



# LinkedIn Opportunity Index 2020

U.S. findings





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# Preface

LinkedIn's vision is to create economic opportunity for every member of the global workforce. Underlying that work is a central belief that two people with equal talent should have equal access to opportunity.

With this as our first principle, we launched the LinkedIn Opportunity Index, an initiative that seeks to understand what people worldwide believe about opportunity – their attitudes, their realities, the challenges they face – and how these factors compare across countries.

The result is a body of research that will inform employers, workers, jobseekers, students, researchers, and policymakers to rethink the meaning of opportunity, and the barriers to it, around the world. A better understanding of the behavioral and cultural differences that impact social mobility and inequality will enable a diverse cross-section of stakeholders to identify and develop new tools and strategies to unlock opportunity for every member of the global workforce.

This research was conducted in September - October 2019 and represents the worldview at that time.

The LinkedIn Opportunity Index seeks to surface insights in three key areas:

1. The macro trends impacting today's career opportunities
2. Definitions of opportunity and perceived barriers
3. Trends in socioeconomic, age, gender and other demographic groups





# Executive summary

These times of great political uncertainty, technological disruption, and economic inequality are transforming nearly every facet of the labor market in the United States, creating both profound opportunity and risk. Entirely new jobs and disciplines are being created, but accelerating change in the world of work also holds the potential to exacerbate existing gaps in access and equity, potentially putting the American Dream out of reach for millions.

The first step in fixing these inequities is to understand the hopes, dreams, fears, and attitudes of all workers at all ages and income levels. This is what the LinkedIn Opportunity Index seeks to do: re-examine opportunity from the inside-out, thereby giving people a chance to share what drives them to seek opportunities. Our research gives us an understanding of the challenges facing the global workforce and empowering people at all levels to drive progress.

Data shows three main obstacles to equal access to opportunity:

- **Socioeconomic stratification**, a growing gap between high- and low-income households
- Growing **barriers to opportunity**, taking many forms across all sectors of this research
- And **[the network gap](#)**, which is the advantage some people have in accessing the opportunities they want based on who they know.

“

Networks have power. Our connections, our professional relationships, become incredibly valuable when it comes to business—when it comes to getting things done.”

Jeff Weiner, CEO, LinkedIn

As a real world example of this, data from the LinkedIn platform shows that more than 70 percent of professionals get hired at companies where they already have a connection.

But networks run more deeply than workplace connections. Further shows that those who **grew up in a high-income neighborhood**, one with a median income over \$100,000, are nearly three times more likely to have a strong network that helps them get the job they want. Those who **attended a top university** are nearly 1.5 times more likely to have a strong network. Finally, those who already **work for a [top company](#)**, defined by LinkedIn as the 50 companies where America wants to work, are nearly two times more likely to have a strong network.

