

Expatriate Insider 2021 Survey Reveals: The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life

- Overall, 45% of survey respondents say that COVID-19 had an impact on their current stay abroad or their relocation plans.
- Survey respondents are currently seeing the biggest effects on personal travel (25%), social life (23%), and their work or business (16%).
- Expats are most satisfied with the official communication on COVID-19 in New Zealand, Taiwan, and Qatar, and least satisfied in Indonesia (57th), Egypt (58th), and Brazil (59th).

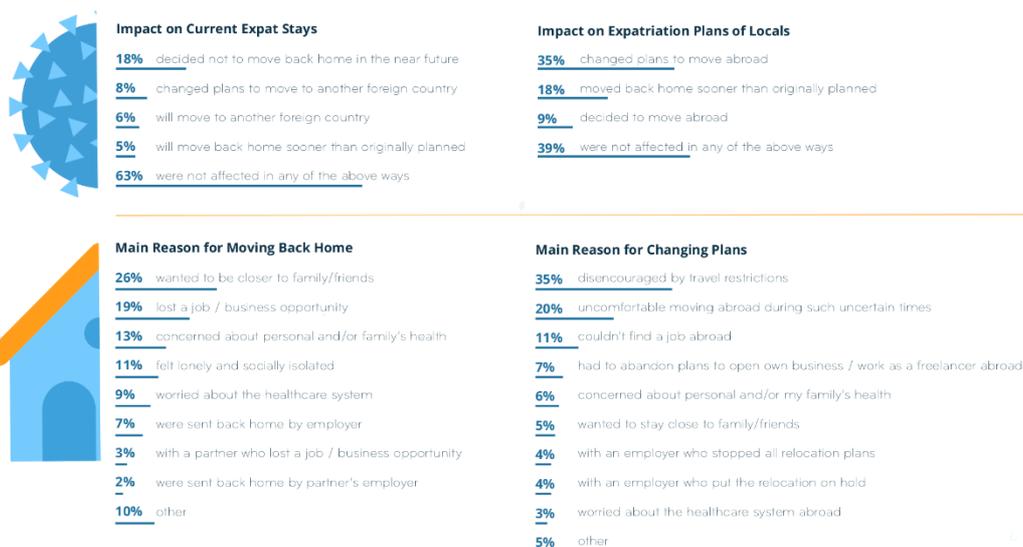
Munich, 18 May 2021 — For the seventh time, [InterNations](#), the world's largest expat community with around 4 million members, has published its *Expatriate Insider* survey. With more than 12,000 respondents, it is one of the most extensive surveys about living and working abroad, providing insights into expat life in 59 destinations.

To shed some light on how COVID-19 has disrupted the lives of those living and working abroad, the questionnaire included a number of questions dedicated to this topic: How did the pandemic change the participants' relocation plans and/or life abroad? Which areas of their lives have been (or will probably be) affected the most — both at the moment and in the long run? How do expats stay up to date on the COVID-19 regulations, and how satisfied are they with the official government communication in their respective country of respondents?

For the first time, parts of the survey were also addressed local residents for the first time, many former expats and expats-to-be among them. A summary of all answers can be found below.

Expatriate Destinations 2021

The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life



The Pandemic's Impact on Relocation Plans

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of billions of people all over the globe, and expats are no exception here. Among *all* survey respondents, close to one in ten (9%) say they have moved or will move home earlier than originally intended due to COVID-19 — though 46% of them also plan to return to their life abroad within the year. A US American respondents shares: *"I left the employer I was with, but I still hope to return overseas in some capacity."*

One in six (17%) had to stop their plans to either move abroad in the first place or to relocate from one foreign country to another. However, 7% also say that they have now decided to move to another country *due* to the pandemic, while 12% of respondents are planning to extend their current stay abroad. The rest (55%) states that the pandemic has not had a direct impact on their relocation plans and/or current stay in a foreign country.

Returning Home during a Global Pandemic

Close to two in five *local* respondents (18%) say that they have returned from a stay abroad earlier than originally planned. When asked about the main reason for their early return, many cite the desire to be closer to their family and/or friends (22%), a job or business opportunity lost due to COVID-19 (21%), or concerns about their personal and/or their family's health (16%). In addition, 12% were recalled by their own or their partner's employer, while one in ten (10%) was worried about the local healthcare system in their host country.

