

Design Pulse 2026

SUMMARY

Design companies, employees, unemployed and students
Themes: AI& Sustainability

Ornamo has annually produced statistical data on the labour market of wage earners in the sector, entrepreneurs and the economic outlook of the sector. The aim is to increase understanding of the industry among its members and stakeholders.

Report: The report was prepared by researcher **Pekka Lith**
Summary: **Emmi Putkonen**, Ornamo

The Pulssi survey was aimed at all design professionals, companies and students.

Total respondents: 544
Wage and salary earners (incl. laid-off persons): 249
Companies (incl. freelancers): 102
Unemployed: 57
Students: 136

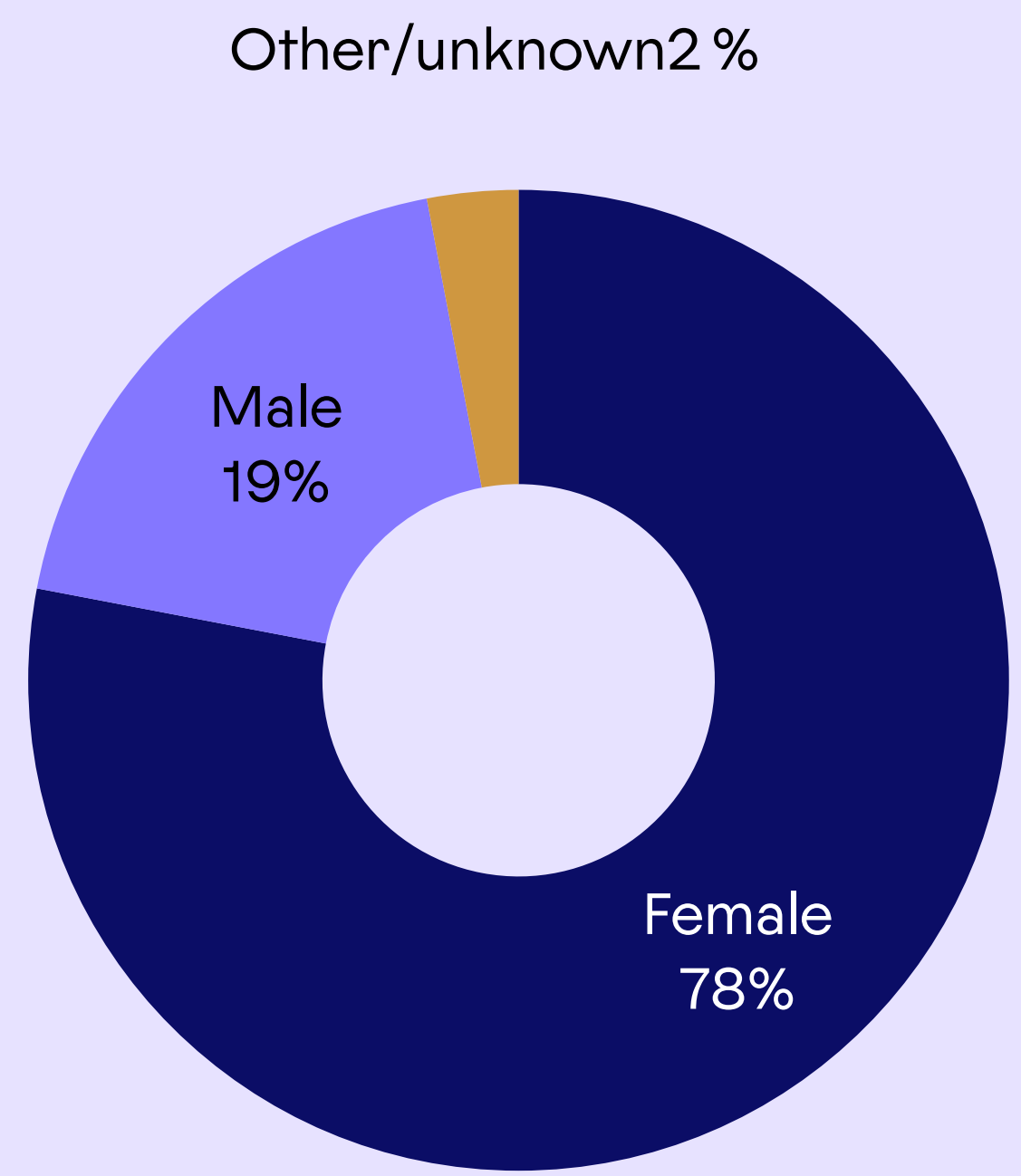
60 %

have a master's degree (2025: 54%)

