

## U.S. Memo

Date: November 20, 2020  
To: Express Employment Professionals  
From: The Harris Poll  
Subject: State of the Unemployed 2020 Survey – United States

*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.*

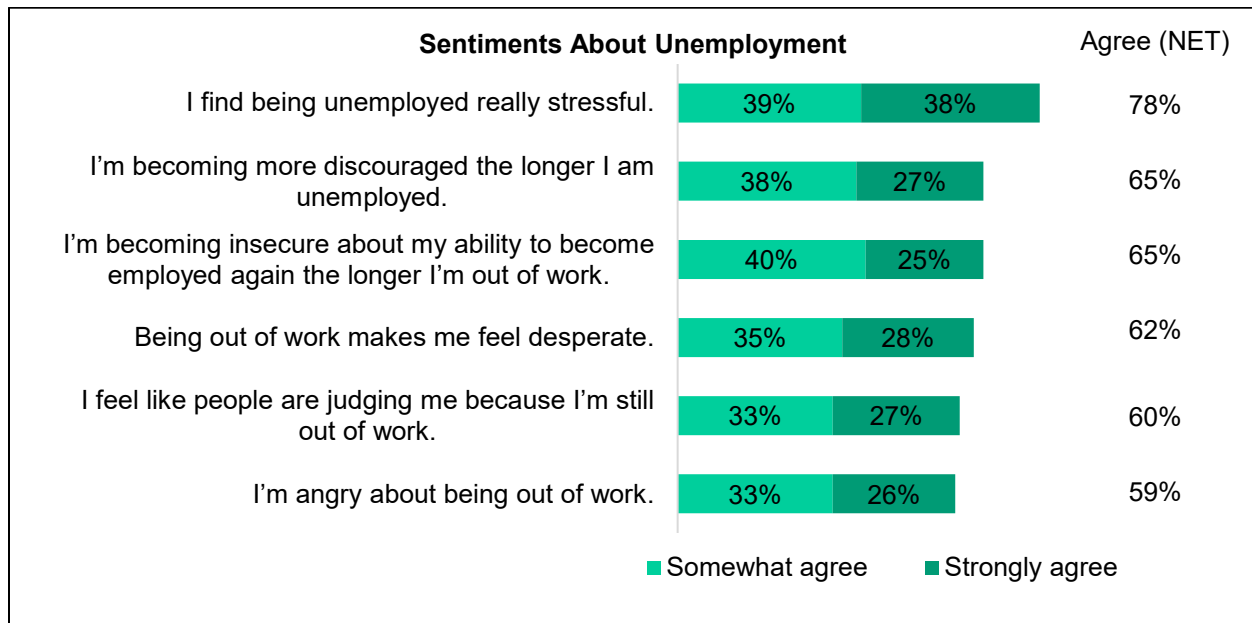
*All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, The Harris Poll avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.*

*Respondents for this survey were selected among panel members who have agreed to participate in surveys. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.*

***The COVID-19 pandemic is unsurprisingly one of the top reasons for unemployment in the U.S., with a substantial portion of unemployed Americans losing their job during the pandemic. The pandemic is also the most commonly reported reason for their continued unemployment, which elicits negative feelings as more time passes without work.***

More than 2 in 5 unemployed adults (41%) have been out of work for 6 months or less, entering unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked why they are unemployed, the most commonly cited reason is they lost their job/their position was eliminated due to the COVID-19 pandemic (33%), followed by quitting (12%) or being laid off (11%). Following a similar sentiment, more than half of unemployed adults (57%) say the COVID-19 pandemic is most responsible for their current unemployment. In fact, many (58%) say if it wasn't for the COVID-19 pandemic, they would still be employed and a similar proportion (60%) believe the COVID-19 pandemic is the reason they are still unemployed (particularly those who have been unemployed for 4-6 months (84%)).

The majority of unemployed adults report negative feelings about being out of work:



Nonetheless, there is an air of resiliency as most are confident everything will turn out fine (74%) and say they are able to handle the stress of unemployment (69%).

At this point, the COVID-19 pandemic may be a hindrance to returning to work. Among unemployed adults who would not or are not sure if they would return to work if offered a job right now (19%), around half say it's because they're concerned about the COVID-19 infection rate (52%) or concerned about their safety (45%).

