



Strengthening **Workplaces**

An initiative of the Fund for Our Economic Future

Attracting, developing and retaining talent for a stronger, more resilient region, as informed by Northeast Ohio's workforce.

The talent shortages that intensified in late 2021 have sustained. As crises of the early pandemic shifted to a “new normal,” lingering challenges point to a complex and permanent transformation. Employers who come out ahead will recognize the long-term shifts and respond with curiosity, creativity and flexibility. This report aims to help understand today's workers and highlight potential strategies for strengthening workplaces.

To view the interactive dashboard, read the background on this project and explore related resources, please visit dashboard.wheretheworkers.com.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This project synthesizes findings of Where are the Workers, an analysis of Northeast Ohio work and workers in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic led by the Fund for Our Economic Future and other partners. This cross-section of notable takeaways aims to orient readers, generate discussion and prompt deeper engagement for those aiming to strengthen work and workplaces.

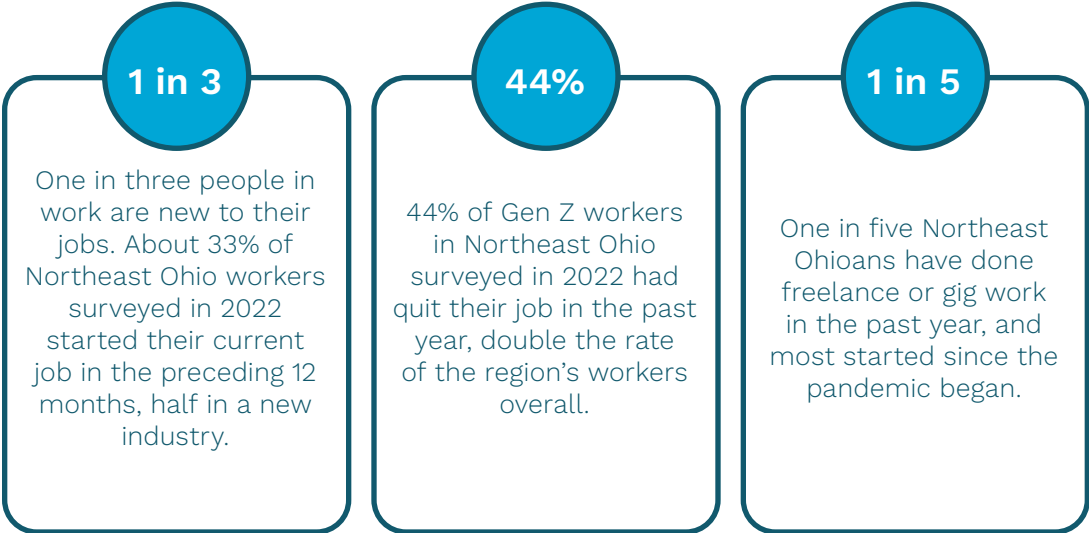
Note: All references to a specific year refer to approx. March of that year through March of the following year in alignment with the early pandemic shutdowns and survey timing (e.g., “2021” is approx. March 2021 – March 2022.) Unless indicated by an asterisk, all data below is statistically significant. Additional methodology and maps of NEO counties covered by this research are at wherearetheworkers.com/methodology.



THE WORKFORCE HAS CHANGED.

Demographic shifts and recent events have transformed our workforce and the people within it.

Today's workforce is not the workforce of ten years ago—it's not even the workforce of 2019, having experienced the cascading crises beginning with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Beyond the effects of the pandemic on people's preferences, priorities and challenges, Northeast Ohio's workforce is changing because its demographic composition is changing. Reaching workers of today and tomorrow first requires understanding who they are, what motivates them and what stands in the way of their success.

