



The changing face of relocation

What assignees really want in 2025

Report 3 – The repatriation experience

How the world works better

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Foreword

Corporate relocation looks a lot different today than it did 10 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, religions and social 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 its 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 alert HR and mobility managers 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 supports that matter most to them, and challenges while away from, and returning to, their home country.

Comparing these views with those 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 members of our Client Advisory Board (CAB). Our CAB consists of 11 organizations, each responsible for their companies' mobility programs.

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.

Additional assignees, from a selection of our top clients, surveyed:

- 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

Returning home after an international assignment may appear straightforward, but the reality is often far more complex. Our third, and final, report addresses the critical area of repatriation and how HR teams, while heavily focused on cultural adjustment, may be overlooking other pressing concerns. Career reintegration, children and family dynamics and even technological re-alignment, all stand to pose challenges and therefore must be considered more closely.

We analyse the fundamental disconnect between what HR professionals prioritise and what

assignees actually need during the repatriation process. Building on our previous findings, this report shares essential insights for HR and mobility teams to help ensure that repatriation is a seamless transition for employees and their families.

Here, we address:

- **Cultural adjustment: A misplaced priority?**
- **Family matters: Re-evaluating HR's focus**
- **Career re-integration: A critical concern**
- **Technology adaptation: An overlooked challenge**

1 Career re-integration: A critical concern

HR and mobility managers consistently identified career reintegration and the availability of a job upon repatriation as major concerns. In fact, 29% of HR respondents said the availability of a job was the primary concern for assignees returning home, while 28% cited reintegration into the home office (Figure 1).

However, assignees from selected top clients had a slightly different perspective (Figure 2). A significant 44% of these assignees said that having a job to return to was their most pressing concern. Another 32% expressed concerns about the loss of excitement in their job post-assignment, while 17% flagged that life in their home country would not be as exciting as their assignment experience.

