

The American Job Quality Study

2026 STATE OF THE U.S. LABOR FORCE



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Foreword

by Jobs for the Future and The Families and Workers Fund

The second year of the American Job Quality Study (AJQS) arrives at a time of compounding economic and labor-market shifts, from the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and changing trade policy to persistent affordability pressures and evolving patterns of hiring and work.

These market shifts underscore the urgency of collecting data that paint a fuller and more accurate picture of the U.S. economy and workforce. While traditional indicators like unemployment remain vital, they tell us little about the day-to-day reality of the American worker, how AI adoption is reshaping work or whether the talent and potential of the American workforce are being fully realized in ways that strengthen American competitiveness and create long-term value for families, businesses and the broader economy. The AJQS is designed to address those gaps.

In its first year, the AJQS helped move job quality further into the mainstream of the national conversation about work, giving employers, policymakers, philanthropy and workforce leaders a shared framework and national evidence base for understanding the quality of work Americans experience. That growing attention reinforced the core premise of the study: To improve the quality of work, leaders must first be able to measure it.

This second report underscores that job quality is not only a measure of worker well-being; it is also integral to business performance, economic resilience and U.S. competitiveness. The findings show clear relationships between job quality and outcomes that matter to employers, including employees' intentions to stay, as well as to workers' health and life satisfaction. And the data provide something leaders have lacked for too long: a practical diagnostic for understanding where job quality is falling short, which conditions matter most and where action can make a difference.

That imperative is only becoming more urgent as AI reshapes work. As technology augments or replaces a growing number of tasks, its effects on job quality and American workers are not predetermined. Employers, policymakers, workforce leaders and workers themselves have choices about how new technologies are deployed and how the benefits are shared. This year's AJQS offers an initial look at how AI use is intersecting with the conditions that define a quality job and establishes a baseline for understanding how those relationships evolve.

Measurement, however, is not the end goal. The purpose of the AJQS is to make job quality visible, actionable and ultimately improvable. Jobs for the Future and The Families and Workers Fund believe that a thriving U.S. economy depends not simply on creating more jobs, but on creating more jobs that allow people to contribute, grow and prosper while helping businesses compete and communities thrive.

This report and the broader study provide a roadmap for operationalizing job quality and a practical framework for understanding what it will take to build a thriving economy in which work is truly working.



Acknowledgments

Gallup acknowledges the invaluable contributions of the partners and stakeholders whose collaboration has been instrumental in developing the study, resulting analysis and report, including Jobs for the Future and The Families and Workers Fund.

We offer special thanks to our research advisers, some of the nation's top experts on job quality who were instrumental in designing the survey and establishing the study's definition of job quality, including: Susan Houseman, Senior Economist, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research; Katharine G. Abraham, Distinguished University Professor of Economics, University of Maryland; Chandra Childers, Senior Policy and Economic Analyst, Economic Policy Institute; Erica L. Groshen, Senior Economics Adviser, Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations; Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Herbert Lehman Professor of Government, Columbia University; Erin L. Kelly, Sloan Distinguished Professor of Work and Organization Studies, MIT Sloan School of Management, and Co-Director, MIT Institute for Work and Employment Research; Thomas A. Kochan, George M. Bunker Professor Emeritus, MIT Sloan School of Management and Institute for Work and Employment Research; Susan J. Lambert, Professor Emerita, Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, University of Chicago; Camille Lloyd, Director, Gallup Center on Black Voices; Beth C. Truesdale, Research Fellow, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

Views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions, policies or the views of the research advisers.





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Introduction

The American Job Quality Study (AJQS) provides a comprehensive national measure of job quality, capturing dimensions of work that traditional labor-market indicators do not, including measures of worker stability, mobility and agency. In both 2025 and 2026, the study surveyed more than 17,000 workers aged 18 to 75 across industries, occupations, geographies and employment arrangements, including both employees and independent workers. More than 11,000 respondents participated in both years, allowing AJQS to track how individual workers' jobs and circumstances have changed over time.

AJQS defines a quality job as one that meets minimum standards across **five dimensions**:



01 | Financial Well-Being

Fair pay, stable employment and benefits that meet basic needs and reduce financial stress.



02 | Workplace Culture and Safety

A safe, respectful environment free from discrimination or harassment.



03 | Growth and Development Opportunities

A clear path to build skills, gain experience and advance in one's career.



04 | Agency and Voice

Influence over decisions that shape one's job, such as pay, working conditions and implementation of technology.



05 | Work Structure and Autonomy

A stable, predictable schedule, manageable workload and meaningful control over when and how work gets done.

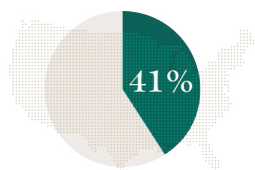
Together, these dimensions provide a consistent benchmark for tracking job quality, disparities across the workforce and changes over time.

This second-year report examines what changed — and what did not — between 2025 and 2026. It uses AJQS's longitudinal data to explore how job quality relates to outcomes for workers and employers, including turnover, absenteeism, health and healthcare costs. It also begins to examine AI through the lens of job quality, including how workers say technology adoption is affecting their work and how those experiences vary across segments of the workforce.

The findings represent only a fraction of what can be learned from AJQS. We encourage researchers, practitioners and public- and private-sector leaders to explore the publicly available data¹ and use the framework to measure and improve job quality in their own communities, industries and workforces.

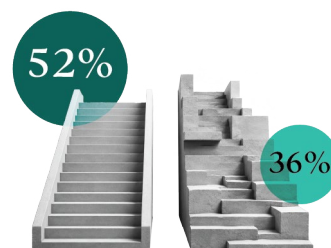
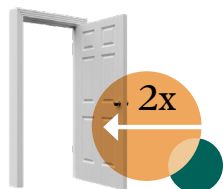
¹ <https://www.jff.org/idea/the-american-job-quality-study/>

Key Findings



For the second consecutive year, only about four in 10 U.S. workers have a quality job. In 2026, 41% of all workers and 40% of employees meet the AJQS standard for a quality job, statistically unchanged from 2025.

Job quality remains unevenly distributed across the workforce. Rates are higher among older workers and those with higher educational attainment, while gaps by gender, race and ethnicity persist. Workplace role is another key differentiator: **52% of managers and leaders** have quality jobs, compared with **36% of individual contributors**.



Employees in quality jobs are more likely to stay with their employer. Employees who were in non-quality jobs in 2025 were nearly twice as likely to be working for a different employer one year later, **15% versus 8%**.

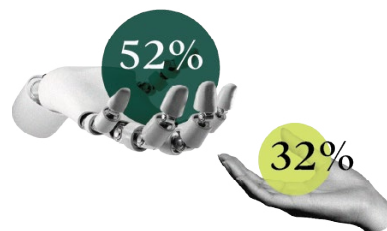
Employees in quality jobs report better health, with potential implications for employers. Fifty-one percent report excellent or very good health, compared with 35% of employees in non-quality jobs. They are also estimated to **miss 20% fewer workdays due to illness or injury** and incur 16% lower annual private-insurance healthcare expenditures.



Workplace mistreatment is common and closely associated with employees' intentions to leave. Twenty-five percent of employees report discrimination or unfair treatment, and 22% report bullying, threats or harassment. Intentions to leave are highest among employees reporting mistreatment from a supervisor.



AI use is concentrated among workers who are already more likely to be in quality jobs. Fifty-two percent of employees who use AI at least weekly are in quality jobs, compared with 32% of those who never use it. Regular use is also more common among managers and employees with higher levels of education.





SECTION 1

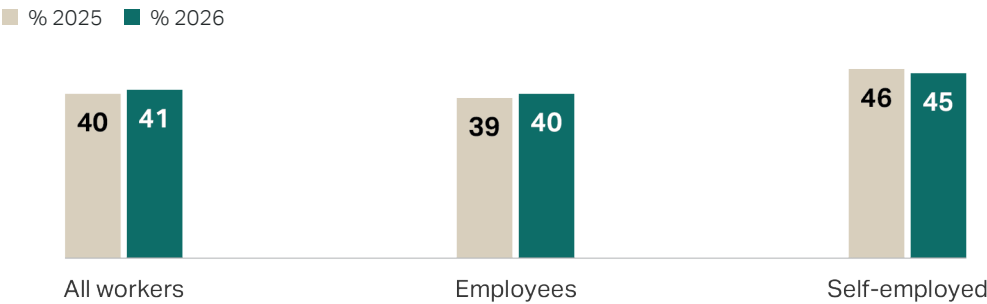
State of Job Quality in the U.S.

For the second consecutive year, only about four in 10 workers in the U.S. have a quality job.

In 2026, 41% of all workers aged 18 to 75 met the study's standards for a quality job, statistically unchanged from 40% in 2025. Together, these two years of findings begin to establish a national baseline for job quality and show that quality jobs remain the exception rather than the norm in America.

Among employees, the quality-job rate is 40%, compared with 45% among self-employed workers. These rates also remain **essentially unchanged from 2025.**

FIGURE 1
Percentage of U.S. Workers in Quality Jobs

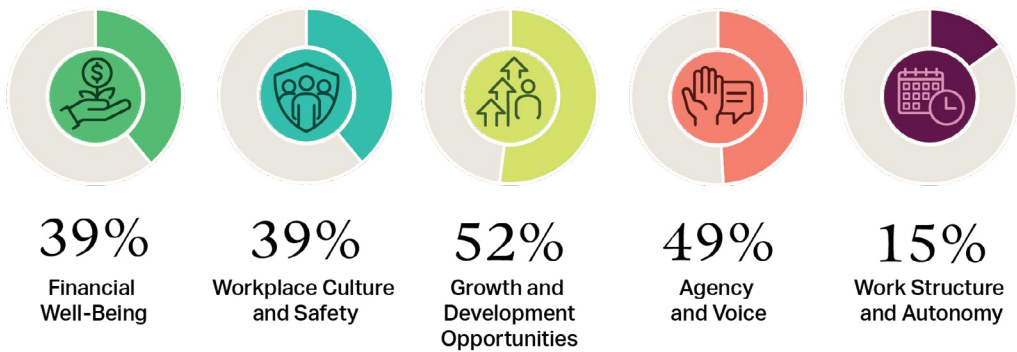


American Job Quality Study Year 1 (2025) and Year 2 (2026)

Because most individuals in the U.S. work for an employer, the analyses that follow focus on employees unless otherwise noted. AJQS also includes self-employed, gig and other independent workers, whose experiences and job quality were examined in a [separate analysis of the year one](#) findings. Additional analysis of these independent worker populations will be needed for the detailed year two data.

