

# 2020 ADVANCE SURVEY OF GLOBAL AUSTRALIANS

**SURVEY RESULTS**



ADVANCE  
CONNECTING  
AUSTRALIANS  
GLOBALLY

# CONTENTS

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- 03** Summary
- 05** Insights
- 08** About
- 09** Key findings
- 12** Key findings: Returned Australians
- 18** Key findings: Overseas Australians
- 21** Resources



# SUMMARY

Global Australians returning home have chosen a variety of paths, but one fifth (17%) are still looking for work. Herein lies the opportunity for employers.

Covid-19 changed the plans of many global Australians, causing up to two thirds of returnees to be back in Australia prematurely.

Analysis of the 2020 Advance Survey of Global Australians reveals that global Australians usually return to Australia when they plan to retire or when forced by personal life stages, such as children entering primary or high school, or when their ageing parents need support. But the pandemic has upended plans for many, bringing them home sooner than they may had planned for. The majority had been overseas for over 10 years, bringing fresh insights, experience and skills back into Australia.

In all, around 400,000 Australians have returned to their birthplace since March 2020. However, these global Australians reveal that reintegrating back into Australia hasn't been an easy experience. Many report finding it hard to break in without an established business network, with nearly one fifth (17%) still looking for work.

A portion (20%) of these returnees are contemplating starting a business of their own. But mostly, they want to bring their skills into a company they believe in, and expect to hit the ground running.



But the biggest surprise since returning to Australia has been the lack of value placed around international experience, along with a cultural insularity and lack of diversity in leadership. Despite bringing home a wealth of knowledge, many returnees are either unemployed in Australia, or working remotely for their overseas employer.

Survey respondents reveal that employers tend to place a significant focus on who you know, rather than what you know. Half (51 per cent) agree that the most challenging part of returning to Australia is rebuilding their professional network.

*Respondents expressed interest in a range of Advance.org services, especially information about professional and board opportunities, and prospects to connect and collaborate with other Australians.*

Up to 35% of global Australians who came back during Covid may return to work overseas if they don't find suitable work or feel settled in Australia. For them, the US (32%), UK (16%) and China (14%) are the likely destinations if things don't work out in Australia.



# INSIGHTS

by **Johanna Pitman**  
CEO of **Advance.org**



*– When expats are hired into senior roles, they have the skills and experience to help Australian companies expand and understand cultural nuances.*

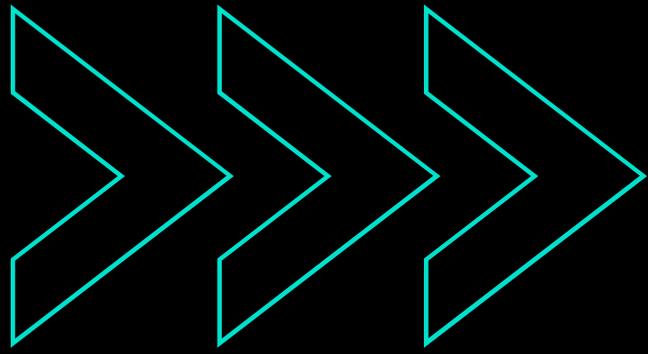
The stream of highly skilled expats returning to Australia present an incredible opportunity to help the local economy recover from Covid-19. Upon returning to Australia, respondents report a vibrant venture community, with good funding and some great founders, who weren't on the scene 20 years ago.

Returning Australians have also noticed that businesses are stepping up to environmental and social issues more willingly, and that the social conscious movement for corporates is more genuine. For some returnees, the cost of schooling and healthcare is substantially lower than when they lived overseas.

In order to reap the rewards of expats returning home, employers and recruiters need to embrace a change in mindset to look beyond our borders and prioritise ability and skill when seeking new talent.



5 Insights



Since returning, some report being surprised about the lack of value placed on their overseas experience, and that recruiters and the companies they represent are still quite narrowly prescriptive about skillsets. Similarly, who they knew versus what they had achieved in their career was deemed more important.

Australian employers fail to recognise the value of offshore experience, and there has been a reported lack of diversity and inclusions. Many who came back during Covid-19 may return to work overseas if they don't find suitable work, or feel settled in Australia.

On occasions when expats are hired into senior roles, they have the skills and experience to help Australian companies expand and understand cultural nuances. So you're getting the best of their overseas experience and ideas, which they're injecting straight into your business.

The perceptions of returning Australians gleaned from the survey provide a glimpse into the relative global competitiveness of Australia.

These global Australians say that there's still a lot that's familiar, but job-wise it's hard to find companies who value the breadth of experience they've gained overseas. They're also struck by the lack of ethnic and gender diversity in senior leadership roles, and how relatively conservative and risk averse Australian organisations are.



