



# PLANISMO

The world has never been flatter. Understanding the challenges and opportunities facing Latin America-based expatriate professionals in 2024.



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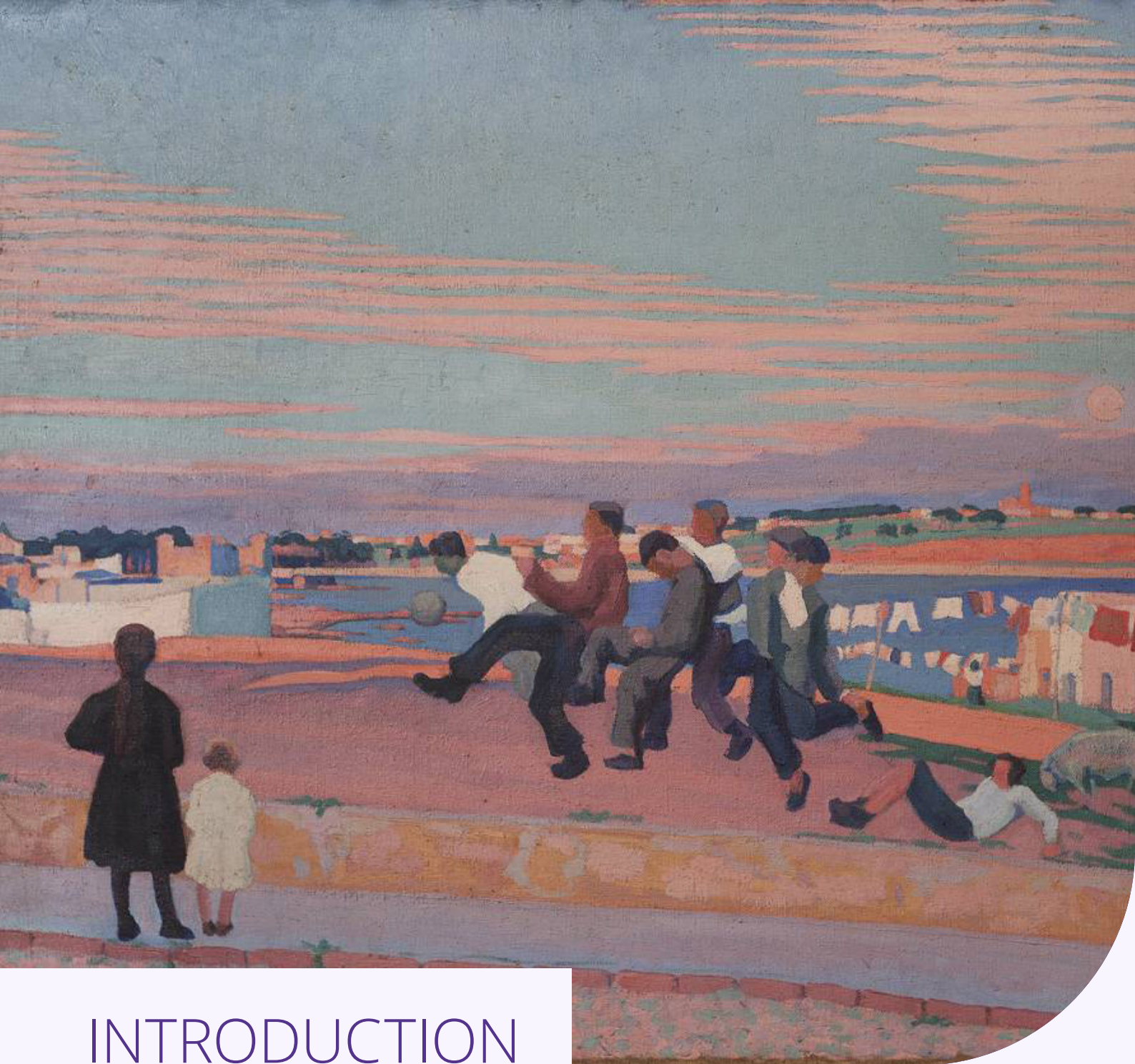
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# INTRODUCTION

**Planismo:** Inspired by the Uruguayan art movement of the same name, Planismo refers to the “flattening” of traditional boundaries of foreground and background resulting in the intersection of different planes – both physical and conceptual. For businesses, we understand it as the next age of globalisation, where location becomes a strategic asset rather than a limitation. This new era allows for increased innovation and flexibility, particularly in the ‘nearshoring’ Latin American corporate landscape.

Image: Partido de fútbol, c.1919. Carmelo de Arzadun (1888–1968)





For expatriate professionals, the world has never been flatter! And with travel rebounding to pre-Covid levels,<sup>1</sup> the growth of remote work continuing to rise at pace,<sup>2</sup> and more multinational companies ‘nearshoring’<sup>3</sup> – investing in exciting markets that are closer to home – Latin America has emerged as the primary destination.<sup>4</sup>

Latin American business has entered the age of Planismo, where physical location and relocation are no longer the rigid constraints they once were. Instead, ‘place’ has evolved into a

third ‘p’, alongside price and product features, allowing brands and companies to extract value and gain a competitive edge.

So, in this new age of Planismo, what motivates expat professionals to relocate to Latin America in 2024? How do they navigate the unique business contexts, social and cultural landscapes, and administrative and regulatory frameworks in these countries? What do they consider the biggest challenges and advantages, and how can companies help guide their individual journeys?



## Methodology

The Mauve survey was conducted by LatAm Intersect PR among 600 expatriate professionals working in three Latin American countries: 200 in Brazil, 200 in Colombia, and 200 in Mexico. All respondents had been living in their country of residence for 6 months or more and were in formal employment at the time of the interview. The participants originated from Europe, Latin America, the US & Canada, and Asia, representing all gender and age groups equally. The survey was conducted between May 10 and June 10, 2024, in the form of an online questionnaire.



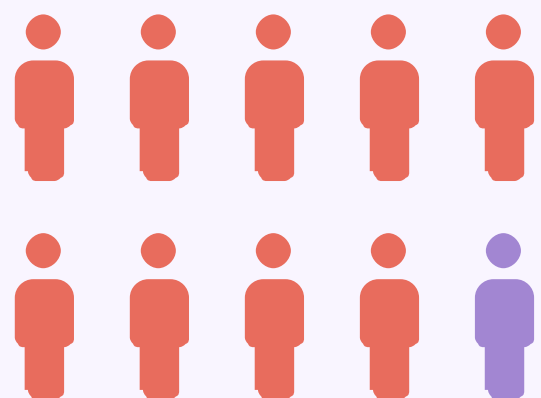


## High hopes and hard landings: the key challenges facing expat professionals in Latin America in 2024

**There is a clear acclimatisation 'gap' between professionals and companies when it comes to the expectations and reality of relocation.** While remuneration is something companies seem to be getting right – almost two-thirds (**64%**) of respondents said their current salary/benefits were either 'better' or 'much better' than before they moved – professionals are not receiving the same care when it comes to dealing with the local bureaucracy and paperwork. 9 out of 10 (**90.8%**) respondents were 'not at all aware' of the local tax implications, processes, and regulations of their new country of residency before moving there. Other evidence of the acclimatisation 'gap' includes the finding that fewer than 1 in 10 (**9.2%**) respondents felt that they were comfortable and productive 'immediately'.