JOB TITLES

- The most common job titles:
- 1. Interior Architect (24%)
 - 2. Service designer (17%)
 - 3. Digital designer (11%)
 - 4. Chief Design Officer (9%)
 - 5. Teacher (8%)

GENDER



61 %

lives in the Helsinki metropolitan area

36 %

had more than 20 years of work experience (2025: 31%)

N = 249

WAGE EARNERS

Wage earners and employment

- Uncertainty is indicated by the fact that the willingness to change jobs has decreased
- The salary level in the sector has improved, and the share of those earning more than 5000 euros has increased over the past three years.
- 60 per cent of wage and salary earners were very or fairly satisfied with their work. The share of those who are very satisfied has increased slightly in recent years.

71 %

works in private companies and 55% with a large employer (more than 250 people).

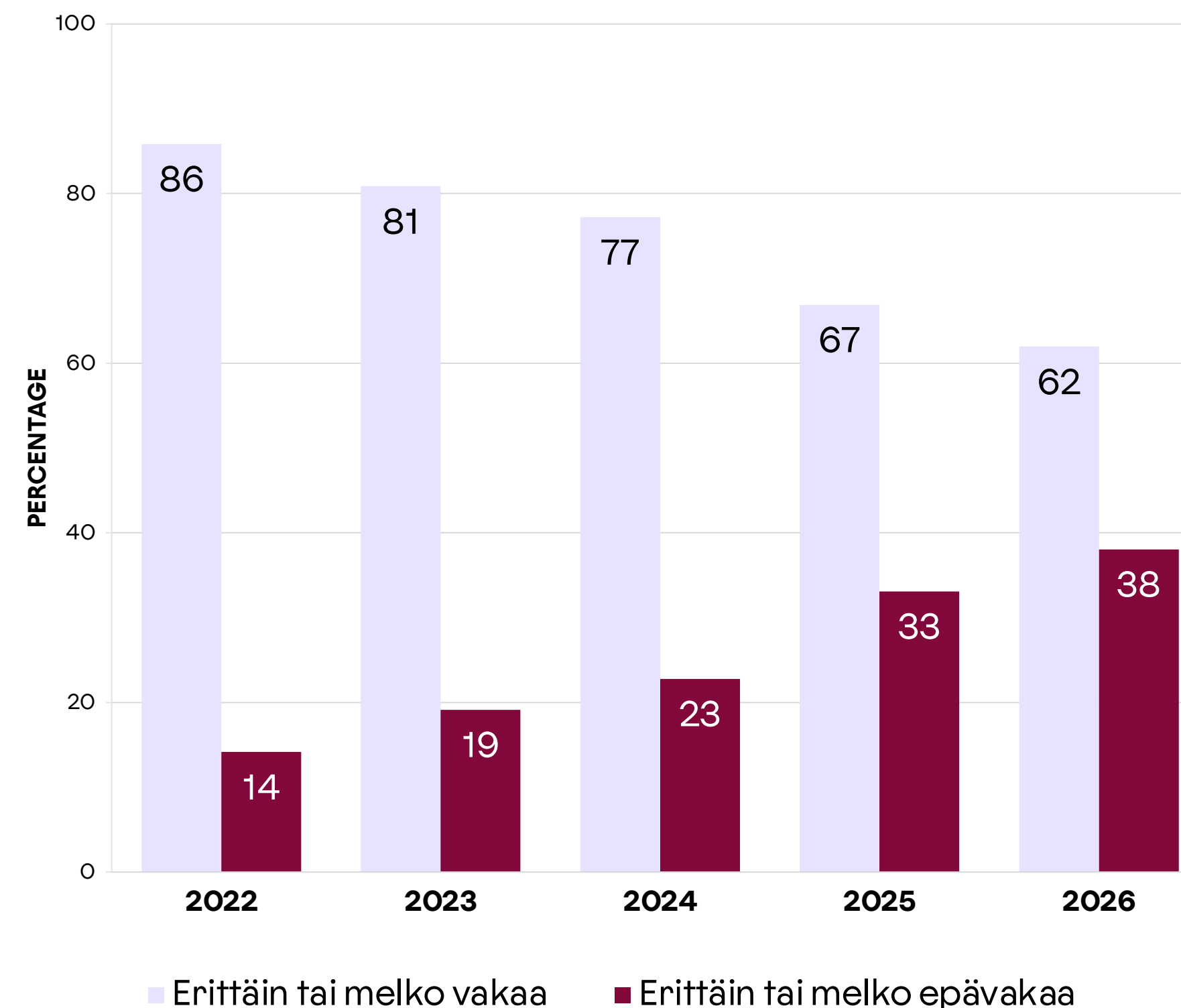
YLEISIMMÄT TOIMIALAT 2026 (2025)

