SDEC

ECOSYSTEM REPORT

2021 PRE-AI BASELINE EDITION

The first empirical benchmark of Cameroon's design workforce, creative tooling, employment structures, and earnings prior to the generative AI era.

The State of the Design Ecosystem in Cameroon

Insights from 125 practicing designers across Cameroon and the benchmark agenda for SDEC 2026.

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ABOUT SDEC

Initiated by **Ndouken Theryx** and supported by **LotinCorp**, SDEC replaces guesswork about Cameroon's creative industry with transparent survey data from 125 practicing designers.

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Initiated & Edited by Ndouken Theryx

Data Collected: March to October 2021

SUPPORTED BY LotinCorp BRANDING AGENCY

CHAPTER 01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Young, Self-Taught Ecosystem at a Crossroads

Cameroon's design workforce is formally educated, resilient, and overwhelmingly self-taught, yet held back by low design incomes, urban concentration, and a steep gender gap.

Surveyed between March and October 2021, **125 practicing designers** reveal an industry anchored in two cities: Douala (Littoral) and Yaounde (Centre) account for 95.2% of respondents. While 66.3% hold university degrees, nearly four in five (78.4%) learned design online rather than in formal design schools.

Graphic design remains the universal entry point (78.0%), but designers practice nearly four distinct skills on average (3.93), spanning UI design, illustration, UX, and video editing. Most work in micro-agencies or freelance alongside full-time jobs.

Compensation remains compressed: 70.9% earn under 150,000 FCFA (~$270 USD) per month directly from design, and 54.9% maintain outside income streams. Crossing five years of experience, operating in Douala, or working remotely for international clients drives the strongest pay leaps.

WHY THIS 2021 BASELINE MATTERS NOW

Collected right before generative AI reshaped creative workflows worldwide, this dataset serves as Cameroon's pre-AI historical benchmark and sets the baseline for the upcoming **SDEC 2026 AI-Era Edition**.

78.4%

Self-taught via the Internet despite 66.3% holding university degrees.

70.9%

Earn under 150,000 FCFA/mo (~$270) directly from design work.

2.5×

Higher share earning 151k+ FCFA from design in Douala vs. Yaounde.

CHAPTER 02

KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

Seven Signals Defining the Ecosystem

125
Designers surveyed across 8 regions

95.2%
Based in Douala or Yaounde

87.2%
Male vs. 12.8% female

58.4%
Work as freelancers

01 / GEOGRAPHY

Two cities hold nearly all talent

Littoral (48.8%) and Centre (46.4%) dominate. Eight other regions account for just 6.4% combined.

02 / INCLUSION

Steep gender gap (12.8% women)

Only 16 respondents identified as female, highlighting an urgent need for targeted outreach and mentorship.

03 / EDUCATION

University-educated, self-taught in design

66.3% hold degrees, yet 78.4% learned design online and only 18.4% attended a specialized school.

04 / SKILLS

Designers wear nearly four hats

Graphic design leads (78.0%), with practitioners averaging 3.93 skills and 3.70 tools each.

05 / STRUCTURE

Micro-agencies and hybrid freelancing

68.2% work in teams of 1-20 staff, mainly in Communication (63.5%) and Marketing (52.2%).

06 / COMPENSATION

Design alone rarely pays the bills

70.9% earn under 150,000 FCFA/mo from design work; 54.9% depend on outside revenue streams.

07 / MOBILITY

Tenure, Douala, and remote export pay off

Passing five years triples higher-tier earnings. International remote workers (8.0%) earn the most overall.

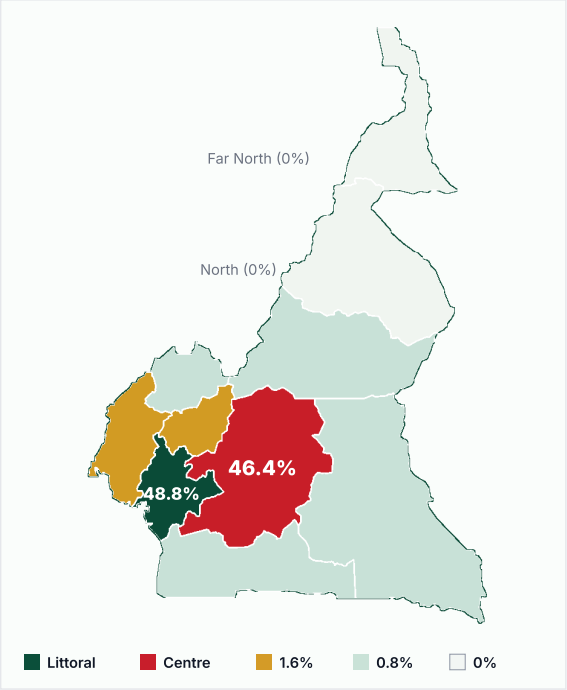
SECTION 01 DEMOGRAPHICS & BACKGROUND

Where Cameroon's Designers Live

Creative activity is split almost evenly between Douala and Yaounde, leaving eight regions with minimal representation.

