



The Changing Face of Relocation

Is Assignee Support Hitting the Mark?

How the world works better

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Foreword

Corporate relocation looks a lot different today than it did 10, 15, or 20 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, religious and family backgrounds taking part in global assignments. As such, the motivators to go on assignment 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 their 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 that 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 our top clients.

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.

In our second report, we look at the guidance and support HR departments offer employees prior to, and during, assignment(s), and whether it's fit to address the key challenges flagged by expats themselves.

While HR claims to offer training in a variety of areas, from cultural adaptation to foreign languages, the attitudes and opinions expressed by expats suggest that it may be falling short. Is assignee support fit for purpose in 2025?

Here, we address:

- Where assignees go for advice
- Is training missing the mark?
- The importance of family support
- The need for defined objectives



1 Where assignees go for advice

Embarking on an assignment is not without its personal and professional challenges, as our first report details. And this is true for all assignees, whether they have relocated once, twice, three times or more.

There can be great uncertainty and hesitancy prior to accepting a foreign posting, as people consider the personal challenges they, and their family, may face in their new host country. Will they struggle to make new friends and professional connections? Will the language, or unique culture, be a major departure from what they're used to? And how will it impact their lives in the short, medium and long-term?

Once they have arrived at their new country, they may also find themselves exposed to a

plethora of new challenges, or changes, that they hadn't previously thought of, and wonder what supports are available to them.

When it comes to seeking information and advice about an assignment, our research has found that HR and mobility teams play a central role. Of the global expats we surveyed, two fifths (**39%**) said their company's HR team and/or relocation specialist was their main source of information pertaining to assignment. This marks HR as the most popular source of information, followed by online forums and social media (**22%**) and friends and family who have relocated before (**17%**) (Figure 1).



Source of information for relocating

39% say their main source of information when deciding to relocate was company **HR / relocation specialist**

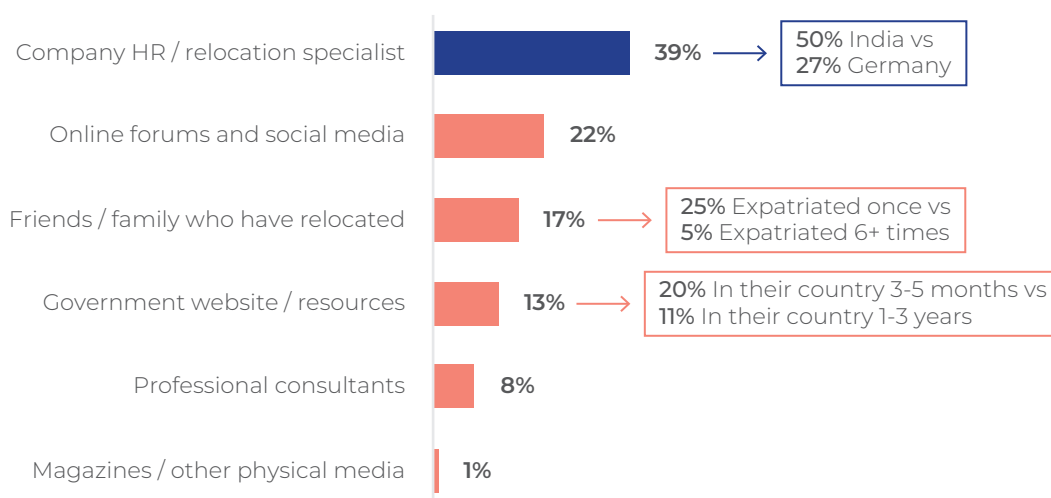


Figure 1

Jo Danehl, Global Intercultural & Language Training and Partner Support Practice Leader at Crown World Mobility adds: “It’s interesting that, even in today’s era of internet and social media, employees still feel that their company’s HR team is the most reliable go-to when it comes to gaining better insight into the relocation experience.”



While it’s nice that trust in the employer has remained high over the years, when it comes to assignment, it may not always be in an employee’s best interest to rely solely on their HR team’s input during the consideration phase. They’re likely to have all of the factual information about the assignment offer, yes, but may not have been on international assignment themselves (or at least, to that specific country) and so lack the lived experience perspective which is so needed at this stage.

When opening conversations around relocation with employees, HR managers should make themselves available to answer as many questions as they can. But they can, and should, encourage them to connect with other colleagues, friends or family that have relocated themselves, to learn more about the process and establish whether they’ll be a good match for the assignment.



Jo Danehl

Global Intercultural & Language Training and Partner Support Practice Leader, Crown World Mobility

2 Is training missing the mark?

When it comes to the support and training on offer, HR and mobility managers state they offering training and support to assignees in some capacity and are confident that it is fit for purpose.

Over half (**56%**) of the mobility and HR managers we surveyed said they provide significant training to assignees prior to their relocation, or ongoing support for second and subsequent relocations. **43%** said they provide some level of training or ongoing support, leaving just **1%** who admit to providing no training at all (Figure 2).

As explored in our previous report, factors such as new culture and language can be extremely challenging for assignees to navigate once they arrive in their host country. So much so, that **40%** of expats said unfamiliarity with the new country made them reluctant to relocate, and a quarter (**25%**) said the same about language barriers. Cultural change (**46%**) and variations in technology (**40%**) are also commonly cited as challenging aspects of relocation.

