

JOB HOPPING AND EARLY CAREER INSTABILITY

by Dr Mohd Amirul Rafiq Abu Rahim, Anis Farhana Amran,
and Adiba Mohamed Azman



ABSTRACT

Frequent job changes among younger workers are often framed as a behavioural failure on the part of the workers themselves and attributed to a poor work ethic. This article challenges that narrative by situating job-hopping within the context of growing structural weaknesses in current labour markets. It argues that rising skill underemployment and low entry-level wages have significantly influenced decisions to move between jobs. While job switching in the early career is often normalised as a short-term adjustment for better progression, this article demonstrates that unstable labour market entry can generate long-run career costs, particularly through two mechanisms: uneven accumulation of skills and the flattening of wage progression. The article concludes that job-hopping should be understood as a structural signal rather than a moral failing. The discussion highlights three key pathways forward to addressing this issue:

1. strengthening wage and job-quality foundations to support stable early-career pathways;
2. strengthening school-to-work matching through work-based learning and structured, employer-integrated career pathways; and
3. strengthening lifelong learning systems.

Please cite the work as follows: **Abu Rahim, M.A.R., Amran, A.F., and Mohamed Azman, A.. Job Hopping and Early Career Instability. Kuala Lumpur: PNB Research Institute, 2026.**

Disclaimer: The following article contains the views and opinions of the author(s) and not of PNB Research Institute or PNB. Cover page image source: Generated using Lovart AI.

JOB HOPPING AND EARLY CAREER INSTABILITY

by Dr Mohd Amirul Rafiq Abu Rahim, Anis Farhana Amran, and Adiba Mohamed Azman

Introduction

Job hopping, or frequent employment switching, is a global phenomenon that has frequently been associated with a perceived decline in work ethics (Apriliani et al. 2025). Excessive job hopping may also disrupt career stability (Munasinghe and Sigman 2004). Popular discourse highlights job hopping as especially common among younger workers.

However, it is important to distinguish between job movement¹ and labour market mobility. While changing jobs is considered a normal phase in the labour market, policy concern arises when repeated movements occur within short periods without meaningful progression in role, skills, or earnings (Mortensen 1986; Arnett 2000). In such situations, high levels of mobility reflect instability rather than advancement.

However, does this pattern necessarily signify a decline in organisational commitment? Or does it reflect growing structural challenges in the labour market?

Studies show job hopping is driven by incentives such as higher expected wage growth and better career matches (Pandey 2019; Doden et al. 2023), but these are not mere

perceived benefits. There has been evidence that job switchers in the United States experienced higher wage growth by 5.8% compared to those who remained in the same employment (ADP Research Institute 2021).

Job hopping has also been significant in Malaysia over the past five years, as reflected in both rising intentions to switch jobs and an increase in actual job transitions (Randstad Malaysia 2025). A Randstad survey found that 35.2% of respondents planned to move roles, a 1.3% increase from 2024. In the latter half of the year, 18% of employees followed through and changed jobs, reflecting a 1.9% year-on-year rise. According to the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), four in five young employees expect to leave their jobs within a year, with the highest voluntary turnover observed among those in their 20s, primarily consisting of Gen Z and late Millennials (Oon 2026).

Malaysian graduates who moderately job hop are also more likely to earn higher and less likely to face skill underemployment compared to their counterparts who either do not job hop or excessively job hop (Hamid et al. 2024). Hence, contrary to the common stigma, job hopping may not necessarily be an undesirable behaviour.

¹ While the terms may at times be used interchangeably in context, this paper adopts movement for clarity and consistency to denote individual job-switching behaviour. In contrast, mobility is more commonly used in labour economics to describe broader labour market patterns or structural conditions. This distinction is important because the typology introduced in this article focuses on the decision to move rather than on the broader environment in which such movements occur. See Kerckhofs et al. (2022)

Nevertheless, studies suggest that frequent job switching is a normal part of early careers and is not unique to today's young generation. Each generation² may experience frequent job changes over the course of their careers. Early millennials were the most frequent job hoppers in the previous decade, but Gen Z workers have surpassed them today. The intention to switch jobs and the frequency of doing so diminish with age (Steenackers and Guerry 2016; Hamid et al. 2024). Oentaryo et al. (2017) found a greater tendency to job hop among those with less work experience, except among professionals with more than 25 years of experience.

In the study, workers with less than 10 years' experience, who were the older millennials, showed the highest frequency of job movements. The trend in job hopping among those with 25 years' experience, who were mostly Baby Boomers and earlier Gen X in the study, further illustrates that job hopping is not strictly tied to generation-specific behaviour, as it also relates significantly to the career phase in which one is.

In the current decade, Gen Z workers entered the job market around the time of the COVID-19 crisis. This period was marked by hiring freezes, leading to intense competition for early-career workers. Such shocks may have reduced or delayed job-skill matching and extended the challenge for their job progression more than it did for past generations. On top of that, job moves are made even easier as digital media platforms make job information highly visible.

However, repeated job movements are not without risks. Stable employment and predictable earnings are key to building financial safety over time (Kuhn and Ploj 2020). Delays in settling for earnings stability may weaken income growth in the long term.

Against this backdrop, this paper discusses whether rising job switching among the young workers signals healthy labour market dynamism or deeper structural pressures. These pressures include weak job matching, limited availability of quality entry-level jobs, wage stagnation relative to the cost of living, and information frictions that raise search costs and delay efficient job matching.

Drivers of Job-Hopping Behaviour

There are many reasons why individuals change jobs, and this phenomenon is not necessarily related to generational differences. In fact, job switching does not strictly reflect an individual's work ethic or disloyalty to an employer. In this paper, we introduce a typology of job-hopping behaviour, distinguishing between **exploratory movement** and **constraint-driven movement**.

