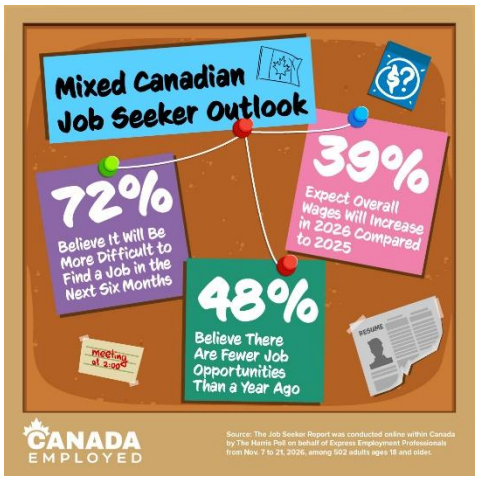
Canadian Job Seekers Have Mixed Feelings About Prospects in 2026

New survey reveals job seekers expect higher wages but believe they will have hard time finding a new job.



TORONTO, Jan. 14, 2026 — With 2026 in full swing, Canadian job seekers are entering the new year with some optimism but still expecting to face challenges on the hiring front, according to the latest Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey.

Close to three-quarters of job seekers (72%) expect it will be difficult to find a job in the next six months, which is in line with six months ago (74%), but significantly higher than the same time last year (62%).

Half of job seekers (48%) also believe there are fewer job opportunities in their field compared to a year ago, similar to last year (46%).

At the same time, 39% anticipate overall wages will increase in 2026 compared to 2025, up slightly from last year (37%).

Finding full-time work remains the primary objective for job seekers, with 78% willing to accept full-time positions, while 38% are willing to accept part-time work. Almost one-third (28%) are willing to accept contract or freelance positions, 22% temporary or seasonal positions and 19% entry-level positions.

Interestingly, 16% are willing to accept positions below their most recent pay level, up from 11% last year.

The intensity of job searches is also shifting. Currently, 29% of job seekers report actively looking for a new job, down from 39% last year, while 71% browse but are not fully committed to their job search. This trend suggests a market where job seekers are cautious.

While nearly half of employed job seekers (47%) have worked more than usual in the past year, this represents a decline from last year (58%). Moreover, fewer employed job seekers say they are working longer hours and more shifts than usual in the past year (33%, down from 43% last year). Fewer are also saying they are working more overtime than usual (24%, down from 31% last year).

In addition, a smaller proportion of employed job seekers have taken on another job in addition to their current one (20%, compared to 30% last year).

However, there are significant generational differences, with Gen Z much more likely than Gen X or boomers to say they have worked longer hours this past year (66% compared to 45% and 27%, respectively), as well as worked more overtime in the past year (39% compared to 17% and 12%, respectively).

Why are employed job seekers looking to make a move?

- 41% cite the need to negotiate better compensation.
- 38% are seeking better work-life balance.
- 36% want to keep an eye on the job market.

Top concerns about staying put:

- 40% worry about not getting the salary increase they deserve.
- 27% fear a slowdown in work opportunities.
- 24% are concerned about losing their job if the economy declines.

Despite these pressures, satisfaction gaps remain a driving force behind career decisions. While 85% say salary is important, only 56% of employed job seekers say they are satisfied with their current salary, an almost 30-point gap. Benefits have a 10-point gap with 74% saying it is important, but only 64% being satisfied with their current benefits package. A 5-point gap exists between the importance of work-life balance (79%) and satisfaction with their current situation (74%). These gaps underscore persistent frustrations that could shape the job market in the months ahead.

“As the job market continues to evolve, success will come to those who stay focused, flexible and proactive,” said Bob Funk Jr., CEO, President and Chairman of Express Employment International. “Job seekers who invest in their skills, remain open to new opportunities and clearly communicate their value will be best positioned to thrive and find the right fit in 2026.”

Survey Methodology

The Job Seeker Report was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from Nov. 7 to 21, 2025, among 502 adults ages 18 and older.

For full survey methodology, please contact Ana Curic at Ana@MapleLeafStrategies.com.

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If you would like to arrange for an interview to discuss this topic, please contact Ana Curic at (613) 858-2622 or email Ana@MapleLeafStrategies.com.

About Robert (Bob) Funk Jr.
Robert (Bob) Funk Jr., is the Chief Executive Officer, President and Chairman of Express Employment International, a global staffing franchisor founded and headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He leads a portfolio of workforce solution brands, including the flagship Express Employment Professionals franchise, along with several affiliated brands serving specialized markets. The Express franchise brand is an industry-leading, international staffing company with franchise locations across the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

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