81%) say they are optimistic about the future of their career.



Challenges Happen, But They Are on the Decline

Although digital nomads report high satisfaction levels, being nomadic is not without challenges. The top challenges reported by current digital nomads are financial stress (27%), being away from family and friends (26%), personal safety (24%), time zone differences making work difficult (23%), and travel burnout (21%). These challenges are consistent with prior years. However, the share of digital nomads reporting these challenges has declined since 2020, primarily due to the loosening of the pandemic and pandemic restrictions.



Most Digital Nomads Plan to Continue, But Few Do It Forever

Almost all (95%) digital nomads say they definitely (60%) or maybe (35%) will continue to be digital nomads. However, only 15% of current digital nomads report being a digital nomad for more than five years, with two-thirds (67%) saying they've been a digital nomad for three years or less.

The reality is that constant travel combined with work can be stressful, complicated and not for the faint of heart. Because of the challenges faced, we estimate that about 15% to 17% of digital nomads return to a more traditional lifestyle each year

But even after they've stopped, the pull of digital nomadism is strong. One in five (21%) of former digital nomads report they will return to digital nomadism in the future, and 58% say they may.

More Domestic Travel, at a Slower Pace

Four in ten (40%) of digital nomads report they plan on spending more time in the U.S. next year and less time abroad, which may be a reflection of work restrictions, the current global geopolitical and economic climate, or personal matters. Still, only 17% say they plan on spending more time abroad. In fact, 51% of digital nomads plan to travel exclusively in the U.S., similar to 2023 but up from 42% in 2022. At the same time, 49% of nomads report planning on at least some international travel, but only 7% plan to spend the entire year outside the U.S.

The study results also continue to show a shift in length of stay at each location. Digital nomads are visiting fewer locations but spend more time at each stop. Often called "slomading", this approach provides a more active social life, allows nomads to learn more about local cultures, reduces travel stress, and improves work productivity. In 2024, the average digital nomad visited 6.6 locations (versus 7.2 in 2023) and spent an average of 5.7 weeks at each location, up from 5.4 in 2023.

DEFINITION:

Slomads - digital nomads who change locations at a slower pace and visit fewer places than most other digital nomads.

Well-Educated, Tech-Savvy, and In-Demand

Digital nomads work in a wide variety of fields, with the main professions including information technology (19%), creative services (14%); education and training (9%); sales, marketing, and PR (9%); finance and accounting (8%); and consulting, coaching, and research (7%).

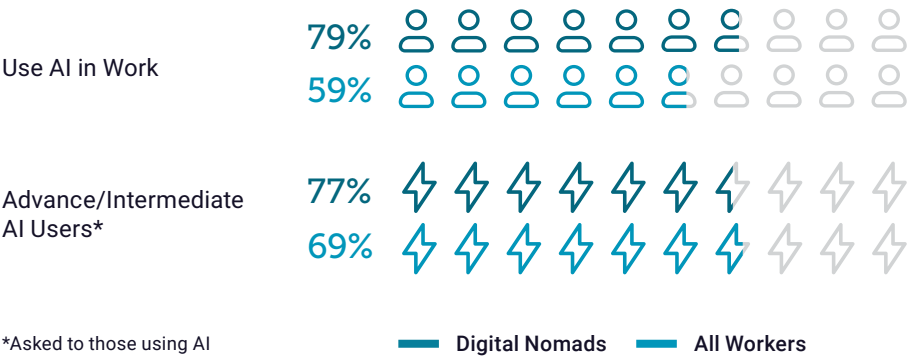
The unifying theme of these professions is that they use digital tools and can be performed remotely. The allocation of talent found across these professions has been consistent over the five years of this study.

Since—by definition—most digital nomads rely on digital tools and the Internet in their work, it’s not surprising that they report having strong technical and artificial intelligence (A.I.) skills.

Eight in ten digital (79%) nomads report they are early adopters of technology, and 76% say they use technology to make themselves more competitive in their work. Since digital nomads spend most of their time working remotely, they’re experienced users of remote work technologies, with 81% saying their work depends on digital connections and technology. Also, 46% report earning money in the creator economy, which requires strong Internet and social media skills.

Digital nomads also report high artificial intelligence (A.I.) usage rates and skills compared to other workers. Eight in ten digital nomads (79%) report using A.I. in their work, and 76% say they’re advanced (35%) or intermediate (51%) A.I. users.

Digital Nomads More Likely to Use AI and Report Being More Skilled



Six in ten (60%) workers who are not digital nomads report using A.I. in their work, with 24% saying they're advanced users and 45% intermediate users.

Digital nomads are also, on average, well-educated, with 52% having a college degree or higher (versus 35% for adult Americans) and 18% reporting having an advanced degree (versus 13% for adult Americans).

Digital Nomad Families

The most common digital nomad stereotype depicts twenty-something backpackers traveling solo, plugged into their laptops at beach bars during the day, and partying hard at night. But while this group gets a lot of media attention, most digital nomads do not fit this description. The median age of digital nomads is 37, and over half (56%) are married or living with their partner.

Even more surprising and consistent with last year's study findings, 23% of digital nomads report traveling with their children. The parents of digital nomad kids believe their children have much to gain from being nomadic – including exposure to new places, people, and cultures, learning skills like resilience and adaptability, and experiencing the joy of adventure.

The top challenges digital nomads with kids cited are the expenses associated with traveling as a family, safety and health concerns, the lack of stability and routines, educational challenges, and socialization issues for their children.

