



The changing face of relocation

What assignees really want in 2025

How the world works better

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Foreword

Corporate relocation looks a lot different today than it did 10, 15, or 20 years ago. What was once an elite, exclusive opportunity, reserved for top-level executives, has become more accessible to a broader range of employees.

The typical assignee profile is changing, with employees of all different ages, seniority, religious and family backgrounds taking part in global assignments. As such, the motivators to go on relocation have shifted. Once praised for its lavish financial packages and generous allowances, it is now seen as a means to advance both professional and personal goals. On the other hand, the barriers and challenges of going on assignment have changed, too. For employees, considering an assignment today is no longer a case of 'if the price is right', but instead, 'is this right for me, my family, and my life goals?'

What is promising is that these shifts have not negatively impacted the appetite for relocation. According to our latest research, two thirds (66%) of global HR decision-makers said the number of employees they have relocated in the past year has increased. However, for HR and mobility managers, the 'changing face' of relocation has created a need for new, more inclusive packages. These must consider diverse training requirements, the needs of assignees' immediate and extended families, and the unique, personal challenges each assignee might face when placed in their host country.

Achieving this relies heavily on understanding what assignees really want out of their relocation experience. Yet, our research highlights a significant disconnect between assignees' reasons for hesitancy, the challenges they face while away, their fears about repatriating – and where HR is placing their focus.

Surveying both those responsible for managing and administering assignment programs, and the assignees themselves, we have set out to understand this disconnect in greater detail. We hope to make HR and mobility managers aware of the critical blind spots they have when it comes to the assignee experience. With insights from Jo Danehl Global Intercultural & Language Training Leader, and Caitlin Pyett, Global Consulting Lead at Crown World Mobility, we hope to bridge this gap and help employers drive effective improvements to their mobility programs, and, in turn, assignees' wellbeing, moving forward.



Jurgen Zyderveld

Group Vice President,
Crown World Mobility



Introduction

In this three-part series, 'The changing face of relocation', we explore insights from assignees on what shapes their relocation experience. We look at their key considerations and motivators pre-assignment, the resources and support that matter most to them, and challenges while away from, and returning to, their home country.

Comparing these views with that of HR and mobility decision-makers, each report highlights the areas that often go overlooked when sending employees away for work, providing an inside look into what assignees really want in 2025.

With three surveys in total commissioned in 2024, we first heard from 1,000 expats living in Australia, India, Germany, Singapore, UAE, UK and USA, as well as over 150 assignees employed by a selection of our top clients.

We then gathered insights from 210 employee mobility decision-makers, working in businesses with over 50 employees, across France, India, Singapore, UAE, USA and the United Kingdom.

HR survey demographics:

- 47% worked for businesses with 500 – 5,000 employees, and 38% for businesses with a headcount between 100 – 500.
- Manufacturing was the top sector (17%), followed by accounting and finance (8%), energy, utilities and oil/gas (8%) and IT (8%).
- Seniority ranged between Senior Manager (47%) to Owner/ CEO level (16%).

Assignee survey demographics:

- 38% have been relocated and living in their current country for over three years.
- 43% identify as women and 56% identify as male, with the majority (74%) aged between 25 – 44.
- 31% have relocated only once, 31% have relocated two to three times and 37% have relocated more than four times.
- 27% of our expat survey respondents were of senior manager level, compared to just 14% for CEOs.

Assignee demographics:

- The majority (72.5%) identified as men, and 25% identified as women.
- 12% are aged between 25 – 34, 33% are aged 35 – 44, and 33% are aged 45 – 54.

What assignees want in 2025

In our first report, we look at the factors that inspire assignees to say ‘yes’ to relocating, as well as the top reasons for hesitation. While both sides are aligned on several push and pull factors, there are some interesting contrasts that emerge which highlight a need for change in how assignments are designed and positioned to prospective candidates.

Here, we address:

- Career progression
- The allure of new cultures
- The double-edged sword of culture
- Family obligations

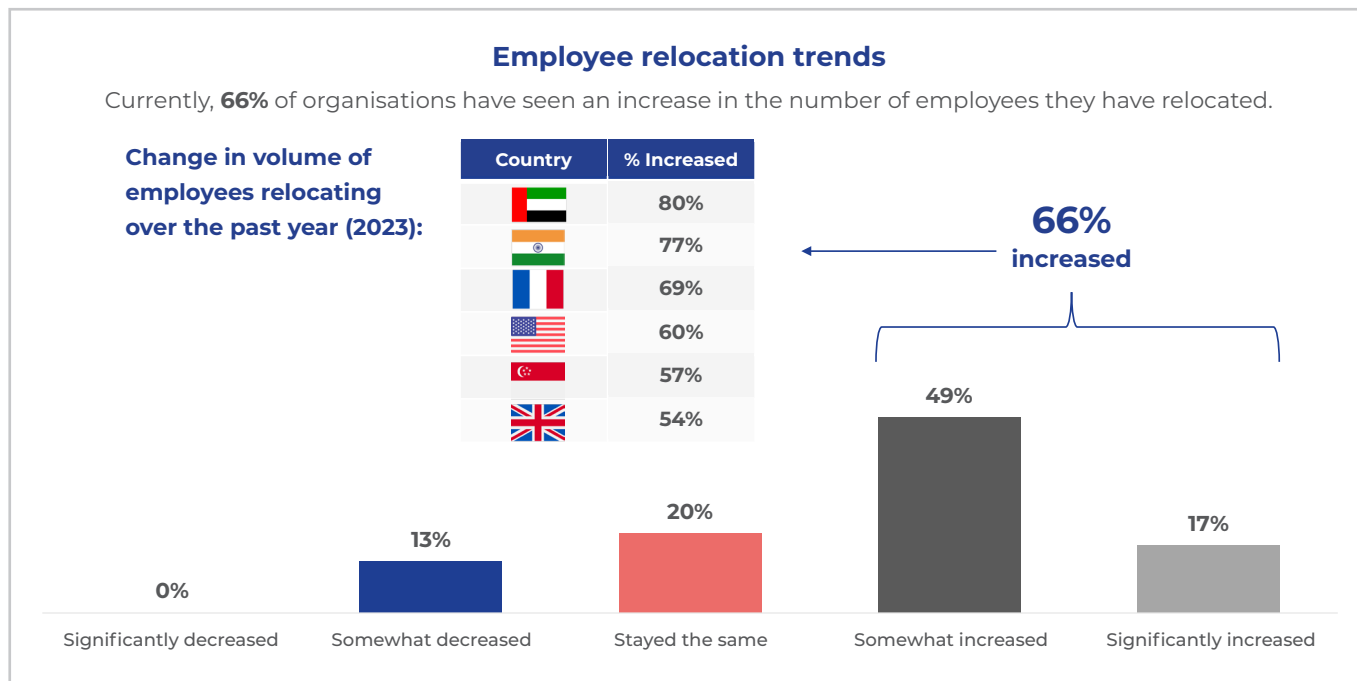
What drives or deters assignees?

1 Consensus on relocation’s benefits

The appetite for assignment has shown no signs of slowing, and this rings true from both HR and the assignees’ perspectives.

