

ACCESS TO WELL-PAYING JOBS AND WORKER MOBILITY IN AN INTERCONNECTED WORLD OF WORK



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INTRODUCTION

With the rise of globalization, countries' economies across the globe have become increasingly interconnected and more interdependent than ever before. This globalization has had a profound impact on the employment landscape, with many employers now operating not only within their local communities or countries but also across continents to leverage supply chains, expand their customer base, and, perhaps most importantly, access a global workforce with a diverse array of knowledge, skills, and abilities.

As a result, workers also find themselves navigating a global job market with a multitude of new opportunities. Yet, the presence or absence of well-paying jobs within a local community, a state or province, a country, or worldwide can shape the lives and livelihoods of workers in significant ways. When local opportunities fall short, workers face a dilemma: stay put or seek employment elsewhere. The draw of better pay may drive worker mobility across borders, but other considerations such as family ties, cultural roots, and community bonds also weigh heavily in workers' decisions, underscoring the intricate trade-offs faced by today's global workforce in accessing well-paying jobs.

In this report, we explore global workers' access to well-paying jobs¹ in their local communities and their countries, investigate how far workers are willing to move or relocate to access a better-paying job, and discuss potential factors that may influence these relocation decisions. By understanding these complexities, employers and policymakers can shape informed policies and strategies that help the global workforce thrive in an interconnected and interdependent world of work.

¹For this research, the term "well-paying job" was left open to workers' personal interpretation, recognizing that its meaning is likely to vary depending on a worker's individual circumstances.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- » **Globally, most workers don't have to look too far for well-paying jobs.** In fact, **over 2 in 3** workers (**70%**) said there are well-paying jobs in their local community for people with their skills and experience, and **4 in 5** workers (**80%**) said there are well-paying jobs in their country for people with their skills and experience.
- » **Independent workers are more likely than workers of other types to rely on foreign businesses to access well-paying jobs.**² Among the various worker types, **over one-third** of independent workers (**37%**) said that they rely on foreign businesses to access well-paying jobs compared to **31%** of temporary employees, **27%** of full-time salaried employees, **19%** of part-time employees, and **18%** of full-time hourly employees.
- » **Dissatisfaction with pay and benefits continues to drive job-seeking behavior globally.** Among workers who were very or extremely satisfied with their pay and benefits, only **15%** said they are actively looking to leave their job for a new one. In contrast, among workers who were not too satisfied or not at all satisfied with their pay and benefits, **nearly half** said they are actively job hunting (**49%**).
- » **Roughly 4 in 5 workers are willing to relocate to access a better-paying job but are split on the distance they would be willing to move.** Globally, **a majority** of workers said they are willing to move a short distance to access a better-paying job, such as relocating within their current city or town (**78%**) or within their current state or province (**57%**). However, only **2 in 5** (**41%**) would be willing to move anywhere within their country and only **1 in 5** (**21%**) would be willing to move to another country to access a better-paying job.
- » **Workers with caregiving responsibilities are more willing to relocate for a better-paying job than those without such responsibilities.** Workers who manage multiple caregiving responsibilities simultaneously (i.e., both child care and elder care responsibilities) said they are willing to relocate the farthest: **About a third** of these workers (**32%**) said they are willing to relocate to another country to access a better-paying job. What's more, **25%** of workers with only elder care responsibilities and **21%** of workers with only child care responsibilities said they are willing to relocate to another country versus only **15%** of those without any caregiving responsibilities.

²For this research, the term “job” was used to describe work engagements performed by an individual worker, including traditional employment as well as self-employment and independent contractor work.

