

# Designer salaries and fees in Switzerland in 2025

## An empirical analysis of the economic situation of design professionals

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The salary and fee study was initiated by the **Swiss Design Association (SDA)** and conducted and scientifically evaluated by the **Zurich Center for Creative Economies (ZCCE)**. The study was financed by the **SDA**, the **Federal Office of Culture (FOC)**, **Pro Helvetia**, and the **Zurich Silk Industry Association**.

This brochure provides an overview of the methodology, results, and classification used in the study. It summarizes key findings and offers a well-founded, easily accessible basis for a discussion of the economic situation of the Swiss design workforce.

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### Introduction

The Swiss Design Association (SDA) commissioned the Zurich Centre for Creative Economies (ZCCE) to conduct a comprehensive study of the incomes and fees of designers in Switzerland. The aim of the survey is to create, for the first time, a reliable, data-based foundation to highlight the realities of work and pay in Swiss design and to provide guidance in this diverse, dynamic, and often opaque professional field. The publication of this study responds to a clearly expressed need of our members and partners, and strengthens the strategic orientation of our professional association for a sound, evidence based development of the industry.

The study is based on an online survey conducted from May to July 2025 with 560 participating designers in 774 jobs. For the wage analyses 644 jobs were assigned to ISCO (International Standard Classification of Occupations) design occupations and evaluated on a weighted basis. Fees and strategic activities were examined in an exploratory and unweighted manner.

### Data basis and methodology

The study combines quantitative evaluations with qualitative feedback: in addition to structured information on income, fees, professional practice, and training, numerous open-ended responses provide important clues for classifying the results. Although widely distributed, the survey is not based on a random sample. Using the Swiss Labor Force Survey (SAKE) to weight the data increases their comparability with the base total of ISCO design professions; still, it should be noted that some sub-groups are represented by only a small number of cases. The results offer a reliable overview, reveal clear patterns, and form a solid basis for the further examination of the realities of work and pay in Swiss design.

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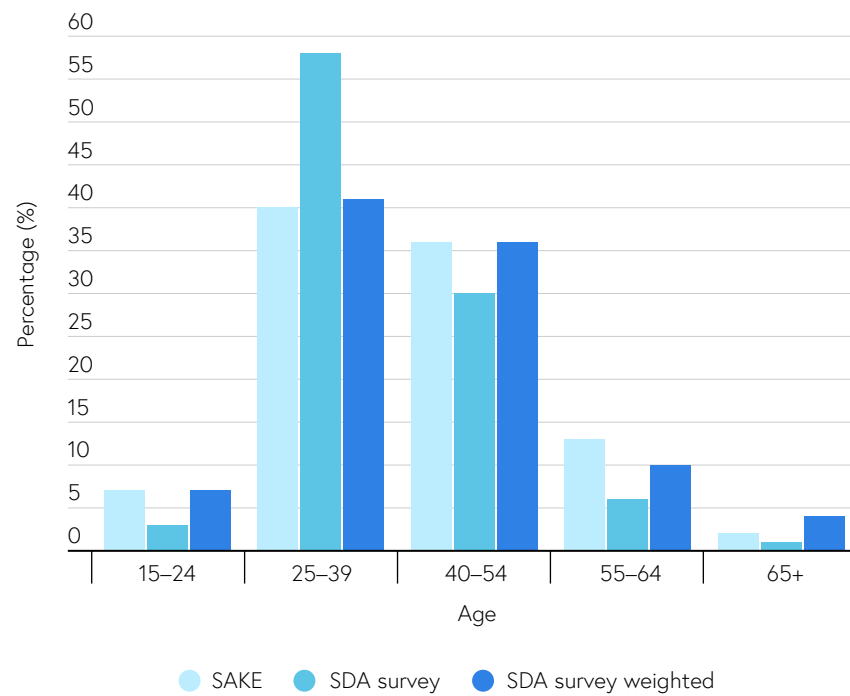
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## Context and interpretation

