



GLOBALLY VOCAL:

Candid insights from employees abroad

Results from the Global Mobility Trends Survey 2015

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Introduction

In the spring of 2015, the National Foreign Trade Council (NFTC) and Cigna Global Health Benefits® (CGHB) sponsored an independent research study to review how the globally mobile experience, perceive and value elements of their assignment terms and programs.

Various studies exploring the components of these assignments mostly derive from an employer's perspective. This study was conceived to determine whether the view from the globally mobile themselves told a similar story or a slightly different one.

Like most studies comparing and contrasting the viewpoints of employers and their employees, there exists a gap that, if used effectively, can guide employers to make more effective decisions about the assignment packages that support their employees abroad.

This is the third time the NFTC and CGHB have collaborated on such a study. Throughout this report, references to the overall findings from the last study, which took place in 2013, explain how the climate for expats has evolved over the past two years.

The 2013 study was comprised of 1,511 expats on assignment in 140 countries around the world. This year, the study garnered 2,704 respondents – a remarkable 79% increase – from 156 countries of assignment.

Notes on methodology.

Similar to the 2013 study, respondents answered a series of questions through a web survey instrument. No self-identifying information was captured, keeping all individual responses anonymous and confidential. This method encourages more honest feedback from respondents.

Respondents were recruited through multiple channels. The web survey was launched in April of 2015 and kept active for eight weeks.

Notes on statistical significance.

The mathematical concept known as statistical significance derives from estimating how likely something is bound to occur. If you toss a coin, you have a 50/50 chance of it landing on heads or tails. Let's say it lands on heads the first time. If you flip it again, and it lands on heads again, the probability of it landing on heads a third time increases due to the outcome of those first two tosses.

Within a typical study, most researchers will demand that the probability of unlikelihood from the outcome of results be less than 5% in order to declare those results as having significance. In normal English, "significant" means important, while in statistics "significant" means probably true (not due to chance). With a larger sample, statistical significance increases.

As the sample sizes have increased with each successive study on this topic, an apples-to-apples comparison is not implied.

Key findings

- Global mobility appears to be evolving into a career unto itself.
- Expats say they need more communication and support, but employers are viewed as moving in the opposite direction.
- Expats want more assistance with local culture and lifestyle – ideally from other colleagues who've 'been there, done that.'
- Employers are more closely managing costs – occasionally resulting in benefit reductions for their globally mobile staff.
- While social media use continues to grow, 57% of employees state they value employer sponsored resources over others. Even still nearly half of survey respondents lack the awareness of employer-sponsored online resources, or state their employer doesn't offer them.
- Disconnects on repatriation persist – slightly more than half of expats say their employer has a formal repatriation program – despite most employers reporting they offer one.
- Most expats hail from North America, but their numbers are down 10% from just two years ago (and down 24% from 2001). Globalization is a likely factor – but this may also reflect ongoing trends among employers to use fewer U.S. expats due to cost and taxation considerations.
- Expats are aware that their employers must balance the considerable costs of mobility programs with the demand for globally mobile talent.

Designed for success

Greater flexibility in plan design was a common theme when employees were asked what employers might change or add to their global mobility assignment packages to make them more useful.

Similar to what was learned in the 2013 report, a one-size-fits-all approach to assignment programs and benefits packages has potential to lead to dissatisfaction, or worse, an unexpectedly abrupt end to a global assignment.

It will remain a continual challenge for global mobility directors to strike a balance between the needs of the business with those of the globally mobile employee and his/her family.

While the trend toward managing costs through benefits reduction might save companies money in the shorter term, the approach may not lead to longer-term satisfaction, loyalty, or success.

Employers will be better positioned to gain stronger returns on their investments in global mobility by more carefully considering the unique circumstances of the employee, his/her family situation, and the cultural adaptation challenges within their country of assignment.

From a health benefits perspective, dissatisfaction over inadequate or no dental benefits was a common theme.



“Try to maintain the ever-shrinking benefits that are associated with international assignments.”

Deciding to go

Reasons for accepting an assignment were largely unchanged from 2013, but for one key difference: Two years ago, nearly one-fourth indicated that they went abroad not because they wanted to, but because they thought they had to. This year, that proportion fell by 12.5%.

In 2015, more were thinking of the compensation and professional opportunities of international work. Sentiment along these lines appeared to be moving from “agree” to “strongly agree.”