FIGURE 1

Geographic Footprint Across Cameroon



REGIONAL SHARE

Littoral (Douala)	48.8%
Centre (Yaounde)	46.4%
West (Bafoussam)	1.6%
South West (Buea)	1.6%
North West (Bamenda)	0.8%
Adamawa (Ngaoundere)	0.8%
East (Bertoua)	0.8%
South (Ebolowa)	0.8%

North and Far North recorded 0.0%.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Littoral (48.8%) and **Centre (46.4%)** capture 95.2% of surveyed designers, mirroring where agencies, corporate clients, and reliable broadband cluster. Expanding digital creative hubs beyond these two capitals remains a major nationwide opportunity.

SECTION 01

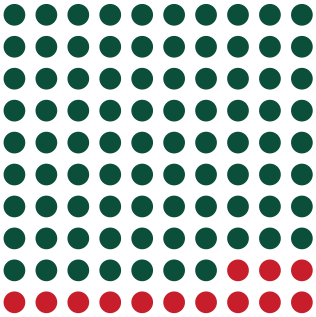
Gender & Age Profile

The workforce is young and heavily male: seven in ten designers are in their twenties, and nearly seven men practice for every woman.

FIGURE 2

Gender Balance & Age Distribution

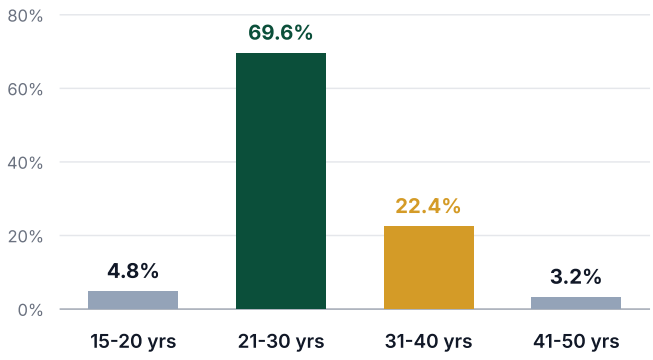
Gender Balance



87.2%
Male

12.8%
Female

Age Distribution



12.8%

Female representation across the entire surveyed community, signaling an urgent inclusion gap.

92.0%

Aged between 21 and 40, led by a dominant 21-30 cohort (69.6%).

SECTION 01

DEMOGRAPHICS & BACKGROUND

Education & Learning Paths

Most designers hold university degrees in other fields while teaching themselves design online.

FIGURE 3

Formal Education Level

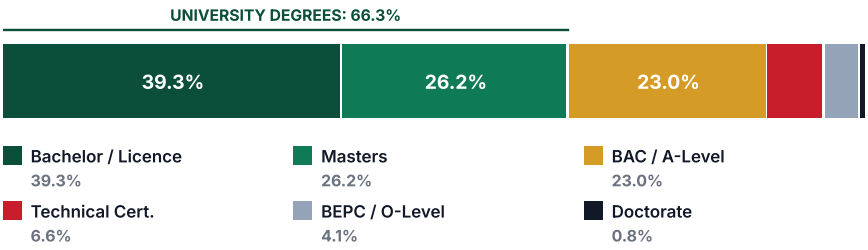


FIGURE 4

How Designers Learned Their Craft



Internet (Self-Taught)	78.4%
Through a Mentor	33.6%
Specialized School	18.4%
Schooled Abroad	3.2%

66.3%

Hold a Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctorate degree, and 89.3% hold at least a BAC / A-Level.

78.4%

Learned design via the Internet. One-third (33.6%) worked with a mentor, while just 18.4% attended a specialized school.

