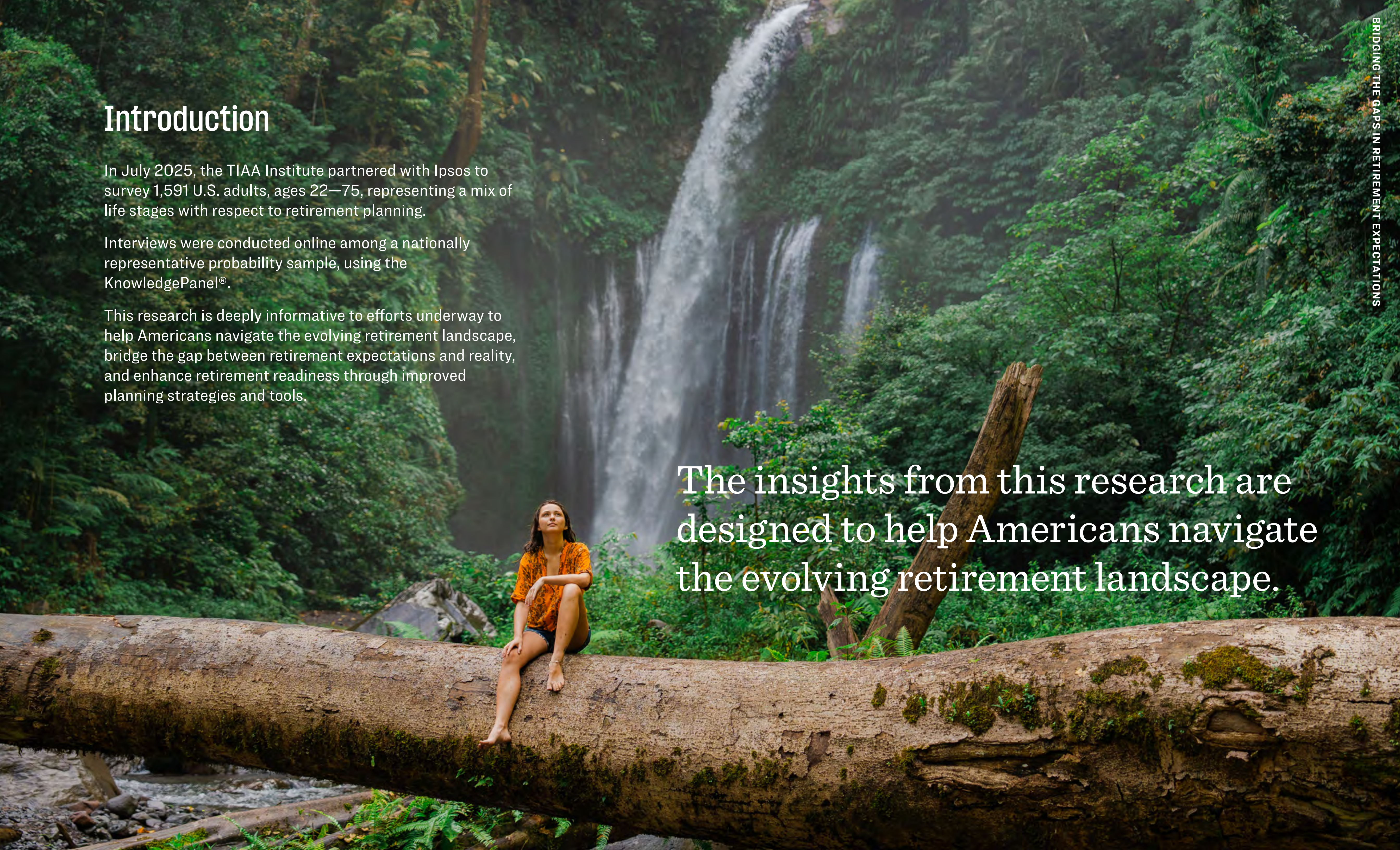
NEW EVIDENCE & INSIGHTS

BRIDGING THE GAPS IN RETIREMENT EXPECTATIONS

TIAA Institute



Introduction

In July 2025, the TIAA Institute partnered with Ipsos to survey 1,591 U.S. adults, ages 22—75, representing a mix of life stages with respect to retirement planning.

Interviews were conducted online among a nationally representative probability sample, using the KnowledgePanel®.

This research is deeply informative to efforts underway to help Americans navigate the evolving retirement landscape, bridge the gap between retirement expectations and reality, and enhance retirement readiness through improved planning strategies and tools.

The insights from this research are designed to help Americans navigate the evolving retirement landscape.

While current retirees find fulfillment through cherished relationships and leisure activities, future retirees' retirement strategies must account for career interruptions that could impact both financial and lifestyle outcomes.

Executive Summary

Attitudes toward retirement

Comparing the experiences of today's retirees with the expectations of future retirees reveals a five-year difference in expected versus actual retirement timing, with many Americans planning to delay retirement to head off savings regrets. While current retirees find fulfillment through cherished relationships and leisure activities, future retirees must account for career interruptions that could impact both their financial security and lifestyle outcomes.

Sources of finances

Current and future retirees point to a shift in retirement funding strategies. Amid declining confidence in Social Security's viability, future retirees plan to rely more on personal savings and continued employment (standing in sharp contrast to today's retirees who are more apt to leverage Social Security and pensions). Future retirees are cautiously optimistic when it comes to understanding and securing guaranteed lifetime income. Auto-enrollment can drive increased retirement plan participation, helping to set future retirees up for success.

Role of advice

While most Americans do not currently work with a financial professional, the one in four who DO report greater confidence in their retirement strategies. Financial advisors can add significant value during employer transitions—something most workers face at one time or another—helping Americans optimize their retirement savings and minimize disruptions. Openness to digital financial planning tools, including those leveraging AI, presents an opportunity

Attitudes toward retirement

There's a five-year gap in retirement age expectations, with many planning delays.

Comparing today's retirees' experiences with future retirees' expectations reveals notable gaps. Current retirees, on average, retired at age 57, while future retirees expect to retire at 62—a five-year difference. and half of future retirees believe it's at least somewhat, if not very, likely that they'll delay retirement (in other words, working longer than expected).

This stands in sharp contrast to current retirees, where just 6% retired later than expected. Instead, half retired earlier than expected and 4 in 10 retired when expected. A notable 1 in 4 (25%) of those not yet retired do not expect to retire at all.

