RE**PURPOSE**

A focus on the technology sector
from the Global Mobility survey 2020/21

SANTA FE
RELOCATION

Mobility has become more complex and uncertain, and the Global Mobility team is now more visible to leadership.

In the 2019 GMS Report, REVISION** our research clearly highlighted the necessity and desire of Global Mobility professionals to transform their roles to focus on value-based activities such as: talent planning, advisory support, enhanced analytics and risk profiling.**

The Business Leaders research also indicated that they too, were looking for a stronger business contribution from Global Mobility, while recognising that the operational role of mobilising employees still had to be delivered.

Fast forward eighteen months and we are now in the middle of a global pandemic that has dramatically impacted our business and social lives, coupled with an uncertain geopolitical environment and nations that are becoming increasingly partisan. In this report we look at how business and Global Mobility are responding and adapting to these significant external pressures.

As organisations redesign their operating models and adapt to a new normal, so too are Global Mobility teams looking to establish how they will their fit into the new Global Mobility puzzle.

Drawing on industry specific data from our recent published 2020/21 RE**PURPOSE**: CH**ALL**ENGING **CHANGE** report, we take a deeper look at the mobility findings and opportunities for the technology sector, with a focus on transformation and talent.
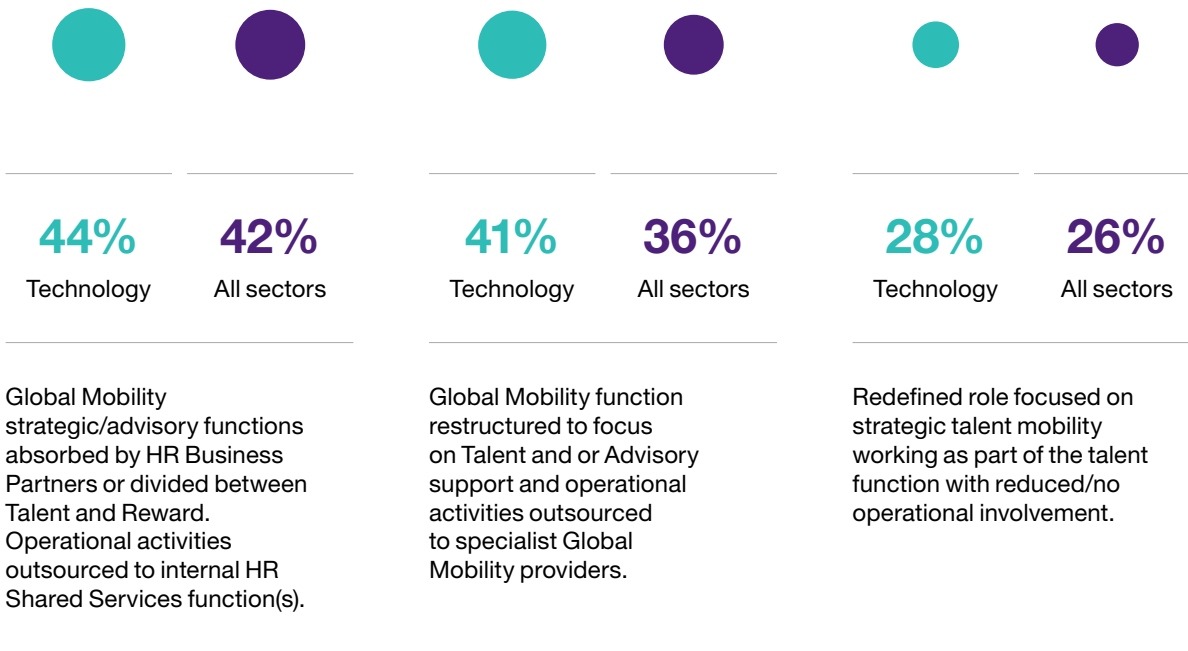
Summary

1	Nearly half (49%) of businesses in technology have already undertaken virtual assignments in the past year, compared to 40% across all sectors—while this trend was already starting to emerge as digital collaboration tools improve, this rise is likely at least in part due to COVID-19 and demonstrates that businesses are keen to facilitate international working arrangements despite travel limitations.
2	Benefits of undertaking international assignments, which are bigger drivers for the technology sector than others, include adding international experience to a CV (31%), enhancing skills by recruiting international hires (30%), earning more money (26%), to improve diversity (25%), to seek an adventure (17%) and to follow a partner (13%).
3	For a notable proportion of companies in the technology sector, one in four (25%), more so than on average (19%), international assignments are seen as mandatory for the most senior staff—the Executive Board, and business area or function heads.
4	To demonstrate value to the wider business team, technology Global Mobility teams are more likely to report on several metrics than average: key talent metrics (40% versus 35%), long-term career success of assignees (32% versus 30%) and KPIs for international compliance (31%% versus 27%)—also by attending executive meetings (35% versus 29%).
5	The technology sector is also much more likely to track employee retention, for a defined period of at least two years (47%), than average (37%)—suggesting that technology mobility teams perceive a greater challenge to hold on to their best talent.

TRANSFORMATION

The year 2020 has, after many months of adapting and reacting to the COVID-19 global pandemic, been a hugely disruptive time for Global Mobility. At the same time, with ways of working and normal life significantly impacted worldwide, the workforce has never before been so reliant and dependent on technology. Therefore, for the technology sector, it is potentially a time for continued growth, although as with all sectors, market uncertainty will likely present problems too.

This article will explore the challenges and opportunities facing those Global Mobility functions working in technology, compared to those across the wider business landscape. As a turbulent, unprecedented year begins to draw to a close and businesses turn their focus to 2021, the structure of Global Mobility teams is likely to evolve, in order to more effectively manage the widening range of competing interests for their time—particularly in the technology sector as shown in **Fig. 1**.
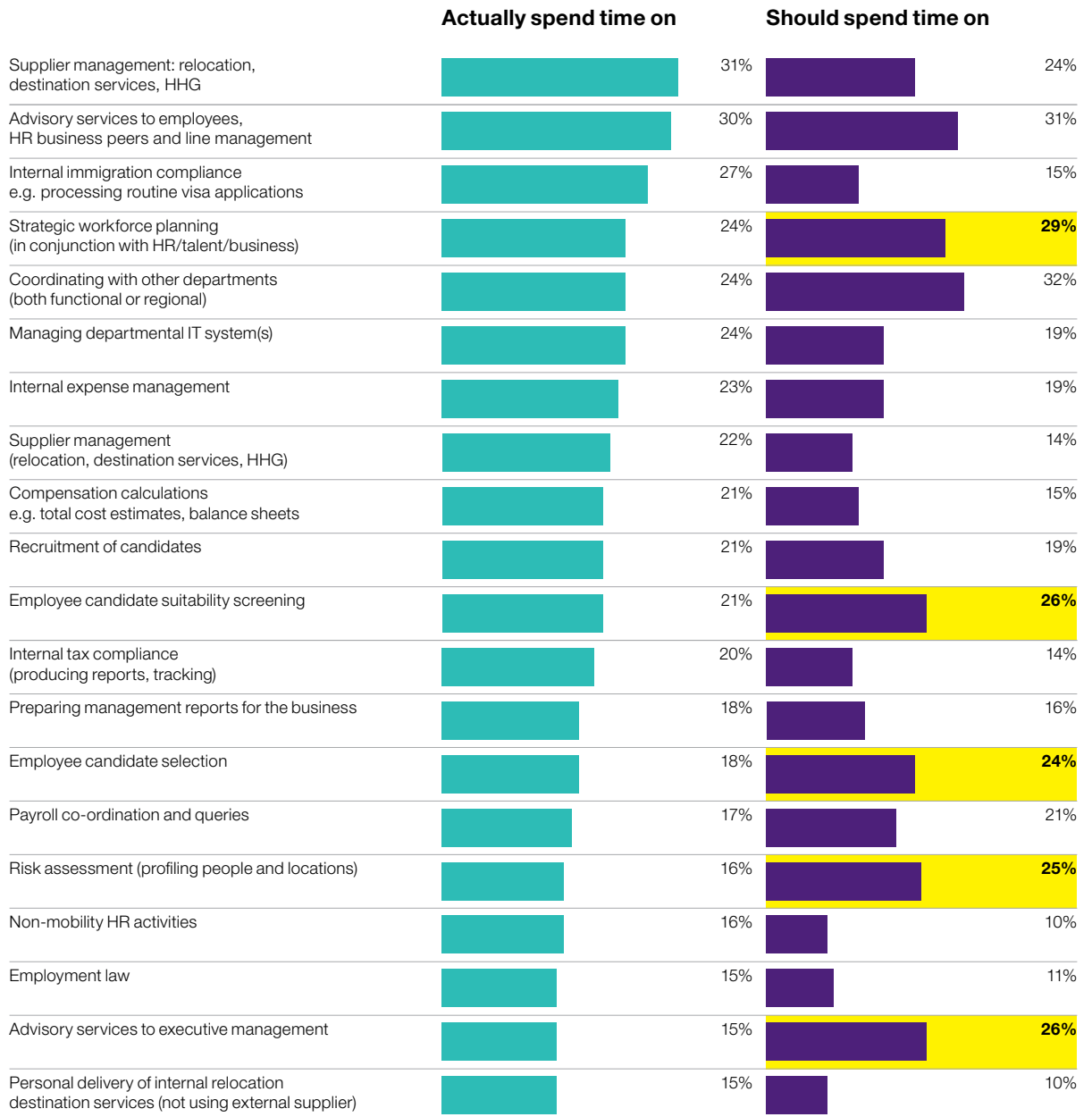
Fig. 1: How Global Mobility team structure will evolve over the next 24 months—top three

44%	**42%**	**41%**	**36%**	**28%**	**26%**
Technology	All sectors	Technology	All sectors	Technology	All sectors

Global Mobility strategic/advisory functions absorbed by HR Business Partners or divided between Talent and Reward. Operational activities outsourced to internal HR Shared Services function(s).

Global Mobility function restructured to focus on Talent and or Advisory support and operational activities outsourced to specialist Global Mobility providers.

Redefined role focused on strategic talent mobility working as part of the talent function with reduced/no operational involvement.

The two most likely scenarios would both allow for greater attention by mobility professionals on talent, and an ongoing outsourcing of operational activities internally within HR or to an external third party. This team structure evolution is reported as more likely in the technology sector than the Global Mobility profession generally. Technology mobility professionals are also more likely to see a redefined role focused on strategic talent mobility, working in the talent function with reduced operational involvement (28%) than average across all sectors (26%). With such a broad remit in Global Mobility, most technology mobility professionals would no doubt welcome the chance to spend less time on tactical or transactional tasks, to free up time for more future-focused strategic work.

However, **Fig. 2** suggests that the greatest part of technology mobility professionals' time is currently being taken up with supplier management (31%), more than advisory services to employees (30%). Is this by choice, role definition or an opportunity to review the existing mobility supply-chain? Cost optimisation and organisational effectiveness may also be a by-product of doing with more less, including Global Mobility providers. With internal immigration compliance the third most likely time allocation (27%), there appears to be relatively less time to prioritise talent strategy. Perhaps a case of 'If I had more time, I could focus on the strategic issues?'.

Fig. 2: Where Global Mobility spend most time versus should be spending their time (Technology)

	Actually spend time on	Should spend time on
Supplier management: relocation, destination services, HHG	31%	24%
Advisory services to employees, HR business peers and line management	30%	31%
Internal immigration compliance e.g. processing routine visa applications	27%	15%
Strategic workforce planning (in conjunction with HR/talent/business)	24%	**29%**
Coordinating with other departments (both functional or regional)	24%	32%
Managing departmental IT system(s)	24%	19%
Internal expense management	23%	19%
Supplier management (relocation, destination services, HHG)	22%	14%
Compensation calculations e.g. total cost estimates, balance sheets	21%	15%
Recruitment of candidates	21%	19%
Employee candidate suitability screening	21%	**26%**
Internal tax compliance (producing reports, tracking)	20%	14%
Preparing management reports for the business	18%	16%
Employee candidate selection	18%	**24%**
Payroll co-ordination and queries	17%	21%
Risk assessment (profiling people and locations)	16%	**25%**
Non-mobility HR activities	16%	10%
Employment law	15%	11%
Advisory services to executive management	15%	**26%**
Personal delivery of internal relocation destination services (not using external supplier)	15%	10%

As technology remains one of the more buoyant sectors both pre-COVID-19 and during the pandemic, Global Mobility professionals recognise the need to repurpose their roles to those activities that will create most value for their organisations; These findings reflect the overall theme that Global Mobility teams want to focus on the areas that are critical to supporting organisational growth.