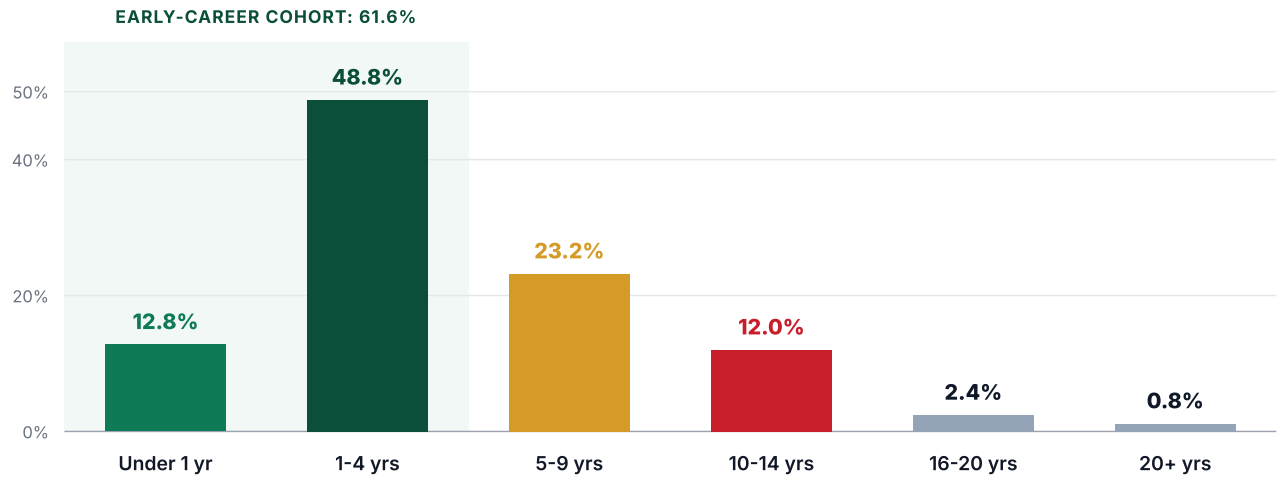
SECTION 01 DEMOGRAPHICS & BACKGROUND

Years of Experience

Over six in ten designers have under five years of practice, leaving senior mentorship capacity thin.

FIGURE 5

Distribution of Design Tenure



61.6%

Early-career practitioners with four years of experience or less (48.8% between 1-4 years; 12.8% under 1 year).

15.2%

Senior veterans with a decade or more of design practice, creating high demand for experienced design leaders.

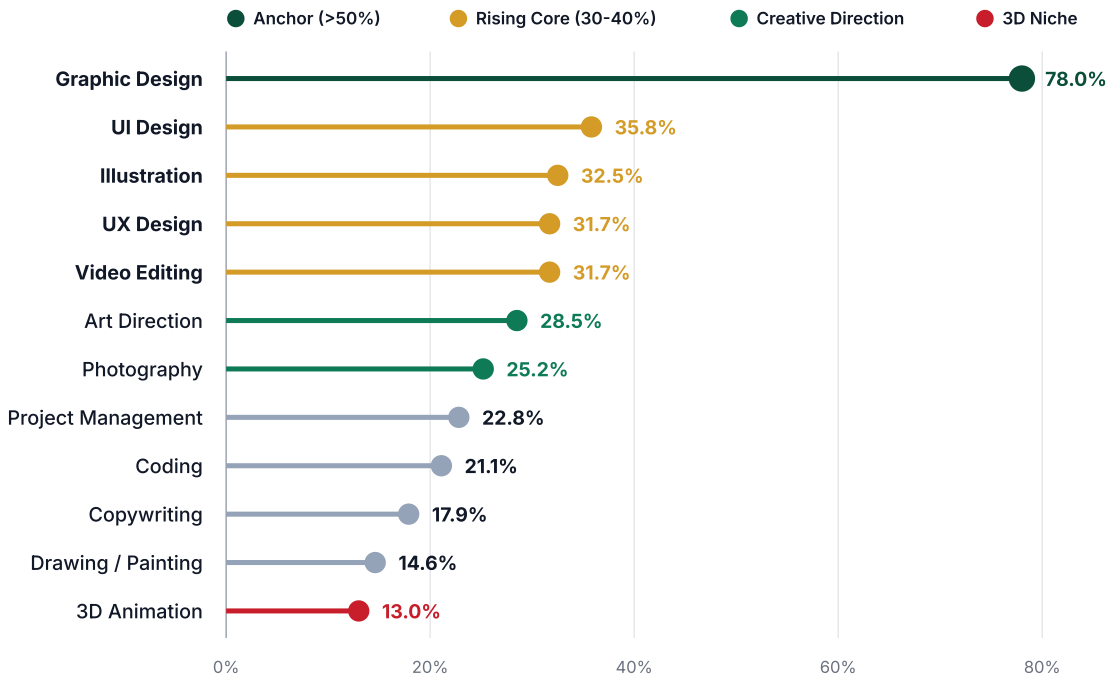
SECTION 02

Skills & Disciplines

Graphic design anchors the ecosystem, yet practitioners average 3.93 distinct skills each to meet broad client demands.

FIGURE 6

Top Skills Practiced by Designers



RISING DIGITAL & MOTION SKILLS

UI design (35.8%), illustration (32.5%), UX design (31.7%), and video editing (31.7%) lead the second wave of capabilities, while 21.1% also code. Additional "Other" mentions centered on 2D animation, motion graphics, brand design, web design, and architecture.