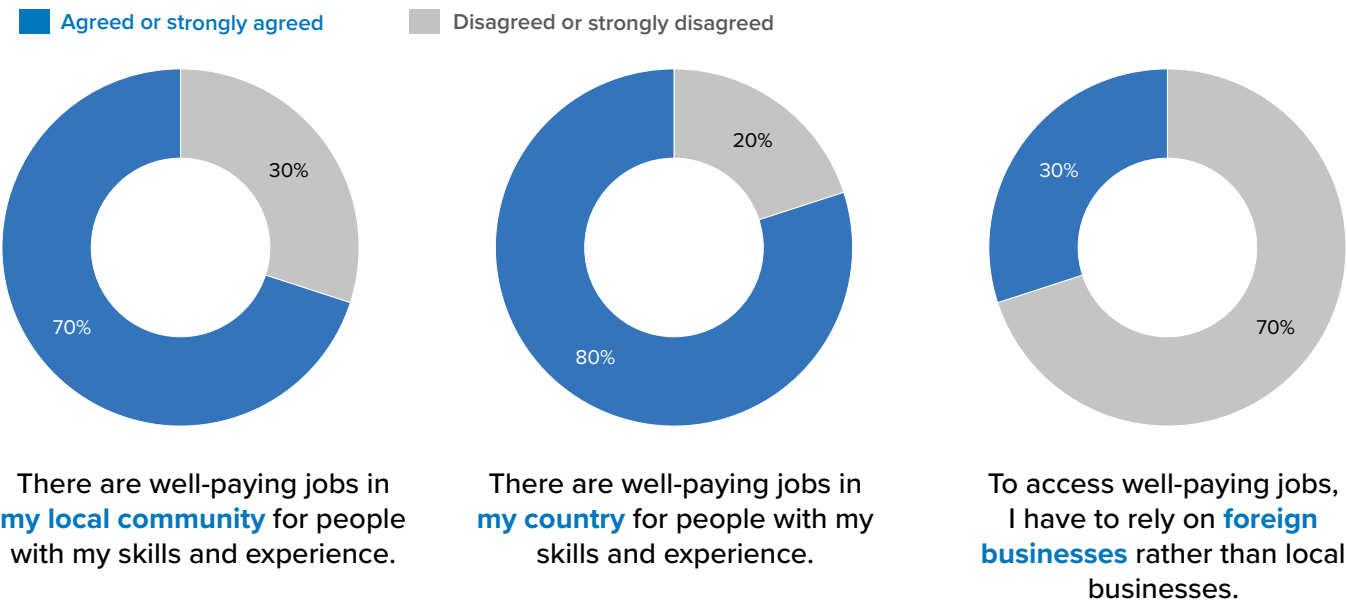


THE GLOBAL WORKFORCE'S ACCESS TO WELL-PAYING JOBS

Globally, most workers said they don't have to look too far for well-paying jobs. **Over 2 in 3 workers (70%)** said there are well-paying jobs in their local community for people with their skills and experience, and **4 in 5 workers (80%)** said there are well-paying jobs in their country for people with their skills and experience. **Less than a third** of global workers **(30%)** said they must rely on foreign businesses rather than local businesses to access well-paying jobs.

The definition of a “well-paying job” can vary substantially by country, locality, or a worker’s personal or family situation, but one thing remains consistent: Access to good pay is of top importance to workers worldwide. In fact, 9 out of 10 workers globally (90%) said that good pay and benefits are very or extremely important to them in a job.

Access to Well-Paying Jobs



GLOBAL WORKERS' ACCESS TO WELL-PAYING JOBS LOCALLY

Although workers of all types generally reported that there are well-paying jobs in their local community for people with their skills and experience, temporary workers were less likely to say this than other workers. This aligns with insights from the current research about temporary workers and their search for long-term positions. **Over 3 in 4** temporary workers **(77%)** would prefer to have a job that is long term rather than temporary. Of those who work a temporary job, the top two reasons why they are in their current line of work is the hope that their temporary job leads to a long-term job and that temporary work was the only type of work they could find.

