

PEOPLE AT WORK

2025



6

CAREER BARRIERS



ADVANCEMENT

19%

The largest share of respondents said their current job lacks any opportunity to advance at all.¹

15%

The share of respondents who believed strongly that they would need to change employers to get ahead.

Source: ADP Research Global Workforce Survey

THE PATH TO ADVANCEMENT ISN'T ALWAYS UP. OFTEN, IT'S OUT.

Contributors

Mary Hayes, Ph.D.
Research director
People and Performance

Jared Northup
Research analyst
People and Performance

Nela Richardson, Ph.D.
Chief economist
ESG Officer
Head of ADP Research

MANY AMBITIOUS EMPLOYEES SAY THEY LACK ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES AT WORK. IT'S ONE BIG REASON THEY QUIT.

Workers these days are adept at reading the landscape. When they quit their jobs, it's not always about moving to the next rung on the career ladder. Often, it's about finding a ladder with more rungs to climb. Career advancement isn't the straight line it once was. Between July 23 and August 6, 2024, we asked a random, stratified panel of nearly 38,000 workers across 34 markets to identify their biggest barriers to career advancement.

The largest share of respondents—19 percent—said their current job lacks any opportunity to advance at all.¹ And 15 percent believed strongly that they would need to change employers to get ahead.

This lack of opportunity was a particular problem in Latin America, where 25 percent of workers cited it as their biggest barrier to career advancement.

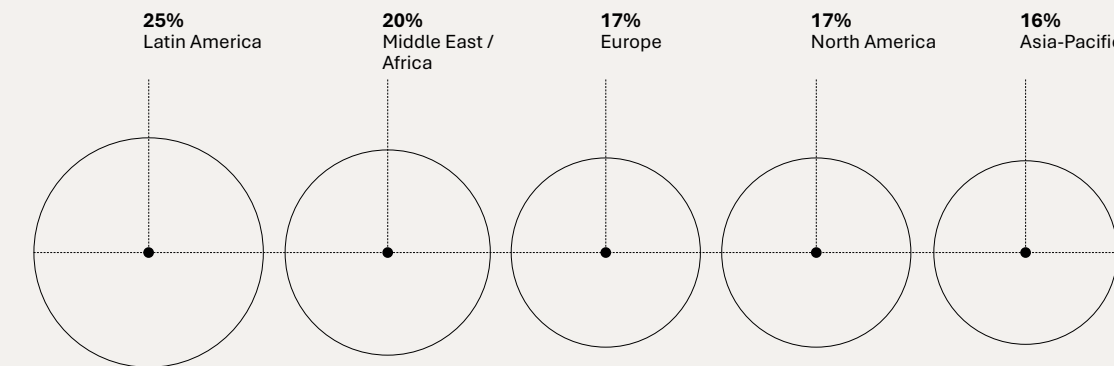
North America is the only region where a lack of opportunity wasn't the most-cited barrier. In this region, 19 percent of workers surveyed said they had a lack of desire to move up the career ladder; 17 percent cited a lack of opportunity.

Only 6 percent of respondents selected a lack of skill as their biggest barrier to advancement, putting this reason near the bottom of the list. This was surprising, given that only 24 percent of respondents said they were confident that they have the skills needed to advance to the next job level. Even fewer—17 percent—strongly agreed that their employers were investing in developing their skills.²

Perhaps having the skills needed for advancement becomes irrelevant to workers if they don't see a clear opportunity to use those proficiencies at their current place of employment.

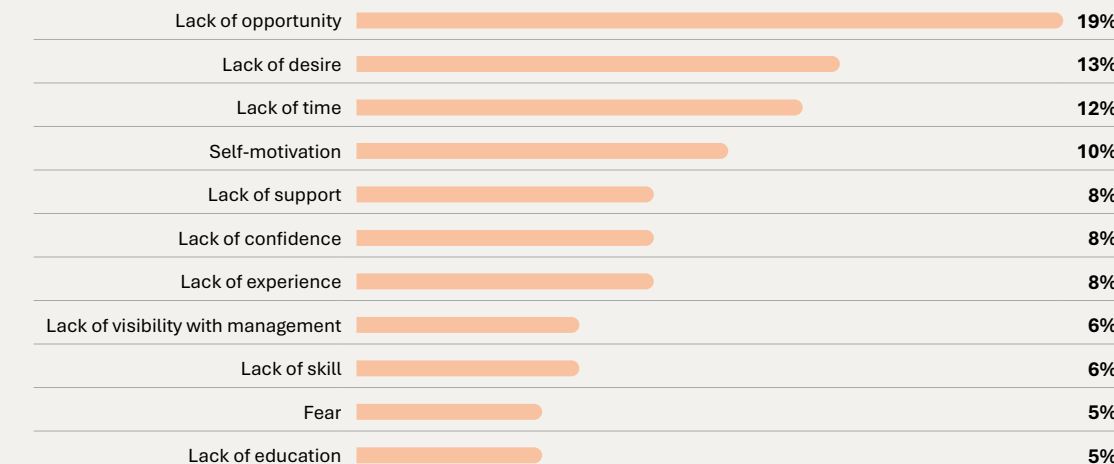
Continued, page 4

LACK OF OPPORTUNITY, by region
Share of workers who feel stymied by a lack of opportunity.