At the other end of the spectrum, fewer disagreed that they were reluctant to go despite concerns from family. At the same

time, more people disagreed that it was important to accept an assignment even if it was unwanted. These two seemingly contradictory responses may indicate that while employees aren’t harboring reservations, others in the household are.

Asked what they considered before accepting their current international assignments, respondents evaluated a list of factors. They assigned each a rating ranging from “not at all important” (one) to “very important” (five).

Top considerations for accepting the first assignment	Agree or strongly agree	
	2015	2013
It was exciting to me personally to move.	91%	90%
An international assignment is a way to enhance my résumé and make me more marketable.	90%	89%
I always wanted to work overseas.	88%	88%

Consideration	Rating 2015	Rating 2013
Quality of life	4.35	4.34
Assignment benefits package	4.35	4.37
Professional development/job impact	4.28	4.27
Quality of health care	4.23	4.27
Family life status	4.22	4.20
Financial impact	4.15	4.18
Implications of move on family	3.75	3.75

Preparing for assignment

What services do companies offer to prepare employees for international assignments? More than three-quarters, said respondents, provide moving assistance. A majority also help to find housing, open bank accounts, set up utilities and other settling-in needs. A similar number offer assistance with vaccinations, prescriptions and finding health care providers. However, employer-provided preparation services are less commonly reported than they were in 2013.

Respondents were asked to choose the three most important services to them. Their selections rank about the same as in 2013. However, the proportion choosing each option mostly went down, probably because several new choices were offered this year. Overall, employers continue to provide the services most important to expats. Note, though, that services may be highly valued even if it isn't one of the three the respondent was forced to choose.

Service	Importance to respondents*		Employers who provide service	
	2015	2013	2015	2013
General relocation services	1st (60%)	1st (63%)	70%	80%
Settling-in services	2nd (47%)	2nd (53%)	62%	62%
Medical preparedness	3rd (43%)	3rd (49%)	62%	65%
Company-paid advance visit to the assignment location to find housing	4th (32%)	4th (36%)	51%	54%
Schools	5th (31%)	5th (35%)	47%	50%
Advance consultation on financial and tax consequences	6th (22%)	6th (31%)	53%	57%
Communication to host location management and staff	7th (16%)	Not asked	59%	Not asked
Cross-cultural training	8th (13%)	7th (14%)	44%	42%
Partner employment resources support	9th (12%)	Not asked	22%	Not asked
Language training	10th (10%)	8th (10%)	41%	40%
Outreach call or text message from health benefits provider	11th (8%)	Not asked	29%	Not asked

According to the Brookfield Global Relocation Trends Survey (2014) 71% of employers cited language training, with 55% offering cross-cultural training – indicative of a communication breakdown?

Meeting overall needs before assignment

On a scale of one to five, respondents rated their employers an average of 3.68 for assignment preparation. The rating for 2013 was 3.77.

Industry	Rating 2015	Rating 2013
Consumer goods and retail	3.93	4.38
Health care and pharmaceuticals	3.79	4.02
Manufacturing	3.78	3.87
Financial services	3.77	3.81
Energy, mining and utilities	3.74	3.79
Education	3.72	3.83
Business services	3.65	3.67
Other	3.58	3.71
Aerospace and defense	3.55	3.45
Technology	3.51	3.84
Nonprofits	3.50	3.26
Professional services	3.47	3.47
Transportation	3.35	3.80

Firms with fewer than 100 employees rated first in 2013. However, this year they fell significantly.

Employee count	Rating 2015	Rating 2013
100–499	3.84	3.73
10,000+ employees	3.72	3.83
10,000+ employees	3.57	3.56
Under 100 employees	3.43	3.85
500–999	3.39	3.60

Firms with more than 1,000 people abroad topped the 2013 assessments. They maintained that position this year despite reduced ratings.

Expat count	Rating 2015	Rating 2013
Don't know	3.84	3.73
1,000+ expats	3.72	3.83
100 to 499	3.57	3.56
500 to 999	3.43	3.85
20 to 99	3.39	3.60
Fewer than 20	3.24	3.52

Region	Rating 2015	Rating 2013
Australia/Oceania	3.92	4.07
North America	3.77	3.86
Europe	3.71	3.86
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.66	3.57
Middle East	3.65	3.61
Asia	3.65	3.80
Central America	3.58	3.93
South America	3.51	3.65

Meeting overall needs on assignment

As a group, respondents rated their employers at 3.74 for meeting their overall needs while on assignment. This is the same overall rating as 2013.

