global talent mobility survey 2026

small-to-midsized programs: trends summary

Our biannual **Global Talent Mobility Survey Report 2026** is a comprehensive exploration into the dynamic intersection of macroeconomic challenges, employee experience, and the ever-evolving landscape of mobility strategies.

With the **final report out now**, we've taken a deep dive into specific industries and program sizes—including small-to-midsized programs—to see what the data tells us.

FOLLOWING ARE KEY FINDINGS FROM 34 RESPONDENTS WHO MOVE FEWER THAN 100 EMPLOYEES ANNUALLY.

why it matters

Whether you're managing challenging relocations, attracting key talent, or future-proofing operations, these insights give you a pulse on trends and opportunities for improvements to talent mobility in small-to-midsized programs.

speed bumps and green lights

what's driving mobility trends?

Whether your company's move volume has gone up, down, or stayed the same, you're in step with about a third of the total number of respondents from our parent report.

While 34% of small-to-midsized companies saw an increase in volume during the last 2 years, 33% saw a decrease, and another 33% saw no change at all. Companies of all sizes and industries showed similar results.

In 2024, companies primarily expanded into new markets (23%) and sought talent that wasn't available locally (19%). Fast forward to 2026, company growth (58%) became the top reason for increased mobility, while the need for non-local talent remained just as critical (58%).

**listen up!
mobility matters:
designing cost-effective
and employee friendly
mobility solutions**

2026 vs. 2024

When it comes to declining mobility volume, the data reveals a significant emphasis on cost containment strategies within small-to-midsized mobility programs, jumping from 32% in 2024 to 82% in 2026. This shift suggests that organizations are facing heightened financial pressures and are prioritizing tighter budget controls. Additionally, there is a marked rise in reduced support and interest in global mobility from the wider business, moving from 14% in 2024 to 46% in 2026, which may indicate growing internal resistance or shifting business priorities.

mobility matters

Based on the above, it's important to note that mobility demand in small-to-midsized mobility programs is rising due to growth and talent shortages, but cost pressure and declining business support may be creating a widening gap between what companies need from mobility and what they're currently willing to invest.

mobility priorities vs. challenges

Small-to-midsized mobility programs continue to balance operational priorities with growing structural challenges. These themes reflect the most common areas of focus and pressure points reported across this segment.

key global mobility priorities	key global mobility challenges
1 compliance	1 extended business travelers or remote workers
2 improve in-house mobility processes and optimization	2 achieving a more flexible approach to mobility
3 improve the employee experience	3 rising mobility costs

Improving in-house mobility processes and employee experience were the top two priorities listed by companies with small and midsized programs in 2024. Compliance has overtaken them both this year, no surprise given the growing number of requirements across areas like immigration, data protection, taxation, and employment law (all of which all demand more attention from teams that are already stretched thin).

top 3 move models

When asked which move types were a priority for their organizations in this segment, respondents shared:

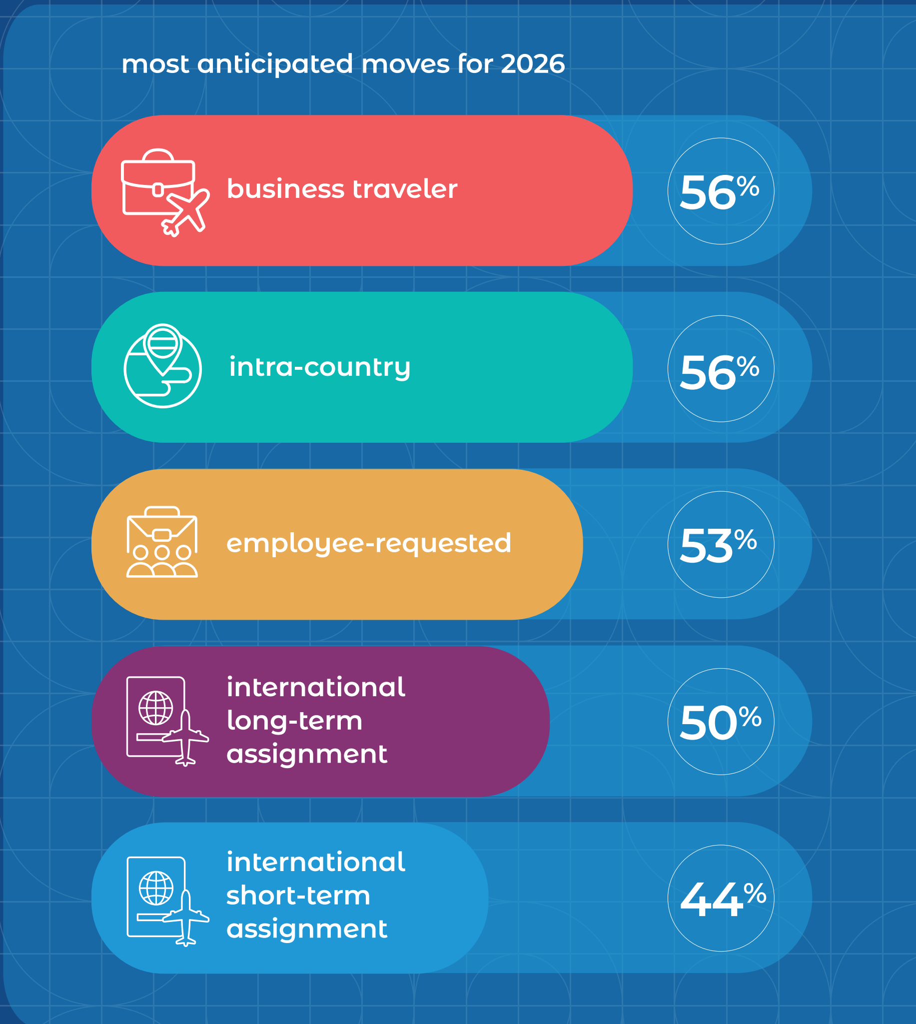
1. managed moves, fully coordinated by a relocation provider
2. core/flex
3. lump sum

