

intercultural trends survey 2026

Curious about the shifting landscape of intercultural programs, we set out to uncover what is really changing—and why. From evolving assignment types and participant demographics to fresh expectations around content, delivery, and technology, our latest survey of 76 professionals from across our global intercultural coach network dives into who today's global assignees are, what they expect, and how their needs are evolving. The result? A snapshot of the trends shaping the future of intercultural training, straight from those on the frontline.

where in the world are respondents based?

EMEA - **41%**

Americas - **32%**

APAC - **28%**

cartus' intercultural coach network

Based around the world, the intercultural coaches that make up our Cartus network help relocating employees improve their intercultural competence, address intercultural challenges, and leverage cultural diversity to achieve their personal and organizational goals ahead of a corporate relocation.

Cartus delivers cross-cultural coaching to 1,400+ relocating employees annually in 200+ countries.





“At Cartus, we made the shift from 'training' to 'coaching' before COVID, and it really benefits us today with our clients and their employees because it is aligned with participant expectations of a learning format that is experiential, conversation-based, and offers practical skills that can be applied immediately.”

– Diane Mullen, Manager, Cartus Intercultural Academy

top 3 trends in intercultural programs

1. Participant preference for virtual sessions

- Shorter attention spans
- Preference for bite-sized information
- Traditional one-day programs now delivered in several short sessions
- Coaches feel the need to pay more attention to pace and delivery

2. Increased demand for employees to have intercultural skill sets

- Team building across cultures
- Global virtual leaders
- More global organizations are identifying intercultural skills as critical for their employees

3. Participants in intercultural programs are more likely to view the topic of “culture” as part of a larger discussion around inclusion

- Inclusive leadership
- Cultural conscious and unconscious biases
- Broad aspects of diversity are brought up in programs, content not limited to culture
- Europe appears to be leaning into diversity, while some US companies seem to be backing away from the topic

*** Note:** The bullet points below each trend reflect participant comments and examples. Examples were provided in an open-ended response format and analyzed for themes.

According to Cartus research, there's increasing demand for employees to have intercultural skill sets.





mobility matters podcast

Hear Lisa Johnson, Director, Global Consulting, and Diane Mullen, Manager, Cartus Intercultural Academy, discuss the importance of investing in training employees for the global workplace.

intercultural programs: shifting demographics

Change is the only constant. Today, global corporations quickly recognize the positive impact of diverse perspectives on innovation, problem-solving, and growth, driving a measurable increase in diverse employee populations globally. An international assignment is commonly attributed to career growth and deemed a life-changing opportunity for the employee and their accompanying family members.

Diversity is not a buzzword but a business advantage.

These shifts in talent strategy have expanded the need for more types of global mobility opportunities to meet business needs. There has been a shift from one-size-fits-all to more flexible options in terms of policy and strategy. The intercultural coaches we surveyed identified demographic shifts among those getting the opportunity to go on international assignments. Encouragingly, the

data reveals that today's assignee population is more diverse than ever before—encompassing a broad spectrum of cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, geographic origins, sexual orientations, abilities, and generations—signaling a meaningful move toward inclusivity and representation in global mobility opportunities.

Top three changes in assignee populations

- More women of all ages
- More employees with rich and varied identities, e.g., bi-cultural, bi-racial, etc.
- An increase in dual career couples (where an assignment for an employee temporarily disrupts the career of the accompanying partner and potentially reduces the income of the family)



58% of coaches are seeing more women in international assignments

47% report an increase in dual career couples

cartus blog!

Find out more: Intercultural program trends: what to look for in 2026 (and beyond)



youth programs: the next gen perspective

When it comes to generational differences, the survey asked specifically about youth program participants—those who are the dependent children of international assignees, typically between six and 18 years old. The insights cited are aligned with many of the trends that more general studies find regarding demographic shifts among Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012) and the emerging Gen Alpha (born between 2010 and 2025).