9 out of 10 respondents (90.8%) were '**not at all aware**' of the local tax implications, processes, and regulations of their new country of residency before moving there

- Not at all aware – 90.8%
- 'Moderately' or 'slightly' aware – 9.2%

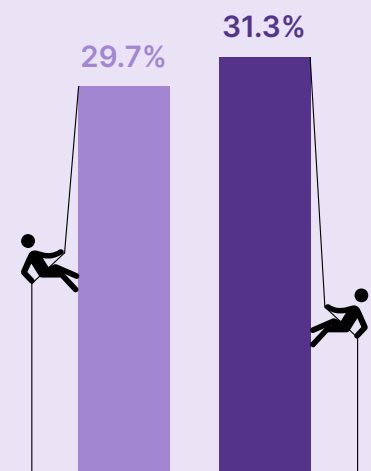


## Professionals move abroad for work, but face 'quality of life' challenges beyond the workplace

Motivated professionals are moving abroad for better work-place opportunities, namely new jobs with new companies (**36.1%** reported a new post with a new employer as the main reason for moving abroad to work) or a new position with their existing company (**28.1%**, the second most popular reason is the respondent's current company offering a new position abroad). However, when asked how they would rate their professional and personal quality of life compared to that of their home country, professional quality of life saw a higher proportion (**64.5%**) score it 'better' or 'much better' compared to personal quality of life (**58.1%**). Not only this, but the biggest challenges faced when taking up a career abroad are a mixture of cultural and professional, with 'understanding and adapting to the local culture at work', scoring highest (**31.3%**), followed by 'making friends' (**29.7%**).

The biggest challenges faced when taking up a career abroad are a mixture of cultural and professional, with 'understanding and adapting to the local culture at work' scoring highest, followed by 'making friends'

- Understanding and adapting to the local culture at work
- Making friends



## The biggest logistical challenge for employees remains lack of preparedness/awareness

A common theme running throughout the survey was the high number of respondents who reported being unaware of local bureaucratic and legal procedures in their destination country. When asked how comfortable with / prepared for local bureaucracy they felt upon arrival in their new country of residence, over two-thirds (**69.3%**) of respondents said they were 'extremely unprepared'. Furthermore, as previously stated, 9 out of 10 (**90.8%**) respondents were 'not at all aware' of the local tax implications, processes, and regulations of their new country of residence before moving there.



## Differences in age, gender, location and country of origin mean there is no single type of expatriate professional

Whether comparing their current salary to that of their country of origin, reflecting on the biggest challenges they face living abroad, or thinking about the future for themselves and their families, all aspects of an expatriate professional's background and profile can affect their decision making. For example, while over half (**54.3%**) of all respondents are considering staying in their current country of residence for 'less than five years', **28%** of those originating from Latin America and the Caribbean intend to stay 'permanently', compared to **22.5%** from Europe, **11.7%** from the US & Canada, and **0%** from Asia.

While the highest proportion (**37.3%** of female respondents and **47.4%** of male respondents) of both genders said they 'haven't decided yet' whether to return to their home country after leaving their current country of residence, a quarter (**24.5%**) of female respondents said they 'definitely' wouldn't be returning (compared to **11.8%** of male respondents), whereas a quarter (**25.8%**) of male respondents said that they 'definitely would' return (compared to **17.9%** of female respondents).

Finally, when it comes to differences in age, older respondents are significantly more likely to say that their personal quality of life is 'much better' compared to that of their home country, with **31.7%** of respondents aged 46–55 agreeing with this statement, compared to **17.9%** of respondents aged 36–45 and **15.9%** of respondents aged 26–35.

## While *Planismo*<sup>7</sup> makes place more accessible, cultural differences between professionals and their countries of residence still vary widely

<sup>7</sup> Planismo refers to the new age of globalised business, where physical location and relocation are no longer the rigid constraints they once were, but now play a key part of a company's global strategy.

The survey revealed remarkable discrepancies, both between the three countries featured and the regions from which the professionals originated. For example, three-quarters (**76.9%**) of respondents based in Mexico said their current salary/benefits were 'much better' or 'better' than their home country, compared to around half (**53%**) of those based in Colombia. Respondents located in Brazil reported taking the longest time to feel at ease and start being productive at work, with **43.4%** saying they felt settled either 'immediately' or after '1–3 months', compared to **83.7%** of respondents in Colombia and **96%** of respondents in Mexico. Over half (**50.3%**) of respondents from the US & Canada found 'making friends' to be the biggest challenge when taking up a career abroad, significantly higher than respondents from other regions, such as Europe (**35.8%**), Latin America and the Caribbean (**19.2%**), and Asia (**5.7%**). These are just a few examples of how cultural differences affect the experience of expatriate professionals in Latin America.



### Intend to stay 'permanently'

28%

from Latin America and the Caribbean

22.5%

from Europe

11.7%

from the US & Canada

0%

from Asia



## INTRODUCING MAUVE

Mauve Group is an award-winning business expansion and employment solutions provider. With over 28 years' experience, Mauve Group supports businesses of all sizes to expand their horizons and achieve growth beyond their home markets.

What began in the 1990s as a one-person enterprise in a small office in Italy, has evolved into an international market-leading group of companies, **with over 70 wholly owned entities globally**. Operating in LatAm for almost **25 years**, Mauve has recently responded to growing opportunity in the region by **expanding its LatAm team**, reinforcing its presence in key markets, and **relaunching its services** to support inbound and outbound expansion across LatAm.

Mauve's creative solutions have helped organisations to succeed in **more than 150 countries worldwide, across over 70 sectors**. With a dynamic suite of products, including **global payroll, employment and immigration solutions**, and more, Mauve Group's bespoke packages ensure that clients and workers alike benefit from **reduced risks, lower costs, and faster timescales** as they embark on their new global venture.



# DIVING IN

We've divided our report into four key areas:



**Business context** – examining professional expatriates' reasons and motivations for working abroad, including their pay, workplace challenges, and comparisons with previous employment.



**Social and cultural issues** – exploring cultural differences between expatriate professionals' home countries and their current country of residence, as well as the social aspects and challenges of adapting to another country.



**Administration and regulation** – looking into the issues of local bureaucracy and taxation, and examining how expatriate professionals compare the systems of their country of residence with those back home.



**Future** – asking what the future holds for our expatriate professionals, whether they plan to stay in their current country of residence or return to their country of origin, how long they plan on staying where they are, and if they would ever follow a partner onwards to another destination.

