global talent mobility survey 2026

manufacturing, construction, and automotive: 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 the manufacturing, construction, and automotive industries—to see what the data tells us.

FOLLOWING ARE KEY FINDINGS FROM 20 RESPONDENTS.

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 these industries.

speed bumps and green lights

what's driving mobility trends?

In this segment, 20% of manufacturing, construction, and automotive companies saw an increase in volume during the last 2 years, 40% saw a decrease, and another 40% saw no change at all. Companies of all sizes and industries in our **parent report** were more evenly spread across the board at about a third in each category.

manufacturing, construction, and automotive programs

top reasons for mobility increasing over the past 2 years

- 100% talent not available locally
- 50% company growth/expansion into different markets (tied)

top reasons for mobility activity decreasing over the past 2 years

- 88% cost containment strategy
- 38% reduced support/interest in global mobility by the wider business

2024 vs. 2026

In 2024, manufacturing, construction, and automotive companies faced a crossroads in talent mobility: on one hand, company growth, local talent shortages, and market expansion were driving the need for increased cross-border movement; on the other, rising costs and a push for cost containment were causing many organizations to rein in their mobility programs.

Today, this tug-of-war continues with businesses balancing the urgent need to move key talent with the financial realities of tighter budgets and wavering support from leadership. The persistent strain between operational necessity and cost management highlights a critical trend: the tension between operational needs and cost control means mobility teams must take a strategic approach to keep companies competitive, especially as visa costs rise and immigration processes grow more complex.

mobility priorities vs. challenges

Across this segment, mobility teams are working to strengthen core processes while navigating increasing regulatory and cost complexity. The themes below reflect the most common areas where programs are investing time and where they're feeling the most strain.

key global mobility priorities	key global mobility challenges
1 improve the employee experience (45%)	1 immigration (45%)
2 improve in-house mobility processes and optimization (40%)	2 rising mobility costs/current in-house mobility processes (tied) (35%)

what's rising, what's holding steady

Improving the employee experience and strengthening in-house processes remain central priorities for this segment, but immigration and rising costs challenge mobility teams, highlighting the ongoing tension between delivering a smoother mobility experience and managing the operational realities that make it difficult to provide.

business on the go: which moves will rule 2026?

A note on business travel

While business travel remains an important move type, it doesn't dominate this segment the way it does in the broader survey, where it was a clear front-runner. Instead, shortterm and long—term assignments continue to play a central role here, a direct reflection of the acute talent shortages and specialized skill requirements across the manufacturing, construction, and automotive industries. These sectors often need employees on the ground, embedded in operations, which keeps assignment—based mobility a priority.

most anticipated moves for 2026

- international short-term assignments — 80%
- intra-country moves/ business traveler/ repatriation (tied) — 75%
- international long-term assignments — 70%

where in the world

top destinations based on proprietary cartus data

2025 2022

It will be important to observe any changes in leading destination locations as work visa and immigration regulations evolve in the coming months, particularly in the US and other countries. However, the United States, India, and China remained top destinations for these sectors through 2025, just as they were four years earlier.

The UK and Switzerland have replaced Canada and the Netherlands in the top five, with Switzerland moving ahead of China last year.

measuring the move: what makes a relocation shine?

The data shows that this segment defines relocation success through a blend of employee experience, business impact, and operational discipline.

This balance reflects the realities of these industries, where performance and relocation transitions directly impact production timelines and project outcomes. Success requires seamless coordination between mobility, HR, and operational leaders — a challenge for teams already managing high volumes, complex regulations, and limited internal resources.

a potential gap

The lower emphasis on talent outcomes suggests a potential oversight that may need attention: long-term retention and talent pipelines are critical to sustaining business continuity and competitiveness. Programs in this segment would benefit from tracking and prioritizing these outcomes more intentionally to strengthen their mobility brand and long-term ROI.

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

A majority (80%) of companies in manufacturing, construction, and automotive industries are considering a policy review this year.

While this year's **parent report** also ranked employee experience and flexibility in the top spots, cost made the top 3 as well. Flashback to 2024, and both cost and DEI were key factors. It may be that in these sectors, the war for talent, such as skilled manufacturing jobs, lessen the focus on cost savings.

key factors influencing review decisions include:

- 81% employee experience
- 63% flexibility
- 44% reduce number of exceptions

zoom in

With organizations shifting their terminology for previous DEI priorities, they are directing the focus to be more embedded in "talent" and "employee experience." Despite DEI dropping out of the top three, it is encouraging that this segment continues to place a consistent emphasis on employee experience and flexibility. However, the shift toward reducing exceptions suggests a growing focus on operational consistency, a practical priority for industries where mobility supports complex, hands-on work. It's also notable that cost has dropped out of the top drivers this year, signaling that immediate operational needs may be taking precedence over budget considerations in policy review decisions.

However, it is important to note that reducing exceptions likely signals efforts to cut costs, with respondents being more precise about their savings strategies this year. Similarly, flexible mobility policies, frequently utilized as an inclusive mobility strategy, may also support cost containment.

