



PERMITS
foundation

INTERNATIONAL DUAL CAREERS SURVEY REPORT 2022

PART 1

Feedback from Global
Mobility Professionals



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Permits Foundation has been tracking trends in global mobility and dual careers since 2008. Our first large scale **employer** survey report in 2012¹ concluded that *“if the careers of both partners cannot be accommodated, this has negative implications for the management of talent, the deployment of human resources, retention of key skills and successful economic outcomes for individuals, organisations, and home and host countries”*.

This latest survey report reflects the views and experiences of **global mobility professionals** from both the public and private sectors in relation to international dual careers. It was carried out between 5 October and 31 December 2021 at a time when organisations were rapidly adapting to a new way of working in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. It therefore reflects how global mobility professionals view the issue of partner support and employment authorisation in an important period of change.

The survey examined:

- the relationship between dual careers and international mobility
- levels of support for the right of accompanying family members to join and to access work
- the impact of immigration restrictions on international business/organisations
- current practice in partner support.

The survey attracted responses from **128** global mobility professionals from over **64** organisations employing almost **4.5** million people in both the private and public sectors. The results confirm that global mobility remains a fundamental part of an international organisation's success. Moreover, direct work authorisation for partners of international employees can positively impact the outcome of an assignment and the attraction and retention of talent.

There is widespread agreement among global mobility professionals that accompanying partners should be authorised to work in the host country directly upon recognition of their dependant status, with support for a broad and inclusive definition of the term “family member”. Employers welcome (further) legislative change in countries where it is difficult to relocate employees because of partner work permit concern. This would help improve transfer of talent, skills and technology and support diversity, equity and inclusion. Policy makers should consider the different types of accompanied assignments as well as the increased interest in virtual assignments.

Employers continue to provide a wide range of partner support options but global mobility professionals feel that their organisations should do more to support dual careers. Opening formal channels of communication with the relocating family, pre-move, could improve assignment outcomes.

¹ Permits Foundation International Mobility and Dual Career Survey of International Employers (Report published in 2012)

INTRODUCTION

Between October and December 2021, Permits Foundation gathered feedback from 128 global mobility professionals from 64 organisations employing almost 4.5 million employees in both the public and private sectors.² Though the absolute numbers varied in these organisations, on average, international employees made up approximately 1.8% of the total workforce.

In carrying out the survey, we requested input from *“individuals who work as an HR manager or similar in an international company, organisation, university or research institute in the field of global mobility, talent management or immigration”*. When asked about their department of work, participants predominantly said they specialised in HR (52%) or global mobility (28%). There was also representation from those working in talent mobility, immigration, operations, employee experience, compensation

and benefits, diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I), and family support.

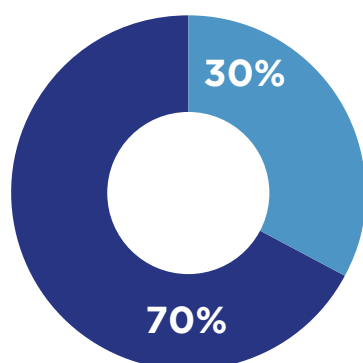
Throughout this survey, unless otherwise stated:

- the term “global mobility professionals”, covers all categories of survey respondents
- the term “partners”, covers married or civil or non-married partners
- the term “international employees”, covers highly-skilled, mobile employees (e.g. intra-corporate transferees, new recruits from outside the host country, locally recruited foreign staff).

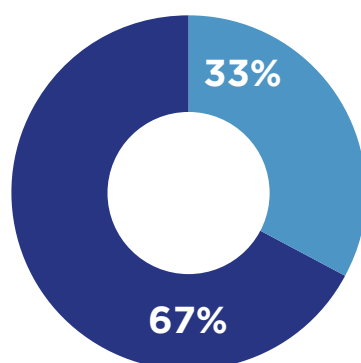
This report is the first in a two-part summary of findings. **Part one** focusses on the feedback from global mobility professionals. **Part two** will look at the input provided by spouses and partners of international employees.

² The list of identified organisations can be found in the appendix.

Organisation background



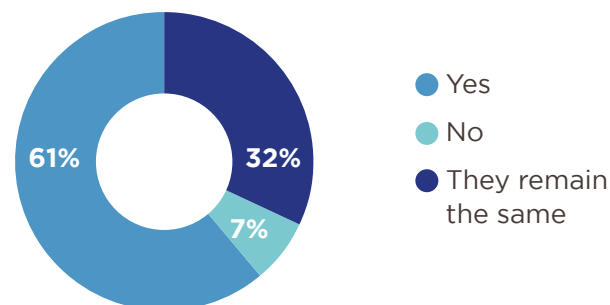
Participant background



- Public sector
- Private sector

DUAL CAREERS, INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT AND EMPLOYEE MOBILITY

Do you think that dual careers and partner issues are becoming more important to your organisation?



The survey figures confirm that managing dual careers is of increasing importance to organisational success. 61% of those surveyed said that dual career and partner issues were becoming more important to their organisation.

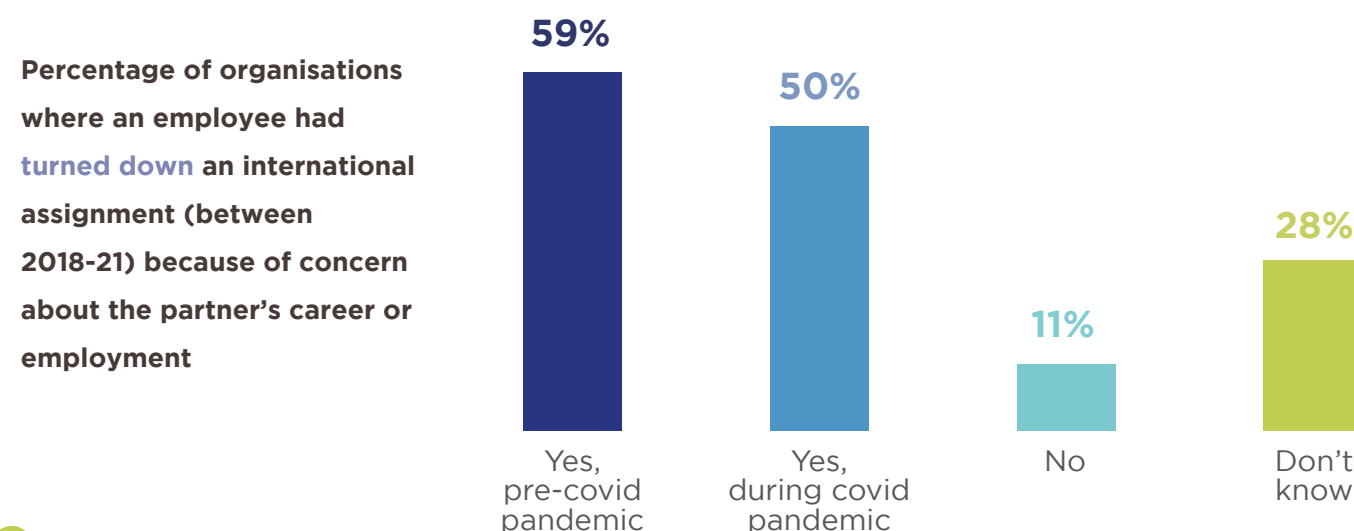
Where a host country allows partners to work, 91% said that their organisation's ability to attract people with desired qualifications and skills increased. 84% of respondents said that their organisation's ability to retain people with desired qualifications and skills increased. 89% said

