Global Benefits Survey

The findings of the Aon 2025 Global Benefits Trends Study are drawn from a survey of global benefits professionals, conducted from January 27 – February 28, 2025. The intent of the study was to understand the global benefits trends associated with multinationals around the world and to gather insights about the roles, responsibilities and evolving priorities of global benefits professionals in multinational companies. Participation included respondents with benefits responsibilities for employees in more than one country. 518 survey responses were submitted from participants across: Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) Asia Pacific (APAC) United Kingdom (UK) North and South America.

In 2025, AON looked at the strategic priorities in Global Benefits of their respondents' companies, and saw 6 major shifts from last year. However, this year's more robust data set is built on a much larger respondent base than 2024 and moves the results a giant step closer to the truest representation of industry sentiment, providing added credence to the findings globally, regionally, and by industry.

Ensuring efficient cost management is unsurprisingly the number one strategic priority across all segments, regions and most industries, rising from number three globally last year. Ensuring that employee benefits are highly valued, which did not appear in the top four in 2024, came in at number three this year. For "leading companies", this is the number one strategic priority.

Rolling out global minimum standards ranked number four (not ranked in 2024), demonstrating that the commitment that multinationals indicated in the 2024 survey (i.e., to almost double the prevalence of minimum standards by 2026) is real.

Looking at the regional trends, In EMEA, surprisingly, managing compliance does not rank in the top five, despite the fact that reporting under the EU Pay Transparency Directive (which includes employee benefits in its definition of pay) will begin in 2027, and there several significant pension regulations that have been announced in that region (e.g., the Netherlands, Italy).

APAC - which had amazing representation in this year's respondent pool, with 103 APAC-headquartered companies participating - is the only region putting the health and productivity of their employees as a top five priority. UK-based companies are putting higher emphasis on ensuring employees value their benefits and minimum benefits standards than on the general competitiveness of their programmes.

When asked, "What are the strategic global benefits objectives for your organisation over the next 1-3 years?", the response that broke into the top Global Benefits Trends Study 2025 this year was "ensuring employees value their benefits". This underscores that multinationals are balancing both how to manage cost effectively in uncertain times (the number one priority this year) with ensuring that this benefit spend, which can be significant, is recognised and appreciated by the very people for whom these programmes are designed. Interestingly, leading companies have indicated that delivering value is a very close second, with cost management at the top, and they are almost twice as likely as other multinationals to say that this is a priority area. Organisations with more than 50,000 employees, companies who reinsure their employee benefits to a captive, and those in the life sciences and hospitality industries, also place a higher emphasis on ensuring that employees value their benefits, making it their number two priority as well.

Technology and the financial service firms – which traditionally have rich benefits programmes – did not rank this objective higher than number three. However, this may be because they have already solved the perception and value equation. Geographically, the UK is the only region where ensuring employee value is a top two priority, as compared to other regions where this objective is number three or lower. This invites the question, what type of approaches are multinationals taking to deliver and enhance value?

Expanding Personalisation

We know that the opportunity to choose benefit programmes that best suit their needs drives value in employees' eyes with 65 percent of employees at multinationals willing to sacrifice some current benefits for a better choice of benefits. 65 percent of MNC employees would sacrifice some current benefits for a better choice of benefits. Only 14 percent of multinational companies provide guidelines for how to introduce personalisation in benefits. For the multinational organisation – offering choice in a consistent manner around the world can be complex due to variations in market readiness, carrier capabilities and the tax and regulatory landscape. This is reflected in the fact that this year's study indicated that 43 percent of companies say that the decision to introduce choice in benefits is generally a decision taken at the local country level. In contrast, only 14 percent of multinationals have issued global benefit guidelines setting out the need for local countries to introduce / consider personalisation or choice in benefits. However, another 43 percent of multinationals are silent on the topic altogether when it comes to their global benefits strategy. Is this a missed opportunity?

Embracing Personalisation

In contrast, leading multinationals are over two times more likely (32 percent) to say they have global guidelines in place requiring that local markets introduce benefit choice. Tech industry, UK- and APAC-headquartered companies were also slightly more likely to have these types of guidelines in place, likely due to the higher prevalence of choice programmes in these two regions. For multinational companies that do allow personalisation of benefits, this ability to customise is generally focused on (in order): medical programmes, defined contribution plans, risk benefits, preventative programmes and wellbeing. This compares relatively well with the findings from the Employee Sentiment Survey, where employees for both multinational companies and all companies globally said that the benefits they valued the most were (in order):

- Medical Coverage/Health Insurance
- Annual Leave/PTO
- Work-Life Balance
- Retirement Savings Programmes
- Career Development Programmes.