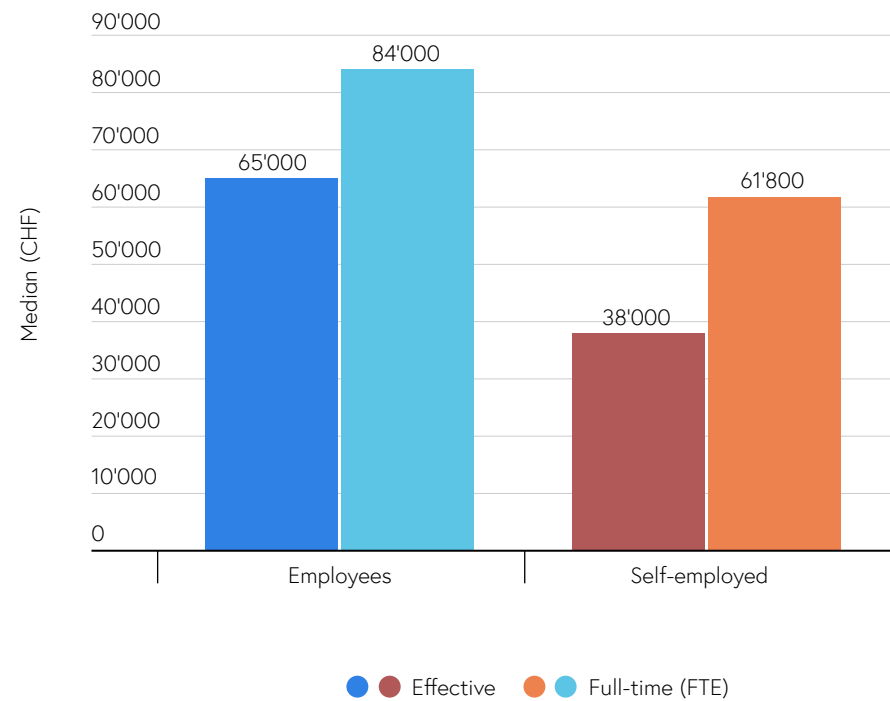
The survey offers the first comprehensive empirical look at the income and fee situation of designers in Switzerland. It provides a reliable frame of reference on pay levels, ranges and patterns, and highlights concrete steps toward greater transparency, predictability, and fair framework conditions. It presents a detailed picture of a diverse industry and creates a realistic basis for in-depth discussions and follow-up surveys.

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Age distribution, SDA survey vs. SAKE



Gross income, employees vs. self-employed



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### Findings that highlight key areas of concern:

- Structural income and stability differences between employment and self-employment
- Persistent gender-specific differences in income and fees (gender pay gap)
- Income development varies depending on professional experience and type of employment
- Above-average income benefits of practice-oriented educational qualifications
- Systematic income advantage of strategic over operational design roles
- Lack of transparency regarding fees and lack of market-wide guidance

### Earned income

The first thing the analysis shows is that the incomes of employed and self-employed designers differ significantly in terms of amount and stability.