RETIREMENT AGE VS. EXPECTATION

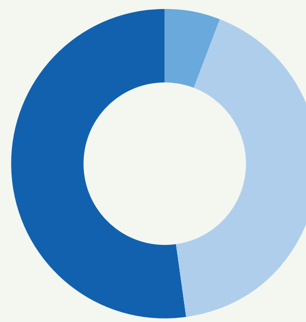
CURRENT RETIREES

57

average retirement age

24%

of respondents



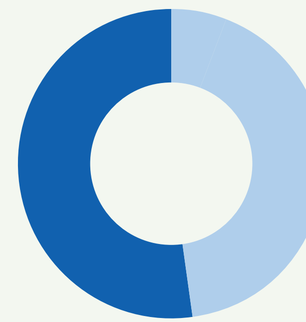
NOT YET RETIRED

62

average retirement age

76%

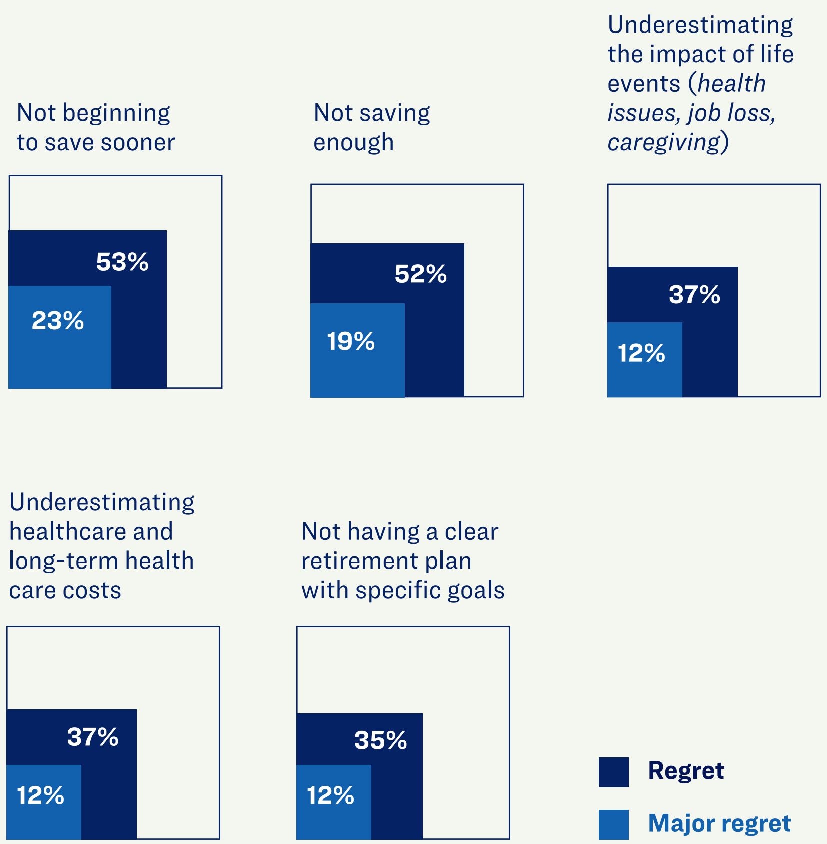
of respondents



Consistent across generations:

52% (Gen Z), **52%** (Millennial), **51%** (Gen X), **51%** (Boomers)

TOP REGRETS AMONG CURRENT RETIREES



Saving tops retirees' regrets—and non-retirees' stressors

Current retirees' experiences can serve as a helpful roadmap for future retirees who are just embarking on, or already navigating, the retirement planning process. What would current retirees advise? Most retirees realize they should have started saving earlier in life (**76%**) and should have saved more (**71%**), both of which is standard financial advice for being able to maintain an adequate retirement lifestyle.

Nearly half of current retirees have regrets related to insufficient retirement planning, notably not having clear retirement goals (**47%**), underestimating retiree health care costs (**49%**) and the potential costly impact of late-life events (**49%**). These regrets highlight areas where basic financial planning and advice can improve outcomes, with more than one in three regretting not having a clear retirement plan with specific goals.

Non-retirees' top concern also centers on saving—specifically, ensuring they have enough in the bank to cover an unexpected expense or financial emergency before retiring.

Paying off debt, both mortgage and other debts, securing retiree health insurance, and hitting a savings target are middle-tier goals they hope to achieve before retiring. And one in six note that paying off their children's education may be a barrier to retiring.

Gender divide:

Women are more likely than men to prioritize building a safety net for the unexpected (**67%** vs. **58%**)and securing health insurance (**47%** vs. **36%**).

Men are more inclined than women to focus on portfolio elements, such as diversification (**33%** vs. **23%**) and reaching a certain value (**26%** vs. **17%**).

Generational divide:

Millennials are the most goal-oriented generation when it comes to preparing for retirement:

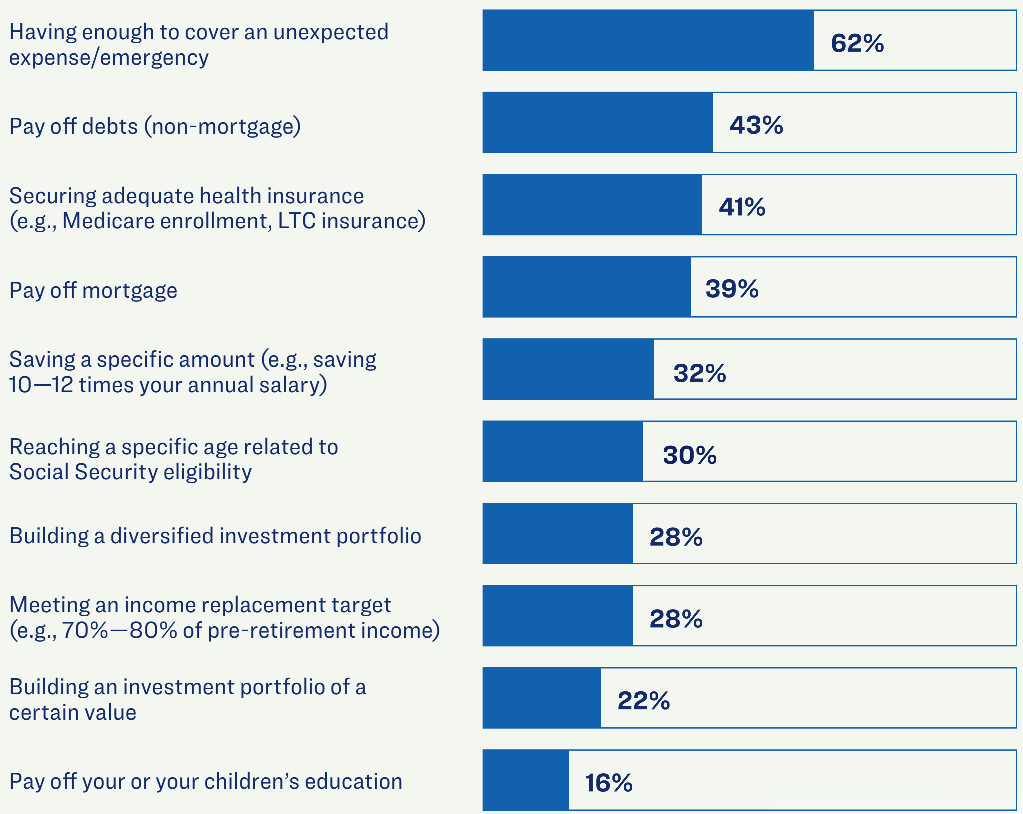
Saving a specific amount (**38%**),

Meeting an income replacement target (**31%**),

Building an investment portfolio that's diversified (**34%**) and of a certain value (**25%**).

Gen X is most apt to be focused on securing health insurance (**47%**), while Boomers zero in on Social Security eligibility (**54%**).

MILESTONES TO ACHIEVE BEFORE RETIRING (NON-RETIREES)



Retirees find joy in retirement in cherished relationships and leisure activities, which are highly anticipated by future retirees.

Proper planning is paramount in ensuring that life in retirement meets, if not exceeds, expectations. Retirees must balance key priorities like relationships, leisure, health, and work.

When it comes to relationships, spending time with family is retirees' most-enjoyed activity. It ranks second among anticipated activities for those who expect to retire (in other words, to they hope spend more time on this in retirement). Among retirees, spending time with friends and grandchildren are virtually tied for enjoyment.

In the leisure category, travel is the most eagerly anticipated activity among those who plan to retire. Yet, it ranks in third place among retirees in terms of enjoyment in retirement, suggesting a disconnect between expectation and reality. However, current retirees and those who expect to retire are more aligned on relaxing, hobbies, and community involvement/volunteering. The same is true for health-related activities, where being physically active is far more enjoyable—or appealing—than medical appointments.

Work—and learning—related items rank lower in enjoyment and anticipation, though sizable shares of retirees enjoy time spent on home maintenance and working in retirement.