"It is in the DNA of the company."

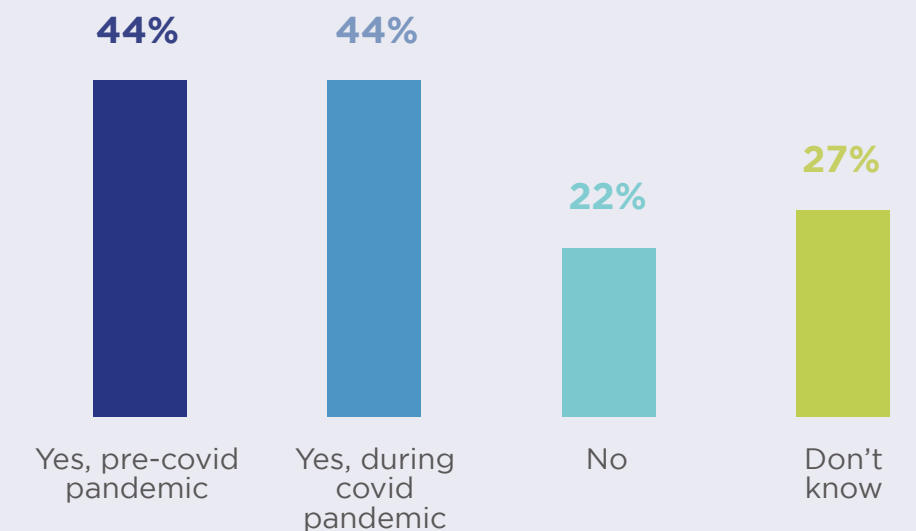
"We want to be a truly international and inclusive organization."

that the willingness of the employee to accept an assignment in the host country increased.

Global mobility professionals reported a **negative impact on mobility if the spouse or partner was not able to access work**. In 59% of respondents' organisations, global mobility professionals answered yes when asked if an employee had **turned down** an international assignment pre-pandemic because of concerns about the partner's career or employment, 50% during the pandemic.



Percentage of organisations where an employee had **returned home** early from an international assignment (between 2018-21) because of concern about the partner's career or employment.



Moreover, in 44% of respondents' organisations, global mobility professionals answered yes when asked if an employee **had returned home early** in the last 3 years (2018-21) because of concerns about the partner's career or employment.

"They have returned home early or not relocated at all owing to the fact that they may have to give up their careers and finding work in foreign location may be challenging."

"I'm sure many co-workers don't want to go on an international assignment because it affects the partner's career."

A significant minority of respondents reported that they did not know the figures in relation to the impact of partner career concerns on the assignment success. Communicating with the relocating family to achieve greater awareness of this issue could be beneficial for organisations looking at ways to improve their employee experience and/or reduce costs.



THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

When giving feedback on the importance of global mobility, the biggest benefit cited was that international assignments facilitate transfer of knowledge, skills or technology. More than two thirds of participants also agreed that international assignments

develop international management potential, help assignees to develop a global mindset, promote diversity, equity and inclusion and help the organisation to attract talent.

What are the benefits of an international assignment to your organisation?



Accompanied assignments

In the survey, we asked about three different types of international assignment where partners are likely to accompany the assignee on a temporary visa:

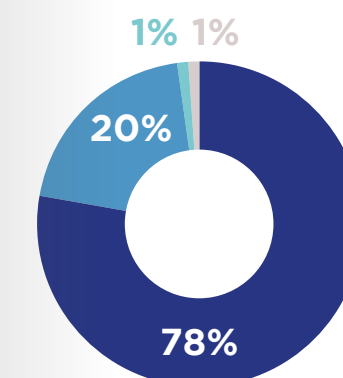
- mobile employees transferred internationally
- new recruits from outside the host country
- foreign staff recruited locally in the host country.

We asked global mobility professionals to predict recruitment in these categories over the next two years (2022-24). 47% expected an increase in international transfers, 46% expected an increase in new recruits from outside the host country, 43% expected an increase in locally recruited foreign staff in host country. A significant percentage of respondents, 30-31%, forecast that the numbers in all three categories would stay the same.

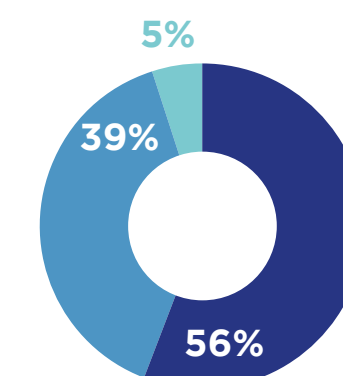
All three were in use and valued. The majority of respondents said that it was **very important** to be able to **transfer mobile employees internationally**.

In your organisation, how important is it to be able to:

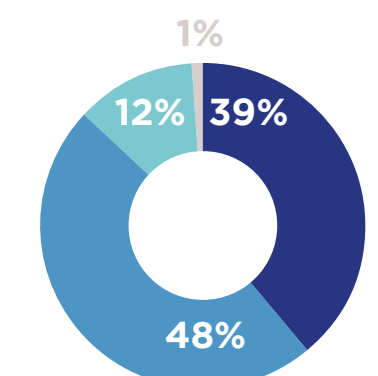
transfer mobile employees internationally?



hire new recruits from outside the host country?



hire locally recruited foreign staff in the host country?



