WAGE TO WALLET™ INDEX

The Resilience Deficit: Labor Workers in an Automated Economy

APRIL 2026

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The Resilience Deficit: Labor Workers in an Automated Economy was produced in collaboration with Ingo Payments and WorkWhile, and PYMNTS is grateful for the companies' support and insight. PYMNTS retains full editorial control over the following findings, methodology and data analysis.

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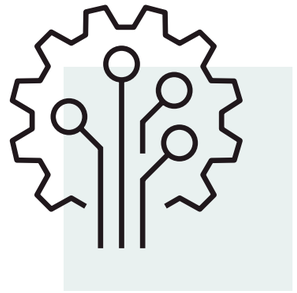
What's **at Stake**

For months, the public conversation around artificial intelligence has focused on the fast-moving technology's impact on office workers and software-heavy jobs, both typically higher-income roles. Block framed a 40% staff reduction in February on its growing use of AI. Oracle slashed up to 30,000 global roles last month to focus on investments in data centers, the core infrastructure of large language models. Amazon said last October it would shed 30,000 corporate roles and spend $200 billion this year alone on capital expenditures, mostly in AI infrastructure.



1 in 3

Labor Economy workers
already has AI or automation
in their workplace.

But not just software engineers, operations leaders, program managers and technical specialists, many of them senior, are feeling AI anxiety. Perceptions of how the rapidly evolving technology will impact jobs, household finances and the broader economy are becoming more pessimistic for rank-and-file workers.

PYMNTS Intelligence's latest Wage to Wallet™ data show that fears about the highly disruptive technology are increasingly trickling down to what we call Labor Economy workers, meaning hourly workers earning no more than $25 an hour and typically less than $50,000 a year. The index and its components rank confidence levels for three categories: the macroeconomic and buying climate, personal household finances and labor market security, all on a scale of 1–100. Lower scores mean declining confidence.

How these scores affect different groups of workers varies significantly. When AI reaches the workplace, lower-income workers report less training, more job insecurity and fewer financial cushions. Compared to higher paid employees, hourly workers look less prepared to absorb change when it reaches them.

Consumer expectations fell across all workers in April, but the drop in perception of job security was particularly stark for Labor Economy workers. These individuals stand out as the group with the least room to absorb a cut in hours, a shift in duties or a technology-related job loss. Meanwhile, as automation reaches Labor workers, training lags: More than one in three Labor workers report new automation or AI in their workplaces. Among those directly affected, nearly six in 10 say they did not receive training on how to use the new tools.

FIGURE 1:

Subindex: Labor market security over time

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

The Resilience Deficit: Labor Workers in an Automated Economy, April 2026

N= 2,369: Whole sample, fielded April 2–8, 2026

Key **Findings**

01

Economic pessimism is rising as job confidence slips for Labor Economy workers.

All workers grew more pessimistic about the economy in April, but Labor Economy workers became increasingly worried about the labor market and their own personal job security.

02

Automation is reaching Labor workers, but training on new tools lags.

More than one in three Labor workers report new automation or AI at work. Among those directly affected, nearly six in 10 say they did not receive training on new tools.

03

Labor workers are less confident they could recover from a technology-driven job loss.

Lower confidence in finding comparable work, weaker belief that their skills will remain valuable and more constrained financial fallback options all point to less room to absorb disruption from AI in the workplace.

