

Expats Insider 2021 Survey: The Future of Working Abroad

Expats around the world talk about their career abroad and how they envision their future working life.

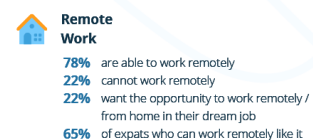
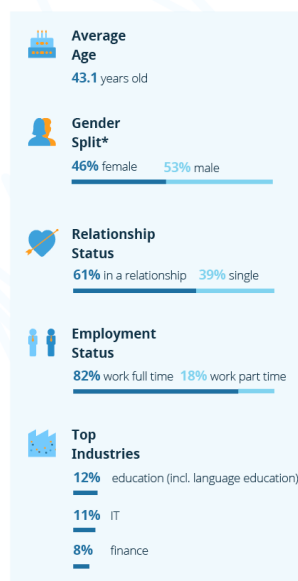
- Working expats around the world are well educated and most frequently work in the fields of education, IT, and finance.
- The concept of New Work is most important in the USA, the UAE, Finland, Estonia, and the Netherlands — and relatively unimportant in Japan, Egypt, South Korea, Turkey, and India.
- A good compensation will remain more relevant than soft factors in a future working environment.

Munich, 14 September 2021 — Why do expats move abroad? According to the *Expats Insider 2021* survey by InterNations, 47% of working expats name their career as the most important reason for relocating to another country. Most of them found a job on their own (17%), were recruited internationally (15%), or were sent by their employer (13%). Just 2% moved abroad to start their own business.

The key focus of this year's *Expats Insider* survey, conducted by [InterNations](https://www.internations.org), the world's largest expat community with more than 4 million members, is the future of working abroad. Expats all around the world shared what it is really like to work abroad and described their working conditions. They also provided insights into how new working arrangements (e.g., remote work) are changing their working life and what they would like to see in the future.

Expats Worldwide

The Future of Working Abroad



* Respondents also had the option to self describe — so the total may not always add up to 100%.
** 17% found a job on their own, 15% were recruited internationally, 13% were sent by their employer, 2% to start their own business
*** Note: This includes working expats and expats looking for a job.

Expats Working Abroad Are Well Educated

Expats working abroad are on average 43.1 years old, and the gender ratio is a fairly even split between male (53%) and female (46%) expats. Overall, they are well educated, with four in five working expats either holding a postgraduate degree / master's degree (47%) or a bachelor's degree (33%). Another 8% have a PhD, followed by one in twenty with qualifications from commercial / technical / vocational training (5%). Just 5% have only graduated high school, and 1% have no degree at all.

When it comes to their current employment situation, 30% are in a senior / specialist position, followed by lower / middle management (17%) and top managers / executives (13%). More than one in five (11%) are self-employed / a freelancer, 9% are teachers / professors, and 7% each either work in entry-level jobs or have their own business.

Education, IT, and Finance Are the Most Common Fields of Work

The most common fields expats work in are education (12%), IT (11%), and finance (8%). Other frequently mentioned fields of work include manufacturing & engineering (7%), healthcare (6%), and advertising, marketing & communication (5%).

About one-third of working expats (33%) have a gross yearly income ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 USD. Four in nine (44%) make 50,000 USD or less, while 23% make more than 100,000 USD.

Lower Working Hours and a Higher Satisfaction with their Work-Life-Balance

While the vast majority of expats works full time (82%), the share has slightly decreased by four percentage points since 2015 (86%).

The changes in the way they work become even clearer when it comes to expats' working hours: In 2015, the average number of working hours per week — for full-time and part-time workers combined — was 42 hours; in 2021 it is just 39.9 hours. This seems to have an impact on personal satisfaction: 70% of working expats are happy with their working hours in 2021 (vs. 64% in 2015), and 68% rate their work-life-balance positively (vs. 63% in 2015).

While the satisfaction with working hours and work-life balance has slightly increased since 2015, expats are less happy with their local career opportunities: less than half the working expats (49%) are satisfied with this factor in 2021, compared to 60% in 2015. On the other hand, expats rate their job security better now, with 67% saying they are happy with this factor (vs. 60% in 2015). Overall, 73% are happy with their job in general, which is 5 percentage points more than in 2015 (68%).

In Which Countries Is the Concept of New Work Most Important?

Close to three in five working expats (58%) say that factors like autonomy, freedom, creativity, personal development, and self-fulfillment are important in the business culture of their host country. These values are closely related to the concept of New Work, which describes the new way of working in the global and digital age.

The top 10 countries where expats rate the importance of New Work in the local business culture the highest are the USA, the UAE, Finland, Estonia, the Netherlands, Bahrain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Sweden. For example, 74% of working expats in the USA say that New Work plays an important role in the local business culture.

When asked to compare the importance of New Work in their home country and their current country of residence, 49% of working expats say that New Work is more important in the business culture of their host country than in their home country. Working expats from Mexico (74%), the Philippines (65%), Turkey (61%), India (60%), and Italy (59%) see the biggest difference in importance as compared to their home country.

In fact, their home countries do not rank particularly well when it comes to the importance of New Work in the local business culture, as rated by other expats. Mexico is the best out of these five countries, landing on 33rd place out of 55. It is followed by the Philippines (40th), while Italy (49th), India (51st), and Turkey (52nd) even end up among the bottom 10 worldwide.

Overall, Japan (55th out of 55), Egypt, South Korea, Turkey, India, Kuwait, Italy, Spain, France, and China (46th) are the ten destinations where expats rate the concept of New Work as relatively unimportant in the business culture. For example, 40% of expats in Japan say that New Work is not important in the local business world, compared to 18% globally.