Access to Well-Paying Jobs in the Local Community by Worker Type

Percentage of workers who agreed or strongly agreed that there are well-paying jobs in their local community for people with their skills and experience



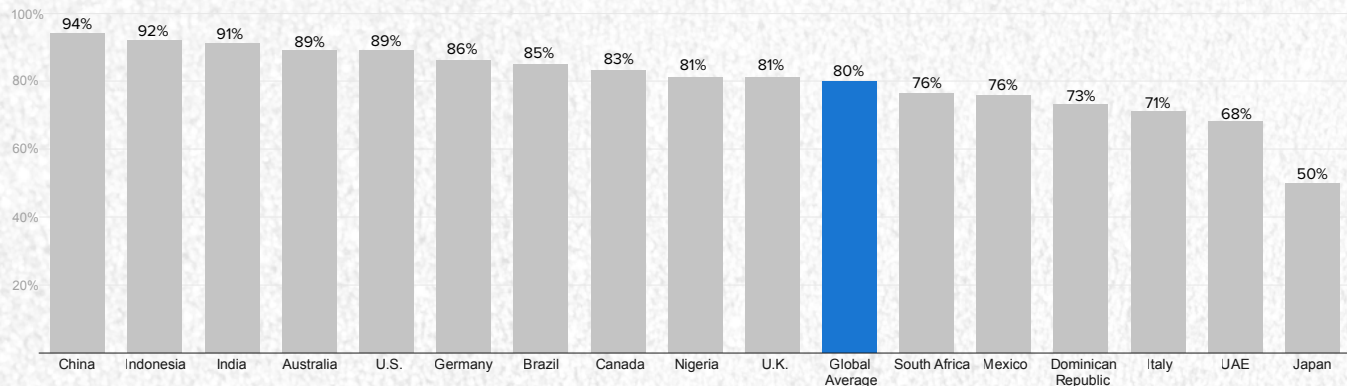
GLOBAL WORKERS' ACCESS TO WELL-PAYING JOBS NATIONALLY

Globally, **4 in 5** workers (**80%**) said that there are well-paying jobs in their country for people with their skills and experience, but there were notable differences across countries.

Workers' Access to Well-Paying Jobs Nationally



Percentage of workers who agreed or strongly agreed that there are well-paying jobs in their country for people with their skills and experience



SPOTLIGHT ON ITALY



Only **71%** of workers in Italy said they believe there are well-paying jobs in their country for people with their skills and experience, compared to the global average of **80%**. One reason for this perception may be Italy's sluggish wage growth relative to many of its peer countries. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Italy experienced the sharpest decline in real wages — wages adjusted for inflation — among the largest OECD economies after the pandemic. By early 2024, real wages in Italy remained 6.9% lower than pre-pandemic levels, impacting workers' purchasing power. Another contributing factor to these perceptions could be the prevalence of temporary employment in Italy. Data from Eurostat, the European Union's statistical office, showed that Italy in 2022 had one of the highest rates of temporary workers in the EU, alongside Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands. Among employed Italians ages 30 to 54, 10.7% held temporary jobs. For employed Italians ages 15 to 29 who were not participating in education, the share in temporary jobs was 38.2%. As shown earlier in this report, temporary workers were the least likely of the five worker types explored in the research to feel that there are well-paying jobs in their local community for people with their skills and experience.

SPOTLIGHT ON UAE



Only **68%** of workers in the UAE said there are well-paying jobs in their country for people with their skills and experience, compared to the global average of **80%**. At first glance, this might suggest that UAE workers face greater challenges in accessing well-paying jobs than their counterparts in other nations. However, a closer examination of the data suggests there may be more to the story. Among the workers surveyed in the UAE, only **2 in 5 (40%)** reported having citizenship in the country. In contrast, **96%** of the workers in the other 15 countries claimed citizenship. This finding aligns with demographic data indicating that expatriates account for over 88.5% of the UAE's residents. Consequently, unlike respondents in other countries, workers in the UAE might have been considering their home countries when responding to this question rather than their country of residence. In fact, **88%** of the noncitizen respondents surveyed in the UAE stated that they relocated to the country specifically for employment opportunities.