PYMNTS **in Depth**

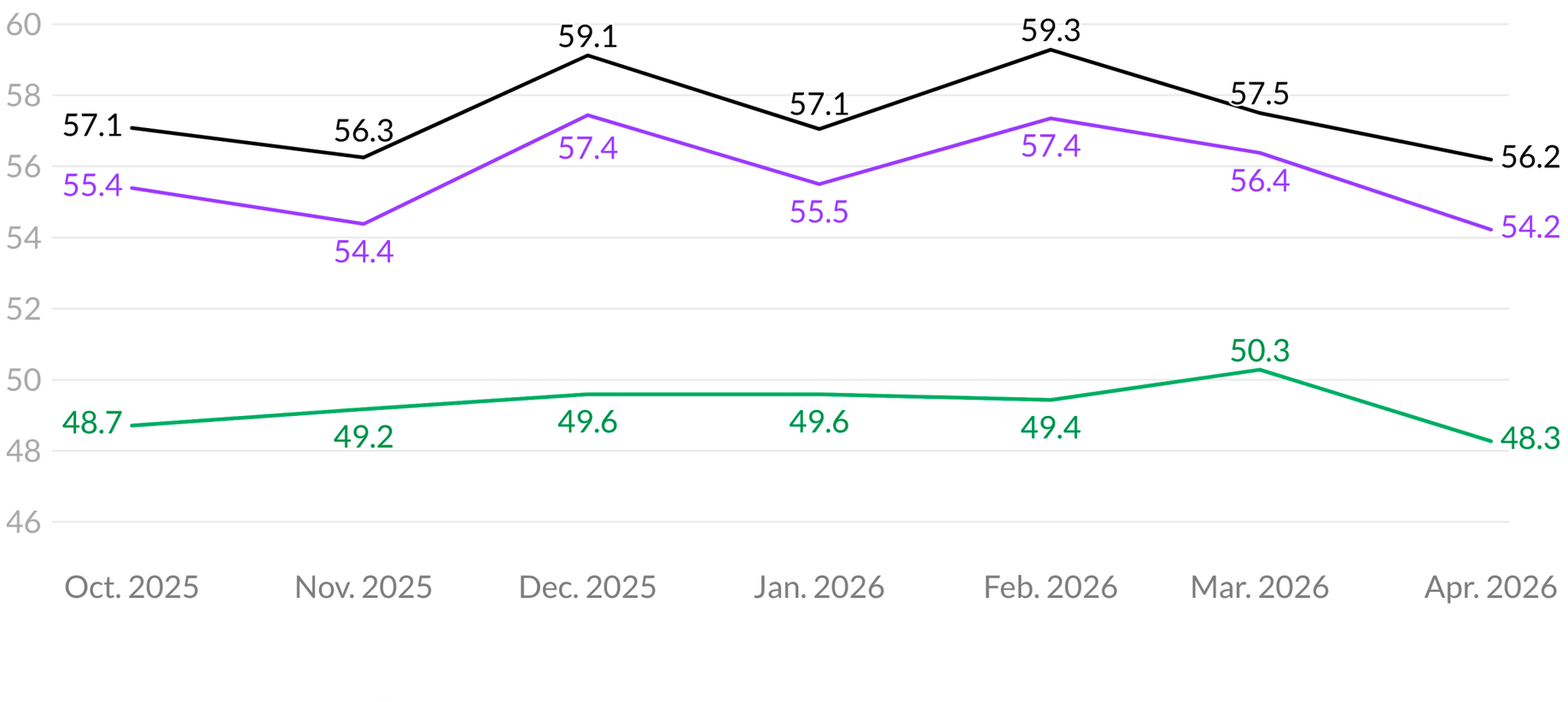
Numbering roughly 60 million adult Americans, about one in three workers are in the Labor Economy. With jobs ranging from warehouse associates, delivery drivers and restaurant and hotel industry staff to caregivers, construction workers and cleaners, they are an economically meaningful slice of consumer spending, accounting for around 15% of annual GDP.

In April, consumer sentiment fell for both Labor Economy and non-Labor Economy workers.

The overall Consumer Sentiment index dropped 2.2 points between March and April. People grew more negative about the national economy, the ability to make major purchases and their capacity to save.

FIGURE 2:

PYMNTS Consumer Expectations Index



Job security confidence among Labor workers dropped **4.2 points** in a single month (March to April 2026).

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Resilience Deficit: Labor Workers in an Automated Economy, April 2026
N= 2,369: Whole sample, fielded April 2–8, 2026

Job fears are growing.

The Job Market Security subindex reveals a notable erosion in confidence among Labor Economy workers. It slipped from 65.8 in March to 63.7 in April. The index dipped as low as 61.5 last November before partially recovering, suggesting that confidence has been fragile and susceptible to external shocks, including the spread of automation through business.

The most pronounced deterioration appears in the Context Job Security component that scores worker sentiment based on their perception of the vulnerability of their coworkers to losing their jobs, not their own jobs. Here, sentiment among Labor Economy workers dropped from 72.8 in March to 68.6 in April. Sentiment about personal job security also grew more pessimistic. It fell from 84.6 in March to 81.8 in April. Overall, Labor Economy workers are increasingly wary about the impact of AI on the job market. When workers feel less able to move between jobs, it can reflect a perception that outside opportunities are narrowing—itself a signal of reduced labor market confidence.

Labor Economy consumer **expectations have fallen to 48.3**—their lowest point since October 2025.