AJQS defines job quality across five dimensions that, together, capture workers' financial security, workplace experience, opportunities for growth, agency and control over their work.²

FIGURE 2
Percentage of U.S. Employees Who Meet Threshold for Quality Jobs on Each Dimension



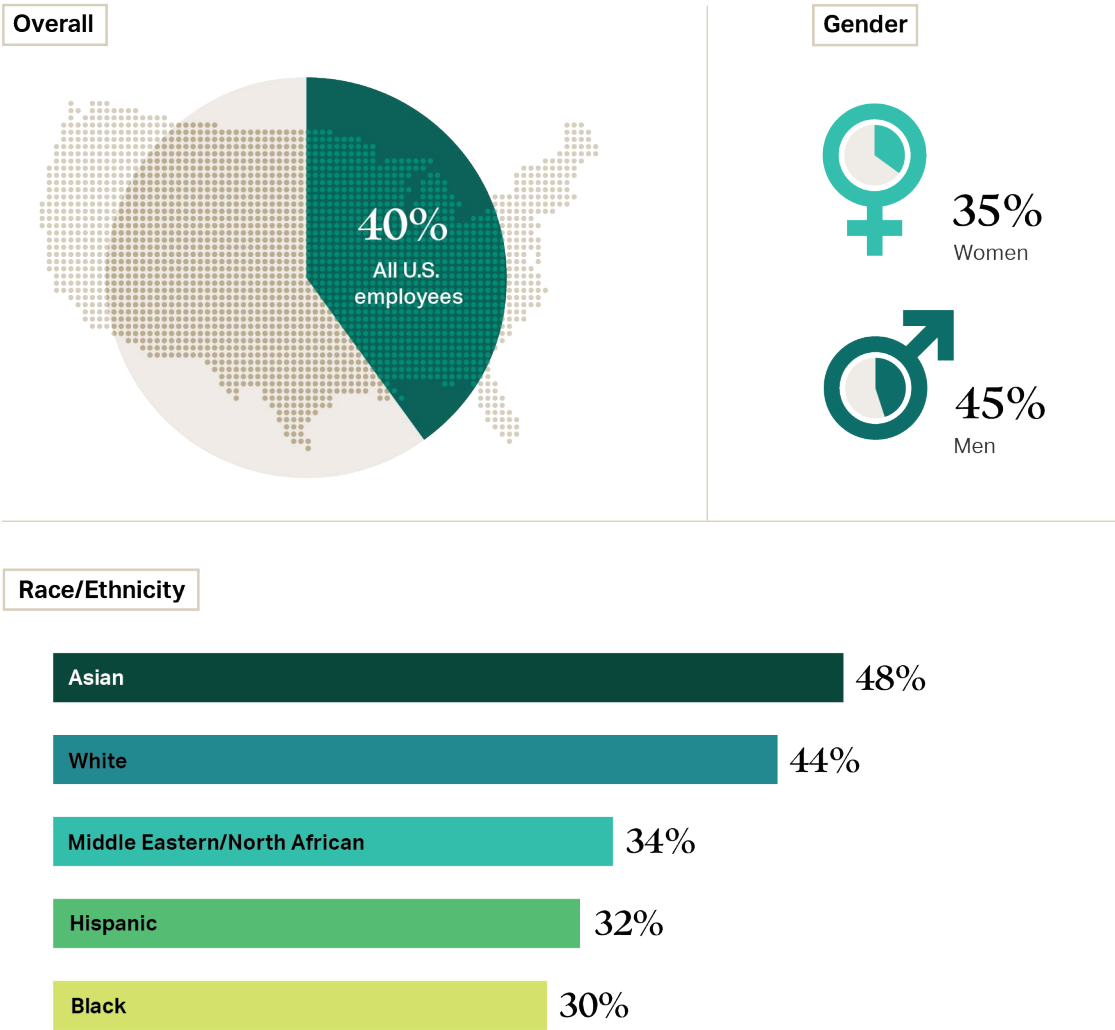
² See the Supporting Information section for the detailed scoring on each dimension of job quality and how the job quality index is computed.

Job Quality by Demographic Group

Substantial differences in job quality persist across the U.S. workforce. Quality-job rates vary by education, age, gender, race and ethnicity, records in the justice system and position within the workplace.

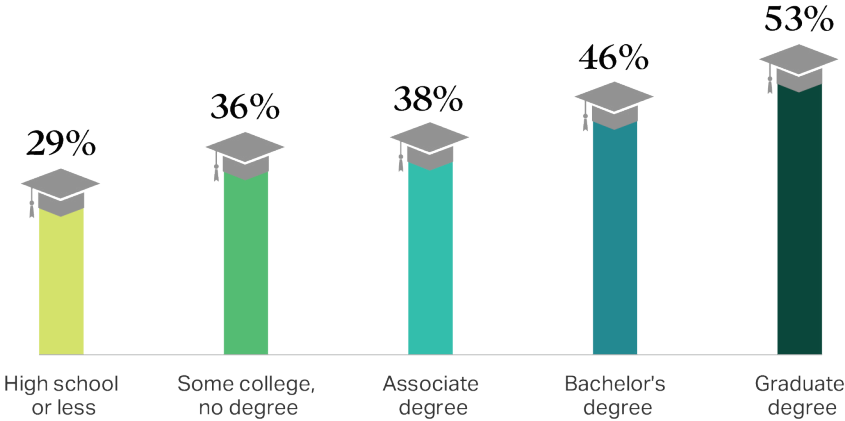
AJQS’s large sample also allows the study to report separately on groups that are often difficult to examine in national surveys, including LGBTQ+ employees, Middle Eastern or North African employees, neurodivergent employees and employees with records of arrest, charges or incarceration. Each of these groups has a quality-job rate below the national employee average.

FIGURE 3
Percentage of U.S. Employees in Quality Jobs, by Subgroup

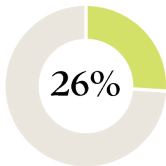


Racial and ethnic categories are based on respondent self-identification of race and ethnicity. The resulting racial and ethnic subgroups still to some degree reflect broad and diverse groups of people with different races or ethnicities, experiences and backgrounds (e.g., Asian people may be Chinese, Vietnamese, Indian or other nationalities; Hispanic people may be Spanish, Cuban, Mexican or other nationalities).

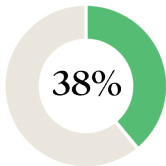
Education



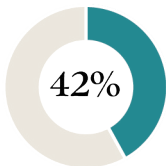
Age



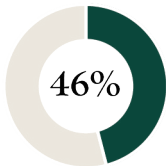
18-24 years old



25-39 years old

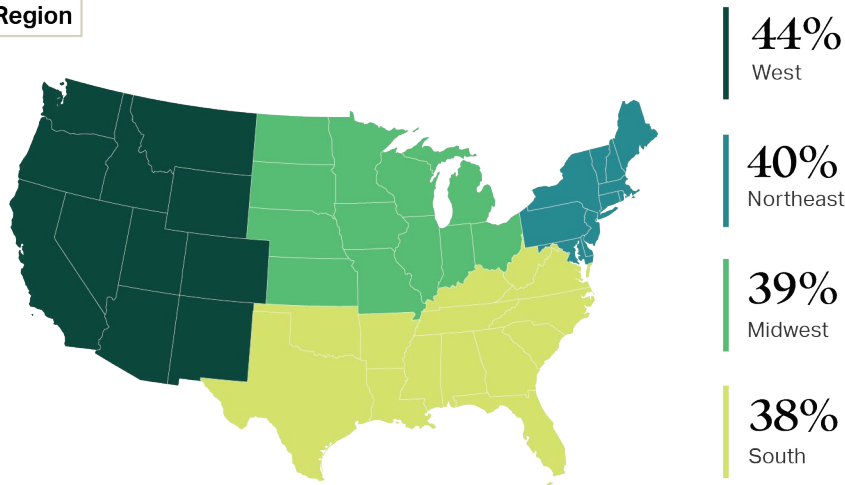


40-54 years old



55+ years old

Region



Records of Arrest or Incarceration

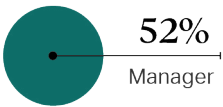


Birthplace

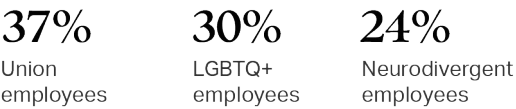


Job Role

(Self-Reported)



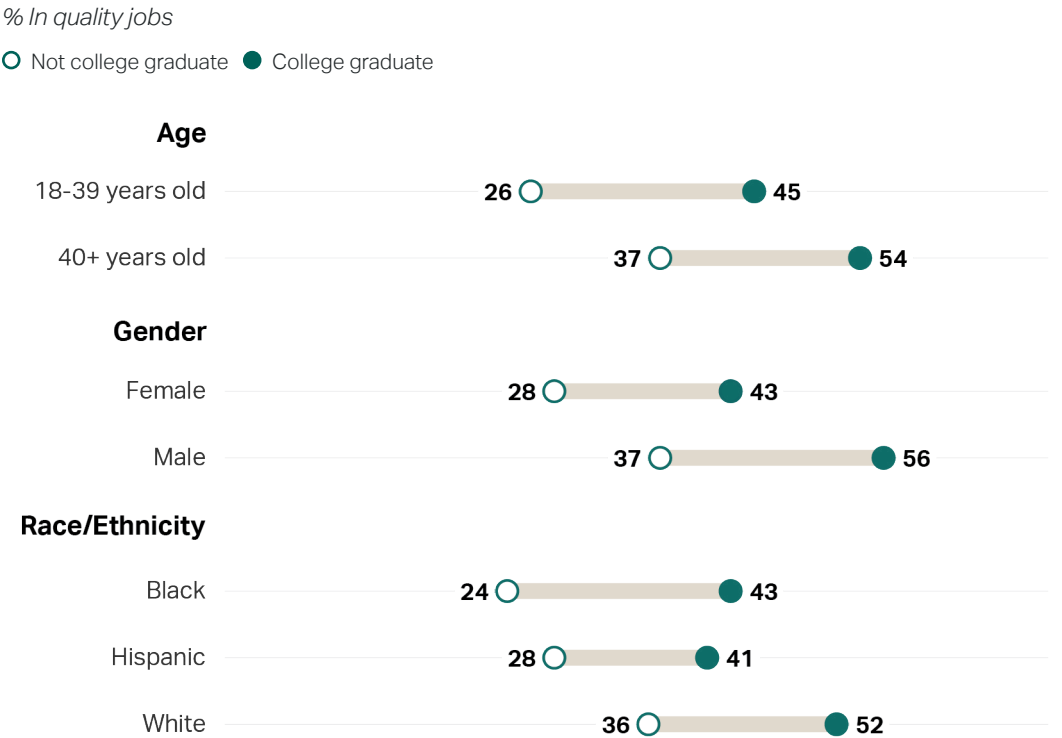
Other



Education and age are strongly associated with job quality, but they do not fully account for differences across demographic groups.