All areas of our report contain cross sections of our survey data that examine differences between respondents depending on their age, gender, destination country, and country of origin.



## BUSINESS CONTEXT:

factors driving expatriates to relocate,  
key workplace challenges, levels  
of preparedness, and post-arrival  
adjustment time



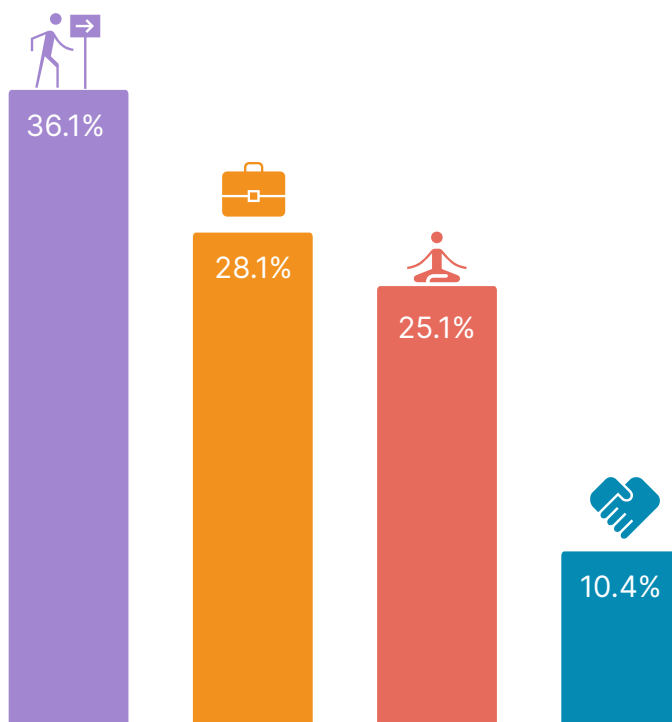
## Boundless ambition: opportunities for career growth drive professional relocations to Latin America in 2024

Almost two-thirds (**64.2%**) of respondents have moved abroad for professional reasons, whether for a new job with a new company (**36.1%**) or for a new position with their existing company (**28.1%**).

However, while they are happy with their remuneration packages – almost two-thirds (**64%**) of respondents said their current salary/benefits were either 'better' or 'much better' than before they moved – they are not getting the same care when it comes to dealing with the local bureaucracy and paperwork. Over two-thirds (**69.3%**) of respondents said they were 'extremely unprepared' for the local bureaucracy upon arrival. This was also the case with ease of settling in – less than 1 in 10 (**9.2%**) felt they were comfortable and productive 'immediately'.

Is there an 'acclimatisation gap' between company and employee, preventing both parties from realising the true value of their expatriation?

### Reason for moving abroad to work



- **36.1%** say the main reason for moving abroad to work is a new post with a new employer.
- **28.1%** report moving to LatAm for a new position with their current company.
- **25.1%** report relocating due to a 'another type of personal decision'.
- **10.4%** moved because of a partner or relative obtaining a new position abroad.

## Destination country insights – how Brazil, Colombia and Mexico compare

- Respondents based in Colombia are almost twice as likely as those in Brazil to have moved abroad due to their company offering them a new position (**35.9%** of respondents in Colombia compared to **18.9%** of respondents in Brazil).
- Respondents based in Brazil are more than twice as likely than those in Mexico to have moved abroad due to 'another type of personal decision' (**35.3%** of respondents in Brazil compared to **16.2%** of respondents in Mexico).
- Respondents from Latin America or the Caribbean are more likely to have moved abroad for 'another type of personal decision', (**39.2%** compared to the **25.5%** average). At just **13.6%**, those from Asia were the least likely to move abroad for this reason.



## Country of origin insights – how respondents' origins impact their perspectives

- Respondents from Latin America or the Caribbean are more likely to have moved abroad for 'another type of personal decision' (**39.2%** compared to a **25.5%** average), with those from Asia being the least likely to move abroad for this reason, at **13.6%** of respondents.
- Respondents from Asia are much more likely to have moved abroad because their current company offered them a position abroad (**67%** compared to a **28.1%** average). Those from Latin America or the Caribbean were least likely to move abroad for this reason, at just **16.8%**.
- Respondents from the US and Canada are much more likely to have moved abroad to work in a new company (**61.4%** compared to **36.1%** average), with just **18.2%** of respondents from Asia citing this as a reason.





## Gender insights – comparing the male and female expatriate experience

- Male respondents are **9%** more likely than female respondents to have moved abroad 'for another type of personal reason' (**29.3%** compared to **20.3%**) and **10.2%** more likely to have done so because their current company offered them a position abroad (**32.4%** compared to **22.2%**).

**Female** respondents are more than **four times** as likely as **male** respondents to have moved abroad because their 'partner or relative obtained a position abroad'

● Female – 18.9%

● Male – 4.2%



## Distance earning: expatriates' current salaries outshine their countries of origin

- When asked to compare their current salary/benefits as an expat with those of their previous position in their home country, only **5.8%** of respondents said they were 'worse,' with even fewer (**0.6%**) saying 'much worse.'
- Almost two-thirds (**64%**) said their current salary/benefits were either 'better' (**38.5%**) or 'much better' (**25.5%**). Less than a third (**29.7%**) said their current salary/benefits are 'the same' as that of their previous position in their home country.



## Destination country insights – how Brazil, Colombia and Mexico compare

- Respondents based in Mexico are significantly more satisfied with their current salary/benefits compared with those of their home country. Three-quarters (**76.9%**) of respondents based in Mexico said their current salary/benefits were 'much better' (**31.8%**) or 'better' (**45.1%**).
- In contrast, less than two-thirds (**60.7%**) of those based in Brazil said their current salary/benefits were 'much better' (**22.5%**) or 'better' (**38.2%**). Finally, around half (**53%**) of those based in Colombia said their current salary/benefits were 'much better' (**21.6%**) or 'better' (**31.4%**).



## Country of origin insights – how respondents' origins impact their perspectives

- Respondents from the US & Canada are the most satisfied with their current salary/benefits compared to respondents from other regions. **71.7%** of respondents from this region said their current salary/benefits were 'much better' (**19.3%**) or 'better' (**52.4%**).
- Respondents from Asia were most likely to say their current salary/benefits were 'similar or the same' (**43.2%** compared to the survey average of **29.7%**). **10.8%** of respondents from Europe said their current salary/benefits were 'worse' (**10%**) or 'much worse' (**0.8%**), significantly higher than the survey average of **6.4%**.