**Spotlight on Parents:**

Most mothers of children under 18 (70%) say they would still be employed if it wasn't for the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 60% of fathers who agree. Despite this, mothers are three times as likely as fathers to say they are not planning to or are not sure if they would return to work if offered a job right now (18% vs. 6%). For most mothers\*, the reason for this is due to caregiving responsibilities for their children (60%) – even higher than their concern about their safety (49%) or the COVID-19 infection rate (45%).

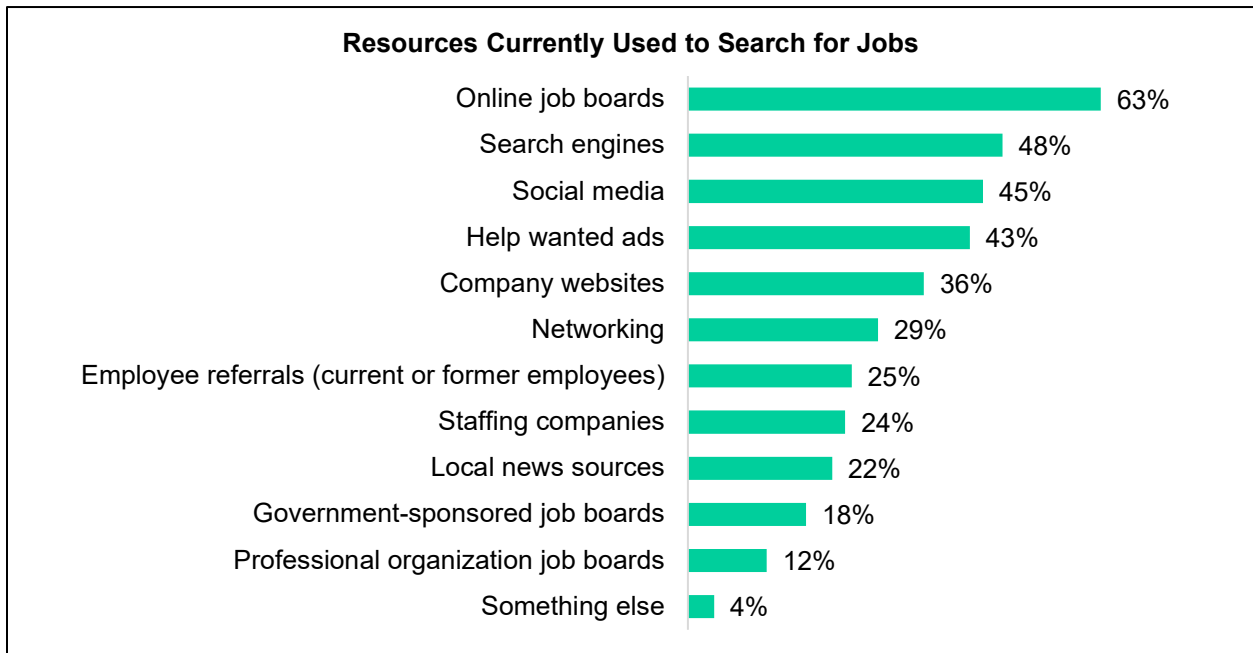
And, their job search priorities are different as well. While fathers report salary/wage (72%), followed distantly by benefits (55%), as the most important aspects to them in their current job search, mothers report flexible hours (70%) – on par with salary/wage (71%) – as their most important criteria. In fact, mothers are about twice as likely as fathers to say flexible hours (70% vs. 41%) and the ability to

*\*Small base (n<100), results should be interpreted directionally.*

***Finding a job is a top priority for the majority of unemployed adults, with many spending hours each week applying to multiple jobs that result in few interviews.***

Although nearly 4 in 5 unemployed adults (79%) say they have not completely given up on looking for a job, the majority (73%) say they expected to find a job more quickly. Around 2 in 3 say they're finding it hard to keep their effort level high in their job search (64%) or say the longer they're unemployed, the harder they're finding it to keep working hard at finding a job (67%). In fact, more than 1 in 5 unemployed adults (21%) say they have completely given up on looking for a job.