Among *expat* respondents — i.e., those who are still living abroad — the share of respondents who say they'll return back home earlier than originally planned is, at 5%, not quite as high. What stands out, though, is that expats who were originally sent abroad by their employer (14% vs. 10% globally) and those who were recruited internationally (15% vs. 11% globally) are overrepresented in this group of respondents. Overall, wanting to be closer to friends and family is the most common motivation for an earlier return as well, with one in three (33%) picking this reason. However, the expats who are planning to return home early are much more likely to give a feeling of loneliness and social isolation as their main reason for deciding not to stay abroad (20% vs. 5% of those who have already returned).

Putting Relocation Plans on Hold

Those respondents who had to put their international relocation plans on hold due to the pandemic often struggle with organizational aspects: 35% say that travel restrictions are the reason for their changed plans. One in five (20%) simply did not feel comfortable moving to another country in such uncertain times, 11% could not or cannot find a job abroad, and 7% state that their work as a freelancer and/or new business owner was made impossible by the pandemic.

Interestingly, the respondents whose relocation plans have changed because of COVID-19 are less likely to name concerns for their own or their family's health (6%), the desire to stay close to family and friends at home (5%), or their employer putting foreign assignments on hold (8%) as the reason for canceling or postponing their move. Still, over three-quarters of the local respondents who had to put their plans to move abroad on hold (77%) state that they still want to move within the next two years, as do around seven in ten expats (69%) whose plans for moving to another foreign country were thwarted by the COVID-19 crisis.

Making the Move *Because* of Corona

Among *local* survey participants, close to one in ten (9%) say they are now planning an international

relocation *due* to COVID-19. In Russia, the share of local respondents who now want to move is particularly high at 20%. Expats, on the other hand, are less likely to plan a move to *another* foreign country due to the pandemic: only 6% give this answer. This group is overrepresented in a number of the GCC States, such as Kuwait (19%), Saudi Arabia (12%), and Oman (11%), which are joined by South Africa (13%), Singapore (12%), and India (10%). Only 36% are considering a relocation followed by a return to their current host country later in 2021, though another 42% at least haven't decided against it yet.

The Pandemic's Impact on Everyday Life

Of course, COVID-19 has not only disrupted the relocation plans of expats worldwide. When asked where they see the biggest impact of the pandemic on their personal life *right now*, the survey respondents point out its effects on personal travel (25%), social life (23%), and their work and business (16%) in particular. The difference between expats and local respondents is quite interesting. Both groups are quick to point out the impact on their social life (24% of expats, 21% of locals). "*My social life was killed by Covid-19 at the worst moment: my arrival,*" a French expat in Budapest shares. However, while respondents living abroad are more likely to struggle with the pandemic's effect on personal travel (28% of expats vs. 18% of locals), one-fifth of local respondents (20%) shares that the pandemic has impacted especially their work or business (vs. 15% of expats).

In the *long run*, respondents are still concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their social life (17% of all respondents), and there are also considerable worries regarding personal travel (22%). When thinking about the future, a larger share of respondents also consider the pandemic's impact on their life in regard to their personal finances (12% vs. 9% who have already seen a major impact), their family life (9% vs. 6%), and their mental health (9% vs. 7%).

How Expats Stay Informed on COVID-19

Expats across the world mostly rely on official government channels (48%), local news (47%), and social media (40%) for news on the COVID-19 situation and the related regulations in their country of residence. To a lesser degree, they also depend on expat news (32%), friends and neighbors (19%), and employers (18%) as sources of information, while the embassy/consulate (9%), family (8%), or personal observations (8%) only play a minor role. Fortunately, only 3% of expats worldwide say they haven't found a good source of information yet.

There are, however, noticeable regional differences: **Official government channels** are a major source of information particularly in expat hotspots such as Bahrain (75%), Singapore (74%), and Luxembourg (65%), in addition to countries where English — the language in which the *Expats Insider 2021* survey was conducted — is an/the official language, from Ireland (70%) to New Zealand (69%) and Australia (66%). The lack of a potential language barrier may also affect the percentage of expats per country who rely on **local news**, which is particularly high in New Zealand (69%), Luxembourg (69%), Canada (67%), Australia (65%), and the UK (60%), for example.

Social media, however, is an oft-cited source of information in GCC States such as Oman (59%), Saudi Arabia (55%), and Kuwait (53%), but also in countries such as Indonesia (53%), Kenya (53%), and Poland (53%). Lastly, **expat/international news** are an important source for respondents in Czechia (59%), Hungary (54%), and Costa Rica (48%), but also in a number of Asian destinations, such as Thailand (55%), China (53%), Vietnam (45%), and Japan (45%).