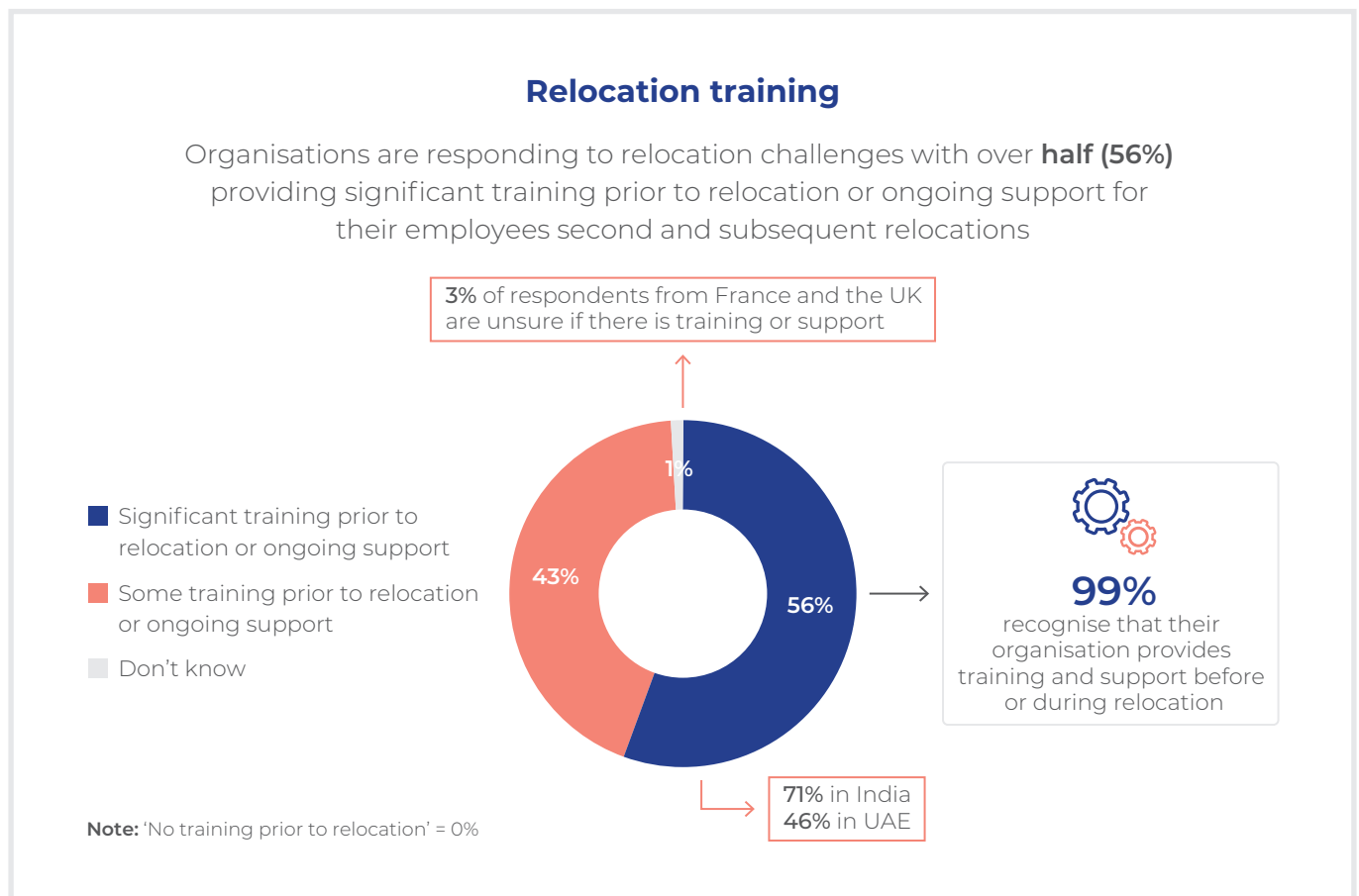


Figure 2

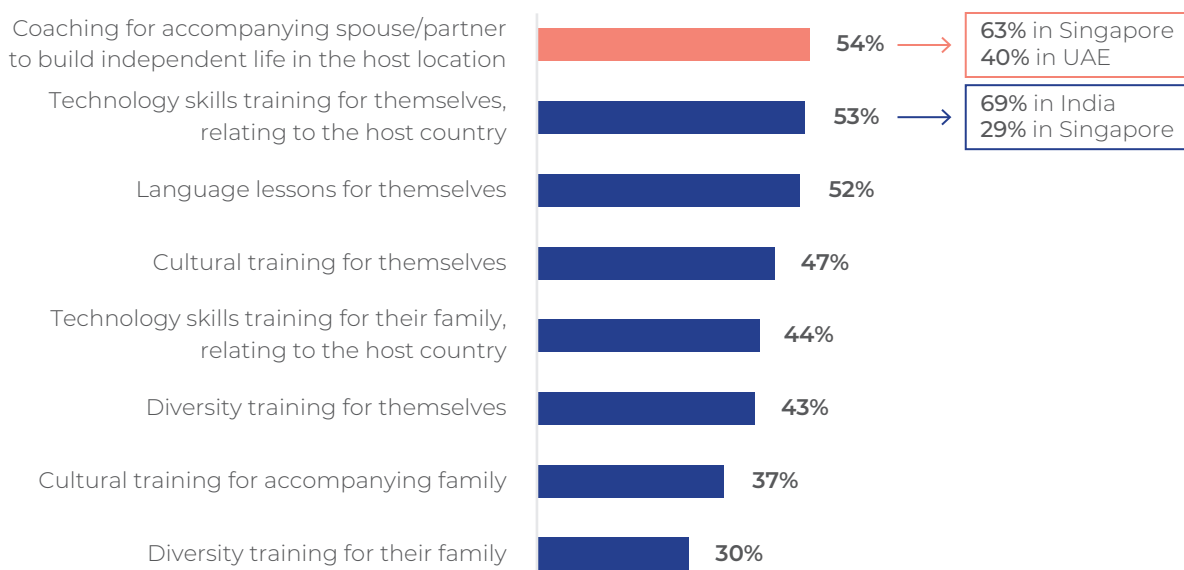


In response, over half (**52%**) of HR and mobility managers indicated they offered language lessons to their assignees prior to their first relocation; **53%** claim to offer technology skills training (relating to the host country); and **47%** claim to offer cultural training (Figure 3).