Exploratory movement refers to job switches made to pursue better employment opportunities that align with one's interests and career development goals. In contrast, constraint-driven movement arises from structural factors within the labour market, such as jobs that do not match an individual's qualifications, low wages, and a lack of clear career progression.

Exploratory Movement

In the early stages of employment, job hopping often reflects a strategic process of exploring personal interests and skill sets. It functions as a "trial-and-error" stage and allows individuals to move across different roles and fields to better understand where they fit. Young workers, in particular, tend to view this phase as an opportunity

to assess their long-term career potential before committing to a more stable position (Arnett 2000). As Neal (1999) suggests, this form of early job movement can be seen as a long-term investment that helps individuals make informed career choices for better future career progression.

² Generations are classified by birth years. Baby Boomers are born between 1946 and 1964, Gen X between 1965 and 1980, Millennials between 1981 and 1996, and Gen Z between 1997 and 2012.

Constraint-Driven Movement

In contrast to exploratory moves, constraint-driven movement occurs when individuals change jobs due to structural frictions in the labour market³. When driven

by structural constraints, repeated movements can signal deeper issues in prospects for job matching and employment quality.

a) Low Earnings

Earnings act as both an economic and psychological determinant of job movements, with job changes reflecting market opportunities and personal evaluations of compensation. In standard job search models, McCall (1970) noted that workers evaluate whether other job opportunities could offer higher earnings than their current position. When expected pay elsewhere exceeds their current wage, they are more likely to switch jobs,

making job-hopping a strategic mechanism for income optimisation. At the same time, perception of fairness could also influence movement decisions. Equity theory (Adams 1965) suggests that employees assess whether their compensation reflects their contributions and responsibilities, and they may leave if pay is perceived as insufficient.

b) Prevalent Underemployment

When employees perceive a mismatch between their skills, working hours and the opportunities available in their roles, they are more likely to switch jobs. Underemployment is characterised into two types, i.e., skill-related underemployment⁴ and time-related underemployment⁵.

the opportunity cost of their education or training rises, creating a strong incentive to seek positions that better reward their skills.

From an economic perspective, both forms of underemployment represent inefficient returns on human capital investment (Becker 1964). When employees cannot fully leverage their qualifications,

Psychological mechanisms support this effect. Person-job fit theory (Edwards 1991) highlights that underutilised skills reduce job satisfaction and that prolonged underutilisation can lead to frustration, reduced motivation, and a sense of stagnation. As a result, both economic inefficiencies and diminished job satisfaction can incentivise employees to move between roles.

c) Lack of Career Development

Career development is a critical driver of employee motivation and retention. Herzberg's "hygiene factors", such as salary and job security, function primarily as dissatisfaction-avoidance mechanisms rather than sources of intrinsic motivation (Figure 1). Lasting motivation often stems from factors such as growth, achievement, and advancement. Promotion opportunities and skill-building programs are therefore critical, as they directly support these motivators (Herzberg 1966).

Economically, the absence of clear career advancement pathways can create perceptions of limited future earning potential. For employees who prioritise economic incentives, smaller organisations with flatter structures and limited advancement opportunities may particularly encourage seeking external positions (Abdel-Khalik 1988).

³ These constraints include weak wage growth, limited advancement opportunities, underemployment and poor working conditions.

⁴ Skill-related underemployment occurs when employees' qualifications or competencies exceed job requirements.

⁵ Time-related underemployment arises when employees work fewer hours than desired.

Figure 1: Herzberg's Motivation–Hygiene Theory framework



Source: Herzberg (1966)

While flatter organisational structures may constrain formal career progression, hierarchical organisational designs do not necessarily resolve retention challenges.

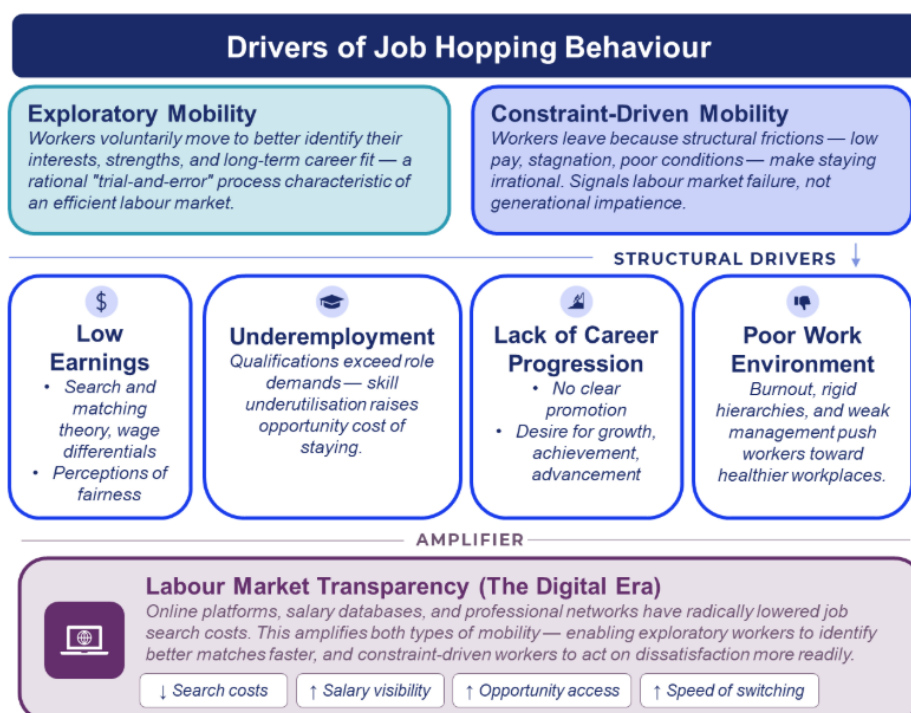
In practice, rigid hierarchies and controlling managerial practices can reduce autonomy and job satisfaction, thereby creating distinct turnover pressures.