Notably, Labor Economy workers consistently score lower than non-Labor Economy workers across nearly every metric and time period shown. The gap is particularly wide in personal job security, suggesting a persistent confidence divide between the two groups.

Taken together, the data paints a picture of Labor Economy workers entering spring 2026 with declining confidence in their job stability.

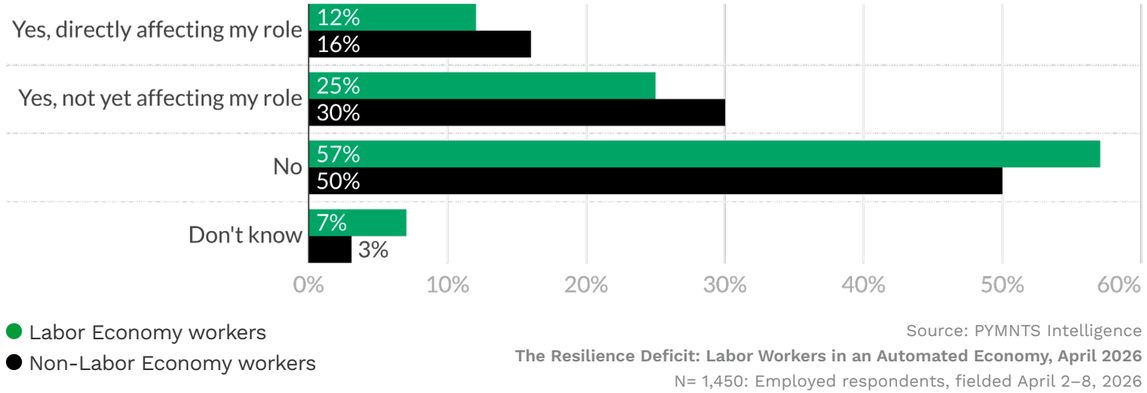
Automation is hitting all workers.

Despite the headlines about AI replacing white-collar roles, automation is already present in a meaningful share of Labor Economy workplaces. Thirty-seven percent of Labor workers say their employer introduced new automation or AI in the last 12 months. Among non-Labor workers, the share is higher at 46%. That shows that AI is spreading across the wage spectrum. Most workers in both groups still say the new tools have not yet changed their daily role. Twelve percent of Labor workers say the technology is directly affecting how they do their jobs, and another 25% say it is present but not yet affecting their role. That suggests the effect of automation is still building.

Once the technology impacts jobs, gaps in professional support emerge. Among directly affected workers, 42% of Labor Economy respondents say they received training on new tools. That means nearly six in 10 did not. Among non-Labor Economy workers, a higher 52% received training.

FIGURE 3:

Share of workers reporting employer automation or AI introduction in the last 12 months



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

The Resilience Deficit: Labor Workers in an Automated Economy, April 2026

N= 1,450: Employed respondents, fielded April 2–8, 2026

Only

39%

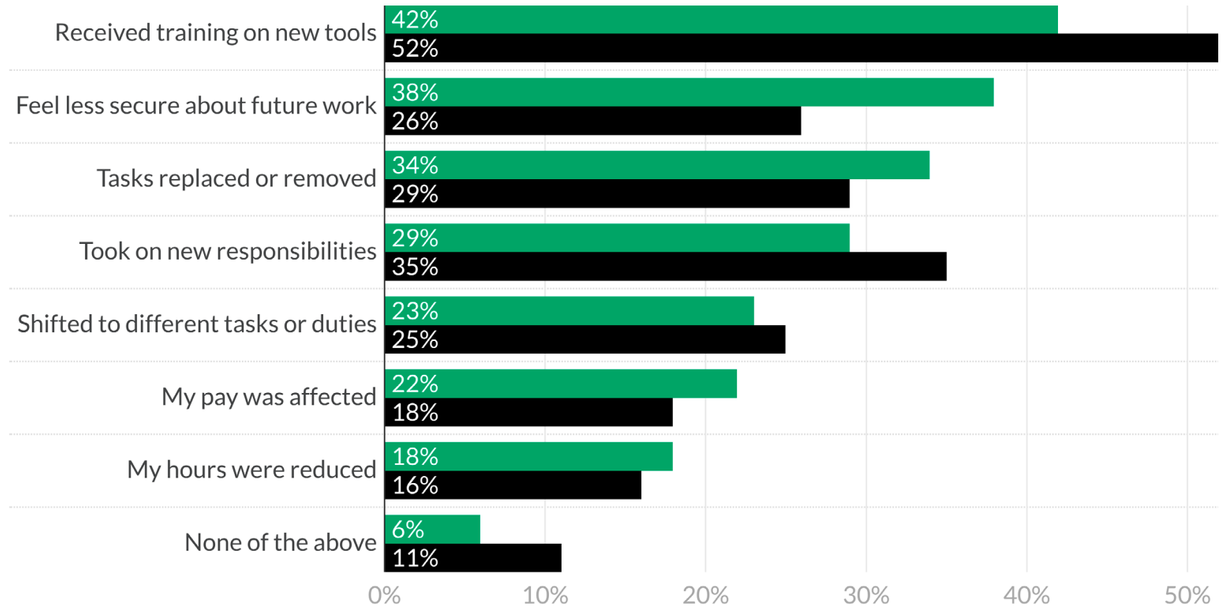
of Labor workers **are confident they could find comparable work** if AI eliminated their role.