HR and mobility managers are confident this training is up to par, with **56%** saying they believe the support provided by internal mobility teams is impactful to the relocating employee (Figure 4).

Relocation training

Pre-relocation training offered to support assignees before first relocation varies from **life coaching (54%)** and **technology skills training (53%)** to **language lessons (52%)** and **cultural training (47%)**



Note: 'None of the above' = 1%, 'Other' = 0%

Figure 3

Impact of relocation support

And mobility teams and external relocation management company's both play an impactful role in facilitating successful relocations for employees – **50% or more** believe that the support provided by these teams are very impactful

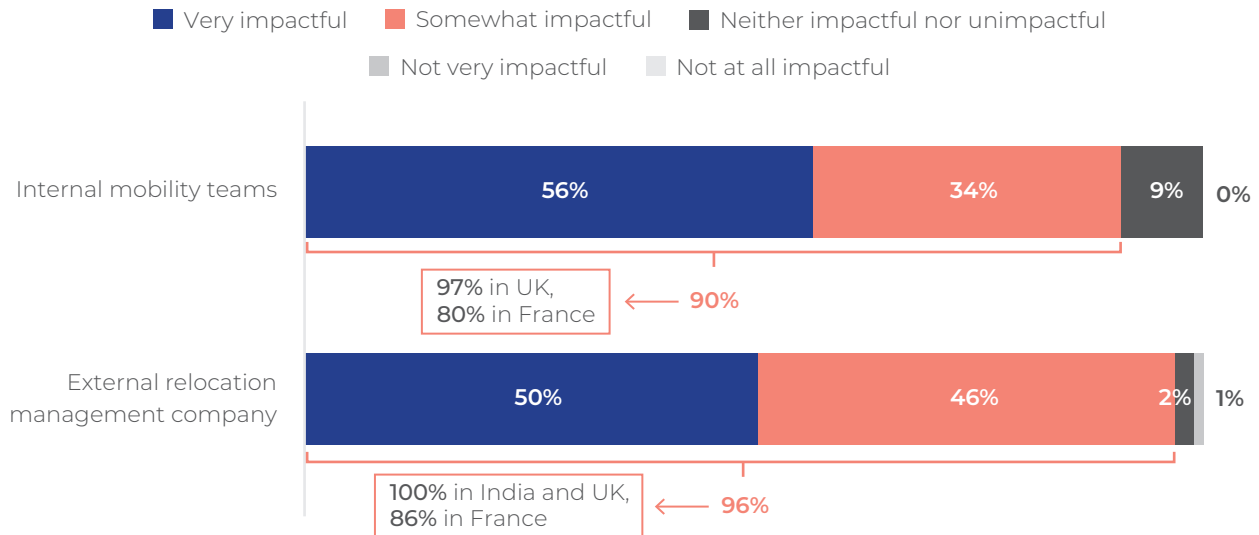


Figure 4

However, this support may not be as impactful as they think. Having surveyed assignees from a selection of our top clients, asking them what other support could have been provided to

them during their assignment, 33 (21%) said language training and 18 (12%) said intercultural training (Figure 5).

What other support could have been provided?

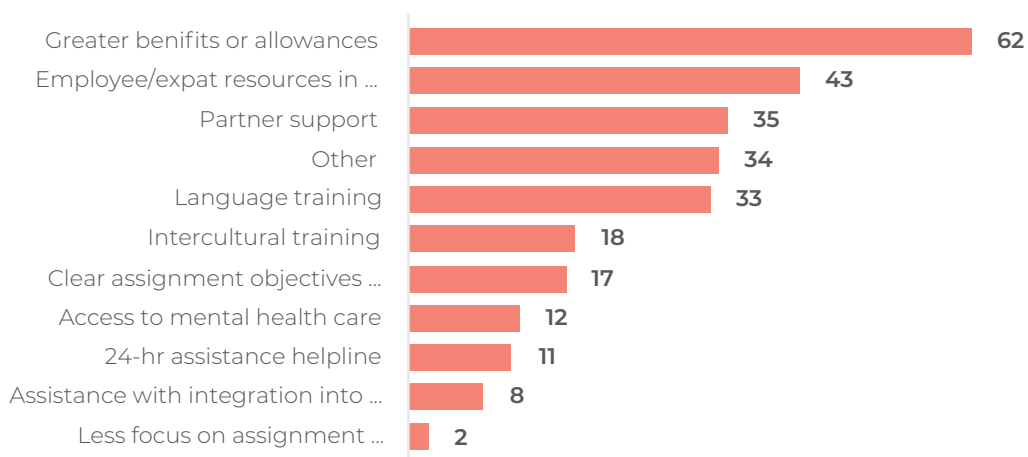


Figure 5

37 (24%) of these assignees claimed no culture training was provided at all, and 26 (17%) said they would have appreciated it being offered (Figure 6). Similarly, 28 (18%) claimed they received no language training, and 40 (26%) said they would have appreciated it being offered (Figure 7).