Industry	Rating 2015	Rating 2013
Education	3.95	4.07
Health care and pharmaceuticals	3.88	3.92
Consumer goods and retail	3.87	4.17
Energy, mining and utilities	3.80	3.72
Manufacturing	3.77	3.80
Business services	3.76	3.66
Nonprofits	3.76	3.52
Financial services	3.67	3.72
Aerospace and defense	3.65	3.48
Other	3.65	3.83
Technology	3.58	3.80
Professional services	3.57	3.44
Transportation	3.47	3.00

Ratings for companies with 1,000 to 9,999 employees rose from 2013. The largest companies stayed about the same. All others fell.

Employee count	Rating 2015	Rating 2013
Under 100	3.83	4.00
10,000+ employees	3.74	3.76
1,000–9,999	3.72	3.59
500–999	3.68	3.82
100–499	3.24	4.00

Companies with the most people abroad garnered ratings consistent with 2013, indicating that more experience with global mobility leads to greater capture of best practices. Companies with 100 to 499 expats improved, while the remainder either lost ground or stayed about the same.

Expat count	Rating 2015	Rating 2013
100 to 499	3.81	3.65
Don't know	3.77	3.70
1,000+ expats	3.75	3.77
500 to 999	3.68	3.80
20 to 99	3.61	3.76
Fewer than 20	3.60	3.76

Health benefits on assignment

For expats, access to health care anywhere remains a top concern. Quick turnaround on out-of-pocket claims edged out dependent coverage to become the third most important benefit in 2015.

Service	Importance 2015	Importance 2013
Access to healthcare services in any country (including US)	4.68	4.71
Emergency medical evacuation	4.56	4.53
Quick turnaround on claims (paid out of pocket, then reimbursed)	4.49	4.45

But awareness of the most important health benefits has not improved.

Service	Yes	No	Don't know
Access to health care services in any country (including US)	74%	9%	17%
Emergency medical evacuation	64%	5%	31%
Quick turnaround on claims (paid out of pocket, then reimbursed)	58%	35%	7%

Expats located in Asia report reduced services from 2013, except for emergency medical evacuation, access to medical personnel for questions and counseling. Those on assignment in Europe and the Middle East report significantly reduced services across the board. The same is true for those in sub-Saharan Africa, except for dependent coverage.

The Americas are a mixed bag. Since 2013, expats in Central America report a sharp uptick in nearly all services. Services are relatively stable for those in South America, except for emergency medical evaluation and claims reimbursement turnaround.

In North America, respondents report significantly greater access to medical consultation and mental health services.

Medical care on assignment

The proportion of expat households accessing medical care on assignment stayed consistent at 79% (it was 78% in 2013). The rate at which expats access routine medical care remains stable.

Routine medical care	2015	2013
Mostly locally	75%	74%
Mostly home country	21%	22%
Have not sought treatment	4%	4%

Routine dental care	2015	2013
Mostly locally	53%	53%
Mostly home country	32%	36%
Have not sought treatment	15%	11%

Serious medical care	2015	2013
Mostly locally	40%	41%
Mostly home country	22%	27%
Have not sought treatment	38%	32%

While the rate at which men accessed care stayed about the same (78% in 2015 versus 77% in 2013), the share of women accessing care rose five percentage points, to 83%. Women were slightly less likely than men to seek care locally. However, for serious medical care they were much more likely to seek treatment locally in 2013: 47% then, compared with 38% today.

Those with a partner at home were about 3.5 times as likely to seek routine medical care in their home country and twice as likely to seek dental care in their home country.

USE OF LOCAL HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS



ROUTINE MEDICAL CARE

↑ 24% Sub-Saharan Africa



SERIOUS MEDICAL CARE

↓ 16% Europe



ROUTINE DENTAL CARE

↑ 55% Australia/Oceania

Rethink repatriation

Slightly more than half of expats say their employer has a formal repatriation program – and yet most employers report they offer one. This perception gap remains a significant topic.

In fact, many respondents expressed that repatriation is effectively the same as expatriation. Expats find a return home can result in culture shock. Changes in finances and taxes for the household were a big concern, as was finding new employment.