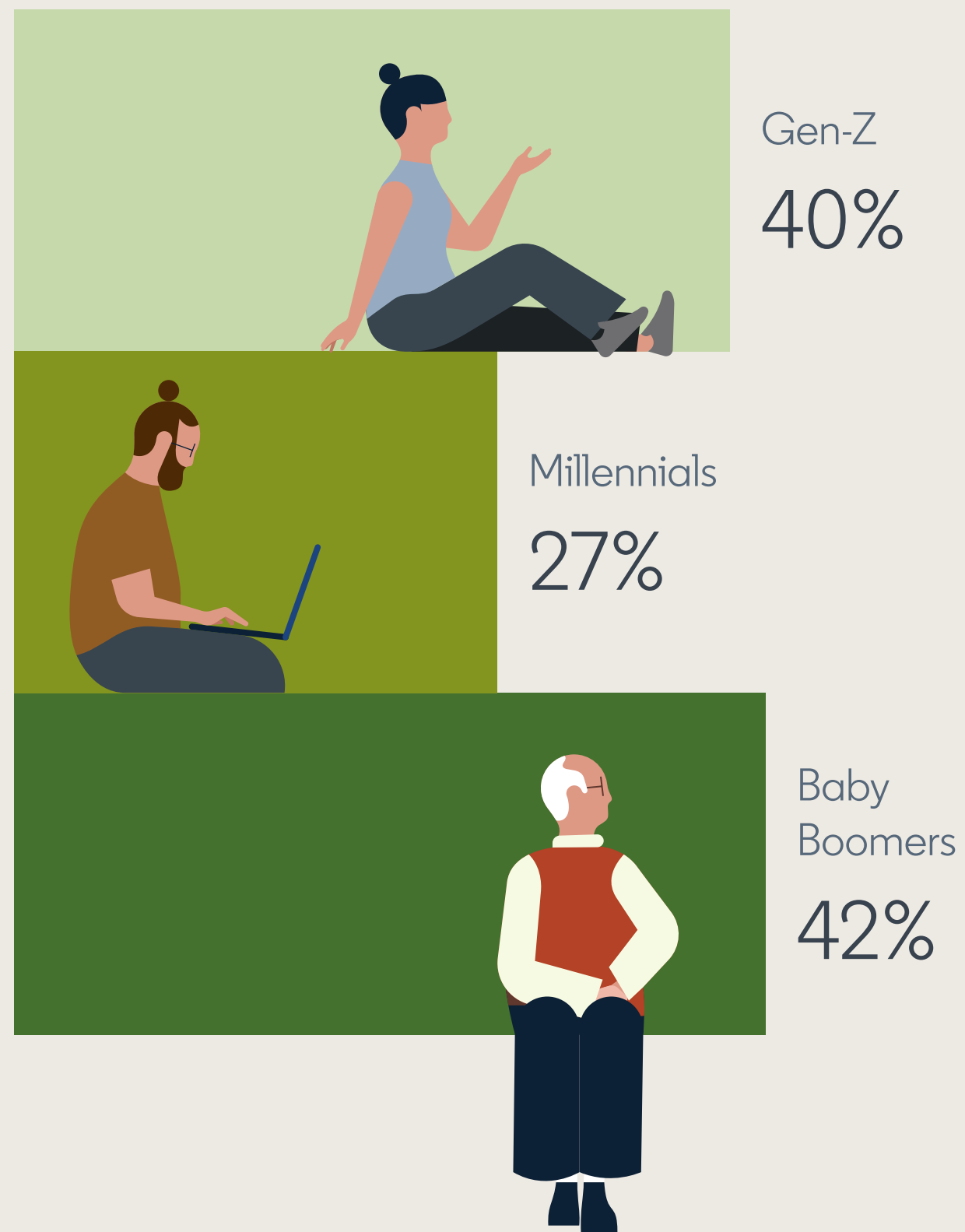
Add it all up and it amounts to up to a **12-fold advantage** for those who have access to all three. A virtuous cycle for those who enjoy it, but a vicious one for those who don't.



get hired at companies where they already have a connection.



## Is juggling finances a major burden?



Searching for ways to understand how these socioeconomic dynamics impact access to opportunity and inform solutions that drive change, LinkedIn developed the LinkedIn Opportunity Index. This report reveals deeper insights about these challenges for each generation by looking at data on a composite of different factors, including outlook on the local economy over the next 12 months, general happiness, quality of life compared to previous generation or parents, and personal confidence in achieving success.

In the research, the similarities and differences across age groups stood out; age was also one of the leading barriers for many U.S. residents. For instance, when asked if juggling finances is a

major burden, 40 percent of Gen-Z, our youngest respondents, say their financial status is an almost insurmountable barrier to opportunity. What may be more surprising is that slightly more Baby Boomers – 42 percent – say the same, even though many are well into their careers, with the youngest already 55 years old. For these workers, retirement may seem a far-off goal, and some research finds that as much as [45 percent of Baby Boomers have saved nothing at all for retirement](#).

By contrast, fewer than 27 percent of Millennials (ages 23 to 38) say their financial status is a “very difficult” barrier, but they are by far the most likely age group to say that their ethnic or racial background presents a “very difficult” barrier.

Workers unanimously agreed a tough job market a difficult barrier to overcome, despite the lowest unemployment rate in decades. Boomers are more likely than any other age group to say this job market is a “very difficult barrier.” They hold a similar sentiment with regards to their education; one in three views their educational background as a “very difficult” barrier to opportunity, while fewer than one in five Millennials is concerned about their educational backgrounds to this extent. This may be attributed to a variety of factors such as job requirements outpacing the ability to upskill, or the fact that the share of young adults with a bachelor’s degree or higher has steadily climbed since 1968, according to the Pew Research Center, making it less of a concern for young adults.