Figure 6

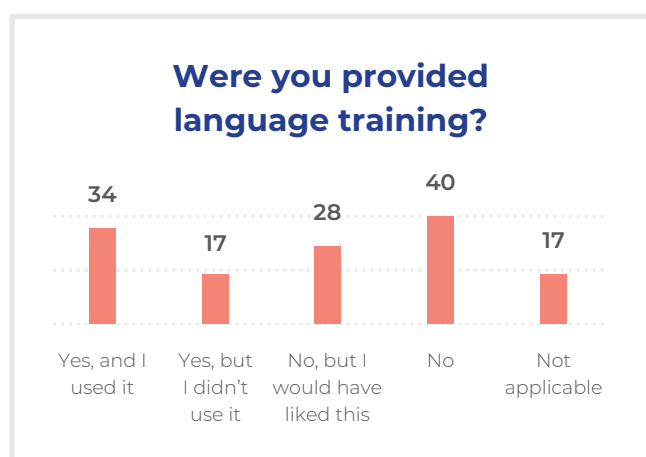


Figure 7



Assignees can be their own worst enemy, struggling through the adjustment when a training program would have helped them build the skills they need to thrive in the host location. HR has the opportunity to enhance the efficacy of its support by regularly checking in with each individual, to better understand their specific cultural and language challenges. More tailored, human-centric training programs, and ongoing communication with assignees, could make a substantial difference – ensuring support is not a ‘one and done’ tick-box exercise or a ‘shot in the dark.’

**Caitlin Pyett**

Global Consulting Lead,
Crown World Mobility

Caitlin Pyett, Global Consulting Lead at Crown World Mobility adds: “Culture and language are clearly big challenges for assignees. While HR managers feel their training and support in these areas is making a real difference to the assignees’ experience, the data says otherwise.”

Jo Danehl adds: “HR should also advocate strongly for the provision of training – and the protection of training budgets – ensuring that what is outlined in policy is actually implemented in practice. Training often faces cuts when budgets are tight, but investing in it is essential for the success and well-being of assignees.

3 The importance of family support

Providing support and training directly to the assignee and easing them into a comfortable mindset prior to their assignment is often only half the battle. Today, the needs of assignees' partners and family members must be considered too. As our previous report explains, the willingness of an assignee's spouse and/or family to make the move can be make or break during the consideration phase. And their wellbeing while away can also impact the success of the assignment.

According to **47%** of the expats we surveyed, convincing their family to move was a challenging aspect of relocating, placing it within the top three (Figure 8). And of our selected clients' assignees, 28 (**18%**) said they experienced partner-related challenges while on assignment (Figure 9).