Quality-job rates are higher among older employees and those with more education, yet gaps by gender and race/ethnicity remain even among college graduates. For example, 56% of male college graduates have quality jobs, compared with 43% of female college graduates. Rates are also higher among White and Asian college graduates than among Black and Hispanic college graduates.

FIGURE 4
Quality-Job Rates Among Those With and Without a College Degree, by Subgroup



College graduates are those with a bachelor’s degree or higher; 49% of Asian college graduates have a quality job. The sample size for Asians without a college degree is too small to report reliable estimates.

Workplace role is another significant dividing line. Measured for the first time in 2026, job role shows one of the largest differences in the study: 52% of managers and leaders have quality jobs, compared with 36% of individual contributors.

Spotlight: Gen Z Employees

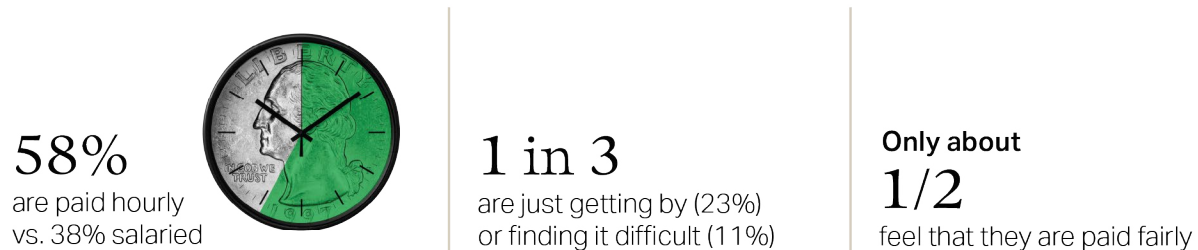
Gen Z employees³ stand out as one of the groups with lower levels of job quality in the study.

Just 32% are in quality jobs, compared with 40% of employees overall. Their experiences point to a broader pattern of economic and employment instability, including greater financial insecurity, less predictable work and higher turnover.

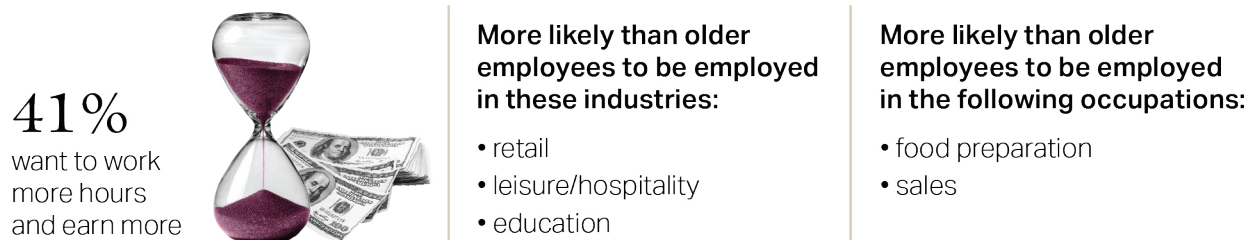
HIGH TURNOVER AND UNCERTAINTY



CONCENTRATED IN HOURLY ROLES



FINANCIAL INSECURITY



As Gen Z employees move further into their careers, future rounds of the AJQS can help show whether these gaps narrow with experience and whether younger workers continue to face distinct challenges in reaching quality jobs.

³ Gen Z employees are those born between 1997 and 2008, or who were ages 18 to 29 in 2026.

Spotlight: Employees With Records of Arrest, Charges or Incarceration

Employees with records of arrest, charges or incarceration are less likely to be in quality jobs than other employees.

Overall, 36% have quality jobs, compared with 41% of employees without records of justice-system involvement. Among those who have specifically been incarcerated, the quality-job rate is lower still, at 31%.

Their current work experiences show that they are more likely to be paid hourly, experience financial insecurity and have fewer opportunities to build skills on the job.

CONCENTRATED IN HOURLY WORK

61%

of employees with records of **arrest, charges or incarceration** are paid hourly, compared with 50% of other employees.



Among those who have been incarcerated, the share rises to

66%

GREATER FINANCIAL INSECURITY

42%

would prefer to **work more hours to earn more money**, compared with 34% of other employees.

40%

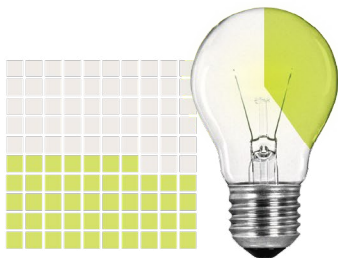
say they are **just getting by financially** or finding it difficult to get by, compared with 29% of other employees.

25%

report having **no retirement plan**, compared with 18% of other employees.



FEWER OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD SKILLS



40%

of employees with records of arrest, charges or incarceration **have access to employer-provided training or education** compared with 47% of other employees.

Job Quality by Industry

Job quality varies substantially across industries. Employees in the professional and business services industry have the highest quality-job rate at 57%, while employees in warehousing (22%) and retail (23%) have the lowest. Construction, utilities, information and financial services also have rates above the national employee average.

FIGURE 5
Percentage of U.S. Employees in Quality Jobs, by Industry

	All employees	Individual contributors	Managers/ Leaders
Professional and business services	57%	54%	65%
Construction	55%	49%	65%
Utilities	52%	n/a	n/a
Information (e.g., publishing, news media, motion pictures)	51%	n/a	n/a
Financial services	51%	45%	71%
Farming, agriculture, mining/extraction (e.g., coal, oil, gas)	47%	n/a	n/a
Government	46%	43%	54%
Wholesale trade	45%	n/a	n/a
Manufacturing	41%	37%	55%
Transportation	38%	33%	63%
Education	37%	35%	47%
Health/medical	37%	33%	51%
Other services	35%	35%	38%
Social services	34%	27%	58%
Leisure and hospitality	30%	25%	38%
Retail trade	23%	21%	31%
Warehousing	22%	n/a	n/a

Below national average
n/a: Insufficient sample size to break out industry workers by position.

Workplace role also matters within industries. Where role-level estimates are available, managers and leaders generally have higher quality-job rates than individual contributors.

But industry differences persist even among managers. For example, managers in retail, leisure and hospitality remain below the national average.

Most industries show little meaningful change from 2025. Construction is the notable exception, with its quality-job rate increasing from 45% in 2025 to 55% in 2026. Within construction, scores improved across all five job quality dimensions, with the largest gain in Growth and Development Opportunities. Further research is needed to understand what contributed to this improvement.

Spotlight: Financial Security

Financial security is fundamental to job quality. A quality job provides enough stability and security for workers to meet their needs without persistent financial strain.

The AJQS Financial Well-Being dimension captures several elements of that security, including earnings, paid time off and job security. The survey also asks employees directly how well they are managing financially, offering a more immediate view of how workers experience their economic circumstances.

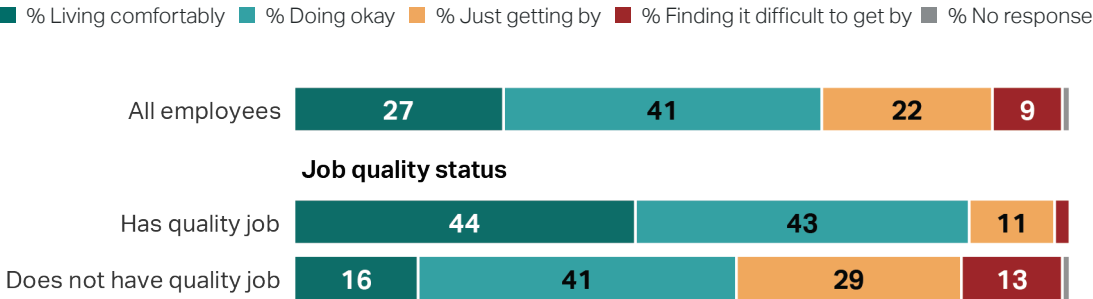


Overall, **nearly one in three employees (31%)** say they are either just getting by or finding it difficult to get by, while 27% say they are living comfortably.

Financial strain is even more common among part-time employees, 40% of whom say they are just getting by or finding it difficult to get by. These figures are similar to those reported in 2025.

Employees in quality jobs report substantially stronger financial circumstances. Forty-four percent say they are living comfortably, while 13% are just getting by or finding it difficult to get by. Among employees whose jobs do not meet the overall quality standard, the pattern is nearly reversed: 16% are living comfortably, while 42% are just getting by or finding it difficult to get by.