22% Design offices (23%)
21% Manufacturing (13%)
15% Higher education institutions (11%)
11% Public administration (9%)
8% IT sector (15%)

34 %

Staff reductions have been made during the past year (2024: 34%; 2022: 16%)

Views on job retention 2022–26, %



THE HIGHEST EARNERS:

An experienced strategic designer over 40 years of age in a management position in a large industrial company or public administration. Master's degree (median salary: approx. 5094–5500 €/month)

LOWEST EARNERS:

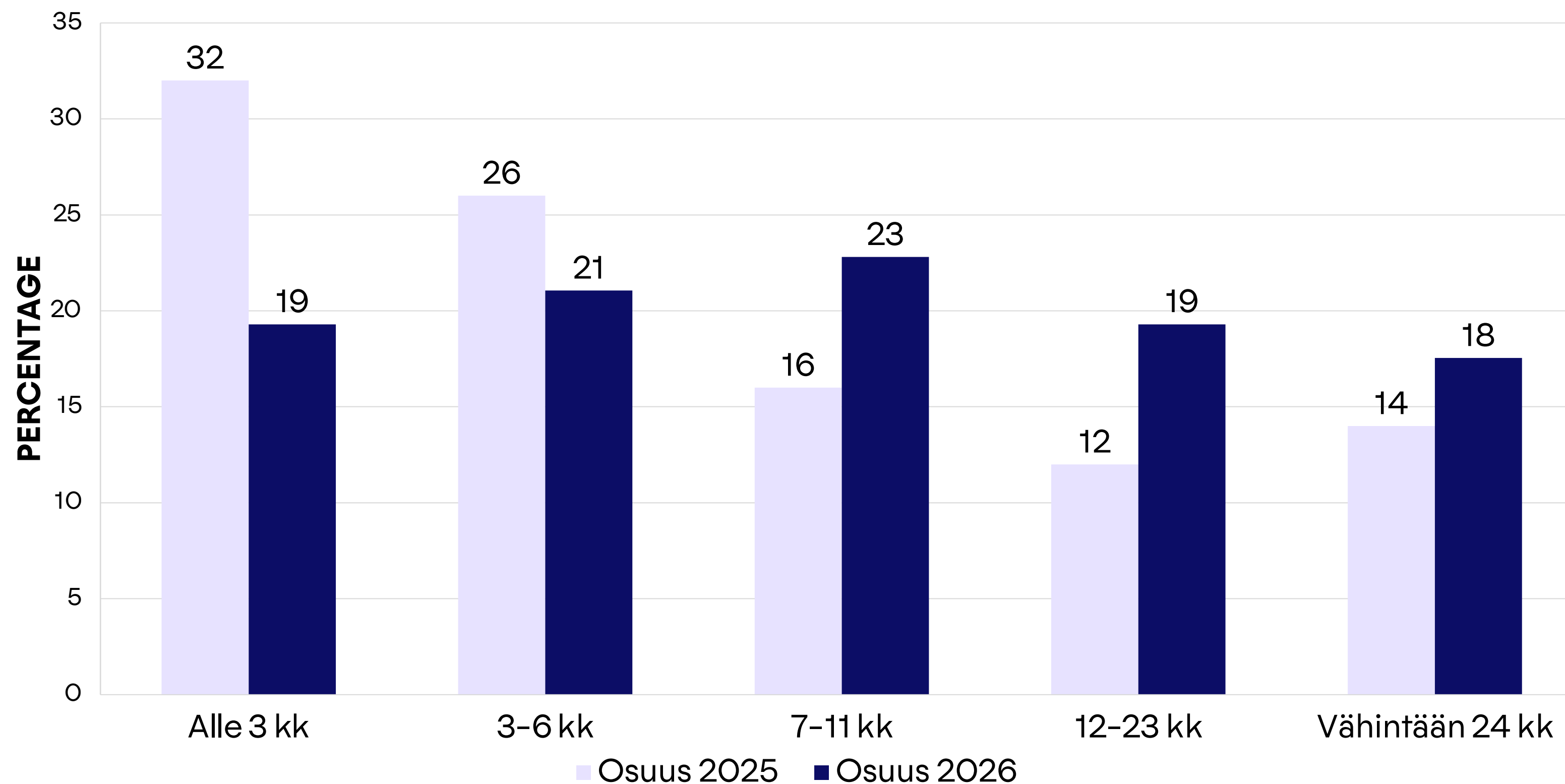
A young designer under the age of 30 with a short career in a small private design office. Bachelor's degree (median salary: less than 3500 €/month).