Still, 7 in 10 (70%) feel that right now, there is no activity that is more important than finding a job, and on average spent 12 hours last week looking for work. The majority (63%) currently use online job boards to search for jobs, while more than 2 in 5 use search engines (48%), social media (45%), or help wanted ads (43%). Nearly 1 in 4 (24%) use staffing companies.



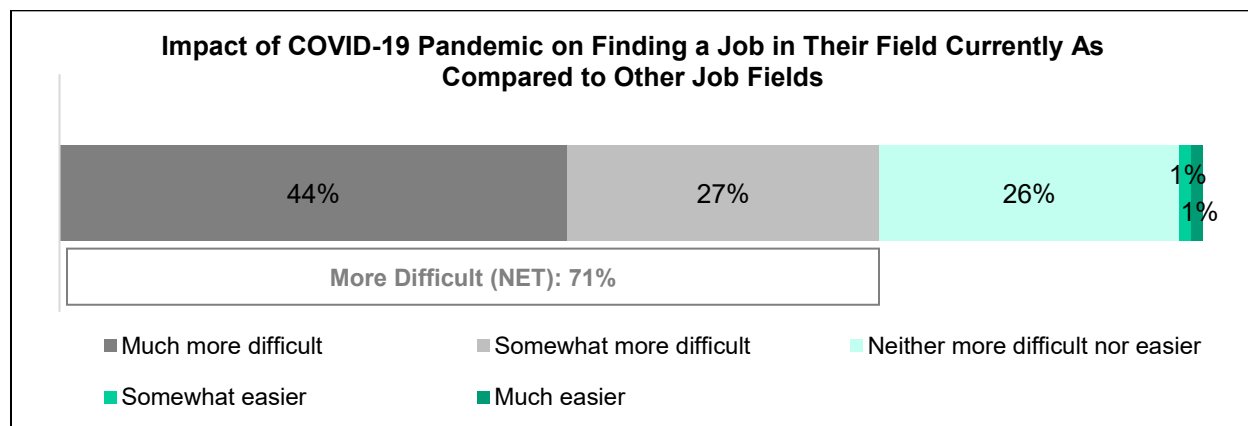
While the majority (74%) say they feel like they know how to go about finding a job, some (36%) say using more resources to find open jobs would make it easier to find a job during the COVID-19 pandemic.

From this job hunting, unemployed adults applied to 11 jobs (on average) in the last month, though only had 1 interview (on average). Of those who have not had an interview in the last month, nearly 1 in 5 last had an interview in Q3 (19%) or at the beginning of this year in Q1 (17%), but only 9% say they had an interview in Q2, presumably due to the onset of the initial COVID-19 wave in the U.S. 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.

***There is a sense of hope among unemployed adults that they will find a job they really want, but the COVID-19 pandemic has created new and exaggerated old challenges in the job search process, pushing many to switch job fields or reevaluate their education and skills.***

In their current job search, most unemployed adults (83%) say they are hopeful that they will find a job they really want in the next 6 months. In line with this positivity, around 2 in 3 are at least somewhat hopeful they will soon find a job that has good benefits (69%), is for the pay they want (69%), or is as good or better than the last job they had (67%). This optimism appears to decline with age, with Gen Z the most likely and Boomers/Seniors the least likely to report such hope regarding a job that has 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%).