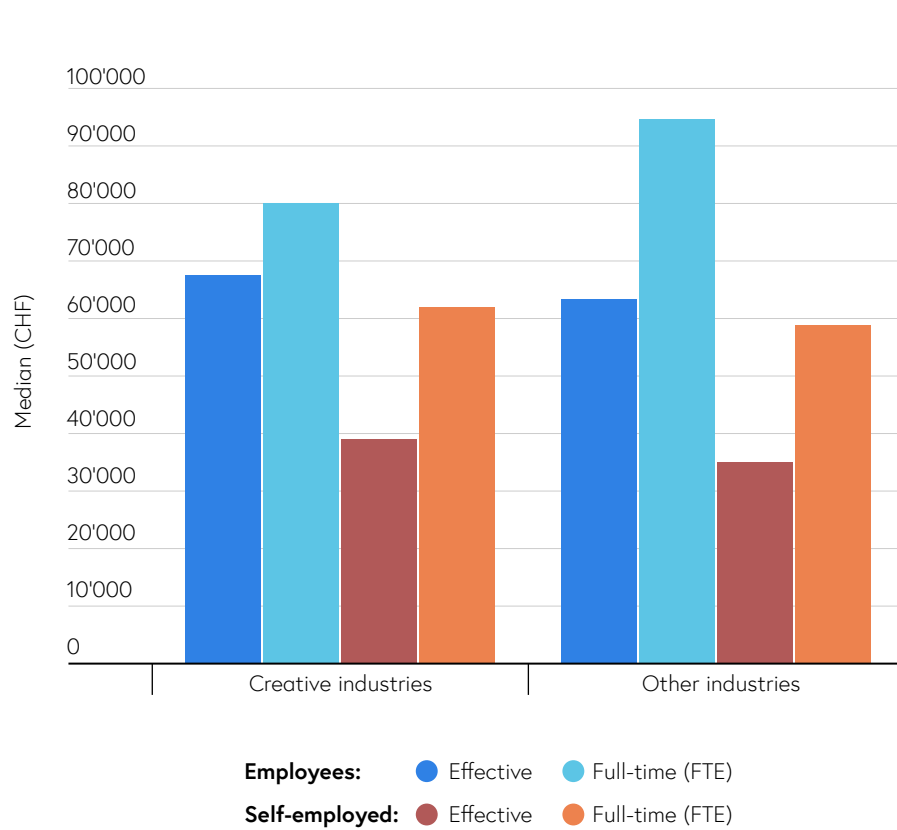
Incomes of employed designers tend to be more stable and higher than those of their self-employed colleagues whose earnings are subject to greater fluctuations and who have a much wider range of different employment situations. Gender-specific differences are obvious across all forms of employment. Regardless of employment status, the average income of women is significantly lower than that of men.

As a rule, income increases with professional experience – much more so however for employees than for the self-employed. In addition it becomes apparent that practice-oriented educational qualifications – such as degrees from technical colleges or professional certificates – are highly valued in the Swiss labor market. Academic degrees or bachelor's and master's degrees from universities of applied sciences, by contrast, do not automatically lead to higher incomes.

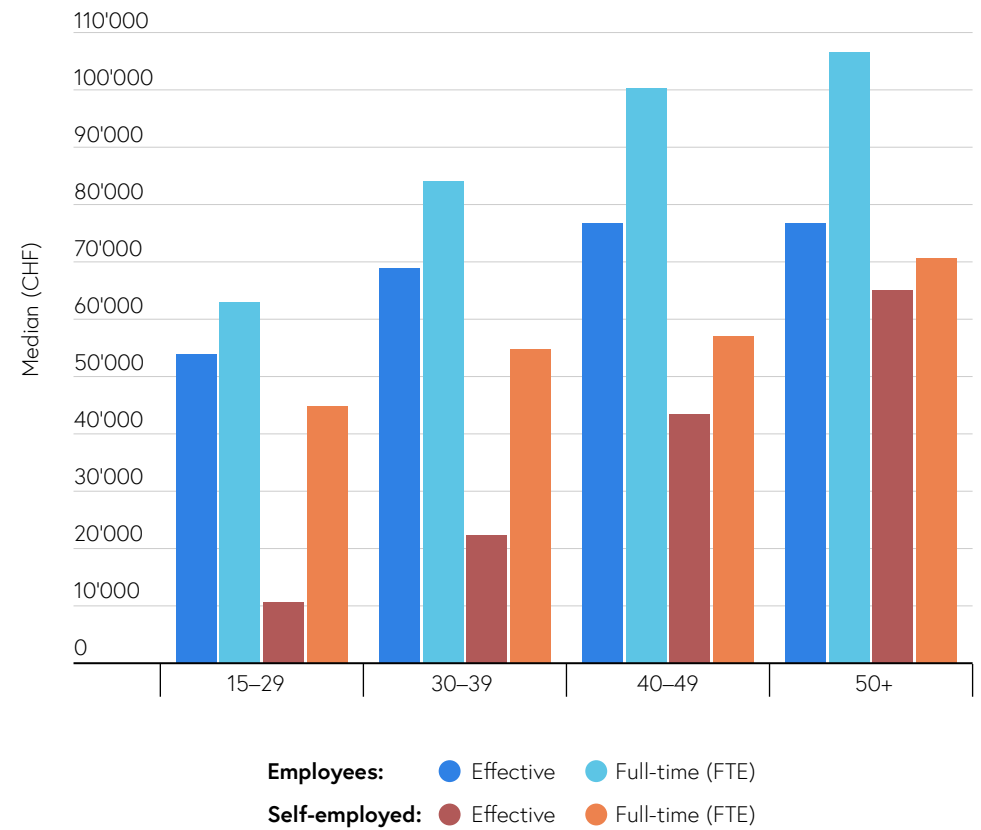
The position of strategic designers (design management/strategic design, design teaching/research, service design) is also striking: they earn significantly higher incomes than those in traditional design professions. This underscores the growing importance of strategic skills and role profiles in the Swiss design market.