- Very important
- Important
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

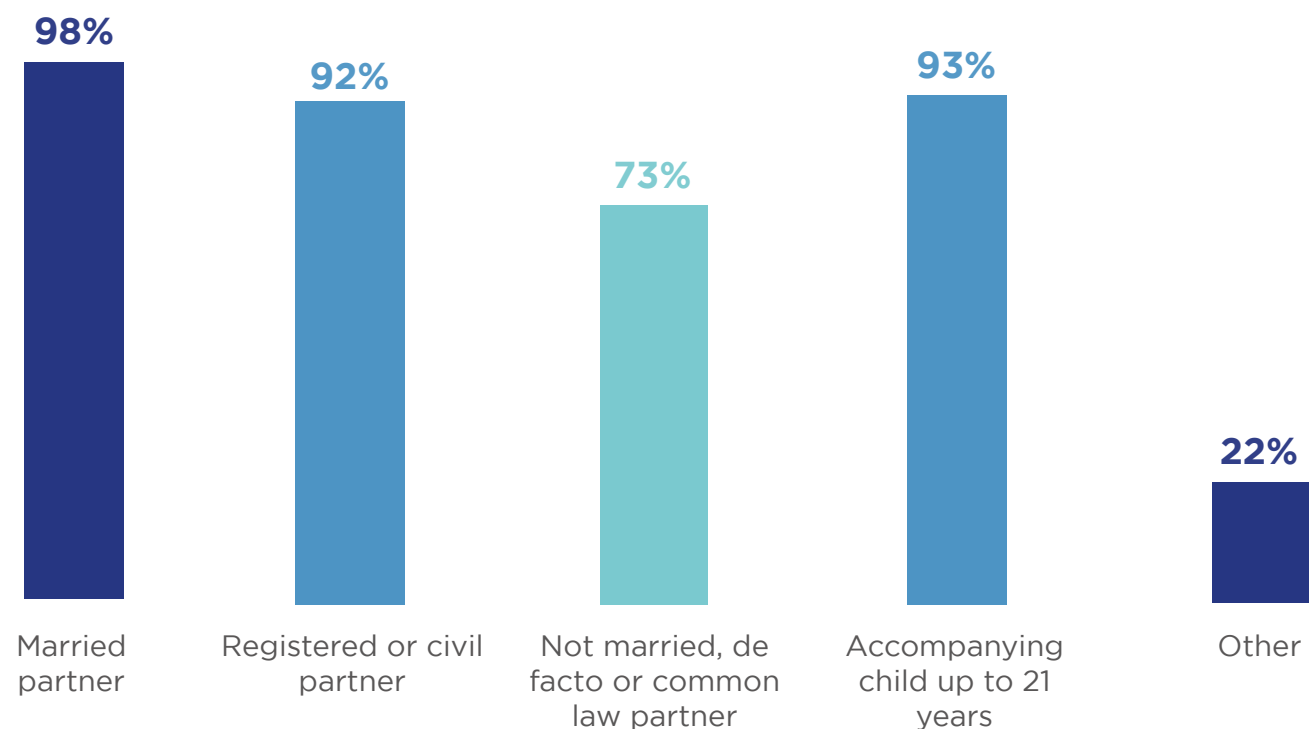
THE RIGHTS OF FAMILY MEMBERS TO JOIN AND TO ACCESS EMPLOYMENT

In our 2012 employer survey report, it was established that for the vast majority of participants (96%), partners of international assignees should be allowed to work in the host country for the duration of the assignment.

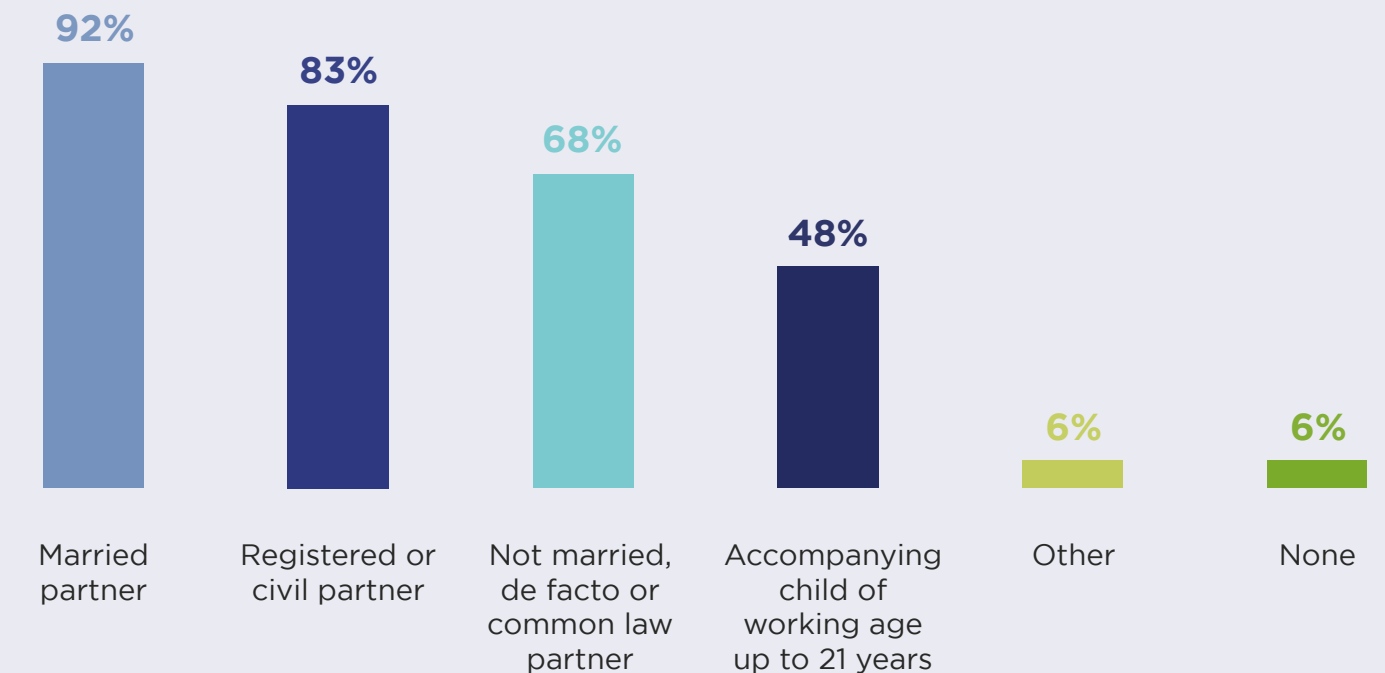
In our 2021 survey we looked further into the definitions of family members. Most

respondents stated that the married partner, registered or civil partner, non-married partner and accompanying child up to age 21 years should be included in the definition of eligible family members who can **accompany** the international employee in the host country. Many of those who selected “other” mentioned dependent parents.