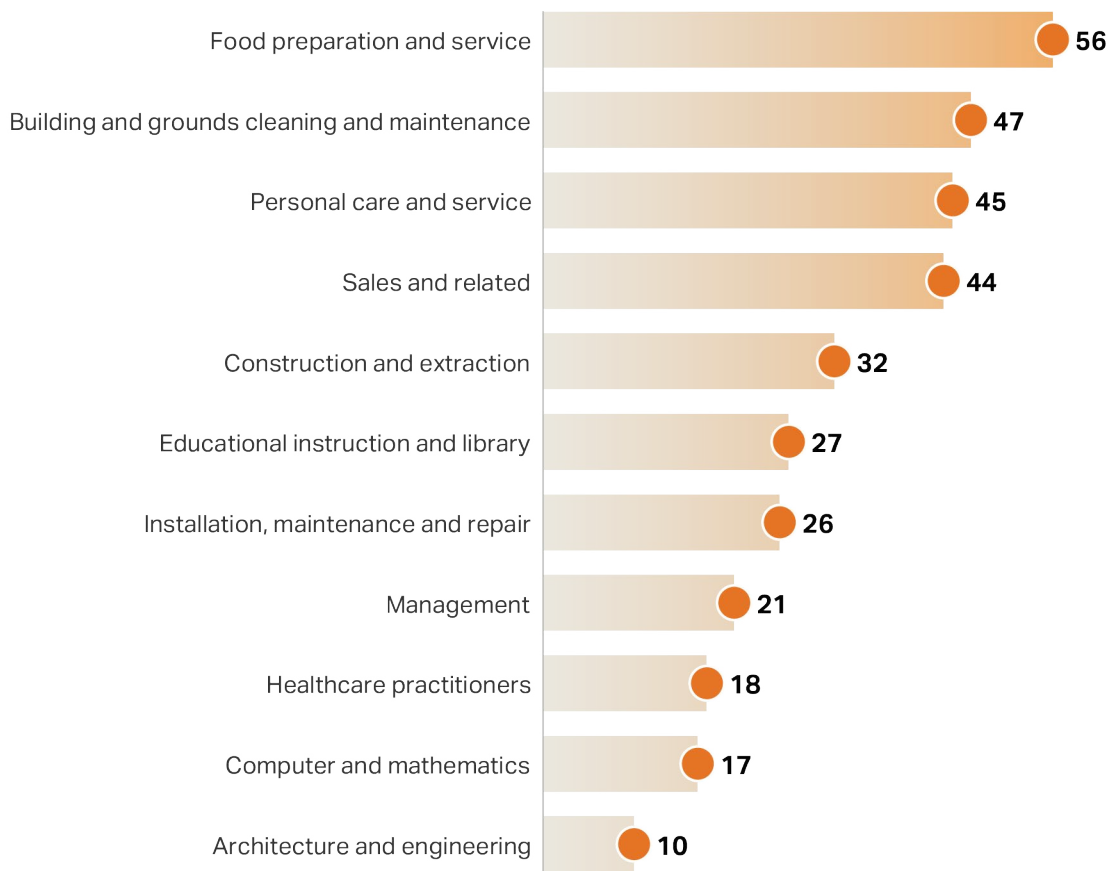
FIGURE 6
Financial Well-Being by Job Quality Status



Note: Values less than 3 not labeled.

Financial strain also varies substantially by occupation. More than half of employees in food preparation and service occupations (56%) say they are just getting by or finding it difficult to get by, compared with much smaller shares in several professional occupations. Building and grounds maintenance (47%), personal care and service (45%) and sales occupations (44%) are also among those with the highest levels of financial strain. These occupations were also among those with the highest levels of financial strain in 2025.

FIGURE 7
Percentage of Employees Who Say They Are Just Getting By or Finding It Difficult to Get By, by Selected Occupations



SECTION 2

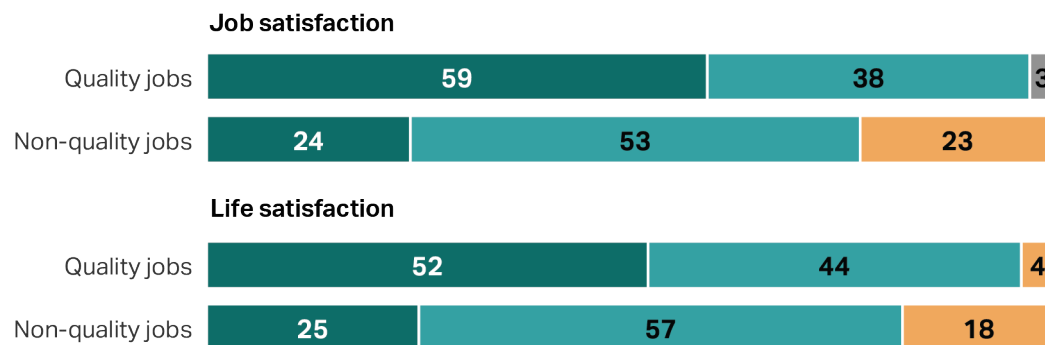
Job Quality and Business Outcomes

Quality jobs are associated with better outcomes for workers and employers alike. Employees in quality jobs continue to report substantially higher satisfaction with both their jobs and their lives: 59% are highly satisfied with their jobs, compared with 24% of employees in non-quality jobs, and 52% are highly satisfied with their lives, compared with 25%.

FIGURE 8

Employees in Quality Jobs Are Twice as Likely to Be Highly Satisfied With Their Job and Life

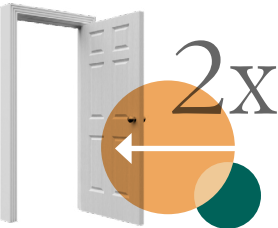
■ % Highly satisfied (8-10) ■ % Somewhat satisfied (5-7) ■ % Unsatisfied (0-4) ■ % No response



This year, AJQS extends that picture to outcomes that matter directly to employers, including retention, missed work and healthcare costs.

Year-Over-Year Retention

Because more than 11,000 of the same workers participated in both years of the study, AJQS can begin to show how job quality relates to whether employees stay with the same employer over time.



Looking at employees who completed both surveys, those who were in non-quality jobs in 2025 **were nearly twice as likely to be working for a different employer one year later.** Fifteen percent changed employers, compared with 8% of employees who were in quality jobs in 2025.

FIGURE 9
Job Quality and Employer Retention, Year Over Year

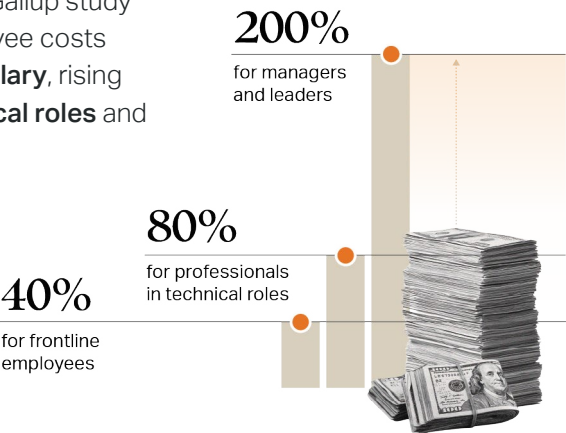
Is your current main job the same employer or business as the one you had 12 months ago?
Among repeat responders

● 2025 Quality jobs ● 2025 Non-quality jobs



Employee turnover can carry substantial costs, including recruiting, hiring, onboarding, lost productivity and lost institutional knowledge. Another Gallup study estimated that replacing a frontline employee costs approximately **40% of that employee’s salary**, rising to about **80% for professionals in technical roles** and **200% for managers and leaders.**⁴

Estimated cost to replace employees



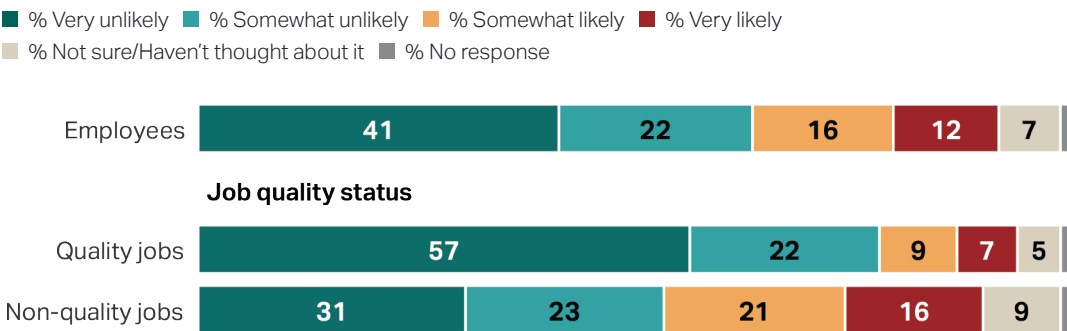
4 <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/646538/employee-turnover-preventable-often-ignored.aspx>

Turnover Risk

Employees’ current intentions to leave or stay in their jobs also highlight connections between job quality and turnover risk. In 2026, 12% of all U.S. employees say they are very likely to leave their current job for a different one within the next year. That share is 16% among employees in non-quality jobs, compared with 7% among those in quality jobs. Conversely, 31% of employees in non-quality jobs say they are very unlikely to leave, compared with 57% of employees in quality jobs.

FIGURE 10
Intent to Leave Current Job, by Job Quality Status

In the next 12 months, how likely are you to leave your current main job for a different job?



Note: Due to rounding, totals may sum to 100% ±1 percentage point. Values less than 3 not labeled.

Statistical analysis finds that employees in non-quality jobs have 3.4 times the odds of planning to leave their employer compared with employees in quality jobs. At the dimension level, **four of the five dimensions significantly predict desire to leave.** Workplace Culture and Safety shows the strongest relationship, followed by Growth and Development Opportunities, Financial Well-Being and Agency and Voice. These relationships remain significant even after accounting for other factors such as age, education level, race/ethnicity and gender.

Drivers of Intent to Leave

3.4x

THE ODDS

Employees in non-quality jobs
are more likely to leave their organization in the next 12 months

Odds of leaving: low vs. high category within each job-quality dimension

-  **3.1x** Workplace Culture and Safety
-  **2.5x** Growth and Development Opportunities
-  **2.0x** Financial Well-Being
-  **1.6x** Agency and Voice

Note: An odds ratio above 1 indicates higher odds of leaving among respondents in the low category. No significant associations: Work Structure and Autonomy.

The importance of Workplace Culture and Safety is also evident in employees’ experiences of respect at work. Nearly one-third (32%) of employees who strongly disagree that they are treated with respect at work say they are very likely to leave their job, compared with 9% of those who strongly agree that they are treated with respect.

FIGURE 11
Likelihood of Leaving Job by Perceived Respect at Work

In the next 12 months, how likely are you to leave your current main job for a different job?

■ % Very unlikely ■ % Somewhat unlikely ■ % Somewhat likely ■ % Very likely
■ % Not sure/Haven't thought about it ■ % No response

Those who **strongly agree** they are treated with respect



Those who **somewhat agree** they are treated with respect



Those who **neither agree nor disagree** they are treated with respect



Those who **somewhat disagree** they are treated with respect



Those who **strongly disagree** they are treated with respect



Note: Due to rounding, totals may sum to 100% ±1 percentage point. Values less than 3 not labeled.

Together, the longitudinal data and current-intention findings tell a consistent story: Employees in quality jobs are both more likely to remain with their employer and less likely to say they plan to leave in the future.