Critical areas to support organisational growth

32%	Strategic workforce planning
26%	Candidate screening (26%) and selection (24%)
25%	Risk assessment
26%	Advisory services to executive management

This will be important for Global Mobility teams in the technology sector to achieve, as they are even more likely than mobility teams in other sectors to prioritise talent-related metrics to demonstrate value to the wider business. **Fig. 3** highlights that reporting on key talent metrics (40%), attendance/engagement in leadership meetings (35%), and tracking the long-term success on repatriated and serial assignees (32%) reveals a strong focus on talent. This is a tangible example of how Global Mobility is shifting their roles in **Fig. 2.** Thus, this is not just an aspiration, but rather a reality based on their actions.

Fig. 3: Methods used to demonstrate Global Mobility's value to wider business—top four

	Technology	All sectors
Reporting on key talent metrics	**40%**	35%
Attendance at executive meetings	**35%**	29%
Long-term career success of repatriated/serial assignees	**32%**	30%
KPIs for international compliance	31%	27%

■ Technology ■ All sectors

Overall Global Mobility professionals in Technology indicate that they have greater engagement with their leadership through the provision of talent metrics and attendance at executive meetings. Equally, given the nature of the relatively more fluid work arrangements of the sector, they also report greater emphasis on KPIs for international compliance. Similarly, post-arrangement, the most common measure used to track the assignment success is by monitoring general career progression—such as promotion and annual performance ratings for two years.

Fig. 4: Measures used to track the success of international work arrangements—top three

Measure		
Career progression e.g. promotion to more senior grade/ bigger role, tracked for a minimum of two years post assignment completion	Technology	59%
	All sectors	54%
Retention—employee remains with the organisation for a defined period; greater than two years post assignment/international work arrangements	Technology	**47%**
	All sectors	37%
Broader/enhanced competencies and skills in organisation's talent inventory	Technology	45%
	All sectors	38%

■ Technology ■ All sectors

In **Fig. 4**, the technology sector is also much more likely to track employee retention, for a defined period of at least two years (47%), than average (37%). This is suggesting that technology mobility teams perceive much more of a challenge to retain their best talent than others. The opportunity, therefore, for Global Mobility teams, is to ensure they are webbed into stronger networks with their HR peers in talent management, HR business partners and key business stakeholders. Many technology companies have long regarded the talent pool as being global. Recruiting, relocating and even resourcing across borders is a common occurrence in the industry.

The nature of certain roles, the possibility even pre-pandemic, to perform roles remotely meant that as a sector technology was particularly well prepared to adjust to pandemic conditions. That said, all of this meant new compliance obligations are being created. There is a remit question on who manages these obligations is it HR, is mobility is it the business? Perhaps the big question will be the impact of the pandemic: will remote hiring and working across borders start to replace some roles? Developer and programmer roles may follow this direction but customer management, and business development roles less so.
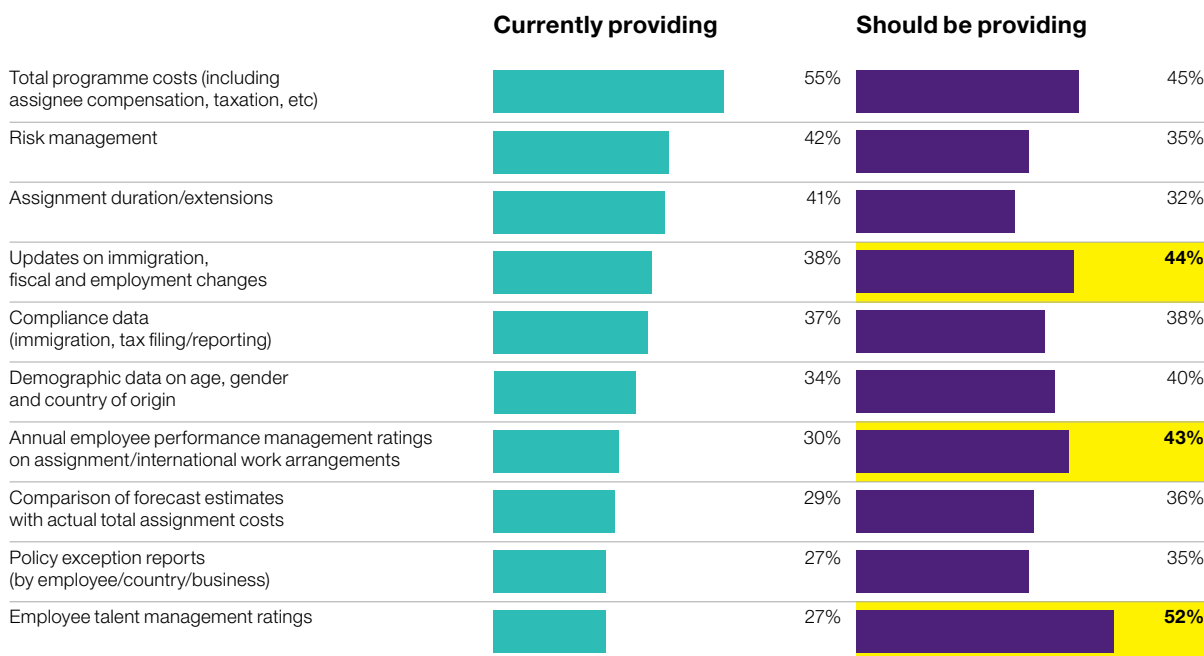
In the startup end of the sector, there has been a mini boom in remote, cross border contingent workers. For the larger scale organisations, they are more likely to use internal talent resources—accessing global talent pools and internal markets for projects too. As a typically young and vibrant industry, with strong competition for the best talent, it would appear that staff retention is a greater challenge than other sectors on average. Moreover, nearly half (45%) of technology mobility teams track broader competencies as well as skills, and are much more likely to do this than other industries.

It is interesting how the role of the virtual assignment has been accelerated within many companies following the impact of Coronavirus. Technology itself is a very broad industry sector and this will work for many companies, although in some businesses this will not replace the traditional relocation experience.
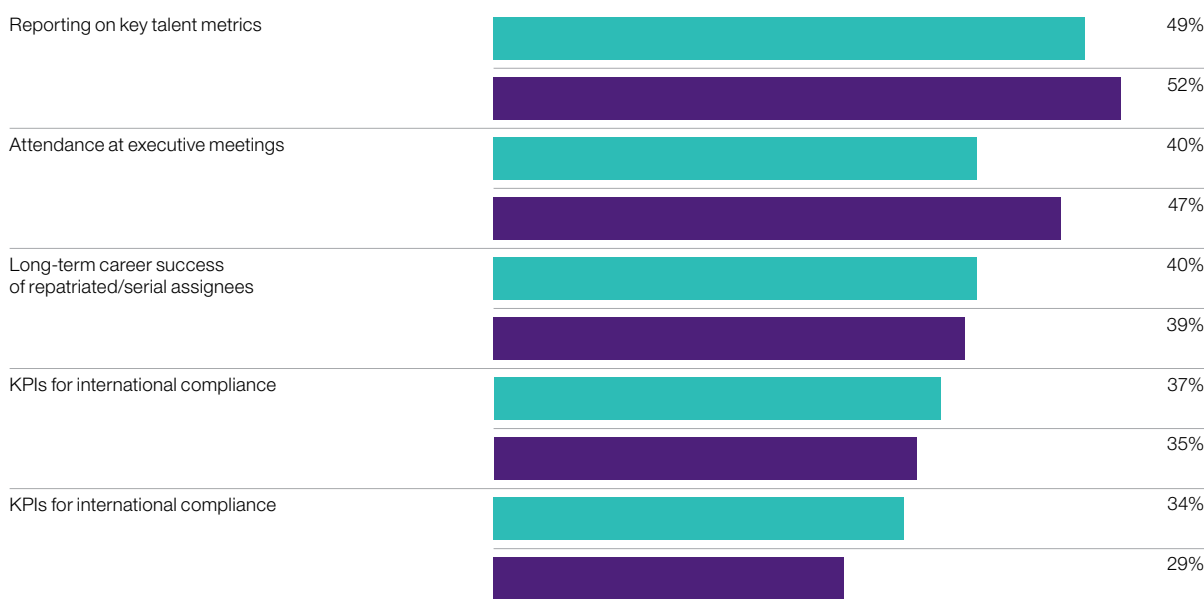
Global Mobility leader, Technology

However, in **Fig. 5** Global Mobility teams in the technology sector still believe they should be focusing even more on providing annual employee management ratings for those undertaking assignments (43%), as well as more general talent management ratings (52%). Over the past five years of tracking this in Santa Fe Relocation's annual Global Mobility report—business leaders want to be informed on the performance and talent potential to validate investment in their people but also be competitively equipped for new projects, succession planning and where to differentially invest in reward solutions. Connected to this is a desire for a greater prioritisation of updates on immigration, fiscal and employment changes (44%).

**Fig. 5: Data Global Mobility teams are currently providing
to the wider business versus data they should be providing (Technology)**

	Currently providing	Should be providing
Total programme costs (including assignee compensation, taxation, etc)	55%	45%
Risk management	42%	35%
Assignment duration/extensions	41%	32%
Updates on immigration, fiscal and employment changes	38%	**44%**
Compliance data (immigration, tax filing/reporting)	37%	38%
Demographic data on age, gender and country of origin	34%	40%
Annual employee performance management ratings on assignment/international work arrangements	30%	**43%**
Comparison of forecast estimates with actual total assignment costs	29%	36%
Policy exception reports (by employee/country/business)	27%	35%
Employee talent management ratings	27%	**52%**

Global Mobility professionals clearly feel that more could be done to report on talent. This is likely due to the need to link their ratings to wider resource planning—as technology is such a buoyant and knowledge-based industry, its talent is in high demand. For many Global Mobility teams in the technology sector however, they will likely need more support as they seek to transform to a more talent-focused role. In **Fig. 6** they outline a range of challenges preventing them from sharing more data around the business. Many teams appear under strain as nearly half (49%) say they do not have enough time or resource to collect the data, although this is slightly better than the average for all Global Mobility teams across sectors (52%).

Fig. 6: Barriers to the provision of data to the wider business

	Technology	All sectors
Reporting on key talent metrics	49%	52%
Attendance at executive meetings	40%	47%
Long-term career success of repatriated/serial assignees	40%	39%
KPIs for international compliance	37%	35%
KPIs for international compliance	34%	29%

■ Technology ■ All sectors

Technology Global Mobility teams also have less difficulty accessing data (40% versus 47% for all sectors), which could be because their businesses are more likely to have stronger technology ecosystems or more affinity with a technology environment. However, a more prevalent challenge appears to be that leadership is not convinced about the value of certain types of data (34% versus 29%), which could also be contributing to teams' knowledge of the right data to provide (37% versus 35%).