d) Poor Working Conditions

Poor working conditions push employees to leave for workplaces that offer better work-life balance and growth, especially when long hours and heavy workloads lead to burnout (Feng and Angeline 2011). Organisation structures and policies also shape turnover. Rigid hierarchies, strict rules, and controlling management can limit autonomy and reduce job satisfaction, pushing employees to leave (Saxena and Jain 2012). Empirical evidence consistently

shows that supervisory style is a key predictor of job-hopping behaviour, as employees pursue roles better aligned with their professional and leadership aspirations (Apriliani et al. 2025). Beyond these factors, digitalisation has changed the way young workers switch jobs. Online platforms make opportunities more visible and increase the likelihood of job movement.

Figure 2: The drivers of job-hopping behaviour



Source: Author's Illustrations

Malaysia's Case: Climbing the Ladder or Stuck in Place?

Having examined the drivers of job hopping, the key question is whether it is an issue in Malaysia. Are young workers moving by choice, or are deeper structural

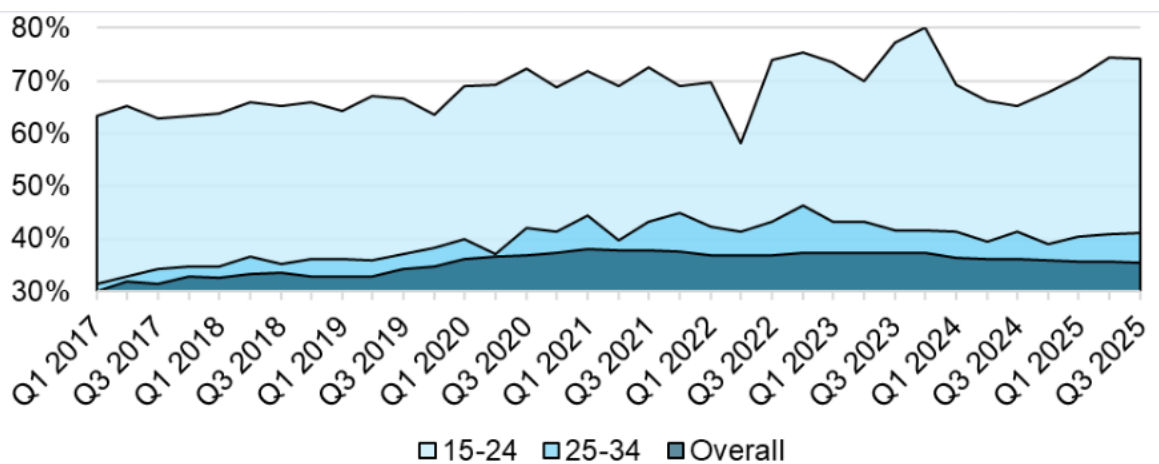
challenges in the early-career job market pushing them to switch jobs?

When Qualifications Outpace Opportunities, Moving Between Jobs Becomes a Survival Strategy

From a national perspective, skill-related underemployment remains the most significant form of workforce underutilisation, although the rate has been trending downward since Q1 2024, affecting 35.5% of the workforce as of Q3 2025 (Figure 3). However, there is a substantially higher rate of underemployment among Gen Z workers (ages 15–24). This trend has been

rising since 2017, with 74.3% of Gen Z employees being underemployed as of Q3 2025. For the 25–34 age group, which captures both older Gen Z and younger Millennials, skill-related underemployment remains above the national average at 41.0% but is still significantly lower than the youngest age group. This may indicate the moderation of skill-related underemployment with age.

Figure 3: Skill-related underemployment by age group



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2017-2025)

The persistence of this cohort-wide underemployment phenomenon over time may also suggest structural embedding rather than a one-off or short-term transition. More graduates are entering the job market, yet many start working in roles below their qualifications. This could be attributed to the declining share of skilled jobs created

in the economy, from around half of jobs created in 2016 to less than a third in 2021 (Abu Rahim and Suhaimi 2022). This growing prevalence of underemployment may explain constraint-driven job movements among younger workers.