Many expats recommended beginning repatriation arrangements at least three months before departure.



Most employers indicate they have a formal repatriation program, but only 54% of expats indicate their company has one. Job security, culture shock and finances are key concerns once an assignment is complete.

**expats
say:**

“Going home is like returning to a new country.”

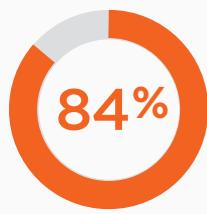
“It’s a clear miss and I have seen many employees end up leaving the company. Which means it’s a real waste of money for the company, as the individual expat has gained valuable experiences and built up the qualifications.”

“Help with schools, locations, housing and transportation – just like when going on assignment. Many of us are moving to completely new areas of our home country, which could be as difficult as moving internationally.”

Returning from assignment

In this year's study, more than half of expats confirmed their company has a formal repatriation program. However, employer-provided preparation services are less commonly reported than they were in 2013 (60% vs. 63%).

Job security is a concern with respondents noting that many assignments end in unemployment rather than career advancement with the employer.



The great majority – 84% – indicated they would accept another international assignment with their current employers.

"My family and I will probably need as much (if not more) help repatriating than we have needed on assignment."

"We need the same kind of support as going overseas to a new country. Do not assume that we know how it all works just because we originally came from there."

Service	Yes		No		Don't know	
	2015	2013	2015	2013	2015	2013
Company has formal repatriation program	54%	53%	16%	17%	30%	30%
Company tracks returning expats	20%	17%	23%	24%	57%	59%

Likelihood of accepting another international assignment	Definitely		Probably		Probably not		Definitely not		Uncertain	
	2015	2013	2015	2013	2015	2013	2015	2013	2015	2013
With current employer	47%	46%	37%	37%	8%	8%	3%	4%	5%	5%
With different employer	20%	23%	42%	43%	15%	17%	7%	5%	16%	12%

Meeting overall needs after assignment

Expats need more information – sooner.

With a 3.35 out of 5 rating, employees rate their employers as doing a “fair” job of meeting their needs upon returning from assignment. Expats recommend that their employers allow three to twelve months’ lead time in preparing for a return.

Industry	Rating 2015	Rating 2013
Consumer goods and retail	3.49	3.58
Manufacturing	3.47	3.69
Healthcare and pharmaceuticals	3.42	3.39
Energy, mining and utilities	3.41	3.39
Business services	3.36	3.27
Technology	3.33	3.25
Other	3.32	3.11
Financial services	3.29	3.27
Nonprofits	3.27	2.98
Professional services	3.17	3.00
Aerospace and defense	3.17	3.12
Transportation	3.12	3.60
Education	3.08	2.80

Not surprisingly, smaller companies showed greater volatility than bigger companies.

Employee count	Rating 2015	Rating 2013
10,000+ employees	3.38	3.35
100–499	3.37	3.19
1,000–9,999	3.29	3.08
500–999	3.14	3.53
Under 100	3.09	3.36



“I’d like to see a repatriation program in which we are given news of the return home at least three months prior to the move so we can prepare.”

“Treat repatriation similar to an international relocation in terms of services provided, and ensure there’s a gap between arriving back in the home country and starting work for employees to take advantage of the services provided.”

Communications

Sherpa-style guide would be valuable to expats.

Communications – before, during and after assignment – are important to expats and the success of their assignment.