This suggests greater engagement is required between HR and business leaders to understand what metrics and data enable them to perceive more value. Regardless of data tracking capabilities and reporting challenges, Global Mobility assignments remain important undertakings for successful organisations. This is expected to continue during the next two years, despite new challenges faced as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic.
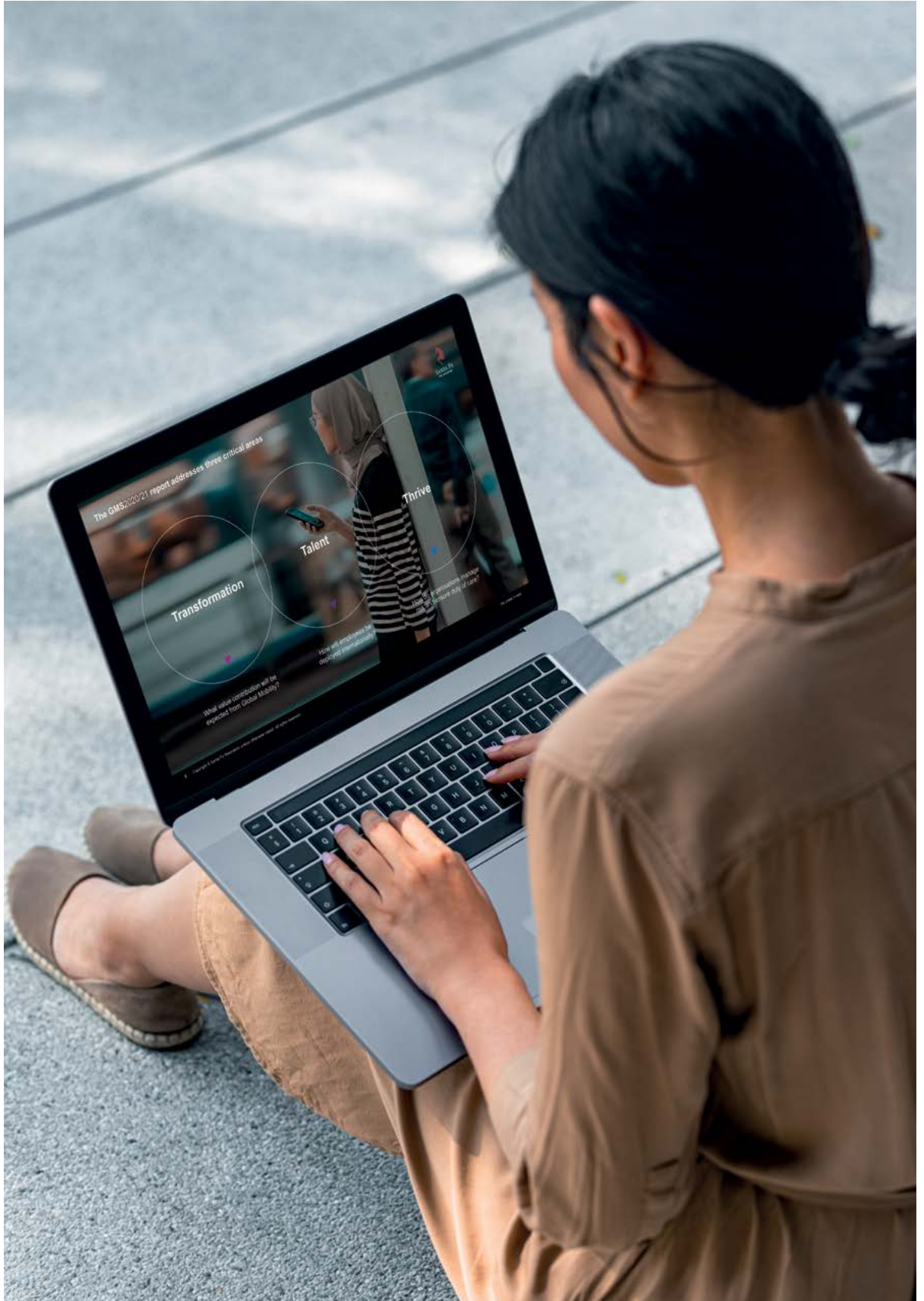
The future of Global Mobility work arrangements in the technology sector

In **Fig. 7** expected net growth is negative for some assignment types, likely due to uncertainty over travel restrictions, costs and actual business cases to undertake traditional assignments. Notably this is the case in particular for strategic long-term assignments over one year (-31%). However, their place is expected to be taken by virtual work arrangements, a new and timely addition to our survey for 2020-21 that are expected to see 41% net growth in the next two years. Nearly half (49%) of businesses in technology have already undertaken this type of assignment in the past year, compared to 40% across all sectors.

Fig. 7: Businesses undertaking assignment types over last 12 months and expected growth in each type of assignment for next 24 months (Technology)
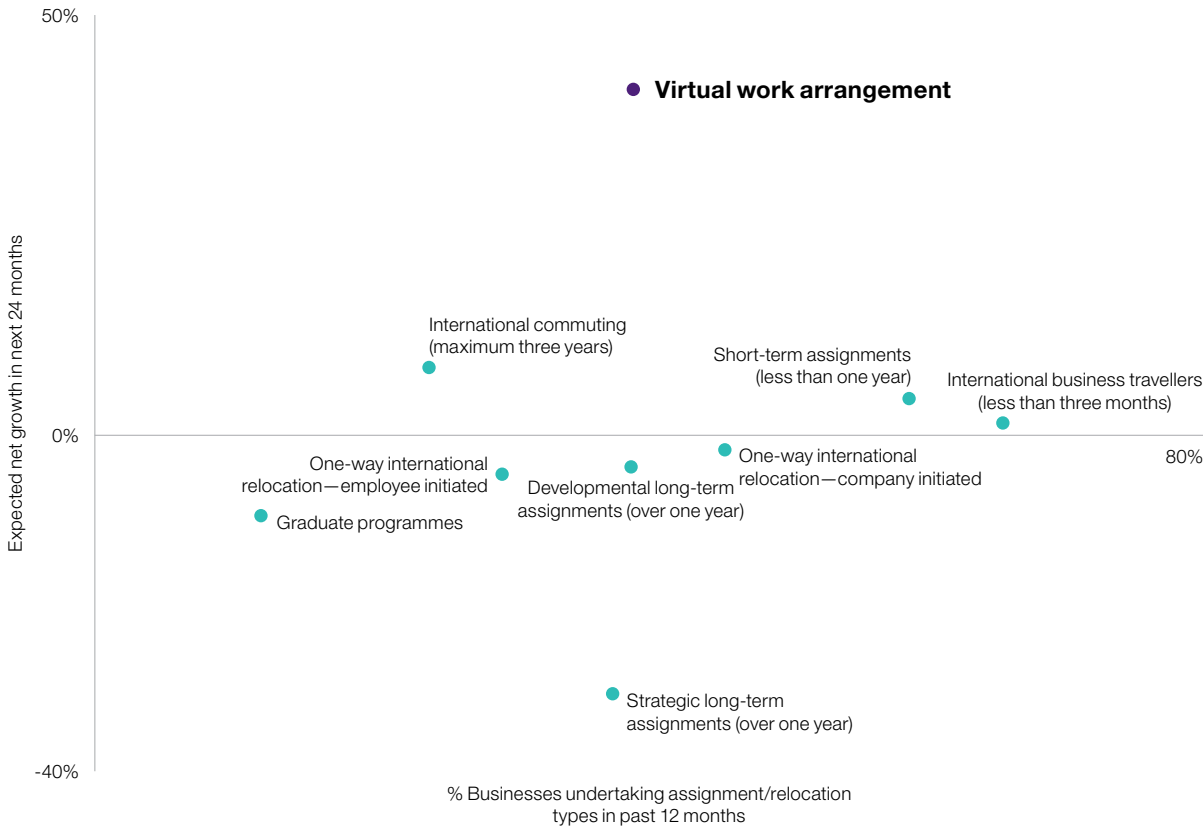

In virtual work arrangements, an employee remains in their home country or in another country outside of their country of employment but works as an individual contributor or as part of a team based elsewhere. Those in the client-facing technology sector are still able to deliver client solutions virtually without necessarily being on-site in a country. On the one hand this could be a reason why the sector is able to remain healthy yet, on the other hand, it also raises broader questions on how best to resource projects and true talent development via international assignments and other work arrangements.

Not least are the potential considerations too, on compliance at a corporate and employer/employee level for immigration, tax and payroll, acquired employment rights and other regional employment considerations such as the amended EU Posted Worker Rights Directive that came into force on 30 July 2020. Although this trend was already starting to emerge as technological collaboration tools improve, this acceleration is likely at least in part due to COVID-19 and demonstrates that businesses are keen to facilitate international working arrangements despite travel limitations.

In terms of gender diversity for the employees undertaking these arrangements, the overall gender split between male and female assignees is similar to the average for all sectors. However, it appears that progress for gender diversity in the technology sector may have stagnated as last year 35% of assignees were women—this year the proportion is 30%.

Fig. 8: Percentage of international assignees who are male and female (Technology)

68%	30%	1%
Male	Female	Other/preferred not to say
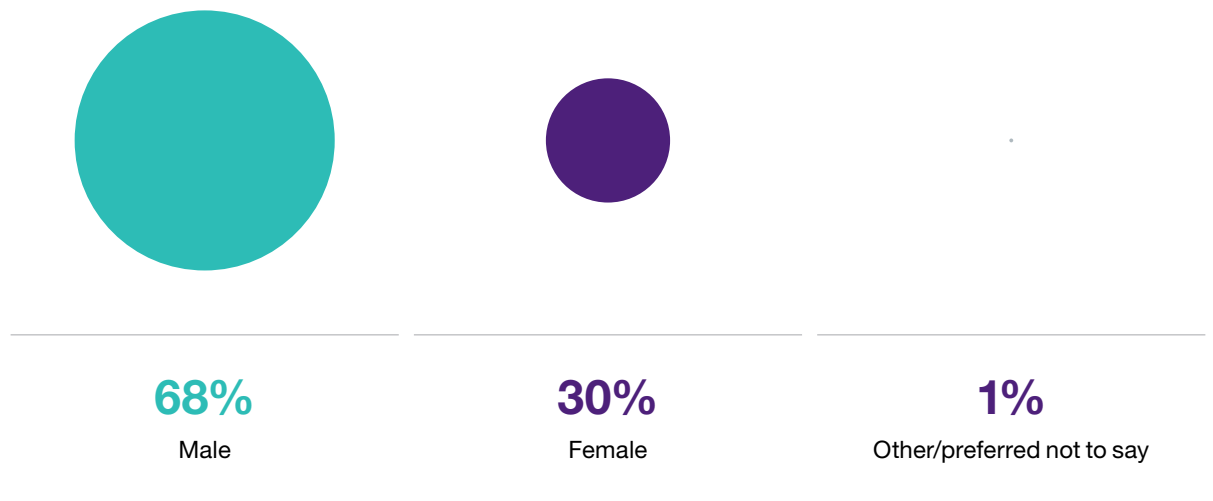
From a talent perspective, this must be an area of opportunity for organisations to enhance their spotlight on diversity and inclusion, to ensure that practices and policies encourage the attraction, engagement and retention of a wider and more diverse workforce.
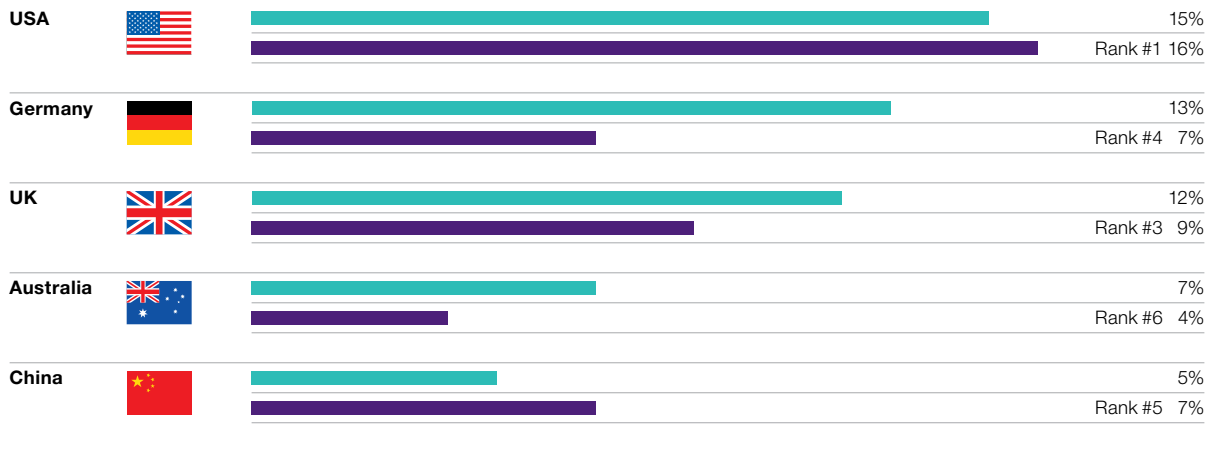
Discussions on future assignment types will really depend on why the person is being sent. A project based assignment need where the work cannot be performed remotely is very different from a leadership level assignment.
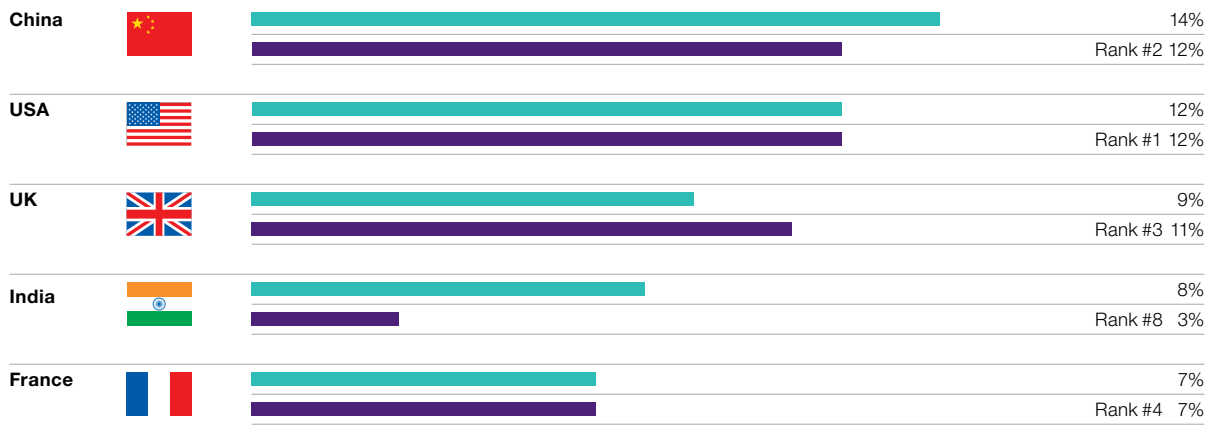
Global Mobility leader, Technology