Of the expats we surveyed, the vast majority (84%) said they were willing to make the move for work before relocating, suggesting that the motivation to relocate is coming from employees, and not just the employer.

Two thirds (66%) of the HR and mobility decision-makers we surveyed said that the number of employees they relocated in the past year had increased (Figure 1). And for half (49%), the appetite for relocation amongst their employees has grown since a decade ago (Figure 2).

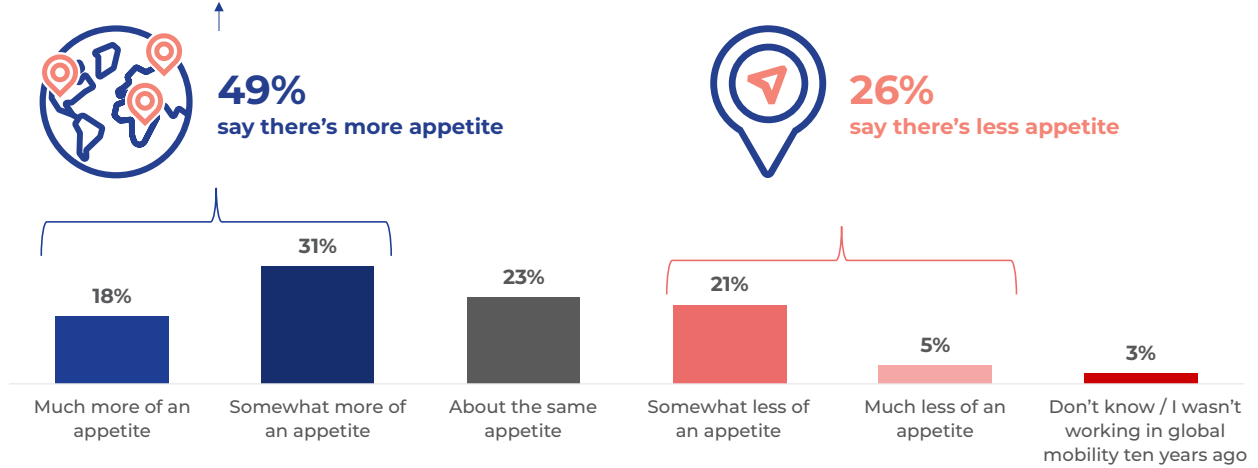


(Figure 1)

Appetite for global mobility

Overall, half of global mobility decision makers (**49%**) believe there is a greater appetite for global mobility now, than there was a decade ago.

The UK (71%) shows the strongest growing appetite for global mobility, with 22% more believing this than the average. Appetite was lowest in the UAE (31%).



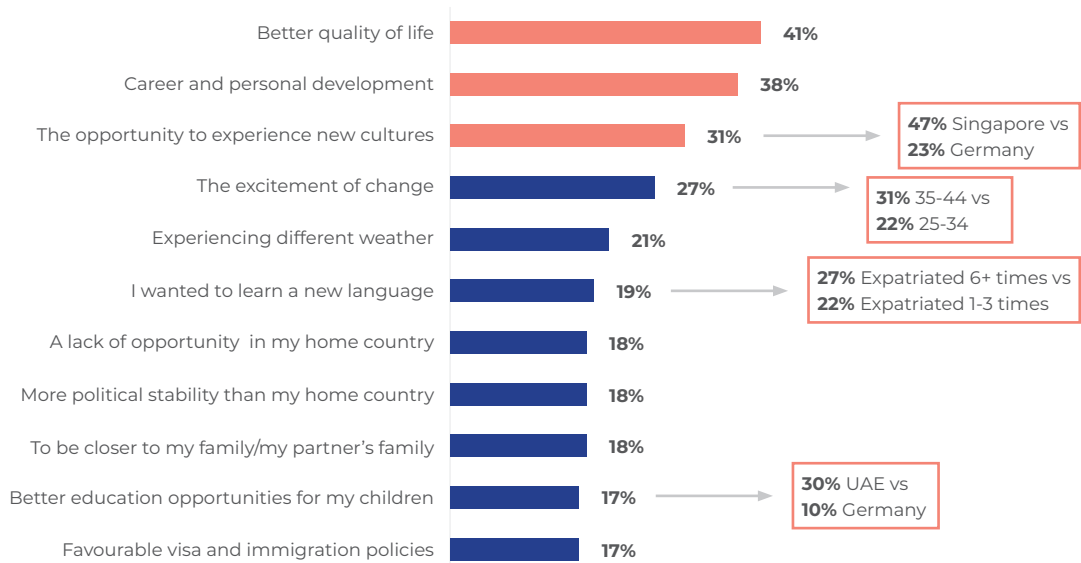
(Figure 2)

Career progression is seen as a key motivator and driver for relocation across the board. When asked what attracted them the most about relocating, two fifths (38%) of expats said career and personal development, marking it as the second top motivator (Figure 3). This is similar for our sample

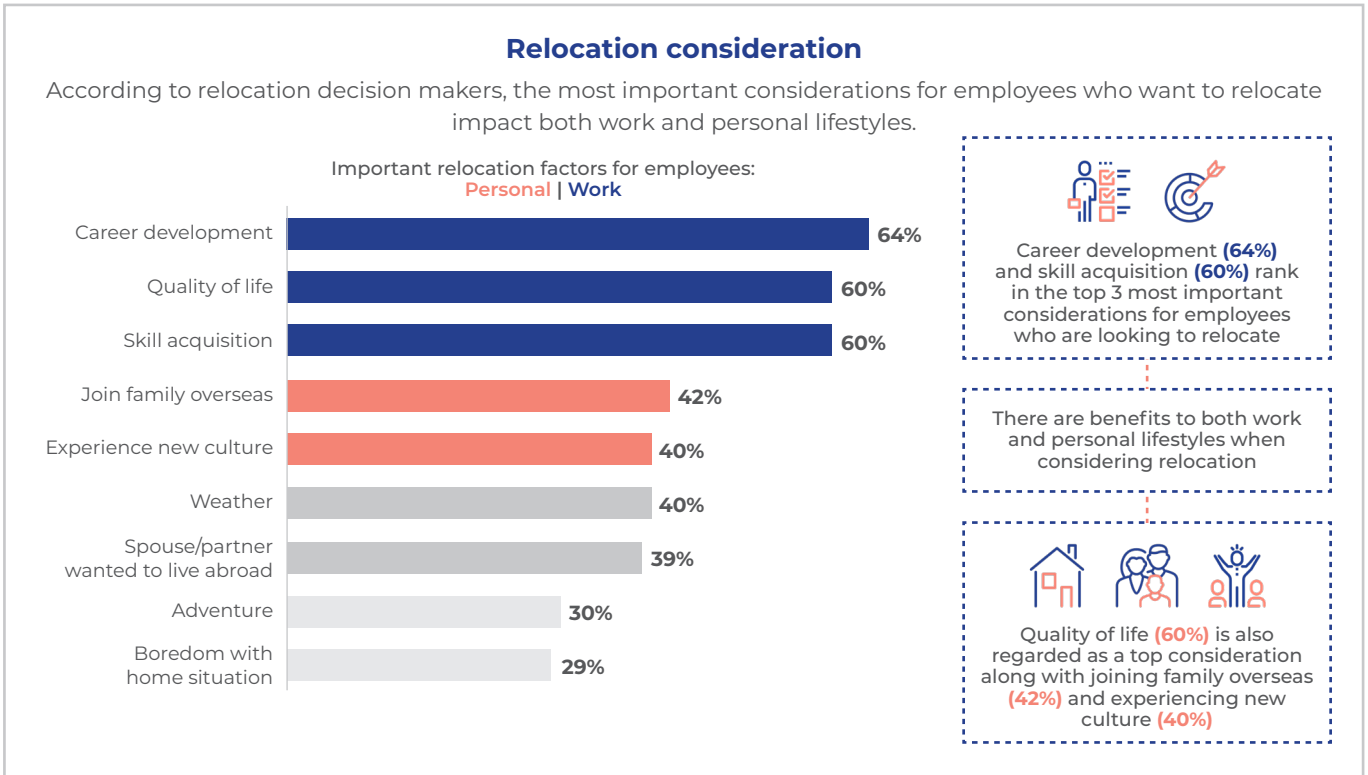
of corporate assignees, 34% of which said career development was their main reason for going on assignment. Unsurprisingly, HR and mobility managers are in alignment, with almost two thirds (64%) citing this as a key motivator (Figure 4).