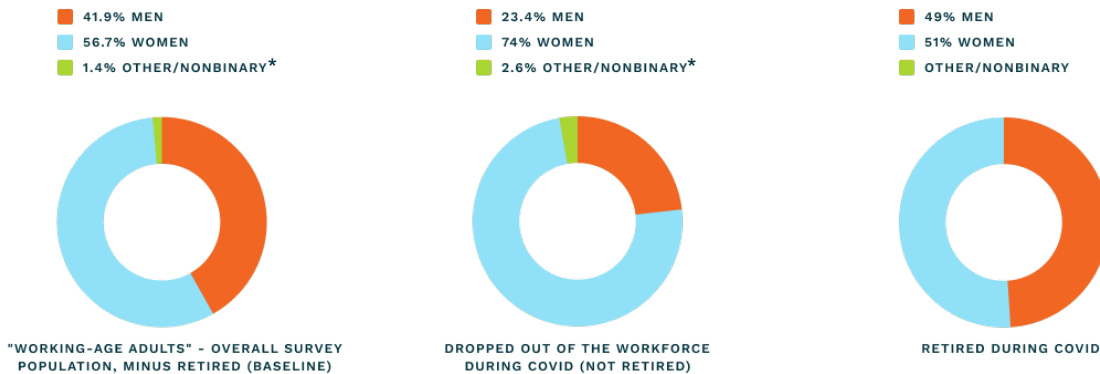


THE WORKFORCE IS SMALLER.

In 2021, there were 1,637,893 people in jobs in Northeast Ohio—95,510 (5%) fewer than pre-pandemic.

About half of people who left the workforce between 2020-2021 retired. The other half quit, were let go, or stopped looking for work. Disproportionately, these workers were women, Gen Z, people with young children, and people in low-income households. Addressing the priorities of these former workers may increase the likelihood of reconnecting them to work. Higher educational attainment was associated with disproportionately more retirements and fewer dropouts, suggesting that these workers had fewer barriers to work to and a stronger financial position to enable retirement if desired.

Below is a snapshot of gender differences in the workforce. To explore more, visit dashboard.wheretheworkers.com.



WORKERS ARE IN NEW ROLES.

The talent crunch is a result of fewer people in jobs overall and more turnover within jobs.

Whether they lost a job, worked from home, or were deemed essential and worked in person, every worker has faced changed realities since March 2020. Employers have experienced significant labor force churn. Nearly one in three workers report being laid off at some point between 2020 and 2022. One in five workers quit a job in 2021, and one in three workers started in a new job, half in a new industry. The quits kept coming: Explore the [online dashboard](#) to see more about who quit in 2021 and who planned to quit in 2022.

THE WORKERS ARE DIFFERENT.

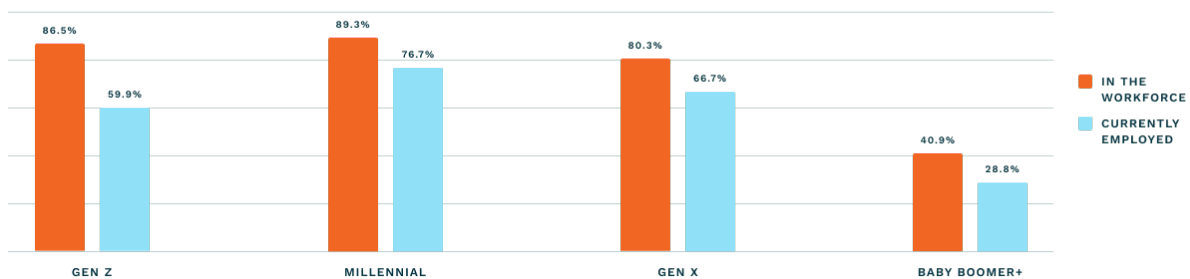
Pandemic or no, demographic shifts are driving workforce changes.

Workforce demographics have changed. Workers of color now make up one in five people in the workforce versus less than one in seven in 2001. And one in seven workers belongs to Generation Z (born 1997 or later), a proportion that will continue to grow. Work culture and norms should respond demographic shifts. “Who is setting workplace culture?” and, “Do they reflect the workforce we are aiming to retain and attract?” are questions employers might ask themselves. Visit the [online dashboard](#) to explore more of Northeast Ohio’s demographic composition across working-age adults, the workforce (employed or jobseeking), and current workers.

WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS

VIEW DATA BY:

GENERATION GENDER CHILDREN IN THE HOME





WHAT WORKERS WANT AND NEED

The factors drawing workers in—and keeping them out—of work.

With app-based gig work and remote work, the ways workers can earn money have broadened. While people have more options, these options aren't all better (for income, advancement or environment), and they're not equitably accessible.

Visit the online dashboard to explore how people at various income levels perceive barriers to employment for themselves and people they know. In addition to individual perception, broad systemic challenges—namely lack of transportation access, childcare access and digital access—have major implications for regional prosperity and disproportionately exclude low-income workers and Black and multiracial workers from family-sustaining wages.

Top 10 barriers to work for themselves or people they know, according to Northeast Ohioans:

1. Pay too low to support family
2. Health issues
3. Concerns for health of yourself or someone in family
4. Disabilities
5. Vaccine mandates
6. Lack of work experience
7. Lack of training
8. Childcare issues
9. Transportation issues
10. Criminal record

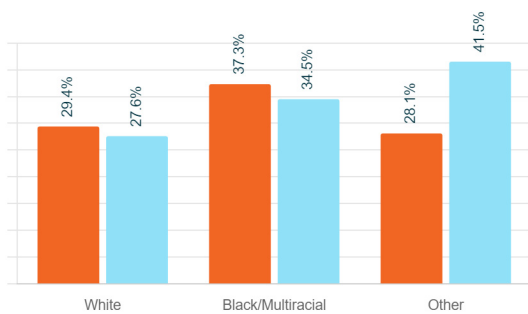
MAKING A LIVING REQUIRES A LIVING WAGE.

When sustained global inflation collides with years of stagnant wages, recent raises don't mean much—and workers are struggling.

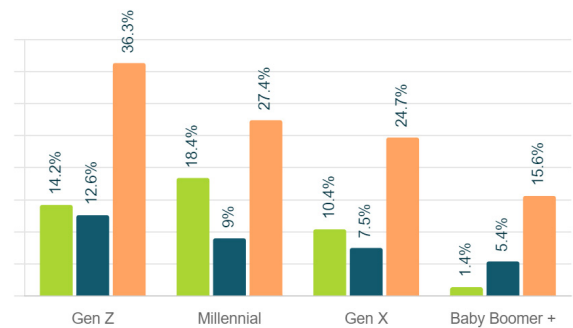
While employers say they've increased pay as their top strategy for attracting and retaining workers, data show these increases happened rapidly, over a short period of time, and after several years of minimal growth. Pandemic-related work impacts also reduced earnings for many workers, while pandemic benefits had little to no impact on most workers' ability to stay out of work. Overall, nearly half (48%) of workers say they do not make enough money to meet their needs.

Below are some examples of the ways in which the pandemic impacted earnings for Northeast Ohio workers. This includes layoffs, pay cuts and reduced hours, and interruptions to work to care for children, older family members, or due to Covid illness. Visit [the online dashboard](#) to explore more.

PANDEMIC IMPACTS ON EARNINGS



- LAID OFF AT SOME POINT IN THE PANDEMIC
- HAD TO TAKE A PAY CUT



- WORK INTERRUPTED BY CHILDCARE DISRUPTIONS
- WORK INTERRUPTED TO CARE FOR ELDER
- WORK INTERRUPTED BY COVID ILLNESS

THE FULL PACKAGE MATTERS.