Gender divide:

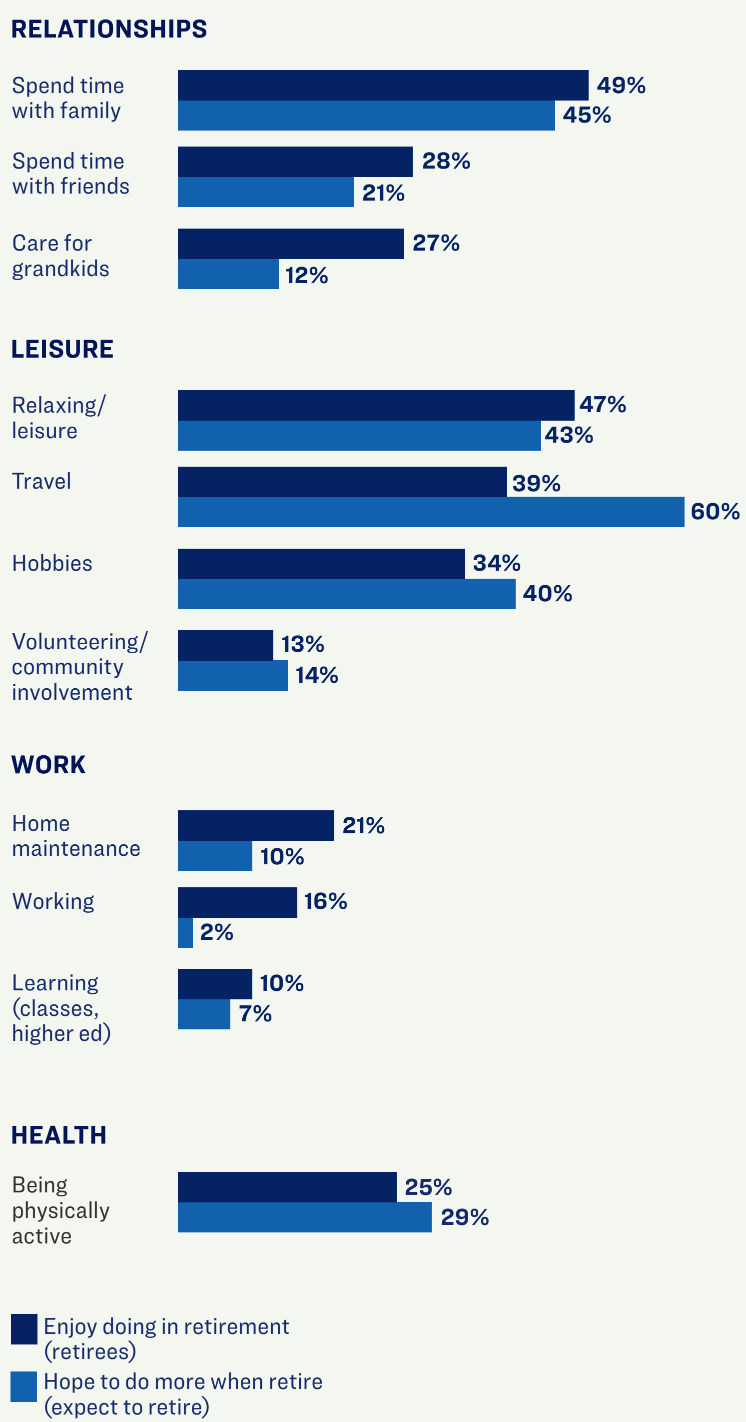
Women who expect to retire are interested in building up relationships in their communities through things like volunteering (**18%** vs. **11% of men**) or taking classes (**10%** vs. **5% of men**).

Men hope to spend more time on their homes (**13%** vs. **7% of women**).

Generational divide:

Gen Xers who expect to retire hope to spend more time being physically active (**38%**).

Boomers "pop" on community engagement/volunteering (**27%**) and learning opportunities (**13%**).



Americans' retirement plans should account for career interruptions.

Americans' work histories reinforce current retirees' regrets about not accounting for life's curveballs, as well as future retirees' worries about the unexpected. Half of U.S. adults ages 22—75 have left the job market for longer than a year. This figure is even higher among parents (**56%**) and caregivers currently providing care for a child who requires special needs or for an adult friend or relative (**65%**).

Top reasons for exiting the workforce include caring for children, followed closely by job-related issues like career changes, burnout, or layoffs. Moving is also a leading reason for leaving the job market.

KEY CAREGIVING STATS

16%

currently serve as caregivers to a child with special needs or an adult friend/relative.

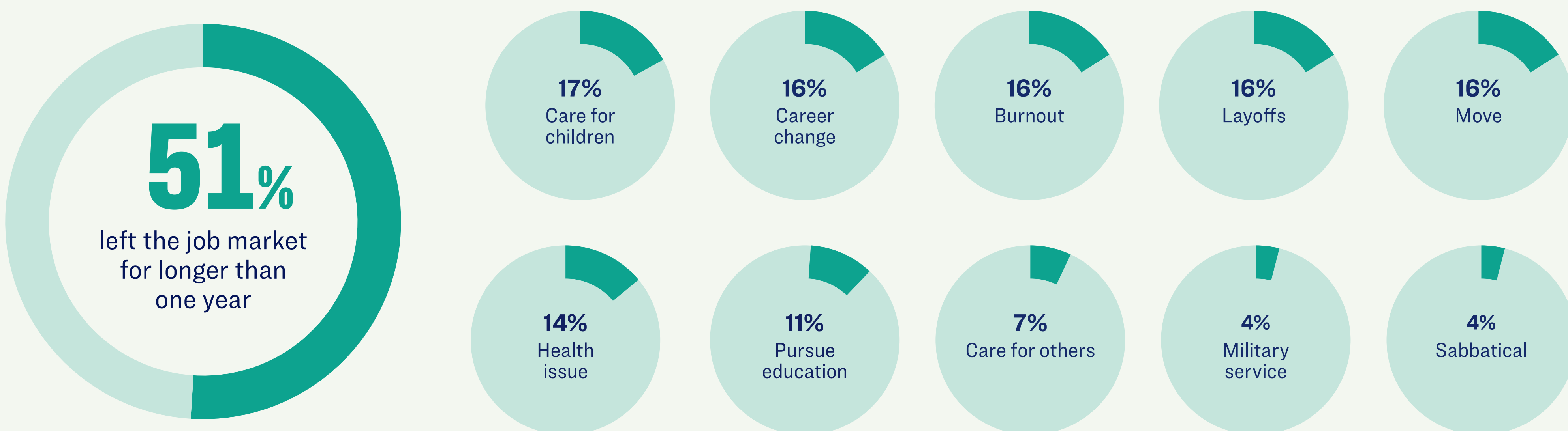
61%

have children: ages 17 and under (**28%**), ages 18—26 (**22%**), ages 27+ (**27%**).

58%

have living parents or in-laws who may require care at some point in the future.

REASONS FOR LEAVING THE JOB MARKET FOR LONGER THAN ONE YEAR



Retirement plans should also factor in a move.

Moving is a significant life event at any age but can be even more complex in retirement. Location, home type, and community support all have implications for healthy aging and finances that must be well-thought-out. Currently, 1 in 4 retirees report moving in retirement, with 1 in 7 moving to a new area, 1 in 10 opting for a new type of home (e.g., downsizing), and 1 in 20 moving to a community that caters to the needs of older adults.

Looking ahead, even more future retirees expect to relocate during retirement. In fact, more than 1 in 3 anticipate some type of move, with about 1 in 5 each expecting to move to a new area or to a different type of home. Notably, 1 in 10 (40%) find this a difficult decision to predict, saying they're unsure.

Gender divide:

Men and women are equally likely to expect to move to a new type of home (**both 22%**).

Yet women are putting down roots in their communities, less likely to say they'll move to a new area (**14%** vs. **22% of men**).

