

Media Release

For Immediate Release

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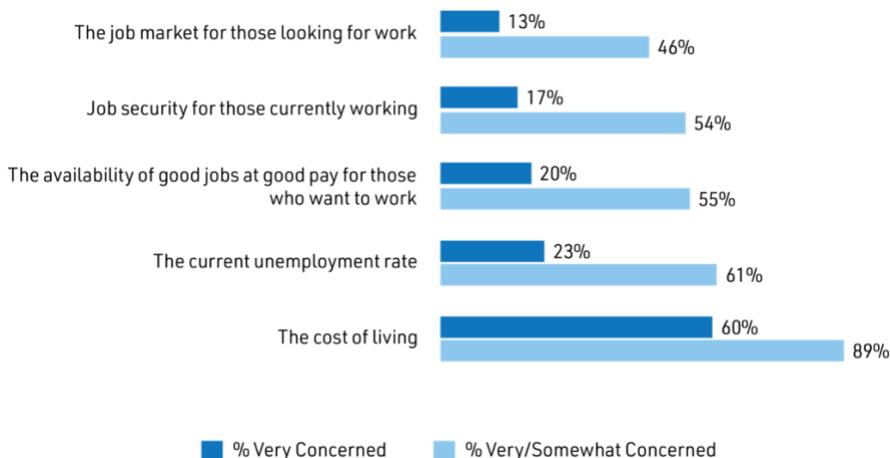
The survey topline with methodological statement are available at:

https://heldrich.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/2021-12/Work_Trends_Topline_Survey_Results_December_2021.pdf or <https://bit.ly/3EAaggR>

What a Difference a (Pandemic) Year Makes: Less Concern, More Confidence Expressed by Workers as 2021 Comes to an End

New Brunswick, NJ, December 9, 2021 - A new *Work Trends* survey of American workers, conducted by the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, finds that 6 in 10 are very concerned about the cost of living as 2022 approaches. In contrast, workers' opinions about the labor market have improved substantially compared to a year ago. In late November 2021, only 13% said they are very concerned about the job market; 43% said they were very concerned in 2020 (see Figure 1 and Table 1). In 2020, 8 in 10 workers said they were very or somewhat concerned about job security for employed Americans (83%), compared to 5 in 10 workers in 2021 (54%). Despite these improvements, 61% of workers are still very or somewhat concerned about the current unemployment rate whereas 85% were very or somewhat concerned in 2020 (see Table 2).

Figure 1. Concern about the U.S. Economy and Jobs, Labor Force, November 2021



Thinking about some economic issues...how concerned are you about...[ITEM]? Very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned (2020: not concerned at all)?

Based on labor force sample. See Tables 1 and 2 for sample sizes.

Table 1. Percent Very Concerned about Jobs, Labor Force, Trend Data

	November 2021	December 2020
Current Unemployment Rate ¹	23%	41%
Job Security for those Currently Working ²	17%	26%
Job Market for those Looking for Work ³	13%	43%
Bureau of Labor Statistics Unemployment Rate*	4.6%	6.7%
Sample size	617 ¹ /616 ² /615 ³	497 ¹ /499 ² /496 ³

Thinking about some economic issues...how concerned are you about...[ITEM]? Very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned (2020: not concerned at all)?

*Based on survey field dates (i.e., October 2021 unemployment rate is reported in the table).

Note: The November 2021 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) unemployment rate was retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empst_11052021.pdf while the December 2020 BLS unemployment rate was retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empst_12042020.pdf.

Table 2. Percent Very/Somewhat Concerned about Jobs, Labor Force, Trend Data

	November 2021	December 2020
Current Unemployment Rate ¹	61%	85%
Job Security for those Currently Working ²	54%	83%
Job Market for those Looking for Work ³	46%	88%
Bureau of Labor Statistics Unemployment Rate*	4.6%	6.7%
Sample size	617 ¹ /616 ² /615 ³	497 ¹ /499 ² /496 ³

Thinking about some economic issues...how concerned are you about...[ITEM]? Very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned (2020: not concerned at all)?

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Workers are clearly more optimistic about finding work today than they were a year ago: 3 in 4 workers say they agree with the statement that “it’s not hard to find a job in America if you really want to work” (75%), 4 in 10 saying they strongly agree (39%), compared to 2 in 10 (24%) in December 2020 (see Table 3). And 3 in 4 workers say it is now a “good time” to find a quality job (73%) rather than a “bad time” (27%), an almost exact flip-flop from one year ago (see Table 4).

Table 3. Finding a Job in America and Wanting to Work, Labor Force, Trend Data

	November 2021	December 2020
Agree	75%	65%
Strongly agree	39%	24%
Somewhat agree	35%	40%
Disagree	25%	35%
Somewhat disagree	17%	27%
Strongly disagree	8%	8%
Total	100%	100%
Sample size	616	500

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statement? “It’s not hard to find a job in America if you really want to work.”