When Staying Does Not Pay Well, Job Hopping Becomes Rational

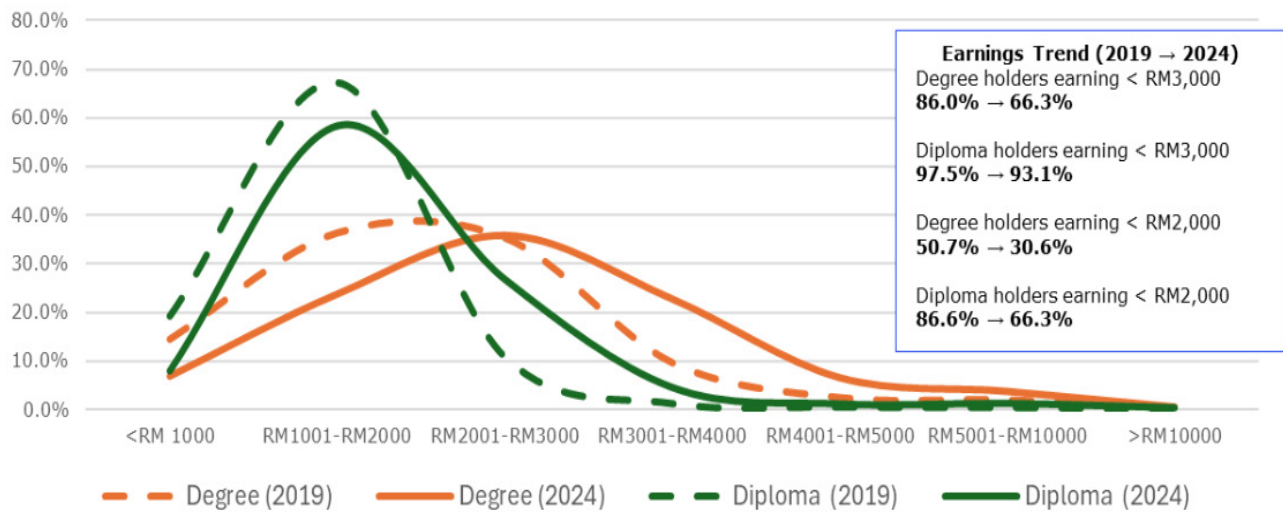
Research has shown that salary and benefits are the top priorities for Gen Z workers in Malaysia, with financial considerations strongly nudging them to job switch (Randstad Malaysia 2025). However, this tendency goes beyond simplistic narratives of income-driven preferences among younger workers. An analysis of 25 years of entry-level salary data (1997-2022) shows that real⁶ entry-level pay within the private sector has declined by 10% for degree holders and 28% for master's degree holders (PNB Research Institute 2025). It is indeed more challenging for entry-level workers to secure a decent-paying job that keeps pace with the cost of living today.

The estimated Minimum Expenditure for a Decent Standard of Living (*Perbelanjaan Asas Kehidupan Wajar, PAKW*) for individuals⁷ living in Kuala Lumpur is around

RM2,400 for a single household and RM3,970 for a dual household (Department of Statistics Malaysia, n.d). And going beyond this minimum base, the government-linked investment companies (GLICs) adopt a living wage policy for all permanent Malaysian employees of RM3,100 (Ministry of Finance 2025).

Yet, a majority of graduates remained earning below basic income benchmarks: 66.3% of degree holders and 93.1% of diploma holders earned less than RM3,000, below the living wage threshold (Figure 4). More strikingly, as many as 30.6% and 66.3% of degree and diploma holders, respectively, earned less than RM2,000, well below the PAKW. Although there is evidence of upward movement, a significant proportion of highly educated early-career individuals still start with low-paying jobs.

Figure 4: Monthly earnings of graduates, degree and diploma holders, 2019 vs 2024



Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2020, 2025)

Low pay and rising living costs have consistently ranked among the top three reasons for leaving a job, with 28% of Gen Z respondents citing this as their primary reason for switching employers (Randstad Malaysia 2025).

Job movement may have become a go-to strategy for pursuing wage growth, creating strong economic incentives for job-hopping among Gen Z workers.

⁶ Adjusted for inflation.

⁷ Based on the data for individuals aged 18-29.

Workplace Pressures are Pushing Employees to Move

Organisational culture in Malaysia has increasingly come under scrutiny due to persistent concerns about work-life balance, burnout, and uneven employee well-being. While objective measures of workplace conditions have improved over time, perceptions of workload pressure and work-life imbalance remain salient, particularly among younger cohorts whose expectations regarding flexibility, psychological well-being, and work boundaries differ from those of earlier generations. According to Remote Technology (2026), in 2024, Malaysia ranked as the second-worst among the top 60 GDP countries for work-life balance, with a score of 27.5/100⁸, an average 40.8-hour workweek, and relatively low minimum hourly wages. Malaysia similarly shared the position of “most overworked” nation with Mexico and Nigeria. Although the country improved to 29th place in 2025 (57.3/100), workload-related concerns remain prominent as Malaysia recorded the highest average hours worked per week among the top 30 countries. Importantly, these indicators should not be interpreted as direct predictors of job-hopping behaviour. Rather, workload intensity and work-life imbalance serve as contextual stressors that may exacerbate turnover when combined with other factors (such as limited career progression, restrictive organisational practices, or insufficient autonomy), factors

that are likewise observed in countries with stronger work-life balance rankings yet persistent job movement.

These structural pressures are reflected in employee well-being outcomes. Evidence from the Malaysia Well-Being @ Work survey shows that well-being is unevenly distributed within organisations, particularly among younger employees, those in lower job levels, and individuals with shorter tenure, who report significantly poorer outcomes compared to senior staff (MEF 2025). In addition, about two-thirds of Malaysian workers experience burnout; around one-fifth cite heavy workloads and after-hours work as the main stressors, while 18% report burnout directly (Employmenthero 2025).

Poor work-life balance is the most frequently cited reason for leaving an employer across generations (48% of Gen Z, 47% of Gen Y, and 46% of baby boomers). Beyond the workload concerns, limited career growth opportunities rank as the second most common reason for turnover among Gen Z and millennials, with approximately a third of employees in these cohorts citing insufficient advancement pathways and development opportunities as key motivators for leaving (Randstad Malaysia 2025).

⁸ The full index score is 100. Countries are scored based on several indicators, including leave policies, healthcare system, average work hours and minimum wages.



Image generated by Lovart AI

The Long-Term Cost of an Unstable Career Start

Job switching is not inherently harmful, and it occurs across all generations, not only among Gen-Z. During the transition from education to the labour market, changing jobs can help explore available opportunities, pursue higher wages, and secure employment that better matches qualifications and interests.

However, job switching can be risky when it exposes individuals to unstable employment. This situation arises when job changes occur within the same role and level,

without taking into account accumulated experience, often due to unsatisfactory working conditions or wages in previous employment. As a result, such movements may form a cycle that may both dampen individual career progression and even negatively affect longer-term earnings trajectory.