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More concerning were comments from respondents that felt Australia was highly insular, and behind global best practice. They observe how disconnected Australian companies are from Asia, and how behind our European peers the financial sector is here.

As one respondent put it, our society sees Asia only as a cash cow. Without the true mutual respect and understanding of how to truly engage with our closest neighbours.

*– With the survey taken in late 2020, global Australians returning to our shores have been buoyed by how well government, the community and businesses have banded together to get through the Covid-19 crisis, which they report not seeing anywhere else in the world.*



# ABOUT

The survey aims to understand the characteristics of Australians living overseas, the circumstances for when they return home, and document the effects of Covid-19 on global Australians.

Advance.org conducted the 2020 Survey of Global Australians from 1 September 2020 to 30 November 2020.

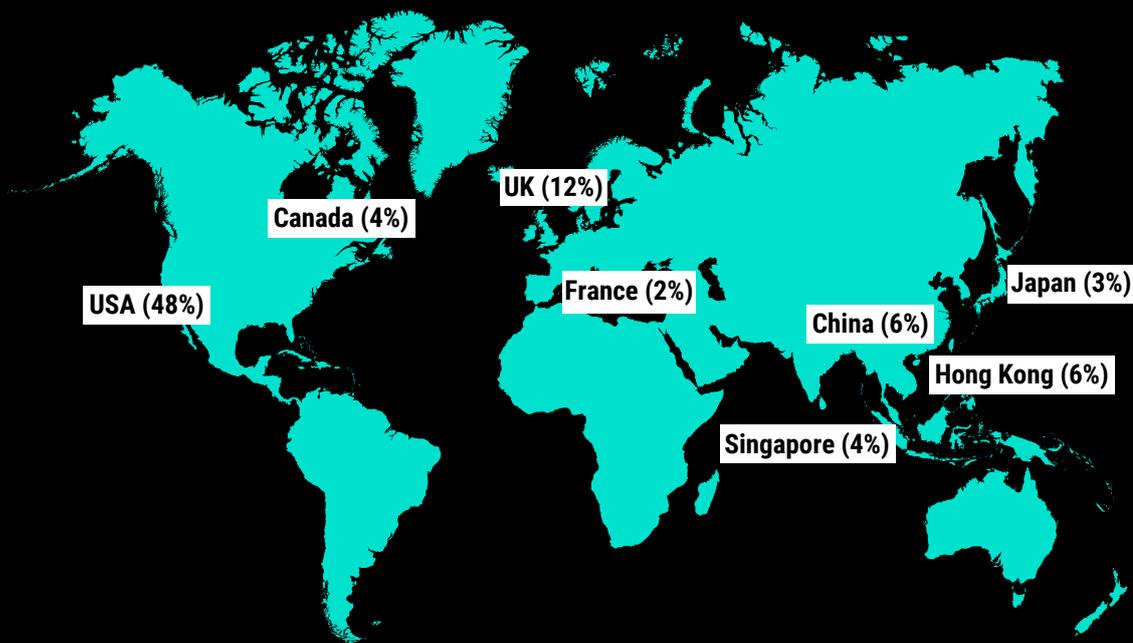
The 1,301 respondents provided insight into the professional lives, choices and perspectives of global Australians.

The Advance Survey also assesses expats' ongoing connections to Australia and the needs of expats that could be best served by Advance.

Perceptions of Australia among this group cluster around three elements:

- . Lack of value placed around international experience
- . Positive, peaceful and well-governed society
- . Increased/troubling cultural insularity

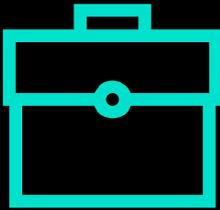
The location of respondents reflects the geographic distribution of Advance overseas members.



# KEY FINDINGS



Most Australians overseas keep in close touch with Australia, continuing to consume media, and are interested in being updated about relevant events, particularly government policies that might impact them (75%), current affairs (66%), stories about other global Australians (5%) and Australian breakthroughs (50%).



The career stage of survey respondents living overseas are manager (31%), CEO, president/C-suite executive (18 per cent), company founder/owner (14%), independent consultant/advisor (11%), early career/young professional (10%), board chair/non-executive director (5%), caregiver (3%), teacher/educator/professor (3%), medical professional (2%), student (2%).



The majority of Australia diaspora are located in the US (mostly New York), Boston, San Francisco and Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Singapore and London. Many Australians have returned home unexpectedly due to Covid-19.