What Are Multinationals Doing?

By taking a look at the data side by side, two key opportunities jump out: the opportunity for multinationals to be allow for flexibility around annual leave (via the ability to buy additional vacation days or, even bolder, providing unlimited annual leave) and incorporating career development programmes within their global benefits package (via reimbursement of professional development courses, access to coaching or education reimbursement programmes).

Interestingly, leading multinationals were more likely to say that they allowed for choice in annual leave, indicating that they may be more attuned to what their employees truly value. However, delivering benefit flexibility in multiple countries can be administratively complex, and 41 percent of companies report that technology plays a critical role in delivering a personalised experience. This compares to 60 percent of leading multinationals, which rely heavily on technology to enable this offering.

The data may however, indicate that bulky and long employee benefit handbooks may not be the most efficient use of resources. While they may be preferred communication approaches, the key question is: are they working? They appear to be more efficient than 2024 as there has been a 50 percent increase in companies saying employees understand their benefits well - currently 27 percent, up from 18 percent. However, while the trend is positive, this is still not an overwhelming majority, indicating that the opportunity remains there for multinationals to seize.

More Multinationals Are Utilising Total Reward Statements

One approach that companies have taken to help employees understand the true value of their benefit package is via total rewards statements. There has been an increase in multinationals implementing these in 2025 (up from 27 percent).

UK- and EMEA-headquartered companies are more likely to take this approach, potentially due to pay transparency and reporting requirements. Interestingly - and demonstrating the commitment to enhancing the perception of benefits and driving value - one out of two leading multinationals has total reward statements in place. This correlates clearly with higher level of understanding and appreciation of benefits, as these types of companies are twice as likely as other multinationals to say their employees understand their benefits programmes. When considering ways to enhance perception and relevance of benefits, one area of opportunity is to leverage advances in technology and AI to hyper personalise communication and the overall employee experience. This year's study found that leading multinationals, together with companies in the tech industry, were more likely to be early adopters of AI. These companies used AI to support with answering employee queries related to employee benefits, to provide support with the selection of relevant benefit programmes and even to make recommendations on personalised programmes that would support an individual's wellbeing. Looking forward, other organisations are looking to catch up and proactively leverage AI to enhance the employee experience, with 28 percent of companies indicating they have plans to consider and/or implement similar solutions.

But what about leveraging the power of AI to support the role of the Global Benefits professional? The study indicated that this is not yet commonplace, with only one in six multinationals currently using AI to support the design and delivery of their employee benefits. This Global Benefits Trends Study 2025 number is expected to nearly triple to 48 percent by 2027.

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Embracing Equity

A key finding from the 2024 study was that the implementation of global minimum benefits standards was expected to expand substantially by 2026. One year in, companies seem to be hard at work, with "implementing global minimum standards to drive global equity" ranking as a top 5 global strategic priority. Multinational companies with captives are twice as likely to be focusing on implementing global minimum standards – the captive arrangement likely acting as an enabler for the implementation of insurance-related minimum standards. Additionally, food, agribusiness, and beverage firms, professional and business services companies, and UK headquartered companies (ranking as the number three strategic priority in that market) are outpacing their peers in implementing global minimum standards. The study also asked about organisations' plans as Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) ambitions have historically been one of the catalysts for implementing global minimum standards. However, "ensuring benefits support the diverse needs of employees around the world" has fallen dramatically as a stated priority for multinationals, from number five in 2024 (60 percent) to number eight in 2025 (18 percent) – likely driven by announcements of rollbacks in DEIB programmes from US-headquartered companies.

This trend is, however, having a knock-on effect, with similar patterns seen across the regions and industry, regardless of company size. The one exception appears to be the financial services industry, where this priority has actually risen from fifth place in 2024 to fourth in 2025.

Future Plans: Inclusive Benefits Strategies

Despite US government pressure to change or abandon their DEIB policies, most US-headquartered companies indicated no change in strategy (46 percent), with 40 percent indicating plans to actually increase the number of inclusive benefits offerings. A similar pattern emerged for non-US-headquartered companies, where 40 percent indicated no changes, and 41 percent shared plans to increase such initiatives. regardless of company size.

Meanwhile, almost two-thirds of leading companies are planning to increase inclusive benefits offerings. Life sciences and retail companies were also more likely to increase their number of inclusive benefit offerings. This continuous focus on companies driving equity via the roll out of inclusive benefits aligns well with employee sentiment, with employees indicating they would like their employers to offer more financial education, wellbeing support and women's health programmes.