These effects occur through two interrelated mechanisms: human capital formation and earnings trajectories.

Mechanism 1: Slower and Fragmented Human Capital Accumulation

In theory, stable employment supports the development of individuals' skills, strengthens expertise, and provides a clear career progression pathway. Workers who remain longer in a role tend to develop stronger technical and problem-solving skills and are better able to meet employers' needs and expectations over time. Under such circumstances, workers are more likely to be given opportunities for career advancement into higher positions.

However, when young workers switch jobs too frequently, especially when moving across unrelated positions and failing to build sufficient expertise or demonstrate satisfactory performance, it can hinder positive career growth.

A study by Fauser and Mooi-Reci (2025), which measures skill development through training hours and task complexity, found that contract workers in short-term

arrangements accumulate significantly fewer training hours per year than permanent employees. Hence, the issue is not job movement itself, but the frequency of job changes that disrupts the accumulation of foundational experience and organisational skills. As a result, prospective employers may find it difficult to assess the potential value these new workers add to their organisations, thereby limiting their chances of securing advanced roles in the future.

Therefore, frequent job switching without sufficient duration to develop adequate experience and skills during early-career transitions poses a risk of slowing individual career development. Since skills are built progressively over time, delays in mastering basic competencies and workplace baseline norms can undermine long-term career growth and leave employers with a less experienced workforce.

Mechanism 2: Setbacks in Earnings Trajectories

Early career instability can also lead to lasting income gaps. The issue is not just lower starting pay but how those early conditions shape future opportunities. Workers who begin in unstable employment are more likely to experience lower employment rates, repeated job disruptions, and continued volatility in their earnings prospects. In the context of the United States, Kuhn and Ploj (2020) compared two otherwise identical workers, one who began in a stable job and one who started in an unstable position. The divergence in earnings emerged early and persisted over time:

- Within the first year, incomes differed by approximately 13%;
- By age 25, the worker with an unstable start earned about 5% less; and
- At age 40, the income gap remained at around 5%, persisting across the life cycle.

Evidence from Australia showed that young workers who cycle through short-term contracts, casual employment, or underemployment faced sustained wage penalties (Fauser and Mooi-Reci 2025). Even those who eventually transitioned into permanent roles earned 85 cents for every dollar earned by peers who began in full-time permanent positions. Although this gap narrowed over time, it did not fully disappear.

These wage differentials had important implications for wealth accumulation. Individuals who began their careers in unstable employment were more likely to remain constrained in investing in long-term assets such as housing, education, or financial savings. Carroll (1997) described this dynamic as a "Sisyphus cycle"⁹ where repeated short-term adjustments limited long-term financial progress.

⁹ Workers build up a buffer stock of savings during brief periods of income stability only to deplete it when moving in and out of precarious employment.

These risks may be higher in Malaysia due to weaker savings capacity and limited social protection (Krishnaveni et al. 2024). Young workers face limited access to formal

protections, structured training, and stable contracts, causing early employment instability to compound risks and potentially lead to prolonged income insecurity.

Way Forward: Protecting Early Career Pathways

Based on this discussion, drawing on available evidence and established best practices, the challenge is therefore, not in restricting individuals (particularly young workers transitioning from school-to-work) from changing jobs. Rather, it is in ensuring that early-career transitions contribute positively to individual career development. Stable and well-structured labour market pathways significantly influence career progression through better job matching, appropriate wages, and access to higher-quality roles (Causa et al. 2021). Therefore, policy

implications should place emphasis on the entry and transition phase into the labour market. Failing to secure the right early-career pathway will impose long-term costs on future outcomes¹⁰.

To address this, policy responses can be organised into three pillars: first, strengthening the foundations of wages and job quality; second, improving recruitment and job-matching systems; and third, expanding lifelong learning pathways.

Strengthening Wage and Job Quality Foundations

International best practices highlight the importance of strengthening the foundations of school-to-work transitions to support stronger long-term earnings trajectories. For example, Singapore has implemented the Progressive Wage Model, which links wage growth to skills, job roles, and work experience (Government of Singapore 2026). This approach enables workers to obtain structured income progression without needing to change jobs frequently.

In Malaysia, the policy direction has also been moving towards skills-led wage progression. It combines minimum wage reforms with progressive wage elements through GLIC-led living wage initiatives (Ministry of Finance 2025) and efforts to align wages with productivity and skills development through the Progressive Wage Policy (Government of Malaysia, n.d.)¹¹.

Spain, meanwhile, implemented major labour-market reforms in 2021 to curb excessive reliance on temporary and fixed-term contracts. These reforms have evidently improved employment stability for young workers. It also introduced greater internal firm flexibility (such as short-time work schemes) that allow firms to adjust to economic shocks without repeated cycles of hiring and dismissal¹².

Although it would prove challenging to outrightly limit contract-based or non-permanent employment, given the increasingly dynamic and flexible nature of both labour demand and supply, Malaysia has adopted an indirect approach by strengthening worker protections and improving job quality. Amendments to the Employment Act and related legislation aim to enhance minimum labour standards and extend worker protections in line with international benchmarks (Srivastava 2023)¹³. The Gig Workers Bill 2025 introduces formal recognition of gig workers, access to social protection, and dispute resolution mechanisms for non-traditional workers. These measures are expected to address existing gaps in income security (Yap Yeong Hui 2025) and signal a gradual shift towards reducing employment precarity, particularly for workers who do not receive benefits equivalent to those in stable, formal employment.

While these developments show important progress for Malaysia, gaps remain. Wage progression remains uneven across sectors, enforcement of labour standards varies, and a large share of workers, particularly those in informal, contract-based, or micro-enterprises, remain excluded from protection and structured career pathways. This highlights the need for continued efforts to strengthen wage structures and job quality as core foundations for more stable early-career transitions.