Table 4. Good Time/Bad Time to Find Quality Job, Labor Force, Trend Data

	November 2021	December 2020
Good time	73%	28%
Bad time	27%	72%
Total	100%	100%
Sample size	618	497

Thinking about the job situation in America today, would you say that now is a good time or (2020: a) bad time to find a quality job?

“Compared to a year ago, workers’ increased optimism about the labor market helps explain their willingness to change jobs in search of better pay or working conditions, quit working for a few months, or even retire,” says Carl Van Horn, Ph.D., Director of the Heldrich Center, who has led the *Work Trends* survey project for over 20 years.

Most Americans with a full- or part-time job at the time of the survey indicated that they are not concerned about their own job security at the end of 2021 (see Table 5). For Americans working full or part time, confidence in finding a new job if needed is significantly higher at the end of 2021 (50% versus 27% say they are extremely or very confident), compared to the end of 2020 (see Table 6).

Table 5. Concern about Own Job Security, Employed Americans, Trend Data

	November 2021	December 2020
Very concerned	10%	13%
Somewhat concerned	19%	29%
Not too concerned	40%	36%
Not at all concerned	32%	21%
Total	100%	100%
Sample size	569	461

Thinking about some economic issues...how concerned are you about...your own job security? Very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned (2020: not concerned at all)?

Table 6. Confidence in Finding New Job if Needed, Employed Americans, Trend Data

	November 2021	December 2020
Extremely confident	25%	10%
Very confident	25%	17%
Somewhat confident	29%	35%
Not very confident	15%	26%
Not at all confident	5%	13%
Total	100%	100%
Sample size	571	458

How confident are you that if you lost or wanted to leave your current job, you could find another job as good or better?

Despite what appears to be a positive outlook for their own work situations in the near future, workers polled in 2021 are divided on whether job, career, and employment opportunities will improve for the next generation of workers (see Table 7).

Table 7. Job Opportunities will Improve for Next Generation, Labor Force, Trend Data

	November 2021	December 2020
Agree	50%	38%
Strongly agree	10%	5%
Somewhat agree	40%	33%
Disagree	50%	62%
Somewhat disagree	42%	51%
Strongly disagree	7%	11%
Total	100%	100%
Sample size	608	498

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statement? "Overall, job, career, and employment opportunities will be better for the next generation than for my generation."

Other findings about workers' attitudes at the end of 2021 include:

- When asked to choose between two ways to describe their current job, 2 in 3 Americans working full or part time say they would describe their job as "just what they do for a living" (68%) rather than giving them "a sense of identity" (32%).
- 6 in 10 Americans working full or part time say they are very or somewhat concerned about the global supply chain impacting their work (58%); 1 in 4 say they are very concerned (24%).

"Just 1 in 10 workers say they are very concerned about the job market for job seekers in 2021, and half say they are very or extremely confident they could find work if they needed to," said Jessica Starace, Research Associate at the Heldrich Center. "Despite being at odds about how concerning the current economy is now and for the next generation, workers think that the jobs are out there, should they need them, in 2022."

How We Did this

The current *Work Trends* survey was fielded online between November 19 and 21, 2021 to a national probability sample of 1,019 U.S. adults age 18+, including 623 Americans in the labor force who say they are employed full time (working at least 35 hours per week), employed part time, or are unemployed and looking for work. The margin of error for the labor force sample (also described here as “American workers”) is +/- 4.3 percentage points. Sampling and interviewing were managed by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC. The December 2020 survey was fielded online from December 4 to 14, 2020 to a national probability sample of 814 U.S. adults age 18+, including 500 Americans in the labor force. The margin of error for the 2020 labor force sample is +/-4.8 percentage points. See the [December 2020 topline](#) for December 2020 trend data (based off of a national sample).

The current survey was fielded prior to the November 26, 2021 identification of the omicron variant by the World Health Organization. Estimates reported may not sum to totals due to rounding. The sample of workers does not include those who explicitly say they were temporarily furloughed from work (0.5% of sample in November 2021 and 2% in December 2020). Both labor force samples include respondents who indicate that they are retired from their main occupation but currently working.

*The **John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development** is based at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University. It is one of the nation’s leading university-based research and policy centers dedicated to raising the effectiveness of the American workplace through improved workforce education, placement, and training. The center identifies innovative workforce practices and practical policy changes that can help Americans receive the education and training they need to be productive and prosperous in a global knowledge economy. Learn more at www.heldrich.rutgers.edu.*

*The American Association for Public Opinion Research honored the Heldrich Center’s *Work Trends* research on the Great Recession with its Policy Impact Award in 2013.*