## Gender insights – comparing the male and female expatriate experience

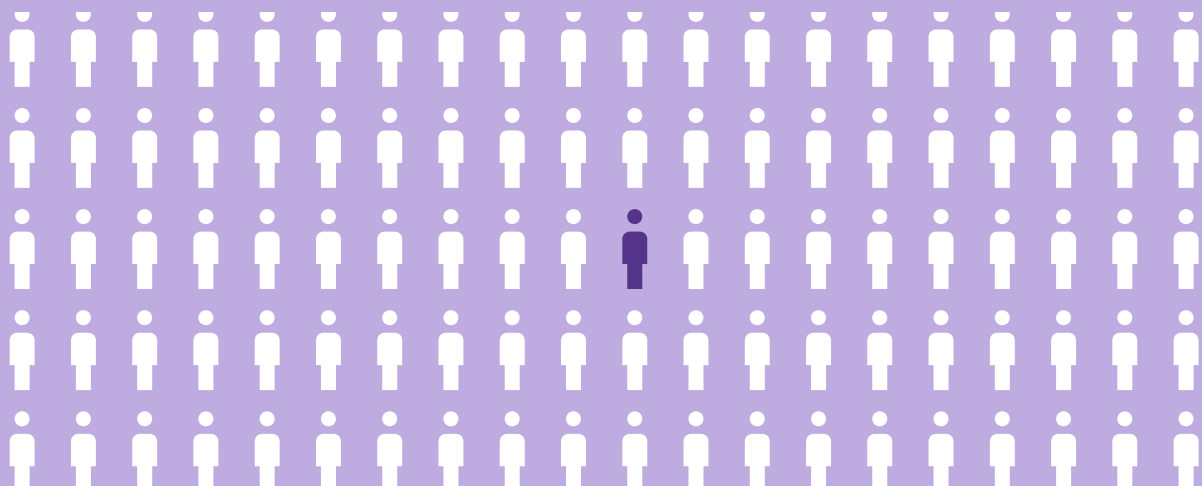
- Female respondents are slightly more satisfied with their current salary/benefits compared with male respondents. **68.9%** of women said their current salary/benefits was 'much better' (**33.5%**) or 'better' (**35.4%**) compared to (**60.8%**) of men who said their current salary/benefits were 'much better' (**19.5%**) or 'better' (**40.8%**).
- Almost 1 in 10 male respondents (**9.4%**) said their current salary/benefits were 'worse' (**9.1%**) or 'much worse' (**0.3%**) compared to **2.3%** of female respondents who said the same thing ('worse' **1.4%**, 'much worse' **0.9%**).



# ¡Papeles en regla!: most expatriates report feeling unprepared for navigating local bureaucratic challenges.

When asked how comfortable/prepared they were with the local bureaucracy when arriving in their new country of residence, over two-thirds (**69.3%**) of respondents said they were 'not at all aware', followed by just under a quarter (**23.6%**) who said they were 'moderately aware'.

Less than 1% (**0.8%**) of respondents said they were '**very aware**' of the local bureaucracy upon arrival



## Destination country insights – how Brazil, Colombia and Mexico compare

**93.6%** of respondents based in Mexico said they were 'not at all aware', compared to just over half of respondents based in Brazil (**56.1%**) and Colombia (**56.2%**).

## Country of origin insights – how respondents' origins impact their perspectives

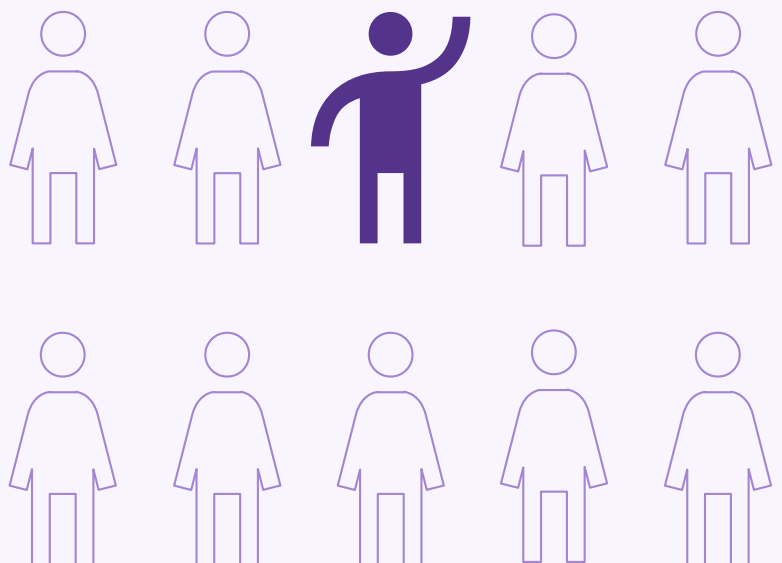
The highest proportion of respondents who said they were 'not at all aware' originated from Asia (**89.8%**), while the lowest originated from Latin America & the Caribbean (**49.6%**).

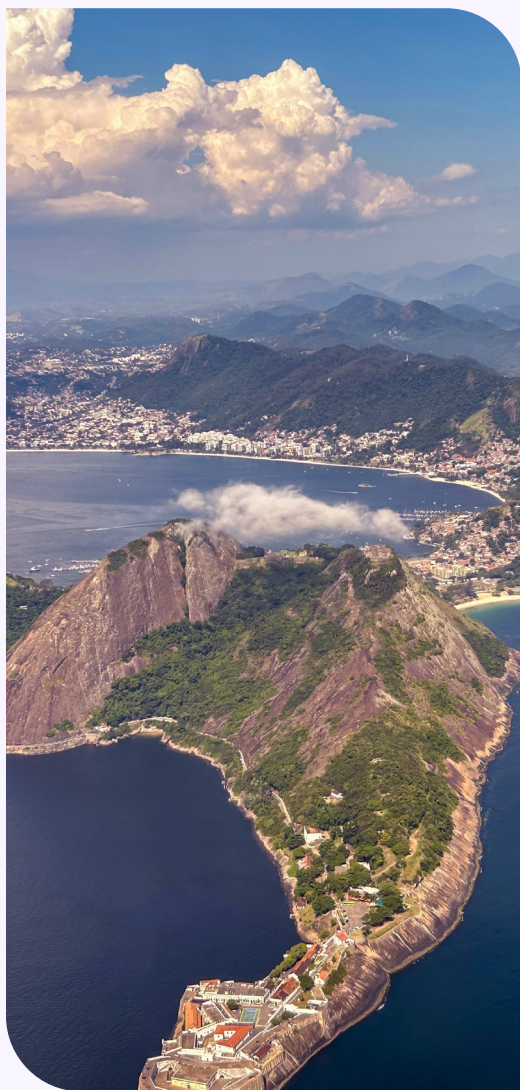
# Settled in yet? very few professionals feel productive immediately

- It took the majority (**64.7%**) of respondents 1–3 months to feel comfortable and start being truly productive in their job after arriving in a new country of residence.
- It took around 1 in 6 (**15.6%**) respondents a little longer, between 3–6 months, but only 1 in 10 (**10.4%**) needed 1 year (**7.2%**) or more than a year (**3.2%**).