Best things about relocating

Better quality of life (41%), career and personal development (38%) and experiencing new cultures (31%) are the top three most attractive factors about relocating.



(Figure 3)



(Figure 4)

Caitlin Pyett, Global Consulting Lead at Crown World Mobility says: “The golden era of mobility, with its lavish packages reserved for top, c-suite level executives, has been and gone. This, paired with macroeconomic shifts such as more dual income families and rising relocation costs, means that the ‘value’ of assignment needs to be reframed. It’s not all about the cash payout and financial perks anymore. Employees, of all different levels of seniority, have the opportunity to build new skills, form new connections and gain valuable work experience while away on assignment.”

For HR and mobility managers, 60% say employees take skill acquisition into consideration when looking to relocate (60%), and of those that do, 61% report this as a top benefit gained from the experience. These stats speak to the true value of assignment from a skill acquisition and development point of view.

“Increasingly, we’re seeing career and skill-related push factors driving people to accept, or seek out, foreign postings. This is great news for employers, as it shows real engagement in the mobility process from employees as a means of development, and not just a money-grabbing exercise. 63% of our expat respondents agreed that their role overseas has been a valuable investment for their organization.”



Jo Danehl
Global Intercultural & Language Training Leader,
Crown World Mobility

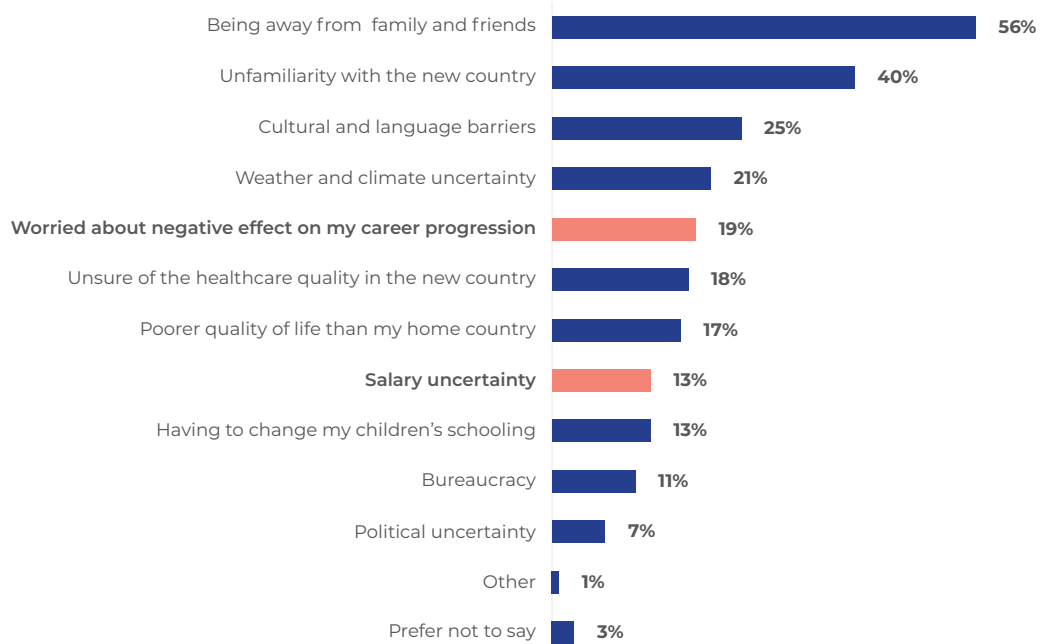


Jo Danehl Global Intercultural & Language Training Leader at Crown World Mobility adds:
 “While it’s encouraging to see more focus on the potential for career development when relocating, HR has a job to do in terms of mapping out what this looks like for each assignee. One in five (19%)

expats said they had concerns over the negative impacts of relocating on career progression, and 13% said they worried about salary uncertainty. HR must not get too comfortable in assuming that employees always see the non-financial benefits of relocating from the offset.”

Reluctancy towards relocating

Being away from family and friends (56%), unfamiliarity with the new country (40%) and cultural and language barriers (25%) are the top three factors that made respondents reluctant to move.



(Figure 5)

