

Work from Anywhere

A Livability Media Study on Remote Workers and Relocation

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Remote workers are ready to make moves. But with this new freedom to work from anywhere, where will they choose to call “home?”

Amid a potential urban exodus, that’s the paramount question for communities interested in courting new talent, creating more diverse places and reaping the extra economic benefits that occur as spending flows from employers in major metropolitans to remote workers in smaller cities.

It’s been nearly a year now since the world went virtual, and did so almost overnight. As offices shuttered due to the pandemic, remote work at many organizations became an experiment, then a more permanent way of life. It’s no wonder that given this newfound freedom, according to an Ipsos survey, 42% of people have either moved or considered moving since March 2020.

There’s no precedent for this migration of newly remote workers and no migratory map that reveals where they’re headed next. In other words, communities around the country have a rare opportunity to make a solid pitch:

“If you can work from anywhere, why not our city?”

As business and economic development organizations bid for the attention and



42%

of the U.S. population has either moved or considered moving since March 2020

spending power of remote workers, **it’s critical for communities to take inventory of what they can offer this cohort in terms of affordability, opportunity, housing stock, education, mobility, outdoor recreation, arts and culture, and health care.**

Remote workers have an exciting opportunity to move to whichever city they’d like, making it important to understand what’s influencing them as they scan the U.S., choosing cities to put down roots.

Livability.com, which specializes in identifying what makes communities and regions great places to live and telling the unique stories of these communities, commissioned an in-depth survey to examine the issues that are driving relocation decisions among remote workers.

The survey, conducted in December 2020 by the leading global market research firm Ipsos, asked 1,005 adults ages 18 and up about the characteristics of livability they value in their future communities.

The Livability Media study evaluated a variety of factors providing insight into questions such as:

- » If a remote job allowed you to work anywhere, what factors would you consider most important when deciding where to relocate?
- » What monthly housing cost would you consider affordable?
- » How have your housing needs and priorities changed since the start of the pandemic?

Livability crunched the numbers and analyzed the survey data to find key insights that reveal what remote workers value most in a new community. Separately, we gathered anecdotes from people who have recently made moves — or who have the flexibility and are looking to move — to better understand what qualities they seek in new cities.

This research can help inform communities as they look to market themselves to remote workers, in turn attracting and retaining new talent and promoting economic growth.

When making a relocation decision, affordability is what matters most

Those who have worked in major metros are accustomed to paying a premium to live in small spaces in big cities. Now, with the opportunity to live anywhere, and do so while making the same salary, remote workers — especially those on the West Coast — are on the lookout for communities where they can stretch their dollars. To put it another way: **Consider affordability the compass guiding remote workers as they look to relocate.**

Nearly four in five respondents ranked affordability among the

top three factors impacting their relocation decision. More than 70% of millennial and Gen Z respondents ranked it as a top three factor. (Before COVID-19, more Gen Z ranked affordability as a top three priority compared to millennials; now, there doesn't seem to be a difference in choices between these two generational cohorts.)

Interestingly, affordability was more important to women, with almost half of the respondents considering affordability a top priority

for relocation compared to about 34% of men. Some more insights: Those without college degrees value affordability more than those with degrees.

What does affordability mean to you?

But “affordability” can be a subjective term, so Livability.com’s survey asked respondents what, exactly, they’d deem affordable in terms of housing costs.

“The most important factor I’ve looked at as I’m choosing a new city is its taxes and cost of living. I’m looking to spend a lot less on both state income tax and pay less for my day-to-day living.”

– Stacy C., an online marketer currently living in Chicago

For most, affordability translates to a monthly rent or mortgage payment under \$1,200 a month. Fewer than 20% of respondents consider \$1,200 to \$1,500 a month affordable and less than 10% say \$1,500 a month qualifies as affordable. Those from the West are willing to pay higher rent and mortgage than those from the Northwest, Midwest and South.



78%

Nearly four in five respondents ranked **affordability** among the top three factors impacting their relocation decision.

50%

of women from the study value affordability as a top priority for relocations when working remotely compared to about **34% of men**. And those with no college degree value affordability more than those with one.

70%

of millennial and Gen Z respondents ranked affordability as a top three factor.