Which of the following dependants should be included in the definition of eligible family members who can **accompany** the international employee in the host country?



Which of the following family members of an international employee should be **authorised to work** in the host country directly upon recognition of their dependant status?



The vast majority of respondents said that family members should be authorised to work in the host country directly upon recognition of their dependant status. Regarding the definition of family members that should be authorised to work, 92% of respondents said this should cover the married partner, 83% the civil partner, 68% the non-married partner and 48% the accompanying child of working age up to 21 years. 6% of respondents cited other family members.

In some countries work authorisation is restricted to the married spouse only. Permits Foundation advocacy reflects the fact that global mobility professionals would like to see improved work access for a wide definition of family members.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DE&I)

Echoing support for a broad definition of family members who should have the right to join and work, many of the comments submitted throughout the survey highlighted support for same-sex and more broadly, LGBTQI+ couples.

"I think that if partners of the same sex were given dependant or working visas in the host country that would make a huge difference in terms of inclusivity."

"Not all sorts of relationships that are recognized by the home country are recognized in the host country. This makes it extra difficult for same-sex couples."

"Think that we need to shift the needle for the LGBTQI+ community in countries where work permits and dependant permits are a challenge as this is an area of concern."

"Lobby for a definition of 'dependent' that is inclusive - recognizing (long-term) partnerships regardless of marital status and sex/identity."

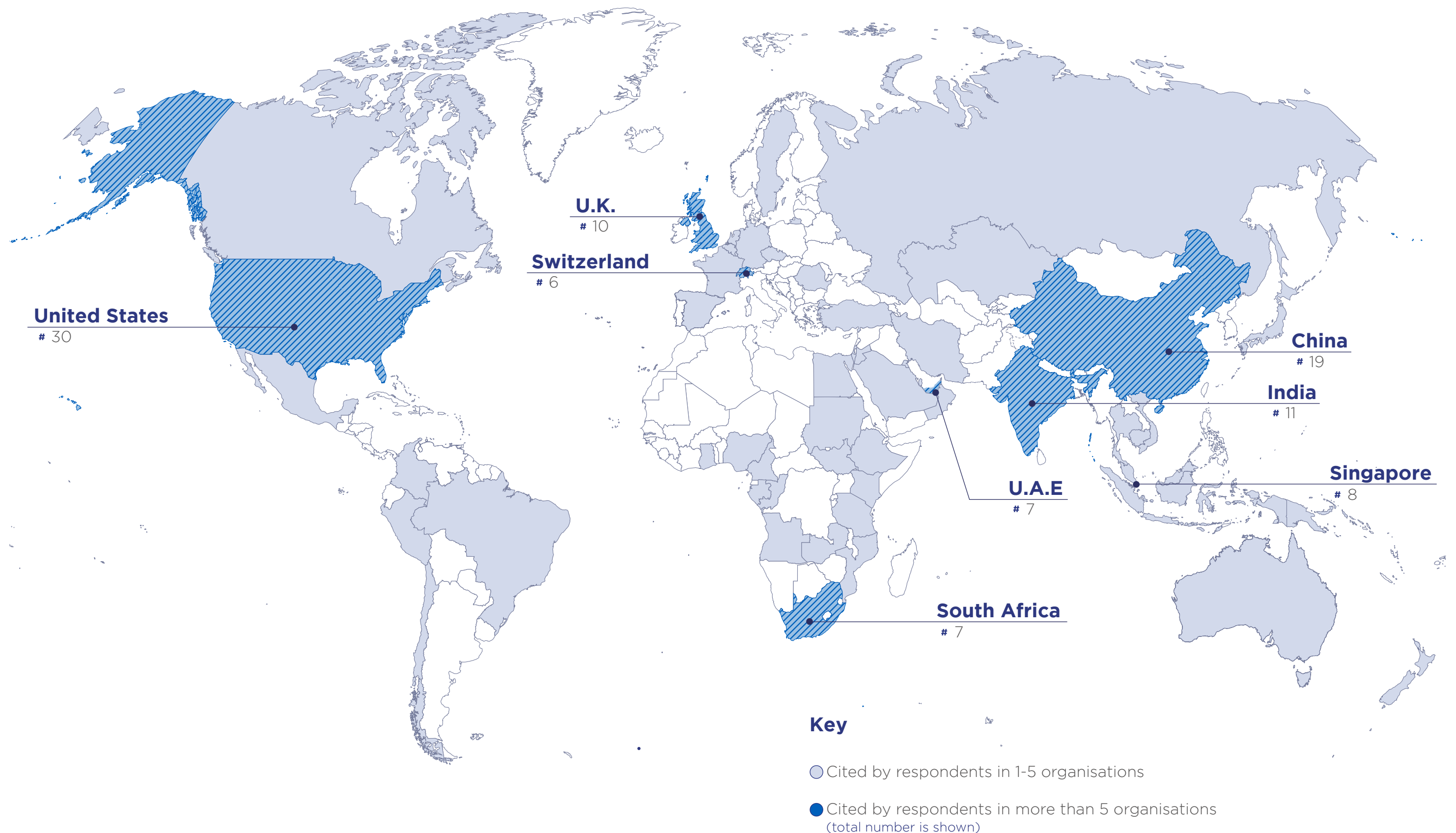
Promoting dual careers support in DE&I policy materials

78% of participants said that where a country enables employment access for partners of international employees, the effectiveness of the organisation's overall diversity, equity and inclusion policy increases. However, for 22% of respondents, the importance of supporting dual careers in the global workplace did not feature at all in their organisation's DE&I materials and 28% did not know. Given its significance to both employers and employees, we recommend that this association between partner work access and DE&I is featured more prominently in company policy and media output.



Computer image: Freepik.com

Destinations where organisations would most benefit from legislative change to facilitate partner access to employment.



PARTNER WORK AUTHORISATION AND COUNTRY RESTRICTIONS

Respondents identified **62** countries where improved partner access to employment would benefit their organisation. As was the case in 2012, the **United States, China, and India** remain the top three destinations where participants would most like to see legislative change. Some of the countries listed already allow spouses, and in some cases partners, to work freely, although this may be limited to certain visas. Other countries have started to make improvements through a simpler application process.

The top 8 countries identified by survey participants are all significant international business destinations. In the **US, UK and Switzerland**, legislation already enables direct work access for dependants. However, in the US, only married spouses in certain visa categories are covered. Several participants also mentioned laborious processing and delays around the US employment authorization document (EAD). This shows that even in countries where partner work access is possible, the associated processing must be streamlined and efficient.