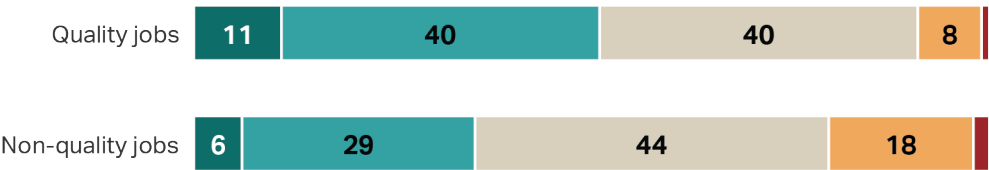
Health, Missed Work and Healthcare Costs

Job quality is also associated with employee health. Fifty-one percent of employees in quality jobs rate their health as excellent or very good, compared with 35% of employees in non-quality jobs.⁵

FIGURE 12
Employees in Quality Jobs Report Better Physical Health

In general, would you say your health is ... ?

■ % Excellent ■ % Very good ■ % Good ■ % Fair ■ % Poor ■ % No response



Note: Values less than 3 not labeled.

Workers in non-quality jobs report poorer health than those in quality jobs, which may affect employers. To examine the workplace impact of health differences, the study combines AJQS data on self-rated health with data from the 2023 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) to examine how job quality relates to healthcare expenditures and workdays missed due to illness or injury.⁶

The analysis estimates that employees in quality jobs have average annual private-insurance healthcare expenditures of approximately \$5,200, compared with \$6,200 for employees in non-quality jobs⁷ — a difference that translates to an estimated 16% lower healthcare cost burden for employers per employee.⁸



Employees in quality jobs are also estimated to miss an average of four workdays per year due to illness or injury, compared with five days among employees in non-quality jobs.

Missed days due to illness or injury

Employees in quality jobs



Employees in non-quality jobs



5 The causal relationship between being in a quality job and reporting better health is unclear; our data can only establish an association between the two.

6 Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). (2025). 2023 Full-Year Consolidated Public Use File (PUF) (Gen. No. HC-251). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Employee healthcare costs and missed days are two areas that lend themselves well to this analysis. But there are other ways in which worker health could influence workplace costs, such as extended medical leave, showing up for work when ill and being less productive, etc.

7 Healthcare costs are calculated using the MEPS 2023 dataset. Healthcare costs paid by private insurance companies are used as an estimate for employer healthcare cost burden. This is limited to employed Americans, aged 18-64, who have health insurance through a private insurance company. AJQS respondents are limited to employees aged 18-64 with health insurance through their current or former employer or a family member's current or former employer. Healthcare costs are currently estimated in 2023 dollars.

8 While AJQS does not have employer-level information, healthcare costs paid by private insurance companies for employees in the U.S. can be used as a proxy for the employer burden of employee healthcare expenditures.



SECTION 3

Workplace Treatment, Job Quality and Retention



How employees are treated at work is central to Workplace Culture and Safety, one of the five dimensions of job quality.

The 2026 findings show that discrimination, bullying and harassment remain common, are unevenly experienced across the workforce and are associated with employees' intentions to leave their jobs.

Who Experiences Workplace Mistreatment?

One in four U.S. employees (25%) reports being discriminated against or treated unfairly at work for a range of factors, such as their age, race, sexual orientation or disability, while 22% say they have been bullied, threatened or harassed by a supervisor, coworker or customer. More than six in 10 (62%) of employees report none of the forms of workplace mistreatment measured by the study.

More employees report being bullied, harassed or threatened by customers than by coworkers or supervisors.

FIGURE 13
Employees Reporting Being Bullied, Threatened or Harassed by Any of the Following People at Work

% Yes



Employee mistreatment is unevenly distributed across the workforce. Several groups with lower overall quality-job rates are also among those most likely to report workplace mistreatment, including **48% of LGBTQ+ employees**, **52% of Middle Eastern or North African employees** and **59% of neurodivergent employees**.

Mistreatment also varies considerably by occupation. Employees in **protective services and healthcare** occupations are among those most likely to report discrimination, bullying or harassment. Employees in **building and grounds maintenance and construction** report some of the lowest rates.



FIGURE 14**Forms of Experienced Workplace Discrimination, Harassment or Bullying***By occupation*

Note: Forms of harassment include discrimination, bullying or other forms of mistreatment. The form can be done by a customer, coworker or supervisor, and the form can be done in relation to the employee's race or ethnic origin, gender, age, sexual orientation, political identity, religious views, physical appearance, physical disability, autism or neurodiversity. Values less than 3 not labeled.

Customer-facing work may contribute to some of these differences. Occupations with higher rates of workplace mistreatment also tend to have higher reports of mistreatment from customers. Differences are visible even within the same industry. In retail, for example, 47% of employees in sales positions report at least one form of workplace mistreatment, compared with 37% of managers.⁹

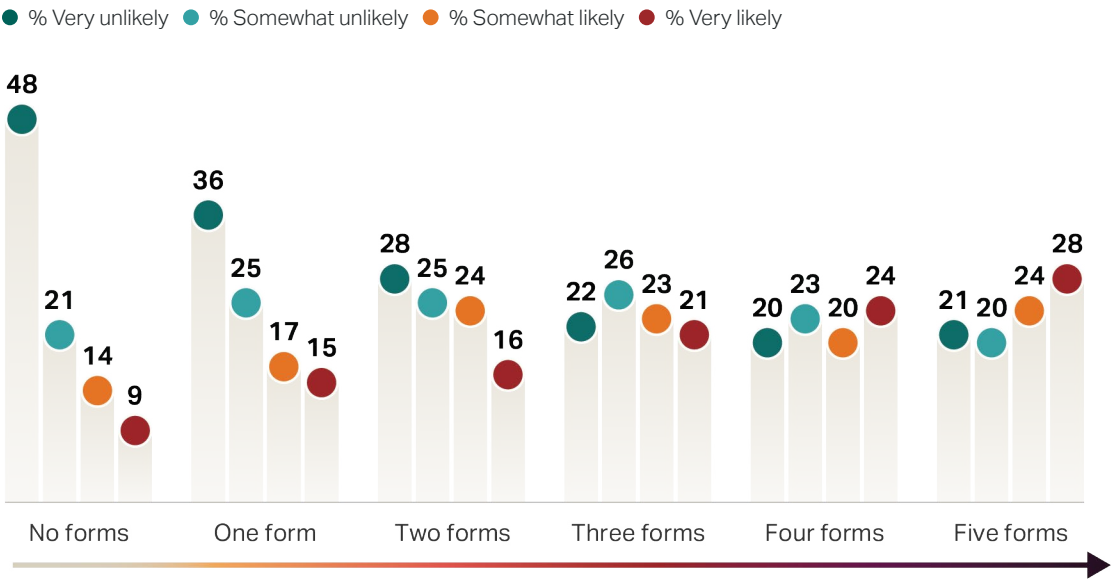
⁹ See the Supporting Information section for more detail.

Workplace Mistreatment and Retention

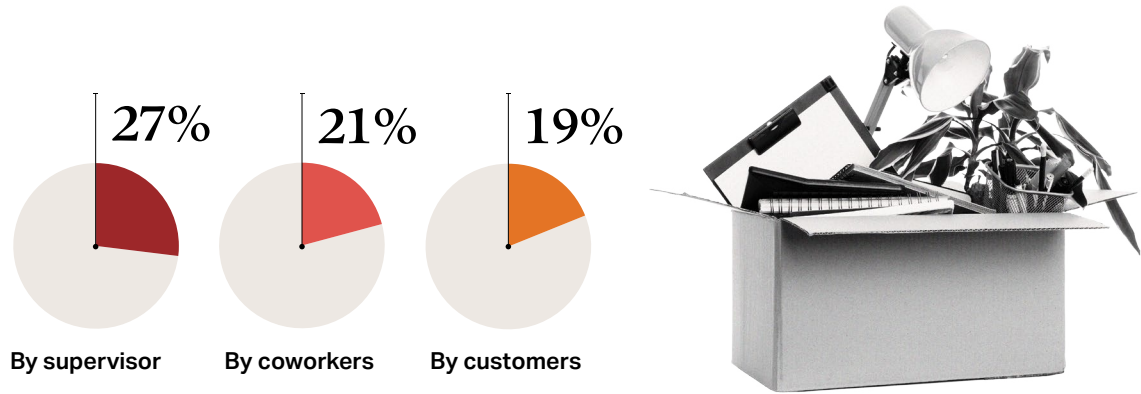
Workplace mistreatment is also associated with greater turnover risk. Among employees who report no forms of discrimination, bullying or harassment, 9% say they are very likely to leave their job in the next 12 months. That share rises to 15% among employees who report one form of mistreatment, and to 20% or more among those who report three or more forms.

FIGURE 15
Intent to Leave by Number of Forms of Workplace Mistreatment Incidents

In the next 12 months, how likely are you to leave your current main job for a different job?



Who the mistreatment comes from also matters. Among employees who report mistreatment from a supervisor, 27% say they are very likely to leave their job, compared with 21% of those reporting mistreatment from coworkers and 19% of those reporting mistreatment from customers. The pattern suggests that how managers treat employees may be especially consequential for retention.



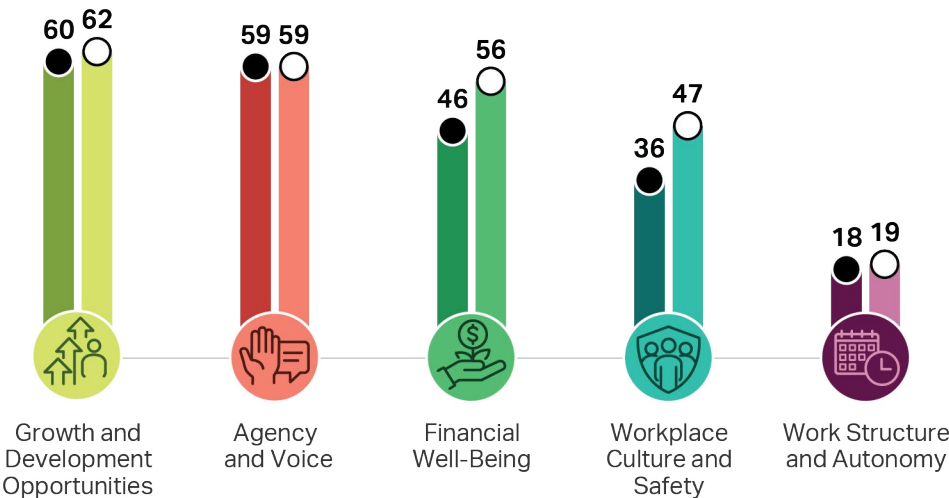
Spotlight: Workplace Culture and Safety for Managers of Color

Managers and leaders are substantially more likely than individual contributors to be in quality jobs, but that advantage is not shared equally. Forty-seven percent of managers of color have quality jobs, compared with 54% of White managers.