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Gross income by industry

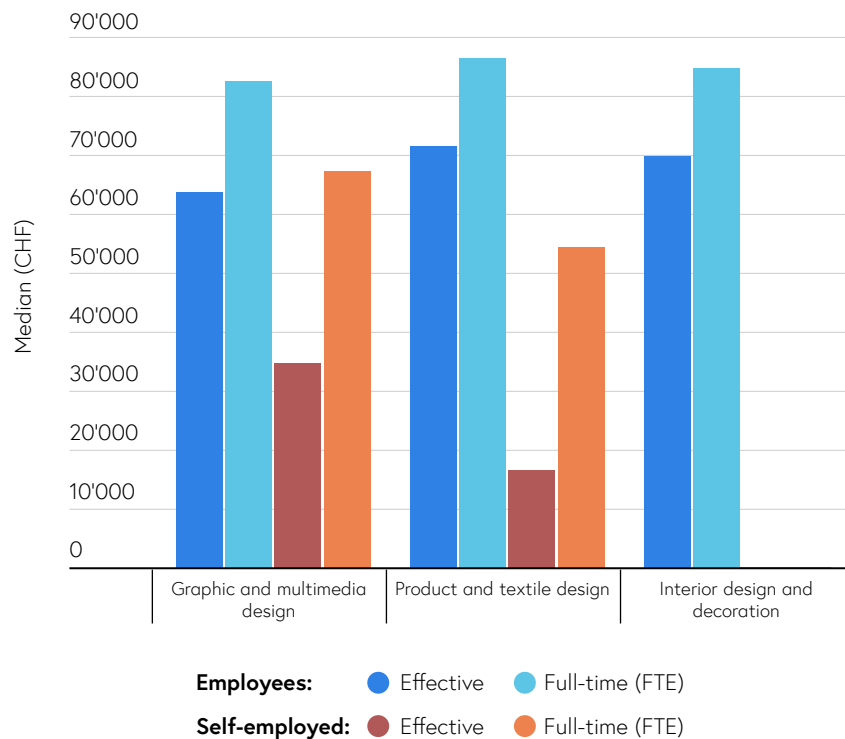


Gross income by age

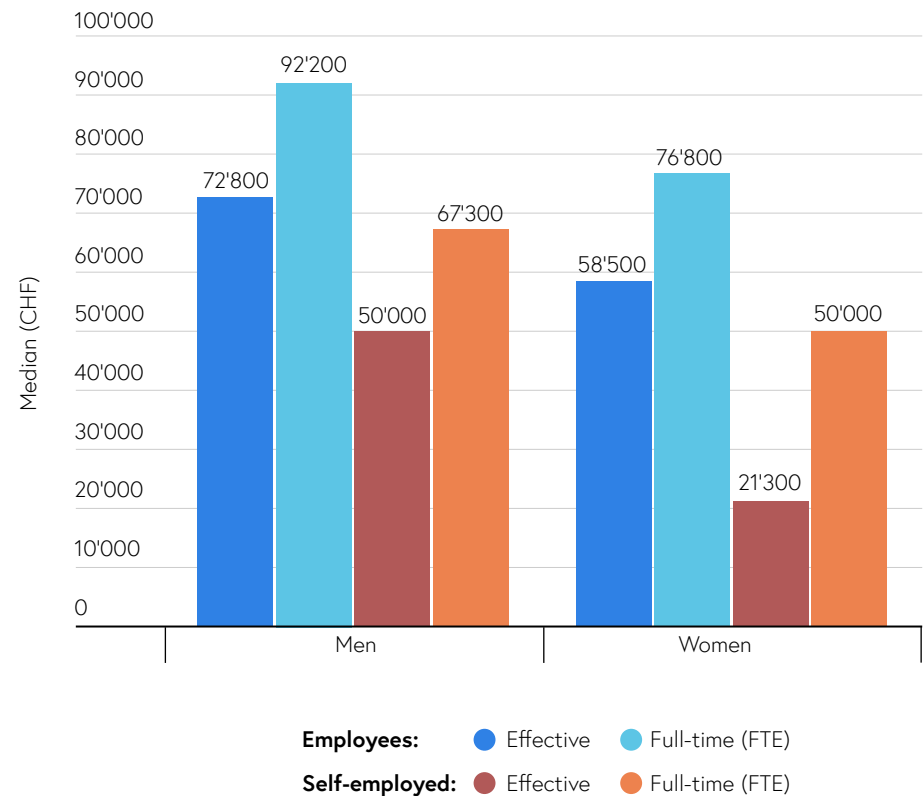