The job changes themselves are not dramatically different across groups. Labor Economy workers report hours being reduced at nearly the same rate as non-Labor workers, 17% versus 16%. They also report tasks being replaced or removed at similar levels, 34% versus 29%. The bigger difference is how secure people feel afterward.

Thirty-eight percent of directly affected Labor Economy workers say they feel less secure about future work, compared with 26% of non-Labor workers. One signal for employers is that training is important.

FIGURE 4:

Effects of new technology, automation or AI on workers directly affected in the last 12 months



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Resilience Deficit: Labor Workers in an Automated Economy, April 2026
N= 230: Employed respondents who were affected by AI, fielded April 2–8, 2026

Preparing for Trouble

The household finance side of AI disruption is just as important. When workers were asked what they would do if their workload were cut in half for a month, all workers gave the same first answer. Thirty-two percent said they would cut nonessential spending. After that, the paths split. Non-Labor workers were nearly twice as likely to draw on savings or emergency funds, 20% versus 11% for Labor workers. The latter were more likely to lean on government assistance, 10% versus 5%.

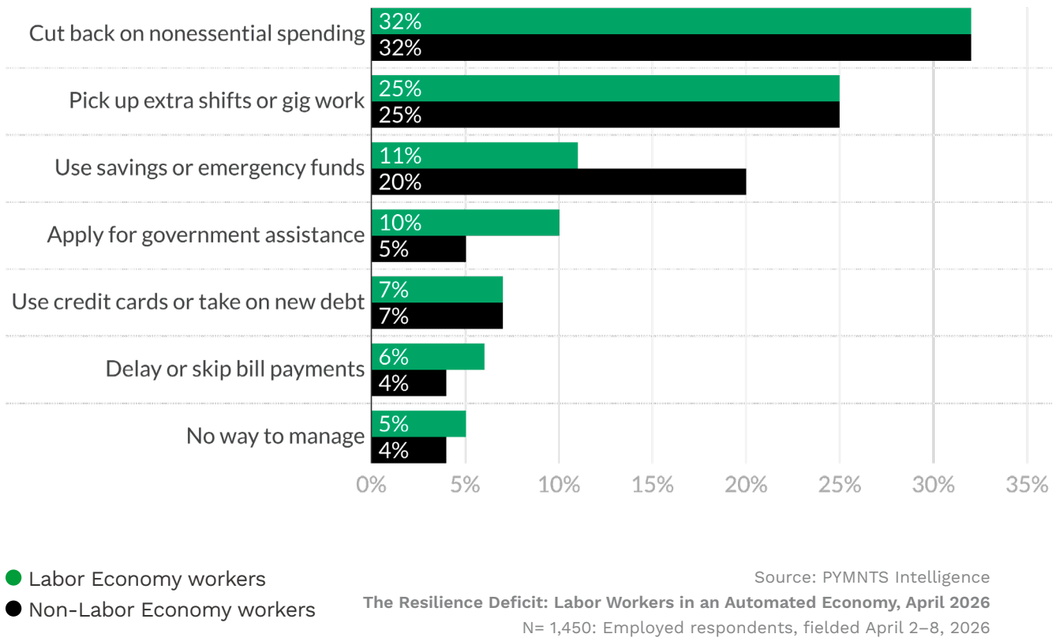
Nearly 6 in 10

Labor workers
affected by AI got no training
for how to use the technology.