The UK was a surprising inclusion as it is a country of global best practice allowing dependants automatic work rights. It may be that the participant responses relate to changes under the new immigration system restricting EU migration but it is important to underline that dependant

work access remains. **Singapore** is likely a country of interest after rules introduced in 2021 restricted the Letter of Consent route to employment for foreign spouses.

There is currently no legislation in place enabling direct work access for recognised dependants of international employees in **China, India, South Africa** and the **United Arab Emirates**. Understandably, employers would like to see change here.

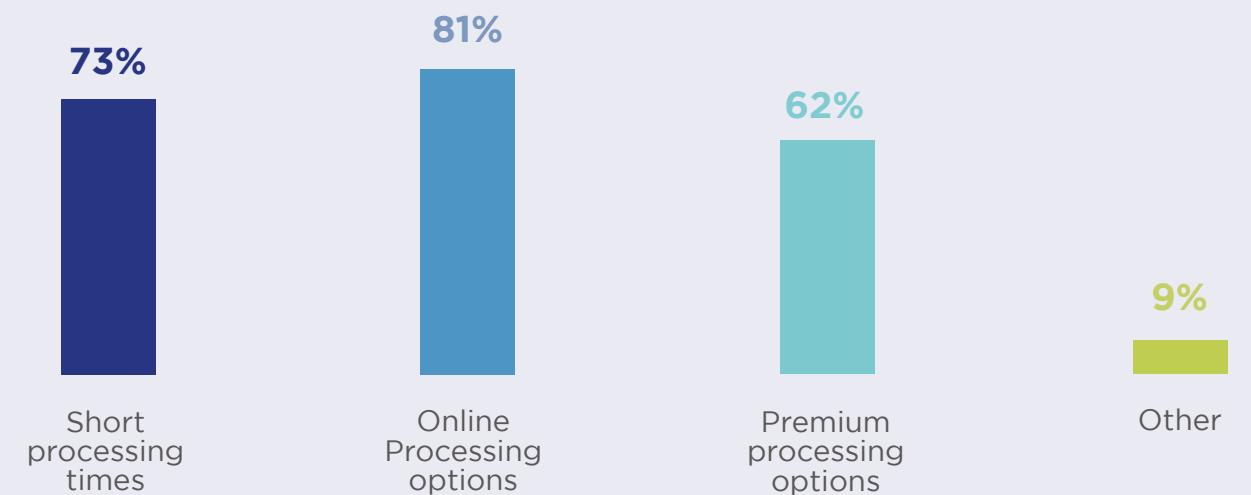
Where host countries do allow direct work access for partners of international employees, the benefits are recognised by global mobility professionals. 80% of participants said that the host country's reputation as a fair, equal opportunity society as well as the country's reputation for doing business, increases as a result.

Permits Foundation continues to carry out advocacy to improve dual careers policy in destinations highlighted by our network. Our progress and further information on country legislation is available in the Permits Foundation [world map](#) of mobile spouse and partner work authorisation.



Employee and dependant visa processing

What practice around employee and dependant processing can help to improve the outcome of a global assignment?



Most global mobility professionals cited online processing options as a practice that could help to improve the outcome of a global assignment. For 73%, shorter processing times would help (of these respondents, almost two-thirds cited a preference of less than 4 weeks). Premium processing options were viewed as helpful to 62% of participants.

In providing further comment, global mobility professionals offered other solutions to help the success of the assignment:

“There should be better local procedures for visa conversion or issuance of work permit without the person having to leave the country first.”

“Getting clear, precise information at the outset so processing can go smoothly.”

“Same turnaround time ... Not in a consecutive but in a parallel manner.”

“Avoidance of duplicate document requests.”

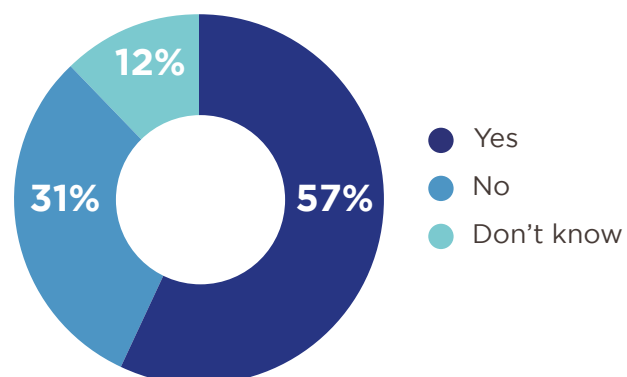
EMERGING ISSUES

Some global mobility issues have emerged in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular relating to family well-being and new ways of working.

Based on the feedback they had received, over half of respondents stated that the pandemic has had an impact on the international employee's **willingness to take up an assignment**. The most cited concerns were about the employee's ability to enter/leave the host country, safety, health and well-being, complex travel procedures and concern about families being split.

Almost one third said that the pandemic had not had an impact on employees willingness to take up an assignment. 12% did not know. In providing further comment, a few respondents suggested that the concerns from international assignees were subsiding as travel restrictions eased.

Based on feedback received, has the pandemic had an impact on the willingness of international employees to take up an assignment?



"Travel bans due to the pandemic made the whole process very complex."

"We had a hire freeze in some countries so difficult to give the global picture. For expats, we did not see a decrease in volume just more delays in getting people to destination because of travel and border restrictions."

