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# Expats offer employers an option in the 'war for talent'

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By **HELEN TRINCA**, THE DEAL EDITOR AND ASSOCIATE EDITOR

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Australian expats who returned during the pandemic have been struck by our parochial employment market – but almost half of them intend to remain here permanently anyway.

And while one-third of those polled in a recent survey have lived offshore for more than two decades, 65 per cent want to come home and 26 per cent want to make the journey in the next three years. Many of those who have come home are working for local firms, but almost one in four is working remotely for an offshore company.

The analysis of the Australian professional diaspora by Advance.org, the network for global Australians, offers interesting details for potential employers keen to beat skills shortages by tapping into the expat labour pool.

The survey says Australia is set to receive “a huge influx of talent”, with 68 per cent of returnees at the senior end of their careers with strong potential for leadership roles. “If Australian companies were to use the connections these individuals have made while working overseas, Australia would quickly become a much more global country, with plenty of room for international partnerships,” the report says.

Advance.org CEO Johanna Pitman said on Friday: “We have always known that there is a steady flow of expats returning to Australia, but we now have the data to back this up.

“Given the current skills shortages, this data creates a strong call for employers to start building relationships with expats early, rather than waiting to connect with them when they return.”

Ms Pitman said the numbers of professional expats returning had held steady because most had a time frame for when they would come home, based around dates such as when their children

started school. "Covid might have made that a lot more difficult but generally, they've kept with that time frame," she said.

However, more than 70 per cent of those who came back in the past two years reported their plans were accelerated by Covid-19, and cited the desire to be close to family and friends and to enjoy Australia's lifestyle and quality of life. Only 11 per cent said they came back for their career.

While 33 per cent have found jobs here, almost a quarter are working remotely – a development Ms Pitman believes could be permanent.

"I think that figure would have been 1 or 2 per cent previously," she said. "This is a fantastic development ... but if this proportion continues to grow, Australian employers will face even stiffer competition for internationally experienced talent.

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"They need to be more intentional about identifying overseas Australian candidates early, rather than waiting for them to apply for roles when they return."

The survey, carried out for Advance.org by Russell Reynolds Associates, covered 729 people living in 40 countries or territories, most in North America (47 per cent); China (13 per cent); and Hong Kong and Asia (21 per cent). Twenty-six per cent worked in financial and professional services, followed by IT and telecommunications (14 per cent), and education and academia (12 per cent).

Most who returned in the past couple of years settled in NSW (54 per cent) and Victoria (27 per cent), with the rest spread across the capitals. Their biggest challenge was rebuilding professional networks here; followed by tax and superannuation issues; and finding a home to buy or rent.

#### **HELEN TRINCA, THE DEAL EDITOR AND ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

Helen Trinca is a highly experienced reporter, commentator and editor with a special interest in workplace and broad cultural issues. She has held senior positions at The Australian, including deputy editor, ma... [Read more](#)