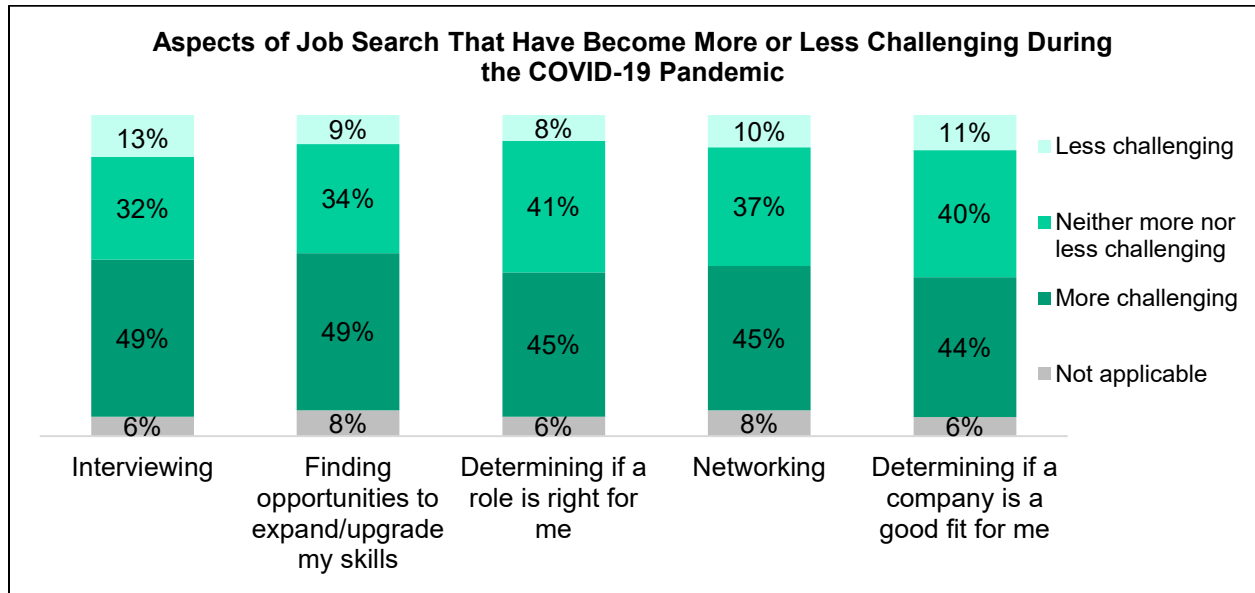
More than 2 in 3 (69%) are at least somewhat hopeful that they will soon find a job in their field, but only 11% say they are extremely hopeful. In fact, for about half of unemployed adults (51%), the COVID-19 pandemic has made them less hopeful that they will find a new job in their field, particularly Boomers/Seniors who have been diagnosed with a chronic health condition (65%). Further, more than 7 in 10 (71%) believe the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more difficult to find a job in their field currently as compared to other job fields, with more than 2 in 5 (44%) saying it has become much more difficult.



Notably, nearly half of 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.

Nearly 1 in 3 unemployed adults (32%) believe changing job fields would make it easier for them to find a job during the pandemic. About 3 in 5 are looking for a job in a different field because they haven't been able to find one in theirs (63%), or believe that starting over in a new field is the only way they can find a job right now during the COVID-19 pandemic (57%).

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only put a damper on finding a job in one’s field, it has created new or exaggerated existing challenges to the search process. More than 4 in 5 unemployed adults (82%) say they are currently facing challenges while trying to find a job during the COVID-19 pandemic; most commonly, they must compete against more people looking for jobs (56%), followed by limited to no opportunities to attend in-person networking events (32%), or limited opportunities to expand their skills (30%). In addition, many report certain aspects have become more challenging, notably interviewing (49%) or finding opportunities to expand/upgrade their skills (49%).



