

Design Pulse 2026

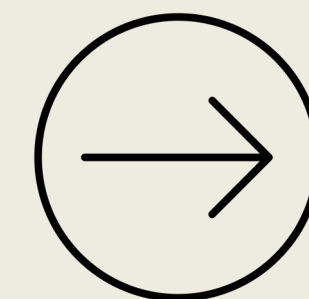
Design industry companies, employees, unemployed
professionals, and students
Themes: AI & Sustainability

Ornamo publishes annual statistics on salaried employment, entrepreneurship, and economic trends within the design sector. The purpose is to enhance understanding of the industry among members, decision-makers, and other stakeholders.

Emmi Putkonen

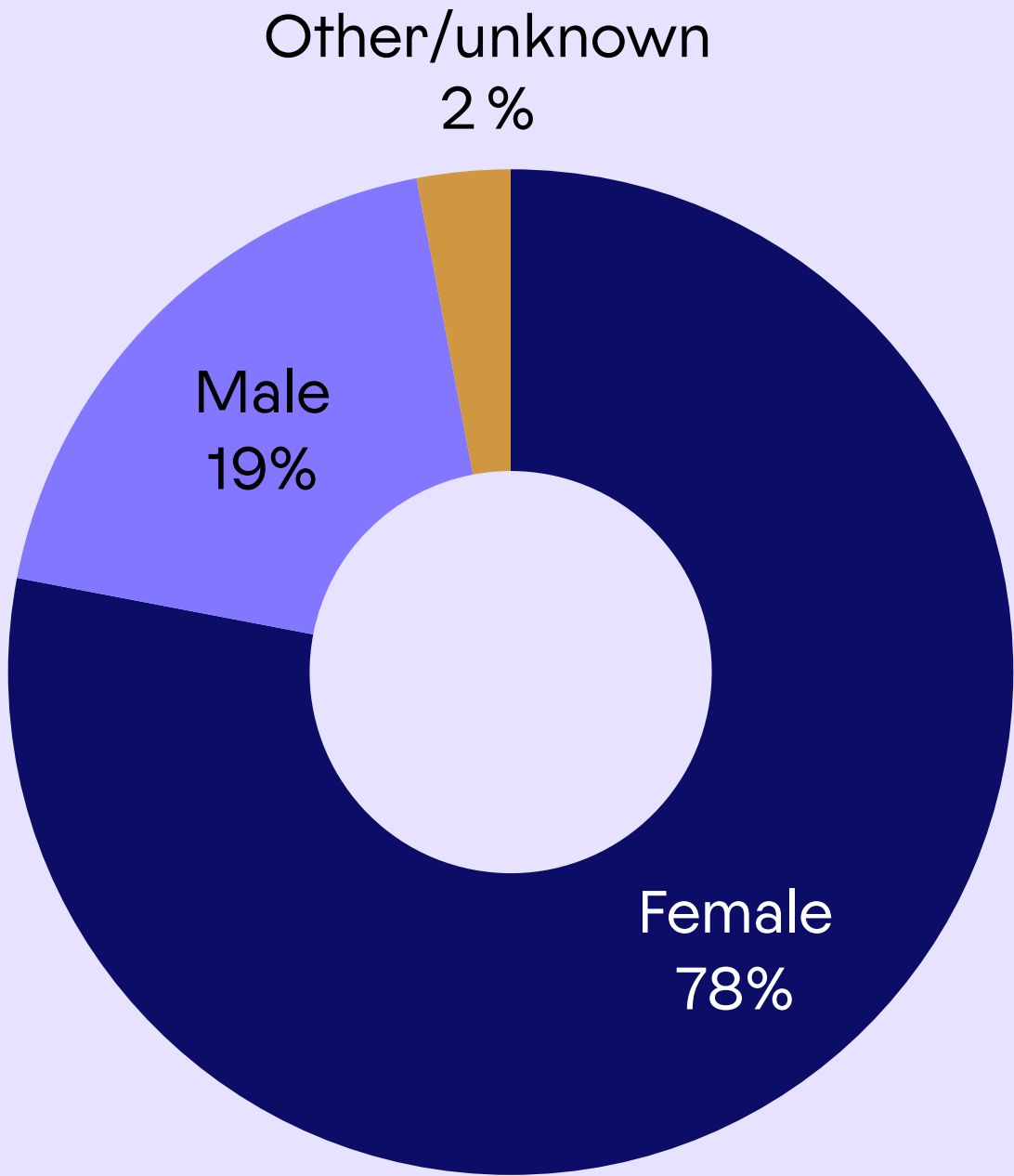
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The full report was prepared by researcher **Pekka Lith**