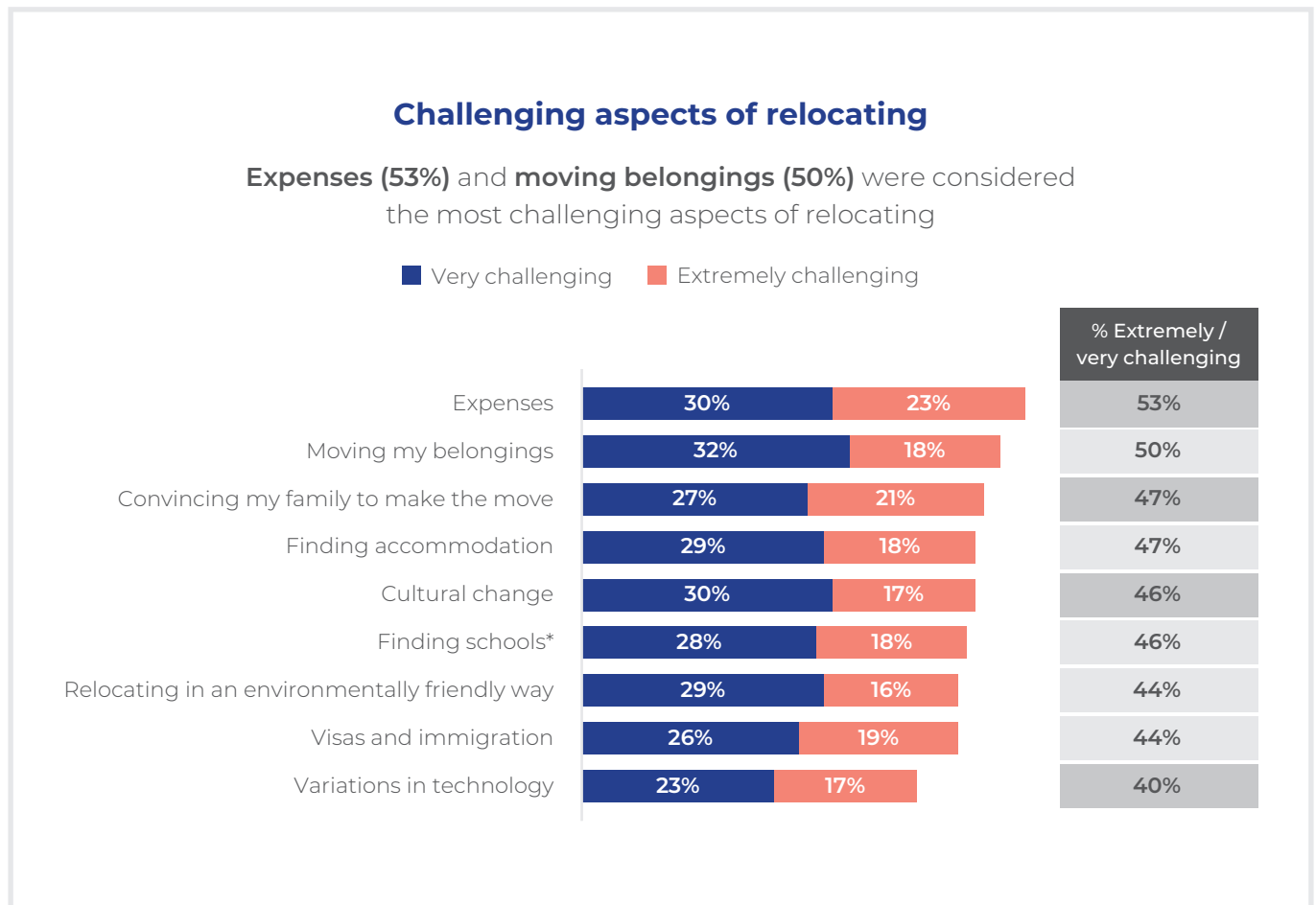


Figure 8

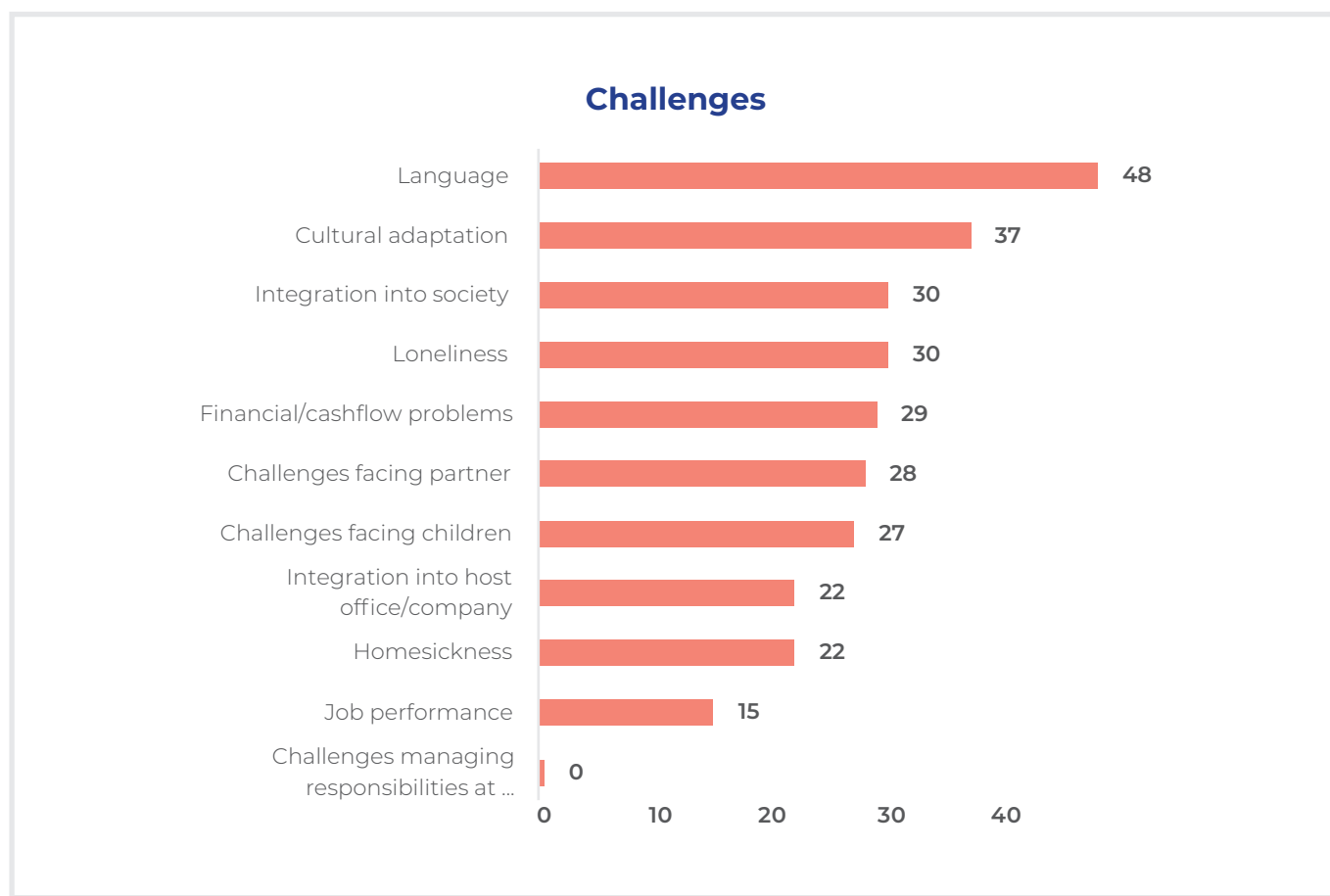


Figure 9

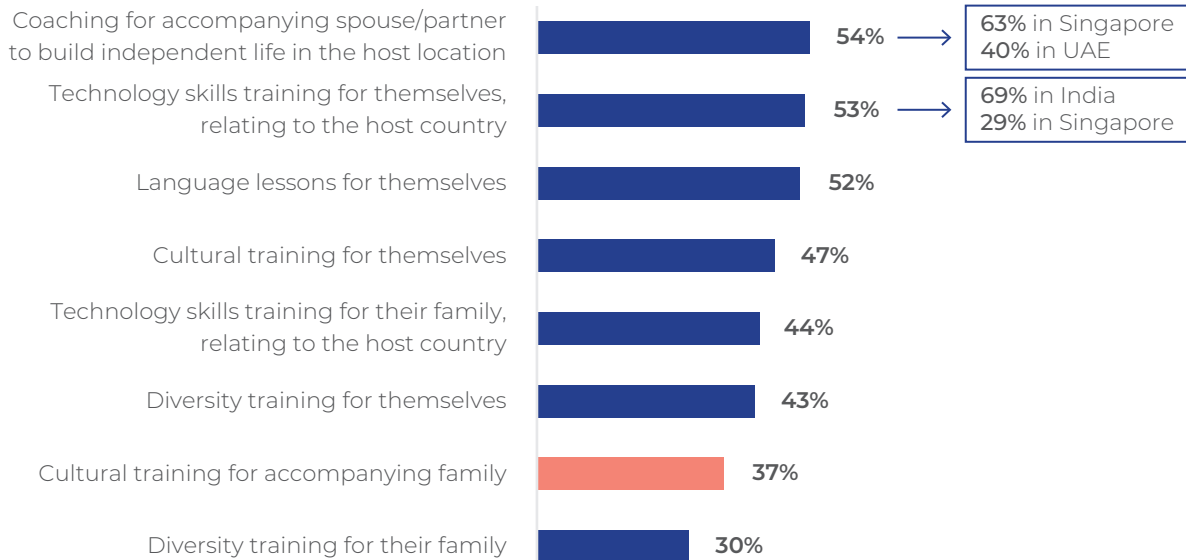
Again, HR and mobility managers believe they make a sufficient effort to address this need for assignees. **54%** claim they offer coaching to accompanying spouses and partners to help them build an independent life in the

host location; **37%** claim they offer cultural training to accompanying family (Figure 10); and a third (**33%**) claim that partner support is most important to assignees, in addition to the remuneration package (Figure 11).