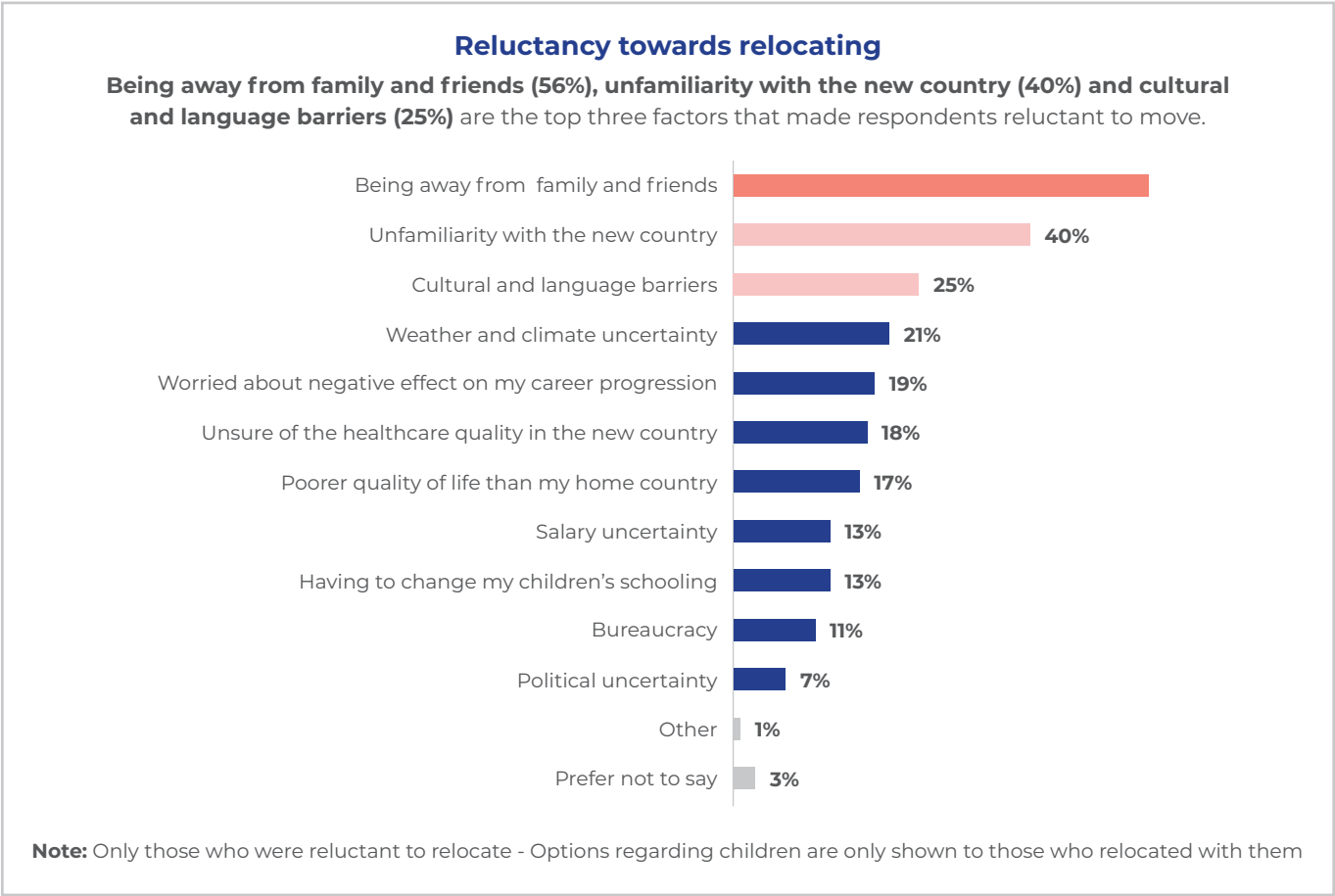
For HR teams, the focus on reintegration and post-assignment roles is a major priority. However, this might be a misrepresentation of assignee concerns. Many employees, particularly those who have spent significant time in an exciting international location, may feel that their career opportunities and job satisfaction will be

significantly diminished upon returning to their home country, making this a more pressing challenge.

Interestingly, according to our assignee research, 19% said that worries about the negative effects on career progression made them feel the most reluctant to move in the first place (Figure 3).

However, 63% agree that their role as an expat has been a valuable investment for their organisation (Figure 4). This suggests that worries surrounding career development amongst assignees are perhaps misplaced, and that the career benefits of relocation must be communicated more clearly ahead of the assignment.

Caitlin Pyett explains, “While HR focuses on the mechanics of job reintegration, assignees are often more concerned with whether their roles in the home country will offer the same level of excitement, challenge, and career progression that they experienced during their assignment.”



(Figure 3)

“This is why repatriation planning should begin before the assignment even starts. Clear, early communication about post-assignment career paths is essential—not only to help employees see the long-term value of their international experience but also to ensure they feel recognised and engaged upon return. Without this, organisations risk losing valuable talent to competitors, undermining the return on investment of the assignment.”