The Pulse Survey was conducted among design professionals, design companies, and students across the sector in early 2026

GENDER



Total respondents: 544

- Wage earners: 249
- Companies: 102
- Unemployed: 57
- Students: 136

60 %

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

61 %

lives in the Helsinki metropolitan area

36 %

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

Design field and designers' work is in constant change. New roles emerge while sustainability demands and AI are leading a path for future design work.

TOP 5 JOB TITLES IN DESIGN 2016

1. Interior architect (31 %)
2. Designer (17 %)
3. Industrial designer (11 %)
4. Fashion designer (6 %)
5. Artist (6 %)

Source: Muotoilualan työmarkkinat 2016

TOP 5 JOB TITLES IN DESIGN 2026

1. Interior architect (24 %)
2. Service designer (17 %)
3. Digital designer (11 %)
4. Design manager (9 %)
5. Teacher (6 %)

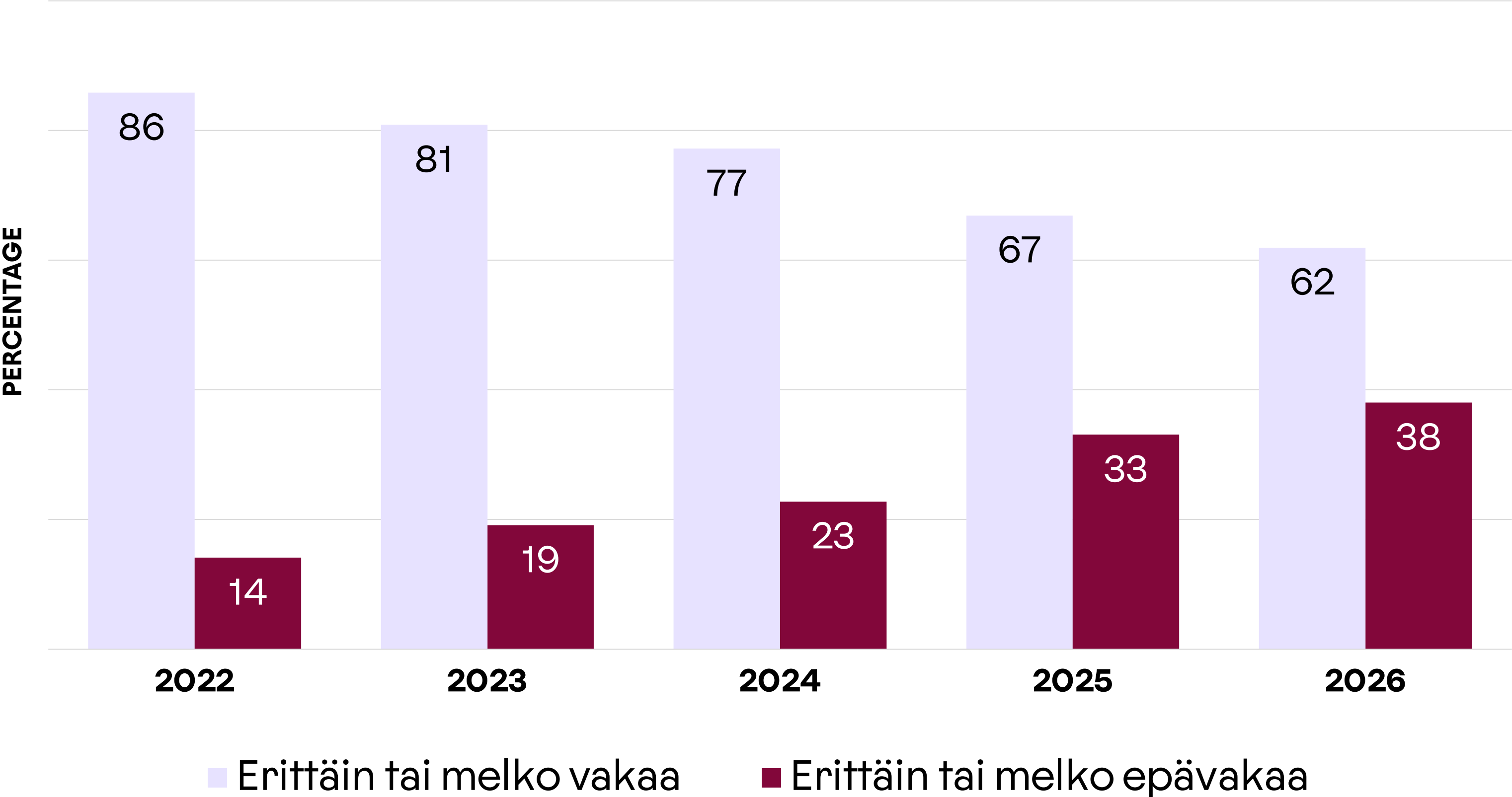
Source: Design Pulssi 2026

Fragmented design industry

Uncertainty is on the rise and the outlook for the future is foggy. On the other hand, the industry is also doing well by many indicators.

The design industry is sensitive to economic cycles

Views on job retention 2022-26, %



34 %

of the workplaces have had staff reductions during the past year (2024: 34%; 2022: 16%).

In design companies, the order backlog has weakened, and several companies have reduced their personnel.

TOP 5

Key customer industries:

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

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

40 %

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

60 %

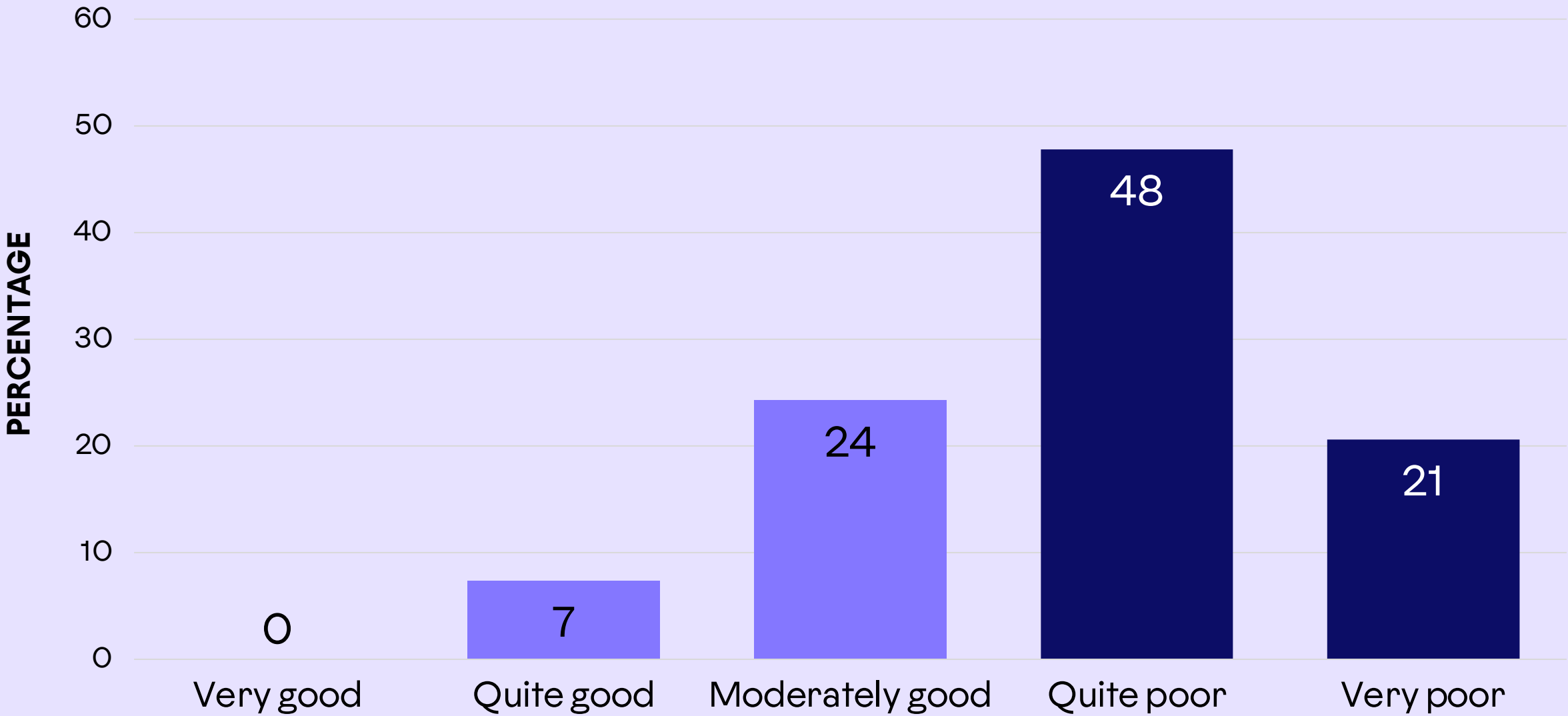
of the unemployed are under 40 years of age and half have a working career of less than 6 years.

TOP 3

Fields that students aim for after finding employment:

- 1. Interior architecture (22 %)
- 2. Service design (13 %)
- 3. Industrial design (12 %)
- 4. Digital design (10 %)
- 5. Sustainable design (8 %)

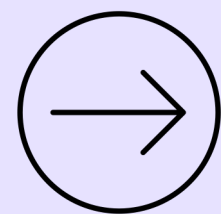
Design students' views on the general labour market situation in their own field of study, %



Fragmented design industry

Uncertainty is on the rise and the outlook for the future is foggy. On the other hand, the industry is also doing well by many indicators.

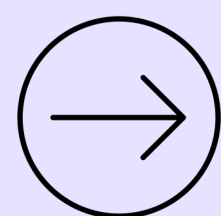
The salary level has grown steadily



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



THE LOWEST EARNERS:

Under 30 years old designer with a short career in a small design agency. Bachelor's degree.

- Median salary: less than 3500 €/month

60 %

of wage and salary earners were very or fairly satisfied with their work.

THE MOST COMMON INDUSTRIES 2026 (2025)

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

SEE ORNAMO'S SARALARY STATISTICS (ONLY FOR MEMBERS)

More than half of design companies and entrepreneurs felt that their business operations were stable

WHAT'S IN COMMON:

- **Design agencies** that have been in operation for more than 10 years
- Turnover of more than **30 000 €** / year, with hourly invoicing of more than **80 €/h.**
- They act as **regular employers.**
- The market area is the **national and/or international** market.