Because most digital nomad kids are school age (86%), education is a significant issue and challenge. Parents report using a variety of approaches to educate their kids. Homeschooling is a popular way of educating; other choices include enrollment in private or public schools or specialized schools and education programs to support digital nomad kids.

Digital nomad families also spend more time traveling domestically than other digital nomads. In fact, 72% of digital nomads with families report planning to travel exclusively in the U.S. over the next year, compared to 51% of digital nomads overall. Digital nomad parents report that domestic travel is much easier than traveling overseas.

Pets are also part of some digital nomad families; 11% of digital nomads report traveling with their pets.

Hidden Corporate Digital Nomads

Because of their travels, digital nomads with traditional jobs can leave their employers open to various regulatory, tax, compliance, and legal risks. Despite these risks, few organizations have formal digital nomad policies and programs. To an extent, digital nomads are off the grid, literally and figuratively. They often work out arrangements with their immediate bosses, go nomadic under informal “don’t ask, don’t tell” agreements, or travel without their organization’s knowledge.

Similar to last year’s results, 14% of digital nomads with traditional jobs reported that their employers do not know they are nomadic. An additional 22% say their company does not have a digital nomad policy, but their boss has given them permission to work nomadically. In other words, about one-third of digital nomads with traditional jobs are “hidden nomad employees,” meaning the company does not know where they are working. This means they could break local employment laws and regulations without their employer knowing they are doing so.

In addition to legal and compliance risks, not knowing where employees are also increases cybersecurity risks.

Organizations Need Digital Nomad Policies

Digital nomads are, on average, well-educated, highly skilled, and digitally savvy. Extremely agile in the digital world, they work predominantly in high-demand, tech-oriented occupations where talent shortages are common and hiring/retaining employees a constant challenge.

Digital nomad policies and programs make attracting these in-demand workers easier. They also help to engage and reward employees who wish to travel. At the same time, digital nomad policies also reduce the legal, regulatory, and I.T. risks associated with nomadic employees.



For information on corporate digital nomad policies, see [MBO’s digital nomad policy guide](#).



Millions Aspire to be Digital Nomads

We ask adult Americans who aren't digital nomads each year if they plan on becoming digital nomads over the next 2-3 years. In 2024, the results project 21 million saying yes and 45 million saying maybe. This is a 7% decrease compared to 2023. These results are likely due to fewer people believing they can work fully remotely in the future due to return-to-work requirements. In our interviews, we also hear international unrest as a reason not to become a digital nomad.

Despite their aspirations, our studies indicate that only 7% to 9% of those saying they will or may become digital nomads over the next two to three years actually do so.

The rest continue to be what we call "armchair digital nomads," those who follow the exploits of others instead of becoming digital nomads themselves. However, this data shows how extensive the interest is in this lifestyle. It also shows a ready pool of digital nomad aspirants to fuel the digital nomad trend into the future.



Digital Nomadism Has a Strong Foundation for Future Growth

When we started the MBO Partners' Digital Nomad study series six years ago, digital nomads were considered an eccentric and fringe group of nomadic workers. But we've crossed into the mainstream with more than one in ten working Americans being digital nomads.

The size and scale of the group have created a strong foundation for future growth. Here are four trends to watch in the coming year.

- 1 More organizations are implementing digital nomad policies.**
Successful corporations are embracing digital nomads and implementing policies that allow their workers to spend time working and traveling. As these workers generally have in-demand skill sets, it's a win for all.
- 2 Countries and cities are competing for digital nomads.**
Governments at all levels realize that digital nomads spend more money than tourists, create jobs for locals, and even start local



businesses. To date, more than 60 countries have created special digital nomad visas and other programs, smoothing out red tape and making it easier for digital nomads to locate in their countries.

3

A growing support industry is making it easier to be a digital nomad.

A wide variety of organizations are now providing products and services to assist digital nomads, everything from cross-border health insurance and financial services to temporary work and living spaces, as well as job sites specifically for nomads. Digital nomad villages—organized communities that provide the work, social, and living infrastructure for remote workers and their families—are also springing up worldwide.

4

Remote work technology and methods continue to improve.

The pandemic-induced shift to remote work resulted in massive investments in remote work tools and technology. These include faster Internet speeds and greater bandwidth, remote collaboration and teaming software, and better tools for operating remotely. Organizations most also now productively utilize blended hybrid workforces, which greatly benefits nomads as well.

Looking Forward

After the explosive growth of American digital nomads between 2020 and 2022, we've seen modest increases in their numbers in 2023 and 2024. This slowdown was expected due to the pandemic easing, life and work returning to normal, and more workers expected to show up at the office at least occasionally.

However, the factors driving the growth of digital nomadism are still in place. People want to travel, awareness and interest in digital nomadism is strong, and the shift to remote work will continue to be a powerful enabler. Because of these factors, we expect the number of digital nomads to continue to grow (albeit modestly) in the coming years.

Methodology

The findings in this research brief come from the 2024 MBO Partners State of Independence in America online panel survey, which was fielded in June of 2024. This is the 14th consecutive year this study has been conducted and the 6th year detailed questions on digital nomadism have been included. For the 2024 study, Emergent Research and Rockbridge Associates surveyed 6,526 residents of the U.S. (aged 18 and older), including 1,055 current digital nomads. The survey results were weighted to reflect the demographics of the U.S.

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