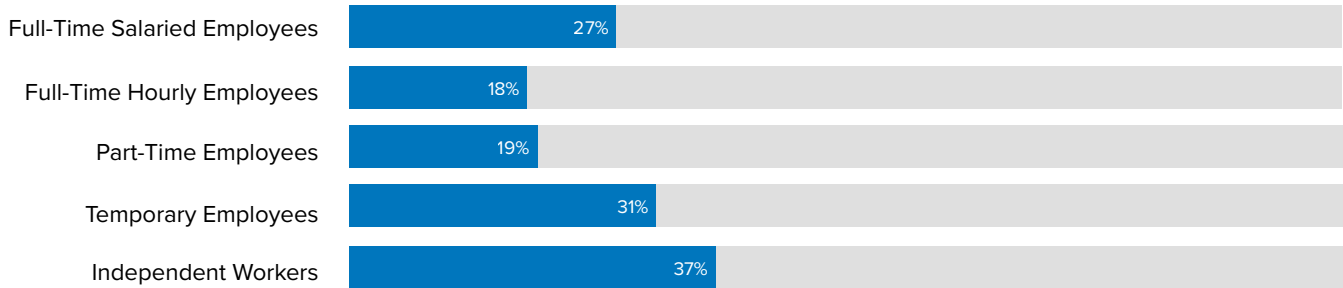
RELIANCE ON FOREIGN BUSINESSES TO ACCESS WELL-PAYING JOBS

Globally, **about a third** of workers (**30%**) said they must rely on foreign businesses rather than local businesses to access well-paying jobs. Interestingly, this trend is particularly notable among the independent workforce, who engage with businesses differently than workers who operate in an employee capacity. In contrast to the other worker types, independent workers often engage with multiple business clients or customers simultaneously to provide services on a project or task basis. **Just over one-third** of independent workers (**37%**) said that they rely on foreign businesses rather than local businesses to access jobs that pay well.

Notably, independent workers’ reliance on foreign businesses for well-paying jobs may be particularly facilitated by their ability to perform work remotely. In fact, among the five worker types, independent workers have the highest share of workers who work either fully remotely or virtually or a hybrid combination of in person and remotely, expanding their ability to serve customers and clients beyond geographic boundaries. In contrast, part-time employees and full-time hourly employees, who tend to work fully in person or onsite, were the least likely to say they rely on foreign businesses to access well-paying jobs (**19%** and **18%**, respectively).

Reliance on Foreign Businesses for Well-Paying Jobs by Worker Type

Percentage of workers who agreed or strongly agreed that they have to rely on foreign businesses rather than local businesses to access well-paying jobs

