

European Workers Shift Focus to Pay, Balance and Wellbeing in 2026

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More than half of Europe's workforce is prioritising higher pay in 2026, while stress reduction and work life balance are overtaking traditional ambitions such as promotion or career change.

That is according to the European Career Outlook 2026 report from [MyPerfectCV](#), based on a survey of 1,000 employed adults across Germany, France, Spain, the UK and Italy.

The research shows 53% of workers name earning more money as their top goal for the year ahead. Meanwhile, 37% want to reduce stress and 34% are focused on achieving better work life balance.

The findings point to what MyPerfectCV describes as a recalibration of career success, with financial stability and wellbeing taking precedence over status or progression.

Jasmine Escalera, Career Expert at MyPerfectCV, said the data signals a broader shift in mindset.

"We're witnessing what I call The Great Rebalance, a shift away from relentless ambition towards sustainable success," she said.

"Across Europe, workers still want to advance, but not at the expense of their wellbeing. Pay, balance and mental health now define career satisfaction."

Pay and pressure shape 2026 priorities

When asked about their main career goals for 2026, respondents ranked earning more money first at 53%, followed by reducing stress at 37% and achieving better work life balance at 34%. Learning new skills was

selected by 33%.

By contrast, only 10% plan to change careers, 9% are aiming for a promotion and 7% intend to start a business. Fifteen percent reported having no specific goals.

The emphasis on stability is also reflected in job search intentions. While 33% say they are not likely to look for a new job in 2026, 67% are at least somewhat likely to explore new opportunities. Of these, 22% describe themselves as very likely and 25% as likely to move.

Among those considering a change, a bigger salary is the leading motivation at 50%. Better work life balance follows at 38%, with 31% seeking more interesting work and 24% citing flexibility, including remote or hybrid arrangements.

Upskilling remains a priority

Despite the shift towards balance, professional development remains firmly on the agenda. More than three quarters of respondents, 77%, plan to upskill in 2026.

Technology leads the way, with 37% intending to develop tech skills such as AI or coding. A further 35% plan to build industry specific expertise, while 28% are focusing on communication and interpersonal skills. Leadership and management skills were selected by 22%.

However, 23% say they have no plans to pursue new training in the year ahead.

Salary and flexibility drive satisfaction

When asked what would most improve job satisfaction, higher pay again ranked highest at 52%. Flexible hours were chosen by 34%, followed by wellness support at 20% and a fully remote option at 18%.

Clearer career paths and better management were each selected by 16%, while 14% believe nothing would improve their current level of satisfaction.

The report concludes that while ambition has not disappeared, it is being redefined. For many European professionals, success in 2026 will be measured less by title and more by financial security, manageable workloads and a sustainable pace of work.