These findings and others strongly confirm that in the United States, your perception of opportunity, and the barriers you face in accessing it, depends on your geography, income, family background, and career path. Opportunity, in other words, is not one-size-fits-all.

Understanding these differences will help guide decision-makers large and small to create policies and workplaces that respond accordingly, ensuring that two people with equal talent have equal access to opportunity, and that no one is left no one behind.



<sup>1</sup> Kristen Bialik and Richard Fry, Pew Research Center Feb. 14, 2019, Millennial Life: How young adulthood today compares with prior generations. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/millennial-life-how-young-adulthood-today-compares-with-prior-generations/>

# Worldwide comparisons

## U.S. ranking

8th

on the  
Opportunity  
Index

3rd

on perception  
of available  
opportunities

6th

on confidence of  
achieving those  
opportunities

Compared to other nations, the U.S. has much to celebrate. Out of the 22 markets surveyed globally, the U.S. is ranked eighth on the Opportunity Index, the highest-ranked developed market and higher on the index than all European markets. The top five countries on the index are all developing markets: India, Indonesia, China, the United Arab Emirates, and the Philippines, an indicator that developing markets are more confident about emerging and growing opportunities in their region.

The U.S. ranked No. 3 globally on perception of available opportunities and No. 6 on confidence of achieving those opportunities. But perception of just how accessible these opportunities are is slightly weaker, ranking No. 8 globally.

Worldwide, optimism and confidence are higher among younger generations, those with a higher tiered education, those earning higher incomes and those living in highly urbanized city centers.

In the U.S., working hard is ranked as the No. 1 way to get ahead in life, at 86 percent—echoing a global sentiment and confirming that the promise of meritocracy remains alive, despite concrete financial concerns and larger economic uncertainty.







# Barriers to opportunity

**Financial status looms as the number one barrier to opportunity both in the United States and the rest of the world.**

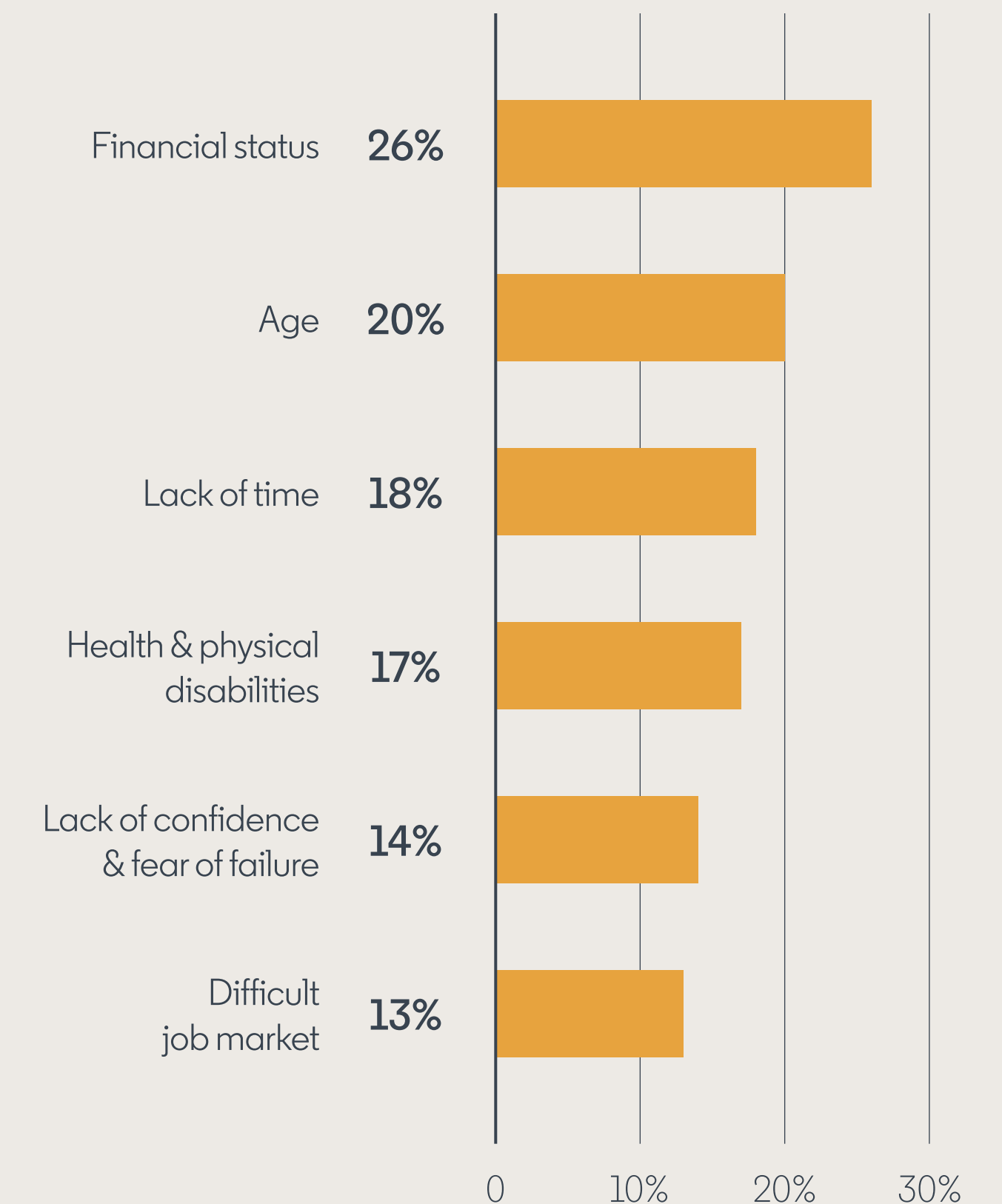
And for good reason: American workers are facing challenges on all fronts, and at all career stages—from growing [student debt obligations](#) to skyrocketing [health care](#) and [housing costs](#) to the challenges of saving enough to [simply be able to retire](#). For many workers, these basic obligations have become an enduring hardship.

