

Air of Despair: 57% of Unemployed Americans Blame COVID-19 for Job Loss

60% Say Pandemic Responsible for Continued Unemployment

New Harris Poll Survey Offers Detailed Look into Who is Unemployed and Why

OKLAHOMA CITY, Dec. 9, 2020 – The majority of unemployed Americans say the COVID-19 pandemic is most responsible for their job loss and continued unemployment, which is becoming more daunting as time passes.

This is according to a newly released survey conducted by The Harris Poll and commissioned by Express Employment Professionals.

More than 2 in 5 unemployed adults (41%) have been out of work for six months or less, becoming unemployed during the pandemic. The most common reason they are unemployed is their job or position was eliminated due to COVID-19 (33%), followed by they quit (12%) or were laid off (11%). Fifty-seven percent say the pandemic is most responsible for their current unemployment and 60% believe COVID-19 is the reason they are still unemployed.

Most unemployed adults report negative feelings about being out of work, saying they:

- Find being unemployed really stressful (78%)
- Are becoming insecure about their ability to become employed again the longer they are out of work (65%)
- Are becoming more discouraged the longer they are unemployed (65%)
- Feel desperate due to being out of work (62%)
- Feel like people are judging them because they are still out of work (60%)

There is a hint of resiliency as 74% are confident everything will turn out fine and they are able to handle the stress of unemployment (69%).

However, the black cloud of the pandemic continues to linger as 19% of unemployed U.S. adults would not or are unsure if they would return to work right now if offered a job, and of those,

about half say it is because of concerns about the COVID-19 infection rate (52%) and 45% worried about safety.

“The workforce has been hit hard this year by COVID-19, and it’s understandable unemployed Americans are becoming more discouraged the longer the pandemic lingers,” Express CEO Bill Stoller said. “This new survey gives us great insight into the plight of the unemployed and how they are staying afloat.”

The national survey of 1,504 U.S. unemployed adults ages 18 and older was conducted online by The Harris Poll between Oct. 15 and Oct. 28, 2020. It offers a detailed, in-depth look at who is unemployed and why.

Efforts Deteriorating in Job Search

Finding a job is the top priority for the majority of unemployed adults (70%) who say there is no activity more important right now than finding a job. On average, they spend 12 hours a week looking for work.

Nearly four-in-five unemployed adults (79%) say they have not completely given up looking for a job but most (73%) expected to find a job more quickly. Sixty-four percent agree they are finding it hard to keep their effort level high in the job hunt, and 67% say the longer they are unemployed, the harder they’re finding it to keep working hard to find a job.

Unemployed adults applied to 11 jobs in the previous month but only had one interview, on average. Of those who did not have an interview in the previous month, 19% last had an interview in the third quarter of 2020, while 17% say their last job interview was in the first quarter of this year. Only 9% say they had an interview in the second quarter, presumably due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Notably, the longer adults are unemployed, the less time they say they’ve spent looking for work, the fewer jobs they’ve applied for and the fewer jobs they’ve interviewed for.

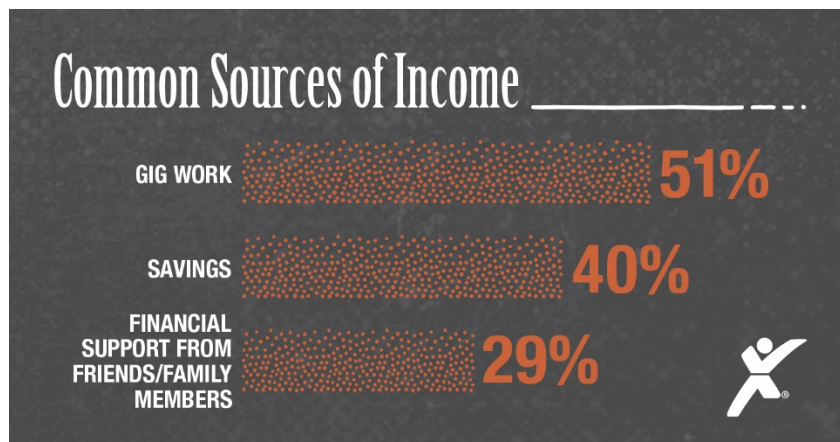


Grim Financial Outlook

More than 2 in 3 unemployed adults (69%) do not feel financially secure right now, and 70% believe they do not have enough savings to survive unemployment much longer.