here's the kicker

Flexible programs support both positive employee experiences and cost control when designed and managed strategically, but when it comes to lump sums, organizations are often surprised when they don't benefit from the "up front" savings they expected. Mobile employees who don't know what they don't know often front-load their spending, leaving insufficient funds for the end of the move. The administrative hours in-house teams spend troubleshooting add up, costing businesses time and money in the long run. If your organization plans to use a lump sum model, consider providing managed lump sum support to avoid setbacks.

business on the go: which moves will rule 2026?

Business traveler moves lead mobility activity this year, often managed as a standalone mobility workstream and cost-effective alternative to long-term moves.



However, less expensive doesn't mean "complication free." Businesses will still need to keep a close eye on the soft-cost drivers that can erode ROI, especially the administrative time required to manage traveler-related activities and obligations across:

- Tracking and duty of care
- Cross-border tax and immigration compliance
- Oversight of remote work and extended business travel (EBT), often managed under the umbrella of mobility

tailored support for growing programs

Learn more about our dedicated Cartus Insignia® team—experts who specialize in helping companies with fewer than 100 moves each year.

measuring the move: what makes a relocation shine?

This year, our survey focused on answering a new question that aligns with both program optimization and employee satisfaction—top priorities for this segment:

Which metrics most effectively define your relocation program's success? Respondents in this segment ranked the following indicators equally, each at 82%:

Together, these metrics show that relocation success comes from the way operational efficiency, employee experience, and business impact integrate. Reaching that balance requires strategic cross-functional coordination, often strengthened by external mobility experts who help unify these priorities into an optimized program. Often, internal mobility teams in this segment simply don't have the time, leadership support, or budget needed to sustain this level of coordination.

driven to adapt: what's fueling mobility policy overhauls?

53% of companies with small-to-midsized programs are considering a policy review this year, down from 57% in 2024. Not surprising since most companies review their mobility policies every 1 to 3 years as a best practice.

key factors influencing review decisions were:

	Small-to-midsized programs	All industries/ parent report
Employee Experience	67%	58%
Cost	44%	52%
Flexibility	44%	50%

This segment places a higher emphasis on employee experience and a lower emphasis on cost compared with aggregated results across all industries and program sizes in our parent report. While the underlying reasons aren't clear from the data, the difference itself is worth noting.

international assignment compensation

who's running the show?

Unlike the parent report—where 75% of respondents handed off their expat compensation duties to a global tax provider—among small-to-midsized programs, the responsibility is widely distributed: 47% outsource to a relocation management company (up from 28% in 2024) and 32% to a global tax provider (new this year). Of particular note, 21% now manage compensation in-house (down from 45% in 2024). As companies in this segment are increasingly asked to do more with less, many internal teams simply lack the time and resources to manage mobility internally.

47% outsource to a relocation management company

32% outsource to a global tax provider

flex appeal: have it your way

When asked if they were planning to include flexible mobility policies in their relocation programs, participants shared the following:

yes	41%
no	32%
maybe	27%

In some ways, these numbers are surprising, since 94% of respondents also shared that they're seeing employee demand for flexibility increasing or staying the same.

fueling flexibility fever

In companies using a core/flex policy, the relocating employee was identified as both the person most likely to select flex benefits and the primary driver behind the push for greater flexibility.