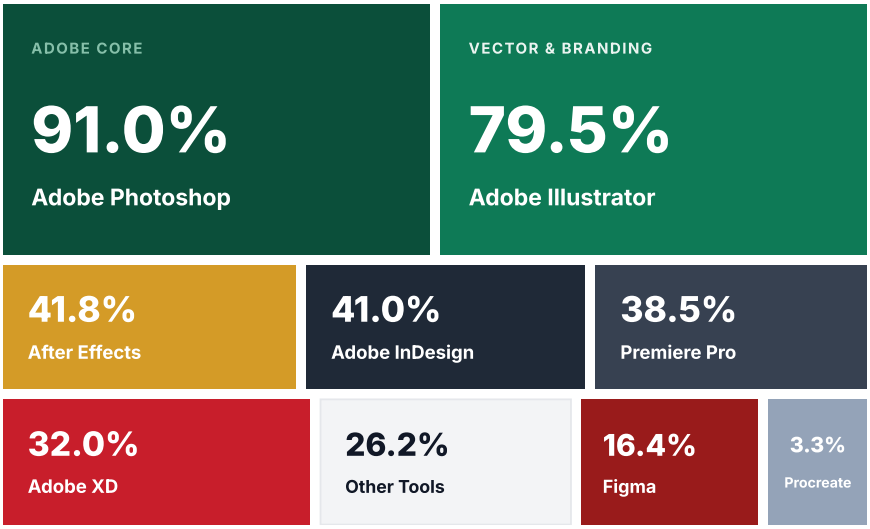
SECTION 02

Software Stack & Tools

Adobe Creative Cloud dominated local workflows in 2021, with zero generative AI tools cited anywhere in the stack.

FIGURE 7

Regular Software Ecosystem



3.70

Average number of tools used regularly per designer.

2×

Adobe XD (32.0%) still doubled Figma (16.4%) in 2021.

0%

Mentioned generative AI tools, establishing a pure pre-AI baseline.

BEYOND ADOBE: 3D & AFFORDABLE ALTERNATIVES

Among free-text "Other" tools, **Blender** led 3D adoption alongside Cinema 4D and Maya, while **GIMP, Affinity Suite, Inkscape, Filmora, and Canva** reflected strong price sensitivity to recurring subscriptions.

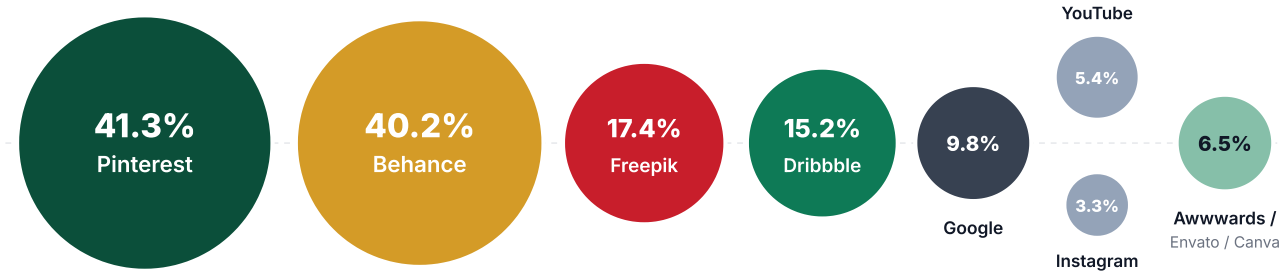
SECTION 02

Creative Inspiration

Pinterest and Behance sit in a virtual dead heat as Cameroon's primary creative reference hubs.

FIGURE 8

Most Cited Inspiration Websites



INSPIRATION MEETS SPEED

While **Pinterest (41.3%)** and **Behance (40.2%)** dominate visual discovery, **Freepik's** third-place finish (17.4%) ahead of Dribbble (15.2%) highlights heavy reliance on ready-to-edit vectors and mockups under tight client turnarounds.