Less than **1 in 10** (**9.2%**) felt they were comfortable and productive 'immediately'





## Destination country insights – how Brazil, Colombia and Mexico compare

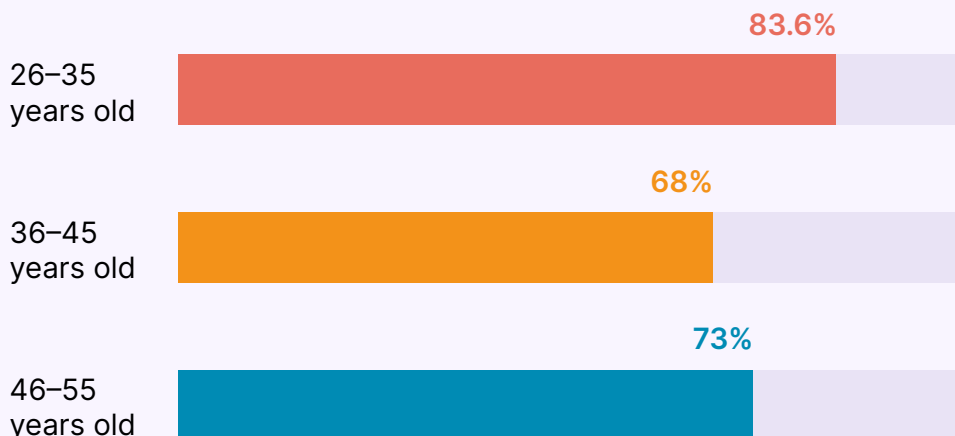
- Respondents located in Brazil reported taking the longest time to feel at ease and start being productive at work. **43.4%** of respondents in Brazil felt settled either 'immediately' or after 1–3 months, compared to **83.7%** of respondents in Colombia and **96%** of respondents in Mexico.
- In addition, **30%** of respondents located in Brazil reported taking 1 year or more to feel at ease and start being productive at work, compared to **0%** of those based in either Colombia or Mexico.

## Country of origin insights – how respondents' origins impact their perspectives

- **35.2%** of respondents from Asia felt at ease and productive at work 'immediately', three times higher than the survey average of **9.2%**.
- The largest proportion of respondents who took the longest time to feel comfortable and productive at work came from Europe. Specifically, **17.2%** of European respondents reported feeling at ease and productive after '1 year or more', compared to the survey average of **10.4%**.

## Age insights

**83.6%** of 26–35 year olds felt settled and productive in less than three months from arrival; this is compared with **68%** of 36–45 year olds, and **73%** of 46–55 year olds.





# SUMMARY

This section shows us that the overwhelming reason professionals are relocating to Latin America is for work. Almost two-thirds (**64.2%**) moved for a new post – either driven by the employee themselves relocating for a new job/ employer (**36.1%**) or driven by their current company offering a position abroad (**28.1%**). Personal reasons (**25.1%**) and moving due to a partner's job (**10.4%**) account for just over a third of respondents (**35.5%**). This means there is still a significant minority – almost 1 in 3 – of people who are moving without a professional impetus driving them.

When we look closer at country differences, these motivations become more varied. Respondents in Colombia are more likely to have moved because of their current company's offer, whereas those in Brazil are more likely to have been motivated by personal reasons. People from Latin America and the Caribbean typically move for personal reasons, while those from Asia and North America move mainly for company offers and new posts, respectively. Gender differences indicate that men are more likely to move for personal or company reasons, while women often relocate due to a partner's job.

So while the world is flatter than ever, not all journeys begin for the same reason or follow the same path. Companies must be sensitive to what personally motivates today's professionals when attracting the best and most suitable candidates for working in Latin America. The new reality of *Planismo*<sup>8</sup> does not negate the fact that cultural differences will always produce interesting, surprising, and sometimes even contradictory results.

In our survey, respondents from Asia were twice as likely as those from Latin America and the Caribbean to say they were 'not at all aware' of local bureaucracy before arriving. Yet they were almost four times as likely to say they felt at ease and productive at work

'immediately'. A person's values and culture extend beyond the office, influencing their professional performance.

This highlights an important responsibility for employers: to understand these cultural insights and leverage them to improve the experience for their remote workforce. By better appreciating what motivates and challenges expatriates, companies can help them achieve their Planismo-focused goals, enhancing both their personal and professional journeys.

By striving to better understand expatriate professionals' diverse motivations, experiences, and aims, companies can ensure that the added 'place' element facilitated by Planismo is integrated effectively and remains a strategic advantage for both individuals and entire workforces. Whether remote or on-site, companies can offer many proven methods of employee support. Comprehensive onboarding programs tailored to specific needs and cultural sensitivity training to foster mutual understanding are essential. Other effective options include flexible work arrangements, especially in the first weeks and months of a new deployment, regular feedback sessions, mentorship or 'buddy' programs, and local support networks to ensure expatriate professionals feel heard and valued. Additionally, providing language training and career development opportunities further enhances the expatriate experience, helping both the individual and their team to thrive.



<sup>8</sup> Planismo refers to the new age of globalised business, where physical location and relocation are no longer the rigid constraints they once were, but now play a key part of a company's global strategy.



## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ISSUES:

challenges of adapting to life abroad,  
comparing quality of life between  
countries of residence and origin



# Becoming a local in the global village: making friends and adapting to work culture are the biggest challenges for professionals pursuing a career abroad

The two biggest social and cultural challenges people face when starting a career abroad lie at the intersection between work and leisure – ‘understanding and adapting to the local culture at work’ (**31.3%**) and ‘making friends’ (**29.7%**). Companies need to understand how these challenges can affect their employees’ quality of life and their ability to reach their full potential within the company.

The fact that over half (**50.3%**) of respondents from the US & Canada found ‘making friends’ to be the biggest challenge when taking up a career abroad shows that there is also a cultural

aspect to this problem, which companies ought to consider when expanding to new territories.

A recent article from the *University of Cambridge* website highlighted similar findings. It identified the four most common challenges for new expats as dealing with culture shock (the stress and disorientation of adapting to a new environment), anxiety related to professional performance, managing workplace relationships, and overcoming cultural differences in communication styles to ensure clear understanding.<sup>5</sup>

Over a fifth (**21.4%**) of respondents identified ‘finding local services that I like’ as their biggest challenge. In contrast, ‘dealing with a country’s bureaucracy’ was seen as the most significant challenge by **17.6%** of respondents, making it the least common concern overall.