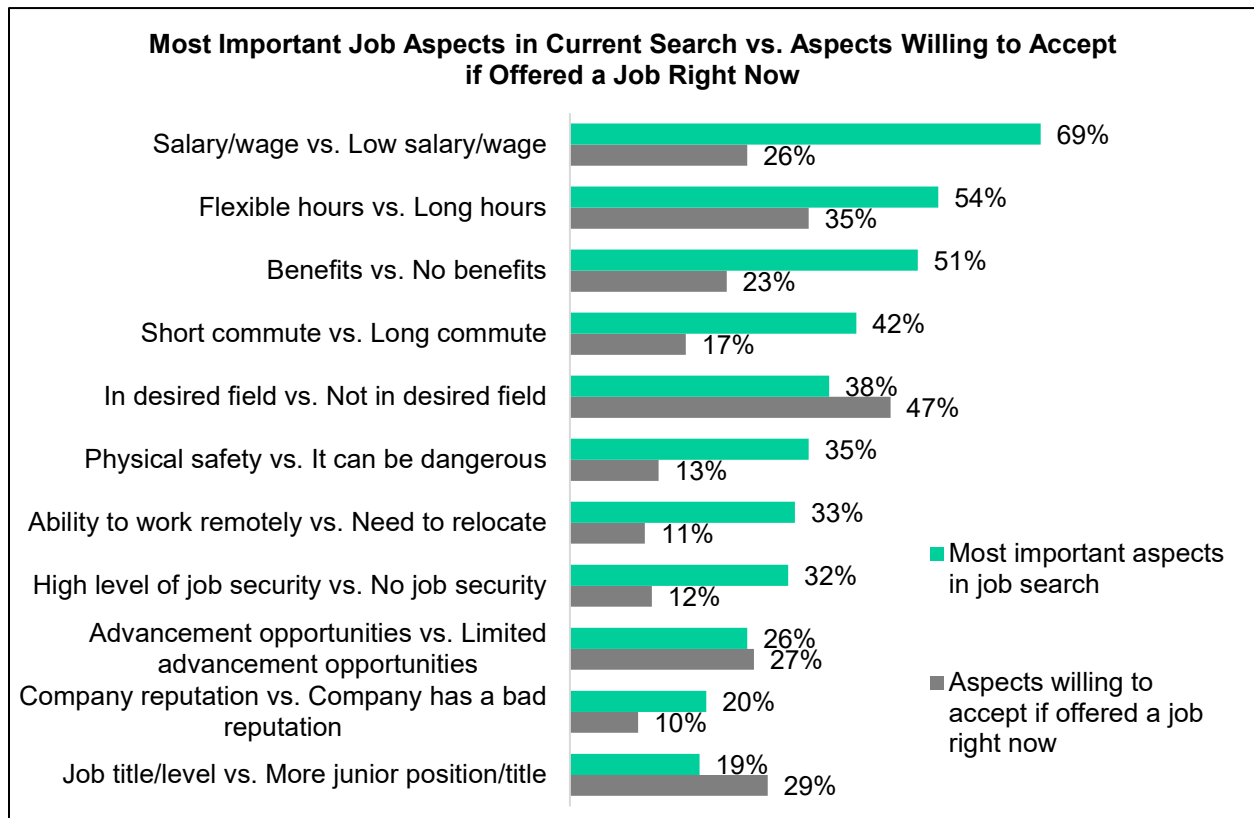
About half of unemployed adults (48%) say they are not surprised they don’t have the skills employers want, particularly since unemployed adults say expanding their hard skills (35%) or improving their soft skills (29%) would make it easier to find a job during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although 3 in 5 (60%) agree their education provided them with many of the skills necessary to be successful in the workplace, 37% of those with at least a bachelor’s degree wish they focused on a vocational career rather than getting their college degree.

**Spotlight on College Graduates:**

*While unemployed adults who don’t have at least a bachelor’s degree are more likely than their more educated counterparts to say they are willing to accept almost any job that will help them pay the bills, those with a college degree or higher are more likely to say they’ll only accept a job that they really want to do. In fact, nearly 2 in 3 college graduates (64%) say they are surprised they don’t have the skills employers want. Despite this self-assurance, college graduates are more likely to become more discouraged the longer they are unemployed, and less likely to be confident that everything will work out fine.*

***In response to new difficulties posed in the process of finding a job and increased competition for job openings, many unemployed adults are willing to sacrifice some aspects of a job that are important to them in order to find work that allows them to pay the bills.***

Resulting from the challenges to finding a job that is a good fit, let alone any job, unemployed adults commonly say they would be willing to accept some aspects of a job, that may be less than ideal, if they were offered a job right now (85%). Although salary/wage (69%), flexible hours (54%), and benefits (e.g., paid time off, health insurance, 401k) (51%) are reported as the most important aspects of a job in unemployed adults' current job search, the aspects they would most commonly be willing to accept if offered a job right now are not in their desired field (47%), long hours (35%), and a more junior position/title (29%). The aspect that appears to be the most non-negotiable is salary/wage, with only around 1 in 4 (26%) saying they'd accept a low salary/wage.