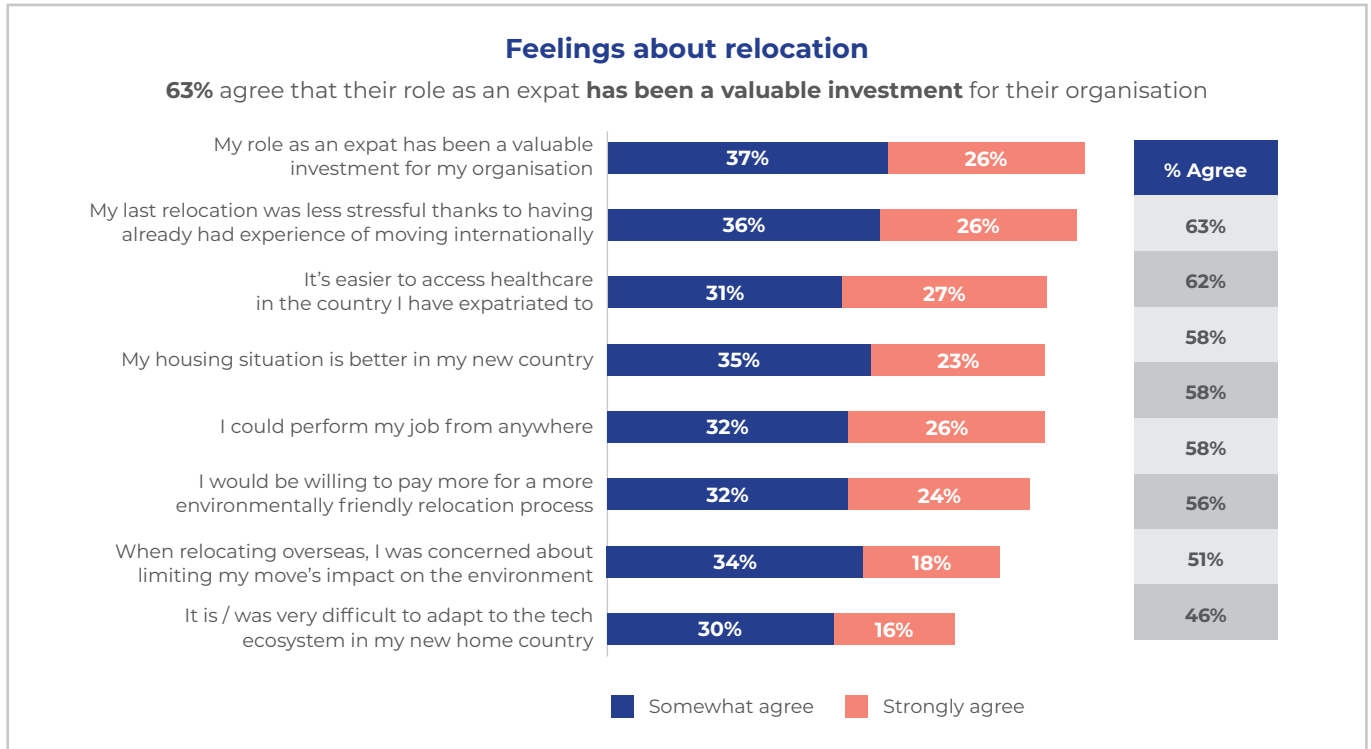
During professional reintegration into an organisation, assignees may indeed struggle with returning to a workplace that has evolved in their absence. 12% of assignees from selected top clients did report reintegration into the home office as a top concern (Figure 2). This is not limited to organisational structural changes or new management; employees often find that their roles, career paths, and expectations have shifted while they were away, and this gap can be difficult to bridge.

In many cases, returning employees find themselves in a position where they have gained valuable international experience, but they find that they

no longer resonate with their organisation's mission. Some may have taken on more senior responsibilities abroad, only to return to the same position they left behind, or even face being ‘underutilised’ in a role that feels disconnected from the career growth they anticipated. This discrepancy can create dissatisfaction and disengagement, ultimately leading to frustration and, in some cases, attrition.

