



Mobility Matters:

# Is relocation still a tool for employee engagement?

Part 1: Assessing suitability and tackling hesitancy



# Foreword

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Relocation has long been used as a tool to engage employees, incentivised by the prospect of new experiences, financial rewards or, often, both. Yet in the wake of Covid-19 and remote working, and with a new generation of the workforce emerging, anecdotally we know that trends are changing.

We set out to learn more about how mobility is being used today as a tool for employee engagement. We wanted to learn more from HR managers around the world about how they now view the relocation of employees as a way of engaging and retaining them, by looking at the benefits it presents for employees and employers.

Among the survey findings, we found that employees are still keen to relocate and immerse themselves in different cultures; 55% of those questioned said that the number of relocations in 2022 had increased compared to the previous year, when more travel restrictions were in place. But relocations through 2023 are decreasing, in large part down to continuing economic challenges.

But with employee engagement becoming increasingly complex in a changing world, we wanted to explore where and how mobility can - or does - play a role.

This section of our research concentrates on the selection of candidates for overseas roles and how companies can address and alleviate any hesitancy that an employee may have about living and working abroad.

We're grateful for the insight of Michelle Taylor, HR Director at a leading solutions provider in the in-flight entertainment industry, and the perspective of Nick Sutton, Vice President for Sales and Marketing at Crown World Mobility.

**Jurgen Zyderveld**  
**Group Vice President, Crown World Mobility**

# Introduction

**In this series of reports, we explore how the global mobility landscape continues to evolve. The pandemic started a revolution in ways of working and our approach to work, both of which have been key contributors to the frequently cited ‘Great Resignation’. With that in mind, we wanted to learn more about how mobility can be used as a way of attracting and retaining talent today.**

We asked 251 HR professionals in the United States, the UK and Ireland, Singapore, France and Germany, 26 questions about assigning employees to a project overseas:



Each respondent held the title of either Senior Manager, Director/VP or C-level/business owner



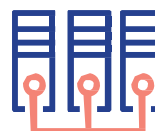
62% of respondents were male, 38% were female



The most common age group of respondents was between 25-years-old and 44-years-old



The most common aggregated revenue of respondents' companies was between \$201m-\$500m



The most common sectors in which the respondents' companies worked in were accounting and finance, IT, and manufacturing and distribution

We asked respondents a series of questions surrounding their business's practices around relocation and its effects on employees. This section of our findings looks at how businesses can assess assignee suitability and address any hesitancy to work abroad, while also incentivising relocation and understanding it as a bespoke process. In our two other reports, we examine:



**Mobility as a means of improving productivity**



**An assignee's wellbeing: balancing an improved quality of life with mental health challenges**

# Assessing suitability and tackling hesitancy

## The allure – and cost – of assignment

**There can be little doubt from the findings of our survey that the attraction of relocation overseas has recently increased. Fifty-five per cent of respondents said the number of people they had assigned to roles abroad was higher in this year than the last, with the practice being most popular amongst 26-to-35-year-olds.**

“I think people are more open to relocation now,” says Michelle Taylor, HR expert. “The pandemic kept people home-based and they now realise that there is more to life than they had before. People are more open to new opportunities and are more willing to go on ‘an adventure’,” she adds.

Similarly, the use of mobility as a way to keep employees engaged is highlighted by 97% of participants who said there is a degree of importance to offering relocation as a way of retaining staff. This may explain why 82% had previously used it with employees threatening to leave their jobs and almost three-quarters had approved relocation requests as a way of stopping an employee leaving the company.



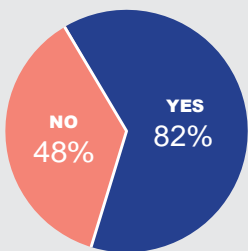
For some, the experience of living in another country gives an opportunity to develop and work on a project they haven't worked on before, with different cultures and new experiences. For others, it has always been part of their career plan.



**Michelle Taylor**  
HR expert

**82% of businesses have offered relocation to employees considering leaving as a way to retain them.**

This is more common in large businesses (84%) than SMEs (76%).