Relocation training

Pre-relocation training offered to support assignees before first relocation varies from **life coaching (54%)** and **technology skills training (53%)** to **language lessons (52%)** and **cultural training (47%)**

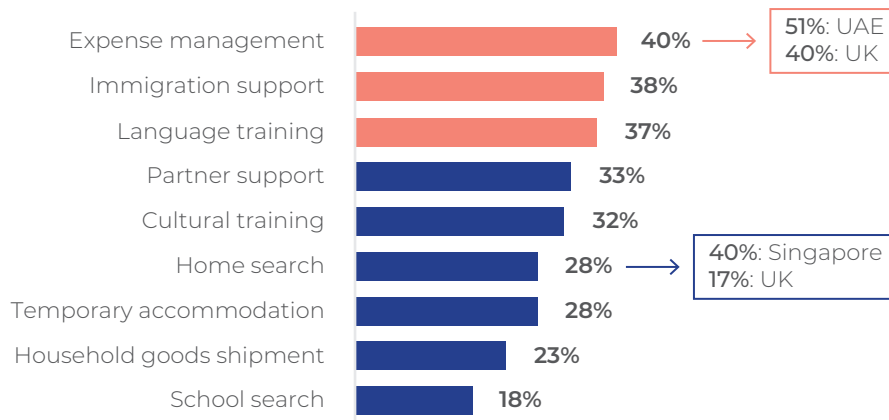


Note: 'None of the above' = 1%, 'Other' = 0%

Figure 10

Importance of relocation package factors

From the perspective relocation decision makers, **expense management (40%)** is deemed the most important support factor, closely followed by **immigration support (38%)** and **language training (37%)**



Note: 'Other' = 0%

Figure 11

Assignees, on the other hand, feel there is a lack of support in this area. Of our selected clients' assignees, 35 (23%) said more support could have been provided for their partner (Figure 12),

and this may have contributed towards hardship on the assignment, with 25 (16%) saying challenges with their partner had a negative impact on their mental health (Figure 13).

What other support could have been provided?