N = 57

UNEMPLOYED

Number of long-term unemployed on the rise

Duration of unemployment in 2025 and 2026, %



TOP 3

The most common job titles of the unemployed:

1. Industrial designer (25%)
2. Interior Architect (19%)
3. Designer (16%)

60 %

of the unemployed are under 40 years of age and half have a working career of less than 6 years (no change from 2025).

54 %

considered their chances of finding employment in the next year to be fairly or very unlikely (2025: 60%)

N = 102

COMPANIES

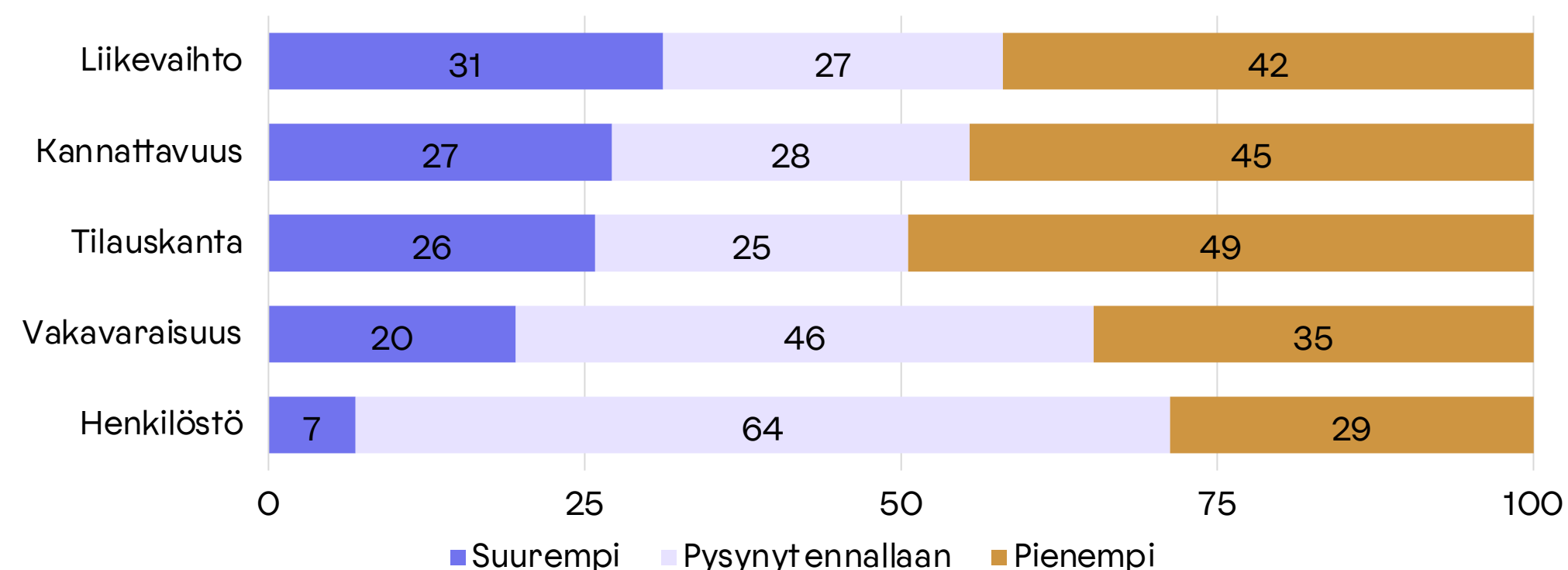
ENTREPRENEURS

