



Cost containment overtakes talent as the biggest challenge for global mobility teams, ECA survey finds

Key findings:

- Cost containment is now the leading challenge facing mobility teams (56%)
- Salary reviews are becoming more structured and less reactive
- Long-term assignments remain central to how organisations operate across borders, with the home-based pay approach still dominant

London, UK – 17 September 2026 – ECA, the leading provider of data, software and expertise for managing and assigning employees worldwide, has released its latest Expatriate Salary Management survey report, revealing how organisations are managing international assignment pay under sustained cost pressure.

The 2026 findings point to evolution, not reinvention. Organisations are retaining familiar salary approaches but applying them with tighter rules, clearer distinctions between package elements and more structured review cycles.

Cost and control have displaced talent as the most pressing challenges. Cost containment is now cited as challenging or very challenging by over half (56%) of organisations, up from 38% in 2022. Other rising concerns include capturing and measuring costs (48%) and consistent policy application (42%). By contrast, talent-related concerns have become less prominent, with attracting and retaining talent losing its position as top challenge and motivating employees to be mobile falling from second to seventh in the rankings.

Management of assignment pay is becoming more structured and less reactive. Despite major economic disruption in recent years, companies are standardising salary reviews to annual schedules while reducing off-cycle reviews. Annual reviews are now firmly established as the norm, with 84% reviewing home-based salaries and allowances once a year.

Long-term assignments remain central to how organisations run their businesses across borders. Organisations most often use them to manage operations (79%), fill skills gaps (64%), and transfer expertise (59%). Two-thirds of organisations have reviewed their long-term assignment policy in the past two years, and 55% expect to do so again within the next year.



Oliver Browne, Head of Content and Insights at ECA said: “The biggest shift we've seen is in what's keeping mobility teams busy. Talent used to dominate the conversation, but cost has now taken over, and organisations are responding by running their programmes more tightly, with a sharper focus on tracking spend and applying policy consistently. What's striking is that this hasn't led to a major rethink of the salary approaches organisations use. The established models remain remarkably stable, with the home-based model still the clear choice for most organisations. Companies are tightening control around their programmes rather than changing the fundamentals.”

The survey gathered responses from 252 organisations headquartered in 29 countries.

To find out more about ECA, please visit: www.eca.global.

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