Five key emerging themes for youth program participants

1. **More globally savvy.** Youth program participants today, when compared to the past, are more aware and open to diversity; however, it is notable that, depending on the location, the mindset of their peers in the host country may not be as open. Participants today also often have more international and intercultural experiences before going on an international assignment, including participation in cultural exchange programs.
2. **Shorter attention spans and comfort with multitasking.** Respondents indicated a mixture of preferences spanning virtual and in-person options. Some found that youth programs best deliver in

person for more enjoyment, engagement, and increased learning. Others indicated participants preferred interactive learning and gamification. Regardless, most participants needed affirmation and guidance throughout the training program.

3. **Greater transparency with personal lives.** The programs need to place greater emphasis on mental health and well-being and on school/life balance. The definition of “success” for youth program participants leans more towards personal and interpersonal accomplishments.
4. **Preference for actionable skills and practical applications.** Participants want to understand who they are and better understand the world, with environmental and cultural concerns being raised during the youth programs. They are also more informed and require more mature training content than in the past.
5. **Notable impact of social media and technology.** Participants are better prepared due to online information and social media, but there is a risk of participants being unrealistically confident about the host location due to cultural information garnered from social media or by using AI tools.

64%
noticed changes
in the mindset
of today's
youth program
participants



non-relocation intercultural programs: preparing the modern workforce

Zoom out. One of the top three trends already identified in this report is an increased demand for employees in global organizations to have intercultural skills. This survey confirms that global organizations across all industries have become more mature when it comes to recognizing the value of developing global competence among their employees. Over the last decade, Cartus has recognized this growing shift and responded with the evolution of our Intercultural Management Training programs.

Zoom in. Of the coach respondents in our global network who lead non-relocation-related intercultural programs, nearly two-thirds (65%) have noticed changes in both the range of program content requested by global organizations and the participants' increased cultural awareness and expectations going into the non-relocation intercultural programs.

How are non-relocation programs evolving today?

1. Program objectives and content
2. Program duration and delivery methods
3. Program participant make-up (i.e., organizational level, location, cultural background, cultural awareness, experiences, and interests)

Program objectives and content trends

Intercultural coaches noted that more companies are requesting programs focusing on developing cultural agility, enhancing team performance, and supporting career development. They also see an increased emphasis on DEI within intercultural program objectives and the need for program outcomes that involve developing actionable skills.



what are non-relocation intercultural programs?

Programs where participants are not typically relocating but will have intercultural responsibilities in their role, including coaching and training sessions focused on developing global competencies, cultural awareness, country-specific business briefings, multicultural teambuilding, global leadership, and inclusive leader competence.



Intercultural skills for all. Forget the old days when only senior leaders got the global skills toolkit. Today, intercultural learning is often open to everyone. Survey respondents spotlight a major transformation: intercultural development programs now reach far beyond the C-suite. Early career pros, team members, and those with international experience are all jumping in, even when relocation is not on the table. The result is a richer mix of voices and perspectives in every session, and a new wave of employees ready to navigate the world with confidence.

In terms of program content, our survey findings highlight a greater emphasis on a range of skill sets to increase global presence, including:

- Mental fitness
- Growth mindset
- Leadership mentoring
- Intercultural conflict resolution
- Influencing from a distance
- Leading remotely
- Business coaching for local leaders

Program duration and delivery trends

In-person vs. virtual. While a few intercultural coach participants continue to see a preference for in-person programs, survey findings overwhelmingly confirm a preference for virtual programs. The rise in virtual formats drives the need for more interactive content and experiential training. The findings noted a resistance to theory and an increase in the use of games and activities to engage program participants.

Our findings also show a general trend toward shorter program duration, often two-hour or half-day sessions, and an overall preference for condensed formats.

“Today, all levels of employees are working globally, not just senior levels. I have seen an increase in open-mindedness to cultural agility as people seem to be able to see the need now that they perhaps didn’t see before.”