The top 3 drivers were:

- Changing employee needs **(71%)**
- Budget constraints **(68%)**
- Changing employee expectations **(68%)**

Based on our observations of companies with programs of this scale, it's notable that two of the leading factors are centered on employees and their overall relocation experience.

inclusive mobility

how relo programs are keeping up with employee needs

dei

76% of the participants in our parent report have continued to prioritize DEI initiatives. A slightly smaller percentage (68%) in the small-to-midsized segment reported prioritizing them, with 14% tweaking their language.

strategy sync

12% of companies with small-to-midsized programs have formally tied their mobility programs to their talent strategies, and another 65% have reported informal connections. This presents an opportunity for companies to formalize mobility's alignment with talent this year.

27% reported addressing emerging employee needs, and another 24% are currently considering changes to better reflect those needs.

equity matters

This year's findings across all industries demonstrate an emphasis on supporting diverse employees and families. Small-to-midsized programs are aligned with these findings.

employee/family scenarios covered in mobility programs

59%
dual-career couples
(partners with their own careers)

32%
pet relocation

29%
support for employees moving from low to high cost-of-living locations

21%
employees/family members with disabilities

21%
dependent parents of employees

global moves, local grooves

helping families thrive abroad

cross-cultural coaching

The majority of participants in this segment (71%) offer cross-cultural coaching to relocating employees and their families.

Policy power-up: 58% of organizations recommend cross-cultural coaching or bake it into policy. Another 13% make it mandatory, acknowledging how crucial it is for employee/assignment success.

language-learning solutions

Most companies across all industries (78%) provide language training. The same is true of this segment, where 65% offer training.

Talk the talk: Almost half (46%) of respondents say their companies recommend language training or include it in their policy, although only 5% require it. For others, it depends on business needs (27%) or the employee's choice (23%).

deep dive!
reverse cultural shock in global mobility

local leaps: intra-country moves

44% of respondents from this segment implement intra-country moves outside of the United States, and 93% of these have specific policies in place to support these move types.

Relo woes: 27% of companies with small-to-midsized programs report failed assignments for domestic moves, most often because employees and their families couldn't settle in the new location—a challenge similar to cross-border moves. Another 47% weren't sure whether any assignments had failed, 14 percentage points higher than our parent report, which is concerning given the clear link between poor employee experiences, early terminations, and attrition. Tracking outcomes and their impact has become essential.

humans + high-tech: the ultimate mobility dream team

As companies lean more heavily on digital tools to support employees through a relocation, they're prioritizing flexibility and choice while still aiming for a top-tier experience.

- Most organizations strike a balance, combining personal attention and smart tech **(62%)**
- Many rely only on a human-centered approach **(38%)**
- No respondents said they had a technology-only solution (a clear sign that most aren't ready to ditch traditional support for the latest tech trends)

	Small-to-midsized programs	All industries/ parent report
Don't use AI technology	62%	49%
Use AI technology	29%	42%
Remain undecided	9%	9%

42%

These results vary from the parent report, where 42% reported using AI technology.

The slower adoption rate in this segment (29%) makes sense: smaller mobility programs often lack the relocation volume needed to justify investing in AI-driven automation or analytics, making the business case harder to prove. With lean teams already stretched thin, they also have limited capacity to evaluate, implement, and maintain new AI tools, which slows adoption even further.

sustainability in motion

making every move matter

Mobility-specific sustainability goals are still emerging, but they're gaining traction as companies respond to mindful talent and new regulations.

Here's where small-to-midsized programs stand:

- An extensive, organization-wide sustainability policy that includes mobility **(24%)**
- A broader corporate policy with little to no mobility involvement **(53%)**
- No policy **(12%)**
- Unsure whether a policy exists, highlighting a disconnect between mobility and ESG owners **(15%)**

repatriation done right: mobility roi

How do businesses measure international assignment success?

1. Meeting assignment objectives **(50%)**
2. Employee experience – sentiment **(44%)**
3. Retention post-repatriation **(41%)**
4. We don't formally measure assignment success **(41%)**

ROI roadblocks: Measuring mobility ROI is crucial to earning mobility's seat at the table, but it's also typically a challenge for most businesses, since almost half of companies don't formally measure assignment success.

Repatriation coaching: While 32% of companies offer repatriation coaching (training and formal debriefs) for globe-trotting employees and their families—68% don't. This represents a missed opportunity to support career transitions, talent pipelines, and employee retention.

read more!
repatriation: employee support drives business success

Companies with small-to-midsized mobility programs face unique challenges

2026 is an opportunity to address them while elevating your overall strategy. Ready to pressure-test your playbook? Contact your Cartus representative or email cartussolutions@cartus.com.