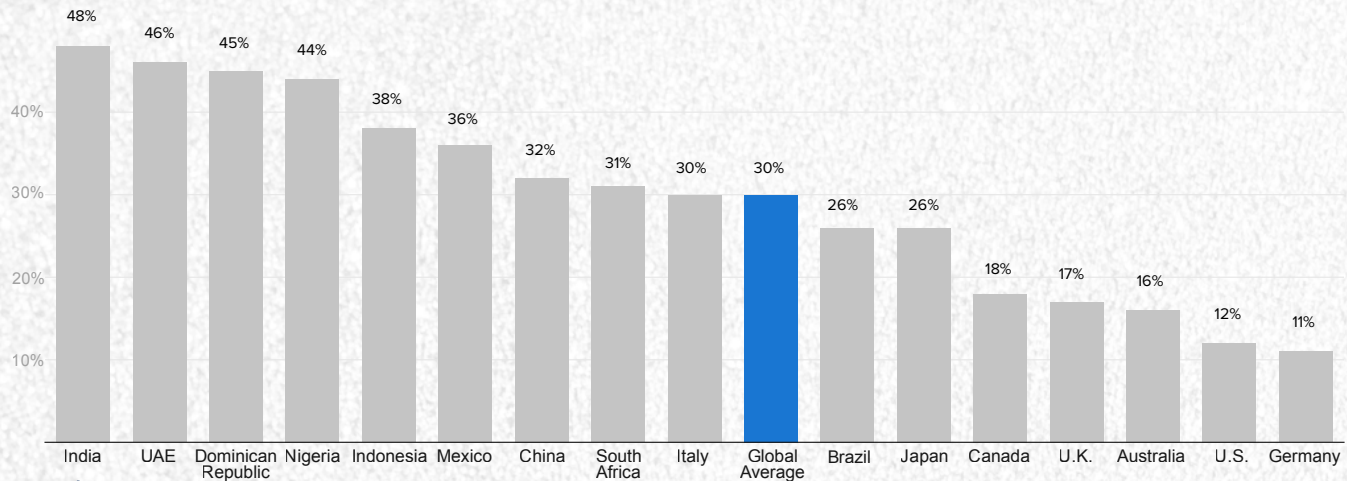


Reliance on foreign businesses for well-paying jobs also varies significantly by country. Across the 16 countries surveyed, the percentage of workers who said that they must rely on foreign businesses to access well-paying jobs ranged from **11%** (Germany) to **48%** (India).

Reliance on Foreign Businesses for Well-Paying Jobs by Country



Percentage of workers who agreed or strongly agreed that they have to rely on foreign businesses rather than local businesses to access well-paying jobs



SPOTLIGHT ON INDIA



About half of workers in India (**48%**) reported that they rely on foreign businesses rather than local businesses to access well-paying jobs, compared to the global average of **30%**. One reason for this high reliance on foreign businesses may be India's burgeoning gig economy. According to the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), 7.7 million workers in India were engaged in the gig economy between 2020 and 2021, and this number is only expected to grow. In fact, NITI Aayog estimated that the number of Indian workers engaged in the gig economy will expand to 23.5 million by 2029 to 2030, representing 6.7% of the nonagricultural workforce and 4.1% of the total livelihood in India. Notably, India's robust digital services and technology sector may be contributing to this growing gig economy. This sector is enabling more workers to find global job opportunities via online platforms. In fact, 2024 estimates from the Online Labour Observatory, a collaboration between the International Labour Organization, the Oxford Internet Institute, and the University of Oxford, showed that over one-fifth of the global online freelance workforce (21%) was from India, with the most popular job field being software development and technology.

SPOTLIGHT ON UAE



Nearly half of workers in the UAE (**46%**) reported relying on foreign businesses rather than local businesses to access well-paying jobs, compared to the global average of **30%**. Initially, this might seem to imply that UAE workers faced more difficulties in securing well-paying positions than workers in other countries. However, there's a deeper context. As previously mentioned, expatriates make up over 88.5% of the UAE's residents. Given that **88%** of the noncitizens we surveyed said they moved to the UAE for the job prospects, it's unsurprising that they reported heavily relying on foreign businesses or, in this case, businesses in the UAE. Notably, among the many nationalities of people residing and working in the UAE, Indian nationals represented the largest expatriate group, accounting for approximately 30% of the population. Workers from India were the most likely to report depending on foreign businesses for well-paying jobs among workers across the 16 countries we surveyed.



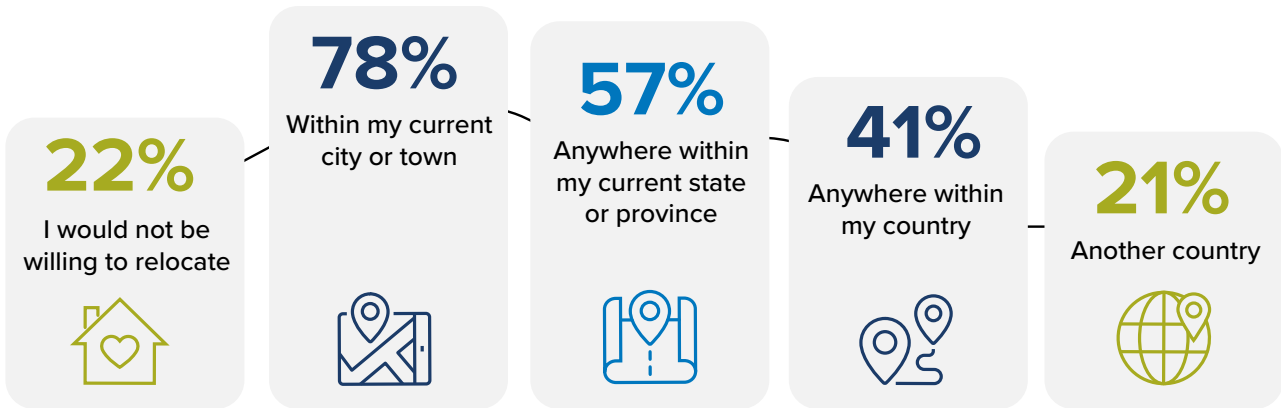
THE ROLE OF WORKER MOBILITY: HOW FAR WORKERS WILL MOVE OR RELOCATE FOR BETTER-PAYING JOBS