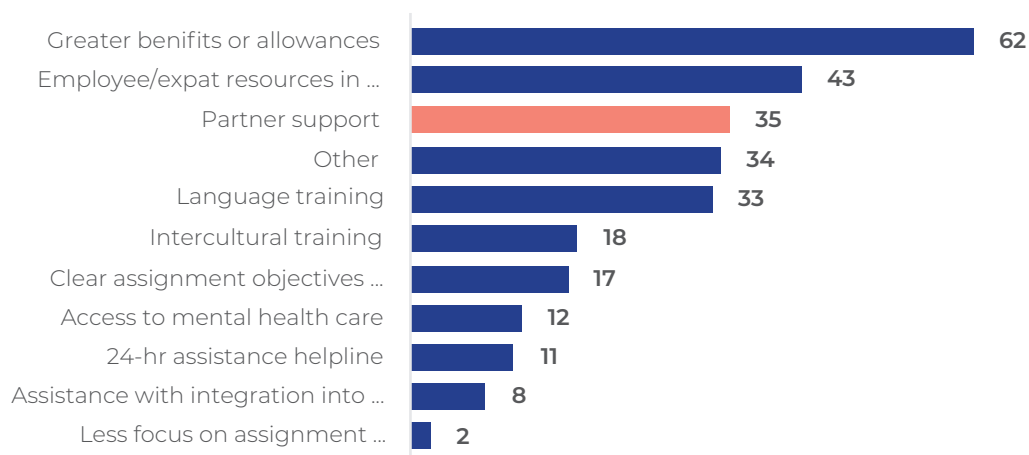


Figure 12

Biggest impact to emotional and mental health

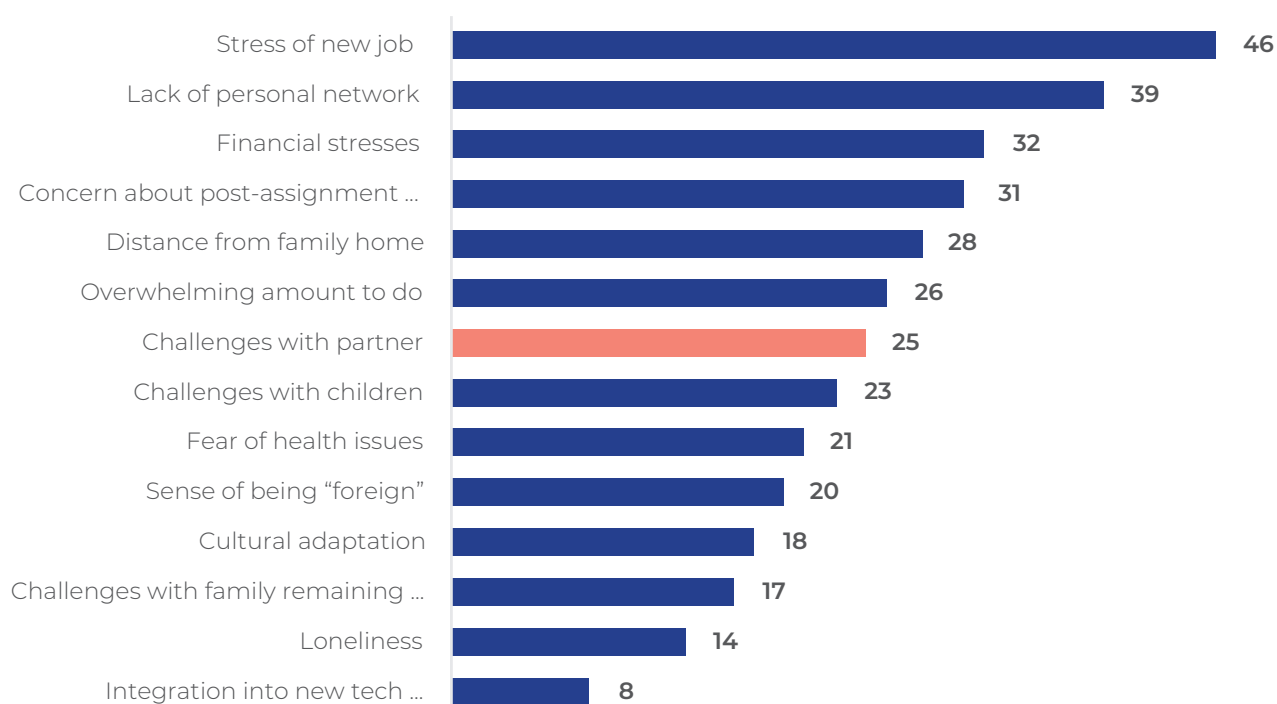


Figure 13



Caitlin Pyett adds: “Although the challenges faced by an assignee’s spouse can often go unnoticed by HR, they pose a very real risk to the success of the assignment and the overall happiness and performance of the assignee. Extending cultural and language training to partners can go a long way in alleviating some of these challenges, yet the data suggests that current supports are not having the desired impact.”

Jo Danehl adds: “According to many of our clients’ assignees, financial concerns about relocating are still top of mind. With so many dual-income households today, it’s difficult to look at these financial worries in isolation. In my view, these are intrinsically linked with the need to support the partner.”

“

The reduction to a single income, as a result of relocating, is a reasonable concern for many families today. Supporting partners during the relocation process is not only a matter of providing cultural training to ease their adjustment, but should also include tailored coaching to help them secure financial independence and paid employment in the host country. This type of support will ensure that families can return to being dual-income households once they relocate and is likely to resonate better with assignees and their partners.

”



Jo Danehl

Global Intercultural
& Language Training and Partner
Support Practice Leader,
Crown World Mobility

4 The need for defined objectives

Finally, as with any professional endeavor, having a plan with set objectives in place is key to ensuring (and measuring) success. In the case of an assignment, setting clear and achievable goals for the employee prior to relocation, and reviewing these regularly while they are away, can support learning and development and provide reassurance that they are progressing well in their career. However, according to our data, assignments seem to be severely lacking in this type of structure.

According to our selected clients' assignees, 17 (11%) said clear assignment objectives could have been provided as additional support (Figure 14). 33 (21%) claimed they had no assignment-specific objectives whatsoever, and 30 (20%) said this left them feeling directionless while on assignment (Figure 15).