84% Large businesses  
76% SMEs

“For some, the experience of living in another country gives an opportunity to develop and work on a project they haven't worked on before, with different cultures and new experiences. For others, it has always been part of their career plan,” says Michelle. “Even if an employee does not want to relocate themselves, they see their colleagues moving and see it as a good thing,” she continues.

The rise in the cost of relocation from the previous year – predominantly due to increases in expatriate compensations – has, we found, not been prohibitive to the number of potential relocations: almost half of respondents claim that the number of staff it can assign to work overseas has risen in the last 12 months. Fifty-three per cent also said that they had noticed employee retention rates increase after a relocation programme. Again, this suggests employees are still engaged by them.

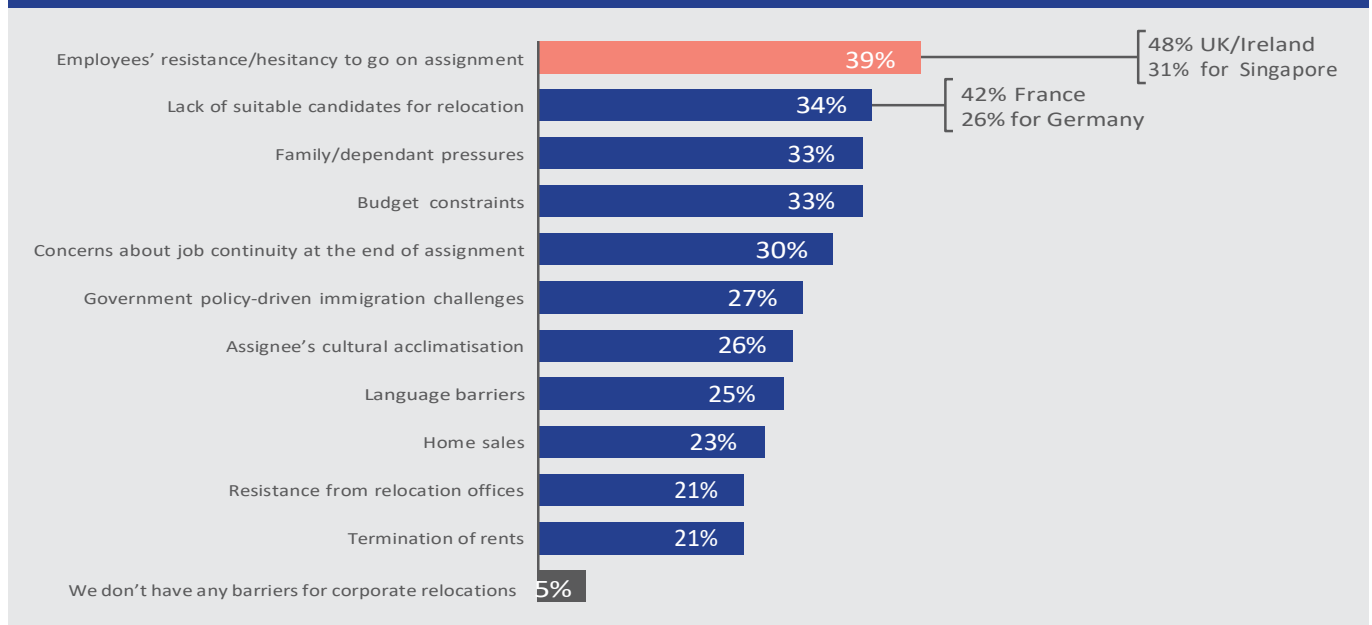


## Addressing resistance and hesitancy

Despite employees looking to expose themselves to unfamiliar cultures, working and being on holiday are two very different experiences. This perhaps explains why, when asked what the biggest barrier to corporate relocations was, 39% said employee resistance and hesitancy. The second most significant barrier to relocations is a lack of suitable candidates.

**Currently, the biggest barrier to success for corporate relocations is resistance/hesitancy to go on assignment (39%)**

This increases to 48% for UK/Ireland compared to just 31% for Singapore



Nick Sutton, Global VP Sales and Marketing at Crown World Mobility, says: "People are unique and their personal circumstances and motivations will be different. It should be acknowledged that many people won't ever be open to relocating and that's fine!