9 Key Findings



The most common pull factors motivating a return home are lifestyle (57%), to be near family and friends (47%), to retire in Australia (32%), to raise children in Australia (34%), to care for ageing parents (32%), for career and business opportunities (16%), because Australia is Covid-safe (14%).



Global Australians who have returned to Australia plan to stay permanently (37%), stay in Australia under the borders open (12%), return overseas sometime in the future (35%), not sure/undecided (15%).



Returnees have mostly settled in NSW (46%), Victoria (22%), Queensland (13%), Western Australia (8%), South Australia (6%), and Australian Capital Territory (5%).



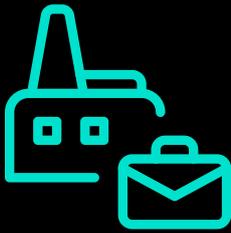
Half (48 per cent) of returned Australians want access and introductions to other returned Australians, information about roles on Australian boards (36 per cent), and information about job openings (24 per cent).



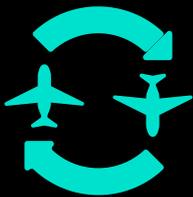
10 Key Findings



Returned Australians have chosen various paths, but 17% are still looking for work, while 36% are working in a new role in Australia, and 16% are working remotely for their employer based overseas.



Returned Australians work in a range of industry sectors, including financial and professional services (29%), information technology and telecommunications (16%), healthcare, research and science (10%), the public sector, social services and philanthropy (10%) and education/academic (9%).

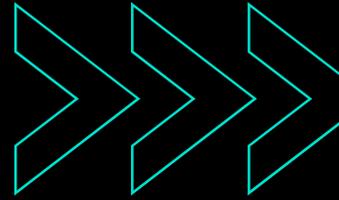


These men (52%) and women (48%) have money to invest when they return, and found that 37% of global Australians who have returned to Australia plan to stay permanently, while 12% plan to stay until the borders open, and 35% will return overseas sometime in the future.



11 Key Findings

# KEY FINDINGS: RETURNED AUSTRALIANS



Around 400,000\* Australians have returned home since March 2020

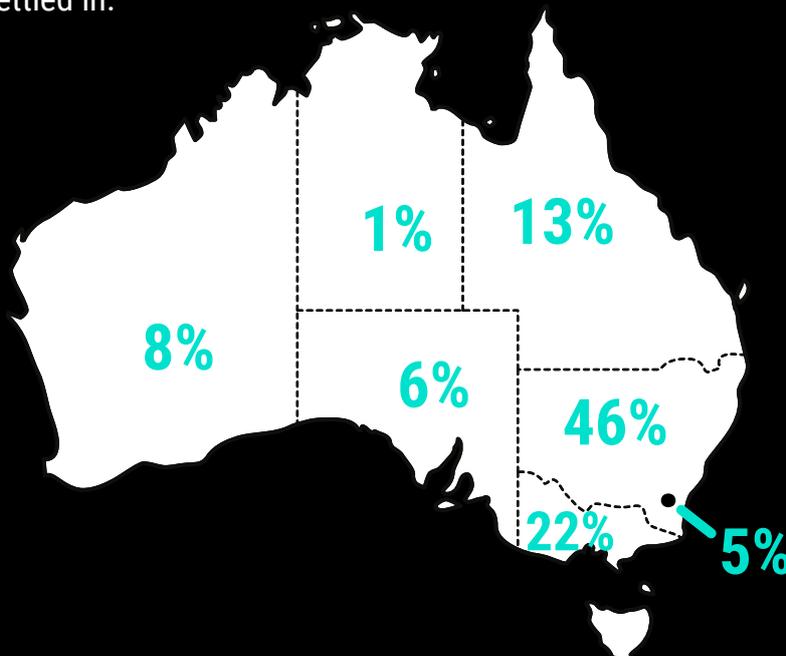
\* Senator Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs, 16 October 2020

Global Australians who have returned to Australia plan to:

- Stay in Australia permanently (37%)
- Stay in Australia until the borders open (12%)
- Return overseas sometime in the future (35%)
- Not sure / undecided (15%)