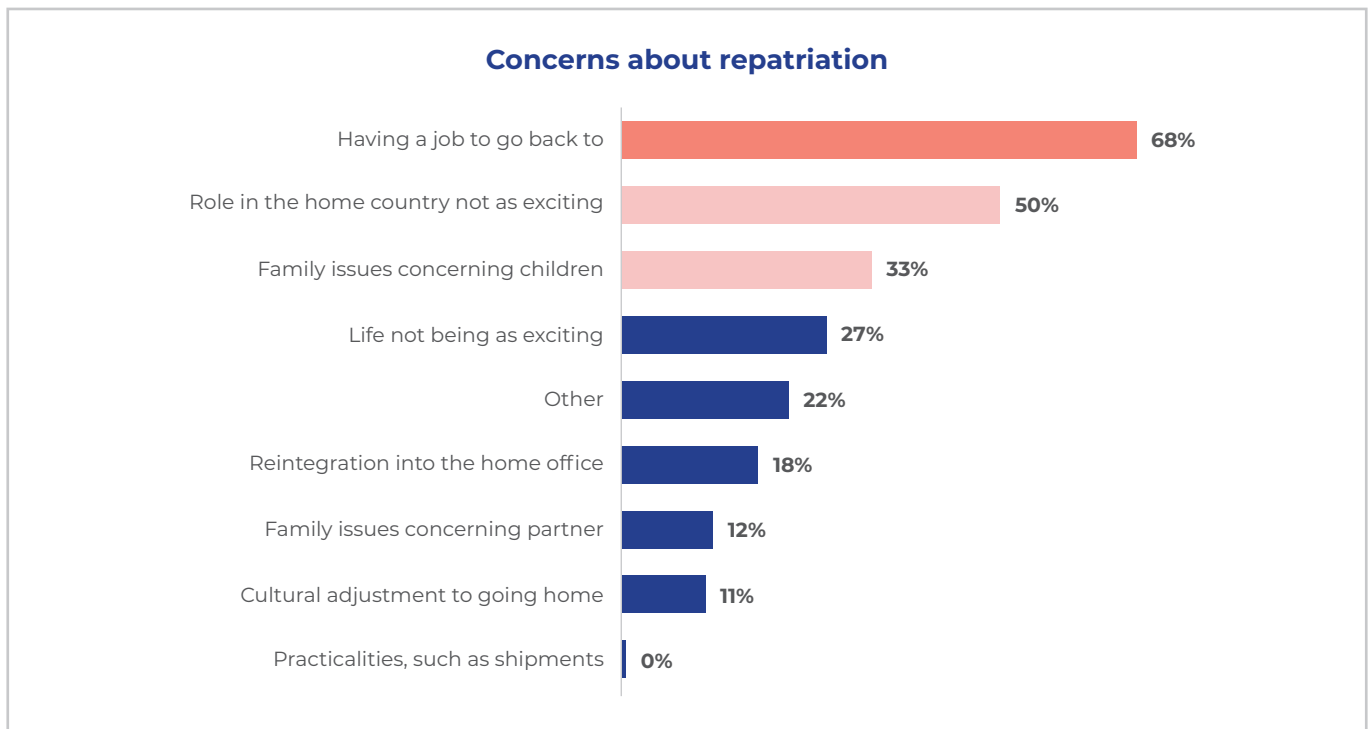
Jo Danehl comments, “Unfortunately, career reintegration is not always given the attention it deserves. A lack of structured support can leave employees feeling unsupported in their career goals, unsure of where they stand within the company, or how to develop further after their return.”

“Providing assignees with career development plans, mentorship opportunities, and clear guidance on how their roles may have changed in their absence could go a long way in addressing this challenge. Career reintegration should not be a passive process. Instead it needs to be an active strategy that ensures returning assignees feel valued and clear about their future within the organisation.”