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Gross income by occupation



Gross income by gender

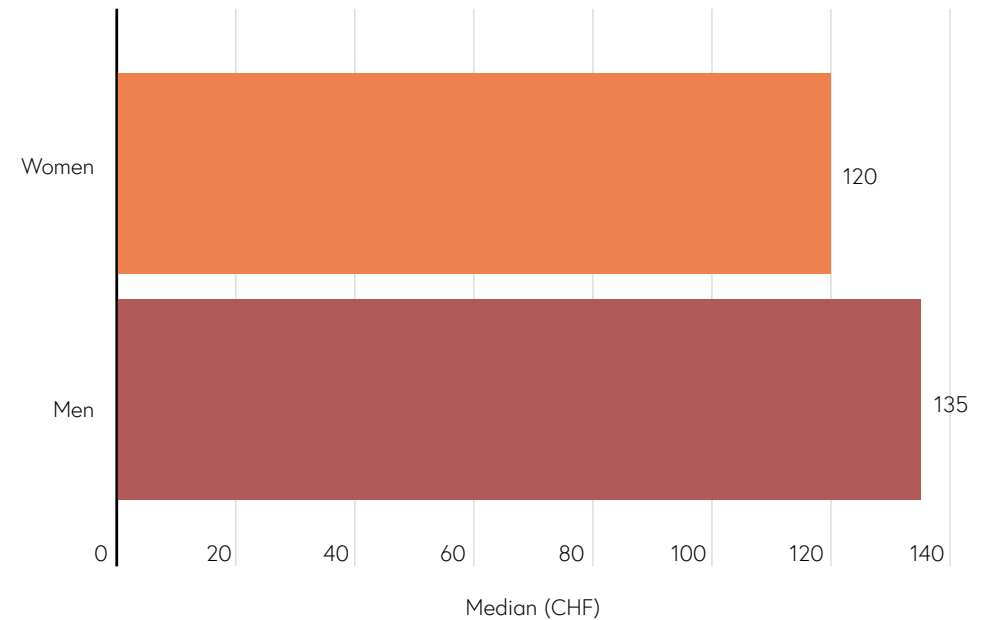


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**swiss design association****Fees**