Call For Action For Directors

- Define what value means to you and your employees
- Consider what value means to you and your employees and how to best deliver this
- Take the time to understand the programmes and offerings that are truly meaningful for your employees and their families
- Consider how to leverage total rewards statements to be transparent about the value delivered to your employees
- Prioritise opportunities to enhance value

- Explore different avenues to deliver value
- Introducing benefit choice, pushing for global minimum benefits standards, and promoting more inclusive benefits are just three of many options available
- Get creative with how or to communicate with your employees
- Become attuned to the ways your employees prefer to receive messaging
- Explore opportunities to leverage new technology to hyper-personalise messaging and enhance perceptions.

While "ensuring compliance and competitiveness" was the number one strategic priority last year, that focus has given way to cost management in 2025. This was true for all multinationals, regardless of region, industry and company size (70 percent of companies say this is their first strategic priority), who are bracing themselves for a period of economic uncertainty. Overwhelmingly, Global Benefits professionals point to high medical inflation as the primary driver of benefit costs, with 70 percent of participants saying it has a "high" impact (as compared to 19 percent expecting "aging workforce" and 17 percent expecting "regulatory burden" to have high impacts on benefit costs).

While APAC- and EMEA-headquartered companies also view medical inflation as the biggest cost driver to manage, participants from these regions seem to have a more balanced view of the drivers of medical trend, putting more weight on the impact of aging, pay equity legislation and regulatory changes. With this in mind, strategies to mitigate costs remain basic and short-term in view, focusing primarily on hard negotiations with insurance carriers and other vendors. 77 percent plan to negotiate with existing vendors, and 67 percent plan to go to RFP.

Only one in four multinationals is considering reducing benefits that are less valued by employees as a means to manage costs. Could this be because companies don't know which benefits are less valued? As mentioned in section one above, this is an opportunity Global Benefits Trends Study 2025 for companies to better align the benefits they are offering with the benefits their employees expect and value most. 25% of multinational companies are considering reducing benefit levels for benefits that are less valued by employees. US companies are focusing more on shared accountability and exploring new ways of delivering health programmes (e.g., variable copay programme, benefit exchanges, etc.), while EMEA and UK companies are banking on flexible benefits as a mean to drive cost sustainability.

The latter trend is interesting given that flexible benefits/choice is both seen as a way to add value but also as a way to drive cost sustainability. 37% of multinational companies are considering implementing wellbeing initiatives. Implementing global and local wellbeing initiatives, which arguably could have a longer-term impact, is being considered by only 37 percent of companies. This finding is consistent with the fact that employee wellbeing as a strategic priority fell from number six to number seven in 2025. This year's study confirms the benefit remit of Global Benefits professionals continue to expand, with typical scope including risk benefits (94 percent), health benefits programmes (92 percent), leave policies (75 percent), wellbeing programmes (74 percent) and defined contribution (73 percent versus 46 percent having oversight for DB). With so many benefits typically within the remit of the Global Benefits professional, and so many areas for potential savings, it does call into question the efficacy of cost saving efforts that focus primarily on medical programmes and short-term strategies.

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While medical costs are increasing exponentially with global medical trend rate expected to be 10 percent in 2025/26, the impact of longevity as well as the increasingly complex regulatory environment should not be underestimated by multinationals. Having a good understanding of the potential impact of these trends on an organisation's overall employee benefit portfolio.

Assessing readiness to appropriately respond to changing legislation should not be discarded as longer-term cost mitigation initiatives. New multi-employer programmes for defined contribution plans in the US and the UK may also drive some efficiencies and savings to Global Underwriting Non-US organisations, and thus may be worth exploring.

The Role If AI In Cost Containment

While there is optimism around the adoption of AI as a means to improve the employee experience in company, Global Benefits professionals do not seem to use data and AI for their own day-to-day purpose (e.g., to anticipate future needs, for support with forecasting and addressing long-term cost trends, etc.). This is likely driven by the continued struggle for data.

Ambitious Strategies

The benefits future continues to be ambitious and broad with multinationals reviewing their global benefits. As mentioned earlier, strategies are also broad in scope, including pension, wellbeing, leave and allowances. Close to 50 percent of companies have indicated that they already have a global benefits strategy, and one in five multinationals further indicates that they are currently developing a strategy. The level of companies reviewing the global strategy annually is rising, with 41 percent reviewing their strategies annually, up from one in three in 2024. So, while multinational companies are very clear on how a global benefits strategy will help them better compete and differentiate in the market, only one in two companies have their global strategy documented and communicated appropriately. We further observed that the larger the company was, the more likely they were to have this strategy documented, although this is still not the vast majority of companies. As we learned in the 2024 study, executing on an ambitious global benefits strategy is still a struggle for most multinational companies, as is ensuring that the governance framework is effective.