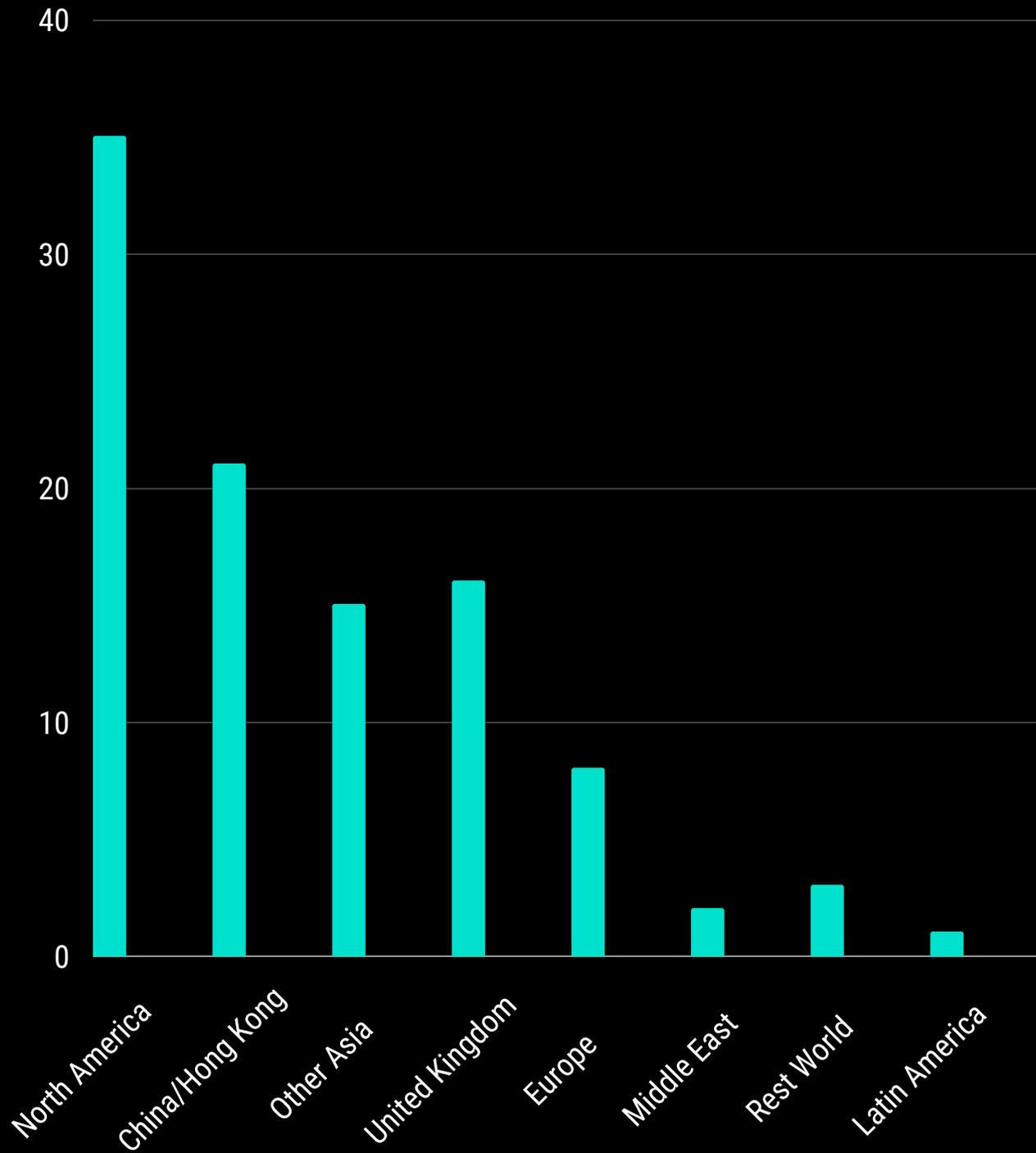
Many Australians who came back during Covid may return to work overseas if they do not find suitable work or do not feel settled in Australia.

Returnees have settled in:



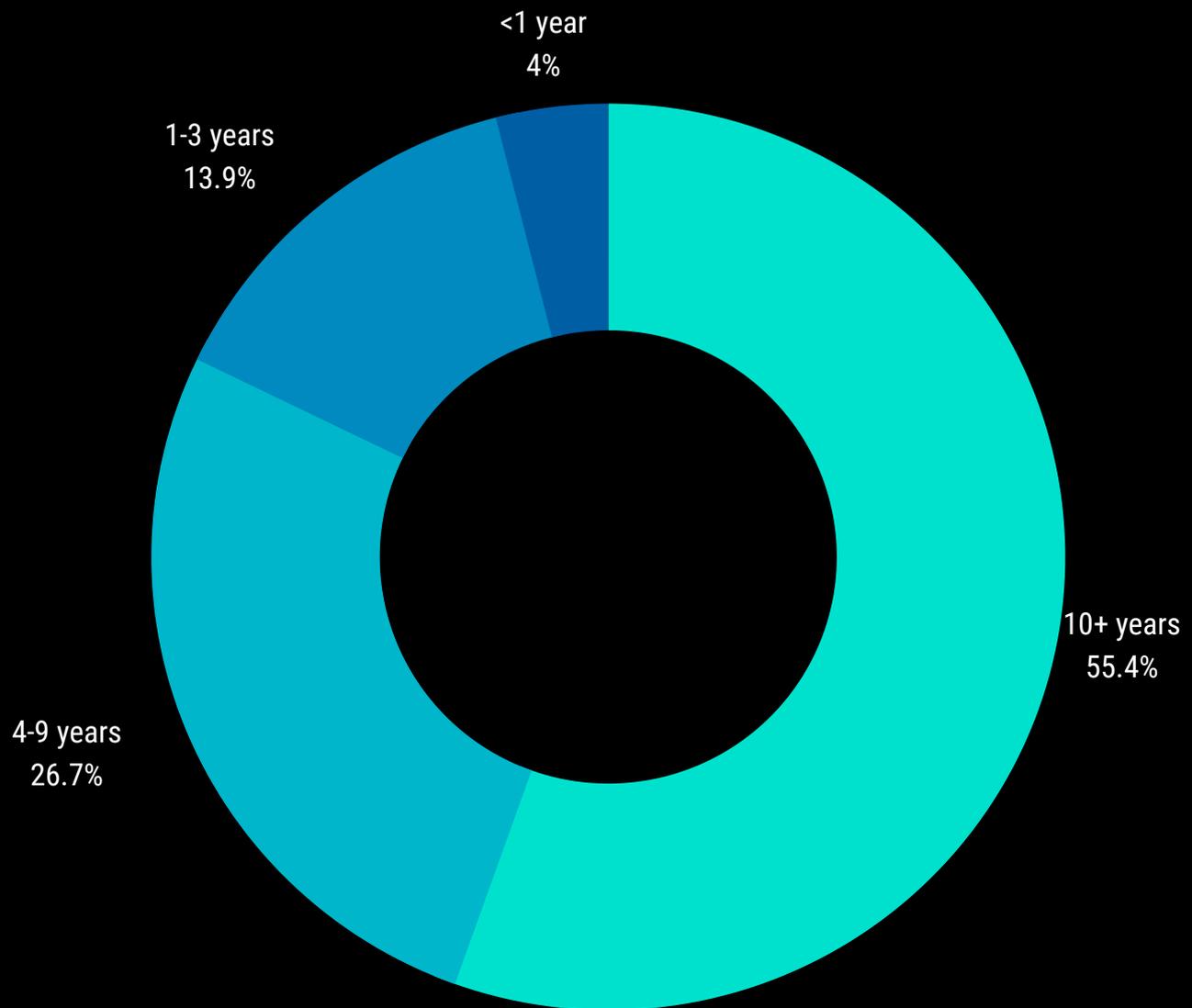
12 Key Findings: Returned Australians

The most common points of departure of the returned Australians surveyed (in late 2020) were the U.S (32%), U.K. (16%) then China (14%).