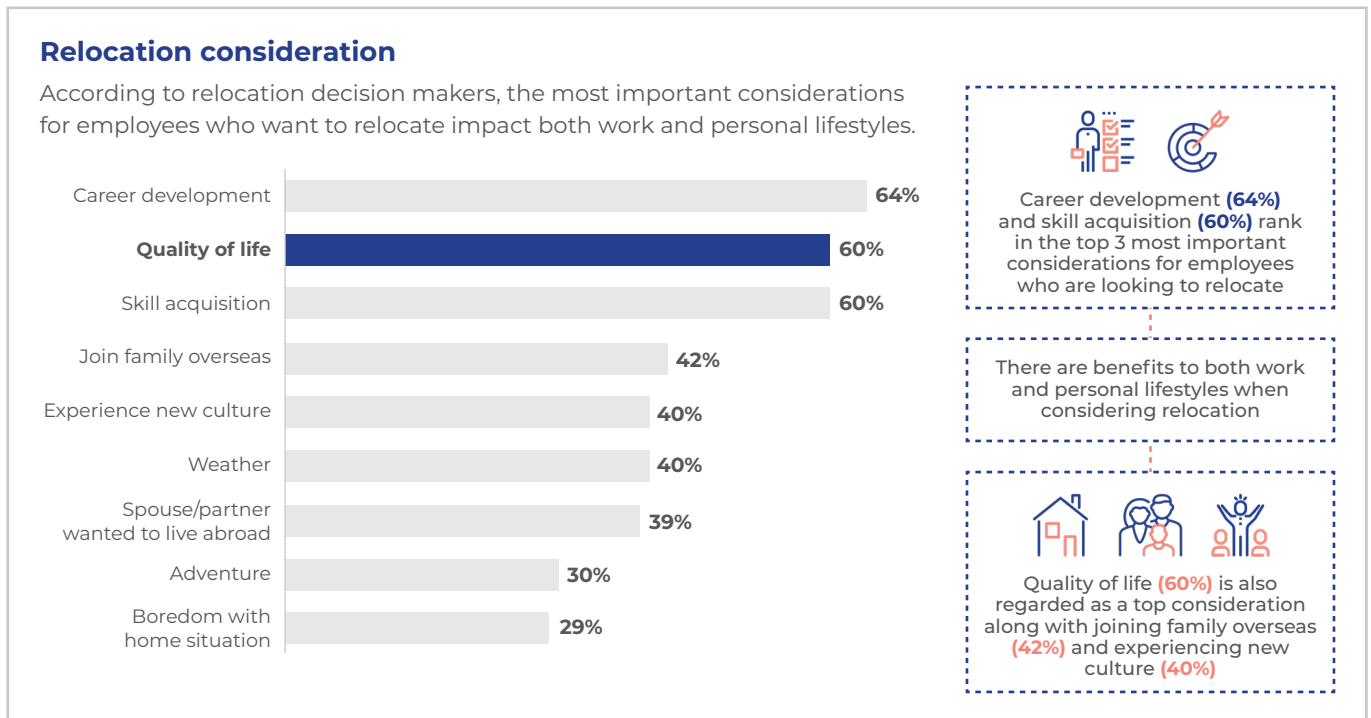
2 The allure of new cultures

Beyond professional development, personal drivers, such as exposure to new cultures and a better quality of life, have emerged as key motivators to go on assignment.

60% of the HR and mobility managers we surveyed said enhanced quality of life was a key consideration for their employees looking to

relocate, marking it as the second top driver (Figure 6). 41% of expats said this is what attracted them to relocate, marking it as the top reason (Figure 7).

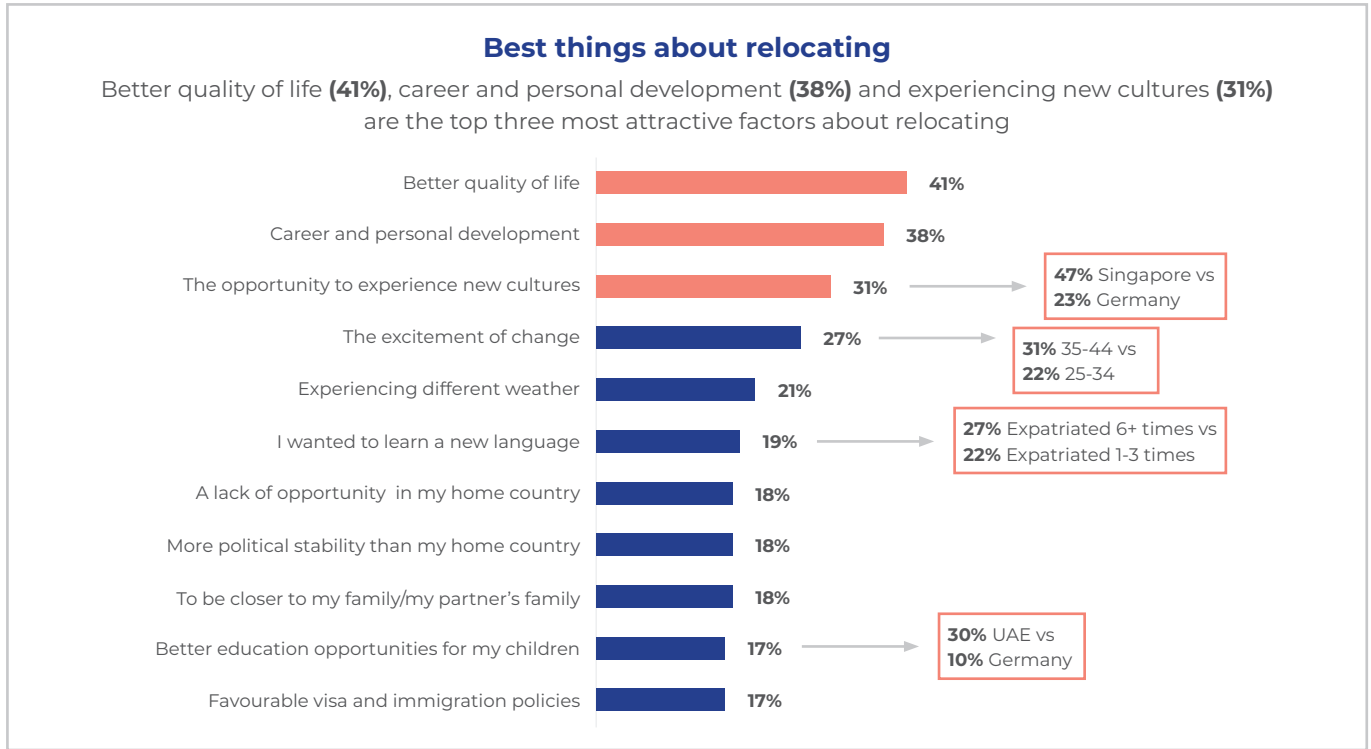
When asked what benefits their employees report gaining after an assignment, enhanced quality of life came out on top (63%), with learning about new cultures ranking third (59%).



(Figure 6)

“Experiencing a new culture is seen as an influential push factor by both HR teams and assignees, although this is more prominent amongst the assignees themselves”, Caitlin adds. “While 40% of HR and mobility managers recognize exposure to new cultures as a key incentive for assignees, it fails to rank in the top three, where professional drivers such as career development and skill acquisition dominate.”

“What’s promising in our findings is that the sense of adventure associated with an assignment has emerged as a significant player”, Jo adds. “This was listed amongst the top five reasons for going on assignment by our sample of corporate assignees, paired with 29% who cited boredom with their home situation. Curiosity is an important trait to look out for in a successful assignee, as it shows open-mindedness and a real appetite for getting the most out of the assignment, both professionally and personally.”



(Figure 7)



Relocation is becoming more ‘democratized’, and assignee populations are becoming more diverse in age, gender, and other socioeconomic backgrounds. While career development and upskilling are goals shared universally by ambitious employees, lifestyle drivers such as new cultures and quality life are incredibly personal and unique to each employee. A better understanding of what cultures your assignees will enjoy most on their assignment, or what lifestyles they’ll be best suited to, can go a long way in terms of aligning their goals to that of the assignment.



