global talent mobility survey 2026

consumer goods and retail: 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 consumer goods and retail industries—to see what the data tells us.

FOLLOWING ARE KEY FINDINGS FROM 11 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 the consumer goods and retail industries.

speed bumps and green lights

what's driving mobility trends?

In this segment, 55% of participants in the consumer goods and retail industries saw an increase in volume during the last 2 years, 18% saw a decrease, and another 27% 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. This segment's more pronounced rise in mobility activity could reflect its fast-moving supply chains and need to deploy talent quickly as the market shifts according to consumer demand.

top reasons for mobility increasing over the past 2 years: consumer goods and retail programs

2026		2024	
83%	expansion into different markets	36%	talent not available locally
67%	talent not available locally	29%	expansion into different markets
50%	greater emphasis on career development (50%)	21%	greater emphasis on career development

2024 vs. 2026

In 2024, the top drivers of **decreased mobility activity** were cost containment strategy (40%), negative company growth (40%), and reduced support/interest in global mobility by the wider business (20%). This year, 100% of respondents with decreasing mobility volume cited negative company growth as the top driver. This was followed by a broad mix of five strategic and operational challenges at 50% each (decrease in remote workers, reduced volume in different markets, reduced support by the wider business, cost containment, and strategy).

mobility priorities vs. challenges

Across this segment, mobility teams are balancing efforts to elevate the employee experience with the operational demands of compliance, process optimization, and policy refinement. In Cartus' experience, maintaining costs is also a key priority for 2026.

key global mobility priorities	key global mobility challenges
1 improve the employee experience (82%)	1 immigration (55%)
2 compliance/improve in-house mobility processes and optimization (tied) (55%)	2 rising mobility costs (46%)
3 review or redesign mobility policy (27%)	3 calculating mobility ROI/extended business travelers or remote workers (tied) (27%)

2024 priorities: This segment listed improve the employee experience, review or design mobility policy, and a more flexible approach to mobility as their top priorities.

2024 challenges: The consumer goods and retail segment listed their top challenges as rising mobility costs, calculating mobility return on investment, and macroeconomic pressures.

what's rising, what's holding steady

Improving the employee experience and strengthening core processes remain central priorities, but immigration pressures, rising costs, and the complexity of tracking ROI continue to challenge mobility teams, underscoring the tension between delivering a smoother experience and managing the realities that constrain it.

measuring the move: what makes a relocation shine?

Respondents in this segment ranked the following as key metrics that help them define mobility program success:

- **91%** employee satisfaction / operational efficiency
- **73%** business impact
- **64%** talent outcomes

Employee satisfaction
e.g. employee/family feedback - cultural, personal adjustment

Operational efficiency
e.g. on-time, on-budget - immigration & tax compliance

Business impact
e.g. assignment objectives met - improved leadership or market presence

Talent outcomes
e.g. employee retention post-assignment, global competency development, career growth, future mobility

zoom in

With each value scored above 50%, this segment demonstrates a mature, well-rounded view of mobility success that spans employee experience, operational rigor, and strategic value. Delivering on this full scope, however, requires seamless coordination between mobility, HR, and operational leaders, which can be a tall order amid top mobility and market challenges. A relocation management company can help by providing the structure and expertise needed to keep execution aligned.

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

Almost half (46%) of companies in consumer goods and retail industries are considering a policy review this year.

Key factors influencing review decisions include:

60% employee experience

40% inclusive mobility and flexibility (tied)

This year's report saw the addition of inclusivity in this segment's top 3 drivers for a policy review, bumping cost out of the number 2 slot, where it was ranked in 2024.

zoom in

The addition of inclusivity as a top driver signals a meaningful shift in this segment, with companies placing greater emphasis on creating mobility policies that support a wider range of employee needs. This suggests that organizations are Talent-focused, prioritizing experience and flexibility over purely financial considerations as they rethink their programs for 2026.

international assignment compensation: who's running the show?

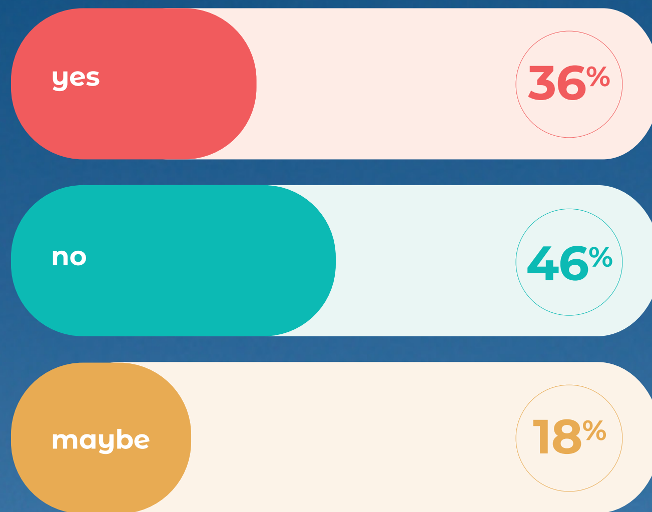
This year, participants from the consumer goods and retail industries reported an even distribution when outsourcing compensation:

36% rely on a relocation management company (up 11 points from 2024), and another 36% choose a global tax provider. 28% manage compensation in-house. Notably, the increased use of a relocation management company suggests that organizations in this segment are looking for structured support and relief from heavy workloads as mobility, compliance, and operational efficiency become more complex.

relocation management company	36%
global tax provider	36%
in-house	28%

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:



Almost half of participants (46%) cited an increasing demand for flexibility among its employees, though a whopping 73% also shared that they are not considering a core/flex program at this time.