The largest differences appear in **Workplace Culture and Safety** and **Financial Well-Being**; experiences are much more similar across **Growth and Development Opportunities**, **Agency and Voice** and **Work Structure and Autonomy**.

FIGURE 16
Percentage of Managers/Leaders Experiencing Quality Conditions on Each of the Five Job Quality Dimensions

● % Managers/Leaders of color ○ % White managers/leaders



The Workplace Culture and Safety gap is especially pronounced: 36% of managers of color experience the quality standard for this dimension, compared with 47% of White managers. Managers of color are also less likely to strongly agree that they feel physically safe at work (45% vs. 62%) or that they feel a sense of belonging (34% vs. 43%).

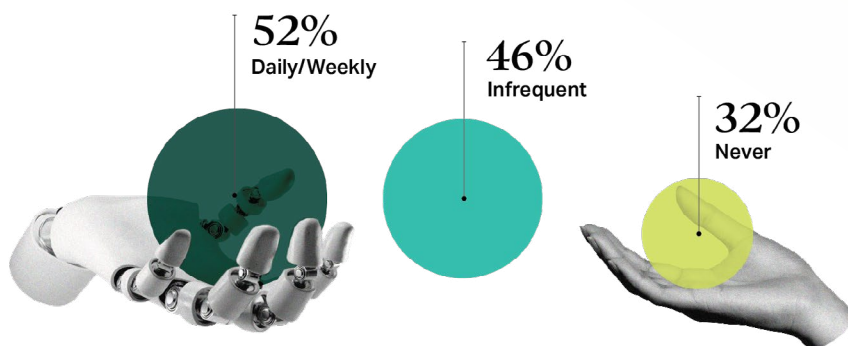
SECTION 4

Artificial Intelligence and Job Quality

Artificial intelligence is already part of work for a substantial share of U.S. employees, but regular use is not yet the norm. More than one in four employees (28%) use AI at least weekly, including 13% who use it daily and 15% who use it weekly, while 54% say they have not used AI in their role.¹⁰ Those regular AI users are also substantially more likely to have quality jobs: 52% do, compared with 32% of employees who never use AI. This association does not mean that regular AI use leads to improved job quality, as many AI users may have already been in quality jobs before they began using AI.

FIGURE 17

Employees in Quality Jobs, by AI Usage



Among employees who use AI, many report meaningful changes in how they work, including helping them do their job faster, find more creative solutions, spend more time on interesting work and produce higher-quality work.

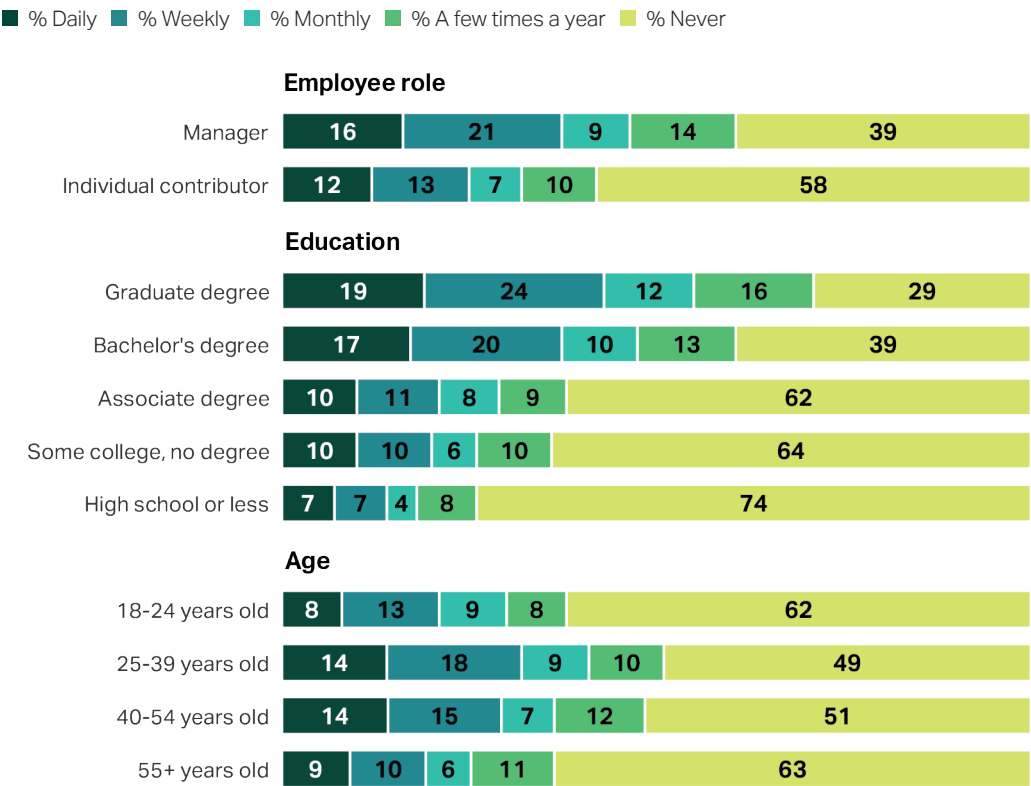
¹⁰ Gallup updates since the AJQS data were collected show AI usage among U.S. workers has increased further. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/712736/organizational-adoption-jumps-six-points.aspx>

Who Is Using AI at Work?

AI use varies substantially across the workforce. It is more common among managers than individual contributors and among employees with higher levels of education. Across industries, 37% of managers use AI at least weekly, compared with 25% of individual contributors. College graduates are also among the most frequent users, while majorities of employees without a college degree report never using AI at work. Employees between the ages of 25 and 54 are more likely to use AI than employees younger or older than those ages.

FIGURE 18
Artificial Intelligence Usage by Employee Role, Education and Age

How often, if at all, do you use AI as a tool to complete work for your main job?



American Job Quality Study Year 2 (2026)

These patterns mirror some of the differences already seen in job quality. Managers and employees with higher levels of education are also among the groups more likely to have quality jobs. This overlap helps explain why regular AI users are disproportionately likely to already be in better jobs and underscores the importance of tracking whether AI use becomes more broadly distributed over time.

How AI Is Affecting the Work Experience

Among employees who use AI, the most commonly reported effect is greater speed: 63% say AI helps them do their job faster. More than half (56%) say it helps them find more creative solutions to their work tasks. Forty-seven percent say it allows them to spend more time on the most interesting parts of their job, and 46% say it helps them produce higher-quality work.

FIGURE 19
AI Users' Reports of How Usage Has Affected Their Job

Please indicate whether using AI has resulted in each of the following in your main job.

Among employees who have used AI in their job

■ % Yes ■ % No ■ % Not applicable

You are able to do your **job tasks faster**



You are finding more **creative solutions** for your job tasks



You are able to focus more of your time on the **most interesting parts of your job**



You are producing **higher-quality work**



Your employer is asking you to **take on more responsibilities**



Some employees also report changes in expectations. Thirty-one percent of AI users say their employer has asked them to take on more responsibilities since they began using AI. Among AI users who say the technology helps them work faster, that figure rises to 37%.

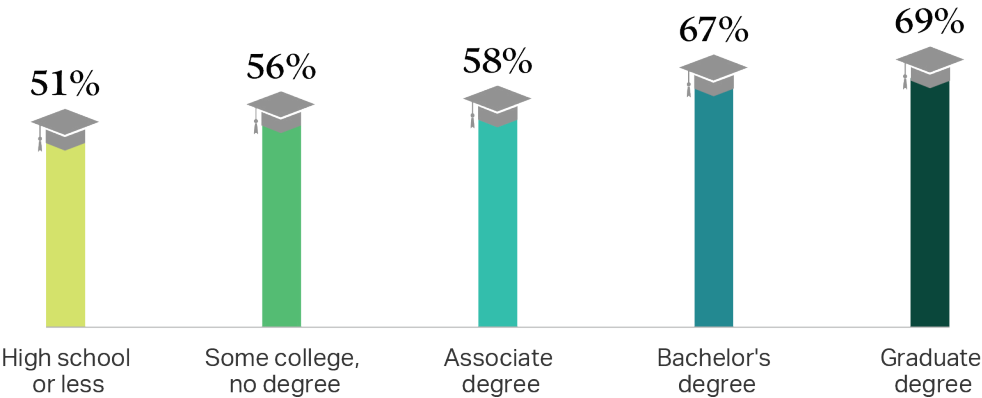
The reported effects of AI are not identical across workers. Employees with higher levels of education are more likely to say AI helps them work faster and spend more time on interesting work. By contrast, reported improvements in creativity and work quality are more similar across education groups.

FIGURE 20
Benefits of AI Usage at Work, by Education Level

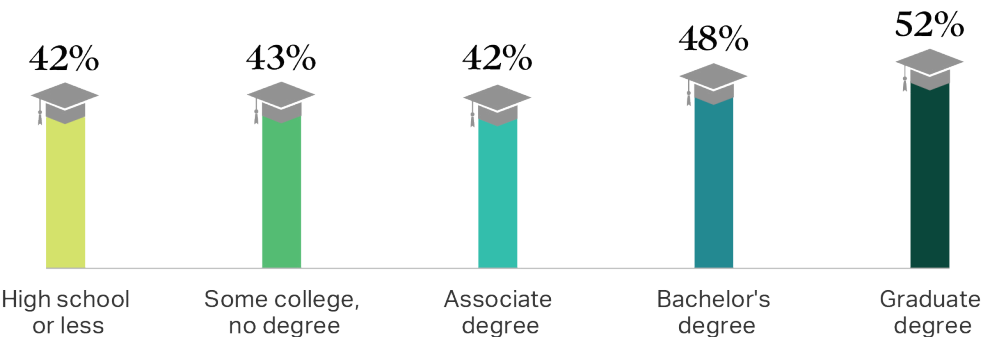
Please indicate whether using AI has resulted in each of the following in your main job.

