Global healthcare

World of Work series

Bringing talent home



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About the research

The findings shared in this report are based on research conducted with 689 HR decision-makers and 641 non-native assignees across 10 markets and three continents.*



The World of Work series

Over the past eight years, we've been monitoring and listening to the experiences of HR leaders and assignees across the world to understand how international placements are evolving.

Shared through a collection of reports, our **World of Work series** explores the challenges and opportunities facing organisations and their people during this time of change.

Starting with an Executive summary report, each edition in the series focuses on a different stage of the assignment journey – every one unique but equally essential to success.

Explore the World of Work series and download the latest reports here.



Executive summary: **Global mobility on the move**



Explore the key insights from the World of Work research, including the current experience of international placements and what businesses can do to further support assignees at every stage of the journey – from preparation and life on assignment to repatriation.

Ready to read.

Pre-assignment: **Setting up for success**



Looking more closely at the findings, the 2nd edition in the World of Work series examines the role preparation plays in protecting against family stress, cultural isolation, and loneliness – now the three main reasons assignments end early.

Ready to read.

On assignment: **Keeping people brilliant**



The 3rd edition in our series looks at what assignees need while they're on placement, and where the opportunities are for businesses to do even more. From increasing family support to improving work-life balance, our findings highlight what life on assignment is really like eight years on.

Ready to read.

Post-assignment: **Bringing talent home**



Repatriation is a risky period in the assignment journey. If it isn't managed well, talent and investment could be at risk. The 4th and final report in the series explores this defining stage for assignees and organisations, and how investing in post-placement wellbeing support could be the answer to a positive return home.

Foreword

Xavier Lestrade, Managing Director, AXA Health International

International assignments are an important investment for organisations and their people. They build skills, broaden perspectives, strengthen global networks and, ultimately, help organisations develop the talent and capabilities they need for the future.

But the value of that investment doesn't end when an assignment does.

As someone who has undertaken many international assignments, and as a leader who has supported others through them, I know that returning home can be a more complex transition than it first appears. After time spent adapting to a different culture, building new relationships and developing professionally, coming home can bring its own challenges. What once felt familiar may no longer feel the same, and the person returning may not be the same either. Time and experience abroad can change who we are, as well as our aspirations.

The final report in our World of Work series explores this often-overlooked stage of the assignment journey and highlights an important opportunity for organisations: to give repatriation the same thought and attention as the departure.

This matters even more as the global mobility landscape continues to evolve. Assignments are becoming shorter, more frequent and more strategic, meaning employers will need to think differently about how they support people throughout the entire journey.

Practically, this involves planning for repatriation early, creating space for open conversations and recognising that the right support will look different for every individual and family.

When organisations take this holistic approach, they can do more than protect their investment. They can help people turn international experience into lasting value, for themselves, their families and the organisation they return to.

"As someone who has undertaken many international assignments, and as a leader who has supported others through them, I know that returning home can be a more complex transition than it first appears."



There comes a point within every international assignment when **plans** need to **start** for the **return home**.

From finishing up projects with colleagues and saying goodbye to friends, to packing up for the move back, it's arguably one of the most turbulent periods for assignees. And you don't need to have experienced it to understand why.

Taking on an international assignment opens a person up to a certain amount of unpredictability, which many throw themselves into to gain the full experience. Over time, new connections form, hobbies develop, cultural curiosity grows, and before they know it, it feels more predictable. More familiar. Maybe like home.

The return, then, which can happen many years later for some, can be a much harder process than many assignees and their employers anticipate, and disorientating in ways that are less spoken about.

In this final edition of our World of Work series, we open up that conversation and look at how organisations can redefine repatriation to protect their people, not just their investment, by providing a positive return home.



The value of what's already been built

There's no question that assignments require real commitment to deliver real value, and throughout our research we've seen that this commitment is deliberate on both sides.

Organisations invest in international assignments primarily to drive performance, accelerate skills development and strengthen their talent pipeline. While employees take on the opportunity to gain experience, improve their career prospects and ensure job security at the end of their assignment.

