Only one out of five organizations are currently hiring for positions in human resources, but the vast majority of HR professionals say they are confident they could land another job if needed, according to the Society for Human Resource Management’s HR Jobs Pulse Survey.

The new survey examines hiring trends in the HR profession as well as HR professionals’ faith in their own job security and ability to find work elsewhere. The results from the January 2014 survey show that more than one-third of HR professionals will likely seek new jobs in the near future, and many in the profession have concerns about stability in their current position. Among the survey’s highlights:

- Nearly two out of five HR professionals (39%) have some degree of concern with their job security (32% were “somewhat concerned,” and 7% were “very concerned”). Among career-level categories, senior-level HR professionals have the least combined degree of concern (29%), and early-career-level workers have the highest degree of concern with job security (59%) (see Figure 3).

- A majority of HR professionals (79%) have some level of confidence that they could land a new position, if needed. Of that group, 63% said they were “somewhat confident,” and 16% said they were “very confident” (see Figure 4).

- Nearly all of the respondents who plan to seek new jobs (94%) said they would look for employment within the HR industry. The top reason cited for starting a new job search (48%) was “better organizational/corporate culture” (see Figures 7 and 8).

SHRM’s HR Jobs Pulse Survey is based on the responses of HR professionals at early career, mid-career, senior and executive levels. Their functions of HR work include, but are not limited to, HR generalists, administrative, benefits, compensation, employee relations, employment/recruitment and human resource information systems.

Much like the job market overall, widespread hiring is not the norm for HR positions at the moment. Just 20% of organizations are currently looking for HR help, and, not surprisingly, the need for HR expertise increases dramatically with company size. Just 2% of small companies (those with one to 99 employees) are advertising for HR positions. On the other end of the spectrum, 62% of employers with 25,000 or more workers are now hiring for HR jobs.

Among the companies that are hiring for human resource positions, HR generalists are in the highest demand (70%), according to the survey. Generalists were also the second-highest category of job postings in SHRM’s HR Jobs online database in October 2013 (see Figure 9), and this trend
may help explain why salaries are on the rise for those positions, according to global HR consultant Towers Watson.

Professional HR positions with no specific discipline had one of the highest average increases in compensation in 2013, according to the 2013 General Industry Human Resources Compensation Survey Report—U.S. by Towers Watson. Those jobs were paid a median total cash compensation of $89,500 in 2013, up 16.2% from 2012. In comparison, median total cash compensation for all HR positions rose an average of 3.6% in 2013, the study said.

Another in-demand HR job category is recruiters; according to the SHRM HR Jobs Pulse Survey, 40% of companies are seeking HR professionals with employment/recruitment skills. That category was followed by administrative positions (32% of companies hiring), employee relations jobs (28%) and benefits positions (25%). Many organizations are also on the hunt for those with training/development expertise (19%), HR information systems (HRIS) workers (18%) and compensation experts (13%).

Perhaps not coincidentally, many of those desired skill sets correlate with attractive compensation packages at the executive level, according to the Towers Watson survey. Talent management executives had a median cash compensation of $234,900 in 2013, up 6.6% from 2012, for example. Experts in the compensation and benefits, HRIS, and employee relations fields were also among the top 10 highest-paid HR executives in 2013, according to Towers Watson’s data.

Special expertise notwithstanding, not all HR professionals are completely confident that their jobs are secure. Overall, 39% of respondents to the Pulse Survey have some degree of concern about their job security (32% are “somewhat concerned,” and 7% are “very concerned”).

Those who were not worried about job security tended to have more experience in the HR profession: 71% of senior-level HR professionals and 70% of executive-level professionals said they were “not at all concerned,” whereas 50% of mid-career HR professionals and only 41% of early-career HR workers have no concern about job security.

And yet, even with a muted level of hiring in the HR industry and the overall economy, the majority of respondents to the Pulse Survey said they could find a new job if needed. Only 21% said they were “not at all confident” that they could land a job. Confidence levels varied among categories of expertise: 80% of both senior and mid-career-level HR professionals had some degree of faith that they could find work if necessary, followed by executive-level professionals (79%) and early-career professionals (68%).

Note: Responses of “not applicable” are not included. Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Source: SHRM HR Jobs Pulse Survey (January 2014)
Other SHRM data show that HR professionals do have an increasingly optimistic view of the labor market and the economy, despite a slow-growth recovery that is now in its fifth year following the Great Recession of 2007-2009.

A total of 55% of respondents to SHRM’s Jobs Outlook Survey for the fourth quarter of 2013 had some level of confidence in the U.S. job market and expected job growth (49% were “somewhat optimistic,” and 6% were “very optimistic”). That number represents a modest increase from a combined 45% of respondents in the fourth quarter of 2012 and also up from a combined 50% in the second quarter of 2013.

Many HR professionals, in fact, plan to start looking for a new job in 2014. More than one-third (37%) of respondents to the HR Jobs Pulse Survey said there was some degree of likelihood that they would start a job search in the next 12 months (22% said “likely,” and 15% said “very likely”).

More than four in 10 respondents (44%) said their search would start within the next two months (29% said “immediately,” and 15% said “within one to two months”). Another 20% of HR professionals said they would start to look for work within six months, and 24% said they would begin their job search within 12 months.

Among the respondents who were likely to look for new jobs, the majority indicated that they were sticking with the HR profession: 94% said they would stay within the industry (66% said they would seek a new opportunity that was the “same as current HR function,” and 28% said “different HR function”). The remaining 5% said they would pursue a non-HR job.

At least one other report confirms that many workers will be on the move in 2014. More than eight out of 10 (83%) of those surveyed said they will seek a new position in the new year, according to a report by Right Management, a subsidiary of global staffing services company ManpowerGroup. Another 9% said “maybe, so I’m networking,” and 3% said “not likely, but I’ve updated my resume.” Just 5% indicated they would stay in their current position in 2014.

In the HR Jobs Pulse Survey, HR professionals provided a variety of reasons for wanting a new job, but nearly half (48%) indicated that they wanted better organizational/corporate culture. Not far behind were those seeking career advancement opportunities (47%) and better compensation/pay (also 47%). Another 29% of respondents said they wanted more meaningful work, and 21% cited the need for flexible work arrangements as their reason for starting a job search.
SHRM HR Jobs Pulse Survey Methodology

A sample of HR professionals was randomly selected from SHRM’s membership database, which included approximately 250,000 individual members at the time the survey was conducted. Only members who had not participated in a SHRM survey or poll in the last six months were included in the sampling frame. Members who were students, located internationally or had no e-mail address on file were excluded from the sampling frame. In October 2013, an e-mail that included a hyperlink to the SHRM HR Jobs Pulse Survey was sent to 5,857 randomly selected SHRM members, and 817 HR professionals responded, yielding a response rate of 14%. The survey was accessible for a period of two weeks and has a margin of error of +/-3%.