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Kim Pohas doesn't want to test the job market; Marieme Barry feels challenged and supported at her job at a data analytics firm.

Workers Hang on Tight to Their Jobs

Americans eschew job-hopping in a 'low hire, low fire' jobs atmosphere

BY RACHEL WOLFE AND JUSTIN LAHART

American workers are staying put.

Workers across all sectors are switching jobs about as infrequently as they were in the years when the job market was still clawing its way back from the 2008-09 financial crisis. The "separation" rate, which includes both people who are laid off and those who leave their jobs voluntarily, has been stuck around its lowest levels since the years after the financial crisis. The flip side of that, the hiring rate, is similarly low.

Note

"It's like a hen laying on its eggs," said Burning Glass Institute labor economist Guy Berger. "People feel like there are not great outside options."

The country is adding around 80,000 new jobs a month, boosted by Friday's jobs report, with 162,000 jobs added in August. That is a big improvement from the 10,000 jobs a month added on average in 2025, but not as robust as 2024 when the country added 122,000 jobs a month.

The market has settled into a "low hire, low fire" atmosphere. Workers who have managed to secure jobs are hanging onto them, especially in white-collar industries where the market isn't nearly as dynamic as it is in blue-collar sectors.

Note

When so few people leave, few new roles open up for anyone else. University of Michigan labor economist Betsey Stevenson likens it to a crowded restaurant where every table filled up 10 minutes ago. It doesn't matter how many tables there are, or how long you've been waiting: Nobody gets a table until someone gets up. So, seeing how long the line is, nobody gives up their seat.

That is especially true if you really like your table. In years past, workers were much more willing to advance their careers and pay by hopping from one company to another, chasing opportunity with less worry about stability.

People who used to view staying at a company as a lack of ambition now see it as the opposite.

Kim Pohas saw a role she would have once considered her dream job posted last month and didn't even apply.

The 42-year-old technical writer in Irvine, Calif., knew she was qualified: Recruiters court her on LinkedIn all the time, she said. But she won't gamble her current role— where she loves her boss, feels valued and has four years of seniority—especially when she keeps seeing friends surface in her feed, freshly laid off.

"I sound like the boomers who are like, 'Stay for 20 years and get the gold watch and the vacation to Hawaii,'" Pohas said. "But maybe they knew what they were talking about."

Rather than test the market, Pohas has spent the past year making herself harder to replace. She taught herself how to use AI coding tools on her own time, then helped her company rebuild a piece of their software—work well beyond her job description. The bet paid off. She got a promotion that takes effect next month.

Note

More than a third of the jobs gained this year have come from the healthcare sector. The construction sector, a beneficiary of the data-center building boom, has also seen gains. Manufacturing, which lost jobs last year amid worries over tariffs, has bounced back. The overall unemployment rate remains low at 4.1%.

Note

White-collar workers can have a tough time breaking into the market. That is because there tends to be less job switching in jobs held by people with higher levels of education— the seats at the table don't empty as frequently, in effect. This can be especially true for veteran workers looking for more senior positions.

Note

Nearly two million Americans have been locked out of the market for at least half a year. The long-term unemployed— people who have been unsuccessfully seeking work for 27 weeks or more—accounted for 27% of unemployed people in August. That was markedly higher than two years earlier, when it was closer to 21%. Among employed and unemployed people seeking work in August, a Gallup poll found that only 33% considered it a good time to find a quality job.

Trex Desai knows what the wait looks like. Seeking health insurance, and colleagues, while working as an independent consultant, Desai sent out more than 200 applications and spent nine months interviewing before landing at a financial technology company five months ago.

"It was absolutely horri-ble," said Desai, who is 38 and lives in Brooklyn with his wife and two children.

He has no desire to go through the experience again anytime in the near—or distant— future, in large part because he's thrilled with where he landed. He's investing in relationships across the company, proactively offering to help his co-workers rather than waiting for them to come to him and staying on top of new developments in the industry to bring back to his firm. "I'm doubling down," he said.

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The lack of white-collar mobility falls especially hard on the young, who make up a big share of job seekers and have long relied on hopping between companies to raise their pay.

Marieme Barry, 25, is one of the ones who made it in—and has no intention of testing her luck. The news analyst at a data analytics firm likes her job, where she feels challenged and supported, works from home and has the vacation days to feed her love of travel. Sure, she'd like to make more money one day. But she considers herself among the best-off of her friends, many of whom searched for months and settled for whatever they could find. She doesn't think a better role is waiting—especially right now. "There's a lot to be said for staying where you are," Barry said. "All things in due time."

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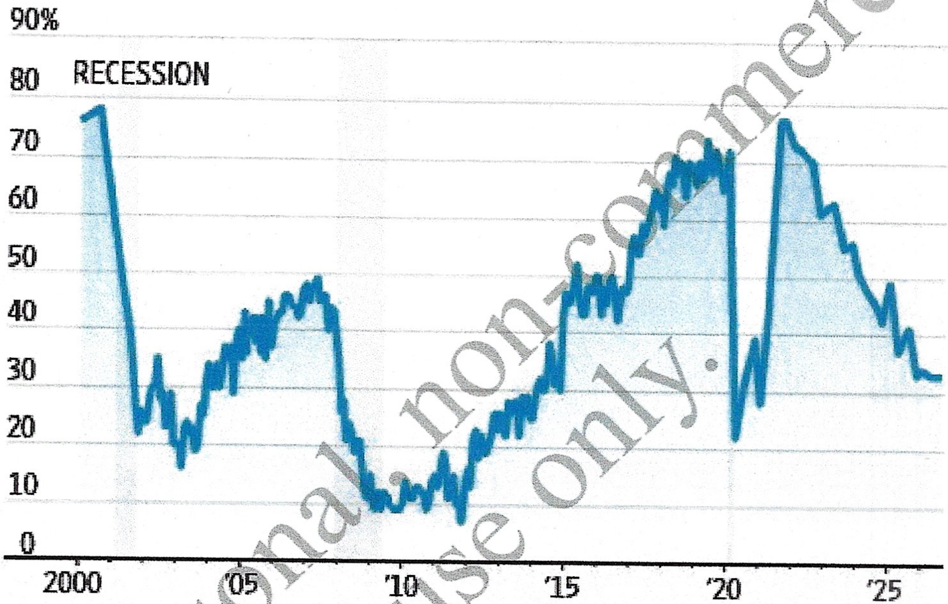
Share of people seeking work who say it is a good time to find a quality job



Note: Includes both employed and unemployed job seekers
Source: Gallup

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