



# CHROs Face Employee Mobility Concerns Amid 'Geopolitical Anxiety'



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**In our second quarter series of virtual meetings with CHROs about the new U.S. administration, M1 members discussed employee hesitancy about relocation, the impact of tariffs on talent, and their continued commitment to DEI.**

The United States has long been known as a “beacon” for expats—a place CHROs have considered a reliable lure for relocating employees.

But several CHROs in M1's second quarterly series of virtual meetings about the new U.S. administration's impact said they're detecting a shift in global employees' appetite to move for roles in the U.S. as immigration crackdowns and geopolitical uncertainty grow. Evidence was anecdotal: “I heard a couple of [employees] say the U.S. used to be a dream destination to develop their career,” one CHRO said in M1's second quarter virtual meeting series about leading HR amid the new U.S. administration. “Now they're not so hot on going.”

But the sentiment was echoed by several other CHROs who joined the May 13 calls. And some surveys are pointing to related dynamics in certain sectors. A survey of more than 1,200 scientists by the prestigious journal [Nature](#) found that 75% of scientists who responded to the poll said they've considered leaving the U.S. Data from Indeed's [Hiring Lab](#) found that starting in August 2024 and continuing into early 2025, global job seeker interest in jobs outside their home country fell significantly. Meanwhile, an online poll by the Canadian software firm [Humi](#) found that among Canadians who have considered a U.S. move in the past five years, 52% said the latest election has decreased that likelihood.

The tone of the latest calls shifted from the [whiplash CHROs expressed](#) in the weeks following the inauguration to an overriding sense of uncertainty. While DEI remained a topic of interest, the impact of new policies on talent mobility, tariffs and immigration grew.

## AT A GLANCE

- Few CHROs said global employees were actively declining offers for U.S.-based roles—but they're seeing greater hesitancy to move or smaller pools of interested candidates.
- On DEI, CHROs say, ‘the middle lane is the right lane’—sticking to the values behind it while quietly shifting how it's discussed.
- Geopolitical risk conversations are moving from ‘less urgent’ to center stage.

**“I’ve had partners not willing to move for different reasons. But never due to a political situation before**

- one CHRO noted in the May 13 virtual calls

Below, we've aggregated the most helpful insights and common themes from the five calls—blinded, of course—to share how CHROs are thinking and responding. If we can help make connections based on the information below, please let us know.

### **1. Some CHROs see employee hesitancy about U.S. moves.**

Employees' willingness to relocate has been declining for years, with the flexibility of hybrid work, higher mortgage rates, and willingness to uproot families prompting relocation levels to reach record lows in 2023.

But some CHROs said what they're hearing now is more than a traditional lack of interest in moving. While few CHROs said global employees were actively declining offers for U.S.-based roles, several noted a greater hesitancy to move or smaller pool of candidates than before. "I have never had a situation like this," said one CHRO, referring to a conversation with a Europe-based employee who had an opportunity to move to Boston. The spouse didn't want to move. "I've had partners not willing to move for different reasons. But never due to a political situation before."

### **2. Relocation to the U.S. isn't the only challenge.**

Some pointed to additional relocation challenges. One CHRO said the hardest place she's had to fill jobs is Taiwan, a fast-growing market for the company that was once a talent draw. "People are turning mobility down a little bit more than they did in the past," the CHRO said. "I think there's a certain geopolitical anxiety behind that."

A more challenging job market is another factor. Said one member: "People are wanting to hunker down and not venture out into the world, especially if they have a spouse that works and has to look for another job."

Meanwhile, some CHROs have faced resistance from employees about travel or relocation involving states with reproductive or LGBTQ rights restrictions, such as Florida or Texas. "We are seeing a lot of people ask to move out of Texas and see if they can do their corporate roles from other states that are more friendly to their communities," said one CHRO, who also said employees have asked about not traveling to certain states. "We're getting more requests in that vein."

### **3. Geopolitical risk is moving to center stage.**

Across sectors, geopolitical disruption has leapt from a peripheral risk to a bigger priority. One CHRO described how the company had recently shifted how it considers geopolitical risk across its executive team. "Instead of each function talking about what their risks are, we're going to look more at the geopolitical bucket as a risk in itself, and have every function contribute to that," she said.

In the past, the CHRO said, "geopolitical was ... not so high on the urgent side. Now, we're going to spend more time on that." That kind of explicit focus on such scenarios helps companies anticipate supply-chain shocks, talent interruptions, and regulatory shifts—making risk discussions more strategically integrated.

#### **4. Tariffs could have an unintended talent impact.**

As tariffs prompt companies to press pause on making investment decisions, expanding into new markets or adapting to their customers' responses, HR leaders say that has an impact on talent, too. "If our clients have lower volumes, then we're going to project basically flat."

Another CHRO said her company is starting discussions about a byproduct of tariffs' financial impact: Moving jobs in roles like finance to lower-cost areas. "The combination of the tariffs on our balance sheet and consumer sentiment and the uncertainty—it is accelerating our workforce distribution, where we're very actively now looking to diversify and take labor and parts of our business outside not just the U.S., but high-cost markets."

#### **5. On DEI, 'the middle lane is the right lane.'**

After several months of pressure, CHROs said they're holding steady to the values behind DEI—while renaming programs or being quieter about them. After getting pressure from employees to be more vocal about diversity and inclusion in 2020, one CHRO said their more middle-of-the-road approach has let them continue efforts with few changes. "People were really annoyed at me five years ago. Now they're 'thank God you're still being supportive,' " the CHRO said.

Another CHRO put it this way: "The middle lane is the right lane. I never take the left or the right. I think it's staying in the middle, doing the work, doing what's right, and persevering."

One leader said a new concern is that as employee resource groups are pushed to be tied more closely to business strategy, she's getting feedback that meetings are "uninspirational. Like, this used to be a fun thing and now you've taken all the fun out." That's concerning, she said, because survey results show people in them have a better experience.

#### **6. Find ways to embrace the volatility.**

Despite all the disruption, several CHROs said they were finding ways to "never waste a good crisis" and prepare their leadership teams that volatility, unpredictability and uncertainty is the new norm. Some cited a need to make their organizations more linear and agile, removing layers of span to speed decision-making. "I always see this noise, [this] mess, as an opportunity for companies that are not leading the pack to close gaps. ... How could we make gains when everyone is distracted and worried?"

Several CHROs said the disruption is forcing them to clarify what their organizations' values are and rely on leadership to set a steady tone. One CHRO said they've been spending a lot of additional time—now every two weeks—educating leaders on how to translate the headlines. "It's really this focus on how do we lead with clarity in a time of uncertainty," the CHRO said. "How do we behave? How do we treat each other? How do we create an appropriate buffer from what's happening outside?"

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