BARRIERS TO CAREER ADVANCEMENT

What's keeping you back? Many workers blamed their lack of advancement on their employers.



¹ We asked respondents this question: What do you see as the biggest barrier to advancing to the next level of your career? Respondents selected only one of the following options:

- Lack of opportunity
- Lack of skill
- Lack of visibility with management, etc.
- Fear
- Lack of education
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of experience
- Self-motivation
- Lack of time
- Lack of support (e.g., mentor, career champion, or advocate)
- Lack of desire (happy in my current job and don't want to change)

² For more information, see our article on [skills development](#) in People at Work 2025.

Source: ADP Research Global Workforce Survey



Continued from page 3

Workers who were confident that they had the necessary skills to advance and those who weren't both selected lack of opportunity as the most common barrier to career advancement.

For many workers, landing a promotion or advancing a career simply weren't top priorities. Nearly 1 in 3 gave a personal reason for not advancing, citing a lack of motivation or confidence. Thirteen percent said they were happy in their current role and had no desire to switch jobs.

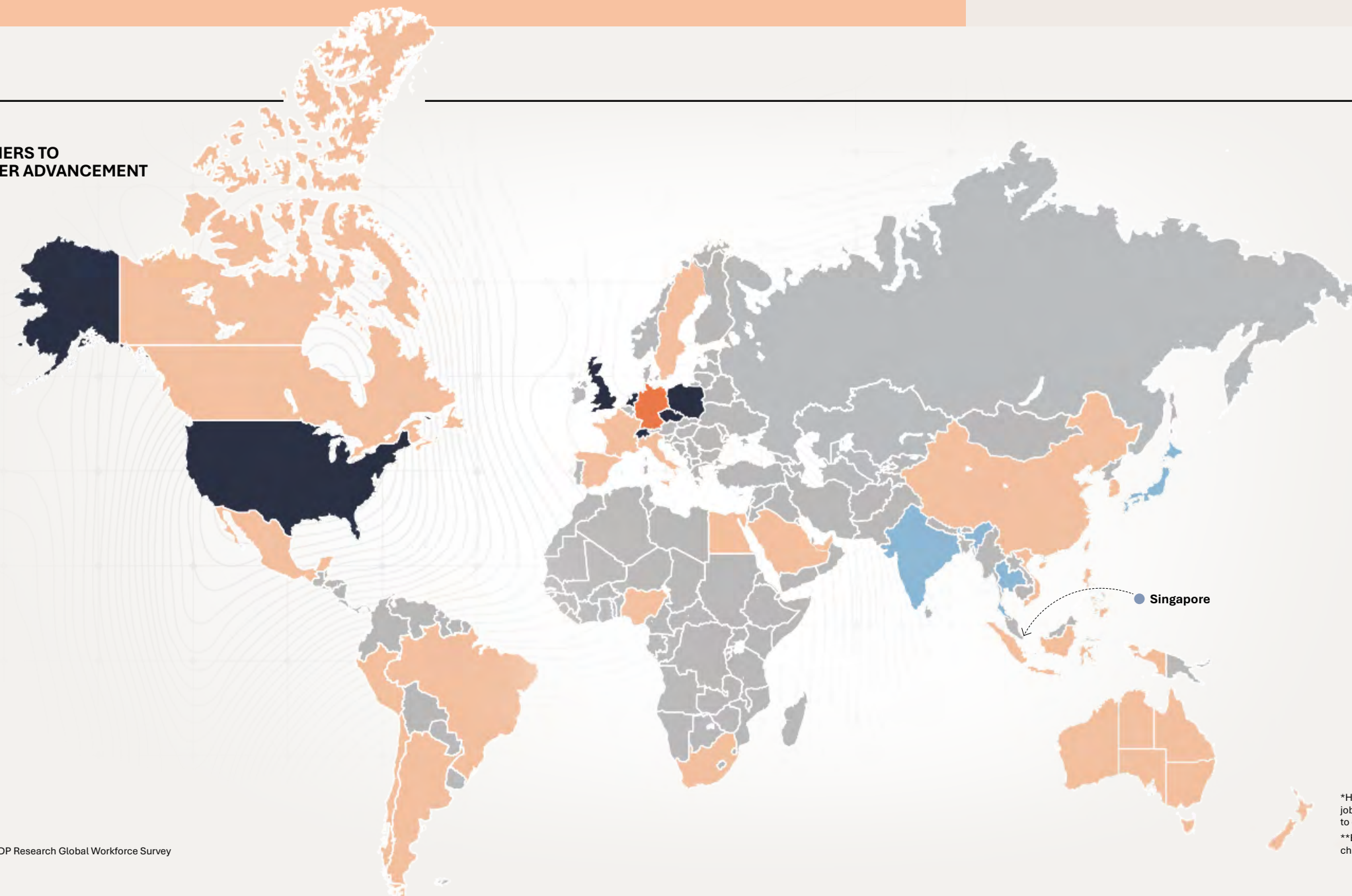
But for people who are keen on landing more responsibility or pay, that ambition influences other decisions. Workers who saw ways to advance in their current job cited that opportunity as their top reason for sticking with their employer. Opportunities for advancement ranked above a flexible work schedule, training and skills development, and even bonus pay when it came to reasons for staying with an employer.