For the most part, organisations are delivering on these aspirations for their people, especially compared to just five years ago:

↑6%	↑8%	↑18%
Post-assignment promotions	Guaranteed roles post-assignment	Help finding new roles in the organisation in another country

"Since I moved to this country, my life has changed for good due to job security and a stable high income."
(UK, Female, 31)

These are meaningful outcomes, and they reflect a growing understanding that assignments are career-defining experiences, not just operational deployments. However, the investment for both parties is only fully realised if the return home is managed with the same consideration as the other stages of the assignment experience.

After all, the support structures that exist at the start – the briefings, the relocation support, the cultural preparation – rarely have an equivalent at the other end of the journey. And yet it's at the point of return that the risk of losing the investment in an assignment is arguably the highest. Unsupported at this key stage, assignees could decide to leave, taking with them expensively acquired skills networks and knowledge.



Shorter = more strategic

Short-term assignments have already seen a 10% increase in the last five years, and 69% of organisations predict further growth by 2030. This shorter timeframe puts added pressure on organisations to not only meet the commercial objectives of their overseas assignments, but to also meet assignee expectations. After all, less time means less opportunity to achieve some of their core motivations for taking on an assignment.

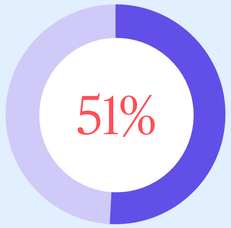
An evolution of this kind could very well mean that employers need to raise the bar in terms of their value proposition and become more strategic about the incentives they offer. As without meaningful outcomes, short-term assignments may become a less desirable prospect and therefore harder to fulfil.

Post-assignment career support
HR decision-makers



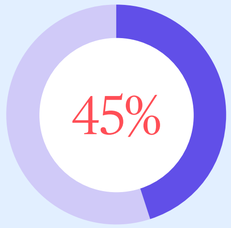
The missing piece

As well as supporting their assignees with job or career opportunities on their return home, many organisations are also providing logistical and financial support. In fact, as we've seen across our World of Work series, they lead the way as the most commonly provided benefits.



Over half

of HR decision-makers say they're providing help with moving costs, temporary accommodation and even tax and financial advisory services.



Almost half

claim to offer bonuses or professional incentives as part of their relocation packages.

These provisions once again reflect a commitment to retaining returning talent and, more promisingly, demonstrate that organisations recognise the reverse impacts of international assignments from a practical standpoint.

However, mental health support needs more attention.

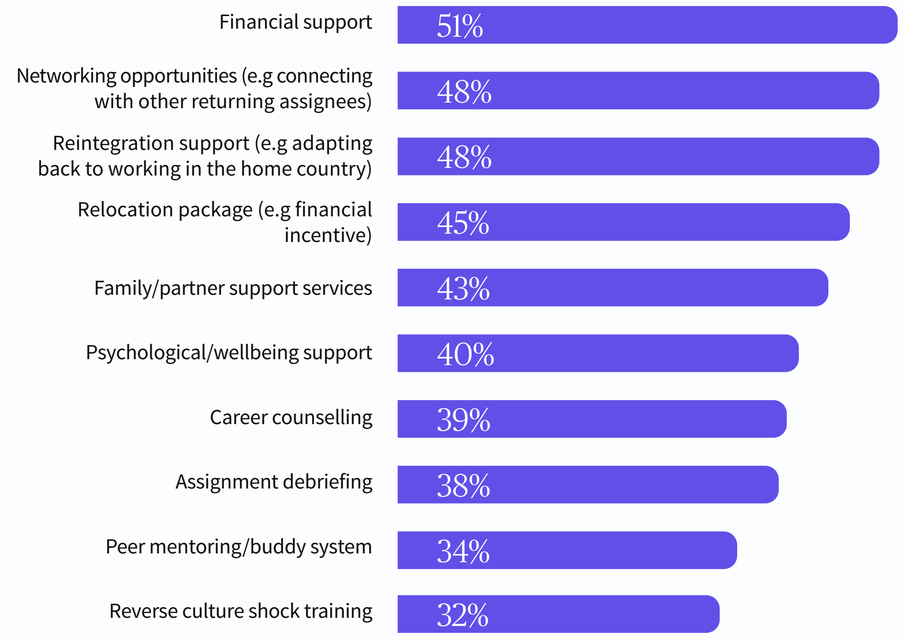
Only 2 in 5

HR decision-makers provide psychological help post-placement, making it one of the least available services for assignees.

