



54% of Job Seekers Expect a Difficult Search Amid Pay, Competition and Job Worries

Rising costs are influencing 89% of job seekers' decisions to pursue new work.

OKLAHOMA CITY, July 22, 2026 — Finding a job feels difficult for many Americans actively looking for work, according to a new Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey, especially when the right role must match their qualifications, pay needs and long-term goals.

Forty-one percent of U.S. job seekers say they are actively looking for a new job, with 82% focused on full-time positions. Both figures are unchanged from the fall of 2025.

Still, more than half of job seekers (54%) say it will be difficult to find a job in the next six months.



Pay, Fit and Competition Top the List

The survey breaks down where job seekers are feeling the most pressure:

- Finding opportunities that match their qualifications: 46%
- Finding a job with enough pay to cover basic expenses: 44%
- Standing out in a competitive job market: 41%
- Navigating automated hiring processes instead of feeling heard by people: 31%

The experience can also feel uncertain. Nearly a third of job seekers (31%) say companies that claim to be hiring but only collect resumes make it harder to find their next opportunity. Others say their experience does not align cleanly with available roles, with 28% citing overqualification as a barrier and 22% citing underqualification.

Current Job Worries Are Also Driving the Search

Among employed job seekers, concerns about pay, job security and the economy remain top of mind.

Their biggest fears about their current job include:

- Not getting the salary increase or raise they deserve: 37%
- A slowdown in work opportunities because of the economy: 31%
- Their company reducing the workforce due to the economic climate: 30%
- Technology or AI negatively impacting their role: 25%

However, uncertainty isn't the only reason employed job seekers are exploring other options. Many are motivated by quality-of-work factors, with 41% seeking better work-life balance, 40% looking for stronger growth opportunities in their current industry and 37% hoping to find or negotiate better compensation.

Rising costs are also part of the equation, with nearly 9 in 10 job seekers saying increasing prices have had at least some impact on their decision to pursue new employment. For 63%, that impact is moderate or substantial.

"The job search may feel difficult, but that does not mean the market is standing still," said Bob Funk Jr., CEO, president and chairman of Express Employment International. "Job seekers are being more intentional about what they want, and employers should be just as intentional about what they offer. Clear expectations, realistic qualifications and strong communication can help turn a challenging search into the right match."

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Survey Methodology

The Job Seeker Report was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from May 19 to June 8, 2026, among 1,000 adults ages 18 and older who are employed but looking for a new job or not employed and looking for work.

For full survey methodologies, please contact Sheena.Hollander@ExpressPros.com, Director of Corporate Communications & PR.

If you would like to arrange for an interview to discuss this topic, please contact Sheena.Hollander@ExpressPros.com, Director of Corporate Communications & PR.

About Robert (Bob) Funk Jr.

Robert (Bob) Funk Jr. is the Chief Executive Officer, President and Chairman of Express Employment International, a global staffing franchisor founded and headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He leads a portfolio of workforce solution brands, including the flagship Express Employment Professionals franchise, along with several affiliated brands serving specialized markets. The Express franchise brand is an industry-leading, international staffing company with franchise locations across the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

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