The design industry is sensitive to economic cycles

Business outlook has improved slightly from the previous year

- Net sales, profitability and solvency have improved
- On the other hand, the order backlog has weakened
- In addition, several companies have reduced their personnel during the gap year.

General economic outlook of design companies in early 2026, %



71 %

of entrepreneurs in the field are sole entrepreneurs

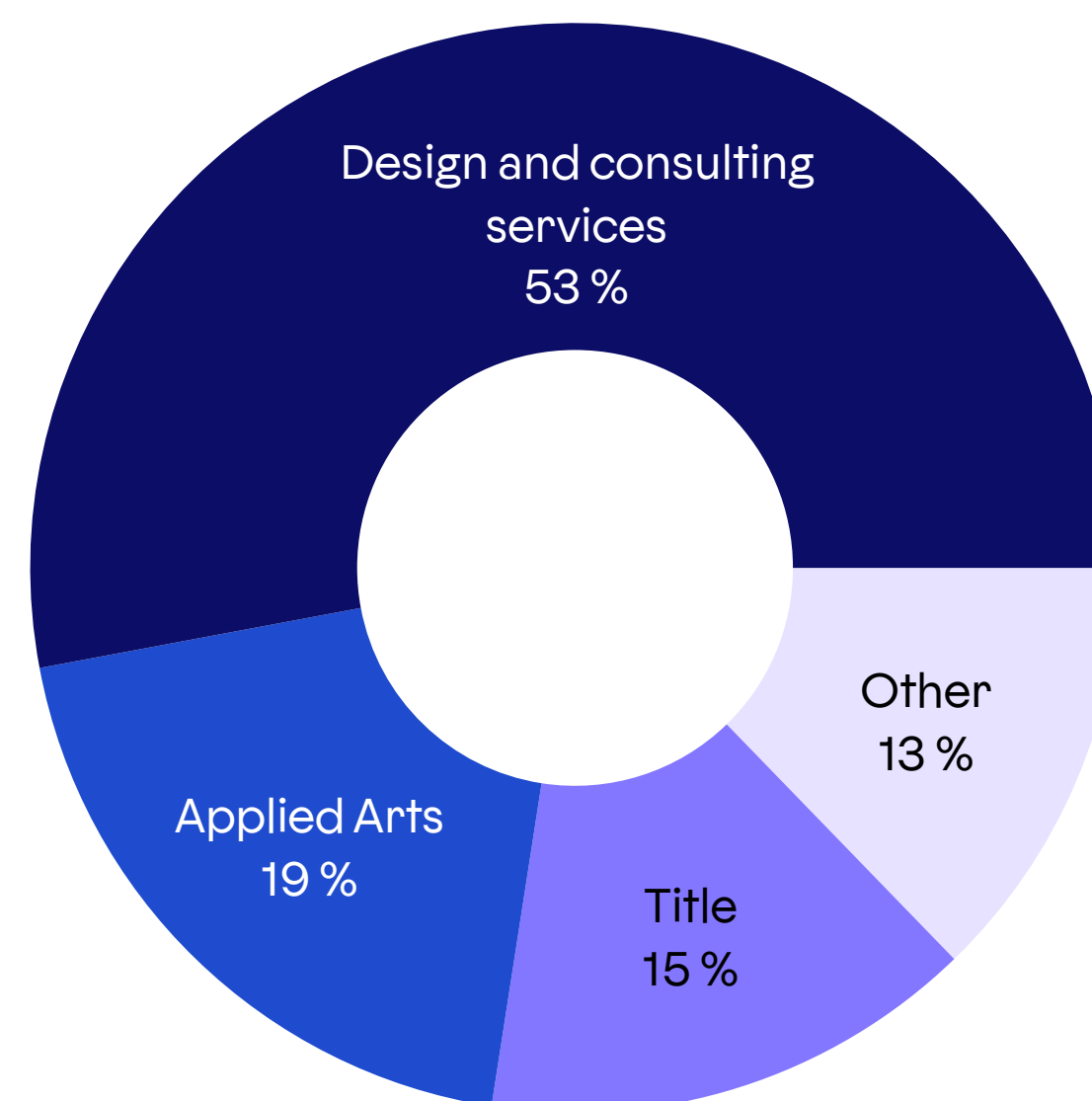
40 %

of companies with a turnover of less than €20,000 per year

30 %

entrepreneurs have side jobs.