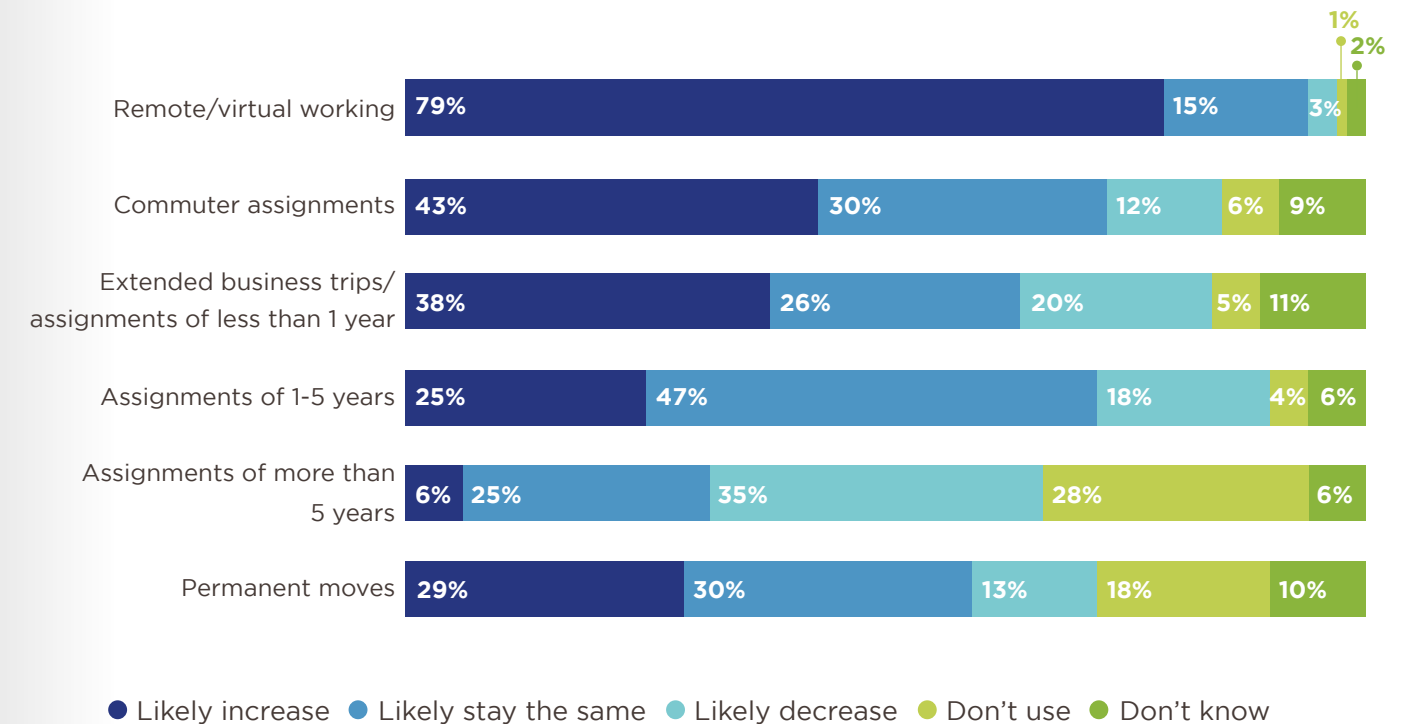
"As we are in the business of spousal support I have seen many relocations getting cancelled in 2020 owing to the pandemic."

"I think remote work is a real gift but there is no clear legislation/tax guidance on it."

"We are seeing a lot of global moves as borders have started to open."

"COVID has not impacted number of positions filled, but the way we are working. For the time being, we see much more flexible working arrangements that were not supported before COVID."

Over the next two years, what changes do you expect to see in the following ways of working?

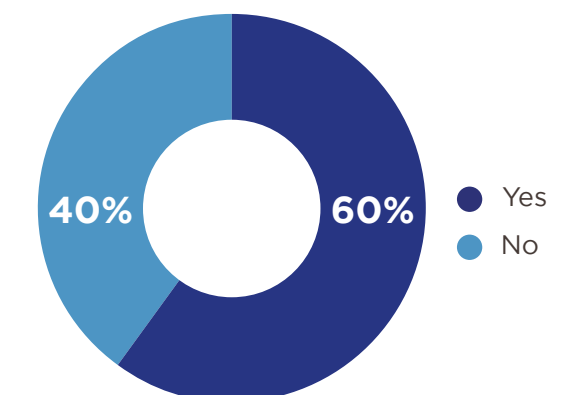


The rise of virtual working

When predicting upcoming changes in patterns of employee mobility, over three quarters of global mobility professionals surveyed agreed that there would be a likely increase in remote/virtual working over the next two years. There was less consensus in relation to other work arrangements. A significant number of respondents expected the number of commuter assignments and assignments of less than one year to increase. Over a third of global mobility professionals felt that assignments of more than five years would likely decrease. This type of assignment was also the least in use.

The increased emphasis on virtual working was also borne out in the figures relating to **dependants**. In the two year period up to December 2021, 60% of respondents had been asked by international employees about the **right of their partner to work virtually**.

In the past two years, have you had any enquiries from your international employees about the right of the partner to work virtually during the assignment?



"Remote work will become equally important for the partner."

EMPLOYER POLICIES TO SUPPORT DUAL CAREERS AND PARTNER EMPLOYMENT

Encouragingly, 78% of participants said that their organisation provided dual career assistance either via a formal written policy, informal guidelines or on a case-by-case basis. For more than two thirds of participants, the level of assistance in their organisation had not changed since the start of the pandemic.

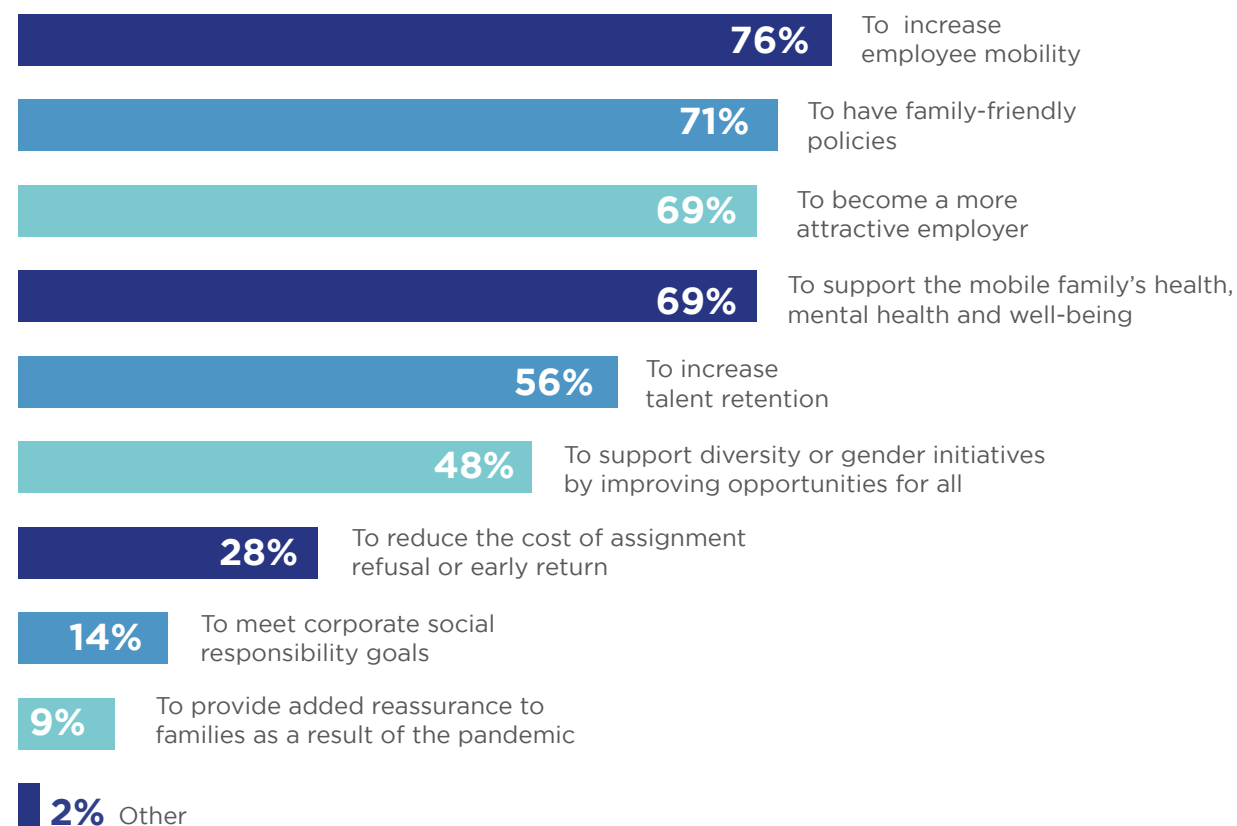
Of the many reasons for providing dual career assistance, most respondents cited that it helps to increase employee mobility and talent retention, supports family health and well-being, gives a visible family-friendly policy or helps the organisation to become a more attractive employer.