Expats' Views on Official COVID-19 Communication

Considering the importance of government channels, just **how satisfied are expats with the official communication regarding COVID-19 and related regulations?** Worldwide, not quite two-thirds (66%) rate this factor positively, with close to a quarter (24%) saying they are completely satisfied. The main complaint among expats who are *not* satisfied with the official communication on the pandemic is that the information is unclear, confusing, and/or contradictory (67%). In comparison, information only being made available in the local language(s) (20%) or not being available at all (15%) was not a major issue for most expats; few considered it hard to find (16%) or struggled with an information overload (9%) either.

Respondents who are satisfied with the official communication in their respective country of residence appreciate that it is clear and easy to understand (60%), as well as easy to find (47%). Around a quarter each also agree that information has been made available in several languages (26%) and that the amount has been just right (26%).

However, there are again major regional differences: New Zealand (1st), Singapore (4th), and Australia (7th) are among the best-rated destinations when it comes to the official communication on COVID-19, possibly due to their strict and early response to the pandemic and their comparatively low infection rates¹, but maybe also due to the English-language bias of the survey. They are joined by four GCC States — Qatar (3rd), Saudi Arabia (5th), Bahrain (6th), and the UAE (8th) — and two countries in Northern Europe: Finland (9th) and Denmark (10th). Neighboring Norway (17th) and Estonia (18th) are also among the top 20 destinations, while Sweden only ranks 46th. Over a third of dissatisfied respondents in Sweden (34%) complain that there was little to no communication in general (vs. 15% globally).

The list of countries that, according to expats, perform rather poorly is more varied, ranging from Brazil (59th out of 59 destinations) and Egypt (58th) to some Asian countries — Indonesia (57th), India (56th), and Japan (55th) — to the USA (54th). More than a quarter of expats in these destinations are dissatisfied with the official COVID-19 communication.

Full Ranking: Where Expats Are the Most and the Least Satisfied with the Official COVID-19 Communication

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|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1. New Zealand | 13. Luxembourg | 25. Malta |
| 2. Taiwan | 14. Canada | 26. Hong Kong |
| 3. Qatar | 15. Costa Rica | 27. Chile |
| 4. Singapore | 16. Portugal | 28. Germany |
| 5. Saudi Arabia | 17. Norway | 29. Austria |
| 6. Bahrain | 18. Estonia | 30. Malaysia |
| 7. Australia | 19. Ireland | 31. Switzerland |
| 8. UAE | 20. France | 32. South Africa |
| 9. Finland | 21. Colombia | 33. Netherlands |
| 10. Denmark | 22. Oman | 34. Belgium |
| 11. South Korea | 23. Greece | 35. China |
| 12. Vietnam | 24. Cyprus | 36. Kuwait |

¹ Time. The Best Global Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic, 1 Year Later. 23 February 2021.
<https://time.com/5851633/best-global-responses-covid-19/>

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|--------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 37. Italy | 45. Hungary | 53. Panama |
| 38. Thailand | 46. Sweden | 54. USA |
| 39. Spain | 47. Ukraine | 55. Japan |
| 40. Ecuador | 48. Mexico | 56. India |
| 41. Czechia | 49. Russia | 57. Indonesia |
| 42. Turkey | 50. United Kingdom | 58. Egypt |
| 43. Poland | 51. Philippines | 59. Brazil |
| 44. Kenya | 52. Romania | |

About the InterNations *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

For its annual [Expat Insider survey](#), InterNations asked 12,420 expats representing 174 nationalities and living in 186 countries or territories to provide information on various aspects of expat life, as well as their gender, age, and nationality. Participants were asked to rate up to 37 different aspects of life abroad on a scale of one to seven. The rating process emphasized the respondents' personal satisfaction with these aspects, considering both emotional topics and more factual aspects with equal weight. The respondents' ratings of the individual factors were then bundled in various combinations for a total of 13 subcategories, and their mean values were used to draw up five topical indices: Quality of Life, Ease of Settling In, Working Abroad, Personal Finance, and Cost of Living. The first four of these indices were further averaged together with expats' general satisfaction with their life in order to rank 59 expat destinations around the world. In 2021, the top 10 are Taiwan, Mexico, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Portugal, New Zealand, Australia, Ecuador, Canada, and Vietnam. Moreover, expats were asked about how COVID-19 has impacted their life abroad; however, these responses did not influence the overall ranking.

For a country to be featured in the indices and consequently in the overall ranking, a sample size of at least 50 survey participants per destination was necessary.

About InterNations

With around 4 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.

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