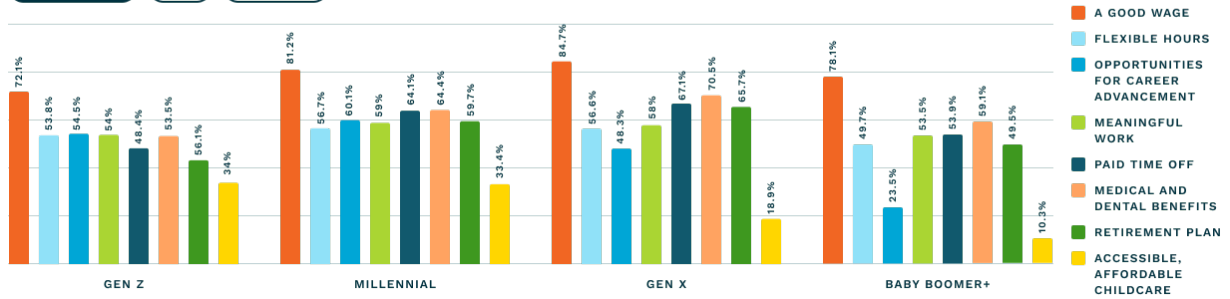
If wages are table stakes, nothing more, workers with choices are more selective and less likely to settle.

While employers and workers alike confirmed that a competitive wage is the most important factor for workers, it's only the beginning. From traditional benefits to advancement, flexibility and remote work, Northeast Ohioans have many other (and varied) priorities. Beyond wages, what workers consider very important in a job varies by generation, race and industry. Explore these differences on the [dashboard](#).

“VERY IMPORTANT” WORK FACTORS

VIEW DATA BY:

- GENERATION
- RACE
- INDUSTRY

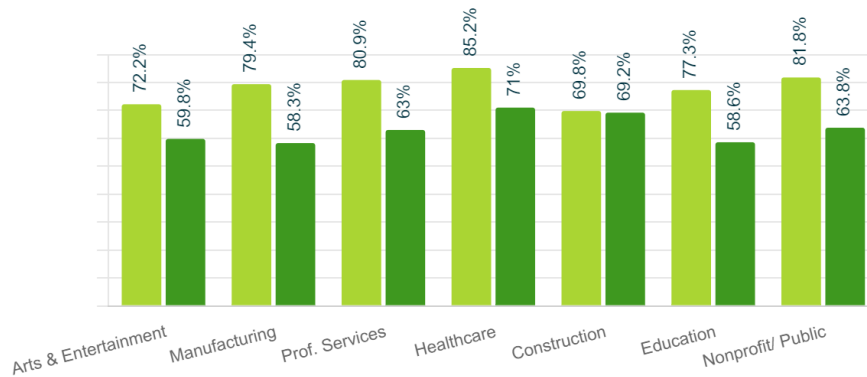


“ALL MONEY IS NOT GOOD MONEY.”

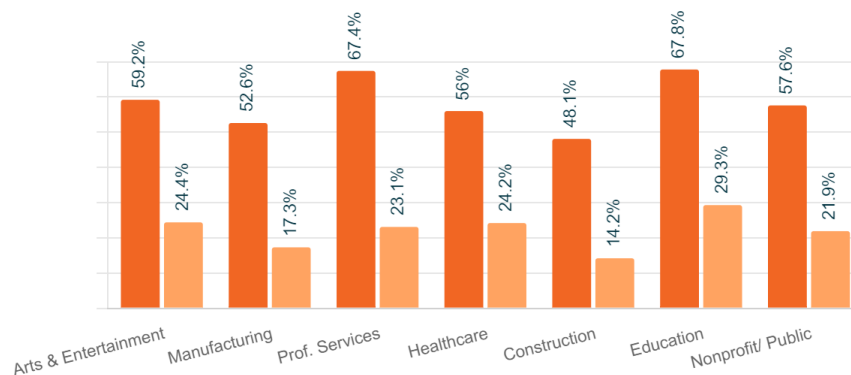
Wages and benefits may attract, but culture decides whether people will stay.

Whether they called it bad management, discrimination, or a “toxic” work environment, almost one in five people who quit their jobs in the past year attributed their decision to cultural issues in their work environment. As one focus group participant put it, “All money is not good money.” Having weathered extreme circumstances and experienced new opportunities, more than half of workers are struggling with increased stress, one in five felt burnout significant enough to call in sick for, and overall are less inclined to stay in a job they dread. Here’s how workers in different sectors are experiencing and feeling about work today. Visit the [online dashboard](#) to explore further.