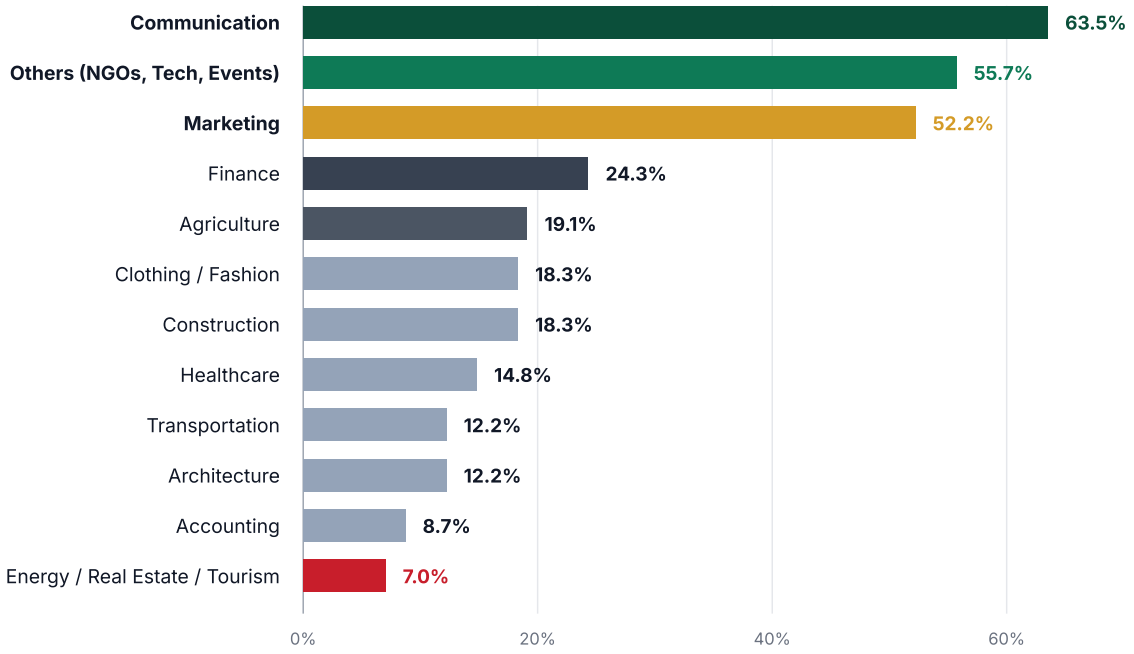
SECTION 02

Industries Served

Communication and marketing firms anchor local demand, while high-value sectors like energy, real estate, and tourism remain largely untapped.

FIGURE 9

Sectors Designers Have Worked For



SECTION 02

Company Size

Nearly seven in ten designers work inside micro or small organizations of 20 people or fewer.

FIGURE 10

Employer Organization Size



1-4 employees (Micro)	38.1%
5-20 employees (Small)	30.1%
Not sure	20.4%
21-50 employees (Mid)	7.1%
51+ employees (Large)	4.4%

SMALL TEAMS, FEW ENTERPRISE DESIGN DEPARTMENTS

Only **4.4%** of respondents work inside enterprises of 51+ employees. Meanwhile, **20.4%** are unsure of their employer's headcount, reflecting informal contracts and project-based client relationships.

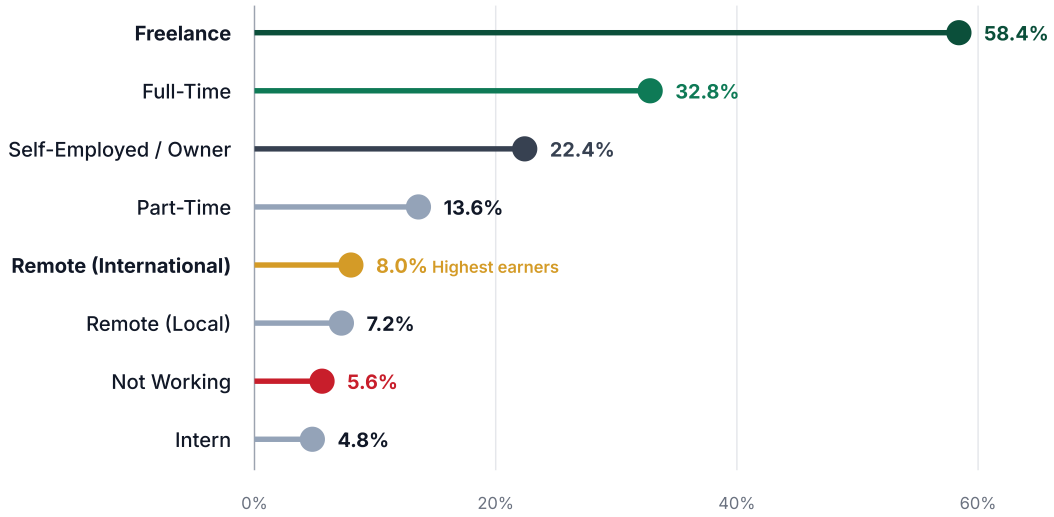
SECTION 02

Employment Structure

Freelancing is the prevailing reality (58.4%), frequently layered on top of full-time jobs to bridge income gaps.

FIGURE 11

Work Arrangements



THE GENERALIST TRAP

Micro-agency dominance paired with multi-skill hiring means small employers routinely expect one "Graphic Designer" to cover branding, video, photography, and web design on a single modest salary. Meanwhile, just **8.0%** work remotely for international clients, pointing to a major export frontier.

SECTION 03

Let's Talk About Money

Separating total monthly earnings from design-specific income reveals why most practitioners maintain portfolio careers.