KEY INSIGHT #2:

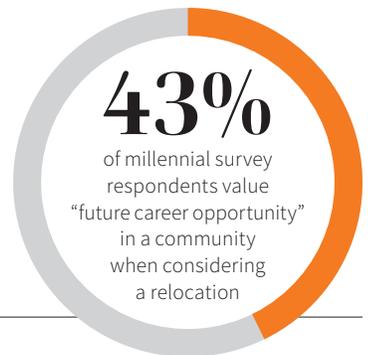
Even in an era of remote work, new residents are looking for cities with ample career opportunities

It's probably no surprise that remote workers are, in general, less interested in career opportunities as they scout new cities because they already have income streams. But when compared to previous years, interest in future career opportunities

didn't drop as dramatically as you might expect.

While remote workers may currently be gainfully employed, COVID-19 has brought about widespread economic uncertainty and presented the harsh reality that the pause button can be pressed on entire industries for an unforeseen length of time.

Those looking to relocate are still interested in identifying cities with a healthy economy and future career opportunities: 43% of millennial respondents, to be exact. According to the Livability.com survey, people of color are even more likely to consider jobs as a top relocating factor.



TOP 3 FACTORS

The percentage of respondents that listed these factors in their top 3 in considering a remote work location.

Factors	2018	2020
Affordability	70%	68%
Climate	46%	49%
Future career opportunities	54%	43%
Higher education options	21%	28%
Outdoor attractions	20%	21%
Good transportation options	20%	21%
Culture/art scene	19%	19%
Prior experience visiting the city	16%	16%
Local political/religious leanings	11%	15%
Airport accessibility	7%	14%
Other	5%	4%



“When I graduated college in 2017, the most important factor to me was what the city had to offer as far as fun things to do. I moved to San Diego because I could live by the beach, there were exciting places nearby for road trips, fun bars, new restaurants to try, and the list goes on. Now that I start medical school soon and have 10 different cities to choose from, the most important factor to me is cost of living. I hope to graduate with as little debt as possible, so I am looking at this factor the most.”

– Maggie W., who is working as a nanny in Seattle with plans to start medical school later this year

Remote workers are on the lookout for incentives

Want to make your community stand out to remote workers looking to relocate? Various incentives could help sway their relocation decisions and help a community overcome more fixed factors, like climate.

The most attractive “sway factors,” according to the

survey results, are those that can offset living expenses, including rent and property tax assistance as well as cash incentives. More than one in three respondents across all age groups listed cash incentives as one of the top three incentives or amenities

that would sway a relocation decision, while nearly one in five respondents listed down payment or rent assistance in their top three. Other incentives could include free coworking spaces, discounted child care and network building assistance.

If a remote job allowed you to work anywhere, would any of the following incentives and amenities sway you to consider moving to a new city or town?

(Percentages in Men vs. Women)

Cash incentives:

31% / 32%

Down payment or rent assistance:

16% / 21%

Help finding a job post-move:

11% / 10%

Other incentives that may help attract remote workers:

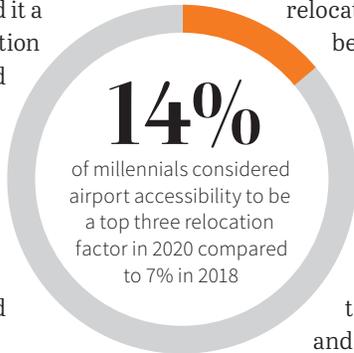
- » Help finding work for a trailing spouse
- » Property tax assistance
- » Free or discounted internet
- » Help connecting with others or building a social network
- » Free or discounted coworking spaces
- » Free or discounted child care