25%

Egypt had the largest share of respondents who strongly agree that if they want to advance in their career, they will need to change companies. Japan had the smallest share, at 7%.

BARRIERS TO CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Source: ADP Research Global Workforce Survey



By market and reason

Most-selected barrier	Market
Lack of opportunity	Argentina
	Australia
	Brazil
	Canada
	Chile
	China
	Egypt
	France
	Indonesia
	Italy
	Mexico
	New Zealand
	Nigeria
	Peru
	Philippines
	Saudi Arabia
	South Africa
	South Korea
	Spain
	Sweden
Taiwan	
United Arab Emirates	
Vietnam	
Lack of desire*	Czech Republic
	Netherlands
	Poland
	Switzerland
	United Kingdom
Lack of support**	United States
Lack of support**	Singapore
Lack of time	Germany
Self-motivation	India
	Japan
	Thailand

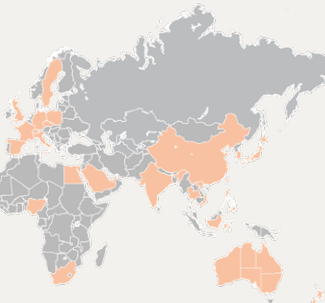
*Happy in my current job and do not want to change
 **E.g., mentor, career champion, or advocate

By region and reason

North America was the only region where 'Lack of desire' was the most-cited barrier.



• **Latin America**
 • **Asia-Pacific**
 • **Europe**
 • **Middle East / Africa**
 'Lack of opportunity' was the most-cited barrier to career advancement.



Lack of opportunity, by market

Argentina	26%
Nigeria	26
Brazil	26
South Africa	25
Chile	25
Mexico	24
Peru	24
Italy	23
Spain	23
New Zealand	21
China	20
Australia	20
France	20
Sweden	20
Indonesia	19
Canada	19
Egypt	19
Germany	17
Saudi Arabia	16
Vietnam	16
Switzerland	16
United Kingdom	16
India	16
Taiwan	16
United Arab Emirates	15
Czech Republic	15
Philippines	15
South Korea	14
United States	14
Thailand	14
Japan	13
Netherlands	13
Poland	12
Singapore	11



AGE AND OPPORTUNITY

Age, too, seems to influence how people feel about opportunities at work.

More than 20 percent of workers older than 40 cited a lack of opportunity as the biggest barrier to their advancement, compared to only 14 percent of people younger than 27.

These older workers are more likely to occupy higher-level jobs. Top managers were less preoccupied about the lack of opportunity than people lower on the company hierarchy, but not by much. Sixteen percent of executives and upper managers cited lack of opportunity as a barrier, compared to 18 percent of middle and frontline managers and 20 percent of individual contributors.

THE BUSINESS RISK

It should come as no surprise to managers that ambitious employees are more likely to be looking for new opportunities. Thirty-four percent of workers who said they can't find an opportunity to advance at their current employer said they were actively looking or interviewing for a new job. Among those who were confident they could advance, only 6 percent said they were actively looking.

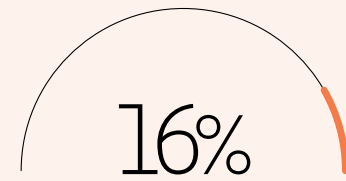
This risk to retention is accompanied by another negative for employers: lower productivity. Workers who feel strongly that they need to change employers to get ahead were 2.6 times less likely to consider themselves highly productive.

DO DEMOGRAPHICS MATTER?

We thought that perceived barriers to career advancement might vary based on demographics, but we found few stark differences.

Men and women in equal numbers cited lack of opportunity as their top barrier to advancement. Parents cited the same barriers as non-parents.

