

Job-hugging, raiding savings and putting life on pause: new research reveals three ways economic uncertainty is quietly remaking America's workforce

- ***Economic uncertainty reshaping workforce benefits landscape:*** New research from Economist Enterprise on the evolving employee benefits landscape reveals how economic uncertainty is freezing career mobility, deepening retirement insecurity, and widening the benefits divide across America's workforce.
- ***Retirement and other milestones delayed:*** Financial pressures are forcing workers to delay retirement by nearly four years, postpone major purchases like homes, and lead 35% to have taken hardship withdrawals.
- ***Job-hugging:*** 62% prioritize long-term security over higher pay and better benefits, and 30% have stopped job searching in the past five years.

New York, April 6th, 2026 — New research from Economist Enterprise focused on employee benefits entitled, “Benefits 2.0”, exposes three forces business leaders can't afford to ignore: economic uncertainty is freezing career mobility, pushing retirement out of reach, and forcing employees to raid savings and delay life decisions just to stay afloat — at a real cost to both employees and employers.

The research — supported by Nuveen, a TIAA company — surveyed 2,063 full-time employed Americans aged 18–62, providing insights across industries including energy and utilities, manufacturing, sports, media and entertainment, financial services and insurance, and government. The findings reveal three forces reshaping how Americans work, save, and plan for the future — and why business leaders can't afford to look away.

The great stay: job security over career mobility

America's workers are holding onto their jobs at a decade-low quit rate of [2%](#), and it's not always because they love their work, but instead are staying put out of fear of losing job security.

Caution, not confidence, characterizes how most American workers are approaching their careers, with 62% choosing long-term job security over seeking out new opportunities. The research paints a picture of a risk-averse workforce navigating economic uncertainty.

Job-search hesitation has become increasingly widespread, with 30% of workers reporting that they have stopped looking for new opportunities over the past five years due to concerns about job security. This trend is even more pronounced in certain sectors, rising to 35% among those in financial services and insurance and 34% in manufacturing. In contrast, government employees appear less affected, with 23% saying they have paused their job search for the same reason.

“America’s workers are prioritizing job stability and a strong benefits package, signaling a shift in how workers weigh risk versus reward in today’s competitive labor market,” **said Matt Terry, who led the research at Economist Enterprise.** “This cautious approach reflects a broader trend: workers are increasingly valuing predictability over advancement, which could have lasting implications for career growth and economic mobility.”

For most Americans, retirement is a moving target

Holding onto a stable job may feel like the safe choice, but for many workers true financial security remains out of reach. With respondents now expecting to retire nearly four years later than planned, the gap between expectations and reality is stark, nowhere more so than in retirement:

- **Working longer out of necessity, not enjoyment:** Of those who expect to work past their ideal retirement age, only 20% cite job satisfaction as the primary reason. Instead, rising living costs (47%) and healthcare expenses (41%—rising to 50% among low-income workers) are the primary drivers of expected delays.
- **Income shapes retirement expectations:** Lower-income workers expect the largest gap, anticipating retiring roughly six years later than their ideal age.
- **Retirement anxiety starts early:** Even Gen Z—many of whom just entered the workforce full-time—expect retirement to be delayed by an average of five years.
- **Retirement delays hit finance and manufacturing hardest:** Workers in financial services & insurance expect the longest delay (5.1 years), followed by manufacturing (4.5 years). Government workers anticipate the shortest gap between ideal and expected retirement (2.9 years).

Raiding savings and delaying life decisions

To cope with financial pressures, workers aren't just adjusting their expectations. They're pulling from retirement savings and deferring major life milestones to stay afloat today:

- **Borrowing from the future:** About one-third of workers (35%) have, at some point, taken hardship withdrawals or loans from retirement accounts. Rates are highest in financial services & insurance (44%) and manufacturing (41%), and lowest among government workers (23%).
- **Reduced retirement contributions:** Thirty percent of workers say they have cut back retirement savings, rising to 36% among high-income workers.
- **Major life purchases delayed:** Three-quarters of workers (73%) have postponed buying a home or car, with millennials most affected (82%). Delayed purchases are highest in manufacturing (79%) and lowest among government workers (69%).
- **Healthcare and family decisions deferred:** Forty-three percent of workers say they have delayed or skipped medical care to avoid costs—rising to 51% in manufacturing and financial services—while one in four (25%) have postponed having children.

"The data in this report should give every employer pause. When workers feel financially insecure, they delay retirement, and that has real costs – both administrative and financial - for organizations carrying expensive, experienced employees who are ready to move on but don't believe they can afford to," said **Brendan McCarthy, head of Nuveen Retirement Investing**. "Employers have more power to change that than they might realise. At a time when employees are craving stability and certainty, employers can stand out as an employer of choice by delivering a more modern approach to benefits that can help employees navigate key life milestones with more confidence."

About the research

The findings are based on independent research and analysis conducted by Economist Enterprise (formerly Economist Impact) and supported by Nuveen. Between November and December 2025, Economist Enterprise surveyed 2,063 full-time employed Americans aged 18–62 across organisations with at least 1,000 employees across the energy and utilities, manufacturing, sports, media and entertainment, financial services and insurance, and government sectors. The analysis captures a broad and diverse cross-section of the workforce, with findings examined across industry, company size, income, ethnicity and other demographic factors to provide a deeper view of how economic uncertainty is reshaping career mobility, retirement planning and benefits decisions.

About Economist Enterprise

Economist Enterprise is the arm of The Economist Group that provides services to businesses, government agencies and financial institutions. Its work is grounded in The Economist Group's values of independence, integrity and progress. Economist Enterprise gives organisations the tools to make better decisions, take confident action and demonstrate leadership on a global stage.

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About Nuveen

Nuveen, a TIAA company, is a global investment leader, managing \$1.4T in public and private assets for clients around the world, as of December 31, 2025. With broad expertise across income and alternatives, we invest in the growth of businesses, real estate, infrastructure, and natural capital, providing clients with the reliability, access, and foresight unique to our 125+ year heritage. Our prevailing perspective on the future drives our ambition to innovate and adapt our business to the changing needs of investors — all to pursue lasting performance for our clients, our communities, and our global economy.

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