Among those who have used AI in their job

% Yes: You are able to do your **job tasks faster**



% You are able to focus more of your time on the **most interesting parts of your job**



AI is also particularly relevant to one element already captured by the AJQS framework: workers' influence over the introduction of new technology. As part of the Agency and Voice dimension, the study measures the gap between how much influence employees have and how much they want over the use of new technologies at work. In 2026, 55% of employees report having less influence than they would like.

These findings are based on employees' own assessments of how AI is affecting their work and do not establish whether employers would evaluate its effects in the same way. Continued measurement can show how AI use and workers' experiences with it change over time, including whether its use and reported benefits become more broadly distributed across the workforce and what those changes may mean for the conditions that define a quality job.

Implications

The data gathered through the past two years of the AJQS highlight that the U.S. is grappling with sharply different realities of work, rather than a single functioning labor market.

For the second year in a row, only about four in 10 U.S. workers are in quality jobs, while workers outside traditional W-2 employment remain less visible in many longstanding labor-market indicators. Together, these findings underscore the limits of relying on employment measures alone to understand how workers are actually faring.

The findings also challenge the idea that critical workplace conditions like schedule stability, employee voice or access to training are merely “soft” HR concerns. These elements, along with safety and compensation, are closely connected to outcomes that matter to workers and employers alike. Employees with quality jobs are less likely to change jobs, less likely to plan to leave their current job and are estimated to miss fewer workdays and incur lower healthcare expenditures. The survey also sheds light on workers’ untapped desire to help shape technology adoption. Taken together, the findings reinforce that job quality is not only a worker well-being issue, but also a business and economic one.

At a time when traditional labor-market metrics can obscure important differences in workers’ experiences, job quality data should complement unemployment and other longstanding measures to provide a fuller barometer of economic health. Workforce and economic development efforts cannot be measured only by how effectively they match supply and demand, but by the quality of the jobs people enter and whether those jobs create lasting value for workers and employers.

Regular AI users are disproportionately likely to already be in quality jobs, raising the possibility that AI could widen existing gaps in job quality if access to its benefits remains uneven. As AI reshapes tasks and roles, workforce leaders, employers and policymakers will need to pay attention not only to whether workers are using AI, but also to the effects it has on employees and organizations that are, and are not, using AI. Continued research and measurement about AI use and outcomes can move us from predictions about its impact toward a clearer understanding of how workers are actually experiencing these changes and who stands to benefit.

And with more than 11,000 workers participating in both years of the study, the AJQS creates a growing opportunity to understand how changes in work and economic conditions relate to job quality over time. As technology and the economy evolve, we must measure not only how many jobs exist, but whether those jobs enable people, businesses and communities to thrive.

About the American Job Quality Study

Methodology

The study results are based on self-administered web and mail surveys conducted Jan. 26-March 24, 2026, with a random sample of 17,874 U.S. adults, aged 18 to 75, who worked for pay in the prior seven days. The sample was drawn from two sources — the Gallup Panel™ and a separate address-based sample (ABS) of the U.S. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based panel that primarily uses randomly drawn address-based sampling to select U.S. households. Panelists can be surveyed online using a web-based survey or offline using a paper-based survey or telephone interviews. For the purposes of this study, Gallup included both online and offline Gallup Panelists, relying upon web- and paper-based surveys to collect data from U.S. adults.

To account for differences in statistical power across the analysis, margins of error were calculated for the full sample and key analytical subgroups:

For findings based upon the total sample of 17,874 U.S. workers, the margin of sampling error is ± 1 percentage point at the 95% confidence level.

For findings based upon the 15,482 U.S. workers who work for an employer, the margin of sampling error is ± 1 percentage point at the 95% confidence level.

For findings based upon the 7,820 female and 7,473 male employees, the margin of sampling error is ± 2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

For findings based upon the 9,285 U.S. employees who are college graduates and 6,177 employees who are not college graduates, the margins of sampling error are ± 1 percentage point and ± 2 percentage points, respectively, at the 95% confidence level.

For findings based upon the 1,551 U.S. employees who were ever arrested (justice-impacted) and the 701 employees who were ever incarcerated, the margins of sampling error are ± 3 percentage points and ± 5 percentage points, respectively, at the 95% confidence level.

Sample sizes and margins of errors at the 95% confidence level for racial/ethnic groups of U.S. employees are as follows: 1,505 Black employees (± 3 percentage points), 2,103 Hispanic employees (± 3 percentage points), 689 Asian employees (± 5 percentage points), 224 Middle Eastern or North African employees (± 9 percentage points) and 10,091 White employees (± 1 percentage point).

Gallup weighted the obtained sample to correct for nonresponse. Nonresponse adjustments were made by adjusting the sample to match the national demographics of U.S. workers aged 18 to 75 on gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets were based on the 2023 American Community Survey figures for the aged 18 and older U.S. working population.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

Calculating Job Quality

The AJQS builds on a broad body of research that examines multiple dimensions of job quality and aspects that matter most to workers, from physical demands and workplace hazards to autonomy and work-life balance.^{11,12}

The study defines a quality job as one that performs well across five core dimensions: financial well-being; workplace culture and safety; growth and development opportunities; agency and voice; and work structure and autonomy.

Each of these dimensions reflects a different element of the work experience and together they provide a comprehensive picture of job quality.

Each respondent receives a score based on how they answer questions in every dimension, with scores ranging from High (1) to Medium (2) to Low (3). Dimensions without valid responses may also be marked as missing or not applicable. The job quality score is then calculated as the unweighted average of these five values. This average can fall anywhere between 1 and 3, with lower scores reflecting higher quality.

Based on the overall average across the five dimensions, each job is then classified into one of three categories:

- **Quality:** 1.00 to < 1.67
- **Non-Quality:** 1.67 to ≤ 3.00
- **Not Classified:** If a respondent does not have a valid score for three or more dimensions, their job quality is not classified.

Note: If a respondent's overall average initially places them in the quality job category but they have a "low" score on the financial well-being dimension, they are recoded into the non-quality job category given the importance of financial well-being to overall job quality.

11 Maestas, N., Mullen, K. J., Powell, D., von Wachter, T., & Wenger, J. B. (2017). *The American Working Conditions Survey: Results from the 2015 RAND American Life Panel*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2014.html

12 Rothwell, J., & Crabtree, S. (2019). *Not just a job: New evidence on the quality of work in the United States* [PDF]. Lumina Foundation. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/not-just-a-job-new-evidence-on-the-quality-of-work-in-the-united-states.pdf>

Job Quality Dimensions



Financial Well-Being

A quality job in this dimension offers fair pay, stable employment and benefits that meet basic needs and reduce financial stress.

Minimum Threshold for Achieving Quality in This Dimension	Survey Items
<p>Full-time workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• earn 300% or higher of the federal poverty level for a family of two (\$5,410/month, which has been adjusted up from \$5,287 in the 2025 study)• have access to some form of paid time off (PTO), for those who are employees• report job security (confidence they can stay in their role if their performance is adequate and economic conditions remain stable) <p>Part-time workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• earn 300% or higher of the federal poverty level for a family of two (\$5,410/month, this has been adjusted up from \$5,287 in the 2025 study) or do not report financial distress and do not want more hours to make ends meet, or do not rely on a second job to get by• have access to some form of PTO, for those who are employees• report job security (confidence they can stay in their role if their performance is adequate and economic conditions remain stable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>What are your usual monthly earnings on your main job?</i> <small>Note: In 2026, respondents entered their actual earnings; in 2025, earnings were entered as ranges of income.</small>• <i>If you had to choose among the following work situations, which of the following would you prefer?</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>work more hours and earn more money, work the same number of hours and earn the same money, work fewer hours and earn less money</i>• <i>Which of the following, if any, can you take paid time off for? Select all that apply.</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>vacation, holidays, own sickness, family member's sickness, childbirth or adoption, personal reasons, none of these/no paid time off</i>• <i>Provided the economy does not change and your job performance is adequate, you could continue to work for your current employer as long as you like. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)</i>• <i>Overall, which one of the following best describes how well you are managing financially these days? (Living comfortably, doing okay, just getting by, finding it difficult to get by)</i>• <i>Please think of the number of hours you work and the money you earn in your main job, including any regular overtime. If you had to choose among the following work situations, which of the following would you prefer?</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>work more hours and earn more money, work the same number of hours and earn the same money, work fewer hours and earn less money</i>



Workplace Culture and Safety

A quality job in this dimension offers a safe, respectful environment free from discrimination or harassment.

Minimum Threshold for Achieving Quality in This Dimension	Survey Items
Generally, workers did not experience a serious work-related injury or illness in the past year and feel safe at work. If they did experience a serious illness or injury at work, they strongly agree that they feel physically safe at work. These workers feel like they belong, are supported, treated with respect at work and are not discriminated against, bullied or harassed at work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>In the last 12 months, on your current main job, did you experience any work-related injuries or illnesses that required medical treatment, change in job activities, or lost time from work?</i>• <i>Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>You feel supported at work.</i>- <i>You feel like you belong at work.</i>- <i>You feel physically safe at work.</i>• <i>You are treated with respect in this main job. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)</i>• <i>Do you feel in any way discriminated against or treated unfairly in your main job because of any of the following?</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>race or ethnic origin, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, age, some aspect of your physical appearance, physical disability, autism or neurodiversity, religious identity, political views</i>• <i>In the past 12 months on your main job, were you bullied, threatened or harassed in any way by any of the following people?</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>a supervisor, a coworker, a customer</i>



Growth and Development Opportunities

A quality job in this dimension provides a clear path to build skills, gain experience and advance in one’s career.

Minimum Threshold for Achieving Quality in This Dimension	Survey Items
Generally, workers see opportunities for advancement at their organization. They have engaged in some form of work-related training or education in the past 12 months and believe their job allows them to learn new things.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does your organization provide you with opportunities for promotion and career advancement?• Over the last 12 months, have you participated in any of the following types of work-related training or education?<ul style="list-style-type: none">- on-the-job training on how to perform job tasks, mentorship on career advancement strategies/ opportunities/business growth, training or education to develop new skills offered or paid for by your employer• Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Your job allows you to learn new things.



Agency and Voice

A quality job in this dimension offers the ability to influence decisions that shape one’s job, such as pay, working conditions and implementation of technology.