As with other sectors, **Fig. 9** shows the USA is the most frequent expected assignment destination for businesses over the next 12 months. In contrast to other sectors, Germany is second rather than fourth (it was also the second most expected destination for the technology sector in 2019).

Fig. 9 Most frequent assignment destinations and most frequent locations employees to be sent from (Technology)

Destinations (% most common 2020)

Country	Technology	All sectors
USA	15%	Rank #1 16%
Germany	13%	Rank #4 7%
UK	12%	Rank #3 9%
Australia	7%	Rank #6 4%
China	5%	Rank #5 7%

Sending from (% most sent from 2020)

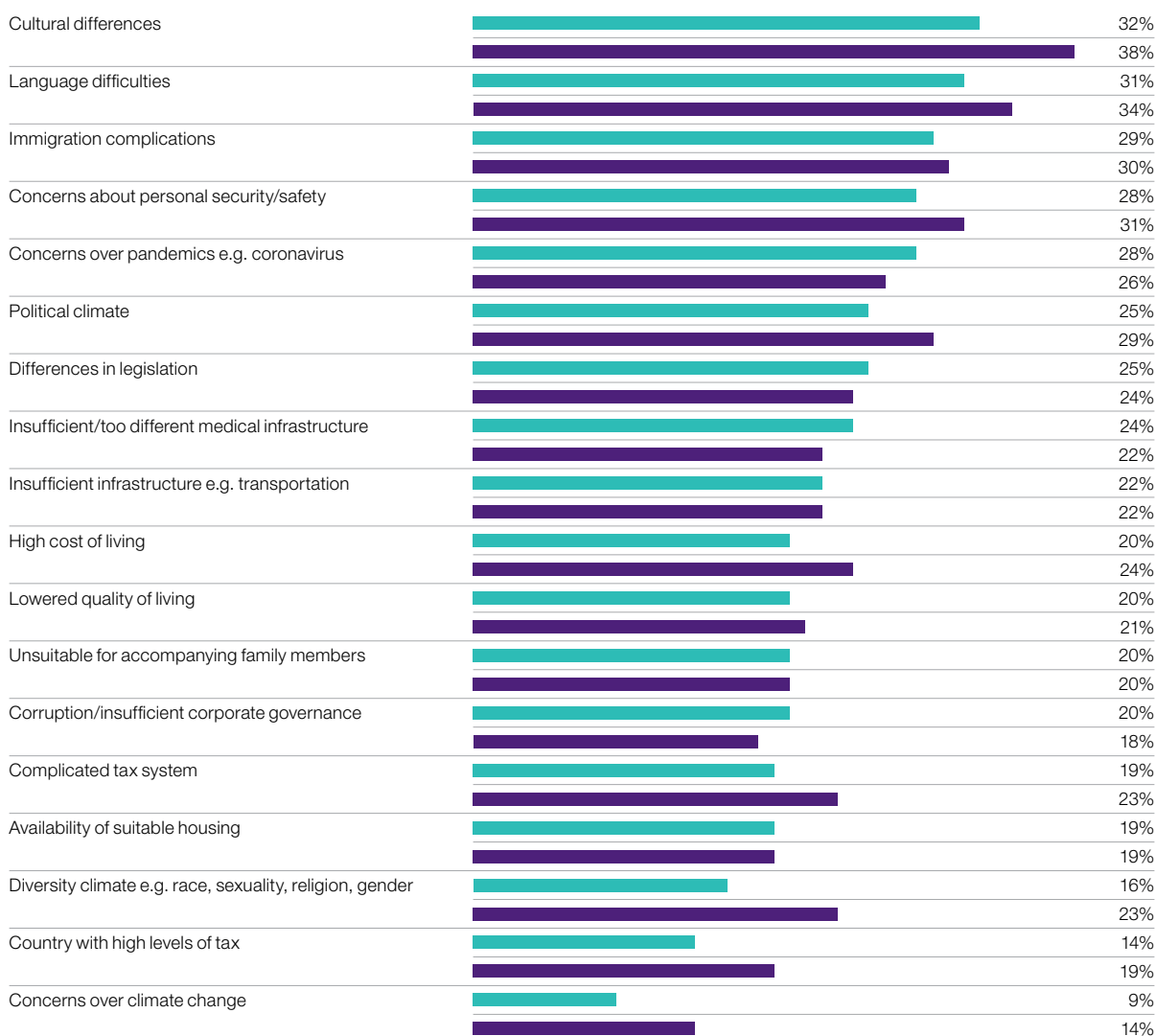| Country	Technology	All sectors
China	14%	Rank #2 12%
USA	12%	Rank #1 12%
UK	9%	Rank #3 11%
India	8%	Rank #8 3%
France	7%	Rank #4 7%

■ Technology ■ All sectors

For sending locations, in the technology sector India features in the top five, instead of Germany which features in the average statistics across sectors. The two most challenging relocation destinations for the technology sector are the same as for the average across sectors, it is the USA and China.

Fig. 10 Most challenging relocation destinations 2020 (Technology)

🇺🇸	**19%** USA #1	🇨🇳	**14%** China #2
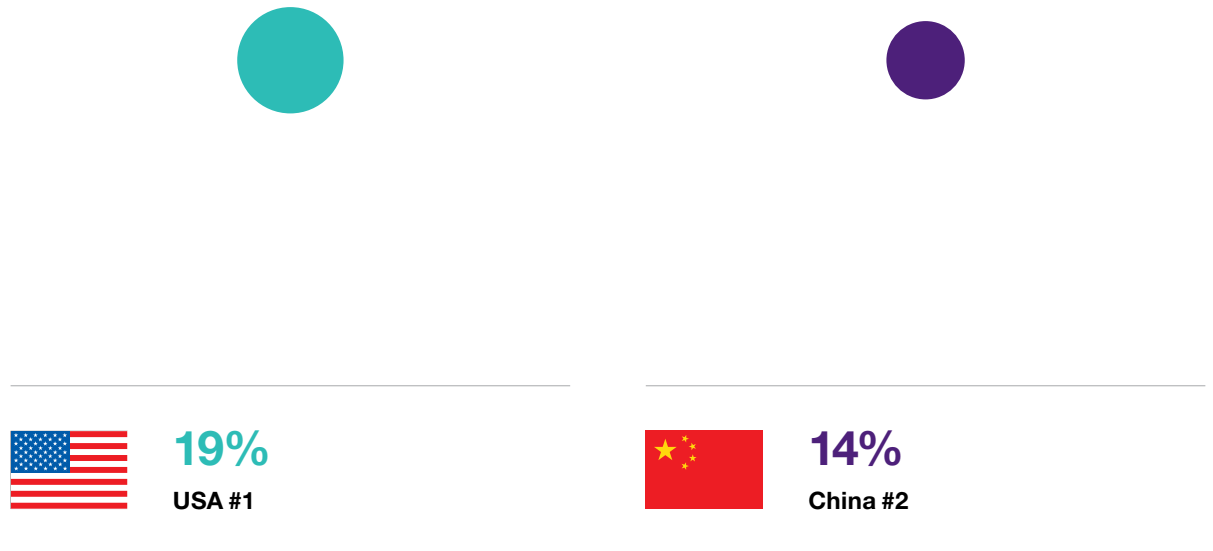
The most common challenges, similar to other sectors, are primarily socio-cultural i.e. cultural differences and language difficulties, as opposed to other more functional issues. Since last year for the technology sector, concerns over a high cost of living have been replaced in the top five challenges by language difficulties— perhaps suggesting that cultural awareness in general is moving higher up on the agenda.

Fig. 11: Why are these destinations most challenging?

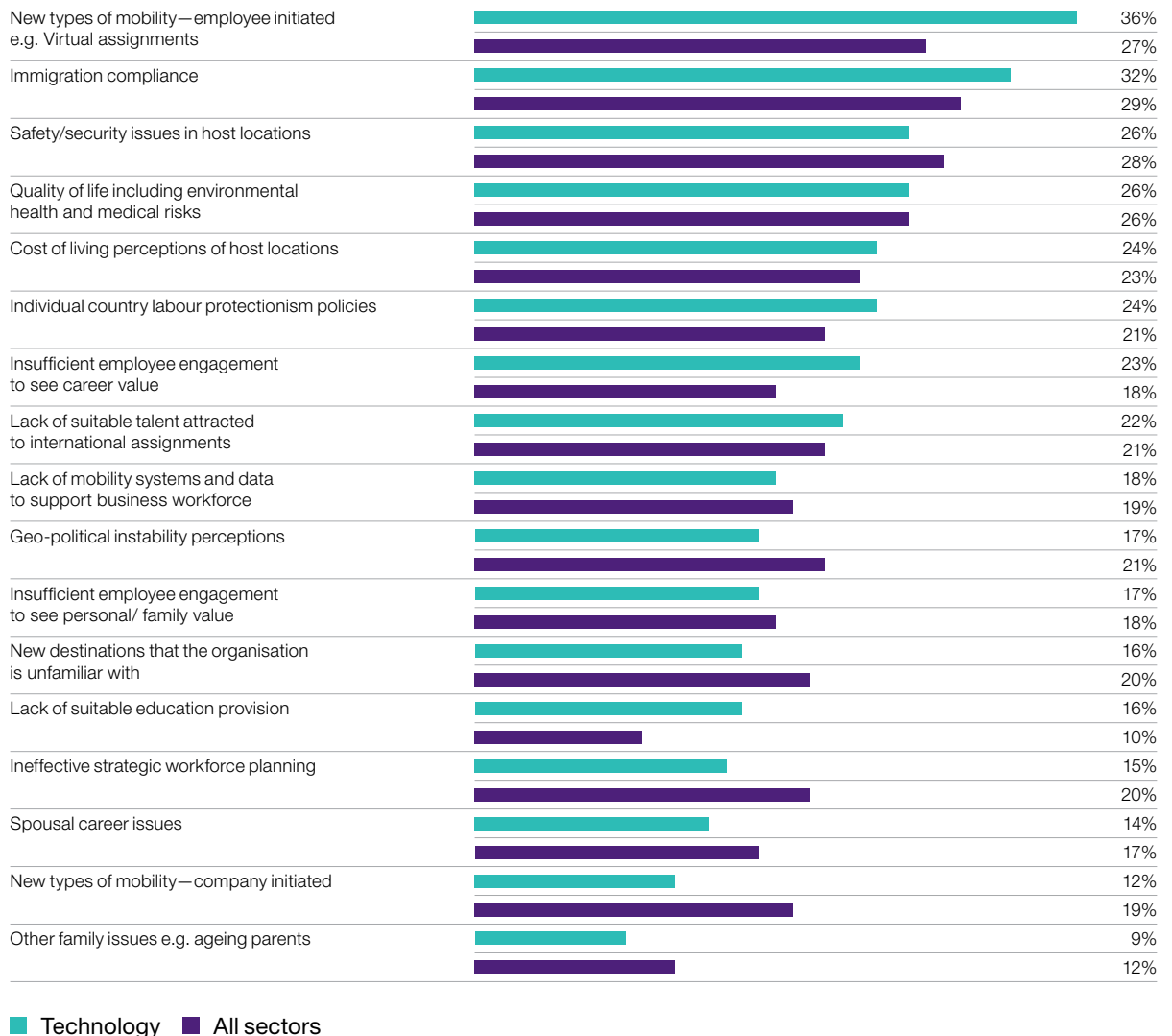| Challenge	Technology	All sectors
Cultural differences	32%	38%
Language difficulties	31%	34%
Immigration complications	29%	30%
Concerns about personal security/safety	28%	31%
Concerns over pandemics e.g. coronavirus	28%	26%
Political climate	25%	29%
Differences in legislation	25%	24%
Insufficient/too different medical infrastructure	24%	22%
Insufficient infrastructure e.g. transportation	22%	22%
High cost of living	20%	24%
Lowered quality of living	20%	21%
Unsuitable for accompanying family members	20%	20%
Corruption/insufficient corporate governance	20%	18%
Complicated tax system	19%	23%
Availability of suitable housing	19%	19%
Diversity climate e.g. race, sexuality, religion, gender	16%	23%
Country with high levels of tax	14%	19%
Concerns over climate change	9%	14%