"One of the first aspects to explore, though, is understanding the 'why'. Common themes and barriers we come across are family, housing, partner's careers, education, and social and support networks, as well as cultural and language challenges," he adds.

Hesitancy to relocate can ultimately have consequences for the employees themselves. Fifty-nine per cent of respondents find themselves having to either very regularly or somewhat regularly terminate the contracts of those unwilling to relocate. "Termination may be

a final option when a role in one territory is made redundant, but the employee can be moved into a similar role elsewhere," claims Michelle.

A successful assignee, though, can have several traits in their arsenal. Being open-minded, culturally sensitive and showing emotional intelligence are the foundations of a successful relocation.

"Being open-minded, culturally sensitive and showing emotional intelligence are the foundations of a successful relocation."

**Michelle Taylor**  
HR expert



## Incentivising relocation

Balancing the wants and needs of assignees with the requirements of a business is obviously tough. No matter how much an employee may wish to be assigned to an overseas role, relocation will undoubtedly involve upheaval on their part. Outlining the benefits of an assignment clearly and in detail to those who are less certain about relocating is vital.

“A foundational element to incentivising relocation is to ensure it is open and accessible to everyone, so making the global mobility policy diverse and inclusive is a great place to start,” says Nick.

“Support and entitlement structures for individuals and different family units is a critical component in making relocations accessible to employees who might not fit the ‘traditional’ mould of an assignee. Even the language used within the policy plays a role, but communication is vital, as is being consultative when understanding what the barriers to relocation might be. Any good policy or programme will help support assignees,” he adds.

However, regardless of frameworks which might be put in place, the process of employee selection is far from straightforward and relocation still needs



One of the most powerful ways of articulating the benefits is with real examples.



**Nick Sutton**  
Global VP Sales and Marketing,  
Crown World Mobility

to be shown as a positive from the employee’s perspective. “Anyone who works in global mobility will know that ensuring an assignment’s success with the right candidates is tricky. One of the most powerful ways of articulating the benefits is with real examples,” says Nick.

“Sharing first-hand experiences from previous assignees brings benefits to life. Nothing encourages and motivates your employees more than hearing about the interactions, skills and experiences that colleagues have gained from an opportunity to live and work abroad,” he adds.

### One size does not fit all

Considering individuals and their feelings surrounding relocation is also important. “Whilst this process is far from formulaic, there are attributes that hiring managers and leaders can look for when considering potential assignees.

Selecting those most likely to thrive in the new location will help give the assignment every chance of succeeding for the individual and the company,” comments Nick.



Understanding and measuring the return from both the company and the employee’s perspective can be an invaluable tool to engage key stakeholders and employees, especially as relocation is set to further increase in popularity.

**Nick Sutton, Global VP Sales and Marketing  
Crown World Mobility**

“While candidates will need a necessary level of experience and hard skills, when considering candidates, it is also important to pay close attention to soft skills such as attitude, resilience and adaptability. These are all key elements that will help the individual navigate the challenges of living and working abroad.

“Furthermore, those who are willing to learn and embrace the culture of their host location are more likely to assimilate quickly into their new surroundings and be effective in their work,” he continues.

### Charting the return on your investment

Just like any business process in which significant sums of money are involved, the business is going to want to understand the ROI from an assignment. “Understanding and measuring the return from both the company and the employee’s perspective can be an invaluable tool to engage key stakeholders and employees, especially as relocation is set to further increase in popularity,” claims Nick.

# Conclusion

Mobility is clearly a tool from which employees and employers can benefit. However, it is important to note that each case must be examined on a one-by-one, bespoke basis which has the employee and their best interests at heart. Despite its many advantages, relocation is not an incentive to all employees, nor is the process particularly simple to implement.

However, when executed carefully and with employee wellbeing at the forefront of consideration to those open to it, relocation can certainly act as a way of keeping a business’s star performers, establishing new presences overseas and increasing productivity.

If global relocation is a process that you would like to include in your company’s offerings to current and potential employees, Crown World Mobility will be happy to discuss opening up this world of possibilities.

**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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