

Expat Insider 2021 Survey: The Future of Working Abroad

South African expats talk about their career abroad and how they envision their future working life.

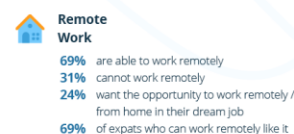
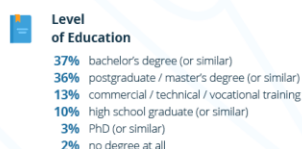
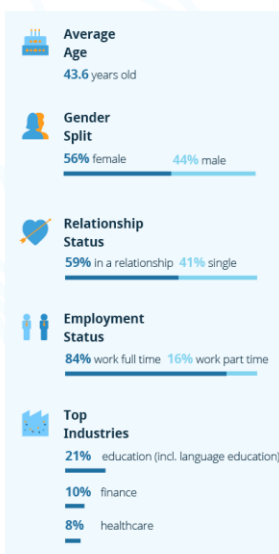
- Education is the most common field of work among South African expats.
- South African expats are very satisfied with the state of the local economy in their host countries.
- A good compensation, a good work-life balance, and flexible working hours are most important to South African expats when it comes to their dream job.

Munich, 14 September 2021 — Why do South Africans move abroad? According to the *Expat Insider 2021* survey by InterNations, 44% of South Africans working abroad name their career as the most important reason for relocating to another country. Most of them found a job on their own (19%) or were recruited internationally (16%). Just 8% were sent abroad by their employer, which is a smaller share than the global average among expats working abroad (13%), and only 1% moved abroad to start their own business. Aside from work-related reasons, an above-average share of South Africans working abroad originally relocated for political, religious, or safety reasons (9% vs. 2% globally) or because they were looking for a better quality of life (9% vs. 6% globally).

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

South African Expats

The Future of Working Abroad



* 19% found a job on their own, 16% were recruited internationally, 8% were sent by their employer, 1% to start their own business

** Note: This includes working expats and expats looking for a job.

The Typical South African Expat Working Abroad

On average, South African expats working abroad are 43.6 years old, and more than half are female (56%). This is ten percentage points more than the global average, where 46% of working expats are women. Similar to the global average, 84% of South African expats work full time (vs. 82% globally).

When it comes to education, South African expats have a lower level of formal education than the average expat working abroad. Just 36% of South Africans have a postgraduate / master's degree (vs. 47% globally), and only 3% hold a PhD (vs. 8% globally). However, close to two in five (37%) have a bachelor's degree, compared to 33% globally. Lastly, an above-average share each says that they have either completed commercial / technical / vocational training (13% vs. 6% globally) or graduated from high school (10% vs. 5% globally) as their highest level of academic or professional qualifications. One in fifty (2%) also has no degree at all, compared to 1% globally.

South African Expats Are Educators, Not Executives

This lower level of formal qualifications could be a contributing factor as to why South African expats are less likely to work in senior positions. Just one-quarter (25%) works in a senior or specialist role (vs. 30% globally), and only 9% are top managers / executives (vs. 13% globally). However, another reason might be the very high share of South African expats being teachers / professors: close to one in five (19%) describe their current employment situation that way (vs. 9% globally).

In fact, 21% state they work in the field of education, which is nine percentage points more than the global average (12%) and by far the most common field of work among South Africans. It is followed by 10% working in finance and another 8% in healthcare. While globally many expats also work in IT (11%), this is just the case for 6% of expats from South Africa.

South African Expats Are Happy with the State of the Local Economy Abroad

More than two-thirds of South African expats (67%) are satisfied with their job in general, which is, however, six percentage points below the global average (73%). It looks like they are mainly dissatisfied with their job security (63% happy vs. 67% globally) and their working hours (67% happy vs. 70% globally).

On the other hand, 49% of expats from South Africa rate their local career opportunities positively, which is the same as the global average (49%). And they are even happier than the average expat with their work-life balance (70% happy vs. 68% globally) and the state of the local economy in their current country of residence (70% happy vs. 65% globally).