The most common sources of income during this time are savings (40%) or financial support from friends and family members (29%). Additionally, half of unemployed adults (51%) say they rely on gig work to keep them afloat.

Seven-out-of-ten (70%) say their household currently has some money in savings, but the majority of those with savings (66%) add the amount is less than \$5,000 and think it will last less than six months (61%). Only 50% are confident they will find a job before their savings run out, which could be why the majority (70%) think in regard to the economy, the country is headed in the wrong direction.



Relying on Unemployment Benefits

Looking at national and state unemployment benefits, 3 in 4 (75%) agree there is not enough financial support provided to those individuals who are unemployed, especially given that more than half (56%) used to be the breadwinner for their household.

Twenty-seven percent of unemployed adults report they currently rely on unemployment compensation benefits. Around half (49%) say they would not be able to make ends meet without this assistance. The average income from unemployment benefits among those receiving them is \$828 a month.

Unemployed adults receiving unemployment compensation benefits, on average, applied to 15 jobs in the previous month, whereas those not receiving benefits applied to nine.

Pivoting Job Fields

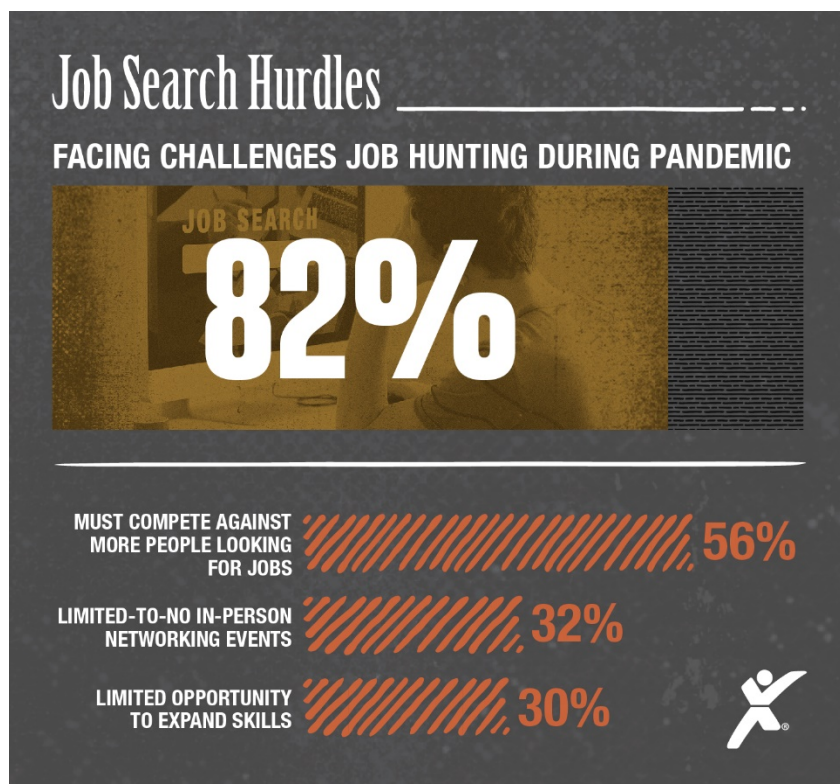
Most unemployed adults (83%) say they are hopeful they will find a job they really want in the next six months. In line with this optimism, more than 2 in 3 (69%) are at least somewhat hopeful they will soon find a job that has good benefits, is for the pay they want (69%) or is as good or better than the last job they had (67%).