MOVING DURING RETIREMENT

THIS SUGGESTS A NEED FOR:

Current retirees

Retirement lifestyle calculators—tools that go beyond dollars and cents—showing how to optimize spending in the areas that matter most, while staying on budget

Incentives for community engagement that tap into retirees' desire to stay active and share their expertise (like, skill-based volunteering, intergenerational programs), as well as greater awareness of the Lifetime Learning Credit for continuing education courses

Free or low-cost financial tune-ups—particularly for retirees age 70 and beyond—ensuring that withdrawal strategies remain sound

Future retirees

Retirement reality workshops that use current retirees' actual experiences to demonstrate best practices, common pitfalls, and unexpected joys of retirement life—helping to bridge expectations gaps

Flexible, phased-retirement options, including education about products that allow for partial withdrawals and continued saving

Career interruption funds and support programs that account for potential career gaps and provide personalized catch-up guidance when interruptions occur

Caregiving retirement credits that provide Social Security credits or retirement account matching for years spent out of the workforce for family caregiving

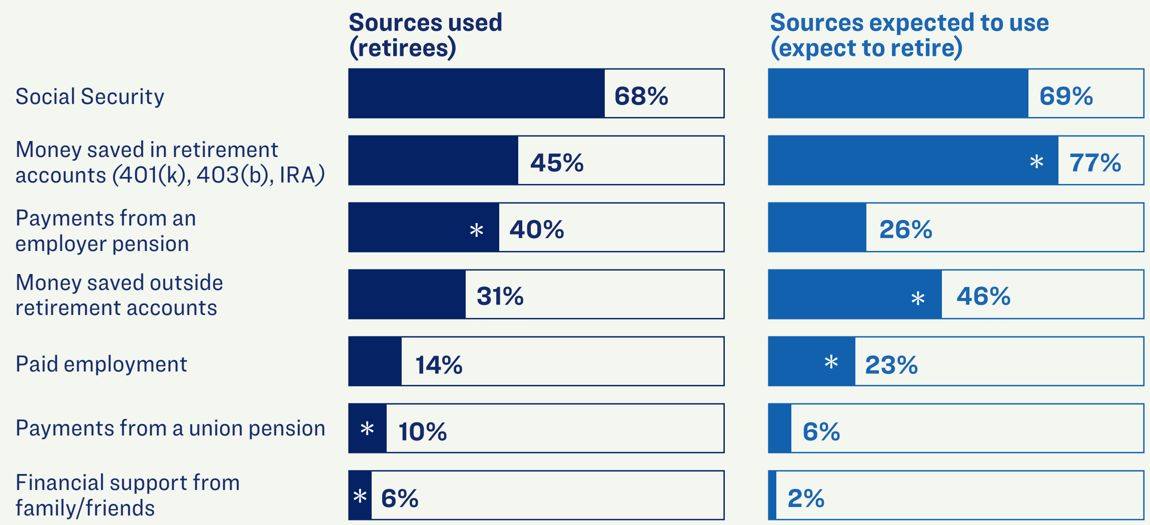
Sources of financing retirement

How to fund retirement: Retirees and non-retirees have a different mix of sources.

Retirement income is another area where the experiences of today's retirees and the expectations of future retirees diverge. Current retirees are more apt to leverage both employer and union pensions. Surprisingly, while **95%** of Americans are covered by Social Security, only about **70%** of current and future retirees plan on using it as a source of retirement income.

A small share of retirees (1 in 20) are currently relying on friends and family for support. Those expecting to retire are more inclined to rely on money saved both in and outside retirement accounts, as well as on continued work in retirement.

RETIREMENT INCOME SOURCES USED/EXPECTED



Significantly higher figure vs. subgroup

GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

Many younger non-retirees don't expect Social Security to be a viable source of retirement income. Overall, 7 in 10 of those planning to retire anticipate using Social Security for retirement income, yet that figure is driven heavily by boomers and, to a lesser extent, Gen Xers. By contrast, just half of Gen Zers expect to use Social Security when they retire. Two in 3 Millennials planning to retire anticipate using Social Security.

Expect to leverage Social Security

94% Boomers
75% Gen X
64% Millennials
51% Gen Z

Non-retirees are cautiously optimistic about guaranteed lifetime income; retirees fare better.

Respondents were asked to consider their ability to convert retirement savings into a steady, guaranteed source of income to last throughout retirement—whether through Social Security, pension plans, annuities, or other types of investments.

With this in mind, upward of 6 in 10 of those planning to retire agree somewhat or strongly that they understand how to secure this type of guaranteed income, are confident they can secure it, and will not retire until it's secured. However, far fewer—about 1 in 5 each—agrees strongly with each of these statements, suggesting insecurity around guaranteed lifetime income.

Retirees, by contrast, fare better. Fully 3 in 4 agree they have a guaranteed source of income that will last throughout retirement, with nearly 4 in 10 holding this view strongly.

Gender divide:

Men are more optimistic than women in both understanding how to secure (**68%** vs. **57%**) and confidence in securing (**73%** vs. **65%**) guaranteed lifetime income.

Generational divide:

Comprehension and confidence around guaranteed lifetime income tend to increase with age:

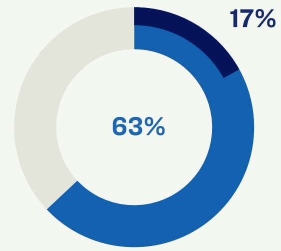
Understand how to secure: low of 56% among Gen Z to a high of **68%** among boomers

Confident they will secure: low of **62%** among Gen Z to a high of **73%** among boomers

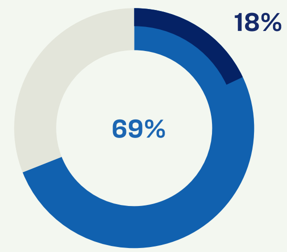
NON-RETIREES ARE CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC WHEN IT COMES TO GUARANTEED INCOME; RETIREES ARE IN BETTER SHAPE

EXPECT TO RETIRE

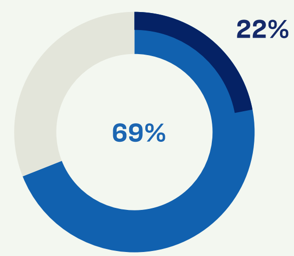
Understand
I understand how to secure a steady, guaranteed source of income that will last throughout retirement



Confident
I feel confident that I will be able to secure a steady, guaranteed source of income that will last throughout retirement

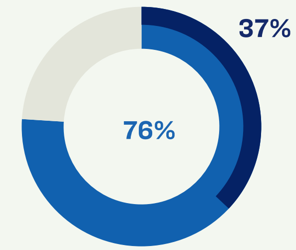


Must-achieve milestone
I won't be able to retire until I'm able to secure a steady, guaranteed source of income that will last throughout retirement



RETIRED

Achieved this milestone
I have a steady, guaranteed source of income that will last throughout retirement

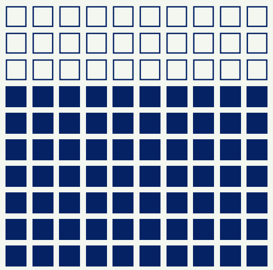


Strongly Agree
Agree

Well-designed workplace retirement plans are increasingly important.