For companies that are seeing an increased need for flexibility, top reasons were listed as changing employee needs, changing employee expectations, and a need to reduce policy exceptions.

what it means

The mixed response on flexible mobility policies reflects a segment that recognizes the value of flexibility but is still grappling with the internal capacity required to deliver it. While rising employee expectations make flexibility increasingly important, many teams are already stretched by cost pressures, process complexity, and competing operational demands. Yet the very benefits companies are seeking (fewer exceptions, improved employee experience, stronger mobility brand perception, and greater efficiency) are often unlocked through more flexible policy design. For organizations navigating these constraints, a strategic mobility partner can help bridge the gap, making flexibility more achievable without adding to internal workload.

inclusive mobility

how relo programs are keeping up with employee needs

dei

In 2024, a third of participants from the consumer goods and retail industries were making progress in their mobility DEI objectives, and another third were just getting started. This year, we wanted to know whether companies in this sector had made any changes to their existing DEI initiatives. The majority in this segment (46%) reported no changes, 27% reported changing their terminology but continuing to have inclusive priorities, and another 27% reported being unsure of where their programs stand. Since inclusive mobility is a top driver behind policy reviews this year, these numbers are in sync with that priority.

strategy sync

27% of companies within the consumer goods and retail segment have formally tied their mobility programs to their talent strategies (14 points higher than the aggregated results in our parent report), and another 55% have reported informal connections (5 points lower than our **parent report**). This presents an opportunity for companies to formalize mobility's alignment with talent this year.

an opportunity for improvement

27% reported addressing emerging employee needs, and another 9% said they are considering them, but the majority (46%) shared this is not a current focus in their mobility program. This presents a significant gap between this segment's prioritization of inclusivity in policy reviews and employee experience, and its limited focus on identifying employee needs; the very insights that would drive effective mobility program design, strengthen employee experiences, and reinforce inclusive mobility commitments and long term talent strategy.

global moves, local grooves

helping families thrive abroad

cross-cultural coaching

100% of participants in this segment offer cross-cultural coaching to relocating employees and their families, up 25 points from the aggregated results in the parent report.

Policy power-up: 64% of organizations recommend cross-cultural coaching or making it a mandatory policy. Another 27% 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 (82%) provide language training, 4 points higher than all segments included in the parent report.

Talk the talk: The majority of respondents (78%) say their companies recommend language training or include it in their policy, while 11% require it. For others, it's offered at the business' discretion (11%).

The findings in this section of the report highlight the maturity in the industry when it comes to supporting the success of employees and families as they integrate into the destination location and perform with local teams. Intercultural competence and communication skills are recognized by this industry as business critical.

local leaps: intra-country moves

55% of respondents in this segment reported implementing intra-country moves outside of the United States, and 83% of these have specific policies in place to support these move types. This demonstrates an increasingly mature business strategy for tapping into and supporting local talent in key growth markets.

Relo woes: A third of participants from consumer goods and retail industries report failed assignments for domestic moves, citing the employees' and their families' ability to adapt as the cause in all cases. Another 17% weren't sure whether any assignments had failed, which is concerning given the clear link between poor employee experiences, early terminations, and attrition. Tracking outcomes and their impact will be essential for this group's mobility ROI.

Additionally, believing that moving within a country is simpler than relocating internationally might be contributing to the number of failed assignments. Sometimes, even for domestic moves, destination services or cross-cultural coaching can assist employees and their families in adapting smoothly to their new location.

humans + high-tech: the ultimate mobility dream team

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

- Most organizations strike a balance, combining personal attention and smart tech (73%)
- Many rely only on a human-centered approach (27%)
- 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 numbers differ greatly from the parent report, where 42% of mobility teams reported using AI technology and 49% said they didn't. Consumer goods and retail organizations may be slower to adopt AI because many face financial pressures, talent gaps, and underinvestment in the skilled workforce and supporting infrastructure needed to implement and scale new technologies*. Indeed, the retail industry also identifies a real need for human touch and interaction when supporting their employees.

*Retail Insight Network (Feb, 2026)

73%
don't use ai technology

27%
use ai technology

sustainability in motion

making every move matter

Mobility Sustainability is a divided focus for this segment, with 46% of participants reporting a broader corporate policy with little to no mobility involvement and another 46% citing an extensive policy or formal goals that touch all areas of the organization, including mobility.

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/completing the assignment (tied) **(55%)**
2. Meeting assignment objectives /career path progression post-repatriation (tied) **(46%)**
3. Retention post-repatriation **(36%)**

46% 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 transition to local in the assignment location.

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 27% of companies offer repatriation coaching (training and formal debriefs) for globe-trotting employees and their families, 73% don't. This also represents a missed opportunity to support career transitions, talent pipelines, and employee retention.

Companies in the consumer goods and retail 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.