Caitlin Pyett

Global Consulting Lead, Crown World Mobility

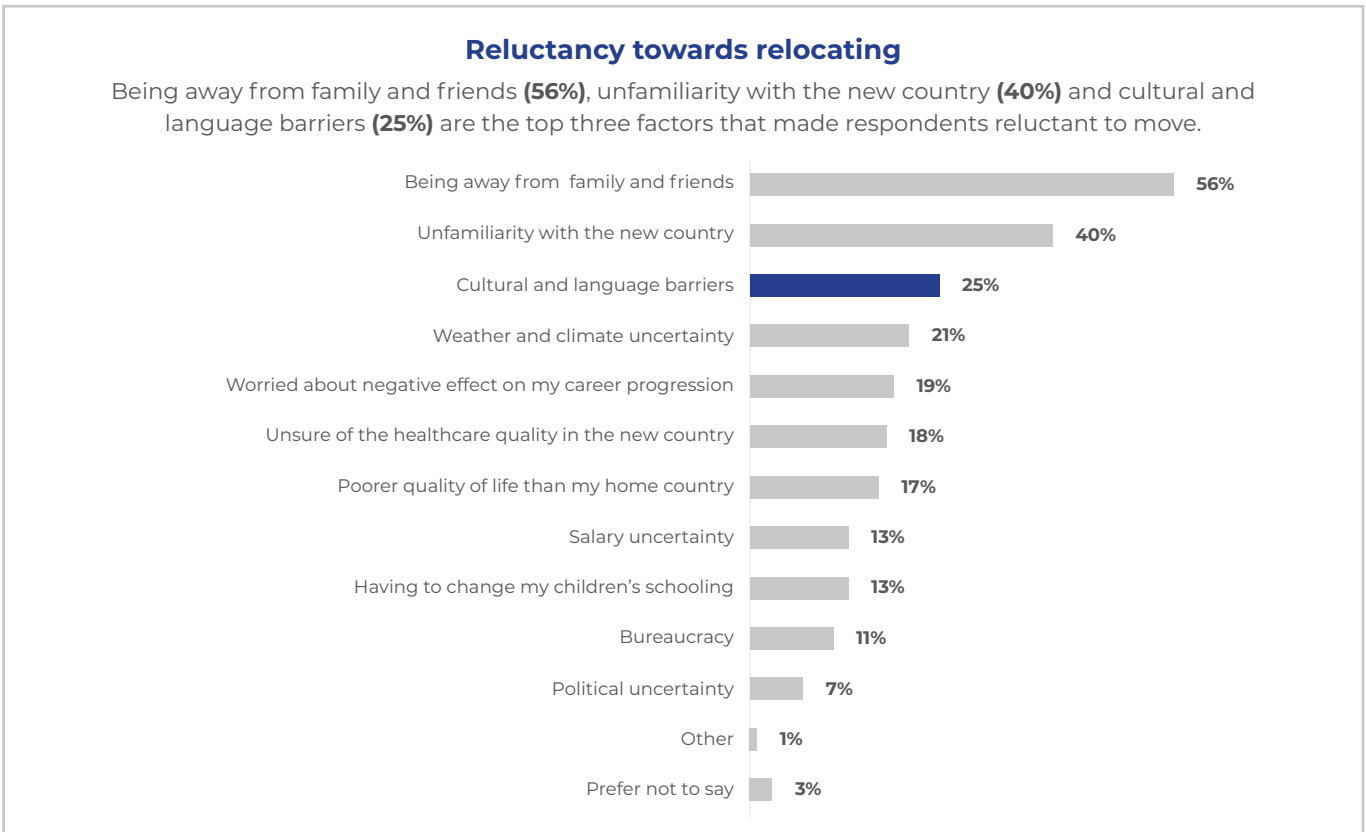
3 Culture is a double-edged sword

The opportunity to experience new cultures is seen as a motivating factor to relocate. However, this is also flagged, across the board, as a significant challenge for assignees while they are away, as well as a source of hesitancy pre-assignment.

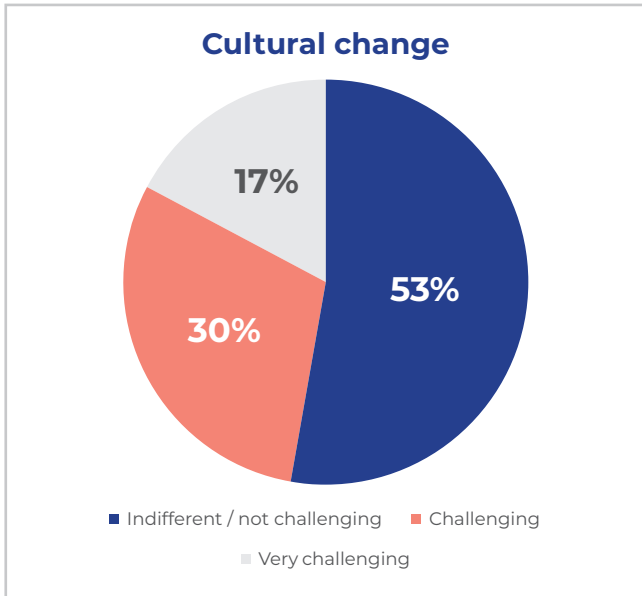
Reluctance to move stemmed from unfamiliarity with the new country for two fifths (40%) of the expats we surveyed and culture and language barriers for a quarter (25%) (Figure 8). This marks them as the top two and three considerations, respectively. HR and mobility managers aren't in the dark when it comes to these cultural challenges. Many claimed that, on average, a small number of relocation offers were denied by employees last year due to incompatible religious beliefs and concerns over the host country's attitude towards sexual identity and orientation.

While on assignment, 46% of expats said cultural change was challenging for them, with 17% of these claiming it was extremely challenging (Figure 9). Language and cultural adaptation were also amongst the top three challenges cited by sample of corporate assignees (Figure 10). And HR and mobility managers agree, with two fifths (41%) saying cultural adaptation was the main challenge for their employees after relocating – the second biggest challenge after language barriers (43%).

“What stood out when looking at the challenges posed by cultural adaption is that HR believes this becomes easier to navigate after completing more than one assignment, but assignees themselves feel entirely different”, Jo comments.