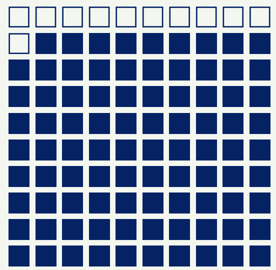
Employer offers retirement savings

401(k), 403(b), or similar retirement account



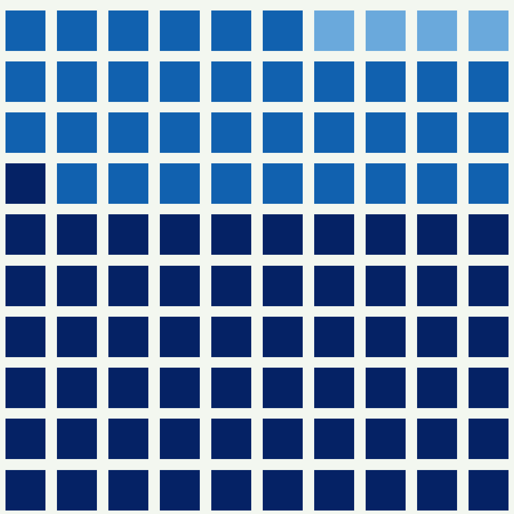
70%
Among those currently working

Are enrolled



89%
Among those where plan is offered

How they became enrolled



4% Not sure

35% Enrolled myself

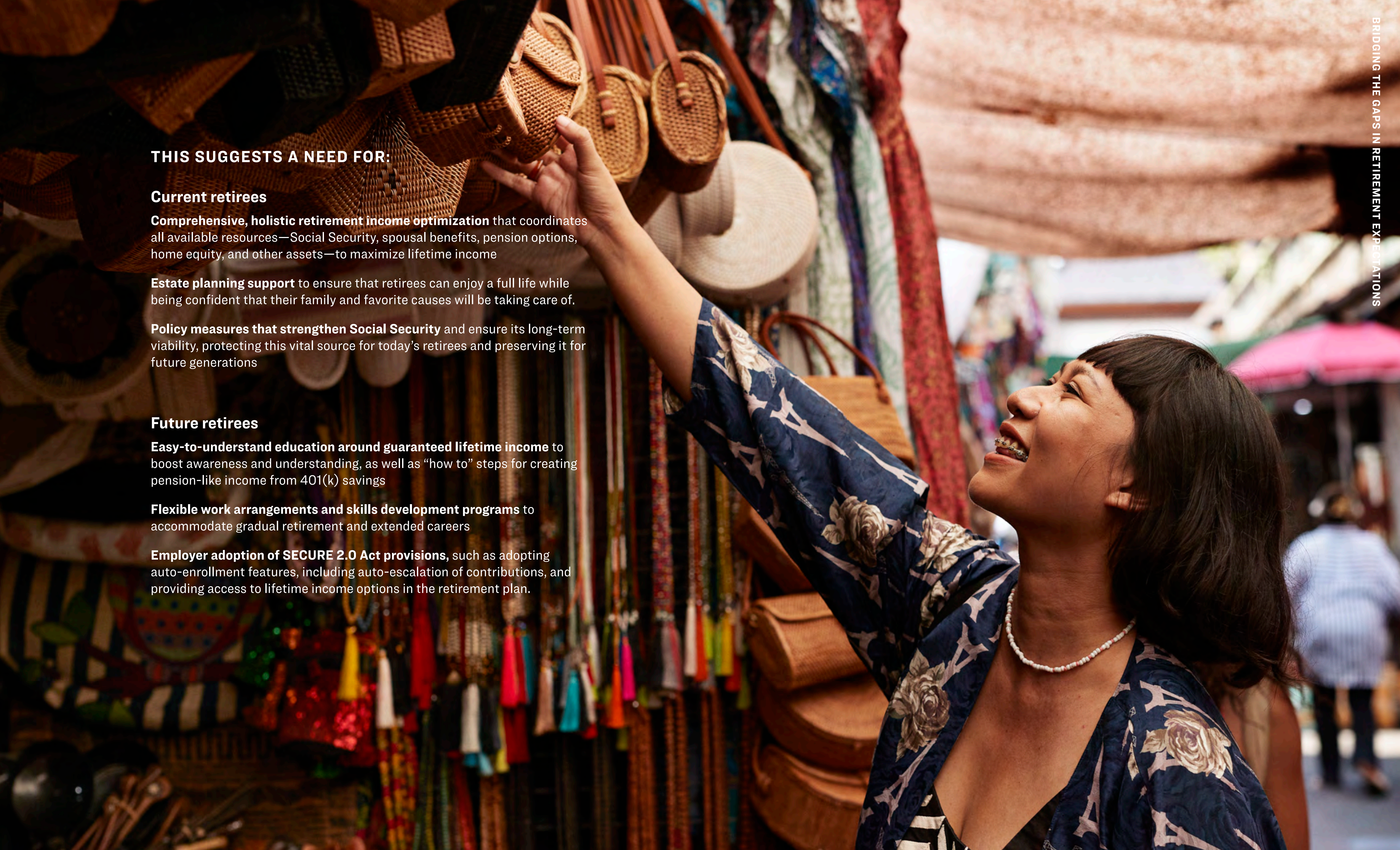
61% Automatic enrollment
No opt-out (**10%**)
Option to opt-out (**51%**)

Auto-enrollment has potential for positive impact on retirement plan participation.

Given concerns about the future structure of Social Security, employer-sponsored retirement plans are more important than ever. This is an area where employers can make a real difference in setting workers up for retirement success through automatic enrollment.

Today, 7 in 10 working Americans ages 22—75 say their employer offers a retirement savings plan—and of these, an overwhelming 9 in 10 are enrolled.

Six in 10 of these report some form of automatic enrollment, whether it be with an option to opt out (more common) or mandatory participation (less common). This plan design feature is especially valuable to younger workers, who will be less likely to have later regrets of not having started saving early enough.



THIS SUGGESTS A NEED FOR:

Current retirees

Comprehensive, holistic retirement income optimization that coordinates all available resources—Social Security, spousal benefits, pension options, home equity, and other assets—to maximize lifetime income

Estate planning support to ensure that retirees can enjoy a full life while being confident that their family and favorite causes will be taking care of.

Policy measures that strengthen Social Security and ensure its long-term viability, protecting this vital source for today's retirees and preserving it for future generations

Future retirees

Easy-to-understand education around guaranteed lifetime income to boost awareness and understanding, as well as "how to" steps for creating pension-like income from 401(k) savings

Flexible work arrangements and skills development programs to accommodate gradual retirement and extended careers

Employer adoption of SECURE 2.0 Act provisions, such as adopting auto-enrollment features, including auto-escalation of contributions, and providing access to lifetime income options in the retirement plan.

Role of advice

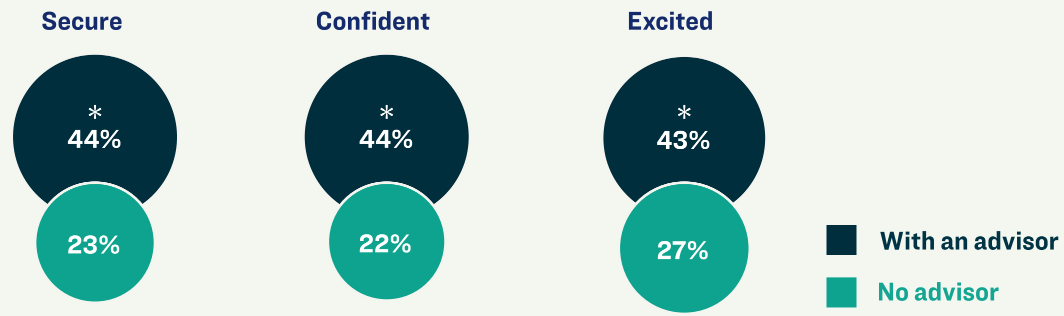
Just 1 in 4 overall work with a financial professional, with these individuals demonstrating greater confidence and understanding.

Relatively few Americans currently take advantage of professional financial planning services for financial, tax, retirement, or investment advice. This figure stands at 1 in 4 among U.S. adults ages 22—75 overall, with retirees being nearly twice as likely to utilize a financial advisor.

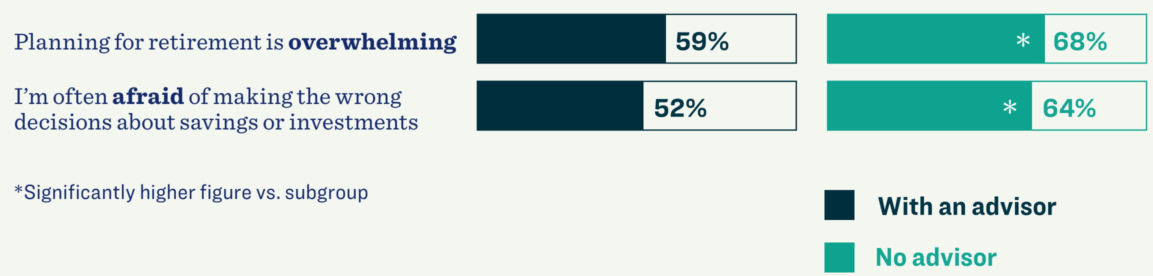
WORKING WITH A FINANCIAL ADVISOR

24% **currently work with a professional advisor** for financial, tax, or retirement/saving/investment advice

WORDS ASSOCIATED WITH RETIREMENT PLANNING



ATTITUDES TOWARD RETIREMENT PLANNING



*Significantly higher figure vs. subgroup

Retirees who leverage professional financial planning services fare better with retirement planning, confidence, and financial fluency. They're more likely than those not consulting a professional to cite positive words like "secure," "confident," and "excited" when asked what first comes to mind when hearing the phrase "retirement planning." They're also less likely to feel that retirement planning is overwhelming or feel fearful of making the wrong decisions about savings or investments.