As we've seen many times across the assignment journey, the obstacles assignees face are very often personal in nature, not work-related. Psychological support, therefore, shouldn't be overlooked as an essential pillar of an HR decision-maker's repatriation strategy.

Repatriation support services

HR decision-makers



"Always ensure the overall wellbeing of your overseas assignees at all times, from deployment through to their return home, as such alleviating the risk of early repatriation."

(HR decision-maker)

The missing piece



However, what makes this gap more complex is that the support provided will not always be distributed in the same way.

Equity

Although 40% of HR decision-makers say they offer psychological and wellbeing support, we've seen before that this provision is often tied to assignment type or seniority level. In practice, that means the support available to one returning assignee may look very different to another. Similarly, those with the greatest need may not always be those with the greatest access.

Consistency

According to our research, employers in North America currently provide higher-than-average levels of career counselling, and psychological and wellbeing support. While employers in Thailand and Kenya report higher levels of financial support and reintegration assistance. These variations suggest that although some markets are beginning to treat emotional reintegration as a priority, it's still far from standard practice globally.

Continuity

91% of HR decision-makers say they encourage open conversations about mental health during an assignee's placement, which is an encouraging figure, but is that culture built in beyond the assignment itself? And perhaps more importantly, are managers in the home country equipped to continue those conversations when an assignee returns? Their employees may not know what they need initially, so being able to create an open and ongoing dialogue with them is important.

All this focus on wellbeing isn't to say that practical support and career intent aren't important – they're fundamental to a positive return home. But by neglecting some of the emotional scaffolding, organisations are leaving an essential gap in their duty of care. The message they may be sending, however unintentionally, is that the logistics of coming home matter more than how it feels to be back.



The predicted rise of short-term assignments is once again a consideration here.

If assignments are set to become more transient, assignees aren't going through repatriation once – they're going to experience it repeatedly. And compared to longer assignments, which give them a greater runway to prepare for the return, short-term assignments can end just as some assignees will be establishing social and professional connections.

The emotional whiplash of this experience will require robust psychological support services that assignees can access if they're struggling to mentally reorientate.

Coming home isn't simple

There's a quiet assumption embedded in how many organisations and even assignees approach repatriation: that going home is the easy part. Yet, just as cultural integration was one of the biggest challenges for assignees at the start of their placement, reintegration can be just as challenging.

This is especially true for those returning from long-term assignments as the scale of readjustment is much greater. And given that this placement type still accounts for the majority of international assignments, it's safe to assume that many organisations will have employees who have lived away from home for some time. This is true of our research alone:

31% of assignees have been living in their host country for **7 years** or more.

That means that for almost a third of assignees, the return home won't be a brief readjustment; it will feel like a major life transition. And arguably, they may even be the least prepared for it, simply because they've found their footing abroad and may not have anticipated how much has changed back home.

These could also be the very people who coped well and required little support throughout their assignment. As a result, not only might they underestimate the challenges of resettling — both for themselves and their loved ones — but they're also less likely to be on their employer's radar as someone who needs additional support.



Coming home isn't simple

Home is where the heart is

"I feel more secure and happy here compared to my country and I've had several self-development opportunities" (UK, Female, 35)

Assignees spend years adapting to a new culture. They build new routines, new relationships, and a new sense of identity shaped by their experience abroad. That process of adaptation is gradual and largely unconscious. So, when they return to a place that hasn't changed in the way they have, the disconnect can be jarring and uncomfortable.

This is called reverse culture shock, and it's one of the most underestimated challenges in the assignment journey. After all, home hasn't changed. The language is the same. The faces are familiar. But the assignee is not the same person who left, and reconciling that gap – professionally, socially, and psychologically – takes time and support.