Remote Work Is on the Rise

One aspect of New Work is already an everyday occurrence for many working expats: close to four in five (78%) are able to work remotely in 2021. However, while 62% say that they can work remotely, 16% add that they *can* work remotely but usually *prefer not to*. Another 16% are unable to work remotely due to the nature of their job, and only 6% cannot work remotely because their employer does not allow it. Overall, 65% enjoy working remotely: more than a quarter (28%) even like it *very much*, while just 3% do not like it *at all*.

Close to two in five working expats (39%) work fully remotely, while the second-biggest share (18%) works remotely for more than 15 days per month. This figure is followed by two to five days (14%), one day or less (12%), and six to ten days (10%).

The COVID-19 pandemic had an effect on the remote work policies for expat employees: nearly three in ten (28%) are now able to work remotely more often than before, while another 20% say that remote work has been newly introduced and is here to stay for them. For around one quarter (26%) their employer's remote work policies have not changed in the long run, while another 26% do not know yet what their employer will decide in the post-pandemic future.

What Working Expats Value Now and What They Envision in the Future

When asked what they like best about their current job, working expats most frequently mention the opportunity to work remotely / from home (32%), a good work-life balance (32%), and flexible working hours (29%).

"What working expats enjoy about the job they have is not necessarily what they envision for their future career. Businesses all around the world will have to offer more within the context of New Work, such as room for creativity. But this is not everything expats ask for," says Malte Zeeck, InterNations Founder and Co-CEO. *"Despite a growing desire for self-fulfillment and personal development, hard factors such as a good salary remain extremely important for expats in a business context."*

In fact, the top 3 aspects that would be especially important to expats in an ideal work environment are a good compensation and/or good benefits (54%), a good work-life balance (49%), and creative/interesting tasks (29%). At the moment, just 28% are happy with their compensation and/or

benefits, and only 21% benefit from having creative/interesting tasks at work.

Expats even seem to be willing to trade off some of the factors they currently enjoy: with just 28% of expats citing flexible working hours and 22% mentioning the opportunity to work remotely / from home as part of their dream job, these factors do not make it into the top 3 aspects for an ideal work environment.

Country Ranking: The Importance of New Work in the Local Business Culture

1	USA	20	Greece	39	Brazil
2	UAE	21	Czechia	40	Philippines
3	Finland	22	Poland	41	Indonesia
4	Estonia	23	Switzerland	42	Chile
5	Netherlands	24	Luxembourg	43	Romania
6	Bahrain	25	Malta	44	Thailand
7	Australia	26	Kenya	45	Cyprus
8	Canada	27	Taiwan	46	China
9	New Zealand	28	Portugal	47	France
10	Sweden	29	Hungary	48	Spain
11	Ireland	30	Colombia	49	Italy
12	Norway	31	Russia	50	Kuwait
13	Denmark	32	South Africa	51	India
14	Singapore	33	Mexico	52	Turkey
15	United Kingdom	34	Austria	53	South Korea
16	Malaysia	35	Germany	54	Egypt
17	Oman	36	Vietnam	55	Japan
18	Qatar	37	Hong Kong		
19	Saudi Arabia	38	Belgium		

About the Future of Working Abroad Report

This report is based on data from the *Expats Insider 2021* survey by InterNations. In total, 12,420 expats participated; the general *Expats Insider* report and an overall country ranking were published in May 2021. However, the report “The Future of Working Abroad” uses mainly data sets from expats currently doing any kind of paid work: 8,313 survey respondents — living in 175 destinations and representing 166 nationalities — match this definition of working expats.

In the *Expats Insider 2021* questionnaire, all respondents, regardless of employment status, were asked to provide information about themselves and to rate various aspects of life abroad on a scale of one to seven. The rating process emphasized their personal satisfaction with these factors; the average ratings of six such factors were bundled into three subcategories, and their mean values were used to draw up a topical index for working abroad. The Working Abroad Index is not only part of the overall country ranking, but it also gets referenced in this report. In 2021, the top 5 destinations for working abroad — out of 59 countries in this index — are Taiwan, New Zealand, Czechia, China, and Denmark.

Moreover, working expats answered some additional questions to describe their working life. Some of these questions explore how COVID-19 has been transforming the workplace and how expats envision their ideal work environment. Lastly, the survey included two more rating questions for working expats. They cover the topic of New Work, the new way of working in the global and digital age. Participants were asked to rate how important this concept is in the business culture of their host country and how the latter compares to their home country. The country averages from the first question were used to compare the importance of New Work in various expat destinations.

For a country to be featured in the New Work ranking, a sample size of at least 50 respondents was necessary. This requirement was met by 55 destinations. New Work is extremely important in the business culture of the USA, the UAE, Finland, Estonia, and the Netherlands.

About InterNations

With around 4.2 million members in 420 cities around the world, [InterNations](#) is the largest global community and a source of information for people who live and work abroad. InterNations offers global and local networking and socializing, both online and face to face. At around 6,000 events and activities per month, expatriates have the opportunity to meet other global minds. Online services include discussion forums and helpful articles with personal expat experiences, tips, and information about life abroad. Membership is by approval only to ensure we remain a community of trust. InterNations is part of the NEW WORK SE, a group of brands that offer products and services for a better working life.

Find more information about InterNations on our [press page](#), [in our company blog](#), or in our [magazine](#).

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