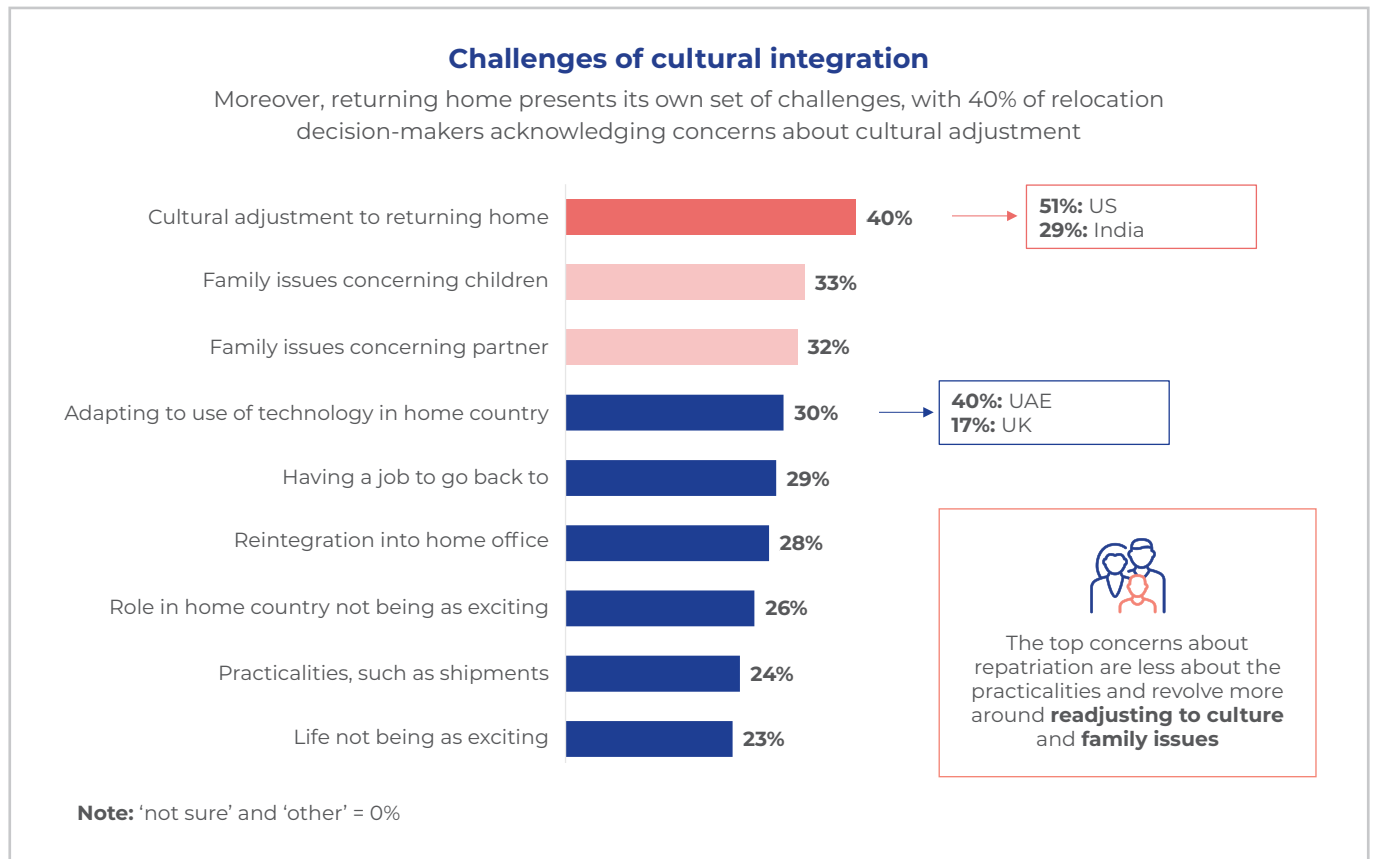
(Figure 4)

2 Cultural adjustment: A misplaced priority?



(Figure 1)

Among assignees from our selected top clients, only 7% considered cultural adjustment as their primary concern upon repatriation - nearly 70% placed concerns around having a job to return to as their top concern, with roles in home countries not being as exciting (50%) and family issues concerning children (33%) following this. (Figure 1).



(Figure 2)

However, the narrative demonstrated by HR and mobility teams doesn't appear to marry up - cultural adjustment during repatriation is often seen as the primary challenge returning home. According to our research, 40% of HR and mobility managers indicated that cultural adjustment was their top concern when bringing employees back to their home country (Figure 2).