It's important to acknowledge that just because workers said there are well-paying jobs in their local community or country for people with their skills and experience doesn't necessarily mean that workers believe they currently hold these well-paying jobs. In fact, only **43%** of workers said they are very or extremely satisfied with their current pay and benefits. What's more, this dissatisfaction is driving workers to look elsewhere. Among workers who said they are very or extremely satisfied with their pay and benefits, only **15%** said they are actively looking to leave their job for a new one. In contrast, among workers who said they are not at all satisfied or not too satisfied with their pay and benefits, **nearly half** said they are actively job hunting (**49%**). Among those who said they are only somewhat satisfied, **1 in 4** said they are actively seeking a new job (**25%**).

Yet, how far these workers are willing to relocate geographically for a better-paying job varies substantially, revealing a spectrum of worker mobility levels and highlighting the diverse considerations and motivations that influence global workers' career decisions in today's dynamic labor market.

Most workers globally said they are willing to relocate some distance to access a better-paying job (i.e., only **22%** would be unwilling to relocate at all), but those who said they are willing to relocate are split on the distance they would be willing to move. **Over half** of workers globally said they are willing to move a short distance to access a better-paying job, such as relocating within their current city or town (**78%**) or within their current state or province (**57%**), but only **2 in 5** said they would be willing to relocate anywhere within their country (**41%**). Additionally, only **1 in 5** workers globally (**21%**) said they would be willing to relocate to another country to access a better-paying job.

How Far Workers Are Willing to Relocate to Access a Better-Paying Job



THE MOBILITY PROFILE: UNDERSTANDING WORKER MOTIVATIONS

Good pay and benefits were essential to workers across the globe, but there were several other considerations that factored into workers’ willingness to relocate and how far they’d be willing to move to access a better-paying job, including the type of job workers perform, their age and current life stage, and their caregiving responsibilities at home.

WORKER TYPE

Among the five worker types, independent workers, followed by temporary employees and full-time salaried employees, were the most willing to relocate to another country to access a better-paying job. Yet, the motivation for this willingness is likely varied. As mentioned earlier, independent workers often depend on foreign businesses for well-paying jobs. Meanwhile, full-time salaried employees may seek to relocate to sustain or increase their above-average incomes, and temporary employees might consider relocating to secure the long-term positions this research revealed they desire.

In contrast, part-time employees were the least willing to relocate any distance for a better-paying job, with **nearly 2 in 5** saying they would not be willing to relocate at all (**39%**). Part-time employees’ reluctance to relocate likely reflects the broader value that they place on flexibility as a central component of why they work part time. Full-time hourly employees, like their part-time counterparts, also expressed a somewhat higher reluctance to relocate, highlighting that the perceived cost associated with moving might outweigh the potential benefits for this group of workers.