¹⁰ Causa et al. (2021) highlight several policy priorities to ensure early job movement supports progression rather than instability. First, improving job matching at entry through stronger school-to-work transitions, work-based learning, and better labour market information. It can reduce repeated job switching caused by poor initial placements. Second, effective worker reallocation to ensure workers move into higher-quality jobs. It should be supported by reskilling and upskilling, particularly amid structural shifts. Third, limiting early-career scarring is critical, as unstable starts can have lasting effects on earnings and employment trajectories, necessitating targeted support at labour market entry. Fourth, improving job quality and reducing reliance on temporary and part-time contracts can prevent cycles of short-term, low-progression roles. Finally, continuous skills development systems are important to allow workers to upgrade while employed, ensuring movements reflects progression rather than disruption.

¹¹ Introduced under the Mid-Term Review of the Twelfth Malaysia Plan, Malaysia's Progressive Wage Policy (DGP) marks a shift towards linking wages with productivity, skills, and career progression. Approved in 2023 and piloted in 2024, the policy will be fully implemented in 2025 with RM200 million allocated, benefiting around 50,000 workers. It moves beyond a static minimum wage by promoting structured wage pathways tied to skills and performance, while supporting lifelong learning to ensure sustainable wage growth.

¹² Early evidence suggests the reform has led to a substantial shift towards more stable employment, with temporary contracts declining by around 30% and permanent hiring increasing significantly. This shift has reduced excessive job turnover and improved employment stability, particularly for younger workers who were previously concentrated in short-term roles. In policy terms, Spain's approach shows that addressing contractual segmentation (by limiting precarious employment and strengthening pathways into permanent roles) can reduce involuntary job cycling and support more stable early-career trajectories.

¹³ The amendments expanded coverage to all employees regardless of wage threshold, strengthened protections on working hours (reduced from 48 to 45 hours per week), and introduced provisions on flexible working arrangements, maternity and paternity leave, and anti-discrimination measures. The reforms also enhanced safeguards on termination, wage payments, and dispute resolution mechanisms that aligns with international labour standards.

Strengthening School-to-Work and Job-Matching Systems

Weak initial job matches often encourage young workers to engage in job hopping without meaningful skill accumulation that supports career advancement. Germany's dual apprenticeship model addresses this issue by integrating classroom learning with paid workplace training, enabling young people to enter the labour market with employer-recognised skills and clearer career pathways (deutschland.de 2025). This approach substantially reduces early-career job hopping. The effectiveness of Germany's system lies in the direct integration of training within firms and its

alignment with actual job roles. In Malaysia, however, this approach remains challenging to implement fully due to institutional fragmentation among training providers, uneven industry participation, and limited firms' capacity to support structured apprenticeship pathways (Spöttl 2021; Abdullah et al. 2025). These constraints highlight the importance of strengthening school-to-work linkages and job-matching systems so that early-career employment facilitates skill accumulation, clearer progression pathways, and more stable labour-market trajectories.

Strengthening Lifelong Learning Systems

Lifelong learning encourages workers to upgrade their skills while remaining employed and to progress at a pace aligned with their career aspirations. Lifelong learning should not be limited to developing existing skills within the same job or role; rather, it should be flexible enough to enable cross-training and upskilling across occupational areas (Brown et al. 2021).

Malaysia has begun to make progress in expanding access to lifelong learning. Initiatives such as the Human Resources Development Corporation (HRD Corp) levy and training schemes have supported firm-level upskilling (Aziz and Abiddin 2025), while programmes such as micro-credentials and short-term certification courses offered by higher education institutions have increased the availability of modular and flexible learning pathways (Rami et al. 2024). In addition, national policy efforts under the Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia have emphasised skills upgrading and reskilling as part of broader workforce transformation strategies (WEF 2025; Loheswar 2024).

Adapting such training models in Malaysia, however, requires addressing institutional fragmentation and limited firm capacity. SMEs in Malaysia account for 95.9% of all business establishments and employ nearly half of the workforce, with a large share concentrated in micro-enterprises (NESDC 2026) that face constraints in providing structured training (Spöttl 2021; Yunus et al. 2024; Abd Rahman et al. 2025).

However, reach and uptake of existing initiatives remain uneven, particularly among smaller firms and lower-skilled workers. While the building blocks for a more responsive lifelong learning system are already in place, greater coordination, targeted incentives, and firm-level support are needed to scale these initiatives effectively and translate them into sustained improvements in early-career outcomes. Taken together, these gaps reinforce the importance of strengthening lifelong learning systems to ensure that early-career mobility supports sustained skill development rather than disruption.

Conclusion

Job hopping among the younger generation should not be interpreted as a decline in work ethic or a sign of impatience. Early-career job movement is often a rational feature of a dynamic labour market and, when undertaken strategically, can benefit career advancement.

Nonetheless, structural constraints have been argued to be the primary drivers of repeated job changes, or job hopping. From a life-cycle perspective, the risks associated with early-career instability are substantial, as discussed in the literature. Instability at this stage can hinder human-capital accumulation, disrupt earnings trajectories, and expose individuals to prolonged financial vulnerability. Consequently, policy objectives should prioritise three core pillars:

- i) **strengthening wage and job quality foundations to support stable early-career pathways**, including fair and structured wage progression and improved employment conditions;
- ii) **strengthening school-to-work and job matching through work-based learning and structured, employer-integrated career pathways** to ensure better alignment between skills and job roles at the point of entry into the labour market; and
- iii) **strengthening lifelong learning systems** to support continuous skill development and enable workers to progress without relying on repeated job movement.



