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New Great Jobs Report Addresses How 40% of American Workers Experienced Worsening Job Quality Since the COVID-19 Pandemic

Washington D.C. — April 7, 2021 — A new report from Gallup — *How COVID-19 Affected the Quality of Work*— shows that 40% of workers have experienced worsening job quality since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, up from 24% as measured in the spring of 2019 relative to the previous year.

In addition to upending social interactions, the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected work in the United States and forced millions of people into unemployment. Conventional labor market indicators document some of these changes but miss how the pandemic has affected the quality of work and played out differently for low-income workers and those working in low-quality jobs at the onset of the crisis.

The new report addresses these issues using the 2020 Great Jobs Survey, a partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Omidyar Network and Lumina Foundation, which continues the research team's [2019 study](#) of job quality measured using worker satisfaction across 11 important dimensions of work. Like the 2019 survey, the updated version — which was fielded in the fourth quarter of 2020 — finds that around 6 in 10 workers are in mediocre or bad jobs. These workers are dissatisfied with critical dimensions of their work, such as compensation, scheduling, purpose, enjoyment or autonomy.

Workers' job quality before the pandemic strongly predicts job quality changes during the pandemic. Those who were in good jobs at the start of the pandemic feel much safer and less exposed than those who were not, regardless of whether they are able to work remotely. Job quality before the pandemic was most strongly associated with control over one's hours and location and the health and safety of one's work environment. For both characteristics, workers with high-quality jobs in 2019 report a net improvement since the pandemic began, while those who had been in low-quality jobs report a net decline.

"Going into the pandemic with a high-quality job — even one that didn't necessary pay a high salary — offered some protection against the worse aspects of the pandemic," said Jonathan Rothwell, Gallup principal economist. "Workers with high pre-pandemic job ratings were at lower risk of layoff, income loss, job quality loss, and have experienced a safer and more supportive work environment as well as less financial hardship."

Nearly three in four workers who started the pandemic in good jobs strongly agree their employer is taking all necessary safety precautions, compared to only 43% of those who started the pandemic in bad jobs. Only 13% of workers in good jobs at the start of the pandemic say they needed to borrow money from friends or family within the past 30 days, compared to 40% of workers who started the pandemic in a bad job.

The report finds that the pandemic exacerbated previous inequities in the labor market, as layoffs, income loss, exposure to the virus, lack of safety and lack of access to remote work have been disproportionately experienced by low-income workers and those who worked in low-quality jobs in 2019.

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“While the unemployment rate has been critical during the COVID pandemic, it is essential for us to understand what major crises do to job *quality*. Other disruptions such as automation, climate change or broader sectoral shifts in our economy are on the horizon,” said Tracy Williams, director, Reimagining Capitalism Team at Omidyar Network. “This important research sheds light on how inequalities in the workplace have been exacerbated in the recent past and presents key insights to policymakers and business leaders as they consider how to protect and promote dignified work in the future.”

COVID-19-related job and income losses have skewed heavily toward Hispanic and Black workers, as well as those with lower education and income levels, resulting in financial hardship for millions of workers and their families.

Overall, almost one-third of U.S. workers — 31% — say they have experienced a layoff (temporary or otherwise) as a result of the pandemic. However, that figure rises to more than 40% in several groups, including those whose 2019 incomes were in the lowest fifth of income, multiracial and Hispanic workers, and those with a high school education only. Black workers and women are also more likely to have been laid off.

Additionally, the report shows that access to remote work has opened new gaps in job quality, with those able to work remotely experiencing an overall improvement in job quality (45% improving versus 33% worsening), whereas those not working remotely experienced deteriorating working conditions (30% improving versus 43% worsening).

For all workers, the level of job quality and changes were significantly worse for those without a postsecondary degree and better for those in professional occupations (defined as those working as healthcare practitioners or in management, finance, legal, engineering, scientific or computer roles).

“The pandemic’s negative impact has been more severe among Black and Hispanic Americans and those who lack education beyond high school. This report provides valuable information that employers and policymakers can use to increase access to education and provide opportunities for high-quality, purposeful work,” said Lumina Foundation Vice President for Impact and Planning Courtney Brown.

Employers and policymakers should prioritize improving conditions for in-person workers, particularly regarding the two quality attributes that most distinguish them from remote workers: making their workplaces as safe as possible and granting them greater control and flexibility. More broadly, a nationwide effort to boost job quality would immediately benefit workers and leave them better prepared for future crises.

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About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people — especially those with the fewest resources — have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Mark Suzman under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

About Omidyar Network

Established by philanthropists Pam and Pierre Omidyar, Omidyar Network is a social change venture that has committed more than \$1 billion to innovative for-profit companies and nonprofit organizations since 2004. Omidyar Network works to reimagine critical systems and the ideas that govern them, and to build more inclusive and equitable societies in which individuals have the social, economic, and democratic power to thrive.

About Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. The foundation envisions a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results, and meets the nation's need for talent through a broad range of credentials. Lumina's goal is to prepare people for informed citizenship and for success in a global economy.