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	50%
no	20%
maybe	30%

what it means

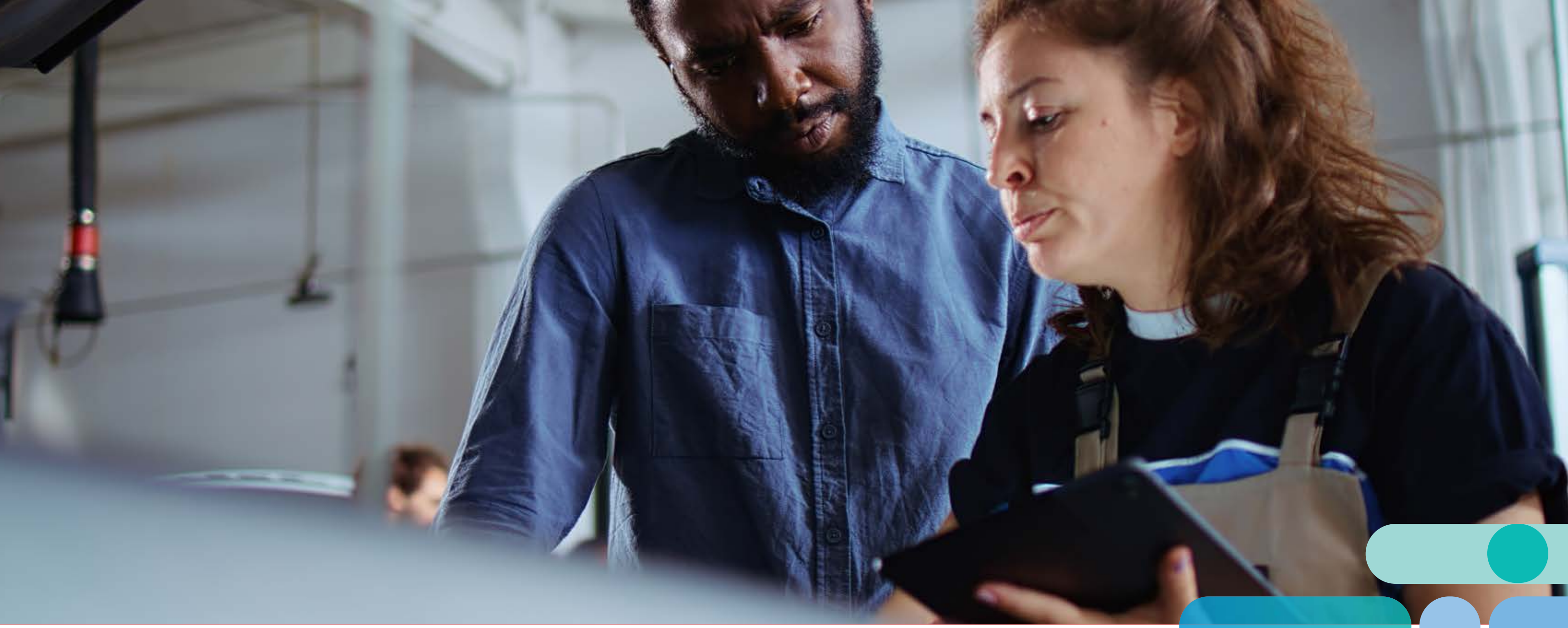
Flexibility is a priority in this segment, with many organizations shifting toward adaptable mobility models and others defining their path forward. Employee expectations and needs are clearly influencing these operationally driven industries, but many organizations are working to introduce flexibility without compromising consistency, compliance, or ROI. Partnering with an experienced relocation management company can help strike that balance.

fueling ﬂexibility fever

In companies using a core/flex policy, the relocating employee was identified as the person most likely to select flex benefits (35%), followed by an HR business partner (20%). The top 3 drivers behind increased flexibility were listed as:

- **Changing employee expectations (85%)**
- **Changing employee needs (75%)**
- **Need to reduce policy exceptions (60%)**

However, it's important to note that another 35% said they aren't considering a core/flex program at all, an unfortunate gap when considering the positive impact flexible programs have on employee experience, program optimization, and cost control—all priorities and challenges faced by this segment.



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. In the manufacturing, construction, and automotive segment, the results are more varied: 45% said they have not made any changes to their DEI initiatives, 25% have changed terminology but continue to prioritize them, and 20% were unsure where their programs stood. A small 5% reported the need to reclassify DEI to *connection and belonging* or eliminating all DEI priorities due to US government requirements.

strategy sync

10% of companies within the manufacturing, construction, and automotive segment have formally tied their mobility programs to their talent strategies, and another 60% have reported informal connections. This presents an opportunity for companies to formalize mobility's alignment with talent this year. 45% reported addressing emerging employee needs, and another 15% are currently considering changes to better reflect those needs.

global moves, local grooves

helping families thrive abroad

cross-cultural coaching

The majority of participants in this segment (80%) offer cross-cultural coaching to relocating employees and their families.