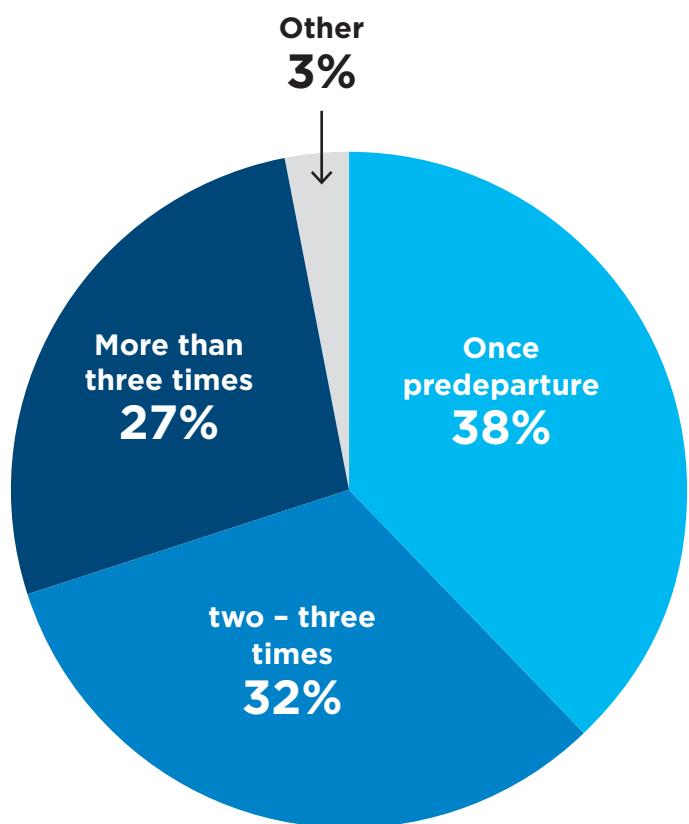
- › Nearly 40% respondents received only one communication prior to departure, and nearly a third received two to three.
- › Over 75% received information about their global mobility program benefits during assignment.
- › Of this group, one in four received messages on a quarterly basis.
- › Email and phone calls with HR/global mobility representatives were the top two forms of communication with 90% and 70%, respectively.

Top preassignment communications	Received
Compensation (including taxation)	80%
Relocation of personal effects/household goods	67%
Medical benefits plan coverage	65%

Compliance and logistics of the assignment were two of the most common topics for preassignment communications, while messages about local culture, lifestyle and emergencies were fewer.

Also important is the idea of a “been there, done that” guide who had the same, or similar, assignment location to aid the expat throughout the assignment.

COMMUNICATION FREQUENCY



“The communication should not only be focused on the bureaucratic part of the assignment, but also on the life challenges.”

“Pair with a person who has served, or is serving, in the same country or region. There are so many details and the locations are so different that it is impossible for the employer to give detailed help for each location.”

Digital communications

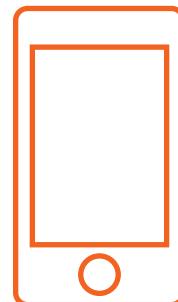
Almost half of respondents either don't know or say their employer doesn't offer info online.

A laptop computer is the device respondents use most often – and prefer – to access the Internet while on international assignment – for now. But, tablets and smartphones are gaining ground.

Devices to access Internet while on assignment	Actual use		Preference	
	2015	2013	2015	2013
Desktop	14%	15%	10%	11%
Laptop	64%	70%	59%	63%
Tablet	9%	8%	15%	16%
Smartphone	13%	7%	16%	10%

The perceived usefulness of digital resources has grown dramatically since 2013. But availability – or, perhaps more accurately, awareness – of employer-provided digital resources actually declined.

Platform	2015	2013
Employer intranet	57%	30%
Health benefits plan provider website	39%	3%
Expat community websites	38%	13%
News websites	32%	42%
Facebook	12%	5%
LinkedIn	10%	3%
Other	5%	N/A
Twitter	1%	0%