Image generated by Lovart AI

Bibliography

- Abd Rahman, Nur Hairani, Yong Zulina Zubairi, Rohana Jani, et al. 2025. "Governance Structures and Systemic Challenges Shaping the Future of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Workforce." *Education+ Training*, 1–21.
- Abdel-Khalik, A. R. 1988. "Hierarchies and Size: A Problem of Identification." *Organization Studies* 9: 237–51.
- Abdullah, Roziyati, Zulkiflle Leman, BT Hang Tuah Baharudin, and Siti Azfanizam Ahmad. 2025. "Key Strategies Predicting Industrial Participation in the Malaysian Apprenticeship Programme." *Journal of Technical Education and Training* 17 (3): 239–59.
- Abu Rahim, Dr Mohd Amirul Rafiq, and Shazrul Ariff Suhaimi. 2022. *Fresh Graduate Adversities: A Decade's Insight on the Graduate Tracer Study*. Khazanah Research Institute. <https://www.krinstitute.org/publications/fresh-graduate-adversities-a-decade-s-insight-on-the-graduate-tracer-study>.
- Adams, J. Stacy. 1965. "Inequity In Social Exchange." In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 2. Elsevier. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60108-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60108-2).
- ADP Research Institute. 2021. *Wage Growth Among U.S. Job Switchers Increased 5.8 Percent Since June 2020 as Businesses Struggle to Attract Workers*. <https://mediacenter.adp.com/2021-07-28-Wage-Growth-Among-U-S-Job-Switchers-Increased-5-8-Percent-Since-June-2020-as-Businesses-Struggle-to-Attract-Workers>.
- Apriliani, Arimbi, Anissa Lestari Kadiyono, Efi Fitriana, and Marina Sulastiana. 2025. "Driver Factors of Job Hopping among Corporate Employees: A Systematic Literature Review." *Acta Psychologica* 260 (October): 105658. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2025.105658>.
- Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 2000. "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties." *American Psychologist* 55 (5): 469–80. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469>.
- Aziz, Shahrul Azuwar Abdul, and Norhasni Zainal Abiddin. 2025. "Synthesising Challenges and Opportunities in Human Resource Development for Productivity Enhancement: Toward a Framework for Malaysia's High-Income Transition." 517–26.
- Becker, Gary S. 1964. *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*, First Edition. NBER. <https://www.nber.org/books-and-chapters/human-capital-theoretical-and-empirical-analysis-special-reference-education-first-edition>.
- Brown, Mark, Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichil, and Elaine Beirne. 2021. *The Global Micro-Credential Landscape: Charting a New Credential Ecology for Lifelong Learning*.
- Carroll, Christopher D. 1997. "Buffer-Stock Saving and the Life Cycle/Permanent Income Hypothesis." Pt. 1. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112: 1–55. JSTOR.
- Causa, Orsetta, Nhung Luu, and Michael Abendschein. 2021. *Labour Market Transitions across OECD Countries: Stylised Facts*. OECD Economics Department Working Papers No. 1692. Vol. 1692. OECD Economics Department Working Papers. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/62c85872-en>.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. n.d.-a. *Labour Force Survey Reports (Various Years)*. Putrajaya.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. n.d.-b. "MyPAKW." <https://www.malaysia.gov.my/en/digital-services/mypakw>.
- deutschland.de. 2025. "How Germany's Dual Vocational Training System Works." *Deutschland.de*, January 27. <https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/business/how-germanys-dual-vocational-training-system-works>.
- Doden, Wiebke, Julian Pfrombeck, and Gudela Grote. 2023. "Are 'Job Hoppers' Trapped in Hedonic Treadmills? Effects of Career Orientations on Newcomers' Attitude Trajectories." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 44 (1): 64–83. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2665>.
- Edwards, J. R. 1991. "Person-Job Fit: A Conceptual Integration, Literature Review and Methodological Critique." In *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, edited by C. L. Cooper and I. T. Robertson, vol. 6. Wiley.
- Employmenthero. 2025. "The 2024 Wellness At Work Report." *Employment Hero (MY)*, Malaysia, April 2. <https://employmenthero.com/my/thank-you/downloadable/resources/>.
- Fausser, Sophia, and Irma Mooi-Reci. 2025. "Non-Standard Employment and Underemployment at Labor Market Entry and Their Impact on Later Wage Trajectories." *Human Relations* 78 (3): 249–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267241239568>.
- Feng, Wong Chyi, and Tay Angeline. 2011. "Turnover Intention and Job Hopping Behaviour of Music Teachers in Malaysia." *Global Journal of Business Management* 5 (4(April)).