- EMEA-based intercultural coach
(survey respondent)

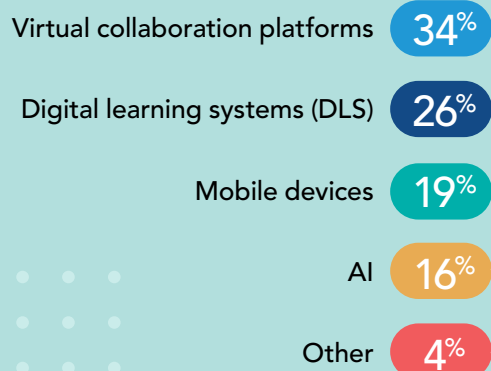
“Companies want a lot of output/takeaways with a minimum time spent in training. Sometimes the expectations are unreasonable but overall, it is nice to see that companies invest in training employees working globally to be more culturally aware and agile.”

- APAC-based intercultural coach
(survey respondent)



connecting across cultures: platforms, devices, and AI

Which technologies do you see impacting your intercultural programs today?



In the current corporate training and coaching environment, technology selection significantly shapes the structure and delivery of intercultural programs. Respondents cited virtual collaboration platforms such as Teams, Zoom, Webex, and Google Meet as the technology that has made the most impact on intercultural training initiatives. This was followed by Digital Learning Systems (DLS), which support virtual deliveries and facilitate the scheduling, tracking, and management of coaches, program participants, and coordinators within global networks.

Learning on the move. No surprises, the latest technology most impacting our coach delivery is the use of mobile devices. Workplace boundaries have expanded; employees and their families now access coaching and learning on the go—whether from a car, on a bike, or even while traveling. This flexibility opens new avenues for engagement but also demands greater creativity and adaptability from those leading these programs.

AI in program design or delivery. It is impossible to discuss the impact of technology on coaching and training without mentioning the increasing use of AI across all industries and business areas. As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly integrated into coaching and

training, 31% of our coach respondents report using AI in some capacity. However, AI remains a support, not a substitute. Human expertise and critical evaluation are still vital to ensure accuracy and relevance.

AI as a tool, not a teacher. The following are ways AI is currently being used across the Cartus global intercultural coach network:

- Creating role plays
- Finding visuals
- Translating
- Creating examples that are specific to the audience's industry or function
- Researching and data finding
- Drafting content
- Checking on current events
- Making examples more engaging

It is important to note that using AI still requires fact-checking for accuracy and is not a reliable source for everything!

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The survey highlights several themes that arise during cross-cultural programs today.

1. Safety and security
2. Inclusion
3. Belonging



rethinking intercultural programs: belonging, safety, and the power of connection



Safety drives belonging. With safety and security being the top theme in today's cross-cultural programs, they are no longer background concerns but front and center for globally mobile employees. When stepping into a new country and culture, people seek assurance that their well-being is a priority, echoing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model in real time. Today's intercultural programs must meet these expectations head on.

Inclusion powers connection. It is also not surprising to see that inclusion and belonging were the top three most prioritized themes in these training programs. In recent years, there has been an increased focus on inclusion and belonging, with companies making growing resources available to support community building among employees. Did you know? About 90% of Fortune 500 companies have Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), and more than 85% of global companies in a recent Cartus client sample feature ERGs on their sites. Additionally, all highlight "inclusion" as a core value, showing a universal shift toward communities that support and celebrate

the employee experience. Cross-cultural awareness and intercultural competence have long been anchors of global talent strategies, precursing the more recent introduction of global inclusion to corporate strategy.



Ready or not, the future of intercultural programs is vibrant, people-centered, and more dynamic than ever. As we embrace the power of global connection, we are not just crossing borders; we are building bridges. Here is to safer, more tailored, and inclusive adventures ahead!

Want to discuss this or any other aspect of your global mobility program? Contact your Cartus representative or email cartussolutions@cartus.com