■ Technology ■ All sectors

Diversity considerations are seen as less of a challenge for technology compared to other sectors—this could be because the sector itself is already relatively diverse. Concerns over pandemics, such as coronavirus, also features as one of the top five reasons—while this may be expected to be one of the first risks, it is likely due to it being a global challenge rather than linked to any one country. Risk mitigation for COVID-19 will impact objectives, until a vaccine is available, as well as other safety and security issues in host locations. Immigration compliance is also expected to continue to be challenging according to technology Global Mobility professionals (32% versus 29% for all sectors).

Moreover, **Fig. 12** shows that, although the technology sector is likely to be amongst the best equipped to embrace new types of mobility such as virtual assignments, technology Global Mobility professionals also see this as much more of a challenge for the next two years than other sectors (36% versus 27%).

Already an option before the COVID-19 crisis, the growth of virtual assignments will now accelerate—and with this, there will be immigration compliance challenges to meet and manage as well (32% versus 29%).

Fig. 12: Main challenges expected to achieving Global Mobility objectives over the next 24 months

Challenge	Technology	All sectors
New types of mobility—employee initiated e.g. Virtual assignments	36%	27%
Immigration compliance	32%	29%
Safety/security issues in host locations	26%	28%
Quality of life including environmental health and medical risks	26%	26%
Cost of living perceptions of host locations	24%	23%
Individual country labour protectionism policies	24%	21%
Insufficient employee engagement to see career value	23%	18%
Lack of suitable talent attracted to international assignments	22%	21%
Lack of mobility systems and data to support business workforce	18%	19%
Geo-political instability perceptions	17%	21%
Insufficient employee engagement to see personal/ family value	17%	18%
New destinations that the organisation is unfamiliar with	16%	20%
Lack of suitable education provision	16%	10%
Ineffective strategic workforce planning	15%	20%
Spousal career issues	14%	17%
New types of mobility—company initiated	12%	19%
Other family issues e.g. ageing parents	9%	12%

■ Technology   ■ All sectors

In **Fig. 7** we saw how the technology sector is ahead of other sectors already in its use of virtual assignments—therefore it could also be that technology Global Mobility professionals are also more aware of the challenges such new types of mobility could pose in the future.
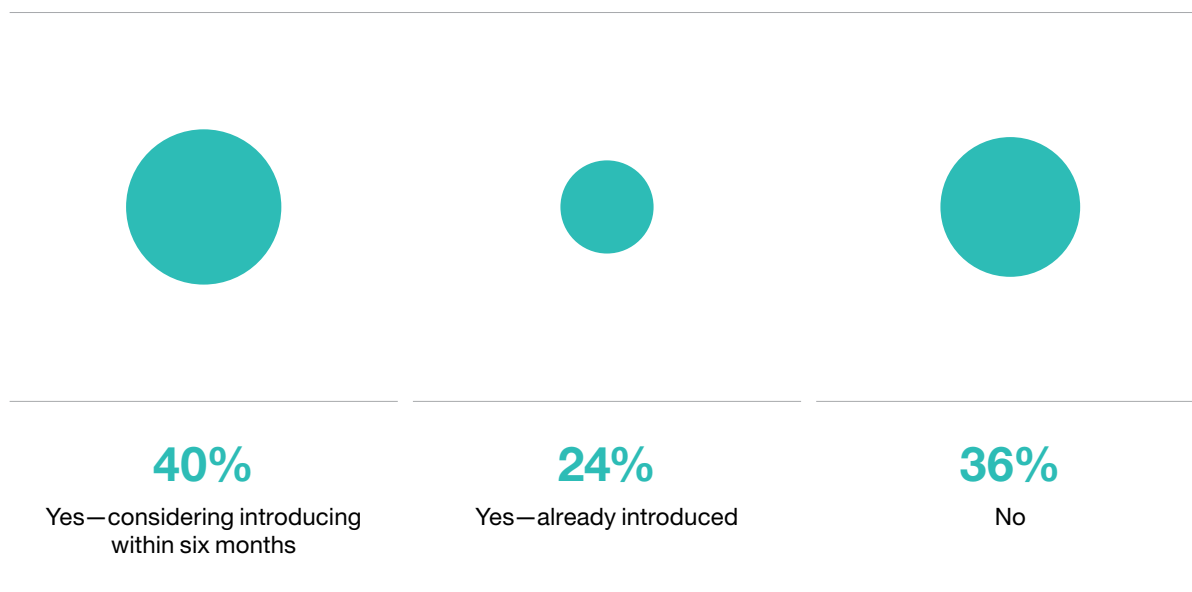
However, this will be an important challenge for the technology sector to plan ahead for, given that offices and technology campuses are amongst the last establishments to re-open in the aftermath of COVID-19.

With so many challenges to overcome, it will be important for businesses to show that they are willing to put assignees' personal needs first when relocating them. Key to this will be the use of more flexible policies tailored to suit the needs of the individuals and their families.
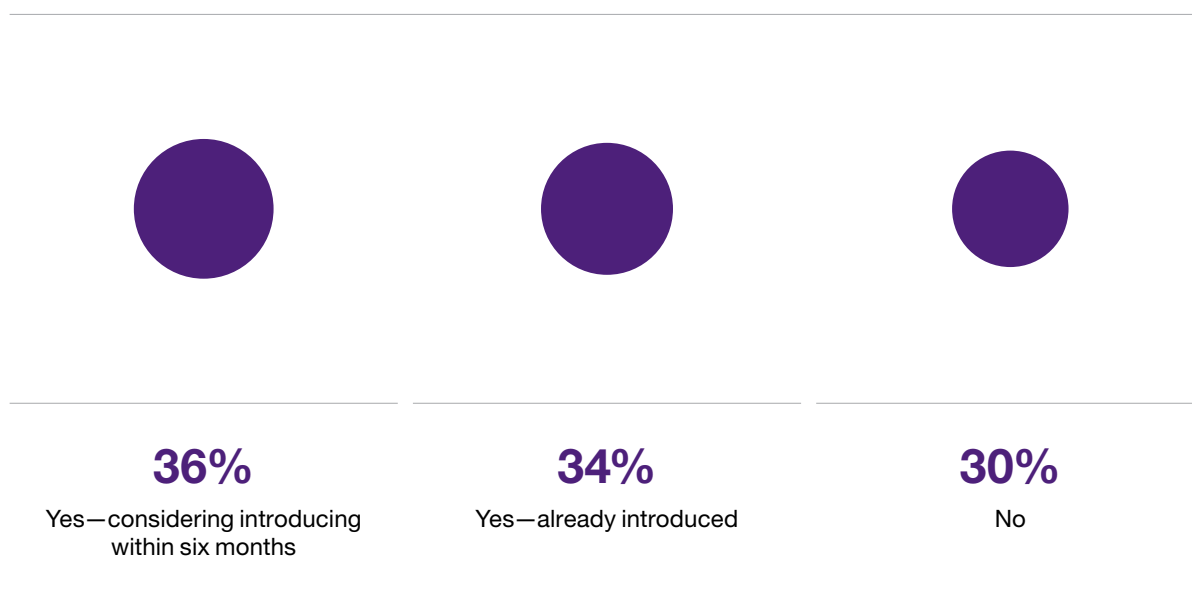
However, this is an area where currently the technology sector appears to be lagging behind other sectors, with a lower proportion of businesses having introduced such policies (24%) than average (34%) at **Fig. 13**. Over a third (36%) are not yet considering introducing these more flexible arrangements within the next six months.

Fig. 13: Introduction of new policies to provide more flexible arrangements within a mandatory/flex (Core/Flex) policy framework
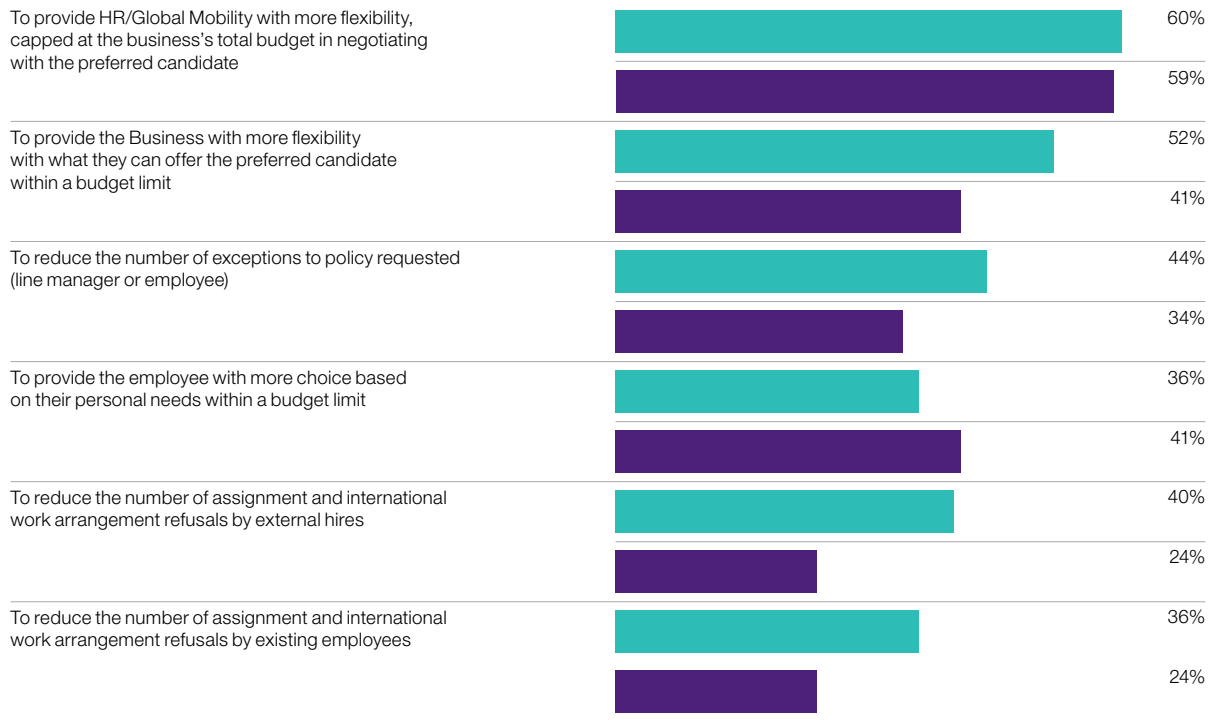
Technology

40%	**24%**	**36%**
Yes—considering introducing within six months	Yes—already introduced	No

All sectors

36%	**34%**	**30%**
Yes—considering introducing within six months	Yes—already introduced	No

The most common current reasons for implementing greater flexibility are weighted towards allowing more choice for the business, rather than giving more flexibility to the employee. The nature of the sector may also be that less traditional long-term assignment resources are required, which often require less choice in the selection of relocation solutions—instead, they require time effective, agile solutions that enable the employee to deploy quickly and compliantly.