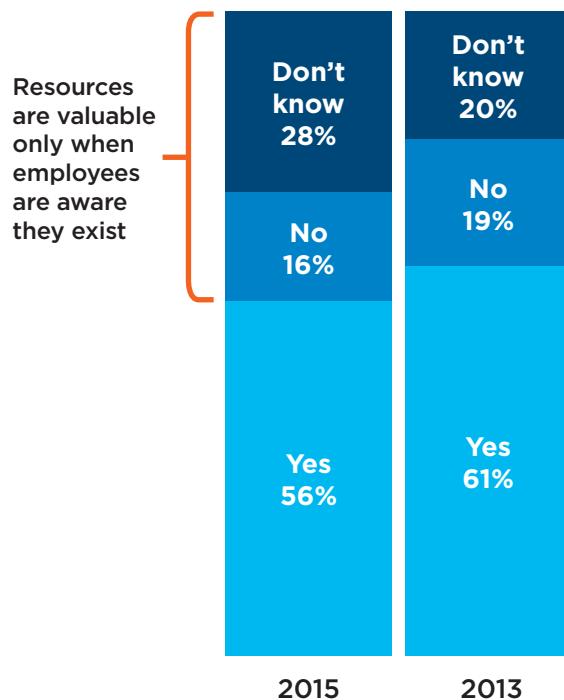


86%
Increase in smartphone use

3X
Increase in social media use since 2013



EMPLOYER-SPONSORED ONLINE RESOURCES



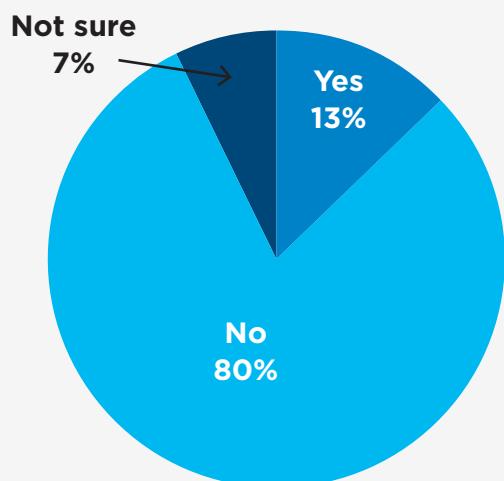
Trends in global mobility programs

Cost reduction, global growth and competition for talent are key drivers

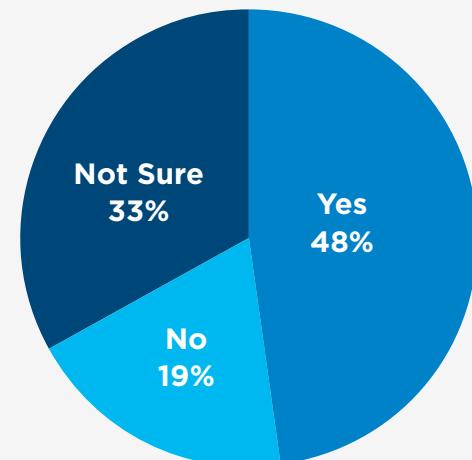
About half of the survey respondents said their employers offered developmental assignments, meaning ones that are generally shorter in duration and intended to broaden employee experience.

- A small percentage (13%) added that they were currently serving one.
- However, a third were unsure.
- In their own firms, 31% of expats are seeing localization, which is defined as reduced packages for longer-term globally mobile employees.