Currently, only one in three organisations provide reverse culture shock training for their assignees, regardless of assignment type. So, whether someone has been on a short-term posting or a three-year relocation, the likelihood of receiving this kind of support remains equally low.

Similarly, reintegration into the workplace may need more attention, as buddy and mentoring systems are only being used by 34% of organisations. Settling back into work and catching up on what's changed can be a significant undertaking for an employee, especially if they're already struggling on a personal level with the transition home.

Family focus

"I have the freedom to be able to better myself and still be able to provide for my family with better work opportunities" (UK, Female, 36)

Partners and children also navigate their own version of reverse culture shock as they leave behind schools, friendships and routines they've built abroad. Their adjustment can shape the repatriation experience for the assignee and have a real impact on the sentiment around their return – even if they don't struggle themselves.

Yet, as we've seen across the World of Work series, family and partner support still lags behind the practical and financial benefits available, with only 43% of organisations offering readjustment services for loved ones.

Keeping people connected

"While I have gained valuable work experience outside my country, at the same time I have lost a few personal connections in my home country" (UK, Male, 47)

An important part of relocation is being able to keep in touch with loved ones back home and, reassuringly, 80% of assignees feel supported by their employer in doing so while they're on assignment. But staying connected and leaning into long-standing relationships can also help to ease the transition when it's time to come home, bringing some familiarity to an unfamiliar time.



1 in 3 organisations provide reverse culture shock training for assignees.

An eye on the future

The answer to a positive return home doesn't belong to any single part of an organisation, nor does it belong solely to the assignee. Getting it right requires a shared commitment from both sides.

For assignees, the responsibility is for themselves and their loved ones. Returning home is a personal transition which needs to be planned for. That involves thinking about what support they might need in advance, as well as the willingness to communicate openly about how the return is feeling, professionally and personally, so their employer can help.

For organisations, it's about planning for the return with the same rigour as the departure. That means building psychological and wellbeing support into the repatriation process from the outset and making sure assignees are aware of what's available. It means treating reverse culture shock as a real and predictable challenge. And it means extending the culture of open conversation that exists during an assignee's placement into the post-assignment period.

Finally, as we've demonstrated across our research, it means recognising that support cannot be the same for everyone: assignees who return home after many years abroad will need a different level of reintegration support than those who return from shorter placements; families need to be considered as part of the transition, not as a secondary concern; and the distribution of support – across seniority and assignment types — needs to reflect those who need it most.



Organisations that invest in these areas will be better positioned for a world where assignments are faster, more fluid and more frequent.