This divergence in priorities indicates a need for HR teams to reassess their approach to repatriation. While cultural adjustment remains a challenge for some, it is clear that other emerging issues - such as adjusting to technology, career progression, and family-related concerns - are becoming more pressing. For many assignees, the return to their home country brings a new set of challenges, where adapting to home-country technology and ensuring career reintegration are much larger hurdles than previously acknowledged.

Caitlin Pyett, Global Consulting Lead at Crown World Mobility, notes: "There is a disconnect in where HR and the employee view the biggest challenge when returning home, but both are equally valid and need addressing - HR teams

may be overestimating the importance of cultural re-adaptation while underestimating the true challenges assignees face, particularly in the areas of career reintegration and technology readaptation."

"One possible reason for this is that HR teams extrapolate challenges from the initial relocation phase, where cultural adaptation in the host country is indeed critical. However, the home environment, though possibly changed over time, is still largely familiar to returning assignees. For most, practical and professional challenges often overshadow cultural ones upon repatriation."

"It's actually encouraging to see HR allocate resources to cultural training because this is a key element to a successful return home, however, casting an eye to repatriation long before the flight home would also enable them to focus on the more obvious challenge of the role their employee is returning home to. A structured debriefing process can help identify and resolve specific challenges faced by individual assignees. This approach conserves resources whilst ensuring that attention is directed when and where it is needed most."

3 Family matters: Re-evaluating HR's focus

Family concerns are another area where HR and assignees appear to be at odds. While 33% of HR and mobility teams cited family issues related to children as a top concern for repatriating employees (Figure 1), the assignee data tells a slightly different story.

21% of assignees from selected top clients flagged children's issues as their top concern, while partner-related family issues were cited by just 7% of respondents (Figure 2). Interestingly, these figures suggest that HR's traditional emphasis on partner support during repatriation may no longer be the most relevant concern for many employees.

Instead, the challenges associated with children's reintegration, such as school transitions, social re-adjustment, and long-term educational planning, are becoming more significant. As HR teams continue to place weight on partner-related support, they may be overlooking the real source of anxiety for many assignees - how their children will

adjust to life back home, particularly if they were born and raised in the country of assignment.

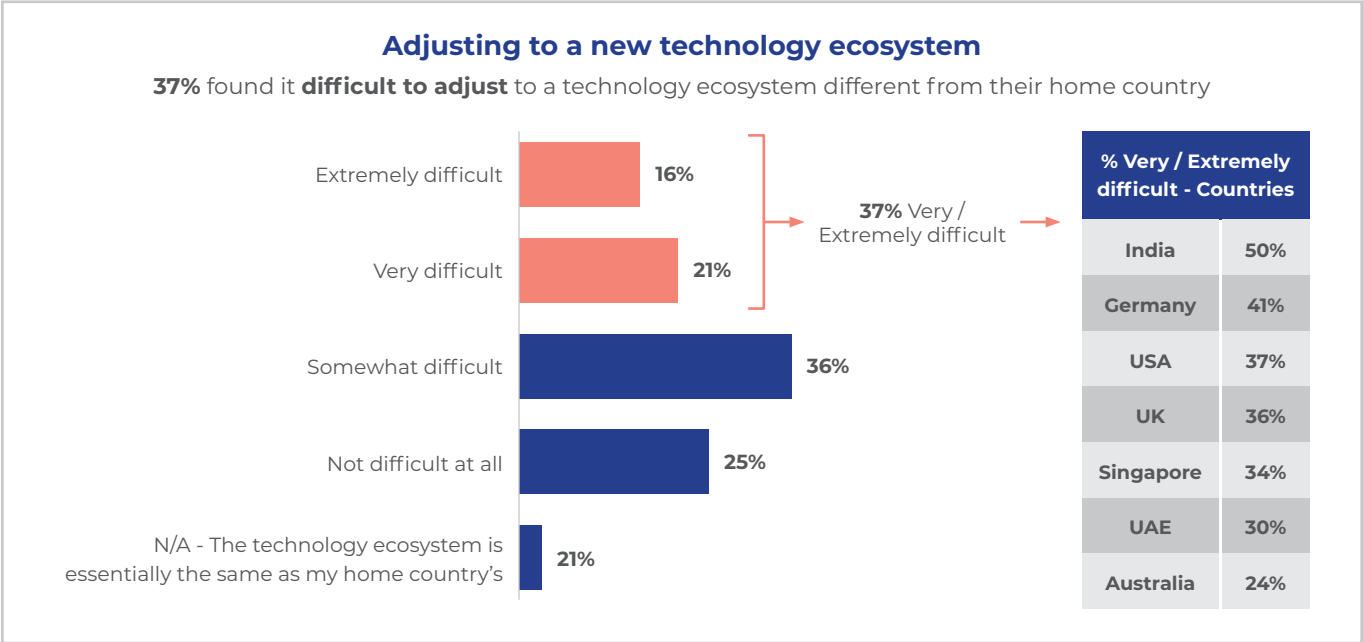
Jo Danehl, Global Intercultural & Language Training Leader, suggests, "HR's focus on partner support during repatriation may need to be rebalanced. The data suggests that children's wellbeing and educational reintegration are becoming increasingly important for assignees, and HR should consider prioritising these concerns."