The focus though, is more on technical project delivery than the broader developmental and intercultural experience for the employee and family (which may be less frequently applied as well). This allows for a more pragmatic approach to better match the business needs and cost profile, while considering the varying circumstances of the employees.
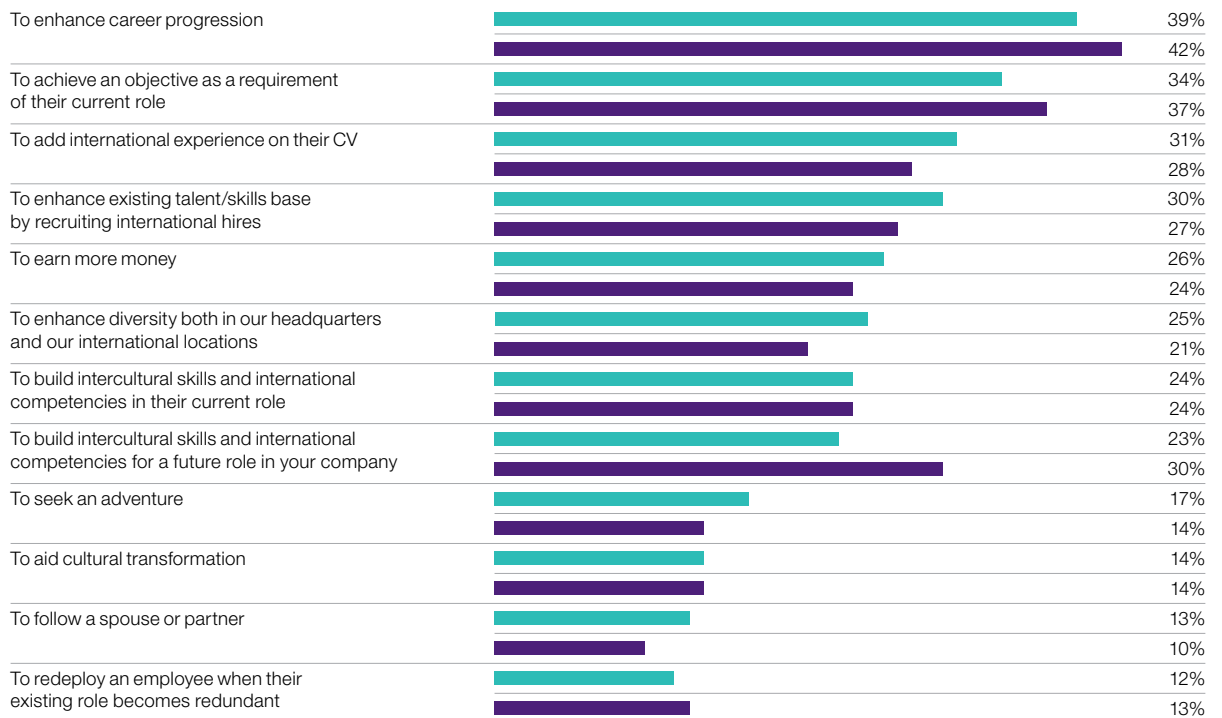
Fig. 14: Reasons for implementing/considering a Core/Flex policy framework

	Technology	All sectors
To provide HR/Global Mobility with more flexibility, capped at the business's total budget in negotiating with the preferred candidate	60%	59%
To provide the Business with more flexibility with what they can offer the preferred candidate within a budget limit	52%	41%
To reduce the number of exceptions to policy requested (line manager or employee)	44%	34%
To provide the employee with more choice based on their personal needs within a budget limit	36%	41%
To reduce the number of assignment and international work arrangement refusals by external hires	40%	24%
To reduce the number of assignment and international work arrangement refusals by existing employees	36%	24%

■ Technology   ■ All sectors

Whether assignments take place within a more flexible policy framework or not, these opportunities provide unrivalled prospects for talent. Benefits considered bigger drivers for the technology sector than others include adding international experience to a CV (31%), enhancing skills by recruiting international hires (30%), earning more money (26%), to improve diversity (25%), to seek an adventure (17%) and to follow a partner (13%).

Fig. 15: Key drivers for employees undertaking international assignments

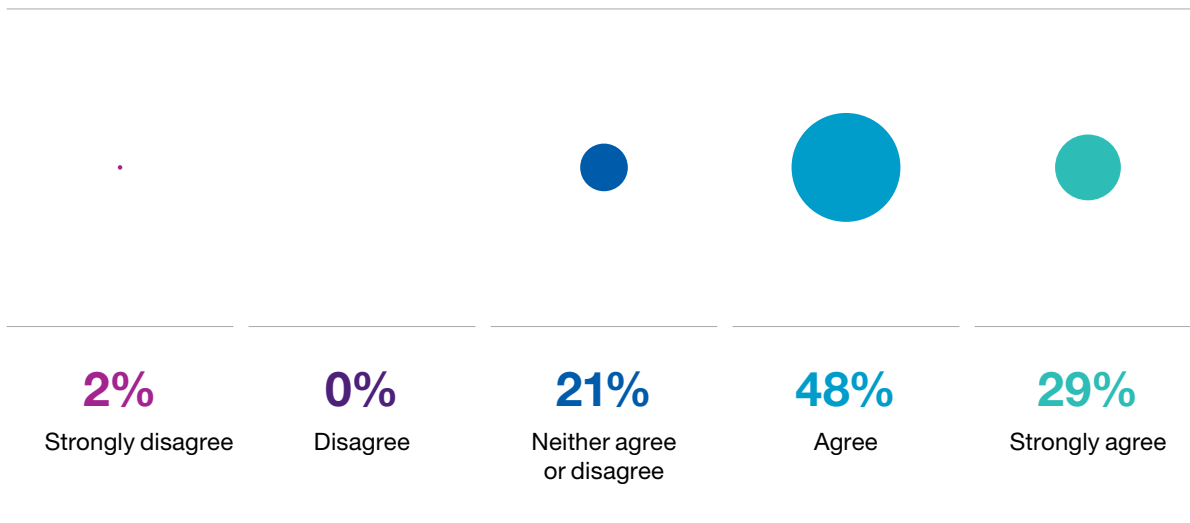|	Technology	All sectors
To enhance career progression	39%	42%
To achieve an objective as a requirement of their current role	34%	37%
To add international experience on their CV	31%	28%
To enhance existing talent/skills base by recruiting international hires	30%	27%
To earn more money	26%	24%
To enhance diversity both in our headquarters and our international locations	25%	21%
To build intercultural skills and international competencies in their current role	24%	24%
To build intercultural skills and international competencies for a future role in your company	23%	30%
To seek an adventure	17%	14%
To aid cultural transformation	14%	14%
To follow a spouse or partner	13%	10%
To redeploy an employee when their existing role becomes redundant	12%	13%

■ Technology   ■ All sectors

Similar to other sectors, there are two main drivers for employees in technology undertaking international assignments—the first is to enhance career progression (39%), demonstrating that international assignments are likely to aid personal development.

The second most important driver, achieving objectives as part of their current role (34%), shows that assignments are considered as part of a formal assessment structure within organisations. This is possibly either as part of a promotion and opportunity system, or as roles are more commonly being expanded to include international responsibilities. All in all, assignments can serve as a means of fast-tracking talent for greater career progression, shown at **Fig. 16**.

The vast majority (77%) agree that employees completing international assignments tend to achieve more than in their careers than those who do not, suggesting that international assignments can serve as an important and valuable gateway to greater career progression.

Fig. 16: Do employees who have undertaken international assignments achieve greater career progression?

Technology

2%	**0%**	**21%**	**48%**	**29%**
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

All sectors

1%	**2%**	**15%**	**54%**	**28%**
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
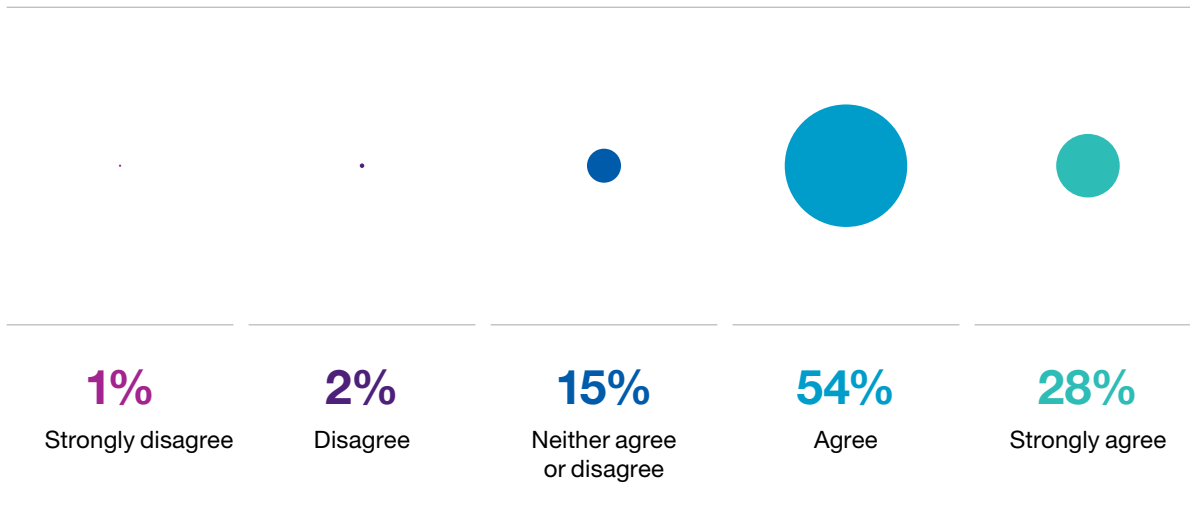
Specifically, they are a key means of ensuring talent can go on to become a successful business leader or manager. For a notable proportion of companies—one in four (25%), more so than on average (19%), international assignments are seen as mandatory for the most senior staff for example, the executive board, and business area or function heads.