How Far Workers Are Willing to Relocate to Access a Better-Paying Job by Worker Type

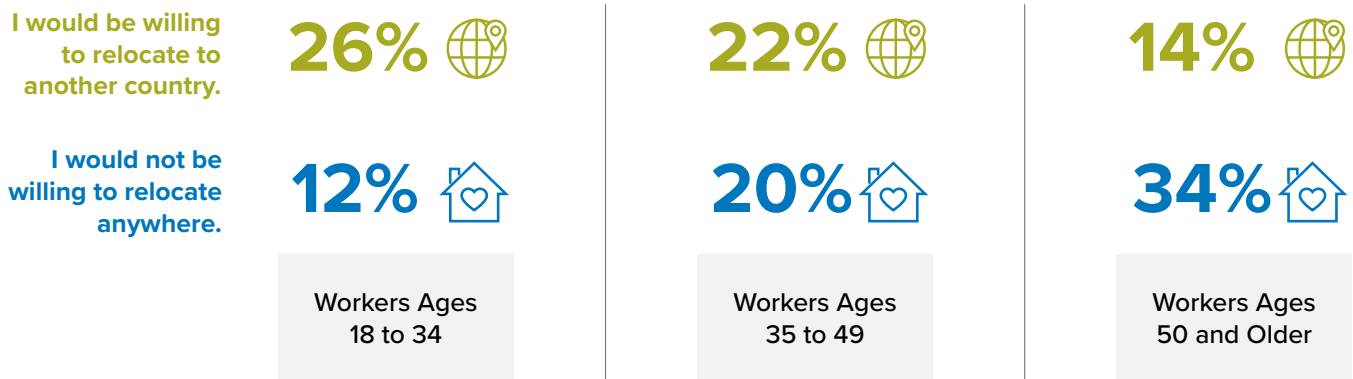


WORKERS' AGE

A worker's age is also an important factor influencing their willingness to relocate for a better-paying job, with willingness to relocate overall and willingness to relocate particularly far distances (i.e., to another country) decreasing as age increased. For example, **1 in 3** workers ages 50 and older (**34%**) were unwilling to relocate any distance for a better-paying job, whereas only **20%** of workers ages 35 to 49 and only **12%** of workers ages 18 to 34 said the same. Additionally, younger workers were more likely than their older counterparts to say they would be open to moving to another country to access a better-paying job: **26%** of workers ages 18 to 34 and **22%** of those ages 35 to 49 said they would be willing to relocate to another country to access a better-paying job, versus only **14%** of workers ages 50 and older.

Notably, these larger trends may reflect the various life stages that workers are in. Willingness to relocate may be influenced by a mix of financial, professional, and personal considerations. Older workers, who may have reached a point in their careers where they have attained financial stability or who may be closer to retirement goals and plans, may find the prospect of relocating long distances for a better-paying job to be less appealing. In contrast, younger workers who are earlier in their careers may be more driven to take greater steps to maximize their income. They may view relocation as an opportunity to advance their careers and boost their earning potential.