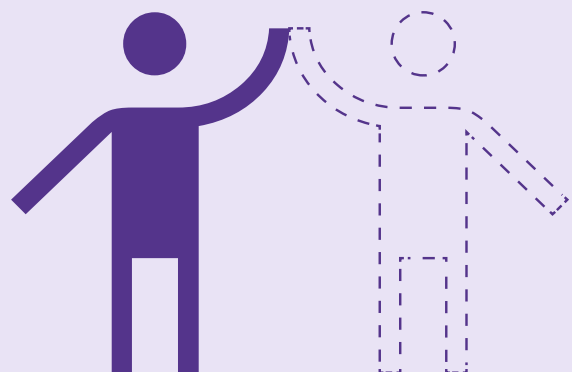
## Destination country insights – how Brazil, Colombia and Mexico compare

- Respondents based in Brazil found, by far, the biggest challenge when taking up a career abroad to be ‘making friends’, with **38.7%** choosing this option, compared to **26.6%** of respondents based in Mexico, and **22.9%** of respondents based in Colombia.
- In contrast, the largest portion of respondents based in Colombia found the biggest challenge to be ‘understanding and adapting to the local culture at work’, with **40.5%** choosing this option, compared to **27.7%** of respondents based in Mexico, and **26.6%** of respondents based in Brazil.
- While the highest proportion of respondents based in Mexico also picked ‘understanding and adapting to the local culture at work’ as the biggest challenge, with **27.7%**, they also had the highest proportion of respondents based in any country to select ‘dealing with the country’s bureaucracy’ (**21.4%** compared to **17.9%** based in Brazil and **13.1%** based in Colombia). Mexico also led in ‘finding local services that I like’, with **24.3%** citing it as a challenge compared to **23.5%** based in Colombia and **16.8%** based in Brazil.

## Country of origin insights – how respondents’ origins impact their perspectives

- Over half (**50.3%**) of respondents from the US & Canada found ‘making friends’ to be the biggest challenge when taking up a career abroad.
- This proportion is significantly higher than respondents from other regions, such as Europe (**35.8%**), Latin America and the Caribbean (**19.2%**), and Asia (**5.7%**). In contrast, half (**50%**) of respondents from Asia thought ‘finding local services I like’ to be the biggest challenge when taking up a career abroad. Again, this proportion is higher than respondents from other regions, such as Europe (**27.5%**), Latin America or the Caribbean (**12%**), and the US & Canada (**0.7%**).

Over half (**50.3%**) of respondents from the US & Canada found ‘**making friends**’ to be **the biggest challenge** when taking up a career abroad





## Gender insights – comparing the male and female expatriate experience

Women were more likely to find ‘understanding and adapting to the local culture at work’ to be the biggest challenge when taking up a career abroad (**38.2%** of female respondents compared to **26.1%** of male respondents). Men were more likely to think ‘dealing with the country’s bureaucracy’ was their biggest challenge (**20.6%** of male respondents compared to **13.7%** of female respondents).



## Age insights

- Older respondents are more likely than younger respondents to think that ‘finding local services I like’ is the biggest challenge when taking up a career abroad (**27%** of respondents aged 46–55 compared to **16.4%** of respondents aged 26–35).
- On the other hand, younger respondents are more likely than older respondents to think that ‘understanding and adapting to the local culture at work’ is the biggest challenge when taking up a career abroad (**37.4%** of respondents aged 26–35 compared to **19%** of respondents aged 46–55).



## Home away from home: most expatriates rate quality of personal life favorably compared to their host countries

- When asked how they would rate their personal quality of life compared to that of their home country, over half (**58.1%**) said it was 'better' (**38.7%**) or 'much better' (**19.4%**).
- Under one-sixth (**15.6%**) of respondents rate their professional quality of life compared to that of their home country as 'worse' (**15.4%**) or 'much worse' (**0.2%**) with another quarter (**26.3%**) deeming it 'the same'.



### Destination country insights – how Brazil, Colombia and Mexico compare

- While the highest proportion of respondents based in all three countries said that their personal quality of life is 'better' compared to that of their home country (**39.3%** of respondents based in Brazil, **34.6%** of respondents based in Colombia, **41.6%** of respondents based in Mexico), there are still some interesting discrepancies.
- Respondents based in Brazil are more than twice as likely to rate their personal quality of life as 'much better' than their home country (**34.7%** compared to **13.1%** of respondents based in Colombia and **9.8%** in Mexico).
- Respondents based in Mexico are most likely to rate their personal quality of life as 'similar or the same' compared to their home country (**34.1%** compared to **27.5%** of respondents based in Colombia and **17.3%** in Brazil).
- Respondents based in Colombia are almost twice as likely to rate their personal quality of life as 'worse' compared to their home country (**24.8%** compared to **13.9%** of respondents based in Mexico and **8.7%** in Brazil).

### Country of origin insights – how respondents' origins impact their perspectives

- Respondents from the US & Canada are marginally more likely to say that their personal quality of life is 'much better' compared to that of their home country (**21.4%** of respondents compared to **19.2%** from Latin America or the Caribbean, **17%** from Asia, and **15%** from Europe).



# Forging connections: majority of expatriates compare quality of professional life favourably to their host countries

- When asked how they would rate their professional quality of life compared to that of their home country, almost two-thirds (**64.5%**) said it was 'better' (**51.1%**) or 'much better' (**13.4%**).
- Less than one-sixth (**14.8%**) of respondents rate their professional quality of life compared to that of their home country as 'worse' (**14.6%**) or 'much worse' (**0.2%**), with another fifth (**20.6%**) deeming it 'the same'.
- The overwhelming majority (**88.8%**) of respondents observe the holidays of their country of residence, as opposed to those of both countries (**5.2%**), those of neither country (**5%**), or those of their home country (**1%**).



# SUMMARY

Everyone knows that relocation for work presents various obstacles, both within and beyond the workplace. However, it's interesting to observe the diversity of responses when professionals are asked to identify their biggest challenges. Over a fifth of respondents cited 'finding local services' as the most significant hurdle, while another substantial proportion found 'dealing with bureaucracy' the most difficult. Experiences also varied from country to country. Respondents based in Brazil struggle most with making friends, whereas those in Colombia find adapting to work culture the most challenging. In Mexico, a much larger proportion of respondents encounter difficulties with local bureaucracy compared to their counterparts in Colombia and Brazil.

Interestingly, a recent study of expatriate experience in Brazil published in the *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management* found that 'expatriates originating from developed countries adapt in a more satisfactory manner than Latin American expatriates, even though they are more culturally distant.' This finding suggests that cultural adaptation is influenced not only by cultural or geographical proximity but also by the perceived status of the newly arrived expatriate professional.<sup>6</sup>

Cultural adaptation also differs depending on your gender as well as your location. Women stated that they were more likely to struggle with adapting to work culture, while for men bureaucracy is the biggest challenge. And of course, age plays a role too. Perhaps it will surprise readers that younger professionals are twice as likely as older ones to consider 'adapting to the local work culture' as their main difficulty. Another interesting takeaway is that the vast majority of expatriates observe the holidays of their new country, a possible indication of their integration into local customs.

What all this tells us is that relocation involves as much attention to the 'soft' issues – such as culture, friendship, and family integration – as to the 'hard' ones, like salary, accommodation, and visa requirements. And while Planismo means that relocation has never been easier, we are not simply pins on a map. Relocation

rarely involves just one individual, but a family and other dependents, all of whom should be considered and accounted for.