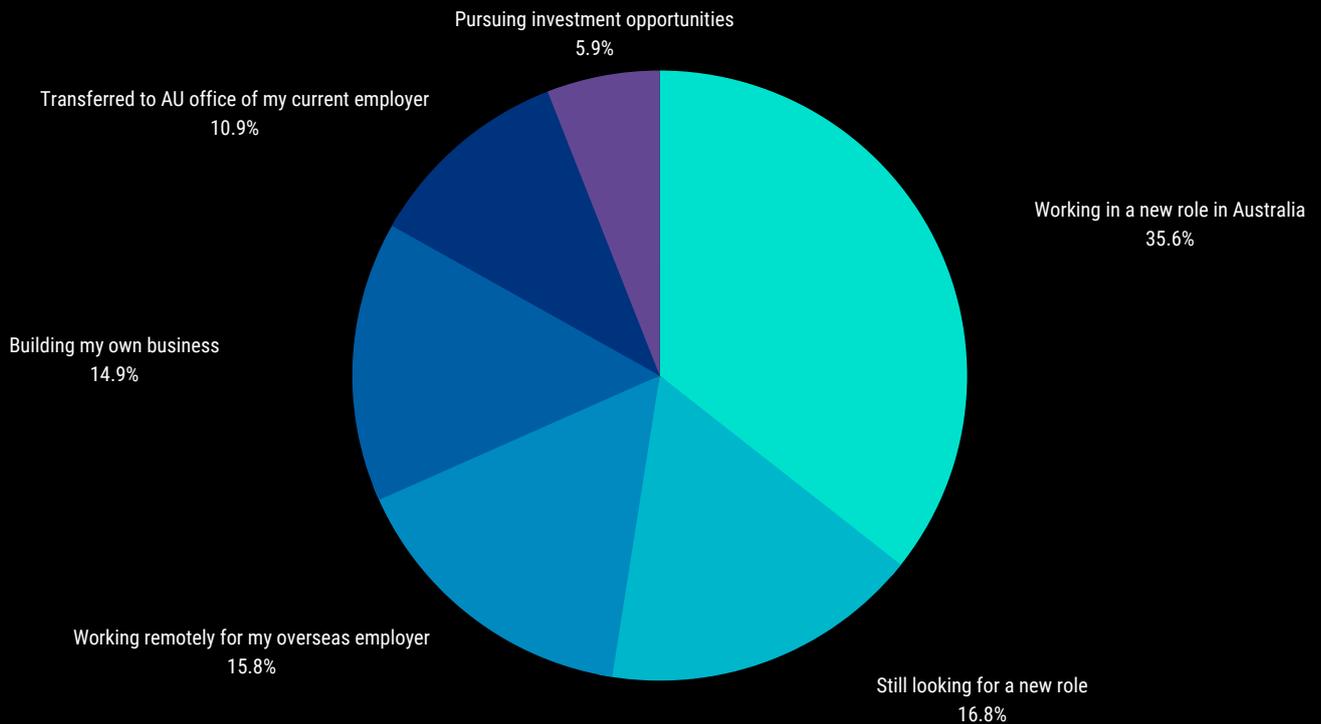
13 Key Findings: Returned Australians

The majority of survey respondents who returned to Australia in 2020 had been overseas for over 10 years.



**14 Key Findings: Returned Australians**

Returning Australians have chosen various paths, but nearly one-fifth (17%) are still looking for work.



Returning to Australia has been challenging for many respondents.

The most challenging aspect of returning to Australia:

- Rebuilding my professional network (41%)
- Sorting tax/superannuation issues (16%)
- Finding a home to buy or rent (14%)
- Deciding where to live (8%)
- Arranging schools and childcare (7%)
- Sorting out medicare / immigration (6%)
- Other (6%)

**41%**  
of returned expats said  
rebuilding their  
professional network is the  
most challenging aspect of  
returning to Australia



15 Key Findings: Returned Australians

## First impressions on returning to Australia have been mixed.

What has surprised you most since returning to Australia?

- Lack of value placed around international experience
- How peaceful and well-governed Australia is / positive handling of Covid
- Cultural insularity and lack of diversity in leadership

### "Positive" surprises

#### **New economy**

- A vibrant venture community, with good funding and some great founders, which was not here 20 years ago.
- The tech startup scene has picked up.

#### **Society**

- Businesses stepping up to environmental and social issues willingly, the social conscious movement for corporates is much more genuine.
- Government/community/business banding together to get through crises, eg bush fires/Covid, something I have not seen anywhere else in the world.
- Quality of infrastructure compared to USA.
- Incredible change, the growth (revitalised, urban development) and global focus on Australia (punching out from small remote island).

#### **Costs / Lifestyle**

- My costs have reduced substantially, mostly to do with school fees and health insurance.
- Greater lifestyle that I remembered.



## "Negative" surprises

### **Recognition of skills**

- How my overseas experience was not valued, that recruiters and the companies they represented were still quite narrowly prescriptive.
- The lack of recognition of overseas experience to begin with - but improved later.
- Technology experience was not as valued in traditional industries as it ought to be.

### **Network**

- Australia has remained rather parochial, which did surprise me. If one does not have an established business network, it is hard to break in.
- That who I knew versus what I had done was more important.

### **Media**

- Media landscape has moved increasingly to the right (lack of diversity of opinion).
- The media in general, have become much more supportive towards conservatism and critical towards Asia. With very low news coverage of Asia. Even when there are coverage we hardly see positive news reports about Asia.

### **Culture**

- How risk averse and conservative it is.
- How few women there are in senior leadership roles.
- Americanisation of politics and culture.
- The lack of diversity in thinking..

### **Global outlook**

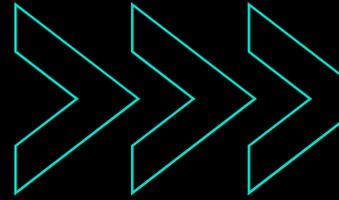
- Highly insular and behind global best practice.
- How disconnected Australian companies are from Asia.
- Financial sector is still behind European peers.
- In many ways our society sees Asia only as a cash cow. Without the true mutual respect, and understanding of how to truly engage with our closest neighbours.

### **Government / Policies**

- How Anglo parochial middle age male our politicians have become.
- The generally poor quality of our senior government officials.
- The lack of R&D investment and incentives, evident in the small size of the Australian technology sector.
- Exorbitantly high cost of living; wage stagnation at 2000s levels.
- Obvious and rampant political corruption.
- Lack of vision of politicians to tackle the big issues, ie climate change.