Asked what they would most likely do if automation or AI eliminated their current role, 46% of non-Labor workers would stay in their field in the same or a similar role, either pursuing similar work (30%) or pivoting to something less exposed to AI (16%). Just 35% of Labor Economy workers say the same. Nineteen percent of Labor workers say they aren't sure what they would do (compared to 14% of non-Labor workers). Asked what they would do if their workload were reduced by half for a month, 25% of both groups said they would pick up extra shifts or gig work. In other words, one in five Labor workers facing the prospect of technology displacement have no plan at all.

FIGURE 5:

First action if workload were reduced by half for a month

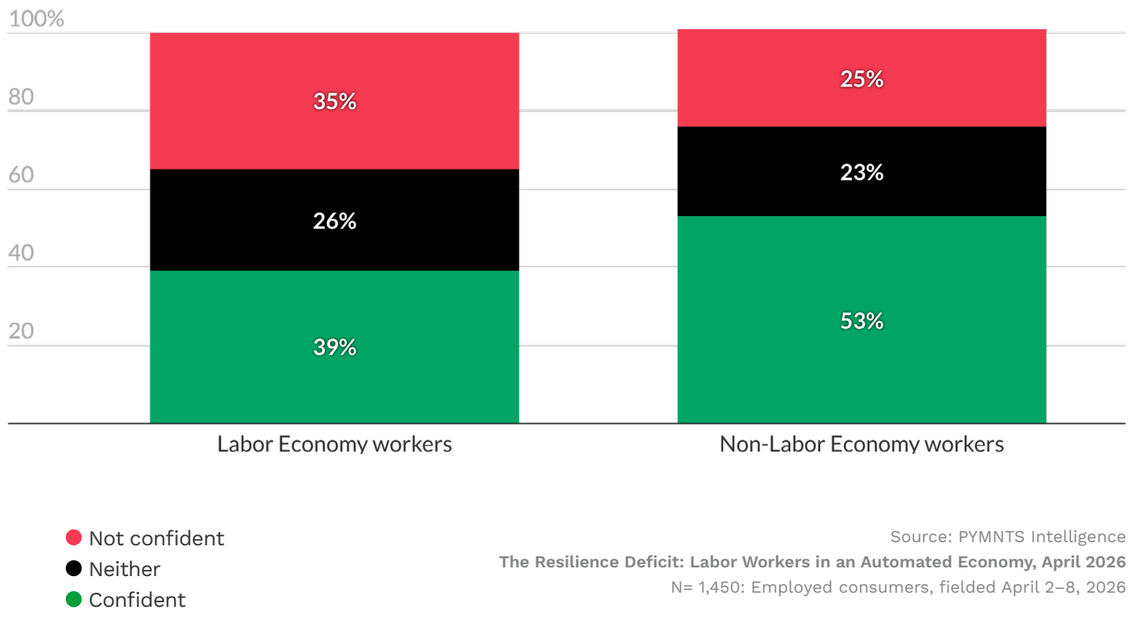


Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Resilience Deficit: Labor Workers in an Automated Economy, April 2026
N= 1,450: Employed respondents, fielded April 2–8, 2026

The confidence gap runs deeper than near-term cash management. When asked whether they could find comparable-paying work in the same field if technology eliminated their current role in the next 12 months, only 39% of Labor workers said yes. Thirty-five percent said they were not confident. Among non-Labor workers, 53% said they were confident and 25% said they were not.

FIGURE 6:

Confidence in finding comparable-paying work if technology eliminates my current role in the next 12 months