"This is a point of improvement we have on the horizon."

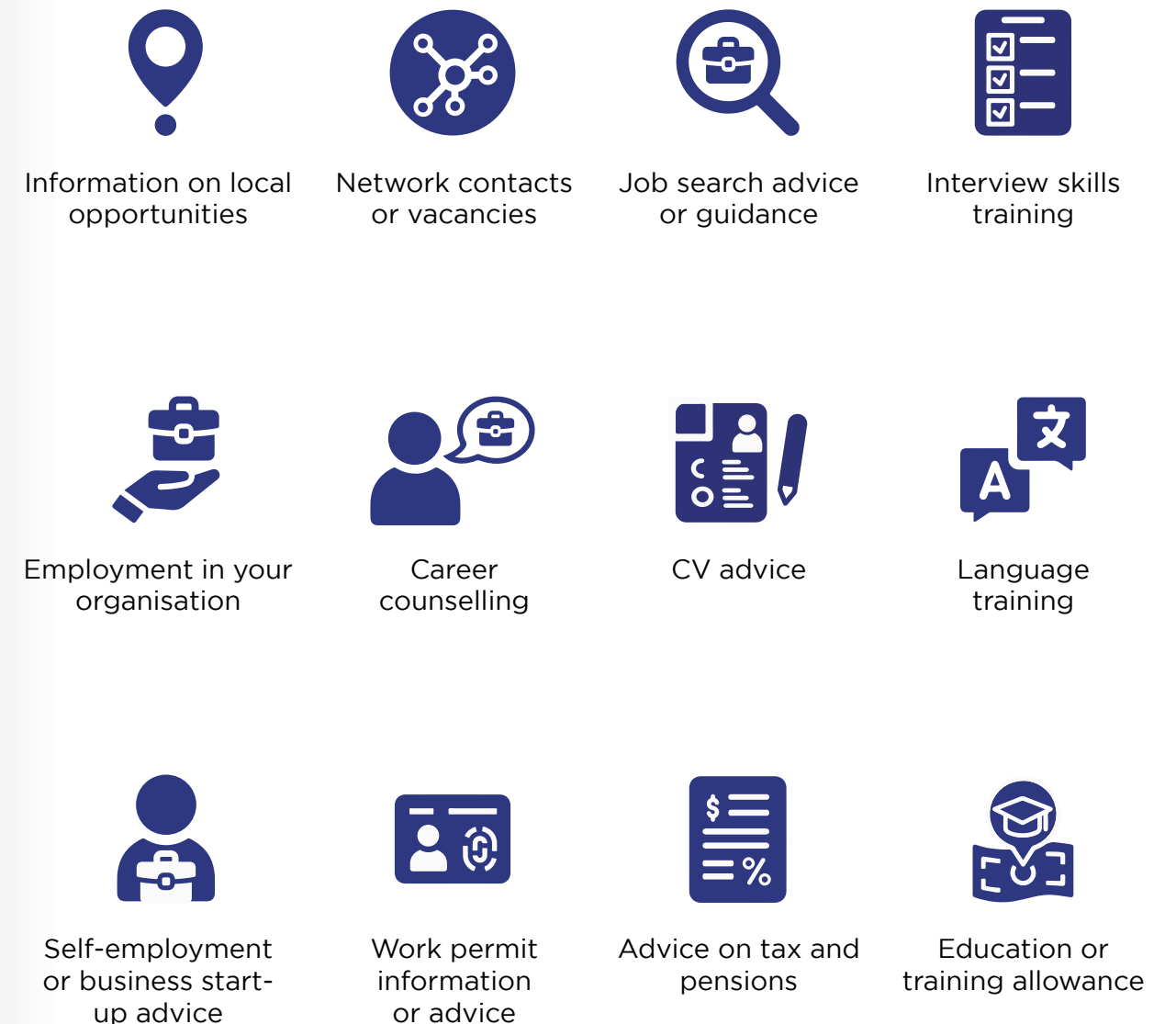
"We have guidelines but they go rather unknown."

"We are updating our relocation policies and are proposing more standard assistance for family support."

Top 5 reasons for providing dual career assistance to partners of international employees



Forms of partner assistance cited by survey respondents



"We offer partner support via a specialized vendor, with an annual budget for partners to spend on career development or education."

We provide a childcare allowance for families with dual careers. We reimburse retirement contributions in the base country."

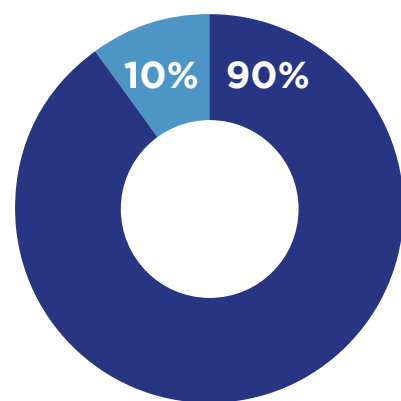
Can employers do more to support dual careers?

Most respondents confirmed that their organisation had provided a means through which HR could be alerted to concerns about partner employment access. However, in just over half of cases, participants reported that this route was informal. 14% indicated that their organisation did not provide a feedback channel.

“They can find information on our website and can request a one-on-one meeting to be informed.”