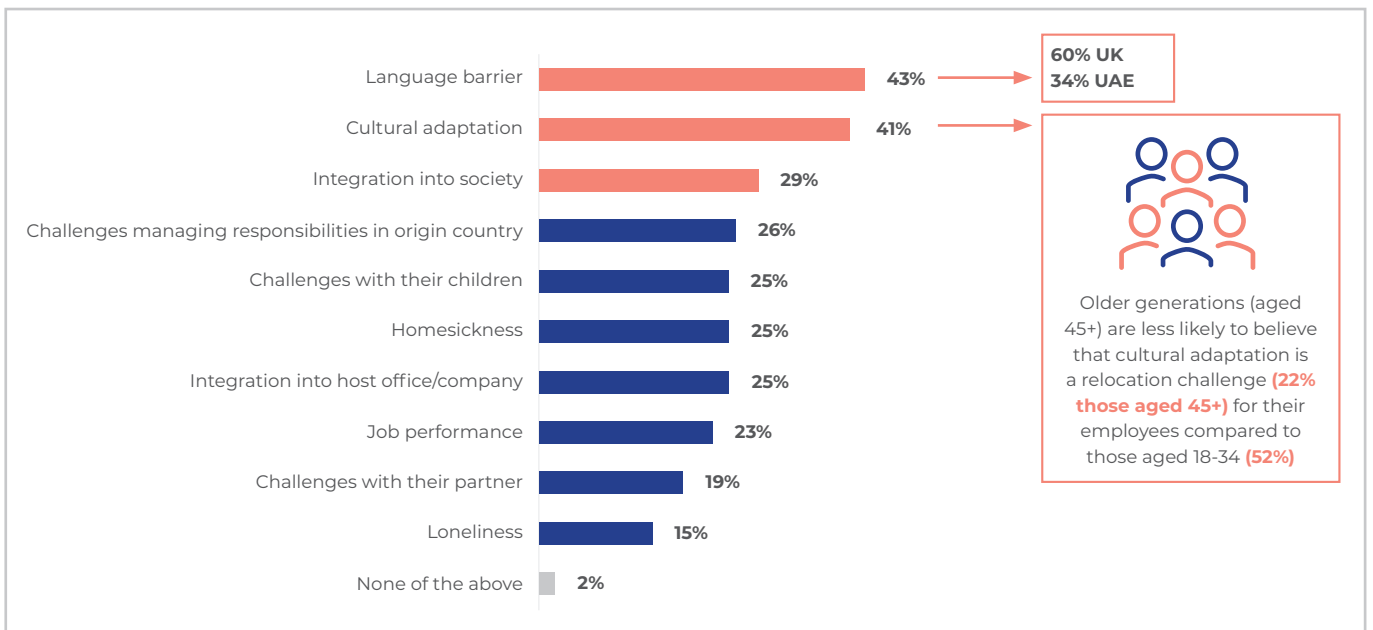
(Figure 8)



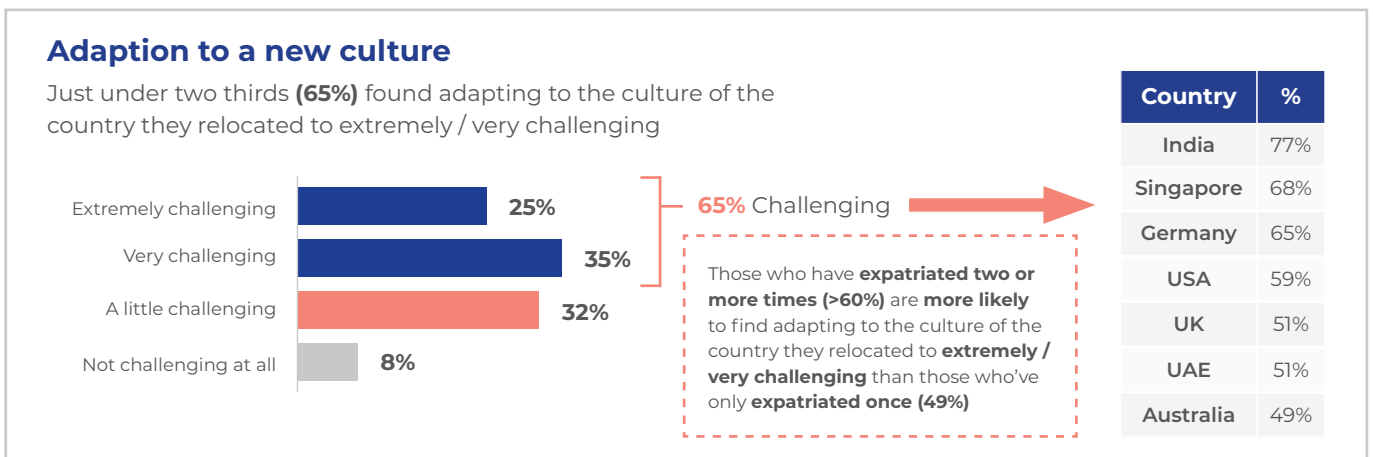
(Figure 9)

Of those who have expatriated two or more times, around 60% said they found adapting to their host country's culture challenging, whereas of those who have expatriated only once, less than half (49%) felt the same (Figure 11).

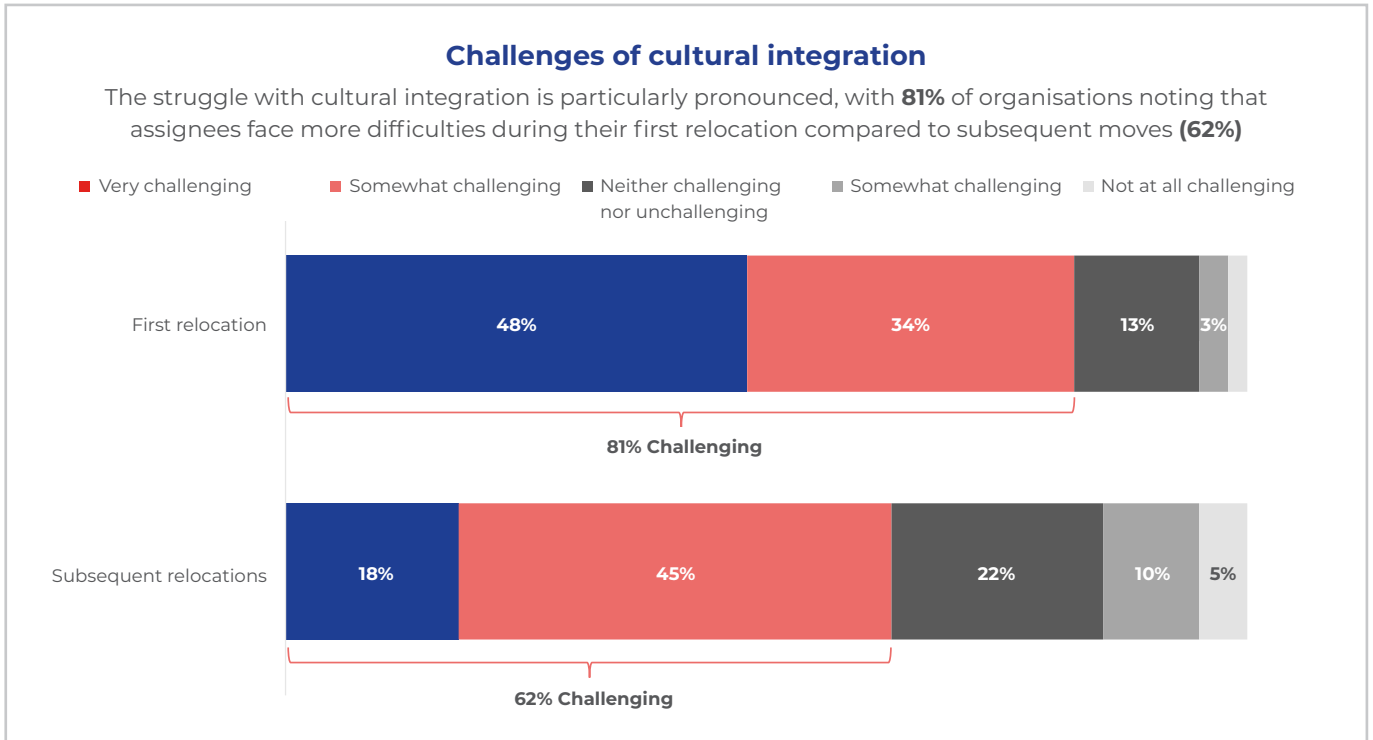
However, 81% of HR and mobility managers said their assignees found this challenging on their first relocation. This then drops to 62% when asked about their subsequent relocations (Figure 12). 48% of HR and mobility managers said their employees found cultural adaptation extremely challenging on their first relocation, vs. only 18% for subsequent relocations.