# KEY FINDINGS: OVERSEAS AUSTRALIANS



Most of those not returning have already lived overseas for 10 or more years, and most of them are living in the United States

The most common "push factors" – motivations for staying overseas – are:

- A feeling of being happy/settled overseas (39%)
- Better career and business opportunities (34%)

Most Australians overseas keep in close touch with Australia: they continue to consume Australian media, and are interested in being updated about relevant events in Australia especially:

- 75% - Government policy that might impact them
- 66% - Australian current affairs
- 51% - Stories about other global Australians
- 50% - Australian successes/breakthroughs
- 43% - Updates on their industry sector in Australia

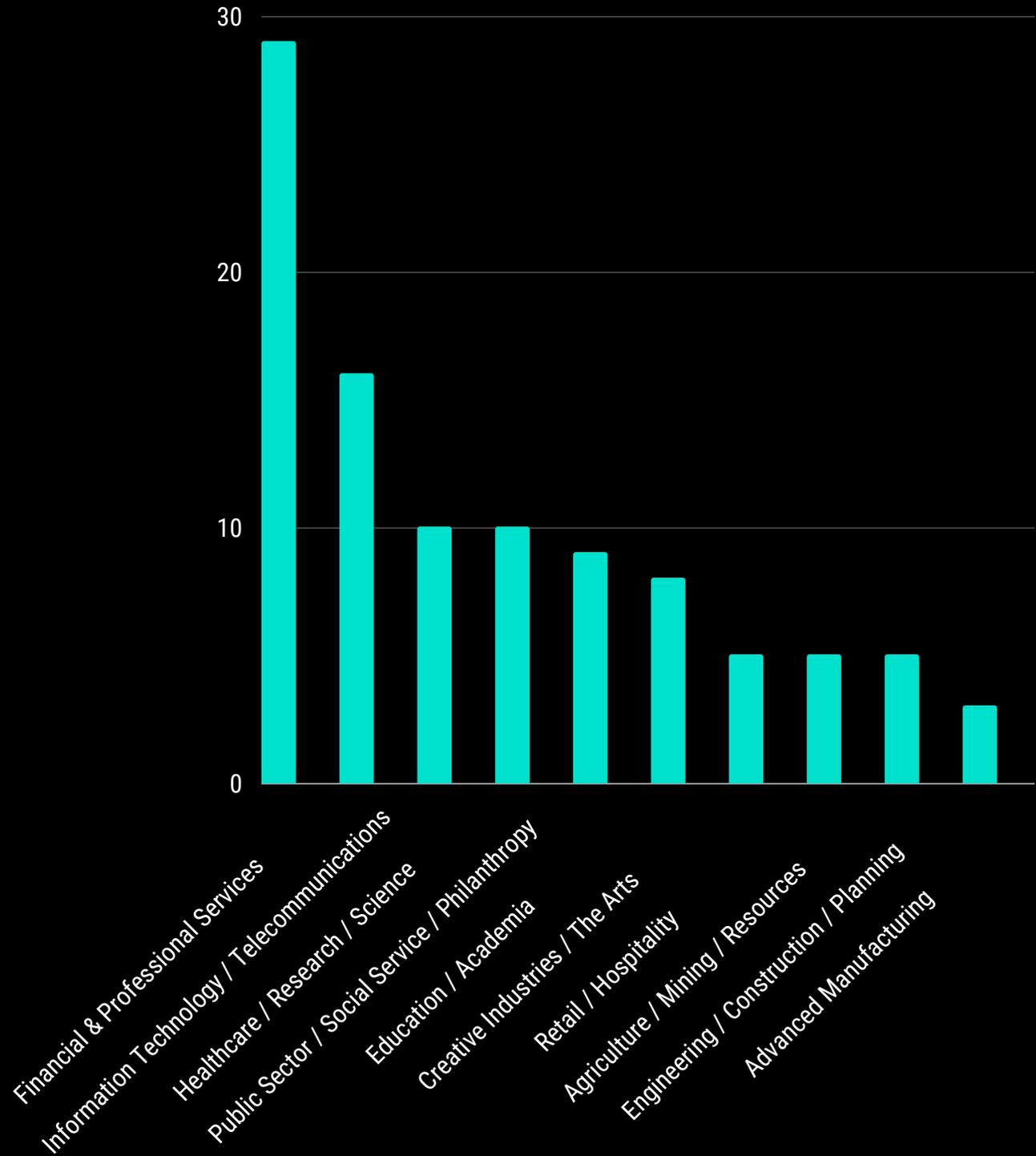
**4 in 10**

expats are motivated to stay overseas as they are happily settled abroad



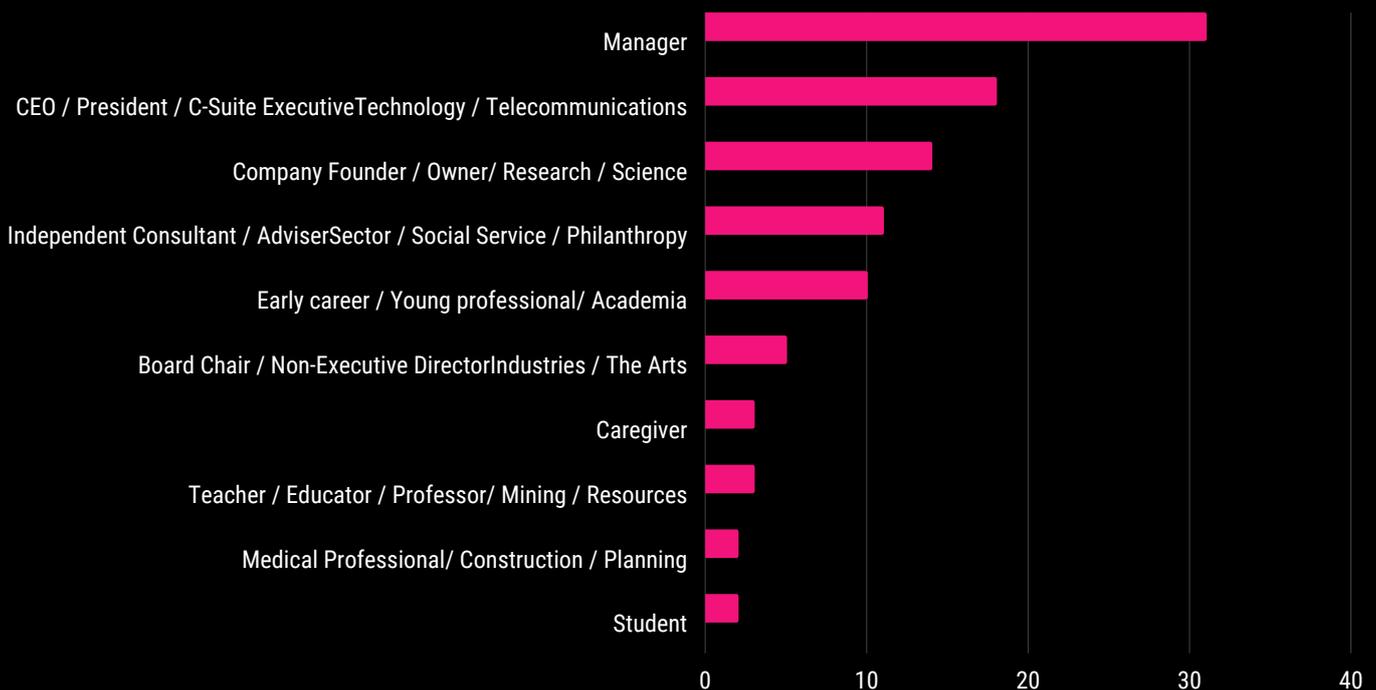
18 Key Findings: Overseas Australians

## Industry representation among survey respondents living overseas



19 Key Findings: Overseas Australians

## The career stage / role of survey respondents living overseas



Respondents who are living overseas tend to be:

- mid-career professionals
- concentrated in high-skill positions and industries (e.g. finance professional services, technology)
- concentrated in major global cities (London, New York City, Shanghai, Singapore and San Francisco).

**Australians spend an extended amount of time overseas: about 51% of Australians returning to Australia do so after 10+ years abroad.**

Of those overseas currently:

- 26% intend to stay overseas
- 22% are planning to return to Australia in 3 or more years.
- 18% will return within 1-3 years
- 13% plan to return in the next 12 months
- 21% haven't made a decision



**20 Key Findings: Overseas Australians**

# RESOURCES



## Read

29 September 2020

CEO Maria MacNamara speaks with the ABC's Patrick Wood about the reverse brain drain > [More](#)

5 November 2020

Global Australian Jackie Lee-Joe speaks with the AFR Boss Editor, Sally Patten > [More](#)

6 November 2020

Advance Chairman Yasmin Allen speaks with the AFR Boss Editor, Sally Patten > [More](#)

27 March 2021

CEO Johanna Pitman shares survey results about returning Australians with The Age's Zach Hope > [More](#)



## Watch

30 September 2020

CEO Maria MacNamara speaks with Ros Childs of the ABC about the early findings from the Advance Annual Survey of Global Australians > [More](#)



21 Resources

# WITH THANKS TO

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