Policy power-up: 75% of organizations recommend cross-cultural coaching or making it mandatory as part of policy. Another 19% make it mandatory, acknowledging how crucial it is for employee/assignment success, higher than most segments, according to this year's data.

language-learning solutions

Most companies in this segment (90%) provide language training, which is even higher than the majority found in the parent survey, across all segments, which came in at 78%. This may be because, for this industry sector, there is more inherent collaboration required between local and temporary project team members compared to other sectors. As a result, employees tend to interact more with local workers, making it essential to communicate in the local language, where possible.

Talk the talk: 72% of respondents say their companies recommend language training or include it in their policy, although none require it. For others, it's offered at the business' discretion (11%), based on a needs assessment (6%) or as a flex choice (11%).

local leaps: intra-country moves

85% of respondents in this segment reported implementing intra-country moves outside of the United States, and 88% of these have specific policies in place to support these move types. This is aligned with Cartus' finding that global domestic mobility strategies are maturing and becoming more critical to talent strategies in many business sectors.

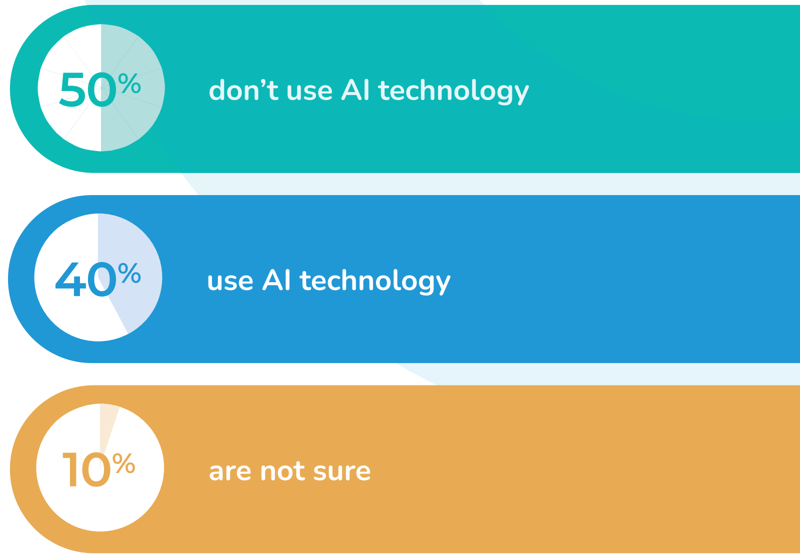
Relo woes: 29% of participants from automotive, construction, and automotive industries report failed assignments for domestic moves, most often because employees and their families couldn't settle in the new location, a challenge similar to cross-border moves. Another 29% weren't sure whether any assignments had failed, which is concerning given the clear link between poor employee experiences, early terminations, and attrition. Enhancing talent mobility strategies (including more support for candidate assessment, educated decisions, and settling in support) as well as tracking outcomes and their impact will be essential for this group's mobility ROI.

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 (65%)
- Many rely only on a human-centered approach (35%)
- Zero 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)

These results closely mirror the parent report, where 42% use AI technology for business and process tasks. APAC's modest lead (51%) may reflect the region's strong digital-first culture and the influence of markets where tech innovation and automation are already deeply embedded in business operations.



sustainability in motion

making every move matter

Sustainability is a strong focus for this segment, with 65% of participants reporting a broader corporate policy with little to no mobility involvement (ahead of the parent report's 53%).

However, mobility-specific goals are significantly behind in both groups: 26% of respondents in the parent report cited an extensive policy or formal goals that touch all areas of the organization, including the mobility function, compared to just 15% in the manufacturing, construction, and automotive segment.

Slow but starting to grow: Companies are increasingly linking mobility with overall sustainability goals, though specific targets remain uncommon. This shift is driven by ESG initiatives that help attract new talent, especially among younger generations, and by new regulations and standards from governments and industries. Consequently, our dedicated Cartus ESG team has noticed an increasing number of clients asking for shared ESG objectives, like carbon emission reporting, to support joint initiatives. Our team also frequently collaborates with Cartus clients to provide information on program impact and commitment levels of downstream suppliers, as well as guidance on how we align with each organization's unique ESG goals.

repatriation done right: mobility roi

How do businesses measure international assignment success?

1. Employee experience **(50%)**
2. Meeting assignment objectives **(45%)**
3. Completing the assignment **(40%)**
4. Career path progression post-repatriation **(30%)**
5. Retention post-repatriation **(30%)**

50% of participants don't formally measure assignment success at all.

It is also important to note that assignments do not always result in repatriation; instead, the relocating employee could go on another assignment or be localized in the assignment location.

Mobility ROI roadblocks: Measuring mobility ROI is essential to securing mobility's strategic influence, and it remains a major gap for the half of companies not formally assessing assignment outcomes. This lack of measurement also limits visibility into employee retention, talent pipelines, and succession planning.

Repatriation coaching: While 20% of companies offer repatriation coaching (training and formal debriefs) for globe-trotting employees and their families, 80% don't. This also represents a missed opportunity to support career transitions, talent pipelines, and employee retention.

Companies in manufacturing, construction, and automotive industries 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.