Retirees who currently work with a financial professional are less likely to have regrets about retirement planning. Some of the biggest gaps between those with and without professional support center on setting clear retirement goals, properly accounting for life events, and understanding guaranteed lifetime income.

RETIREES' REGRETS ABOUT FINANCIAL PLANNING

	With a financial advisor	Without a financial advisor
Not saving enough	43%	* 58%
Underestimating health care costs	30%	* 41%
Underestimating life events	26%	* 43%
No clear retirement plan/goals	23%	* 42%
Not accounting for economic factors	23%	* 37%
Confusion on guaranteed lifetime income	20%	* 37%
Carrying too much debt into retirement	19%	* 31%

**Significantly higher figure vs. subgroup*

Many are open to digital tools—and support their financial professionals leveraging them.

Given the significance of retirement planning and the relatively small share of Americans who seek professional financial guidance, it seems natural that people would be in search of additional support, including AI-powered tools.

In fact, 4 in 10 Americans are somewhat, if not very, open to leveraging AI tools for money management and future planning. There's also modest interest in a range of AI-powered tools—from retirement income calculators (1 in 3 are interested), to AI-powered chatbots that provide financial advice and answers to financial questions (1 in 6 are interested).

Those who are not yet retired, particularly younger generations—are more likely than current retirees to express interest in each of the AI-powered tools surveyed.

40% **are open to using AI tools**

To help with money management and planning for the future

Higher among Gen Z (**44%**) where **6%** are already using AI for these purposes and among millennials (**49%**).

57% **are open to their financial professional using AI**

Support for AI-powered tools extends beyond individual consumers to include financial professionals themselves. Nearly 6 in 10 of those currently working with a financial professional are somewhat or very open to their professional using AI tools for money management and future planning.

INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING AI-POWERED TOOLS

	Total	Retired	Not yet retired
Retirement income calculators that factor in inflation, life expectancy, and market volatility to project income needs	34%	24%	37%
Budgeting apps that categorize expenses, track spending, and provide personalized insights on financial habits	26%	17%	29%
Financial education platforms that provide customized financial education content based on individual knowledge level, financial situation, and retirement goals	21%	13%	24%
AI-powered chatbots that provide financial advice and answers to financial questions	16%	9%	18%

Most have changed employers—and financial advisors can help.

In today's workplace, changing employers or careers is increasingly common. Nearly 8 in 10 U.S. adults ages 22—75 have done so at least once during their adult career, with the average number of employer changes at 4.2, and it's slightly higher among Gen X adults (4.5).

Each employer change creates both opportunities and challenges for retirement savings—and Americans are experiencing both. On the positive side, 1 in 3 have moved from an employer without a retirement savings plan to one with a plan, which is a more common transition than the reverse (17% left an employer with a plan for one without). Still, 1 in 4 have left jobs before fully vesting, leaving employer matching contributions on the table.

For many workers, changing jobs also means navigating a rollover. 3 in 10 have rolled a 401(k) into an IRA, while 1 in 4 have rolled a 401(k) into a new employer's plan. Financial professionals are well-positioned to help workers navigate these transitions and ensure that saving for retirement is on track.

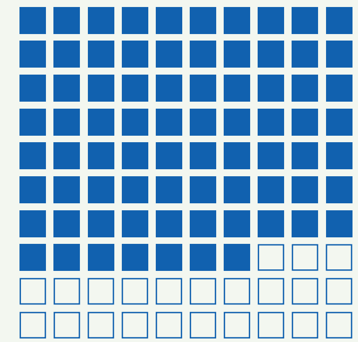
Those who have changed employers at least once report:

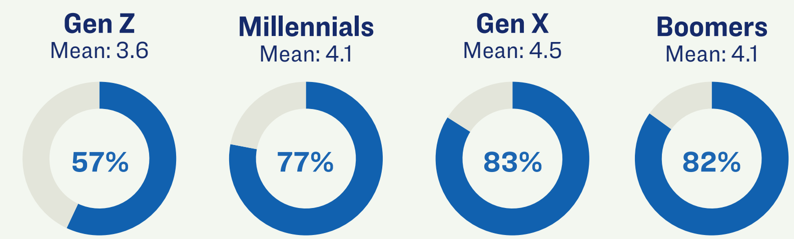
- **32%** Moving from an employer without a plan to one with a plan
- **31%** 401(k)/retirement account rollover into an IRA
- **26%** 401(k) rollover into a new employer's plan
- **24%** Leaving a job prior to fully vesting
- **20%** Retirement savings cash-out when changing jobs
- **17%** Moving from an employer with a plan to one without a plan

SWITCHED EMPLOYERS IN ADULT CAREER AT LEAST ONCE

77%

Mean number of switches is 4.2





THIS SUGGESTS A NEED FOR:

Current retirees

Free or low-cost retirement check-ins, designed specifically for retirees who haven't worked with an advisor before, that focus on withdrawal strategies, tax optimization, and adapting financial plans as life's circumstances change

Tax credits or deductions to encourage middle-income retirees to engage financial planning services, helping to bring professional guidance to more consumers

Digital platforms tailored to retirees, combining AI-powered tools with human support and offering accessible advice around common retiree issues like Social Security optimization

Future retirees

Hybrid advice models, combining frequent AI-driven guidance with periodic human advisor check-ins, helping to build strong money management behaviors and instill confidence at an affordable price

Expanded employer-sponsored advice benefits that incorporate financial planning resources into benefits packages, including ways to optimize rollovers, avoid early withdrawal penalties, and maintain retirement momentum through life's disruptions

Special focus: millennials

Many millennials are already planning to delay retirement, wanting to ensure sufficient savings for "the unexpected" among other milestones.

Millennials continue to transition and grow their lives while navigating major milestones, from buying homes and choosing long-term partners to starting families and advancing their careers. They are juggling competing needs and responsibilities. Half have children, while two-thirds have living parents or in-laws who may require care someday. One in 7 are already providing care to a child with special needs or an adult friend or relative.

Meanwhile, this generation faces financial obstacles that can make it difficult to plan and save for the future, such as paying-off student loan debt and currently high home mortgage and rental costs. Retirement may seem like a distant goal (if it is a goal at all) but the financial decisions this generation is making today will have long-term impacts on their future retirement security. Millennials need the tools and opportunities to help them act today to ensure their future well-being.

Most (74%) millennials expect to retire at some point: age 60, on average, and three years older than when current retirees actually left the workforce. However, half of those expecting to retire believe they'll likely need to work longer than planned (in other words, delay retirement). One potential reason for this delay is the ambitious list of milestones millennials hope to achieve before retiring. Compared to non-retirees overall, millennials are especially focused on paying off mortgage debt, hitting savings targets, and building a diversified portfolio of a certain size. These sometimes competing goals highlight the importance of affordable access to financial advice and planning tools.

EXPECTED AVERAGE RETIREMENT AGE

60

52% likely to delay retirement (among those who expect to retire)

CAREGIVING

14%

currently serve as caregivers to a child with special needs or an adult friend/relative.