Financial status is an especially high barrier for people seeking to start their own business, and for those trying to strike a better work-life balance, a group that overwhelmingly includes working mothers and older workers.

## Among the leading barriers to opportunity:

- 1. Financial status was the leading barrier for more than a quarter of U.S. respondents** (26 percent). Higher proportions of U.S. respondents (30 percent) cite **paying off loans/debt**. Globally the average is 23 percent.
- 2. Age is considered the second-biggest barrier in the U.S.**, with 20 percent saying it is an obstacle to successfully achieving opportunity.
- 3. Lack of time** is cited by 18 percent of U.S. respondents, on par with global respondents at 17 percent.
- 4. Health and physical disabilities** are concerns for 17 percent, significantly higher than the global average of 11 percent, factors that may be top of mind for people in the U.S. given rising costs and uncertainty about the future of healthcare insurance.
- 5. A lack of confidence and fear of failure** comes in as the next-biggest barrier in the U.S. at 14 percent, another nod to the delta between this pace of rapid change and achieving the American Dream for U.S. workers.
- 6. A difficult job market** is cited by 13 percent of U.S. respondents, especially for students. This ranks as the sixth most significant barrier in the U.S., which is interesting given the job market has steadily grown over the past decade.

## Leading barriers:





# Work hard, embrace change, be ambitious

For today's workers, the American Dream may seem harder to achieve than it was a generation or two ago, but many still cling to its ideals. Americans hold strong, and in some ways traditional, ideas about opportunity, elevating the importance of hard work, and flexibility over education.

## The leading U.S. indicators of getting ahead in life are:

1. **Working hard** ranks as the number one way to get ahead in life in the U.S., echoing a global sentiment. Further, women are more likely than men to rank it highest.
2. **Willingness to embrace change** ranks second, aligned with global rankings and sentiments that having transferable skills is a leading factor to getting ahead.
3. **Americans believe that being ambitious about [your] career** is more important than other respondents worldwide – the indicator ranked third in the U.S. versus sixth globally.
4. **Having transferable skills** ranked fourth in the U.S. As skills and jobs change at a rapid pace, having a skillset that's applicable to a range of roles will give professionals a leg up.
5. **Having the right connections and level of education** tied for fifth place, placing an emphasis on the importance of access to these critical factors throughout career development.

## Women

In the U.S., women are more likely than men to cite not just working hard, but also embracing change, ambitiousness, skill transferability, and equal access to opportunity as important in getting ahead.

## Men

On the other hand, men are more likely to cite characteristics like age, outward appearance, family wealth background, and special assistance from the government.





# Do what you love (and don't worry about work-life balance)

What does opportunity mean? How do Americans define opportunity for themselves? Americans prioritize passion over security and balance, a stark contrast to the reality of financial and job concerns that are top of mind in the U.S.