Minimum Threshold for Achieving Quality in This Dimension	Survey Items
Workers’ influence nearly matches or matches the level of influence they believe they should have across three areas: compensation, including pay and benefits; working conditions, including physical safety and the ability to take breaks; and the adoption of new technology, including new software, AI tools or robotics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How much influence do you, or your coworkers collectively, have on the following issues? (A lot to none)<ul style="list-style-type: none">- compensation (pay and benefits), working conditions (e.g., physical safety, ability to take breaks), new technologies used in your job (e.g., new software, artificial intelligence tools, robotics)• How much influence should you, or your coworkers collectively, have on the following issues? (A lot to none)<ul style="list-style-type: none">- compensation (pay and benefits), working conditions (e.g., physical safety, ability to take breaks), new technologies used in your job (e.g., new software, artificial intelligence tools, robotics)



Work Structure and Autonomy

A quality job in this dimension offers a stable, predictable schedule, manageable workload and meaningful control over when and how work gets done.

Minimum Threshold for Achieving Quality in This Dimension	Survey Items
Workers know their schedule at least two weeks in advance, unless they set their own hours. Stability and control mean their hours don't fluctuate more than 25% or the difference between the fewest and greatest hours worked in a month is at most four hours without their choice, and they have input on when and how much they work. Workers also generally believe they have the freedom to decide how they do their work, get to do a lot of different things and have enough time to get everything done, while reporting that the job does not typically require them to work very fast.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>How far in advance do you usually know what days and hours you will need to work on your main job? (24 hours or less to always the same schedule)</i>• <i>Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>You have the freedom to decide how you do your work.</i>- <i>You get to do a lot of different things on your job.</i>- <i>Your job requires that you work very fast.</i>- <i>You have enough time to get everything done at work.</i>• <i>In general, how much input do you have into the following at your main job? (A lot to no input)</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>the number of hours you work each week, the days you work each week, when you work each day, whether you can take off a few hours (for personal reasons)</i>• <i>How many hours do you usually work PER WEEK on your main job?</i>• <i>In the last month, what is the greatest number of hours you worked in a week on your main job?</i>• <i>In the last month, what is the fewest number of hours you worked in a week on your main job?</i>

Additional Charts

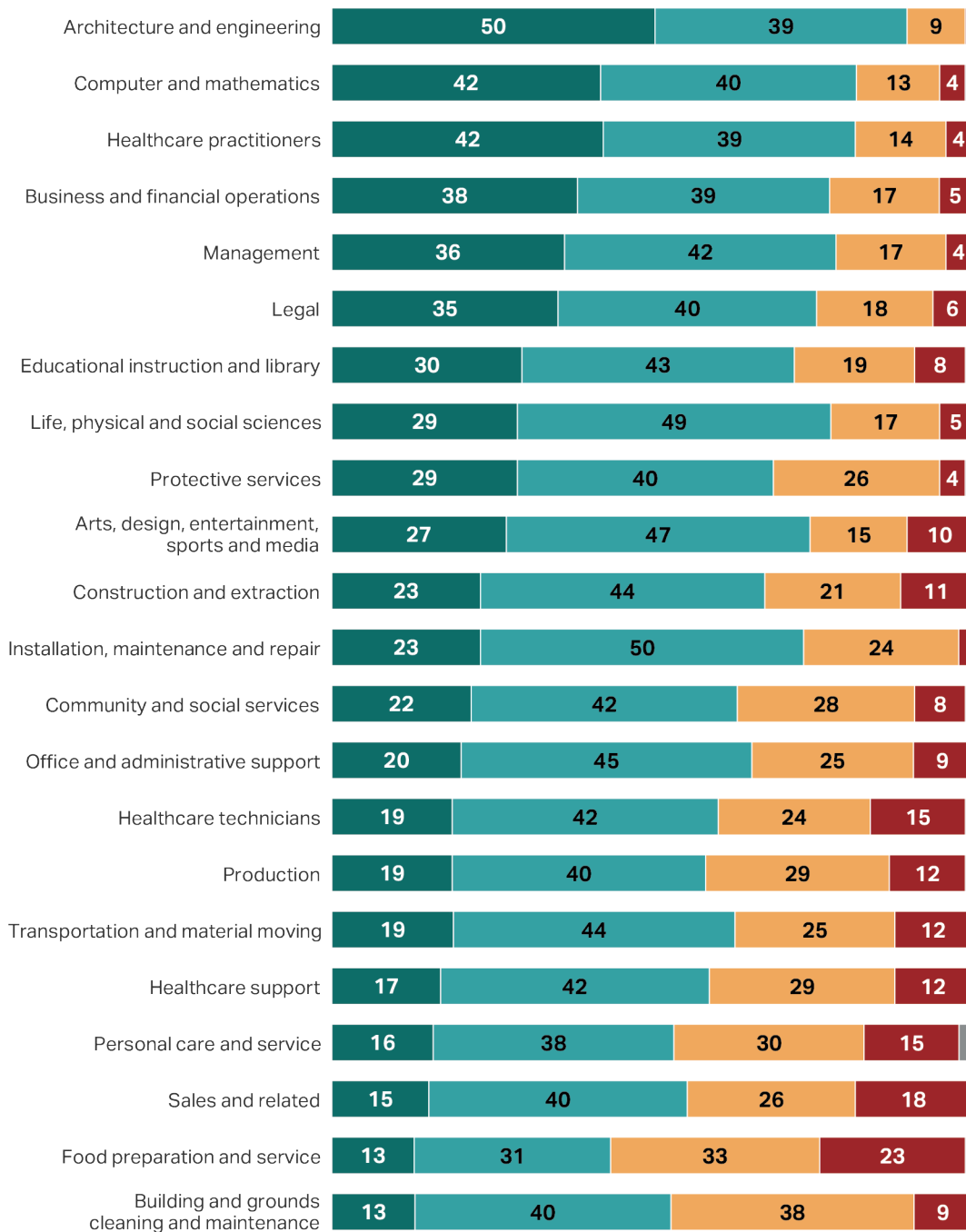
FINANCIAL WELL-BEING BY OCCUPATION

FIGURE 21

Overall, which one of the following best describes how well you are managing financially these days?

By occupation

■ % Living comfortably ■ % Doing okay ■ % Just getting by ■ % Finding it difficult to get by ■ % No response

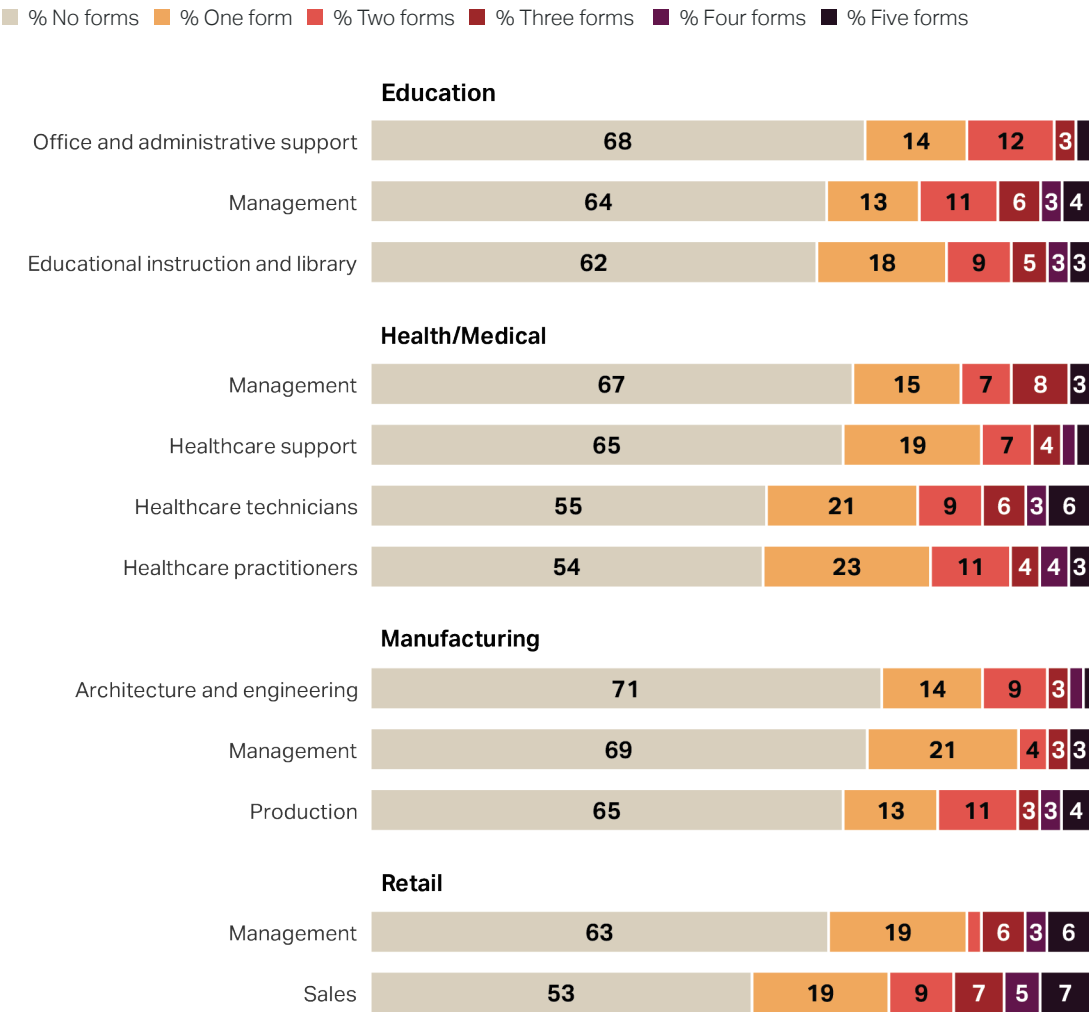


Note: Values less than 3 not labeled.

WORKPLACE CULTURE BY OCCUPATION

FIGURE 22
Forms of Experienced Workplace Discrimination, Harassment or Bullying

By occupation within industries



Note: Values less than 3 not labeled.

About the Research Partners



Jobs for the Future (JFF) transforms U.S. education and workforce systems to drive economic success for people, businesses and communities.



The Families and Workers Fund (FWF) is a collaborative fund investing in solutions that help families and workers thrive. FWF coordinates philanthropy, government, and business to invest in and scale solutions that expand access to good jobs and essential benefits, strengthen the systems that make economic mobility possible, and give workers and families a meaningful voice in shaping the future. The Families and Workers Fund is housed at Assets Under Movement, an independent 501(c)(3) charity.



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Our special thanks to the staff who contributed to the authorship of this report.

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