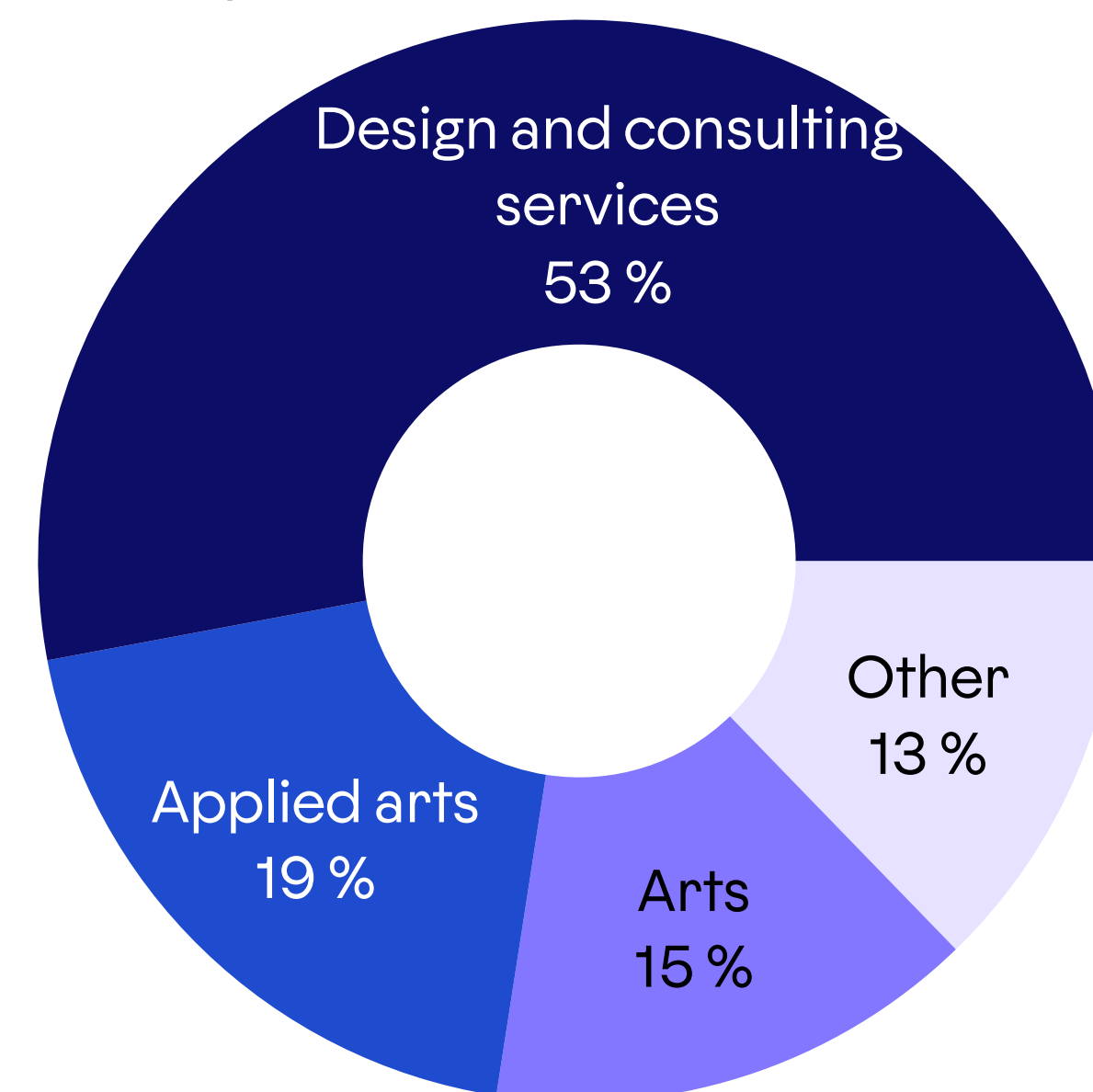
60 %

of company et were at least moderately satisfied with their employment situation and 52% with the billing level.

71 %

of entrepreneurs in the field are sole entrepreneurs

Industries of enterprises 2025, %



40 %

of companies with a turnover of less than €20,000/year (no change from 2025)

Sustainability policies have moved sustainability into the mainstream and made it a strategic priority across industries.