Industries of enterprises 2025, %



TOP 5

Key customer industries:

1. Private households
2. Design Offices
3. Cultural institutions
4. Applied Arts
5. Real Estate & Construction

26 %

announced that it was possible to suspend business operations. On the other hand, **61%** felt that their business operations were on a stable footing.

N = 136

STUDENTS

Students' confidence in the labour market is weak and the transition to working life is considered challenging.

- Students' experience of the general labour market test has deteriorated since 2023, when 38 per cent said that the labour market situation was at least fairly good.
- Building working life connections during studies was considered important, and more of it was hoped for.
- 84% of the students have completed or are planning to apply for a traineeship in Oulu, and only 15% indicated that they do not intend to do a traineeship in higher education.

40 %

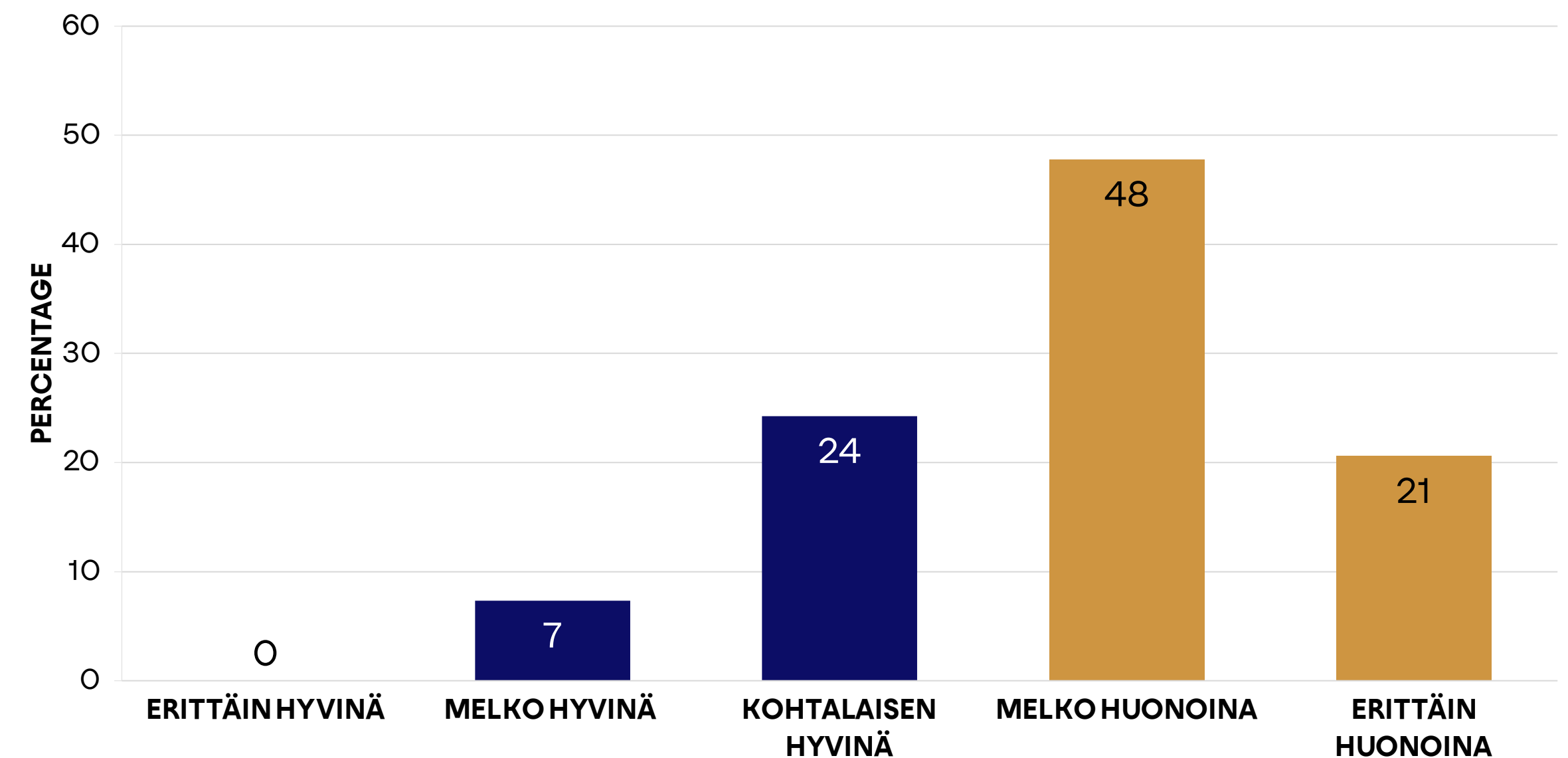
of students feel that the studies prepare them for working life very or fairly well.