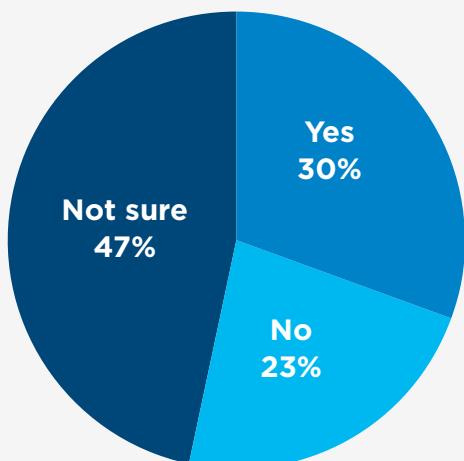
CURRENTLY SERVING A DEVELOPMENTAL ASSIGNMENT



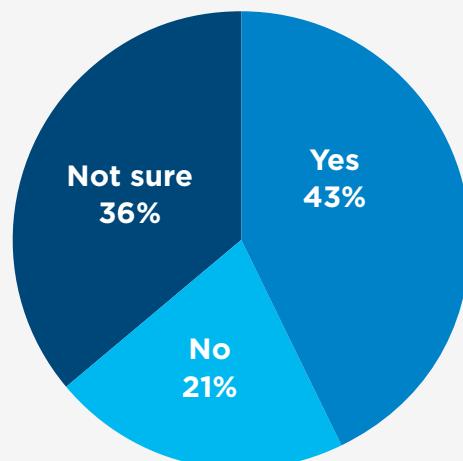
FIRMS OFFERING DEVELOPMENTAL ASSIGNMENTS



SEEING OWN FIRM LOCALIZE BENEFITS



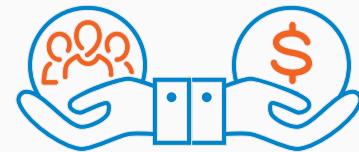
SEEING OTHER FIRMS LOCALIZE BENEFITS



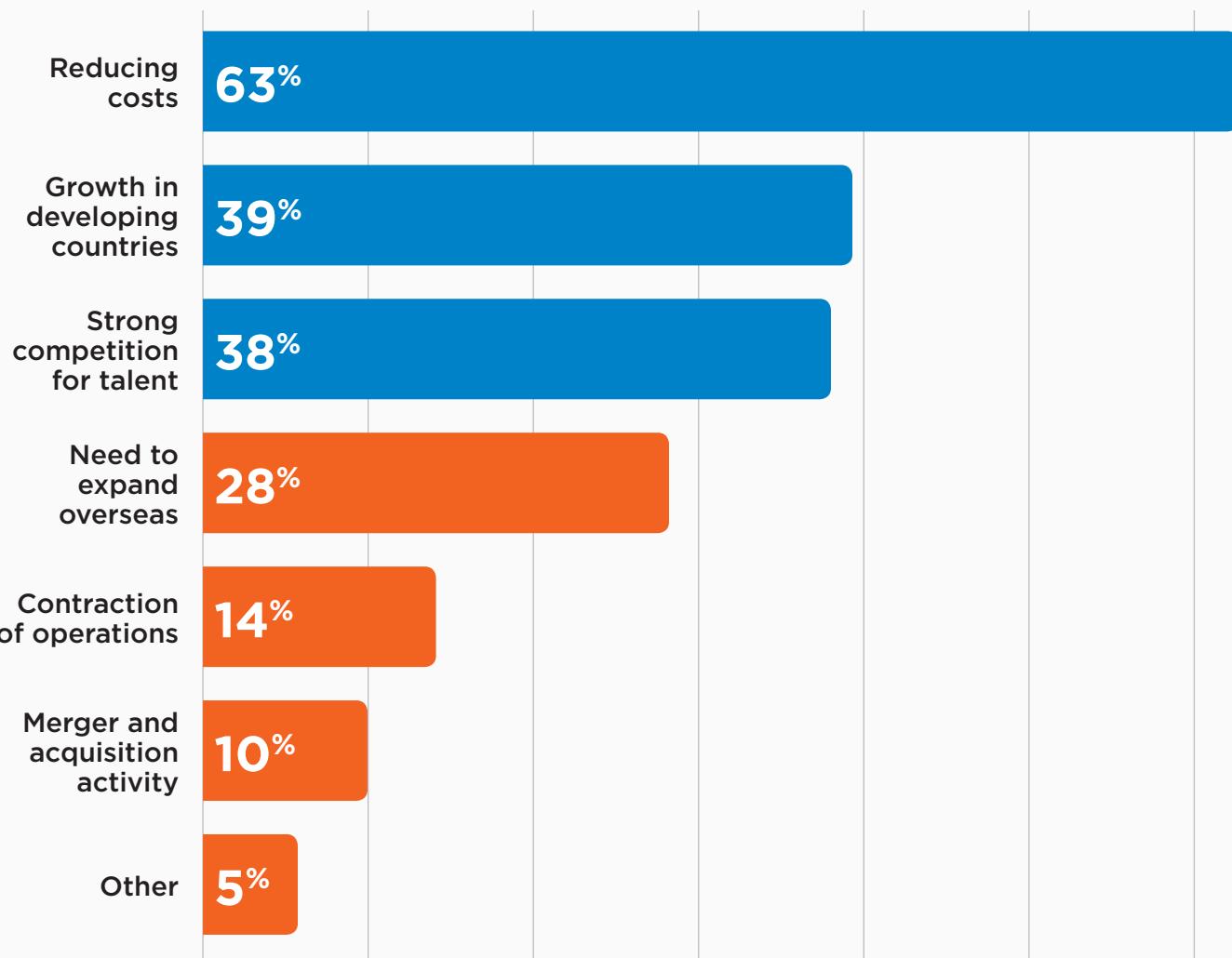
Trends in global mobility programs

Cost reduction, global growth and competition for talent are key drivers

Respondents are aware that their employers must balance the considerable costs of mobility programs versus the demand for globally mobile talent. The realistic assessment of this challenging dynamic appears to be in line with what employers report on this topic.



Key drivers of global mobility – expats and employers agree



Expat profile

Expat group growing older; North America sending fewer expats abroad than previous years

Among people who go abroad for work, three things are probably true: They're male, they're middle-aged and they have a family.

- The expat group is growing older, as Generation X enters its peak earning years and Baby Boomers remain in the workforce longer than did previous generations.
- Fewer of them have children or a partner; if they do, they're more likely to leave them at home.