"HR teams should shift focus toward offering child-specific support. This could include helping with school placements and providing resources for managing reverse culture shock in children. While partner support should not be neglected, prioritising child-centric initiatives is more likely to bring about tangible benefits for the entire family unit, reducing stress and improving overall adjustment."



4 Technology adaptation: An overlooked challenge

Another often overlooked aspect of the repatriation experience is the challenge of technological reintegration. While assignees may have adapted to new systems, tools, and platforms during their time abroad, these tools might be outdated or even completely different from those implemented at their home office.



(Figure 5)

37% of expats found it difficult to adjust to a technology ecosystem different from their home country whilst on assignments, with technology in day-to-day life (43%) and mobile payments and banking (40%) cited as key technological differences (Figure 5). This suggests that since adapting to new technology in their host country was a clear difficulty, expats may also face trouble adapting back to the technology of their home country after being away on assignment for long periods of time. This is supported by data in the HR and mobility manager survey, with 30% of respondents identifying adapting back to home-country technology as a top concern (Figure 1).

These figures therefore indicate the need for a focus on pre-repatriation tech support to help with this adaptation, particularly where advancements may have been made in the home country during the assignment period.

Jo Danehl comments, “Technological issues are frequently under-addressed during repatriation.

And to make matters worse, the inability to operate effectively with new software or systems can add stress to the already challenging transition process. HR teams should recognise that technology presents a legitimate issue and take steps to address it proactively.”

“Offering training on new technologies, providing clear documentation on software updates, and even assigning a dedicated tech support resource can ease the burden on returning employees. This can facilitate a smoother transition back into the workplace, as employees will feel more equipped and confident in using the tools that are now a part of their daily work routine.”

Caitlin Pyett adds, “As technology continues to play an increasingly significant role in both the workplace and daily life, HR teams must recognise the importance of pre-repatriation tech training and support, particularly to bridge the gap between the home and host country.”



Conclusion

The efficacy of global assignments hinges on how effectively organisations support their assignees, not just abroad but also upon their return. Successful repatriation extends beyond logistics and instead requires a nuanced understanding of the human experience and the broad range of challenges faced. Our 2024 research indicates critical gaps in HR's current approach, from over-emphasising cultural adjustment to underestimating career reintegration and technology adaptation. In 2025, HR and mobility managers need to re-evaluate their approach to repatriation.

Repatriation planning must begin well before the assignee's return, focusing not just on cultural re-adaptation, but also career development, family support and technological alignment. Agile strategies that challenge assumptions and can adapt to address these concerns stand to ensure that repatriation becomes a seamless and positive experience for assignees.

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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