TOP 3

Fields that students aim for after finding employment:

1. Interior architecture
2. Service design
3. Industrial design
4. Digital design
5. Durable design

Design students' views on the general labour market situation in their own field of study, %



N = 538

WAGE EARNERS

ENTREPRENEURS

UNEMPLOYED

Designers' sustainability expertise is strong, but its utilisation in business is still limited.

- However, sustainability expertise is considered an important part of a designer's work
- Only a few entrepreneurs in the design sector feel that it is essential to be familiar with sustainability regulations, as the majority of customers have not presented any reporting requirements for it.

61 %

is able to utilise their sustainability expertise in their work, at least to some extent. In addition, 50% of the companies have utilised sustainability expertise in customer assignments.

TOP 3

Design professionals have the **strongest** sustainability expertise:

1. Equality and accessibility
2. Cross-sectoral cooperation
3. Circular economy

38 %

Design companies have a sustainability strategy, and an additional 39% have one coming up or are being planned.

25 %

of companies to comply with sectoral commitments.

TOP 3

Design professionals have the **weakest** sustainability expertise:

1. Understanding sustainability regulation
2. Life cycle thinking and calculation
3. Understanding metrics and data

N = 538

WAGE EARNERS

ENTREPRENEURS

UNEMPLOYED

STUDENTS

AI raises sustainability and copyright concerns, not fears for designers' professional value

- The main concern for designers related to artificial intelligence is the environmental load generated by artificial intelligence
- In addition, issues related to reliability and copyright are considered critical.
- Artificial intelligence is not seen as a threat to the appreciation of designers' professional skills.
- Young people and students in particular have a negative attitude towards artificial intelligence.

40 %

utilizes artificial intelligence constantly or quite a lot. The share is higher among wage and salary earners than among students and self-employed persons.

TOP 3

The most common uses of artificial intelligence are:

1. Text production
2. Information retrieval
3. Brainstorming and conceptualisation

37 %

have a positive attitude towards AI, 36% neutrally and 28% negative.