Yet designers have long been engaged with many of its core principles, from resource efficiency and product longevity to human-centered solutions and systems thinking.

Sustainability is strongly a part of designers' work

61 %

is able to utilise their sustainability expertise in their work, at least to some extent.

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

TOP 3

Design professionals have the weakest sustainability expertise:

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

However sustainability regulation is not strongly a part of designers' work

25 %

of companies to comply with sector-specific commitments and standards such as:

- ISO standards for sustainability (ISO 14001 & ISO 27001)
- GDPR
- Accessibility requirements
- Green Office
- LEED and BREEAM
- M1 emission classification
- EPD (Environmental Product Declaration)
- FSC and PEFC certifications
- GOTS and OCS
- CE marking and TÜV certifications
- Key Flag & Design from Finland
- Apartheid Free Zone

74 %

of the companies, the customer has never presented reporting requirements related to sustainability.

Design companies that had to report to the customer or in connection with a tendering process on topics related to responsibility:

- LCA and carbon footprint calculations
- Safety related to the CE mark
- Ecology and life cycle of packaging materials
- Data protection, information security
- Principles of ethical conduct

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

37 %

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

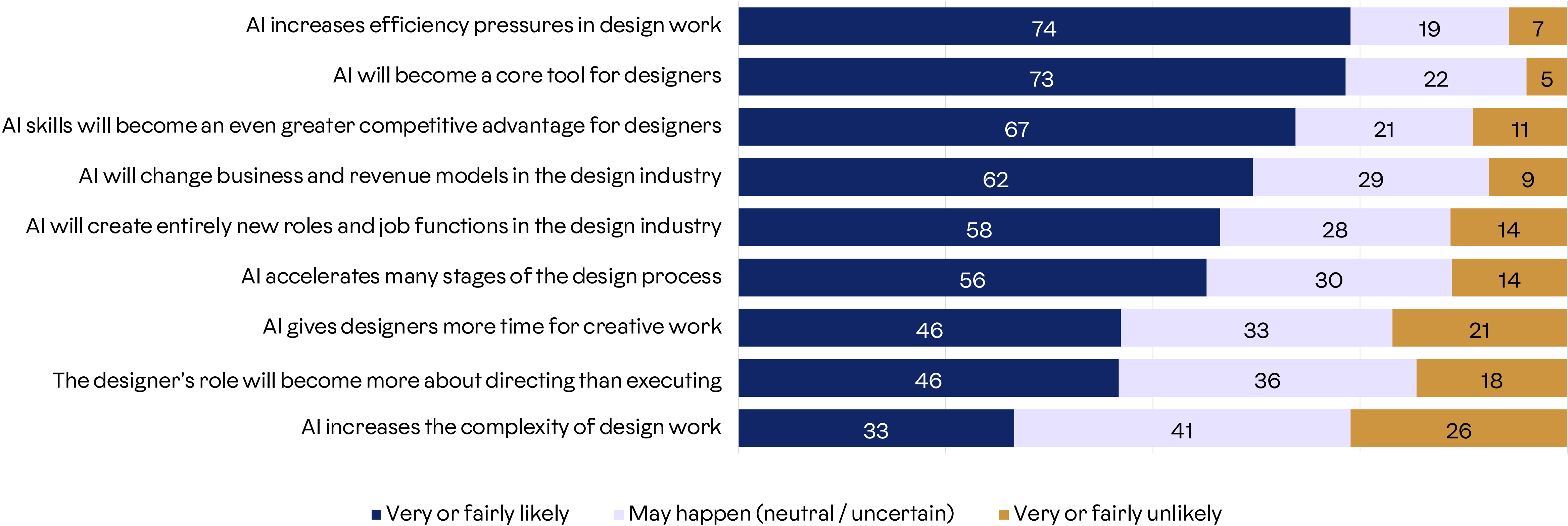
TOP 3

The most common uses of AI:

1. Producing or processing text
2. Searching for information
3. Brainstorming and conceptualisation

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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