



People at Work 2021: A Global Workforce View

Nela Richardson, Ph.D.

Sara Klein



Executive summary

The ADP Research Institute's *People at Work 2021: A Global Workforce View* provides a starting point to understand the situation facing employees today across five dimensions of working life: worker confidence and job security; workplace conditions; pay and performance; worker mobility; and gender and family.

Acting as a barometer of how the global workforce feels one year on from the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's report delivers unrivaled insight into how workers and employers have coped so far and how the workforce feels about the future.

Though attitudes and behaviors are impacted by the local path of the pandemic in different parts of the world and the policies adopted by various governments, several overarching trends are developing.



1 Worker confidence: Optimism is shaken yet persistent

COVID-19 has dented worker sentiment: although the majority (86%) of workers still say they feel optimistic about the next five years in the workplace, this is down from 92% last year. This decline is understandable given that more than a quarter (28%) report having been laid off, furloughed or temporarily laid off by their employers and almost one in four (23%) having to take a pay cut. The impact on job

security and optimism is uneven, with younger workers being the hardest hit. However, many workers think COVID-19 will have a positive impact on issues like flexibility and development of skill sets.

2 Workplace conditions: Unpaid overtime soars and empowerment rises on flexible working

Unpaid overtime has jumped sharply to 9.2 hours per week on average, up from 7.3 just a year ago. The amount of 'free time' provided to employees is highest among hybrid workers (those who divide work time between home



workers feel more empowered to take advantage of flexible working arrangements: two-thirds (67%) say so today, up from just over a quarter (26%) before the pandemic. Nearly half (47%) say their managers allow more flexibility than company policy provides.

3 Pay and performance: Pandemic ripple effect puts payment precision in the spotlight

More than one in four workers (28%) report having taken on a new role or changing roles due to job losses in their organization and most of them (68%) received a pay raise or bonus for doing so. Unfortunately, underpayments have affected more than three in five workers this year (63%), and late payments are on the increase. Even where payment is accurate, a lack of alignment between pay schedules and when bills are due causes cashflow troubles for a significant proportion of the workforce (24%). Issues around payment accuracy and promptness resonate more when people are concerned about their financial or job security, or when they are working harder than ever, and in more stressful circumstances.

4 Worker mobility: Workers on the move as a result of the pandemic

The pandemic has driven a shift in both where and how workers work and live. Less than a year since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, its impact has already seen three quarters (75%) of the global workforce make changes to or plan to change their living arrangements, rising to 85% of Generation Z (18-24 year olds). One in seven workers (15%) are actively trying to move into a new industry that they consider more “future proof”. Compared to one year ago, appetite for gig work – the most mobile and flexible work option of all – has increased in Asia Pacific and Latin America while holding steady in Europe and declining in North America.

5 Gender and family: Women feel the strain – and pay gaps hold

Two thirds (67%) of the global workforce say they have been forced to make a compromise between their work and their personal life because of the impact of the pandemic and the research points to some concerns for women and parents in particular. 15% of working parents report that they or someone in their household stopped working voluntarily, rising to 26% for those with children under one. Half of respondents (52%) believe employers’ provisions for working parents will cease within a year. Against this backdrop, women are more likely to report that stress management is a challenge and feel less assured about job prospects compared to men. Women are also less likely than men to receive a pay raise or bonus for taking on additional work or changing roles, with the greatest gap in North America.