FEELINGS ABOUT WORK



- MY EMPLOYER PROVIDES A SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENT
- EMPLOYEES ARE APPRECIATED FOR A JOB WELL DONE



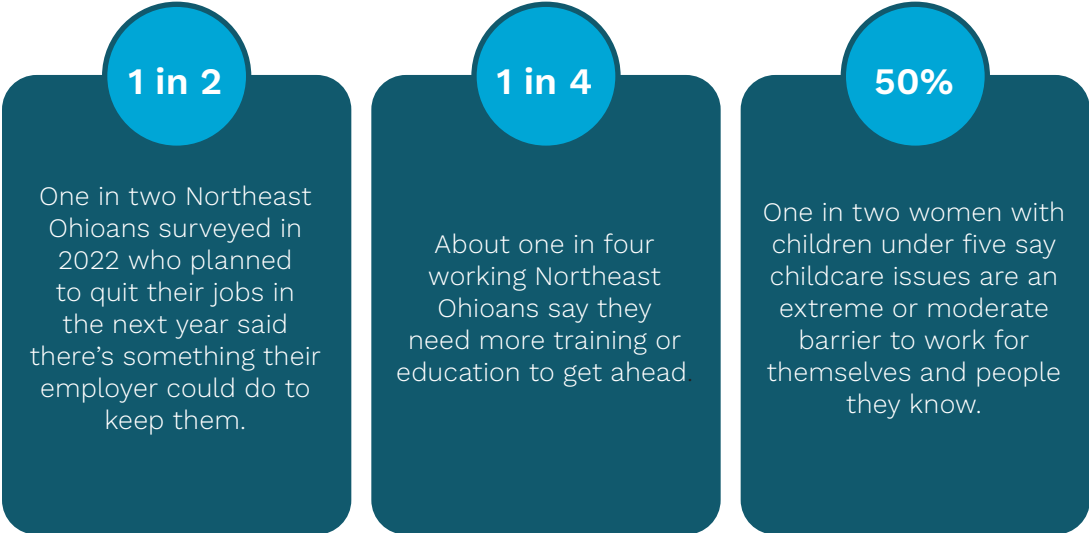
- I HAVE EXPERIENCED AN INCREASE IN STRESS AT WORK SINCE THE PANDEMIC
- I HAVE CALLED IN SICK DUE TO BURNOUT IN THE PAST YEAR



STRENGTHENING YOUR WORKPLACE

Compensate competitively and transparently, create paths to meaning and advancement, and cultivate an inclusive and engaging culture.

Talent shortage or no, a strong workplace is always a competitive advantage. While this analysis points to several promising strategies for strengthening workplaces, there's no one path to success. The North Star? Ask employees what they want and need. Consider the untapped insights you might learn from the people you employ:



WHAT WORKERS WANT: FLEXIBILITY.

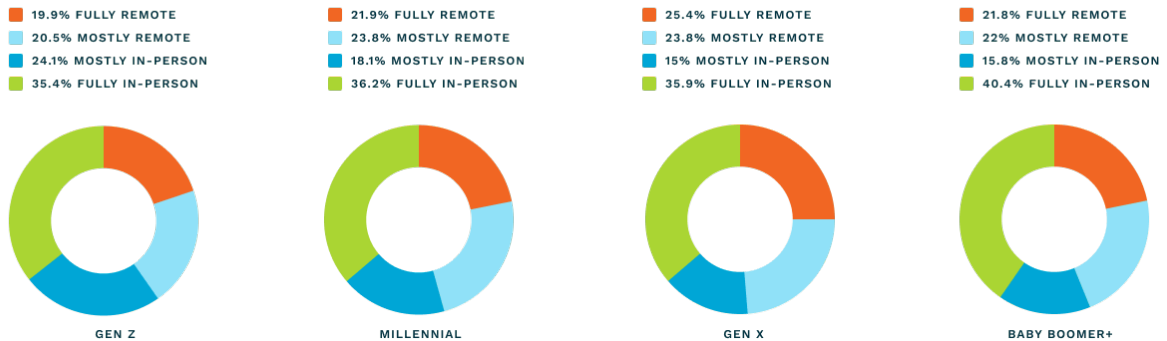
Flexibility includes—but isn't only—remote work.