FIGURE 12

Total Monthly Income vs. Design-Only Income (FCFA)

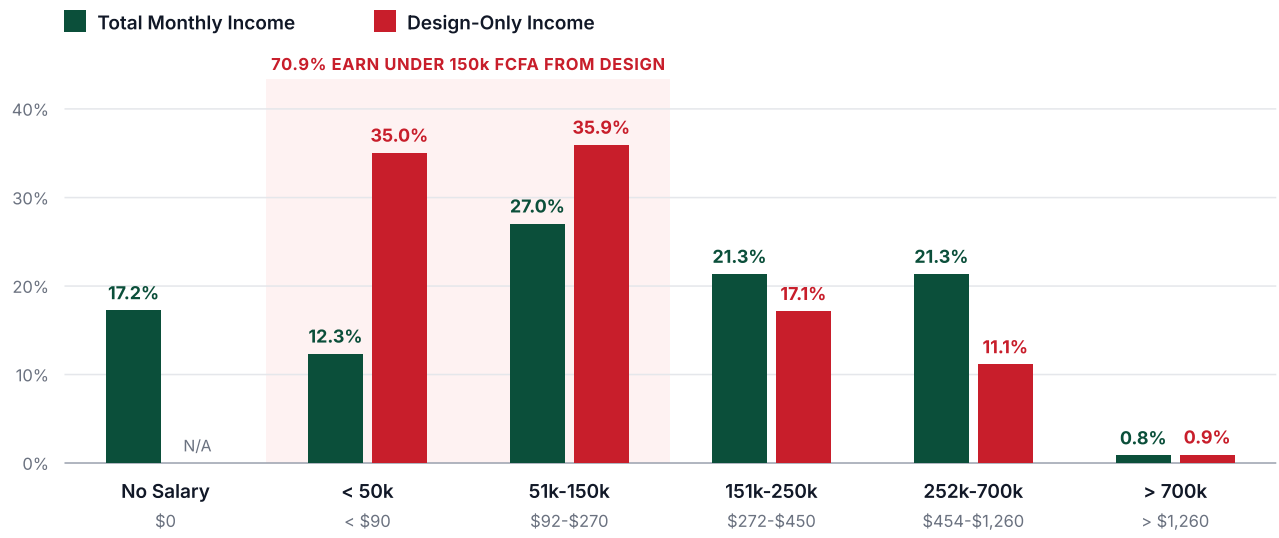
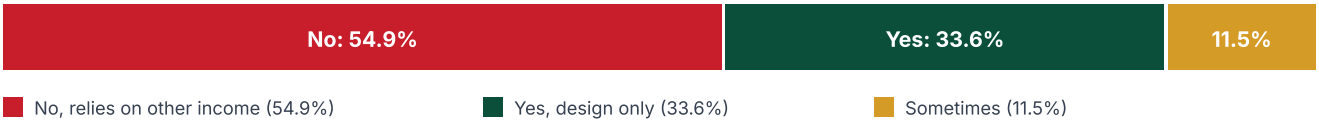


FIGURE 13

Is Design Your Only Source of Revenue?



SECTION 03

Compensation Breakdown

While 43.4% earn above 150,000 FCFA across all income sources, only 29.1% reach that mark from design work alone.

70.9%

Earn 150,000 FCFA (~$270) or less per month from design work.

54.9%

Rely on non-design income streams (plus 11.5% intermittently).

0.9%

Earn over 700,000 FCFA (~$1,260) per month from design.

MONTHLY INCOME BRACKET (FCFA)	APPROX. USD (2021)	TOTAL INCOME	DESIGN-ONLY INCOME
No regular salary	$0	17.2%	N/A
Less than 50,000 FCFA	< $90	12.3%	**35.0%**
51,000 to 150,000 FCFA	$92 - $270	**27.0%**	**35.9%**
151,000 to 250,000 FCFA	$272 - $450	21.3%	17.1%
252,000 to 700,000 FCFA	$454 - $1,260	21.3%	11.1%
More than 700,000 FCFA	> $1,260	0.8%	0.9%

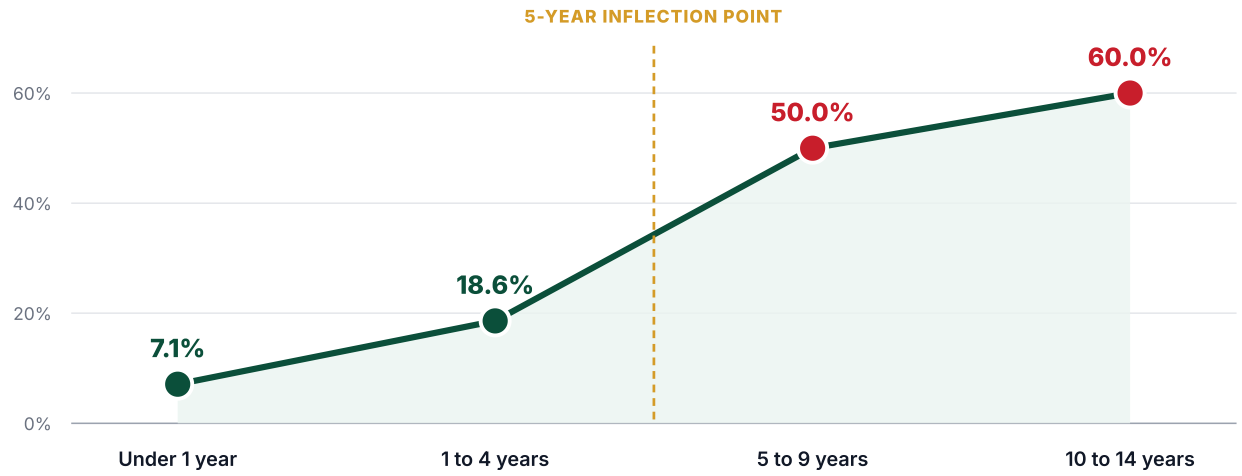
SECTION 03

The Five-Year Inflection Point

Tenure is one of the strongest predictors of compensation: crossing five years in design nearly triples the odds of earning above 150,000 FCFA/month from creative work.