(Figure 10)



(Figure 11)



(Figure 12)

“HR seem to be downplaying the struggle of adapting to new cultures for ‘seasoned’ assignees”, Caitlin adds. “And this may be due to several factors, such as ‘familiarity’ with the relocation process, or perceived success of one, or multiple, previous assignments.”

“Regardless of whether an employee has relocated before, it can be a daunting and challenging experience. Having to adapt to a new culture for the second or third time over the course of a career can lead to serious ‘culture fatigue’. It’s important that HR remains mindful of this when preparing relocation packages for their employees and ensure they have heard their concerns and can provide the right supports before the relocation.”

Among expats who have relocated multiple times, over half (56%) report encountering increased cultural differences as part of the process. The top cultural challenge during an assignment is learning the language, cited by 39% of expats (Figure 13). HR and mobility managers are in alignment, with 43% reporting language barriers as

the main challenge employees face on relocation – rising to 60% for UK HR departments.



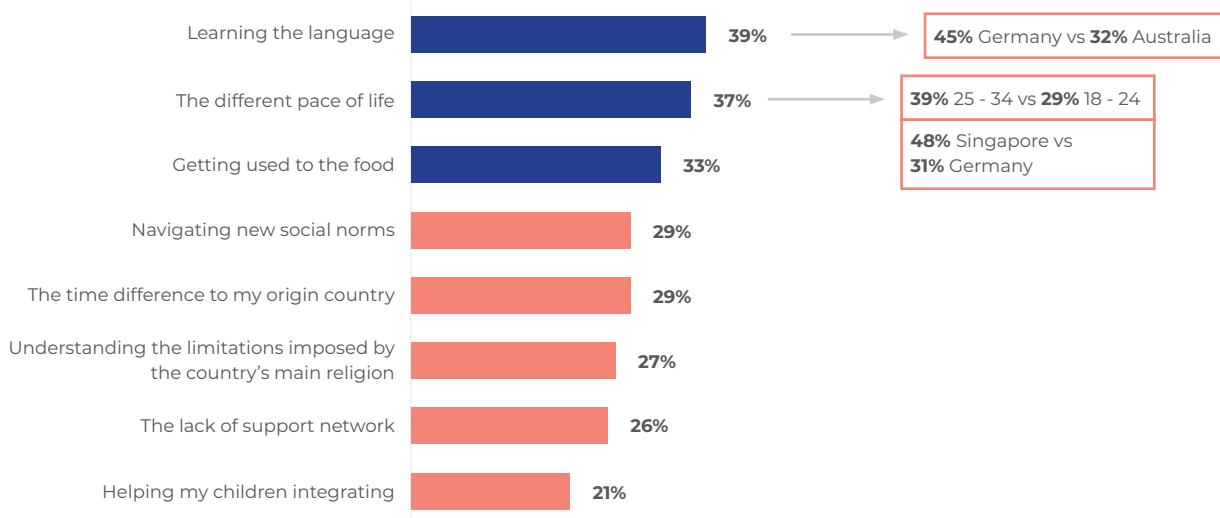
However, no two assignments, countries, or cultures, are the same, and various different factors, such as age, family structure, life stage, or even seniority of role, can impact an assignee’s ability to integrate with their new country’s culture, network, socialize and take part in every-day life.



Caitlin Pyett
Global Consulting Lead,
Crown World Mobility

Cultural challenges

Learning the language (39%), different pace of life (37%) and getting used to the food (33%) were the top three challenges faced during relocation



(Figure 13)



4 Relocating with family

Relocating today is about more than just the assignee. Our research has shown the impact family and caregiving considerations are having on employees when considering a relocation, as well as the fall-out that often comes when leaving these close personal networks behind.

Convincing the family to move was cited by almost half (47%) of our surveyed expats as a challenging aspect of relocating (Figure 14). 27% of these said this was extremely challenging. However, this has fallen off the radar for HR and mobility managers, with partner challenges ranked as the ninth most important factor (Figure 15).

“HR needs to understand that today, it is not about just relocating the employee you know and work with”, Jo adds. “Dual income households are now commonplace, traditional ‘breadwinner’ family structures are on the decline, and the needle is slowly – but surely – shifting away from male-led assignments. Employees today have to take into account whether their partner and family are willing and able to commit to their assignment.”

For our sample of corporate assignees, spousal concerns are high on the list of pull factors, with partner’s career being the second top reason for hesitancy when considering relocation. However,

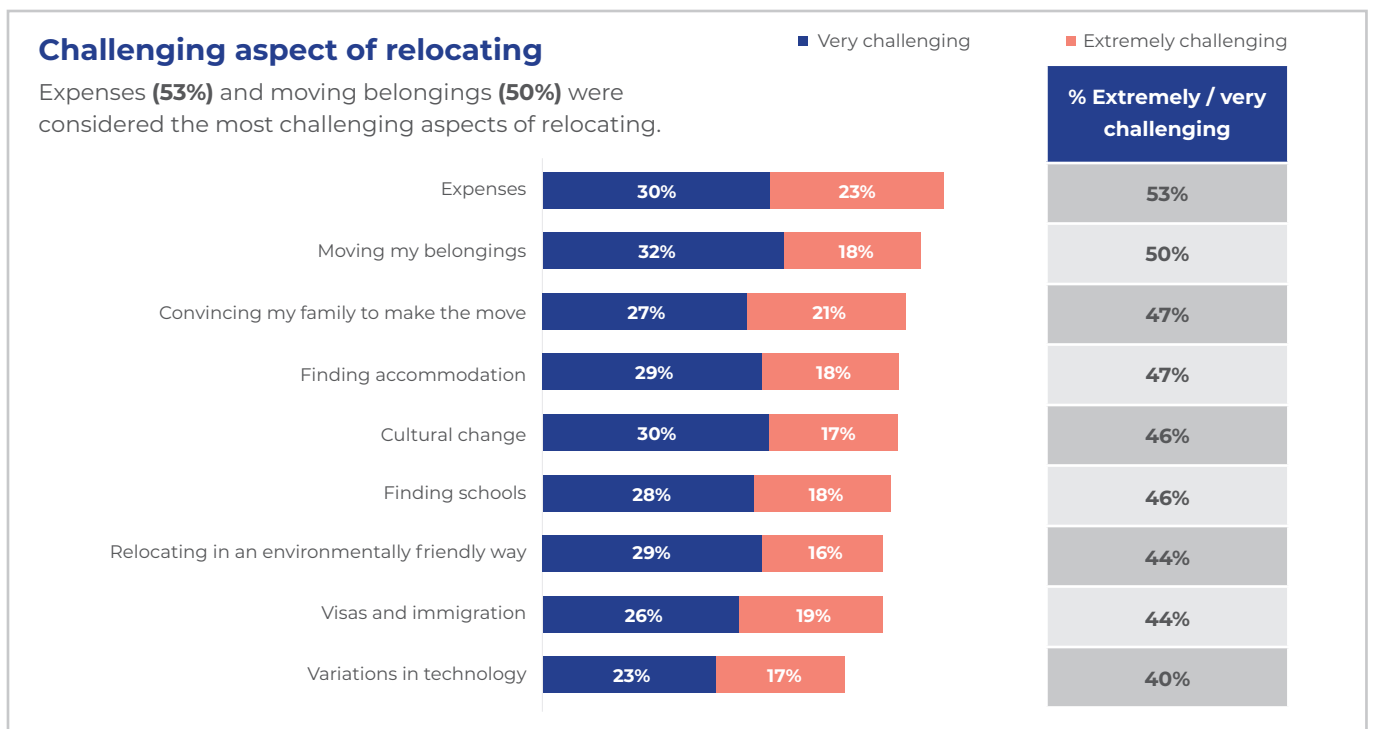
we see HR and mobility managers rank challenges with partners as the second lowest challenge for assignees. Additional family barriers also come into play here, with changing children’s schooling cited as a challenging aspect of relocation for 46% expats, and concerns about parents’ health driving reluctance for 40% of the assignee survey respondents.