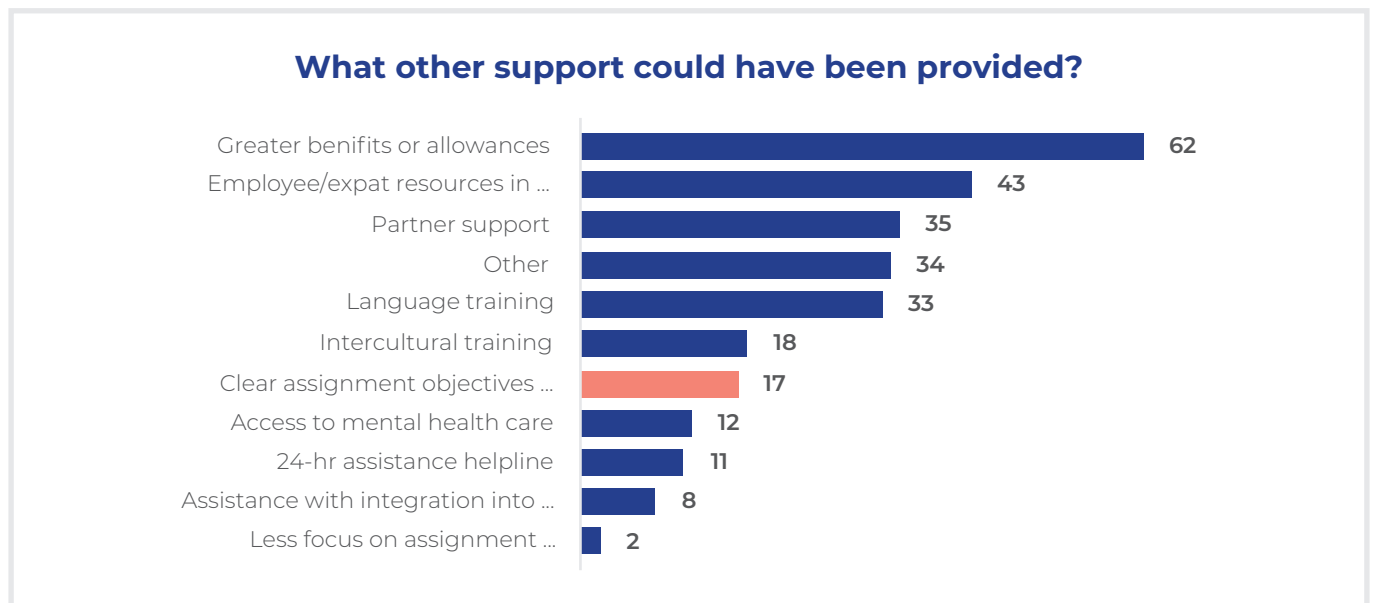


Figure 14

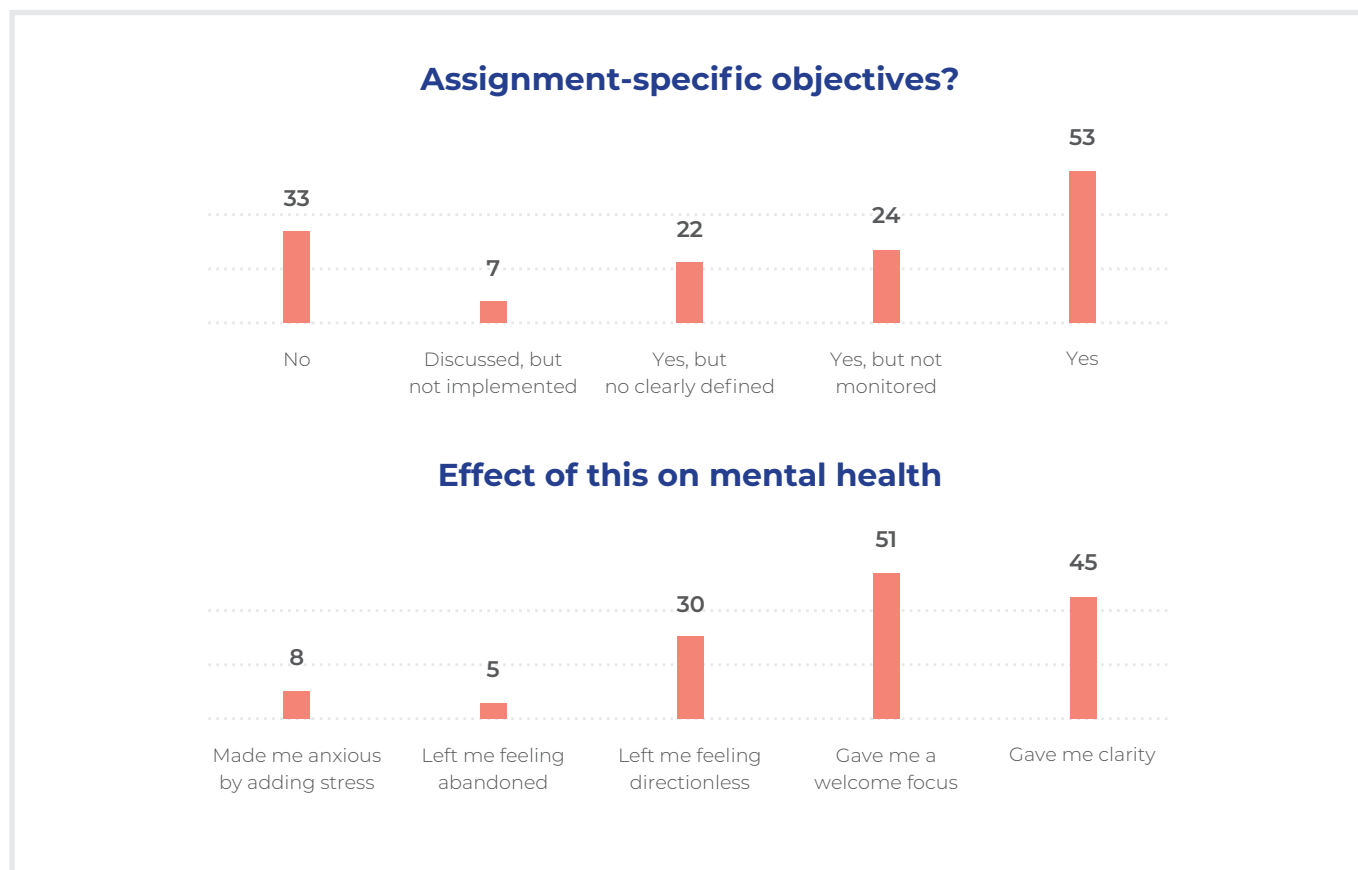


Figure 15

Caitlin Pyett adds: “The last thing any HR or mobility manager wants is for their employees to feel directionless while they’re away representing their company. So, it’s alarming that, of our selected clients’ assignees, so many are unaware of clear objectives that have been set for them while on assignment.”

“Setting clearer objectives and ensuring these align with a robust training and development plan can significantly boost assignee engagement. To achieve this, employers need to foster better alignment between mobility and talent development teams. This ensures that the training provided, and the objectives set, by the mobility team feed directly into the assignee’s career development plan and long-term aspirations.”

Jo Danehl adds: “Objectives serve a larger purpose, too, beyond professional development. In an unfamiliar environment, having concrete goals can help focus the assignees’ mind and provide a clear path forward. We encourage our cultural training participants to set short, medium, and long-term personal goals for this very reason.”

“Additionally, shared goals are a great way for the employee and their accompanying family members to move in the same direction. These goals can also serve as a reminder of the fun activities they planned to do together, which can be especially helpful when challenges arise.”

Conclusion

HR and mobility managers are aware of how important training and support is for their assignees. And with the unique insights about where current training programmes may be falling flat (outlined in this report) we hope to see more satisfied assignees (and families) heading into 2025.

In our next, and final report, we will explore the concerns and challenges of employees when repatriating after an assignment, and whether HR is aware (and prepared for) these when welcoming them back.

If you are interested in aligning your mobility program to meet the needs of assignees, or learning more about these findings, please get in touch with the Crown World Mobility team.



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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