Only six percent of companies with a global benefits strategy document say this is fully adhered to by their markets around the world, while 12 percent of companies say their governance structure fully meets the objectives of their needs. This means that multinational companies cannot simply execute on everything they want to do. This low level of adherence is a challenge that cuts across all industries; no industry has indicated that it has solved for it. Even companies with captives are not more likely to have full adherence to their strategy. That being said, multinationals with captives are more than twice as likely to say that their governance structure supports their objectives. Contrary to what we would expect, smaller companies do not have an advantage or better control in this area. Companies with fewer than 5,000 employees globally have similar levels of adherence to their global strategy as those of larger multinational companies (greater than

20K employees). The one area that is seeing comparatively strong adherence to governance frameworks is the largest companies (over 50K employees). They are more likely than their smaller multinational peers to have strategy documented and better adherence.

Finally, the survey considered the teams delivering and executing on the global benefits strategy and found that Global Benefits teams at leading multinationals are 67 percent more likely to have Global Benefits Centres of Excellence (COEs), although average team size is only slightly larger than market practice (five versus four). More likely to have team members with diverse backgrounds, as they are two times more likely to hire externally. They are also more likely to support many different approaches to training for their team members beyond on-the-job training – from mentoring, coaching and internal rotations to leveraging.

Call to action for employers:

- Revitalise your global benefits strategy. If you haven't done this recently, take the opportunity to dust off your global benefits strategy and consider how this could be further expanded and socialised to drive engagement and excitement from leadership, regions and local businesses. consultants and supporting external qualifications
- The number of individuals at a company managing global benefits globally varies greatly, from one to 38 associates. This wide range may reflect a growing trend to have a hybrid reporting model, with global COEs and local benefits leads reporting to countries in all/key markets. Small team size could potentially hinder a company's ability to govern benefits and react quickly to changes. However, these companies have assessed their governance structure to be highly effective. This may be because these companies are 40 percent more likely to share regulatory burden risks with external consultants versus prioritising tasks in-house
- Scrutinise your governance model
- What can you learn from leading multinationals that may be relevant to your organisation?
- Is there an opportunity to review engagement with leadership, internal communication and change management processes or reporting approaches that could tip your governance model from "ineffective" to "effective"?
- Outsourcing of Specific Functions. Global Benefits teams at leading multinationals are almost twice as likely to outsource management of insured benefits and pension programmes and to have looked into and/or implemented multi-country solutions. In contrast, one out of three multinationals have not even looked at outsourcing insured benefits, and one out of two has not looked at outsourcing pension programmes
- Global benefits professionals unite! Global Benefits professionals are ambitious and know what they are looking to achieve. However, resources and stretched, and teams are constantly shrinking. Is there a new model your Global Benefits team could adopt - or is there an opportunity to work smarter by outsourcing key core tasks?

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Conclusion: Navigating The Future Of Global Benefits

For organisations operating at scale, the ability to attract, support and retain talent in a predictable, value-driven, and cost-effective manner remains central to long-term performance. That hasn't changed. What has changed is the context. The Global Benefits industry faces technological advancements, rising costs, growing regulatory scrutiny, complex global footprints, and a workforce that expects more - from their benefits and their employers.

Through the insights gathered from global benefits professionals worldwide, the 2025 Global Benefits Trends Study offers readers a path forward to address the industry's most pressing challenges and opportunities. Multinationals are increasingly focusing on delivering value to employees through personalised benefits, enhanced communication, and strategic equity priorities, such as global minimum benefit standards. Cost management has emerged as a critical goal, yet the ability to manage costs effectively varies widely among organisations. A thorough examination of governance models can revitalise global benefits strategies, encouraging organisations to learn from leading multinationals and explore opportunities for improvement in engagement, communication, and change management processes.

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THE 2025 GLOBAL BENEFITS TRENDS STUDY

The 2025 Global Benefits Trends Study serves as a valuable resource for organisations seeking to navigate the complexities of global benefits management. By leveraging the insights and recommendations provided, businesses can unlock potential, drive sustainable growth, and create a better future for their company, employees, and the communities they serve. www.aon.com