67 %

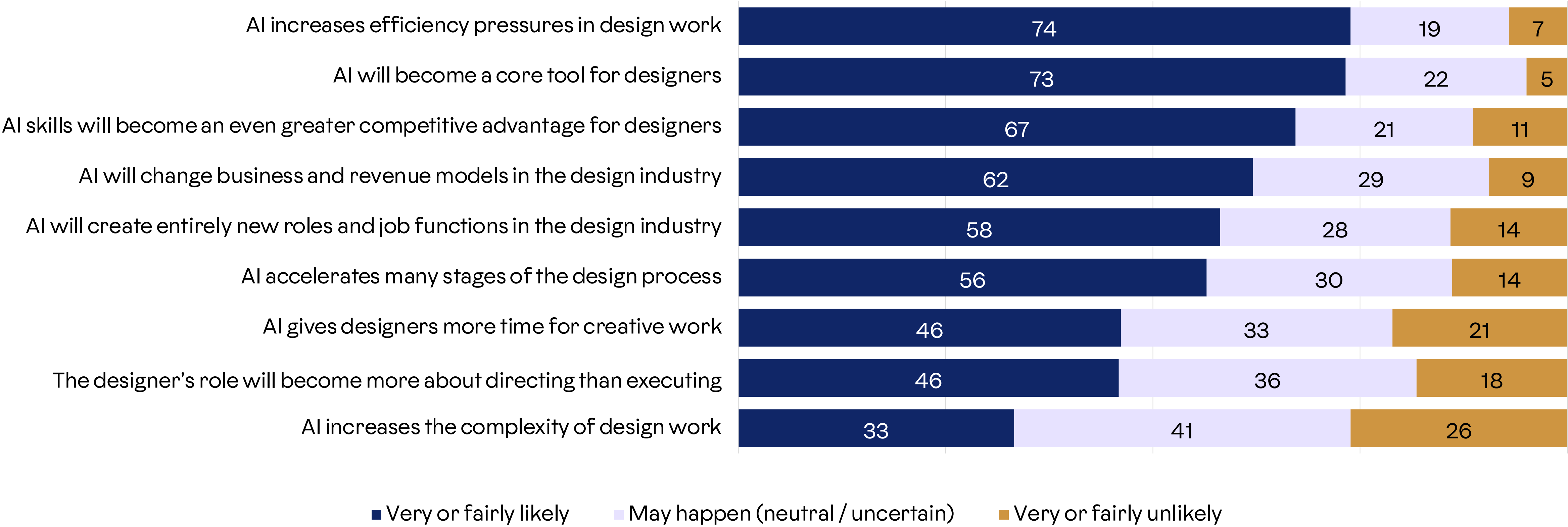
feel that artificial intelligence will become an even greater competitive advantage for designers.

74 %

estimated that artificial intelligence will increase the pressure to improve efficiency in designers' work, and 62% estimate that it will change the revenue logic of the design industry.

Artificial intelligence is changing work, demands and challenging business

Designers' views on the effects of artificial intelligence on designers' work, %



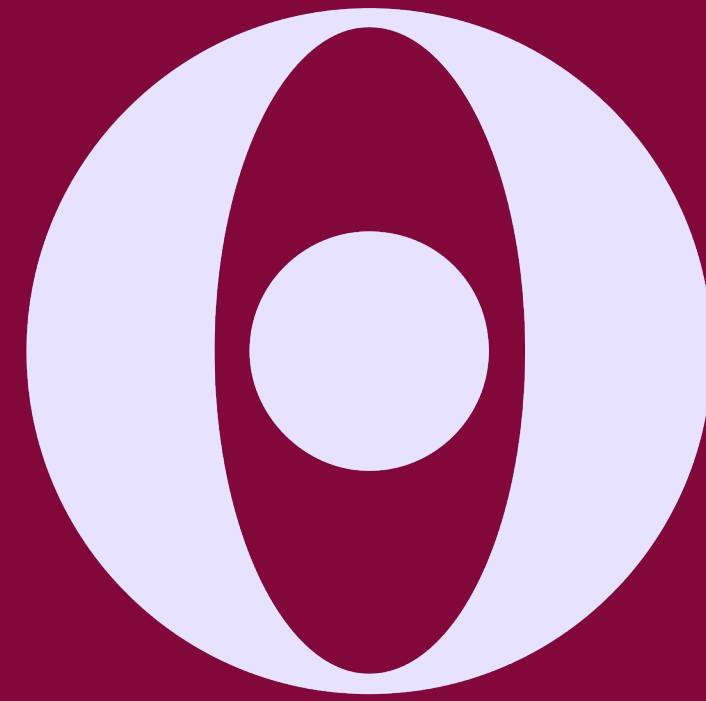
CONCLUSIONS

The design industry is currently in a divided and uncertain situation: employment prospects are weak and long-term unemployment is increasing. Companies are small and sensitive to economic cycles, which is reflected in the livelihood challenges for many operators.

CONCLUSIONS

At the same time, especially experienced professionals, are doing well. Despite current difficulties, business outlooks for the coming years remain cautiously optimistic.

New operating models related to artificial intelligence and sustainability are seen as key opportunities for the future and as factors that create a competitive advantage.



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[@ORNAMORY](https://www.instagram.com/ornamory)

[INFO@ORNAMO.FI](mailto:info@ornamo.fi)