MILESTONES TO ACHIEVE BEFORE RETIRING (NON-RETIREES)

61% Having enough to cover an unexpected expense/emergency

45%* Pay off mortgage

44% Pay off debts *(non-mortgage)*

38%* Saving a specific amount *(e.g., saving 10—12 times your annual salary)*

38% Securing adequate health insurance *(e.g., Medicare enrollment, LTC insurance)*

34%* Building a diversified investment portfolio

31%* Meeting an income replacement target *(e.g., 70%—80% of pre-retirement income)*

25%* Building an investment portfolio of a certain value

23% Reaching a specific age related to Social Security eligibility

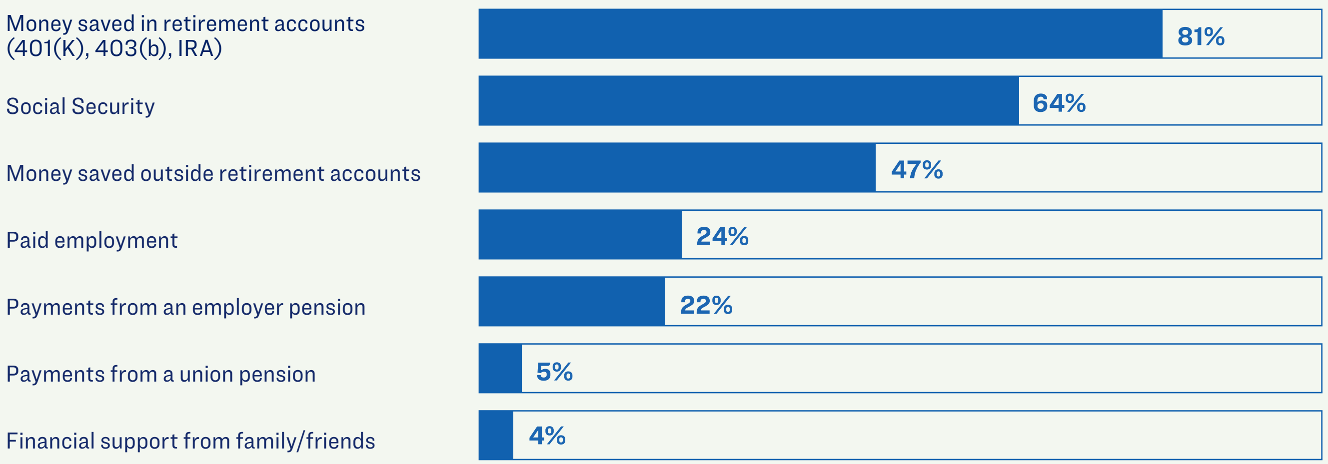
18% Pay off your or your children's education

* Significantly higher figure vs. total non-retirees

Millennials expect to rely heavily on personal savings and continued work in retirement.

When asked which sources of income they expect to use during retirement, millennials rank Social Security in second place—unlike current retirees, who place it in first. Eight in 10 millennials anticipate using money saved in their retirement accounts, while nearly half plan to tap savings outside of retirement accounts. Additionally, 1 in 4 believe they'll continue working to fund retirement.

EXPECTED RETIREMENT INCOME SOURCES FOR MILLENNIALS



The desire for guaranteed lifetime income outpaces understanding among millennials.

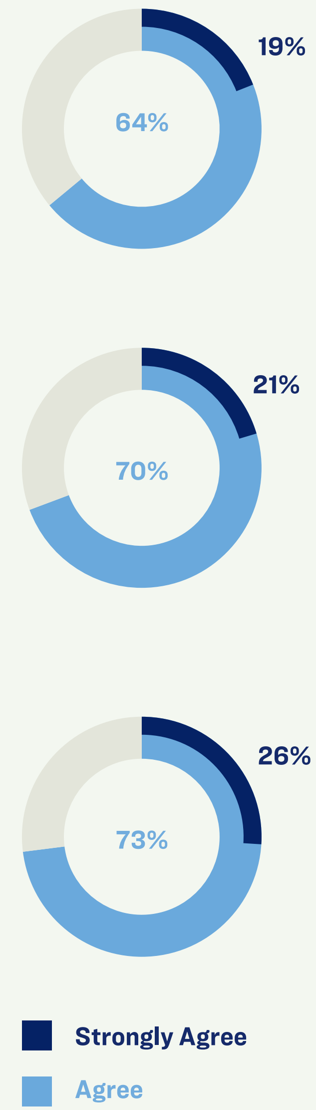
Three in 4 millennials believe they cannot retire until they secure a guaranteed source of income to last throughout retirement. While 7 in 10 are confident they'll be able to secure this type of retirement income, fewer—2 in 3—say they actually understand how to secure it. Notably, relatively few hold any of these views strongly, suggesting both confusion and uncertainty around the concept of guaranteed lifetime income.

EXPECT TO RETIRE

Understand
I understand how to secure a steady, guaranteed source of income that will last throughout retirement

Confident
I feel confident that I'll be able to secure a steady, guaranteed source of income that will last throughout retirement

Must-achieve milestone
I won't be able to retire until I'm able to secure a steady, guaranteed source of income that will last throughout retirement



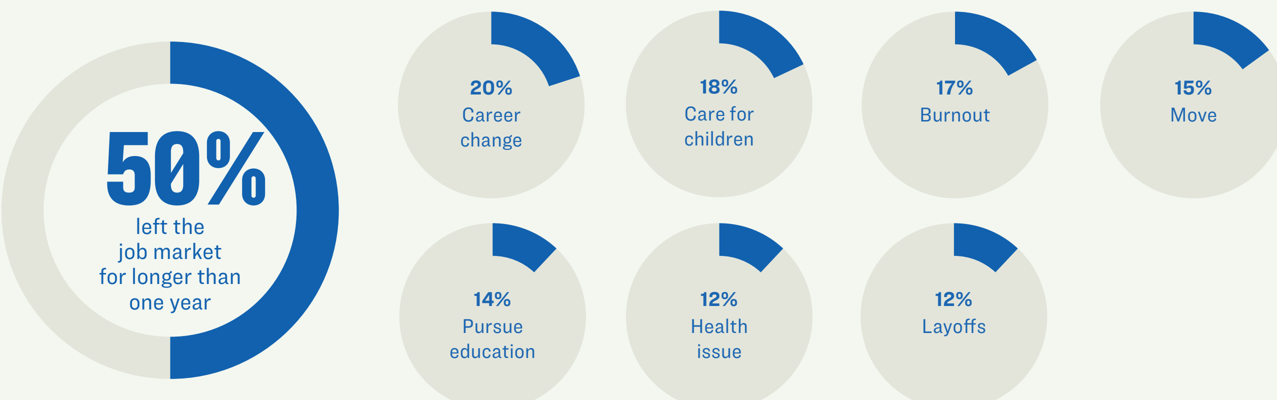
Millennials' retirement plans should factor in career interruptions—and job changes.

Having enough savings to cover unexpected expenses and emergencies is top-of-mind for millennials when planning for retirement. However, are they giving enough thought to employment changes that could impede or even derail their savings plans? Half of millennials report having left the workforce for more than a year, with career changes, childcare, and burnout being the most common reasons.

Employment changes don't need to last a year to impact retirement planning and saving—even switching jobs can have significant implications. Three in 4 millennials have changed employers at least once in their adult careers, averaging four employer changes. These changes bring important decisions about how to handle retirement accounts: 3 in 10 have rolled over a 401(k) into an IRA or into a new employer's plan, while 1 in 5 have cashed out retirement savings when changing jobs. A notable 1 in 4 left a job before fully vesting, forfeiting employer match contributions.

Auto-enrollment is a bright spot, helping to drive retirement plan participation among millennials. Three in 4 (75%) say their employer offers a retirement savings plan and, of these, an overwhelming 91% are enrolled. Roughly 6 in 10 enrolled millennials report some form of automatic enrollment—whether it be with an option to opt out (53%) or without one (9%).