FIGURE 14

Share Earning 151,000+ FCFA/Month from Design by Experience



WHY RETENTION MATTERS

Early years are financially steep: only **7.1%** of newcomers and **18.6%** of designers with 1-4 years pass 151,000 FCFA/month from design. Designers who persist past year five jump to **50.0%** (5-9 years) and **60.0%** (10-14 years).

SECTION 03

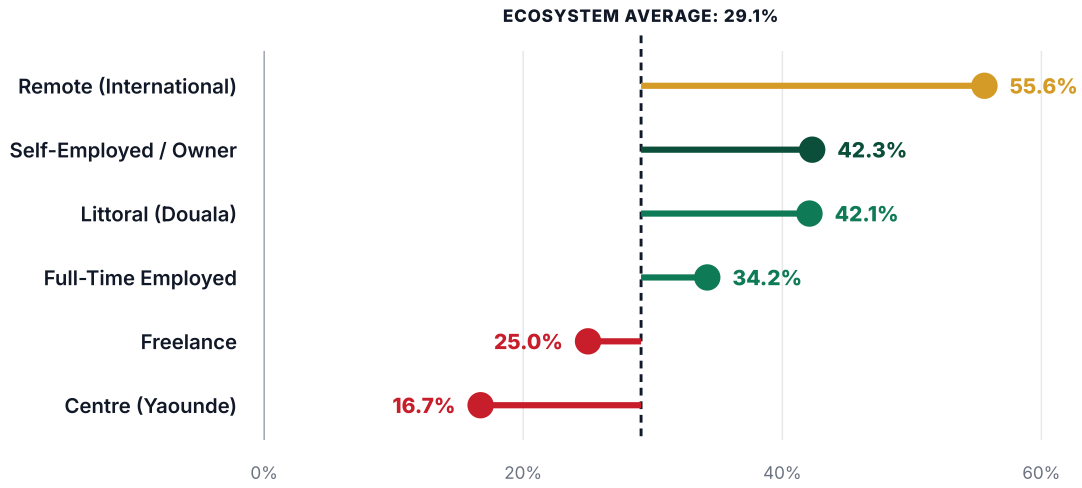
EARNINGS DRIVERS

Geography, Remote Work & Ownership

Beyond tenure, where designers work and how they structure client relationships separate top earners from the ecosystem average.

FIGURE 15

Share Earning 151,000+ FCFA/Month from Design vs. 29.1% Average



REMOTE EXPORT

55.6% from design (88.9% total)

International remote workers out-earn local freelancers more than 2 to 1.

DOUALA VS. YAOUNDE

2.5x regional earnings gap

42.1% in Littoral pass 151k FCFA from design vs. 16.7% in Centre.

OWNERSHIP & UI/UX

Studios & UI/UX lead pay

Business owners (42.3%) and UI/UX specialists (33.3%) beat solo freelancers (25.0%).

SECTION 04

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

One Last Question... Or Two

Thirty-three designers shared candid remarks, and 103 opted in by email to receive these findings, confirming strong appetite for local industry data.

01 / VALUATION

Undervaluation & weak design culture

Clients routinely underpay and overlook how design drives commercial results.

02 / ACCESS

High training, PC & software costs

Prohibitive license and hardware costs fuel piracy and leave mobile designers underserved.

03 / HIRING

Role bloat in job descriptions

Listings frequently bundle five creative disciplines under one "Graphic Designer" title.

04 / GROWTH

Ambition to export services abroad

Designers seek practical playbooks to win international clients and scale revenue 3x to 4x.

> *Difficile d'apprendre seul. Les formations coutent chere, les machines coutent chere, les logiciels sont quasi toujours pirates... SEULE LA PASSION NOUS MAINTIENT AU CAMEROUN.*
>
> Translation: Training, PCs, and software are expensive and clients pay poorly. "Only passion keeps us going in Cameroon."

> *Je souhaiterais avoir des astuces sur comment exporter efficacement mes services a l'exterieur, et multiplier mon chiffre d'affaires mensuel par 3 ou 4.*
>
> Translation: Seeking advice on exporting services abroad and multiplying monthly revenue 3x to 4x.