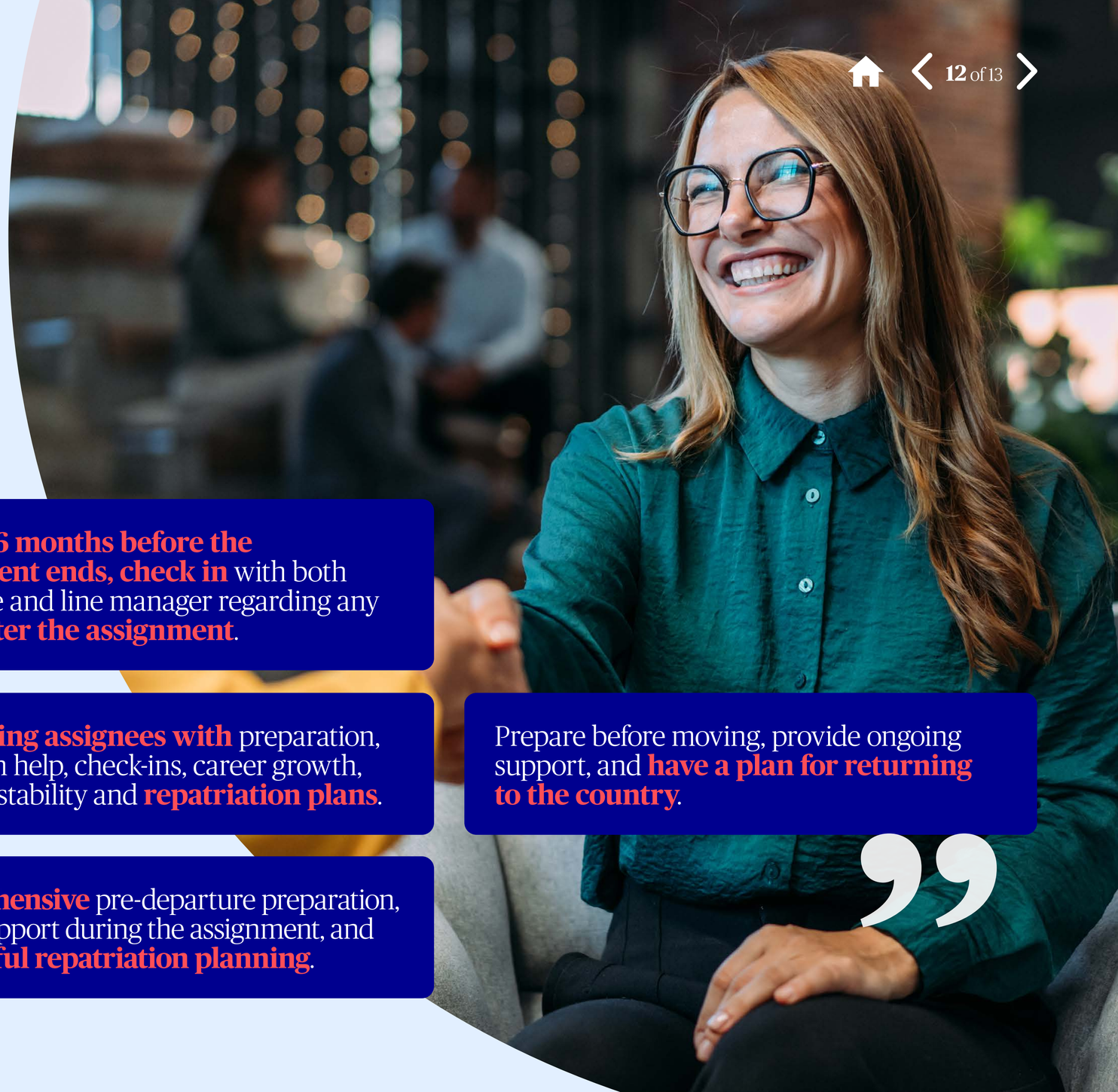
As assignments become shorter, repatriation will become more common and so will the demand for support. To prepare for this evolution, coming home must no longer be treated as supplementary to mobility strategies, but essential to securing the investment organisations are increasingly committing to.

After all, as our World of Work series has so clearly exposed, the full value of an international assignment can only be realised when the whole journey is supported.

Repatriation in practice

An HR-insider's view

Hear from HR decision-makers around the world about how they successfully bring talent home. From clear communication and regular check-ins to repatriation planning.



We have **clear communication**, comprehensive support, and culturally sensitive practices. This includes providing detailed information about compensation and benefits, offering cultural training, and **facilitating a smooth repatriation process**.

Always **ensure the overall wellbeing** of your overseas assignees at all times, from deployment **through to their return home**, as such **alleviating the risk of early repatriation**.

About **3-6 months before the assignment ends, check in** with both employee and line manager regarding any **plans after the assignment**.

Supporting assignees with preparation, relocation help, check-ins, career growth, financial stability and **repatriation plans**.

Comprehensive pre-departure preparation, robust support during the assignment, and **thoughtful repatriation planning**.

Prepare before moving, provide ongoing support, and **have a plan for returning to the country**.

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*Research conducted in June 2025 by Savanta. A total of 689 HR decision-makers (US:110, UK:109, France:53, Germany:54, UAE:55, Kenya:52, Hong Kong:50, Singapore:50, Thailand:53 and China:103) and 641 non-native assignees (US:106, UK:114, France:51, Germany:52, UAE:59, Kenya:66, Hong Kong:49, Singapore:52, Thailand:51 and China:41) were surveyed.

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