Gender	2015	2013
Male	81%	80%
Female	19%	20%

Age	2015	2013
Under 25	1%	1%
25 to 34	14%	17%
35 to 44	28%	29%
45 to 54	31%	29%
55 to 64	21%	20%
65 or Older	5%	4%

Relationship status	2015	2013
Partner with expat during assignment	58%	61%
Partner not with expat during assignment	26%	23%
Does not have partner	16%	15%

Family status	2015	2013
All children with expat during assignment	29%	30%
Some children with expat during assignment	7%	6%
Children not with expat during assignment	37%	34%
Does not have children	27%	29%

Although most expats still hail from the U.S., their numbers are down 10% from just two years ago (and down 24% from 2001.)

- Globalization is a likely factor – more companies have operations, and therefore local employees, abroad.
- This change may also reflect ongoing trends among employers to use fewer U.S. expats due to cost and taxation considerations.

Citizenship (by region)	2015	2013
Asia	14%	13%
Australia/Oceania	5%	4%
Central America	2%	1%
Europe	23%	22%
Middle East	2%	3%
North America	42%	49%
South America	6%	5%
Sub-Saharan Africa	5%	3%

Citizenship (by country of note)	2015	2013
United States	38%	42%
United Kingdom	8%	8%
India	5%	6%
Australia	5%	Unknown
Canada	4%	5%

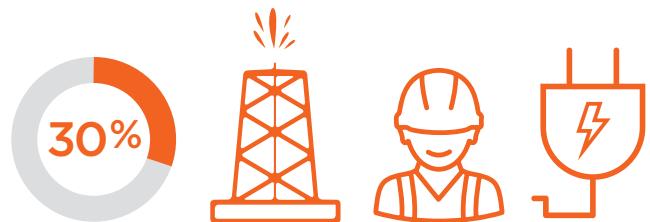
Employer profile

Asian companies are sending more expats; while European companies sending fewer

- Companies in the energy, mining and resources sector made up a significant percentage of employers in this year's survey.
- Representation for business and professional services is down by half.
- And companies overall are sending employees to a smaller number of countries.

Industry	2015	2013
Aerospace and defense	8%	7%
Business services	6%	12%
Consumer goods, retail	6%	7%
Education	4%	2%
Energy, mining, utilities	30%	20%
Financial services	4%	5%
Health care and pharmaceuticals	4%	4%
Manufacturing	10%	10%
Nonprofits	5%	4%
Other	8%	10%
Professional services	3%	6%
Technology	11%	12%
Transportation	1%	1%

Employee count	2015	2013
Under 100	1%	1%
100-499	4%	3%
500-999	4%	3%
1,000-9,999	20%	18%
10,000+ employees	71%	75%



EMPLOYERS ARE IN ENERGY, MINING AND UTILITIES

Expats worldwide	2015	2013
Fewer than 20	3%	2%
20 to 99	7%	6%
100 to 499	14%	13%
500 to 999	8%	8%
1,000+ expats	48%	49%
Don't Know	20%	22%

Employer hq (by region)	2015	2013
Asia	4%	2%
Australia/Oceania	2%	1%
Central America	0%	<1%
Europe	8%	10%
Middle East	2%	3%
North America	82%	82%
South America	1%	1%
Sub-Saharan Africa	1%	1%

Countries where employer has expats	2015	2013
1 to 3	5%	3%
4 to 9	12%	11%
10 to 29	27%	27%
30 to 29	17%	17%
50 or more	39%	42%

Assignment profile

2015 CITIZENSHIP (by region)



More expats taking on multiple assignments

This year's survey showed more employees are relocating to Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, while fewer are going to Europe or the Middle East.

Also, the proportion of expats with more than five assignments under their belts has increased sharply. This may indicate that global mobility is becoming an occupation in its own right.

Expected length of current assignment	2015	2013
Less than three months	2%	6%
Three months up to six months	2%	6%
Between six months and one year	4%	7%
One year	8%	8%
Two to three years	35%	37%
Three to four years	15%	14%
Four or more years	13%	10%
Indefinite	14%	11%
Uncertain	7%	7%

Total assignments	2015	2013
1	28%	35%
2	18%	22%
3	15%	14%
4	9%	8%
5	5%	4%
More than 5	25%	18%



"My kids have lived in six countries (including America) and they feel more at home in Asia than they do in the West."

Together, all the way.[®]



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