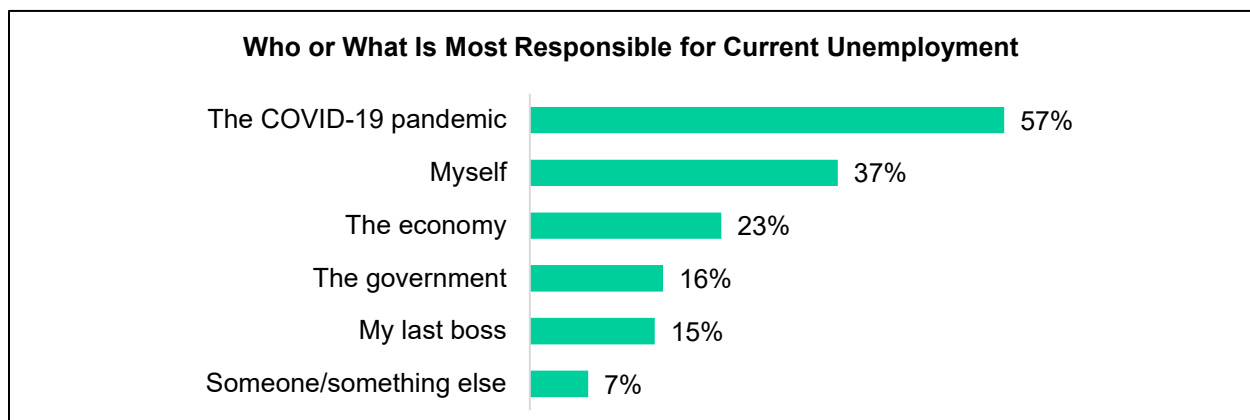


The majority of unemployed adults (61%) are willing to accept almost any job that will help them pay the bills, particularly those who have been out of work for 4-6 months (72%). Although around half (53%) say they don't apply for jobs that offer minimum wage because it's just not enough to pay the bills, nearly 3 in 5 (57%) agree the COVID-19 pandemic has driven them to start looking for a job that pays lower wages than they would like. Beyond salary, a substantial minority are at least somewhat willing to relocate to another city/town (44%) or state (33%) to find a job. Notably, some unemployed adults are even willing to relocate to another city/town (28%) or state (24%) where the number of new COVID-19 infections is rising.

***The sacrifices that unemployed Americans are willing to make to find a job now may be due to feelings of financial insecurity as savings are running thin, most are not receiving unemployment compensation benefits, and many do not have substantial financial support.***

The most common sources of income unemployed adults rely on are their savings (40%), followed by financial support from friends/family members (29%). In addition to this, around half of unemployed adults (51%) are relying on gig work (i.e., short-term, temporary and/or independent work) to keep them afloat. Seven in 10 (70%) say their household currently has some money in savings, but of those that actually have savings, the majority say they have less than \$5,000 saved (66%) and believe it will last less than 6 months (61%). Not surprisingly, most (70%) believe they do not have enough savings to survive unemployment much longer. Only half (50%) are confident that they will find a job before their savings run out, and given this exhaustible resource, it's not surprising that more than 2 in 3 unemployed adults (69%) do not feel financially secure right now, with 42% saying they do not feel financially secure at all.

This outlook may be dampened by the fact that the majority (70%) say in regard to the economy, things in the country are headed in the wrong direction. More than 1 in 5 (23%) say the economy is most responsible for their current unemployment and another 16% say the government is most responsible. Gen Z is about twice as likely as their older counterparts to say the government is most responsible for their current unemployment (Gen Z, 27%; Millennials, 16%; Gen X, 12%; Boomers/Seniors, 12%).



While national and state governments provide unemployment benefits as a support, 3 in 4 (75%) agree there is not enough financial support provided to people who are unemployed, especially given the fact that more than half of unemployed adults (56%) used to be the breadwinner for their household. More than 1 in 4 (27%) report they are currently relying on unemployment compensation benefits during their unemployment, and around half of unemployed adults (49%) say they would not be able to make ends meet right now without the assistance of unemployment compensation benefits. Among those receiving them, on average, they receive \$828 each month, far from enough to live on. Despite a common myth that unemployment benefits enable workers to remain out of the workforce, those who are currently receiving unemployment compensation benefits, on average, applied for 15 jobs in the last month whereas those who are not receiving such benefits applied for 9. And, when it comes to extended COVID-19 compensation benefits, only 18% are receiving them through their state and expect them to last for only 12 more weeks (on average).