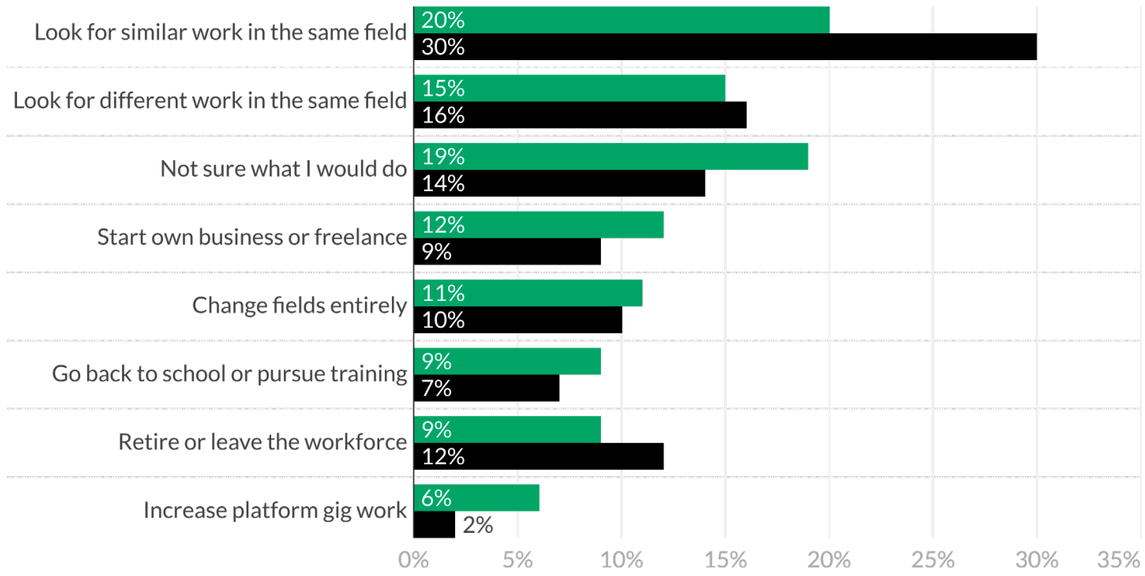


Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Resilience Deficit: Labor Workers in an Automated Economy, April 2026
N= 1,450: Employed consumers, fielded April 2–8, 2026

The same divide appears in how workers think about the future value of their skills. Six in 10 Labor Economy workers believe their skills will remain valuable as technology evolves. Among non-Labor workers, 74% say the same. Their action plans tell a similar story. Just 35% of Labor Economy workers say they would stay in their field by looking for similar work or moving into a different role in the same field. For non-Labor workers, that share rises to 46%. Nineteen percent of Labor workers say they aren't sure what they would do at all. Another 11% say they would change fields entirely. This is why Labor Economy workers feel more exposed to disruption by AI in the workplace.

FIGURE 7:

Most likely action if automation or AI eliminated current role



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Resilience Deficit: Labor Workers in an Automated Economy, April 2026
N= 1,450: Employed respondents, fielded April 2–8, 2026

Conclusion

April's Wage to Wallet report shows that AI and automation are reaching both sides of the workforce. Yet Labor Economy workers appear less equipped to manage the consequences. They receive less training. They feel less secure in their jobs. They have thinner cash buffers and narrower backup plans. The combination makes technology disruption feel more immediate in the Labor Economy than the public conversation often suggests. The implication for banks, payroll firms and FinTech providers is that the households most exposed to income volatility may also be the least supported as work changes.

Methodology

The Wage to Wallet Index is a monthly study that that tracks how wage growth, income access and job stability among 60 million essential U.S. workers impact household resilience, consumer demand and overall economic performance. This report is based on a survey of 32,464 U.S. adults. Analyses of data on automation, training, displacement and fallback are based on 2,369 respondents. The report compares the sentiments of Labor Economy workers, defined here as hourly workers earning no more than $25 an hour and typically less than $50,000 annually, with those of non-Labor Economy workers earning above those levels.

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About

The Wage to Wallet™ Index is built on a combination of three complementary data streams:

WorkWhile data: Provides real-time insights into employment trends, hourly wages, job participation rates and shift utilization across manufacturing, warehousing, logistics, retail, event and hospitality sectors. This data reveals how labor supply and compensation fluctuate at the ground level of the economy.

Ingo Payments data: Offers visibility into wage disbursement patterns and the adoption of instant pay. It captures how workers choose to access and manage their earnings and how instant availability of wages influences financial behavior and cash flow management.

PYMNTS Intelligence proprietary data: Supplements these sources with original survey data capturing financial sentiment, spending patterns, savings levels and credit reliance across worker segments. This data identifies the behavioral and emotional contours of the Labor Economy, including confidence, stress and spending. Labor Economy and Wage to Wallet are trademarks of PYMNTS Intelligence.

Official U.S. government data: Provides overall data on the U.S. economy and the size of consumer spending and employment cohorts. This includes data from the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Bureau of Economic Analysis on consumer spending by age and income level; total number of employed people by detailed occupation group and age; number of people by age and income level; and the level and growth of U.S. GDP.

The integration of these three sources enables the Index to measure relationships between earnings velocity, income access and financial resilience, and to connect these microeconomic realities to macro-level outcomes such as GDP growth, consumer demand and inflation sensitivity.