> *Do not have a job title for Graphic Designer that has a job description of five other jobs in one.*
>
> Respondent on local hiring standards

> *Merci pour l'initiative. Il existe tres peu de donnees reelles concernant les metiers de la creation au Cameroun.*
>
> Translation: "Thank you for this initiative. Very little real data exists about creative professions in Cameroon."

CHAPTER 07

METHODOLOGY & LIMITATIONS

How This Study Was Conducted

Survey Design & Collection

Data was collected between **March 15 and October 9, 2021** via a bilingual (English and French) Google Forms questionnaire taking under six minutes to complete, yielding **125 submissions**.

The survey was shared across design communities, social media, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Dikalo. Respondents received a complimentary copy of *"28 Survival Tips for the Freelancer"* upon completion.

Analysis & Conversions

Multi-select responses were parsed into individual category shares, and free-text entries (inspiration websites and additional tools) were normalized to consolidate spelling variants. USD conversions use the 2021 average exchange rate of ~555 FCFA per USD.

LIMITATIONS

Online self-selection: Digital distribution favors urban, connected practitioners over rural designers.

Bilingual phrasing: Future editions will run fully parallel French and English forms.

Self-reported brackets: Income ranges are self-reported, and optional items carry minor non-response.

PRIVACY & ETHICS

No names or employer identities were collected. The 103 voluntary email addresses submitted for report delivery were stripped prior to analysis and are never linked to responses.

CHAPTER 08

LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE

From the 2021 Pre-AI Baseline to SDEC 2026

Captured immediately before generative AI transformed creative work globally, this 2021 dataset establishes Cameroon's pre-AI benchmark and sets up a five-year comparison for **SDEC 2026**.

DIMENSION	2021 PRE-AI BASELINE	KEY QUESTIONS FOR SDEC 2026
Tooling & AI	Photoshop (91.0%) and Illustrator (79.5%) dominated; Adobe XD doubled Figma; **0% AI tools** cited.	How deeply are generative AI tools used daily, and has Figma fully replaced Adobe XD?
Skills & Value	Graphic design anchored 78.0% of respondents amid heavy client role bloat.	Has AI commoditized basic logos and flyers while raising premiums for UX, strategy, and art direction?
Pricing & Pay	70.9% earned under 150k FCFA/mo from design; 54.9% needed outside income.	Have AI speed gains boosted margins, or have local clients used AI to push fees down?
Remote Export	95.2% operated in Douala or Yaounde; only 8.0% worked remotely internationally.	Have global payment rails and remote platforms lifted international work beyond 8.0%?
Inclusion	78.4% self-taught online; license costs drove piracy; women stood at 12.8%.	Are paid AI plans creating new barriers, and has female representation grown past 12.8%?

LAUNCHING SDEC 2026

Keeping core 2021 metrics comparable while adding a dedicated AI-era module will give Cameroon its first five-year longitudinal view of creative work.

CHAPTER 09

CONCLUSION & PRIORITIES

Where the Ecosystem Goes Next

Cameroon's design community runs on remarkable grit and self-taught talent. Turning that energy into sustainable creative careers requires four focused shifts.

PRIORITY 01

Build freelance business & export readiness

With 58.4% freelancing and international remote workers earning 2x+ higher design incomes, training must go beyond software into pricing, contracts, and global client acquisition.

PRIORITY 02

Close the 12.8% gender gap

Scholarships, women-in-design mentorship circles, and visible female speakers on local stages are vital to widen the creative pipeline.

PRIORITY 03

Standardize local roles & rate guides

Publishing clear local role templates (Graphic vs. UI/UX vs. Motion) and transparent pay benchmarks will help curb multi-role hiring abuse.

PRIORITY 04

Decentralize training & launch SDEC 2026

Take workshops beyond Douala and Yaounde with accessible tools (Figma, Blender, GIMP, Affinity), and track five-year AI-era progress in SDEC 2026.

CHAPTER 10

The People Behind This Report

This benchmark grew from a personal initiative into a community effort thanks to the leadership, advice, and generosity of Cameroon's creative and tech champions.



Ndouken Theryx
INITIATOR & LEAD RESEARCHER

Conceived, led, and edited the study to replace assumptions with real ecosystem data.



Henri Lotin
FOUNDER, LOTINCORP

Supervised the research, guided the strategy, and supported publication via LotinCorp.



Kenneth Binwi
VISUAL GRAPHICS CONTRIBUTOR

Supported early visual direction and graphics for the presentation of the findings.



Bine Moukouri
COMMUNITY CHAMPION

Championed the research early by sharing raw survey insights live on conference stages.



Lorentz Kwonmazou
LEAD, GDG DOUALA

Brought strong developer-community backing and visibility through GDG Douala.



William Takor Manyi Arrey
RESEARCH ADVISOR

Provided key guidance to sharpen the survey instrument and research questions.

Special Thanks: Gratitude also to **Bass Wallet**, **Xtincel**, and all **125 Cameroonian designers** who took the time to share their candid experiences.