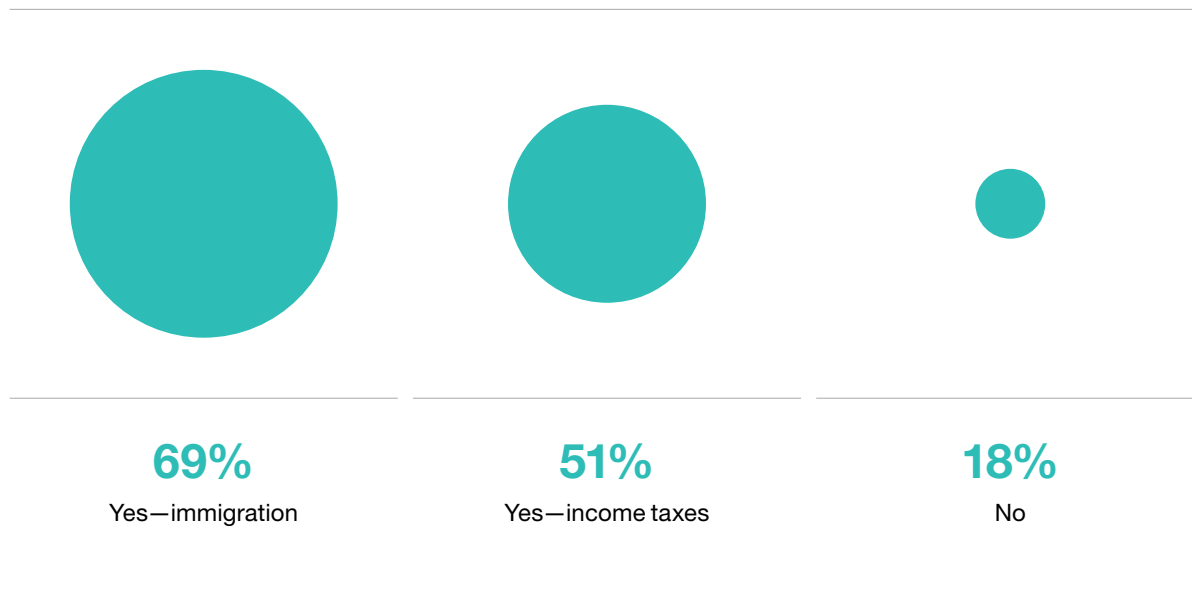**Fig. 17: Talent strategy for using international assignments**
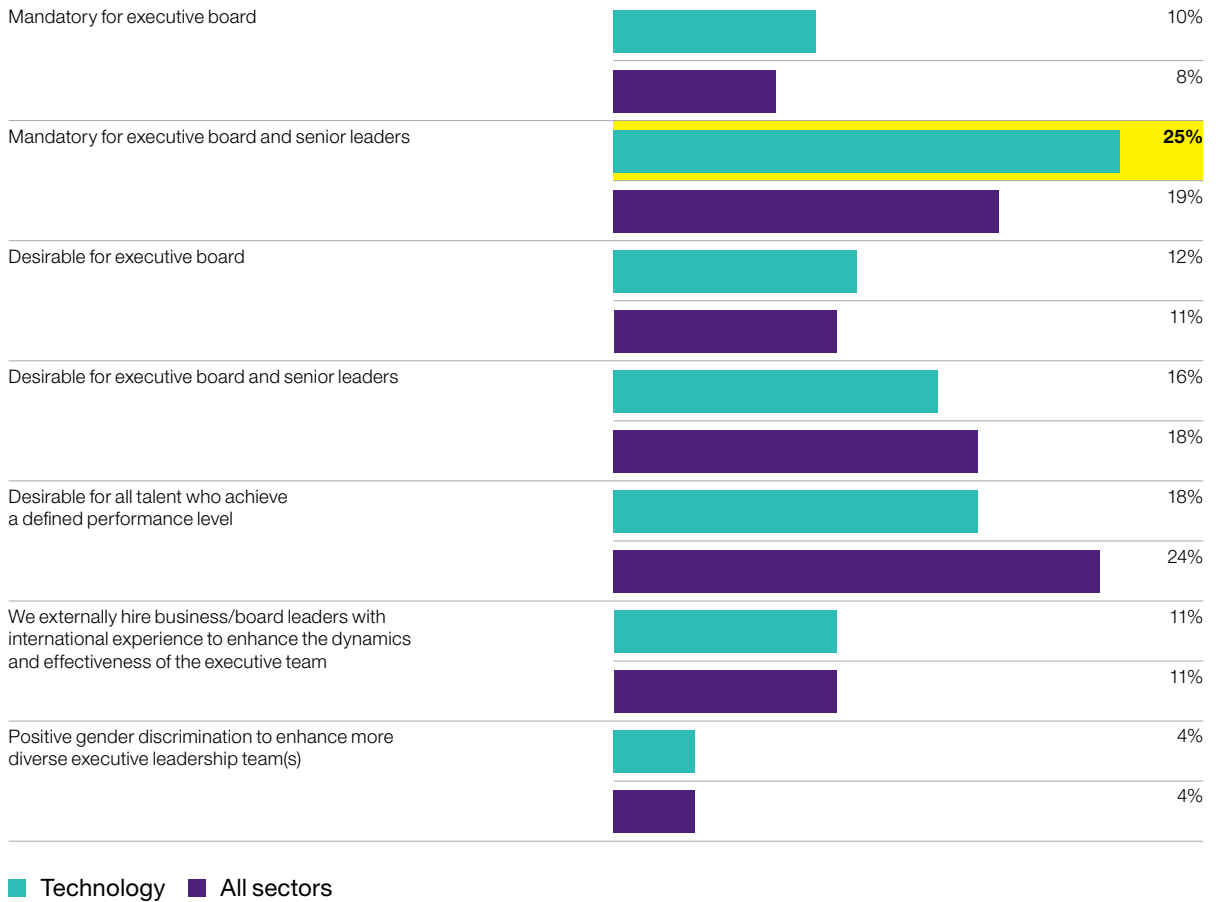
	Technology	All sectors
Mandatory for executive board	10%	8%
Mandatory for executive board and senior leaders	**25%**	19%
Desirable for executive board	12%	11%
Desirable for executive board and senior leaders	16%	18%
Desirable for all talent who achieve a defined performance level	18%	24%
We externally hire business/board leaders with international experience to enhance the dynamics and effectiveness of the executive team	11%	11%
Positive gender discrimination to enhance more diverse executive leadership team(s)	4%	4%

■ Technology ■ All sectors

In all, 2021 and beyond will be a significant year from Global Mobility with continuing pressure on Global Mobility and all downstream activity but more related to recovery efforts than the pandemic itself…and the question for Global Mobility professionals is one of adaptation to best respond to changing demand.

Global Mobility leader, Technology

As we have seen throughout this report, compliance will continue to be complex for Global Mobility and HR teams in the technology sector, even more so in a post COVID-19 landscape. The majority of businesses (82%) have a programme in place to ensure that international business travel is compliant. This is either for immigration requirements (69%) or income taxes (51%), although it is slightly below the average for all sectors.

Fig. 18: Do Global Mobility professionals have a programme in place to ensure international business travel is compliant?

Technology

69%	**51%**	**18%**
Yes—immigration	Yes—income taxes	No

All sectors

71%	**54%**	**16%**
Yes—immigration	Yes—income taxes	No
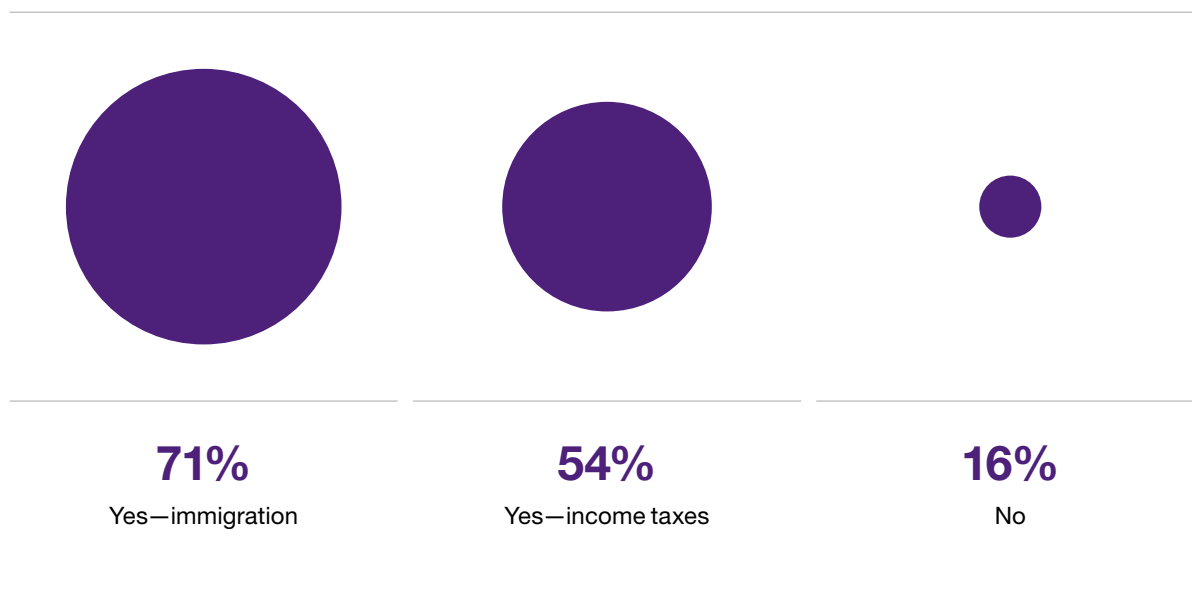
Fig. 19: Is this programme managed through technology?

Response	Technology	All sectors
Yes—Excel spreadsheets	73%	75%
Yes—tools provided by other provider	7%	4%
Yes—tools provided by immigration advisor	4%	3%
Yes—tools provided by tax advisor	3%	4%
No	13%	15%

■ Technology ■ All sectors
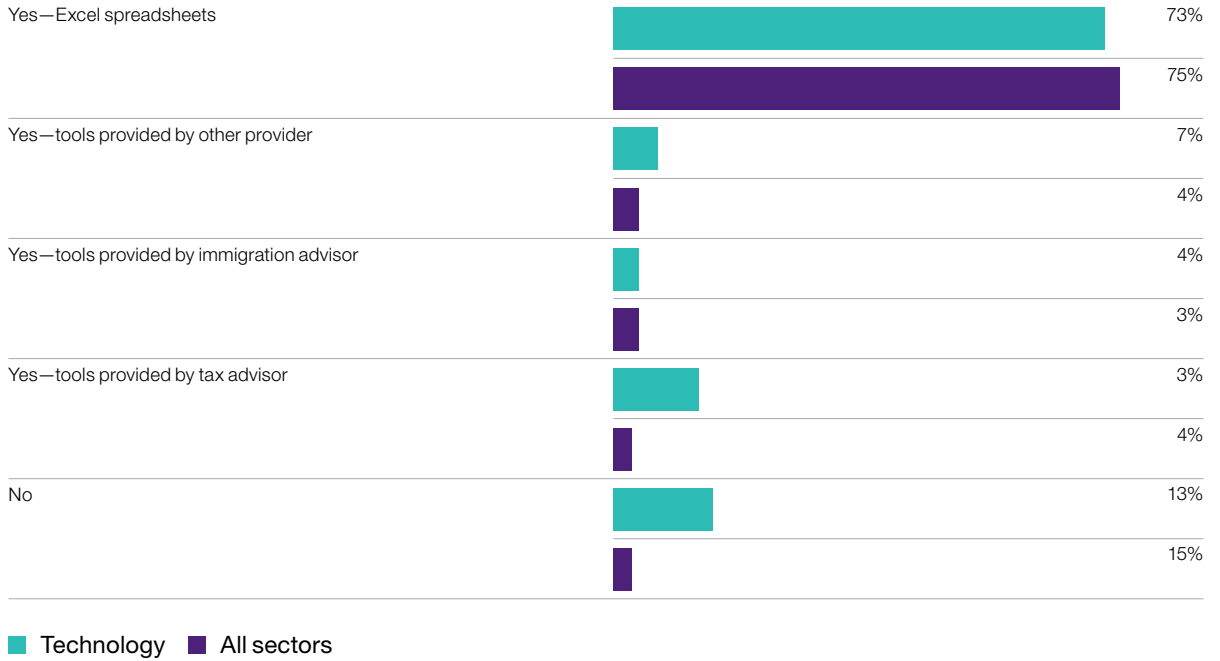
While in most cases this programme is managed through technology, it tends to be basic methods such as Excel spreadsheets (73%) in use. Considering the advanced digital ecosystems that most technology companies have in place, there is a case to be made for more advanced tools to be adopted for managing Global Mobility as well, in order to improve efficiency and efficacy around compliance for international travel.

This becomes even more compelling when we note that Global Mobility professionals, particularly in the Technology sector, are expecting increasing compliance complexities to have a significant impact on their team over the next 24 months.

There is also significant recognition that they will take on increased responsibility to prepare employees for host country socio/political and environmental conditions over the 24 months as well. This is the case for 32% for the technology sector, compared to 27% for all sectors on average, at **Fig. 20**.

