

# Executive Summary

The costs associated with global mobility are high, with some evidence suggesting that the costs exceed \$1 million per assignee, per assignment, and that the total cost to multinational corporations could be as high as \$75 billion a year<sup>2</sup>. The continued reporting of international assignment failures only adds to the costs, with 44% of MNCs reporting failures in the Asia Pacific region and 63% reporting failures in Europe<sup>3</sup>.

As a result two trends are emerging amongst employers looking for ways to justify the continued use of their international mobility programs: (1) obtaining an expatriate return on investment<sup>4</sup>, and (2) developing global talent management programs for international assignees. Yet, another more critical issue impacts both of these emerging trends: the influence of the trailing spouse on assignment success. It has been clearly demonstrated by industry surveys that 'family issues' is the number one reason why international assignments are declined. 'Family issues' is also the main cause of assignment failure<sup>5</sup>. But what, *exactly*, are these family issues? And what can HR practitioners do to address these concerns?

'... if an international assignment represents an opportunity to learn, it is clear that expatriate failure must represent the waste of such an opportunity ...'

Kamoche, 1997<sup>1</sup>

## OBJECTIVES

This survey on the trailing spouse explores the issues and challenges associated with being the accompanying partner on an international assignment. It is from the perspective of the trailing spouse and explores the non-work/family issues associated with deploying international assignees. The survey is intended to provide practitioners, assignees and trailing spouses with useful information to assist them in making informed decisions about their international assignments. The statistical and benchmarking data provided in this survey is intended to assist practitioners with the development and design of their expatriate policies and programs.

This survey provides insightful conclusions from the trailing spouse's perspective in six specific areas:

- o Organisational support from HR
- o Barriers to mobility (willingness to relocate)
- o Family issues<sup>6</sup>
- o Work/Life challenges
- o Dual-career challenges
- o Assignment success factors

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This survey is authored by Yvonne McNulty, founder of [www.thetrailingspouse.com](http://www.thetrailingspouse.com), Phd candidate (Monash University, Australia), consultant, writer, and trailing spouse. The catalyst for this survey was the original research conducted by the author in 2001 whilst undertaking a research degree (Masters level) at Southern Cross University, Australia. The recognition of the research at that time, as evidenced by editorials in the major Australian, New Zealand and UK press throughout 2002, led to the extension of the research into a 4-year study (2001-2004). The findings of the 4-year study are presented in this published survey.

## SAMPLE

The sample upon which this survey is based includes 264 trailing spouses originating from 28 home countries, and currently living in 54 host-countries, including Scotland, Greece, Brunei Darussalam, Russia, Chile, Australia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Brazil, England, Iran, Mexico, France, Uganda, and Singapore.

**THE SAMPLE**

- 264 trailing spouses
- From 28 countries
- On assignment in 54 host countries

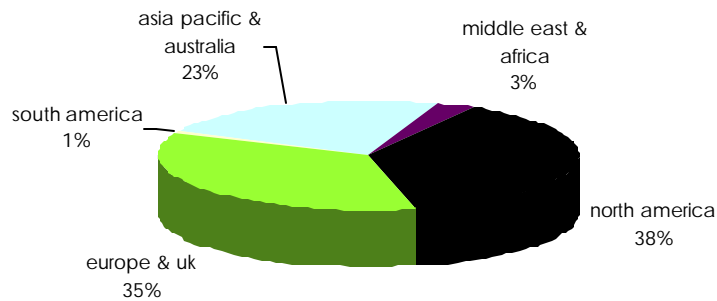


Figure 1: Home-country regional breakdown

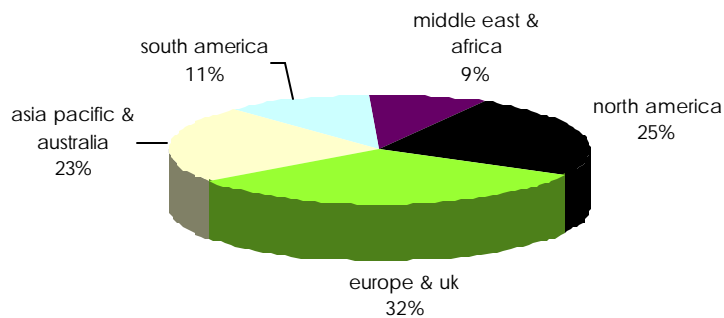


Figure 2: Host-country regional breakdown

## METHODOLOGY

Respondents were invited to participate in the survey by accessing the structured questionnaire online at [www.thetrailingspouse.com](http://www.thetrailingspouse.com). The sample of 264 responses is comprised of 91% female and 9% male.



**Figure 3: Gender**

This survey (and the study upon which it is based) represents one of the most comprehensive and unique surveys of its type because it utilizes an exclusive sample of trailing spouses. It presents findings based on the analysis of frequency data. To test for significant differences among means, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. Statistical significance levels were set at  $p=.05$ . The reliability of the survey was maintained by using Likert scales to measure importance, perceived needs, and level of services offered. Likert scales are among the most commonly used tools to measure respondents' perceptions on issues that are otherwise difficult to quantify. Other questions were measured using appropriate ordinal, nominal, interval, or ratio scales.

## WHO IS THE TYPICAL TRAILING SPOUSE IN THIS SURVEY?

- o Married (97%), for at least 4 years (72%)
- o Female (91%), with children (57%)
- o Under 40 years of age (54%)
- o Has been on an international assignment before (58%)
- o Speaks 2 or more languages (58%)
- o Is currently expatriated to Europe/UK (31%)
- o Is in a dual-career family (67%)
- o Has a tertiary education (Bachelor's degree or above) (84%)
- o Had to give up a career in order to relocate (64%)
- o Cannot continue a career or get paid employment due to work-permit/visa restrictions (55%)