Historically, companies have focused on tangible aspects such as salary negotiations and housing arrangements. However, they must now also address the more complex 'soft' issues, like cultural assimilation and social support networks. It also goes without saying that getting the 'hard' aspects right – especially when it comes to paperwork and bureaucracy – ensures that first impressions and experiences start from a place of security, curiosity, and well-being. Our research underscores this, revealing that both adaptation and productivity are influenced by both these factors, as we'll explore in the next chapter.







## ADMINISTRATION AND REGULATION:

local bureaucracy and taxation, how expatriate professionals compare the systems of their country of residence with those back home



# It pays to know: majority of expatriates unaware of local tax rules prior to moving

A staggering 9 in 10 (**90.8%**) respondents were 'not at all aware' of the local tax implications, processes, and regulations of their new country of residency before moving there.

Relocation – and the full benefits of Planismo – can only be realised in full accordance with legal norms. This means conforming to the legal standards of both the expatriate professional's country of origin and their new country of residence. Preparation and planning are vital. In most cases, the employee will be held

accountable for regulatory breaches, particularly around personal taxation. However, it is in the employer's interest to provide resources and access to locally specific guidance to ensure compliance. This 'joint responsibility' of both parties, along with appropriate communication and preparation regarding these challenges, will ensure the full potential of relocation is achieved. Our data suggests that work is required on both sides to ensure this.

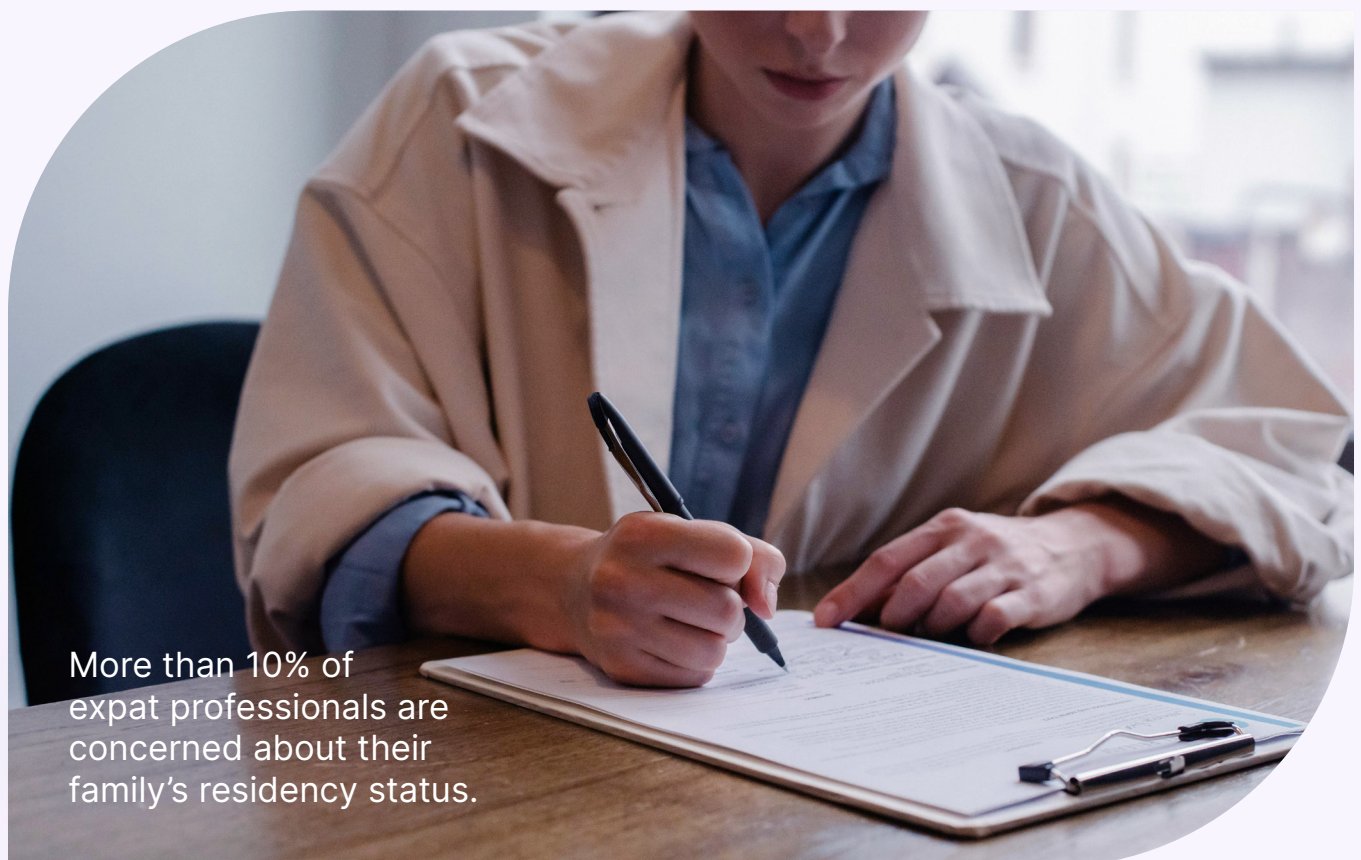


In corroboration with our own findings, the Bulletin of the Centre for Research and Interdisciplinary Study stated, 'Various studies have found that between **16 to 40%** of all expatriate managers who are given foreign assignments end them early due to their poor performance or their inability to adjust to the foreign environment (Black, 1988; Dunbar and Ehrlich, 1986), and as much as **50%** of those who do not return early function at a low level of effectiveness (Copeland and Griggs, 1985).'<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, the current situation is far from optimal and could compromise the success and longevity of many professional expatriates' relocation. However, with the right preparation, companies and their employees can give themselves a far higher chance of a successful and enduring relocation.

## Greener grass or redder tape? expatriates split over whether levels of bureaucracy rank better or worse in their new countries of residence

- When asked to compare levels of bureaucracy (both personal and professional) between their new country of residence and their home country, respondents seemed fairly evenly split. **27.3%** of respondents replied that the level of bureaucracy (both personal and professional) is 'better', **26.9%** replied that it was 'worse', and **26.7%** said that it was the 'same or equivalent'.
- However, three times as many respondents (**14.2%** compared to **5%**) stated that the levels of bureaucracy (both personal and professional) in their new country of residence were 'much worse' compared to those who thought they were 'much better.'



More than 10% of expat professionals are concerned about their family's residency status.

## Familiar concerns: significant minority of expatriates worried about personal and/or family residence status in host country

- When asked if they ever worried about their own or their family's residence status in their new country of residence, over two-thirds (**69.3%**) of respondents didn't cite any concerns.
- Just over 1 in 10 (**11.6%**) cited concerns about 'the situation of my family in general in this country', with less than 1 in 10 citing other concerns, such as that their 'visa/residence won't be renewed' (**8.2%**), that their expat status will make them 'less professionally competitive compared to a local employee' (**7%**), or general concerns about 'meeting all professional requirements' (**3.8%**).