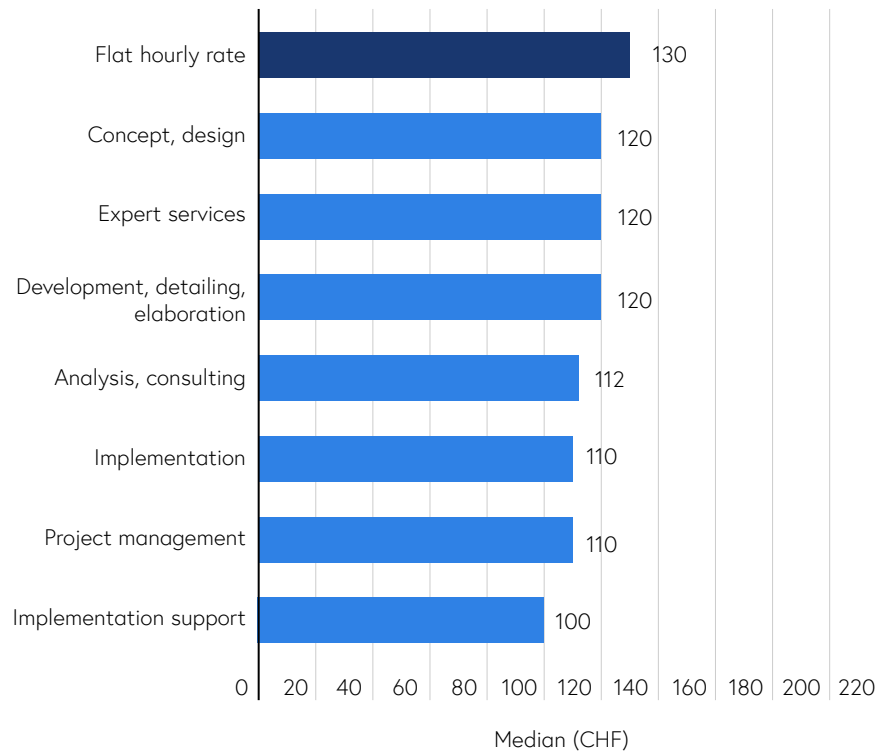
The fee analysis shows a firm correlation of pay with seniority and level of responsibility, whereas the types of services rendered – e.g. analysis, concept development, project management – play a lesser role. Hourly rates increase mostly with growing experience, specialization, and management responsibility.

Women receive lower fees than men across all levels of experience. The survey also shows that although many designers report stable or rising fee rates, they also emphasize a clear need for more guidance in the design market, for fee benchmarks, and for legal support.