Fig. 20: Global Mobility view of interventions and trends having a significant impact on Global Mobility function over the next 24 months—top five

Intervention/Trend	Technology	All sectors
Increasing compliance complexities (tax, employment or immigration)	37%	31%
Increased responsibility of employers to prepare all internationally mobile employees for host country socio/political and environmental conditions	32%	27%
More cultural diversity	27%	23%
Global Mobility teams/function fragmented into talent, shared services etc	26%	23%
Increased use of artificial intelligence (robotics, chatbots, etc)	25%	27%

■ Technology ■ All sectors

One in four also expect to see more cultural diversity in Global Mobility (27% versus 23%) and division into separate talent, shared services and compliance functions (26% versus 23%). The latter could help teams to be better resourced to focus on their key goals, such as assignee development and overcoming compliance complexity. A quarter also see an opportunity for increased use of artificial intelligence in Global Mobility.

For example, chatbots to improve the experience for employees and their families—to help ensure communication is always available and questions are answered even when resources are stretched. In fact, the biggest impact of digital innovation generally in the technology sector is expected to be the freeing up of more time, to focus on advisory and strategic activities.

In **Fig. 21**, nearly half (43%) see this impact compared to 36% across all sectors. Notably there are also opportunities for digital innovation to improve the management of compliance and risk through better connected systems and processes (41%), and to provide enhanced data analytics for workforce planning (40%).

A common theme here is the role that digital innovation can play in enhancing the employee experience—ensuring that appropriate technological solutions are in place will be key to helping Global Mobility to win hearts and minds, as it looks to inspire its assignees and help them thrive.

Fig. 21: Global Mobility's awareness of digital innovation—top three
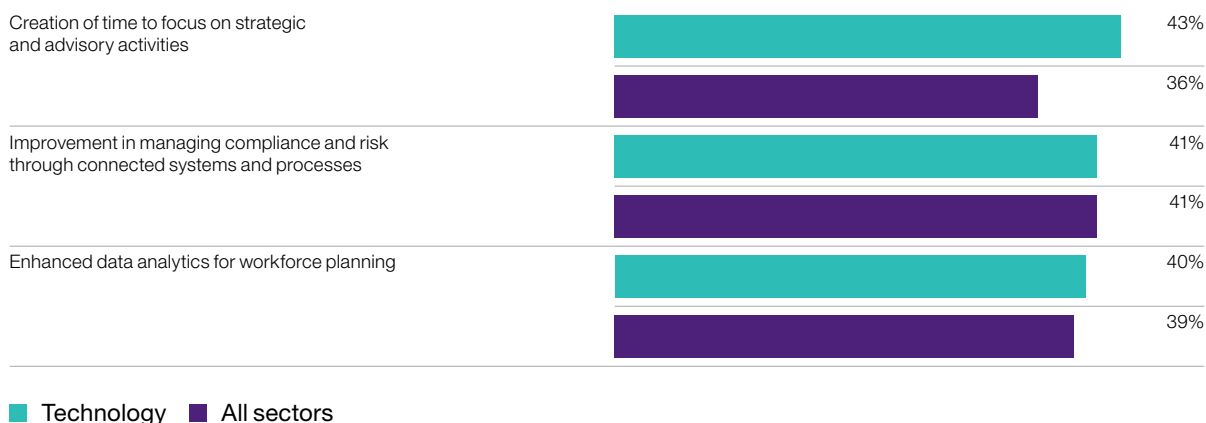
	Technology	All sectors
Creation of time to focus on strategic and advisory activities	43%	36%
Improvement in managing compliance and risk through connected systems and processes	41%	41%
Enhanced data analytics for workforce planning	40%	39%

■ Technology ■ All sectors

It is likely the Global Mobility leadership and specialists will have a broader view of the range of interdependencies we now face in terms of meeting post-COVID employee expectations on location agnostic work arrangements, the added complexities (human and regulatory) of running a cross-border mobility program, all while managing costs in a more challenging economic environment.

Global Mobility leader, Technology

REFLECTIONS

Global Mobility leader one, international technology company

This report is very insightful and shows that the technology sector faces the same challenges as other industry sectors. However the detailed analysis identifies the themes common to our particular sector. It is interesting how the role of the virtual assignment has been accelerated within many companies following the impact of Coronavirus. Technology itself is a very broad industry sector and this will work for many companies, although in some businesses this will not replace the traditional relocation experience.

Global Mobility leader two, international technology company

Yes, life for Global Mobility professionals is definitely more complex and uncertain, and yes we have become much more visible to the leadership through managing the fall-out from COVID-19.

The difficulties faced by assignees and their families during the pandemic has highlighted there remains a role for human interaction and reassurance amongst all the self-service portals and chatbots. A need for personalised assignee reassurance will continue as travel opens up again and we see the report recognises the increased responsibility of employers to prepare internationally mobile employees for their assignments. You can streamline and cut back as much as you like—but you are still dealing with a person, their life and their family and that will always require a level of human interaction and support.

As the pandemic took hold the attention invested by leadership in making sure their assignees were alright was heartening to see—whether leadership attention to Global Mobility issues and the teams that manage mobility will continue once things start to settle down remains to be seen.

I was surprised (but maybe I should not have been) at the low level of technology used to manage Global Mobility programs. Ironically the trusty old Excel spreadsheet has been given a new lease of life with the widespread adoption of Microsoft Teams which makes data held in Excel sheets more readily available across the team and having the most up-to-date version always available.

The responses on the impact on the Global Mobility function over the next 24 months are interesting. I read the comments on the fragmentation of the function slightly differently. The diverse range of tasks—strategic, transformation, advisory and operational—require very different skillsets. So I see the fragmentation as aligning the task with the correct skillset. A technician is not necessarily the best person to manage an operational workflow at scale. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and maybe a common boss, will help to ensure effective outcomes delivered in a collaborative manner.

Discussions on future assignment types will really depend on why the person is being sent. A project based assignment need where the work cannot be performed remotely is very different from a leadership level assignment.

Within the technology sector a significant proportion of assignments will be project based, and many companies will have already been delivering work remotely pre-COVID for cost reasons. If the work has to be performed at a specific location then in essence we need our people where we need our people, and this will continue to drive assignments with the duration based on the time needed to complete the work.

As there is now less expectation for attendance at meetings in person it will widen the pool of talent available to attend those meetings, so whilst we will see less business travel for meeting attendance perhaps we will see some key personnel relocate to a time zone that will facilitate their attendance at virtual meetings during regular (or at least daytime) business hours.

Fewer assignments will make those who have been on assignment more valuable. The broadening of experience and upskilling of soft skills that comes from an international assignment is a valuable commodity and there may be a diminishing pool of talent with this characteristic over time. So those companies better able to track employee retention and proactively cherish those staff will have a competitive advantage.

All this brings us back to the report's opening salvo 'life for Global Mobility professionals is definitely more complex and uncertain'— I suspect that comment was written in the context of the immediate tactical outcomes of COVID-19, however this underplays the range of strategic, tactical and operational issues that sit within an organisation's global mobility team. It is likely the Global Mobility leadership and specialists will have a broader view of the range of interdependencies we now face in terms of meeting post-COVID employee expectations on location agnostic work arrangements, the added complexities (human and regulatory) of running a cross-border mobility program, all while managing costs in a more challenging economic environment.

Global Mobility leader three, international technology company

The pandemic for us has led to a resurgence of interest in Global Mobility and as a Global Mobility leader it reinforces my view that Global Mobility professionals need, to an extent, to reinvent themselves as the industry, at least in the short-term but perhaps indefinitely, has changed.

The impact, beyond the obvious, is multifaceted and these are addressed in Fig. 22.

In all, 2021 and beyond will be a significant year from Global Mobility with continuing pressure on Global Mobility and all downstream activity but more related to recovery efforts than the pandemic itself…and the question for Global Mobility professionals is one of adaptation to best respond to changing demand.

Fig. 22: The impact beyond

1	The increased drive for efficiency through automation—in part to reduce costs;	Automation driving efficiency/cost reduction—there is a reality within Global Mobility…and that reality is that only part of what we do is strategic—the majority is responding to changes in legislation, market practice, client demand to reduce cost etc. The pandemic, if not immediately, will certainly force organisations to find ways to reduce cost and as much of what Global Mobility is complex but repetitive it is ripe for automation.
2	The impact on Global Mobility vendors and partners;	Impact on vendors—it cannot have been a good year for relocation vendors whose revenue largely comes from fixed fees associated with physical movement across borders…gone are the days of rich packs, household goods shipments being the norm etc. The focus for many now is on giving people the information they need, in a format that's easy to digest, enabling rapid deployment at the lowest possible price point. Just as Global Mobility professionals may need to rethink themselves as a result of the pandemic so may those vendors who provide services to the industry.
3	The forced review of how Global Mobility works within organisations;	Global Mobility—how does it work? Global Mobility functions tend to be very traditional…and they tend to operate without too much interest from the business—until things go wrong! The pandemic changed that—the natural assumption of HR leaders looking at their functions and assuming that a pandemic means no movement = no/limited requirement for Global Mobility professionals has led to renewed focus on what it is that the function(s) actually do…that will continue—and per point 2., Global Mobility professionals should embrace this opportunity as a catalyst for change in their respective organisations.
4	The closer link to point three and the long discussed talent agenda;	The link to talent—once again the debate has surfaced—where should Global Mobility sit? Is it a reward function? Should it be part of HR? Or should it be combined with functions like talent acquisition, talent management and learning and be part of a buy (i.e. recruit), borrow (talent management/workforce management) or build (i.e. teach existing resources new skills) strategy versus being in a silo/standalone.
5	The reality that countries continue to need migrant talent—but that need might be overshadowed through policies of domestic protectionism that are implemented to protect domestic jobs.	Domestic protectionism versus the need for talent…I predict this will become more of an issue in North America and Europe in the months ahead as governments attempt to deal with rising unemployment and "populist demand" to stop migration in the belief that this will positively affect the employment prospects for those in the domestic market. However, the reality is that when an organisation is moving talent across borders it does so because it cannot find that talent in the market of requirement and that trend will continue as in most cases the talent available now, potentially unemployed as a result of the pandemic and its impact, will not or does not have the skills required across numerous sectors.

Global mobility as an industry is not in its final stages, it is simply transforming.

Transforming lives, careers, the roles within Global Mobility, including the creation of new roles such as data and systems analysts. Data will increasingly play a critical role in the value that Global Mobility teams deliver to their organisations.

The Global Mobility function may also fragment to become absorbed into talent, reward or a Global Mobility business partner role, with transactional work re-allocated to an internal shared service team or outsourced to a Global Mobility specialist provider. We survive, we re-purpose and we thrive—possibly in new ways and with a new normal.

Or search "RE**PURPOSE**: Challenging change"

The process

We surveyed **838 professionals** responsible for Global Mobility programmes across **45 countries**. In addition, **55 Business Leaders** were surveyed, spanning the UK, the US, France, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Survey respondents represent organisations that in total employ:

5.1m	At least 5.1 million staff globally.
24,578	At least 24,578 full-time and part-time Global Mobility professionals.
556,287	Respondents are globally managing at least 556,287 internationally mobile assignees.

Global Mobility professionals responses by…

Headquarter location

Europe	56%
Asia	21%
North America	20%
Africa	2%
South America	1%
Middle East	0%
Australia/New Zealand	0%

Respondent location

Europe	52%
Asia	30%
North America	15%
Africa	1%
Middle East	1%
South America	0%
Australia/New Zealand	0%

Industry sector

Financial	13%
Technology and Communications	11%
Pharmaceuticals and Health	10%
Manufacturing	8%
Engineering	7%
Construction	7%
Professional Services	5%
Consumer Products (FMCG)	4%
Retail	4%
Transport and Logistics	3%
Automotive	3%
Utilities and Energy	3%
Others	3%

1. RE**VISION**: Mobility through the looking glass, GMS 2020/21, Santa Fe Relocation, Rason J., Palmer J., Ferrigno P.

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