# SUMMARY

While the largest proportion of professionals reported that bureaucracy levels were better in their current country compared to their country of origin, nearly as many found their situation 'worse' or 'the same' - painting a less than rosy picture. Notably, more expatriate professionals judged their bureaucratic situation to be 'much worse' than before, compared to those who found it 'much better.'

This highlights an important opportunity for companies: easing the expatriate experience not only lightens the bureaucratic load, but also feeds directly into productivity gains and workforce harmony. Latin America's reputation for opaque bureaucracy is well-known. But with the right local specialists, organisations can significantly reduce corporate and individual burdens. Simplifying bureaucracy enhances productivity and workplace satisfaction - crucial for companies aiming to maximise their workforce's potential.

As previously stated, the majority (**64.7%**) of respondents took 1–3 months to feel comfortable and start being truly productive in their job after arriving in a new country. But others (**15.6%**) took slightly longer, between 3–6

months, while around 1 in 10 (**10.4%**) needed 1 year (**7.2%**) or more than a year (**3.2%**). Less than 1 in 10 (**9.2%**) felt comfortable and productive 'immediately.' The variation in this data underscores the importance of streamlining the expatriate experience—doing so not only accelerates the time to productivity, but also contributes to overall workforce harmony and effectiveness. Similarly, most respondents have no concerns about their own or their family's residence status. But there are still significant minorities who expressed worries - ones that local expertise and good company practice could all but eliminate.

It's also important to remember that, according to another recent study by Cigna, **86%** of expatriates worldwide suffer from stress. And more than half (**69%**) said they desire more support from their employers, with only **33%** having access to mental health support.<sup>10</sup> Providing these cost-effective support networks and options for flexible work can help to ease the already intense transition to another country and working environment.







# THE FUTURE:

whether expatriate professionals plan to stay in their current country of residence or return home, the estimated length of their current stay, and if they would ever follow a partner abroad

Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat* was published in 2005, almost exactly 20 years ago. The spread of globalisation that his work anticipated is now a reality, but the axes and hubs through which trade flows have changed significantly since the time of writing. Latin America, barely mentioned in Friedman's seminal work, has emerged as a key player in redefining the trade routes that define today's globalised economy.

To take an example from global trade, Latin America accounts for one-third of India's global exports of cars and motorcycles (representing \$1.79 billion in sales), while exports of all products from India to Brazil (\$6.48 billion) are

higher than that of traditional trade partners such as Japan (\$6.18 billion) and Thailand (\$5.7 billion).

These are the new trade routes that will shape future global commerce, and Latin America will be a key protagonist in shaping the future of the global economy. This trend is also reflected in our data: over half (**54.3%**) of respondents are considering staying in their current country of residence for 'less than five years', the most popular answer. A further **28.5%** of respondents are considering staying for 'more than five years', while **17.2%** are considering staying 'permanently'.





## Finding your horizon: most expatriates have residency expectations of five years or less

- Over half (**54.3%**) of respondents are considering staying in their current country of residence for 'less than five years', the most popular answer.
- A further **28.5%** of respondents are considering staying for 'more than five years', while **17.2%** are considering staying 'permanently'.



## One-way or return? largest proportion of expatriates 'undecided' on whether to return home after current assignment

- When asked if they plan to return to their home country or go to another country when they leave their current country of residence, the highest proportion of respondents said that they didn't know or were 'not decided yet', at **43.1%**.
- Around one-fifth of respondents chose the three other answers: **22.4%** said 'yes', **17.2%** said 'no', and **17.2%** intend to stay where they currently live.



## Keeping company: majority of expatriates undecided as to whether they would follow a relocating partner/spouse

- Almost two-thirds (**63.1%**) of respondents said that they 'don't know' or were 'not decided yet' whether they would consider following their partner/spouse to relocate to another country to follow his/her career.
- A further quarter (**25.1%**) said 'yes' they would follow their partner/spouse to another country, and **11.8%** replied 'no'.



# SUMMARY

Our findings suggest that expatriates often face uncertainty about their long-term future, indicating a significant degree of flexibility and openness to change in their career and personal lives. It's nearly an even split between those planning a short-term stay and those committed to settling for the longer term. However, the large proportion of professionals who are undecided about whether they would follow their partner's career relocation reveals an interesting tension that companies need to be aware of and plan for.

To effectively address this, companies must recognize that a comprehensive relocation package goes beyond the typical offerings, such as moving services, school searches, and housing assistance. The real value lies in getting the “hard” issues right – ensuring compliance, securing visas, managing taxes, and addressing social security concerns. By focusing on these critical aspects, businesses can create a relocation package that truly supports expatriates and their families, reducing hesitancy and uncertainty.

For example, our survey found that just over 1 in 10 (**11.6%**) expatriates expressed concerns about ‘the situation of my family in general in this country’, with other concerns such as the fear that their ‘visa/residence won’t be renewed’ (**8.2%**), worries about being ‘less professionally competitive compared to a local employee’ (**7%**), and concerns about ‘meeting all professional requirements’ (**3.8%**) also being significant. With a substantial number of expatriate professionals worried about their family’s – and their own – residency status, it’s clear that addressing these issues is vital for a successful relocation experience.





## CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

In an age of Planismo, the strategic geographic location of a company's employees offers a vital new axis of opportunity along which to operate. As our survey has found, professionals are highly motivated to travel for work and, if correctly supported and incentivized, to stay for five years or more in their new country of residence.

Latin America is already becoming one of the most strategic regions through which companies can boost their brand awareness, enter new markets, and explore new trade possibilities, as well as tapping into the ample pool of local talent. However, as our survey has also shown, just because we live in an age of Planismo, perhaps precisely because

we live in such an age, employers must ensure that professionals who are willing to relocate find more than enough support from the beginning of their journey all the way through. This means preparation for new systems of work, bureaucracy, and culture.

By ensuring a holistic approach that recognizes that quality of life is both a professional and personal matter, companies can succeed in their planned expansions and provide a wealth of experience and stimulating challenges for the professionals who help take them there.



Here are some relevant further insights from the Mauve team that address challenges raised in each of the following chapters:

#### From Chapter 2. Business context

**Salary Benchmarking** – When expanding or establishing a new office overseas, salary benchmarking offers more than simply setting a financial standard; it ensures pay is equal and fair across your responsible global business.

**Compliance assessments** – These are comprehensive assessments that mitigate risk, improve risk management, and support the delivery of global mobility solutions: the gateway to reaching new customers and clients in international markets.

#### From Chapter 4. Administration and regulation

**Global Visa and Immigration Services** – Mobilise your workforce globally with compliant visa and immigration processes, wherever your business may take them.

#### From Chapter 5. The Future

**Global business expansion services** – Tap into the specialist skills of a global talent pool, diversify your international operations, and broaden your client base – all without the risks and costs of setting up new legal entities.

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