- Government of Malaysia. n.d. "Dasar Gaji Progresif." Dasar Gaji Progresif. Accessed March 30, 2026. <https://www.gajiprogresif.gov.my/>.
- Government of Singapore. 2026. "What Is the Progressive Wage Model." Ministry of Manpower Singapore, Singapore. <https://www.mom.gov.sg/employment-practices/progressive-wage-model/what-is-pwm>.
- Hamid, Hawati Abdul, Mohd Amirul Rafiq Abu Rahim, Shazrul Ariff Suhaimi, et al. 2024. "Shifting Tides: Charting Career Progression of Malaysia's Skilled Talents." Khazanah Research Institute (Kuala Lumpur), March 4. <https://www.krinstitute.org/publications/shifting-tides-charting-career-progression-of-malaysias-skilled-talents>.
- Herzberg, F. 1966. *Work and the Nature of Man*. OH: World Publishing Company. Cleveland.
- Kerckhofs, Linde, Marie-Laure Vandenhoute, and Kris Hardies. 2022. "Changing Jobs like Changing Clothes: The Hobo Syndrome among Career Starters." *Discover Psychology* 2 (1): 23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44202-022-00036-4>.
- Krishnaveni, Vilayudhan, Zuroni Md Jusoh, Mohd Amim Othman, and Norzalina Zainudin. 2024. "Financial Security in Retirement: The Importance of Savings vs Earnings in Malaysia." *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 14 (10): 1671–83.
- Kuhn, Moritz, and Gašper Ploj. 2020. *Job Stability, Earnings Dynamics, and Life-Cycle Savings*. IZA - Institute of Labor Economics. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep61186>.
- Loheswar, R. 2024. HR Minister Proposes Upskilling as Study Shows 620,000 Jobs in 10 Sectors Set for Impact Soon from AI, Digitalisation. (Kuala Lumpur), November 18. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2024/11/18/hr-minister-proposes-upskilling-as-study-shows-620000-jobs-in-10-sectors-set-for-impact-soon-from-ai-digitalisation/157256>.
- Lovart AI. (2026). AI-generated image of "A Worker Jumps from One Building to Another in Search of Better Opportunities". Generated by Lovart AI.
- McCall, J. J. 1970. "Economics of Information and Job Search." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 84 (1): 113. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1879403>.
- MEF. 2025. "Malaysia Well-being@Work© Index Report." 2025 Malaysia Well-Being at Work Index Report, Malaysian Employers Federation. <https://2025wawreport.o-psych.com/>.
- Ministry of Finance. 2025. "GLICs Adopt Living Wage Policy For All Permanent Malaysian Employees ." May 1. <https://www.mof.gov.my/portal/en/news/press-citations/glics-adopt-living-wage-policy-for-all-permanent-malaysian-employees>.
- Ministry of Higher Education. 2020. *Graduates Tracer Study Report 2019*. Putrajaya.
- Ministry of Higher Education. 2025. *Graduates Tracer Study Report 2024*. Putrajaya.
- Mortensen, Dale T. 1986. "Job Search and Labor Market Analysis." *Handbook of Labor Economics* 2: 849–919.
- Munasinghe, Lalith, and Karl Sigman. 2004. "A Hobo Syndrome? Mobility, Wages, and Job Turnover." *Labour Economics* 11 (2): 191–218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2003.05.001>.
- Neal, Derek. 1999. "The Complexity of Job Mobility among Young Men." *Journal of Labor Economics* 17 (2): 237–61. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209919>.
- NESDC. 2026. *Economic Performance and Outlook 2024/25*. National Entrepreneur and MSME Development. https://smecorp.gov.my/images/Publication/MSME_Insights/2024_25/Economic_Report/Economic%20Full%20Version.pdf.
- Oentaryo, Richard J., Xavier Jayaraj Siddarth Ashok, Ee-Peng Lim, and Philips Kokoh Prasetyo. 2017. "On Analyzing Job Hop Behavior and Talent Flow Networks." 2017 IEEE International Conference on Data Mining Workshops (ICDMW), November, 207–14. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICDMW.2017.172>.
- Oon, Jun-Yang. 2026. "Youths Call It Quits after 18 Months." *News*. The Star, January 11. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2026/01/11/youths-call-it-quits-after-18-months>.
- Pandey, Dhruva Lal. 2019. "Job Hopping Tendency in Millennials." *NCC Journal* 4 (1): 41–46. Commerce. <https://doi.org/10.3126/nccj.v4i1.24733>.
- PNB Research Institute. 2025. *Entry-Salary Trends in Malaysia: Insights From Private Sector Employment (1997-2022)*. PNB Research Institute. <https://www.pnb.com.my/en/ri/article-research/entry-salary-trends>.
- Rami, AA, I. Arif Ismail, M. Amin Sarman, M. Faiq Abd Aziz, and N. Afiqah Zulkify. 2024. "Readiness of Higher Education Leaders to Implement Micro-Credentials in Malaysia." *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education* 13 (6): 3983–92.
- Randstad Malaysia. 2025. *Randstad Employer Brand Research 2025 (REBR)*. <https://www.randstad.com.my/hr-trends/employer-brand/rebr/>.
- Remote Technology. 2026. "Global Life-Work Balance Index 2025." Remote, Remote Technology, Inc. <https://remote.com/resources/research/global-life-work-balance-index>.

- Saxena, Parul, and Rajiv Jain. 2012. *Managing Career Aspirations of Generation Y at Work Place*.
- Spöttl, Georg. 2021. "Malaysian Apprenticeship Implementation: Issues and Challenges towards Effective Employers Engagement." *Journal of Technical Education and Training*.
- Srivastava, Shreya. 2023. "11 Key Amendments to the Malaysian Employment Act, 1955: Implications for 2024 and Beyond." Darwinbox. <https://blog.darwinbox.com/malaysian-employment-amendment-act-2022>.
- Steenackers, Kelly, and Marie-Anne Guerry. 2016. "Determinants of Job-Hopping: An Empirical Study in Belgium." *International Journal of Manpower* 37 (3): 494–510. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-09-2014-0184>.
- WEF. 2025. "How Malaysia Has Been Preparing Its Workforce for the Future." World Economic Forum, World Economic Forum, June 10. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/06/malaysia-steven-sim-workforce-future-ai/>.
- Yap Yeong Hui. 2025. "Malaysia Gig Workers Bill 2025: Key Protections." Chooi & Company. <https://chooi.com.my/malaysias-gig-workers-bill-2025-a-landmark-in-protecting-the-new-workforce/>.
- Yunus, Mohd Zulkifli Mohd, Mohaizi Mohamad, Azimuddin Bahari, and Nurul Faiezah Ngadimin. 2024. "Way Forward: Future Skills Framework, Strategies, and Action Plan for Malaysian Talent Development." *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 27 (1): 45–62.