For the vast majority of those surveyed, the point at which assignee families were most likely to ask them about the partner’s right to work in the host country was at the **pre-move stage**.

At what point are families going on assignment most likely to ask you about the partner’s right to access work in the host country?



- before the move
- while in host country

Though there was recognition from 61% of survey participants that dual career and partner issues were becoming more important at their workplace, **65% of respondents felt that their organisations should do more to support dual careers.**

To help employees plan for their relocation, organisations may wish to consider providing relocating families with information about dependant work authorisation in the host country. This will help the family to consider the partner’s options and manage expectations. It would be most beneficial if offered as a two-way dialogue at the pre-move stage of the assignment and as part of a formalised partner support programme.

“The family aspect is becoming an important topic in the organisation, as we are focusing on our people management (including well-being and family well-being).”

“There are financial and practical constraints to increasing some aspects of support, but in general given the ongoing and growing focus and importance of this issue to employees, continued engagement and support will be very important.”

“We already have a very comprehensive policy but we could do more to communicate.”

“This will help to portray our organization as an attractive employer that ‘takes care’ of its workforce.”

FURTHER INPUT FROM GLOBAL MOBILITY PROFESSIONALS

When given the opportunity to add further comment, many of those surveyed reflected on their reasons for supporting dual careers:

“With the world evolving with both partners having a similar level of education and similar career aspirations, the ability to work for the accompanying partner becomes a key factor to accept or reject an international assignment.”

“Relocations often fail without proper career assistance for the talent who will accompany an employee during the relocation. Dual-career couples comprise a very high percentage of global families. In today’s time, recovering the second income after relocating is vital for the household’s success. Besides second income it is the sense of empowerment that an accompanying talent needs when in a foreign land.”

“Recently, we are seeing more women in assignments. In these cases the spouse work permit is a show stopper and is a real barrier to career progression for some very talented female employees.”

On the issue of partner work permit restrictions in the host location, some respondents referenced the conditions specific to the diplomatic sector:

“As a government department, there are certain specific considerations (such as Diplomatic accreditation) that impact on this issue.”

“Our employees abroad are diplomats and therefore the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations is applicable to them and their family members.”

When we asked what more Permits Foundation could do, respondents confirmed that sharing data and collective advocacy in support of enabling dual careers helps to bring about change.

“The findings of this survey will be a very important step towards addressing the issues and providing more efficient and effective dual career support to our employees.”

“Keep sharing information.”

“Continue to offer up to date catalogues of what is possible in each country.”

“Continue to advocate for partners’ work authorization and reducing administrative hurdles.”

CONCLUSION

This survey confirms that where there is an international assignment, partner employment access has a positive impact on talent attraction and retention, employee experience, diversity, equity, inclusion and the reputation of the host country.

In many countries, demographic forecasts point to skills shortages that cannot be met by the local workforce alone and will require foreign talent. Governments, companies and international organisations need to be fully aware of the effect that barriers to partner employment can have on employee relocation abroad. Employers would welcome the removal of work permit restrictions for accompanying partners. Mirroring the Foundation's 2012 survey, the USA, China and India continue to top the list of countries where legislation to improve partner employment access would be appreciated.

For most global mobility professionals, the definition of family members authorised to work directly upon recognition of their dependant status should be broad, covering married and non-married partners and (for half of respondents) working age children. Many of those surveyed underlined the need to support same-sex couples. However, the importance of enabling dual careers did not always feature in DE&I materials produced in house.

While most organisations already provided some form of partner support, the majority of global mobility professionals surveyed felt that more should be offered. This

could be achieved by establishing a formal channel of communication between HR and the accompanying partner at the pre-move stage and by providing information about dependant work authorisation in the host country.

In the wake of the pandemic, there has been a shift in the types of international assignments carried out. While intra-corporate transferees remain very important to employers, it is expected that recruitment of local international hires and foreign recruits from outside the host country will also increase over the next two years. Governments looking to attract and retain talent should legislate to facilitate partner work access for all three of these categories. There is also a clear expectation among global mobility professionals that virtual or remote working will strongly feature in the new way of working, including for partners of international employees.

We hope that the results of this survey are useful in helping both governments and employers to address their dual career policies. We suggest that this report be looked at along-side the results of our corresponding partner survey report. Permits Foundation continues to campaign for improvements to spouse and partner work permit regulations. Further research, country information and updates on our advocacy progress can be accessed on the Permits Foundation website. We encourage our network to reference the Permits Foundation [world map](#).

APPENDIX: PARTICIPANTS'

ORGANISATIONS

- ABB
- Addax Petroleum
- AkzoNobel
- Alstom
- American School of The Hague
- BASF SE
- BGRS
- BMW Group
- Boehringer Ingelheim
- Booking.com
- British School in The Netherlands
- Chevron
- China Europe International Business School
- Colas
- Computershare
- Deloitte
- Detecon
- Deutsche Telekom
- European Stability Mechanism
- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
- Fragomen LLP
- Google
- Hewlett Packard Enterprise
- IKEA
- IMPACT Group
- Indu Law Group, PC
- Johnson & Johnson
- Jotun
- Karl Waheed Avocats
- Lonza
- L'Oréal
- NetExpat
- Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Newland Chase
- Nexus International School (Singapore)
- Novartis
- Procter & Gamble
- PwC
- Robert Bosch GmbH
- Royal Philips
- SAP SE
- Schlumberger
- Schneider Electric
- Shell
- SPIE OGS
- TBS Education (Business School)
- The Clorox Company
- Theradynamics Rehab Management, LLC
- TotalEnergies
- UN Secretariat
- UNDP
- UNHCR
- UNICEF
- UNOPS
- UNRWA
- Unilever
- Unity Technologies
- University of Cambridge
- University of East Anglia
- University of Kent
- Volkswagen
- Washington University in St. Louis
- Wood

About Permits Foundation

Permits Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit corporate initiative. We support international mobility by promoting work authorisation for expatriate spouses and partners worldwide. The Foundation raises awareness of international best practice regulations and advocates change through focussed representations to governments. This is one of a series of survey reports carried out by the Foundation, gathering feedback from partners and employers. All resources are available on the Permits Foundation website.

Acknowledgements

Permits Foundation would like to thank our sponsors and wider network for taking the time to share this survey and/or provide feedback. With special thanks to ABB, BGRS, Chevron, Expat Communication, GIZ, Global Connection, Mercer, NetExpat and REA for their input at the development phase of the survey.

Contact us

- Email: contact@permitsfoundation.com
- Website: www.permitsfoundation.com
- Twitter: @permitslobby