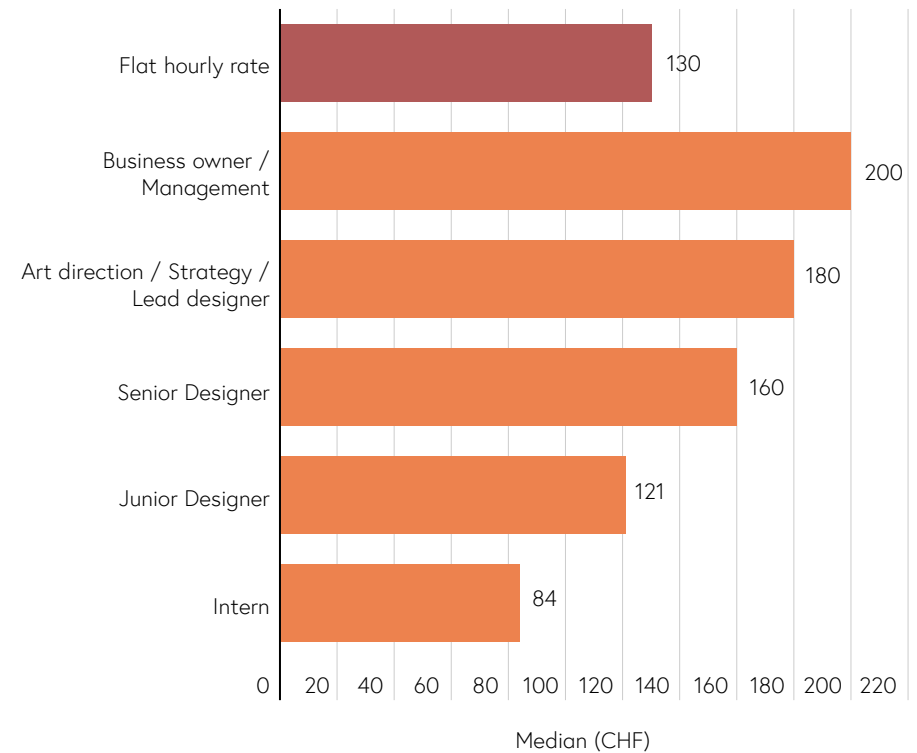
**Hourly rate by gender**

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Hourly rate based on performance



Hourly rate based on function



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## **How Swiss designers assess their economic situation**

Many designers experience their financial situation as uncertain. Although the majority say they can get by on their current income, concerns about the future and gaps in pension provision are widespread. Many also perceive their career development as limited. A significant proportion of respondents have seriously considered leaving the field – often for economic reasons but also due to high stress levels or a lack of prospects.

## **Qualitative feedback**

The responses to the open-ended questions point to a variety of challenges: increased pressure to justify bids, non-transparent award procedures, difficult entry conditions, and the often inadequate strategic integration of design in organizations.

Some respondents mention growing unease in dealing with AI – particularly with regard to future demand, pricing, and copyright issues. Frequent mention is also made of a desire for clear guidelines, for greater emphasis on pricing and negotiation skills in training and practice, and for better social security, especially for the self-employed.

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## Key findings of the study

The economic situation of designers varies significantly depending on whether they are employed or self-employed. This is reflected not only in the level of income, but also in its predictability and security, as well as in the availability of social and retirement benefits.

Gender-specific differences persist across roles, activities, and forms of employment. Both in terms of income and fees, the gender pay gap is significantly above the Swiss average – indicating the need for continued political and structural action.

The fee analysis also shows that seniority, experience, and level of responsibility play a much greater role than the type of service provided. Many designers perceive their financial situation as fragile and are concerned about their professional future and retirement benefits.

Entering the labor market is particularly challenging for young professionals. It turns out that practice-oriented educational pathways – especially higher technical colleges and professional certificates – are highly valued in the labor market. Academic degree programs, including bachelor's degrees from universities of applied sciences, do not automatically lead to better financial prospects, which highlights the need to rethink the actual educational returns of different training pathways.

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### How the SDA will continue its work

The available data will be used to advocate for fair wage and fee conditions in the political and economic spheres: the SDA is using the findings of the study as a basis for its next steps. Building on the patterns that have emerged, it is working with members, partners from politics, business, and educational institutions to strengthen transparency and fairness in Swiss design and to improve the framework conditions for the profession in the long term.

In order to highlight developments in the Swiss design market not just selectively but over the long term, the SDA repeats this study **every two years**. The aim is to keep the wage monitor up to date in order to provide, over time, a reliable, continuous data basis to track the changes in wages and fees in Swiss design, while at the same time creating the transparency that many members have long been calling for.

The current study thus forms an important starting point for in-depth discussions, professional exchange, and the further development of knowledge and skills within the industry. It provides a solid basis for actively shaping the future viability of the design industry in Switzerland in an evidence-based manner.

The complete scientific study can be obtained free of charge from the Swiss Design Association office:

**[sda@swiss-design-association.ch](mailto:sda@swiss-design-association.ch)**