How Far Workers Are Willing to Relocate to Access a Better-Paying Job by Age

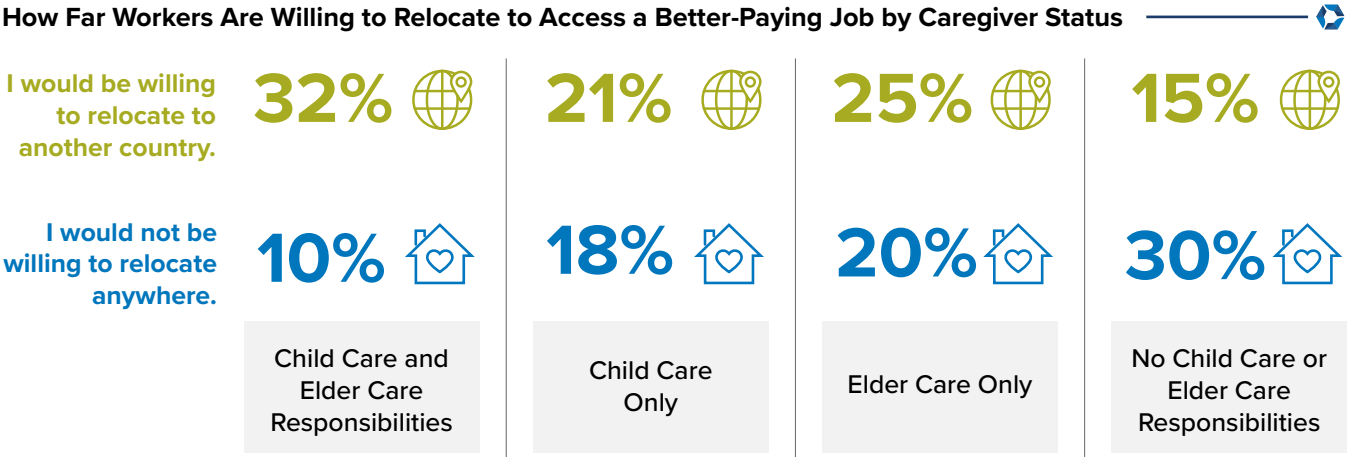


WORKERS' CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

Workers with caregiving responsibilities may also have unique considerations impacting their willingness to relocate to access better-paying jobs. Interestingly, workers with caregiving responsibilities were more likely to express a willingness to relocate for a better-paying job than those without any caregiving responsibilities. **Nearly 1 in 3 workers** without any caregiving responsibilities **(30%)** expressed an unwillingness to relocate for better pay, whereas only **10%** of workers managing a combination of child care and elder care responsibilities, **18%** of those managing only child care responsibilities, and **20%** of those managing only elder care responsibilities said the same. In fact, global workers managing both child care and elder care responsibilities simultaneously were the most willing to relocate to another country for a better-paying job, with **about a third (32%)** saying they would be willing to do so. What's more, **21%** of workers with only child care responsibilities and **25%** of workers with only elder care responsibilities said they would be

willing to relocate to another country, versus only **15%** of those without any caregiving responsibilities.

These trends may seem counterintuitive at first, but they reflect larger patterns of what it means to be a caregiver across the globe. While some people may think caregiving responsibilities would make workers more unwilling to relocate because others are reliant on them for their well-being, it may actually be this reliance that makes workers with caregiving responsibilities the most willing to relocate. For example, a key motivation for migrant workers to relocate to another country in order to secure a better-paying job may be to send financial support to their families back home. In fact, [the United Nations](#) projects that migrants will have sent more than \$5 trillion to low-income and middle-income countries for such purposes by 2030. In other words, for workers to meet the needs of those they are caring for, they must have a well-paying job, and a well-paying job may be particularly essential for a worker juggling multiple caregiving responsibilities.



CONCLUSION

The SHRM Global Worker Project is focused on building a shared, human-centered understanding of the future of the workplace, shedding light on the intricate challenges facing today's workers and the emerging trends shaping tomorrow's workplaces. This study equips employers and policymakers with important information to develop inclusive and effective global policies and practices that recognize and value the unique, diverse needs of the contemporary workforce. By moving beyond a one-size-fits-all definition of a "traditional worker," global leaders can better foster workplaces where workers of all types can thrive.

The findings of this report underscore how understanding the dynamics of worker mobility and the factors that drive it are essential for fostering a thriving global workforce. Workers may relocate for a range of reasons — some within their control and others not — but competitive pay remains a key motivator. Businesses that invest in offering competitive wages not only improve their ability to retain local talent but also benefit by attracting skilled workers from other towns, cities, states, provinces, countries, and regions, enabling them to address critical talent gaps. Similarly, policymakers hold a vital role in creating frameworks that facilitate worker mobility, ensuring that individuals can pursue meaningful employment without undue barriers. By addressing such needs, both employers and policymakers can establish pathways to economic resilience and sustainable growth, contributing to a more prosperous global economy.

Want to learn more? [Visit SHRM's Global Policy hub page.](#)

METHODOLOGY

SHRM surveyed 16,000 workers across 16 countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the Dominican Republic, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States) via a third-party online panel from Feb. 22 to June 7, 2024. Workers of all types and from a wide variety of industries were sampled. Responses were balanced to ensure representation of workers across age groups and genders. For each country, the survey was translated into the country's official language. In countries where English was the official language, the survey language was localized.





OUR PURPOSE IS TO ELEVATE HR

Our mission is to empower people and workplaces by advancing HR practices and by maximizing human potential. Our vision is to build a world of work that works for all.

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