In fact, several out of the top 5 most common destinations for South Africans working abroad rank among the top 10 worldwide for the state of the local economy: Switzerland comes 4th, followed by Germany (7th) and the Netherlands (10th). Australia still lands in a good 14th place, while the UK only comes 35th. However, this is still far ahead of South Africa, whose state of the local economy is voted the worst in the world by expats living there (59th out of 59).

A Good Compensation: A Highlight Now, an Important Factor in the Future

When asked what they like best about their current job, the top response given by South Africans working abroad is a good compensation and/or good benefits (33%). The share of South African expats citing this aspect is even five percentage points higher than the global average (28%).

In fact, more than half the South African expats working abroad (51%) have a gross yearly household income ranging from 50,000 to 150,000 USD (vs. 45% globally). While another 44% make up to 50,000 USD per year, which is on par with the global average (44%), only 5% make 150,000 USD or more. This is a considerably smaller share than the global average (11%).

A good compensation and/or good benefits is also the most frequently mentioned aspect when South African expats are asked to imagine their dream job: close to three in five (57%) name this factor, which is slightly above the global average (54%).

Working Remotely Is Not So Common among South Africans

More than three in ten South African expats (32%) also name the opportunity to work remotely / from home as a highlight of their current job, making it the second-most cited aspect. In fact, 69% of those who can work remotely actually like doing so (vs. 65% globally). However, South African expats are a lot less likely to be able to work remotely than expats worldwide: close to seven in ten (69%) say that they can work remotely, compared to 78% globally. More than one in five (21%) are unable to work remotely due to the nature of their job (vs. 16% globally), and 10% cannot work remotely because their employer does not allow it (vs. 6% globally).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the remote work policies for some South African expats, though: 20% say that remote work was newly introduced and is here to stay, and another 27% are able to work remotely more often than before COVID-19. However, 31% also share that their remote work policy has not changed in the long run, while this is just the case for 26% of expats worldwide. Considering that many South African expats work in the field of education, this might not be much of a surprise.

When they are asked to imagine their dream job, the opportunity to work remotely / from home is also not particularly important for South African expats. Not even a quarter (24%) name this aspect.

Personal Growth Is More Important Than General Career Development

So, what is important to South Africans working abroad when they envision their professional future? The top aspect (a good compensation and/or good benefits) is followed by a good work-life balance (48%) and flexible working hours (33%).

Interestingly, while 25% of South Africans want to have some room for personal development / growth in their dream job, just 15% find their general career development important. Globally, it is rather the other way around: 20% of expats worldwide name their general career development as an important aspect, while 22% find room for personal development / growth important.

“When it comes to the future of working abroad, it is clear that South African expats are not willing to sacrifice their personal life for their career,” says Malte Zeeck, InterNations Founder and Co-CEO. “Together with other factors like autonomy, freedom, creativity, and self-fulfillment, the wish for personal growth is closely related to the concept of New Work. This concept describes a new way of working in the global and digital age.”

South African Expats Find Modern Approaches to Work Abroad

More than half the South African expats working abroad (54%) say that the concept of New Work is more important in the business culture of the country they now live in than in South Africa. On a global scale, just 49% of expats say the same when comparing their respective host and home countries.

In fact, four out of the five most common destinations for South Africans working abroad rank ahead of South Africa when it comes to expats comparing the importance of New Work in the local business culture. The Netherlands (5th) and Australia (7th) even land among the top 10 worldwide, followed by the United Kingdom (15th) and Switzerland (23rd). South Africa then lands in 32nd place, while Germany comes 35th.

For example, 76% of expats living in the Netherlands say that New Work is important in the local business culture, while just 53% of expats in South Africa agree.

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

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

About the Future of Working Abroad Report

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

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

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

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

About InterNations

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

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

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