1. **Being able to follow a passion or do what I love** is the No. 1 opportunity being sought after in the U.S. This is in line with research that finds younger professionals are prioritizing values over a paycheck
2. **The ability to spend quality time with loved ones ranked second.** Not surprisingly, older workers (Baby Boomers) made up a majority of respondents with this specific definition of opportunity.
3. But Americans, it turns out, are also worried about keeping jobs -- even if they keep them away from their families. **Job security** is the third most sought-after opportunity for U.S. respondents, mainly by Millennials.

4. And despite being the number one most important thing to global respondents, **work-life balance**, including leisure or hobbies outside of time with family, is fourth in the U.S.
5. Rounding out this list is **keeping the body and mind active.** Perhaps not surprisingly, the importance of this indicator is mainly driven by Boomers, who are more likely than any other group to consider it their most important opportunity.

## How do Americans define opportunity for themselves?

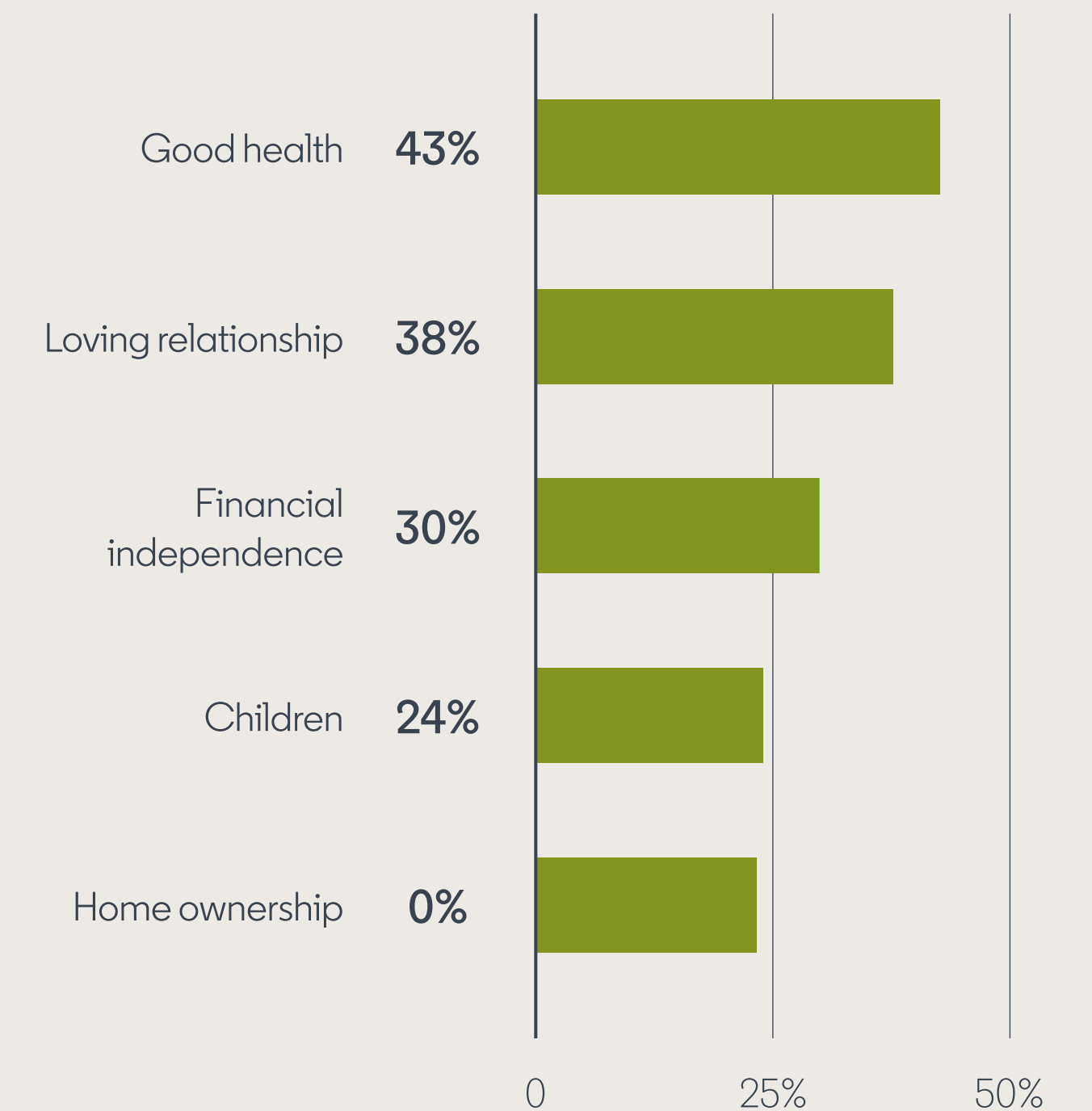


But the data suggest that in the big picture, non-work-related factors play a significant role in Americans' conceptions of "a good life." Americans prioritize health and relationships more than those in most other countries.

- **Good health** is considered the leading definition of a good life in the U.S. at 43 percent, slightly lower than the global average of 49 percent. It is a significantly higher indicator among U.S. women, 45 percent of whom make it a top priority, while just 40 percent of men say the same.
- Having a **loving relationship** is also considered an essential component of good life in the U.S. at 38 percent, significantly higher than the global average of 26 percent. Women are also more likely to cite this as essential.

- The third-strongest association with a good life: **financial independence**. Nearly one in three U.S. respondents say this is the most essential characteristic of a good life, on par with the global average.
- **Children** are also considered a top indicator of a good life in the U.S., at a much higher percentage than the global audience (21% vs. 17%). Women are significantly more likely than men to associate children with a good life (24 percent vs. 18 percent).
- **Home ownership** rounds off the top five indicators of a good life in the U.S., on par with global levels.

## Components of a good life:





# Top issues: global environment, safety, security, technology

Outside factors have a big impact on overall individual success, and the stability of entire economies. To truly understand opportunity, we need to understand the issues outside of individual control that may be a barrier to opportunities.



Americans in the survey worry about a lot of pressing issues:

a warming planet, safety, & technological change.



The top three leading concerns for Americans are:

1. **The environment** tops the list as the most pressing issue in the U.S., echoing a global sentiment, according to the survey. The youngest respondents, members of Gen Z, are most concerned about the environment, echoing a global trend in which younger generations are concerned with issues related to climate change and sustainability.
2. Americans also worry about **safety, security and crime**, an issue that's become difficult to ignore in the U.S. Among all generational groups, Millennials in the U.S. are more concerned about safety and security than other age groups.
3. Among the youngest and oldest workers, keeping up with **technological challenges like automation** is perceived as a major barrier to opportunity – more than half of both Gen Z workers and Boomers cite it as “somewhat” or “very difficult” to overcome. We know that every industry around the world is seeing emerging technology like AI, machine learning and automation in their workplaces. This rapid change presents a challenge and an opportunity for everyone to learn new skills to stay competitive.



# Conclusion

Given these challenges, how can we equalize access to opportunity for everyone, at every stage of their career, in every area, and in every circumstance? How can we unlock everyone's potential?

This research helps us see more clearly than ever where the gaps in opportunity lie, which is the first step toward making sure economic opportunity is available for all. Fortunately, we're not alone in this effort: emerging approaches like [skills-based hiring](#) and [matching technologies](#) are helping to create new pathways to opportunity for the global workforce. In short, we need to help everyone work together, with access to tools and resources that can help them overcome the barriers they face.

# Methodology

LinkedIn and GfK, an information technology and services firm based in Nuremberg, Germany, developed a tool to measure seven components straddling both macro- and micro-factors.<sup>2</sup>

Using this framework, researchers created short, 20-minute online surveys administered with a diverse, nationally representative sample of more than 30,500 people ages 18 to 65 in 22 markets comprising North America, Latin America, Europe, the Asia Pacific region, and the Middle East.

The U.S. survey encompassed about 2,000 respondents, 65 percent of whom were either employed or self-employed at the time of the survey. Ten percent were not employed, and another 10 percent were retired, while 6 percent were students and 8 percent homemakers. Of the total, 48 percent had at least a bachelor's degree and 16 percent had an advanced degree.

<sup>2</sup> The tool's seven components are: 1. outlook on the nation's economy over the next 12 months. 2. outlook on one's personal financial situation over the next 12 months. 3. quality of life, i.e., happiness. 4. quality of life compared to one's parents. 5. availability of in-market opportunities. 6. assessment on accessibility of opportunity over the next 12 months. 7. confidence in achieving success.