Preferences for remote, hybrid and in-person work vary by generation and gender. Digging into what's behind the preferences can help employers better understand whether requests for remote work are stemming from desires for more flexible shift times, the cost of travel (both time and money), dress code, insulation from negative or discriminatory work culture, a preference for working independently, ability to cover unexpected family demands, or something else. Understanding these factors can help employers improve overall workplace culture and environment.

REMOTE WORK PREFERENCES

VIEW DATA BY:

GENERATION RACE GENDER



TAP INTO THE BIG PICTURE.

Individual success and regional success are inexorably linked.

Not every factor of the talent shortage is solvable at the individual workplace level: Many jobs are made physically inaccessible by sprawling development and transportation barriers. Some jobseekers can't afford to stay out of work to complete training that would qualify them for a better job. Workers turn down more hours or better pay to avoid falling off the "benefits cliff" that helps them make ends meet. Independent restaurant owners can't raise wages with food costs skyrocketing. At the Fund for Our Economic Future, we're working to tackle big, complex systems issues just like this to advance equitable economic growth across NEO. Visit thefundneo.org to learn more and read about our work to strengthen jobs and the economy for everyone, regardless of race or place.

EVOLVE WITH THE WORKFORCE.

Time and again, workers who participated in this research shared examples of how they see things differently as a result of their experiences at the height of the pandemic. For workplaces to thrive, employers need to see things differently, too.

“The pandemic provided an opportunity to ‘change lanes’ for once. In the past I never had the opportunity to ‘take my foot off the accelerator’ and examine the external environment for new and innovative opportunities.

WORKER FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, CUYAHOGA COUNTY – MAY 2022



MORE RESOURCES

Ready to get to work (and reach more workers)? Access additional resources for understanding today’s workers and strengthening workplaces below.

Explore Strengthening Workplaces

Interact with the data, download charts or share this summary of the Strengthening Workplaces report at [dashboard.wherearetheworkers.com](https://www.wherearetheworkers.com/dashboard).

Driving Systems Change

Learn how projects like the Paradox Prize, sector partnerships and job hubs are tackling regional challenges too big for any one employer to solve alone, and how the Fund for Our Economic Future is leading this work at [wherearetheworkers.com/systems](https://www.wherearetheworkers.com/systems)

Methodology

With 5,000 residents and 600+ employers participating in surveys and focus groups, the body of data generated through this analysis is expansive. Get details on how we conducted the research and present these findings at [wherearetheworkers.com/methodology](https://www.wherearetheworkers.com/methodology)

Advancing an Equitable Economy

Learn about the Fund for Our Economic Future, the network of leaders behind Strengthening Workplaces, and how you can join us in advancing equitable economic growth in NEO at [thefundneo.org](https://www.thefundneo.org).

Emerging Tools for Job Quality

Many entities are testing solutions in the emerging field of “job quality.” Explore emerging tools and resources from the broader workforce ecosystem at [wherearetheworkers.com/other-resources](https://www.wherearetheworkers.com/other-resources)

News and Commentary

Read the latest news and contributed commentary relating to the analysis behind this report at [wherearetheworkers.com/news-commentary](https://www.wherearetheworkers.com/news-commentary)

CONTACT

If you have questions about this analysis, email watw@thefundneo.org. You can also subscribe to email updates to hear the latest about tools, commentary, events and other resources to strengthen jobs, reach workers and expand opportunity in Northeast Ohio by visiting [dashboard.wherearetheworkers.com](https://www.dashboard.wherearetheworkers.com).