Partner hesitancy and career considerations are often ‘hidden’, but they are still a major source of hesitancy for assignees, as there is no longer an expectation that spouses will move where their partner’s next role is situated.

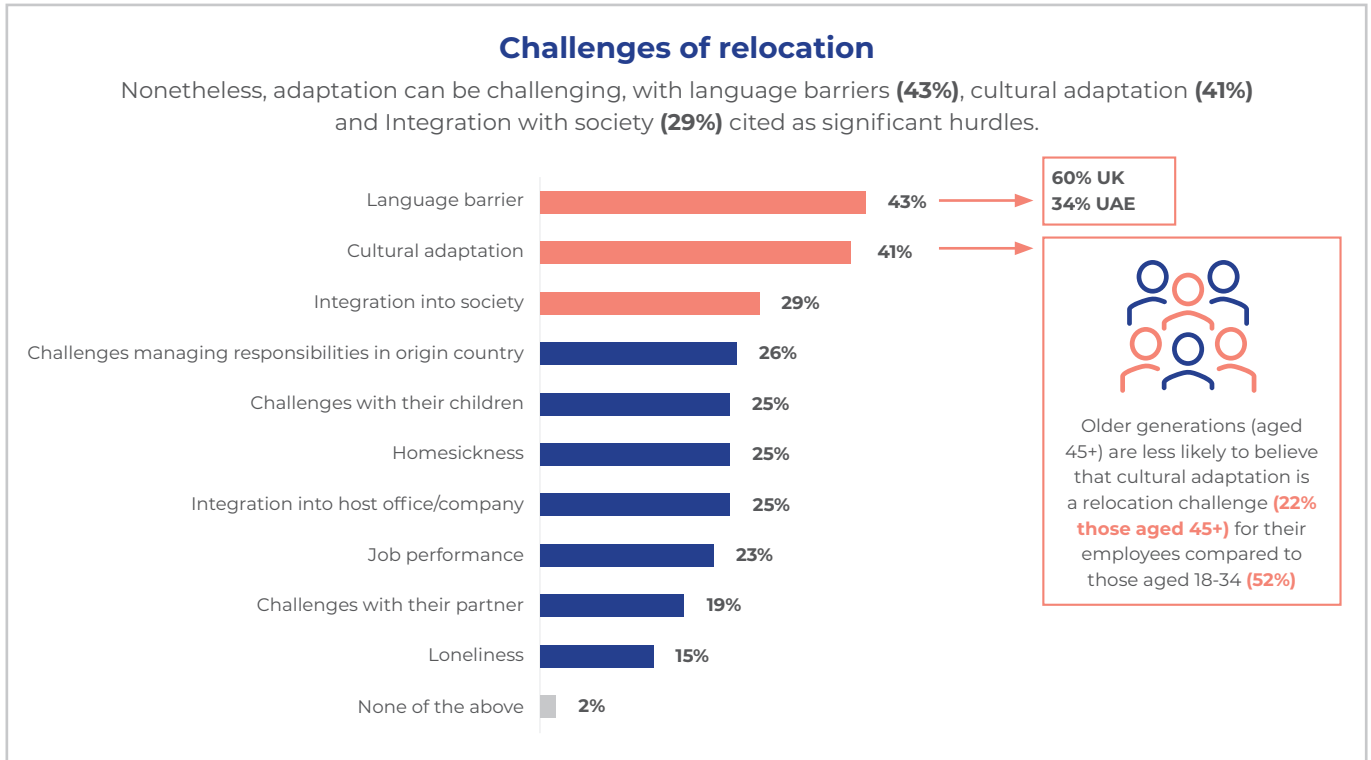


Jo Danehl

Global Intercultural & Language Training Leader, Crown World Mobility



(Figure 14)



(Figure 15)

“With cultural adaptation proving to be a big challenge for assignees, as well as spousal and family commitments, it’s no surprise that leaving other family members, friends, and loved ones behind at home has also emerged as a challenge”, Caitlin adds.

“30% of our sample of corporate assignees said loneliness was a challenging aspect of relocation, and their top reason for hesitancy was the distance from family and friends. When we compare that to only 15% of HR and mobility managers thinking loneliness is a top challenge, we can see that there’s a big disconnect here. HR seems to be underestimating the true personal challenge of

uprooting one’s life for relocation, and the impact not only the family travelling with the assignee can have on their wellbeing overseas, but also the family they are leaving behind.”

“Our advice to HR is to be mindful that, outside of each individual’s work situation, there is a personal life which they may not always feel comfortable sharing. It may be worth considering implementing Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), or other supports such as buddy systems, to help assignees establish new social connections in their host country, and overcome some of these challenges in their first few months.”

Conclusion

While assignees and their mobility departments are aligned on some aspects of what makes relocating challenging, and rewarding, there are clearly some gaps that must be bridged.

Career advancement and the opportunity to bask in a new culture are seen as big selling points for relocation, but on the other hand, assignees report challenges with cultural adaptation and familial commitments – some of which HR aren't as privy to.

In our next two reports, we will look at what support and training assignees really value, to help address and alleviate some of these challenges,

and whether HR is tuned in to these needs through the resources they currently offer. We also explore the concerns and challenges of employees when repatriating after an assignment, and whether HR is aware (and prepared for) these when welcoming them back.

If you are interested in aligning your mobility program to meet the needs of assignees, or learning more about these findings, please get in touch with the Crown World Mobility team.



About Crown World Mobility

Crown World Mobility helps corporations manage global talent and talented individuals perform on the global stage. We work with all stakeholders to find the right solution, implementing a global mobility program that is successful for everyone. Services include research and consulting, assignment management, immigration services, compensation administration and employee and family support.

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