Workers at all sizes of employers—from the smallest businesses to the very large—cited similar barriers to advancement.



Among workers who identified as a racial or ethnic minority in their market, **16 percent** cited lack of opportunity as a barrier to advancement, compared to **20 percent** of non-minorities.

REASONS TO STAY

Among workers who see opportunities to advance within their current company, we asked people why they stay with their current employer.³

Top three reasons

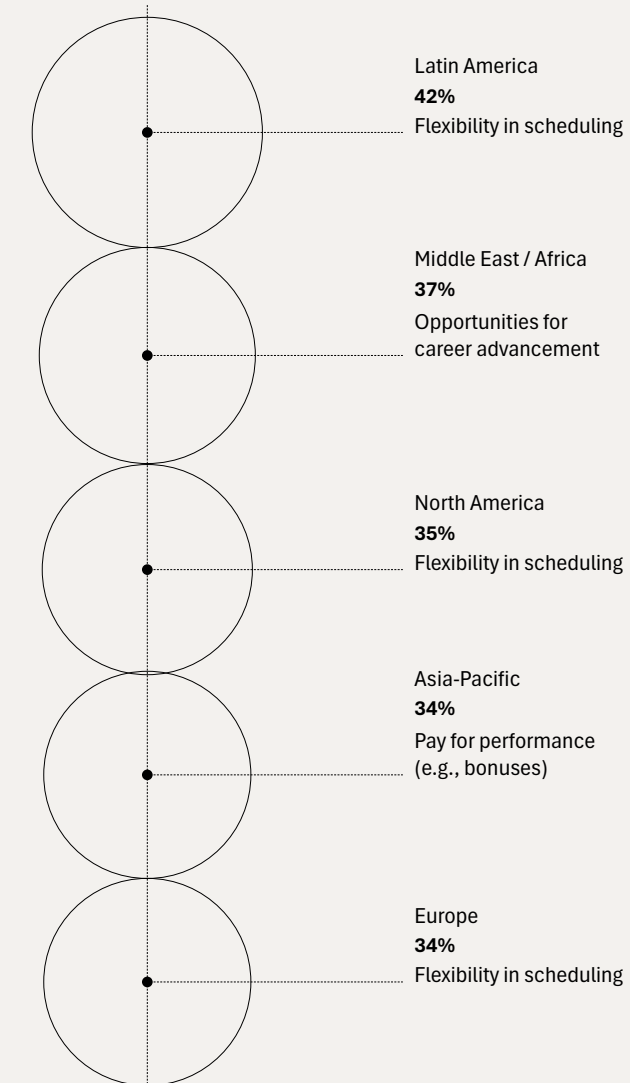


More reasons respondents choose to stay with their current employer:

Pay for performance (e.g., bonuses)	33%
Retirement benefits	20
Employer-sponsored health care	18
Telecommuting (work from home)	16
Free meals and snacks	8
Right to take industrial/labor action	6
Casual dress days	6
Paid time off to volunteer	6
Unlimited vacation	5
Maternity paid leave	5
On-site cafeteria	5
Tuition reimbursement	5
Employer child-care support	4
Paternity paid leave	4
Temporary assistance fund	3
On-site fitness center	3
Student loan debt assistance	3
On-site childcare	2

³ We asked survey participants to respond to this question: From the following list, which are the top three (perks) reasons you stay with your current employer? (Select up to three)

TOP PERK / REASON FOR STAYING WITH EMPLOYER, by region



EXIT DOOR

Share of workers who strongly agree they will need to change companies to advance in their careers, by market

Egypt	25%
India	24
Saudi Arabia	22
Chile	19
South Africa	19
Switzerland	18
Mexico	18
United Arab Emirates	17
United States	17
Thailand	17
Brazil	16
Nigeria	15
Philippines	15
Canada	15
New Zealand	14
Argentina	14
Sweden	14
Peru	14
Australia	13
United Kingdom	13
Singapore	13
Italy	13
Spain	13
Germany	13
China	13
France	12
Vietnam	12
Taiwan	11
South Korea	11
Netherlands	10
Czech Republic	10
Poland	10
Indonesia	9
Japan	7

THE TAKEAWAY

Career growth isn't only about having the necessary skills. It's also about the ability to see a clear path to the future. For some employees, the desired path might be upward, into higher ranks. For others, it might be lateral growth accompanied by new responsibilities. It's possible that many workers who feel they have no opportunity to advance simply lack visibility into what's available. Employers that highlight career development offerings and opportunities might see positive changes to worker sentiment.

OUR MISSION

The ADP Research mission is to make the future of work more productive through data-driven discovery. Companies, workers, and policymakers rely on our finely-tuned data and unique perspective to make informed decisions that impact workplaces around the world.