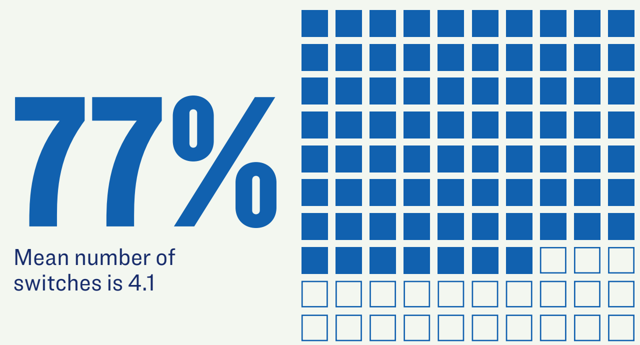
MILLENNIALS' TOP REASONS FOR LEAVING THE JOB MARKET FOR LONGER THAN ONE YEAR



Millennials who have changed employers at least once report:

32%	Moving from an employer without a plan to one with a plan
29%	401(k)/retirement account rollover into an IRA
28%	401(k) rollover into a new employer's plan
27%	Leaving a job prior to fully vesting
20%	Retirement savings cash out-when changing jobs
19%	Moving from an employer with a plan to one without a plan

SWITCHED EMPLOYERS IN ADULT CAREER AT LEAST ONE TIME



Half of millennials are open to using digital tools for financial planning.

Today, relatively few millennials work with a financial professional for financial, tax, or retirement planning advice. At 17%, this figure is less than half the rate among boomers (39%). While only 3% of millennials currently use AI tools for financial planning, half are open to the idea.
The digital tools they find most appealing include retirement income calculators, budgeting apps, and financial education platforms that customize content based on individual knowledge, financial situation, and retirement goals.

INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING AI-POWERED TOOLS

Retirement income calculators that factor in inflation, life expectancy, and market volatility to project income needs	39%
Budgeting apps that categorize expenses, track spending, and provide personalized insights on financial habits	35%
Financial education platforms that provide customized financial education content based on individual knowledge level, financial situation, and retirement goals	29%
AI-powered chatbots that provide financial advice and answers to financial questions	22%

49%

are open to using AI tools to help with money management and planning for the future

THIS SUGGESTS A NEED FOR:

Career transition safeguards, such as portable benefits that follow across frequent job changes, automatic rollover services to prevent 401(k) cash-outs, and greater education around vesting and other facets of financial literacy

Employer benefit offerings, such as student loan matching or emergency savings accounts to help manage “the unexpected”

Simplified guaranteed income solutions with clear, jargon-free education about how to create pension-like income from their workplace retirement plan or IRA

Greater access to digital life-stage financial planning tools that connect competing priorities (like student loans, home buying, childcare, retirement) and help balance today’s needs with tomorrow’s security

Conclusion

There are many opportunities to help Americans navigate the shifting retirement landscape and bridge the gap between expectations and reality. While progress is being made in retirement preparedness, there is substantial room for improvement. Without action, Americans of all ages risk significant hardships. Younger generations—often without access to a traditional defined benefit pension and increasingly likely to have student loan debt—may lack the savings or guaranteed income needed to retire when they want, if at all. Older generations may be unable to maintain their desired lifestyle throughout retirement. All may find themselves navigating critical financial decisions without the support and confidence they need. Accountability for progress is shared.

Workers at every life stage have a role to play—from building foundational habits and financial literacy early in their careers to optimizing growth and protecting gains mid-career to careful transition planning as retirement approaches to, actions and behaviors that will help them sustain their lifestyle throughout retirement. This means establishing buffer (or emergency) saving to protect against unexpected workforce gaps, participating in retirement reality workshops to bridge expectations gaps, and developing comprehensive strategies that coordinate all available resources—from Social Security timing to home equity.

Financial advisors and services providers should leverage these insights to deliver more effective client education, introduce appropriate AI tools at different life stages, and build confidence by addressing both the emotional and financial dimensions of retirement planning. Specifically, they should develop hybrid advice models that combine AI-powered guidance with human consultation, create simplified and jargon-free education around guaranteed income solutions, and offer free or low-cost financial tune-ups for retirees 70 and beyond to ensure sound withdrawal strategies.

Employer adoption of SECURE 2.0 Act provisions, such as adopting auto-enrollment features, including auto-escalation of contributions, and providing access to lifetime income options in the retirement plan. Support can be customized for each generation's unique needs, whether that means onboarding support and micro-learning modules for Gen Z or phased retirement options and education around retirement income and legacy planning for Boomers..

Policymakers should strengthen the retirement security framework through initiatives that address today's evolving workforce and retirement expectations. This could include implementing caregiving retirement credits for years spent out of the workforce, allowing pre tax retirement plan contributions to count toward student loan forgiveness programs, and providing tax incentives for middle-income Americans to access professional financial guidance. A robust public education campaign about the SECURE 2.0 Act of 2022 would help employers and workers alike effectively leverage this legislation.

Meanwhile, The TIAA Institute will share this research broadly, dig deeper with future studies to inform solutions, and partner with like-minded organizations to help Americans better prepare for and thrive in an evolving retirement landscape.

Appendix

Methods

This research—Bridging Retirement Expectations Gaps: New Evidence and Insights—was conducted in July 2025. A total of 1,591 U.S. adults ages 22—75 were interviewed using the nationally representative KnowledgePanel. Oversamples were conducted in order to analyze key audiences: LGBTQ+ (n=325) and Rural (n=325) respondents.

	Total	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
AVERAGE AGE	47.2 years	25.3 years	36.6 years	52.6 years	67.2 years
GENDER	49% M / 51% F	48% M / 52% F	51% M / 49% F	51% M / 49% F	45% M / 55% F
ARE CAREGIVERS	16%	15%	14%	20%	14%
LGBTQ+	11%	24%	13%	6%	5%
RURAL	20%	17%	16%	20%	24%
RACE/ETHNICITY: White, Non-Hispanic	60%	58%	55%	58%	70%
RACE/ETHNICITY: Black, Non-Hispanic	12%	12%	13%	14%	10%
RACE/ETHNICITY: Hispanic	18%	23%	20%	19%	12%
RACE/ETHNICITY: Other/Multi	9%	7%	11%	10%	9%

About the research

This research —Bridging the gaps in retirement expectations New Evidence and Insights—was conducted by Ipsos from July 1 to July 17, 2025. This poll is based on a nationally representative KnowledgePanel® probability sample of 1,591 adults, ages 22 to 75, with an oversample among LGBTQ (n=325) respondents. The KnowledgePanel®is the original and most well-established online probability-based panel that is representative of the adult population in the United States. Members are recruited using a scientifically developed address-based sampling methodology. In order to maintain full representation of all adults, households without internet access are provided internet-enabled devices and ISP, as well.

The survey was conducted in both English and Spanish. Survey data were weighted to adjust for gender, age, race/ethnicity, census region, metropolitan status, education, household income, and language dominance among both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ respondents. The weighting benchmarks were derived from KnowledgePanel (KP) profile data, which were calibrated to reflect the demographic characteristics of the U.S. adult population, ages 22 to 75. This calibration approach was based on demographic benchmarks from the 2024 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS) from the U.S. Census Bureau with the language dominance benchmark obtained from the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS).

The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, for results based on the entire sample of adults. The margin of sampling error takes into account the design effect, which was 1.18, and is higher and varies for results based on sub-samples. Sampling error is only one potential source of errors. There may be other unmeasured non-sampling error in this or any poll. In our reporting of the findings, percentage points are rounded off to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages in a given table column may total slightly higher or lower than 100%. In questions that permit multiple responses, columns may total substantially more than 100%, depending on the number of different responses offered by each respondent.

About Ipsos

Ipsos is one of the world's leading market research and opinion polling companies, operating in 90 markets and employing nearly 20,000 people. Our researchers, analysts, and scientists are passionately curious, with multi-specialist expertise that enables us to deliver deep insights into the actions, opinions, and motivations of citizens, consumers, patients, customers, and employees. Our 75 solutions draw on primary data from surveys, social media monitoring, and qualitative or observational techniques. Our tagline "Game Changers" reflects our ambition to help our 5,000 clients navigate a rapidly changing world with confidence.

Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos has been listed on Euronext Paris since July 1, 1999. The company is part of the SBF 120 and Mid-60 indices and is eligible for deferred settlement (SRD).

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