The positive outlook, however, appears to decline with age, with Gen Z the most likely and boomers/seniors the least likely to report such hope regarding a job with good benefits (Gen Z, 83%; millennials, 70%; Gen X, 68%; boomers/seniors, 56%) or is for the pay they want (Gen Z, 84%; millennials, 70%; Gen X, 68%; boomers/seniors, 52%).

More than 2 in 3 (69%) are at least somewhat hopeful they will soon find a job in their field, but more than 7 in 10 (71%) believe the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more difficult to find a job in their field currently compared to other job fields. Notably, nearly half of those who were previously employed as white-collar workers (49%) say the pandemic has made it much more difficult to find a job in their field, compared to 38% of blue-collar workers.

Sixty-three percent of unemployed adults are looking for a job in a different field because they haven't been able to find one in their line of work and 57% believe that starting over in a new field is the only way to find a job right now during the COVID-19 pandemic (57%).

Regarding the job search, 82% say they are currently facing challenges while trying to find a job during the COVID-19 pandemic, including competing against more people looking for jobs (56%), limited-to-no opportunities to attend in-person networking events (32%) or limited opportunities to expand their skills (30%).



Additionally, about half of unemployed adults (48%) say they are not surprised they don't have the skills employers want. Many believe expanding their hard skills (35%) or improving their soft skills (29%) would make it easier to find a job during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite 60% saying their education provided them with many of the skills necessary to be successful in the workforce, 37% of those with at least a bachelor's degree wish they had focused on a vocational career rather than getting their college degree.



Accepting Less than Ideal Job Offers

Because of difficulties in the current job process and increased competition from other job seekers, 85% would be willing to accept some aspects of a job that may be less than ideal if they were offered a job right now. Although salary/wage (69%), flexible hours (54%) and benefits (51%) are reported as the most important aspects of a job in unemployed adults' current job search, if offered a job right now, they would most commonly be willing to accept a job not in their desired field (47%), that requires long hours (35%) and a more junior position/title (29%).

The most non-negotiable aspect is salary/wage with only 1 in 4 (26%) saying they'd accept a lower amount.



The majority of unemployed adults (61%) are willing to accept almost any job that will help them pay the bills, particularly those who have been out of work for four-to-six months (72%). More than half (53%) say they don't apply for jobs that pay minimum wage because it's not enough to pay the bills, but 57% agree the COVID-19 pandemic has driven them to start looking for a job with lower wages than they would like.

"A job is about so much more than a paycheck, so our hope is to get people off the sidelines back into the workforce, safely," Stoller said. "Even during these incredibly challenging times, unemployed Americans need to feel a sense of hope and dignity through meaningful employment that will allow them to provide for themselves and their families."

Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between October 15 and October 28, 2020, among 1,504 U.S. unemployed adults (defined as adults ages 18+ in the U.S. who are not employed, but looking for work). Figures are weighted where necessary by age by gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, household income, marital status, household size, weekly internet usage, and propensity to be online to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available upon request.

Generations defined as: Gen Z (ages 18-24), millennials (ages 25-38), Gen X (ages 39-54) and boomers/seniors (ages 55+).

About the Survey

- [Memo from The Harris Poll](#)
- [Study by The Harris Poll](#)
- [Infographic](#)

If you would like to arrange for an interview with Bill Stoller to discuss this topic, please contact Sheena Karami, Director of Corporate Communications and PR, at (405) 717-5966.

About Bill Stoller

William H. "Bill" Stoller is chairman and chief executive officer of Express Employment Professionals. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, the international staffing company has more than 825 franchises in the U.S., Canada and South Africa, and beginning in 2020 will expand to Australia and New Zealand. Since its inception, Express has put more than 8 million people to work worldwide.

About Express Employment Professionals

At Express Employment Professionals, we're in the business of people. From job seekers to client companies, Express helps people thrive and businesses grow. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, OK, our international network of franchises offer localized staffing solutions to the communities they serve, employing 552,000 people across North America in 2019. For more information, visit www.ExpressPros.com.