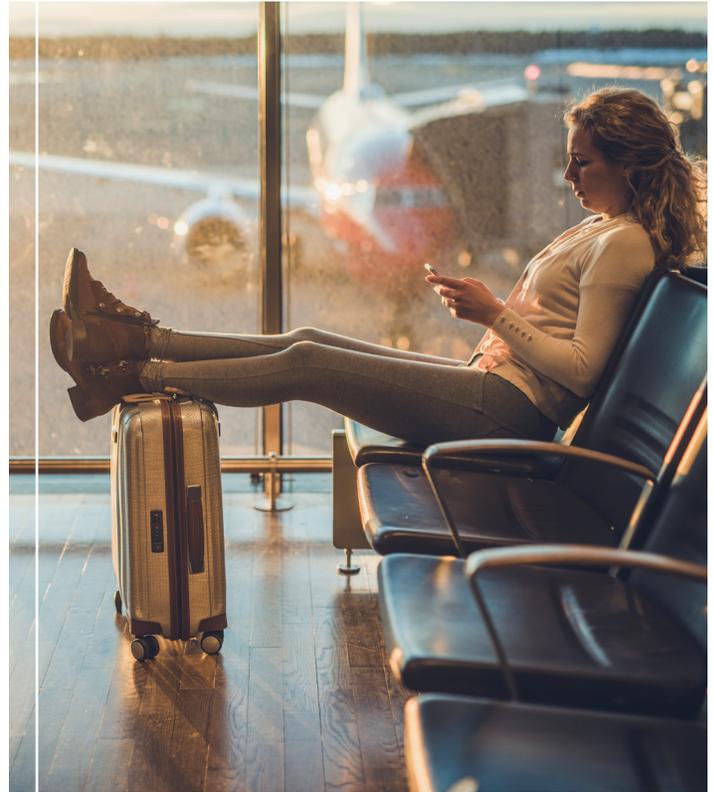
KEY INSIGHT #4:

Living near an airport is gaining interest

Interestingly, at a time when travel has largely been restricted, millennials and Gen Z have shown an increased interest in airport accessibility. Among millennials, 14% in 2020 considered it a top three relocation factor compared to 7% in 2018. Similarly, 11% of Gen Z in 2020 considered it a top three factor compared to 5% in 2018.



It could be that respondents are excited to travel when the world reopens, and they are eager to take advantage of potentially cheaper flights. If remote workers are relocating, they may be anticipating future business travel to their company's headquarters or looking to stay connected to family and friends.



“One of the reasons Chattanooga appealed to me was its position as a hub between other cities of interest within driving distance (Nashville, Atlanta and Birmingham, where my family is.) With COVID making air travel more challenging and anxiety-inducing, this has become even more valuable. However, I do appreciate that Chattanooga has an airport. My company is based in New York, so it will be easy to take trips to see my team once that’s feasible again.”

– Adeline V., who moved from Los Angeles to Chattanooga, Tennessee, in March 2020.

KEY INSIGHT #5:

Climate is an important factor, especially for women and retirees

The great outdoors became even greater amid a pandemic while people were hunkered down at home. Overall, 59% of respondents listed climate as a top three relocation factor, but women (64%) are more likely than men (54%) to consider it a top three factor.



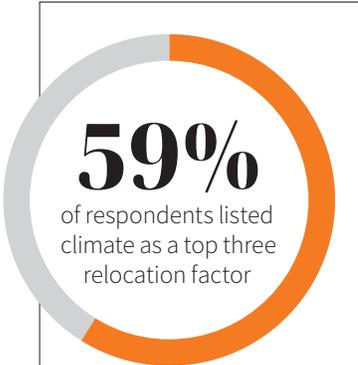
Some more climate insights:

- » Those with a household income less than \$50,000 a year are less likely to consider climate as a relocation factor.
- » Married couples are more likely to move to a new city due to climate reasons compared to singles.
- » Retirees chose climate as a top factor for relocation.
- » Due to COVID-19, millennials are more likely to consider climate a top three factor for relocation than Gen Z.

Amenities, including outdoor recreation and arts and entertainment options, still play a key role in influencing relocation decisions. One in five respondents cited outdoor recreation options and the arts and culture scene as a top three consideration.

KEY INSIGHT #6:

‘Give us some space’ is the message from renters and homebuyers amid COVID-19



“My wife and I had both been tired of city life for quite some time, and the added stress of the pandemic only boosted our desire to get out of the city.

We’re both outdoorsy types, so we really wanted to go somewhere with a lot of nature nearby. Luckily, we both work from home, so we’re able to work anywhere as long as we’ve got an internet connection.

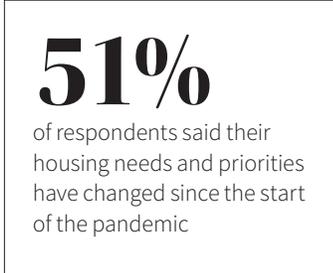
We chose Boulder because of its close proximity to Rocky Mountain National Park and other state parks and national forests. There are lots of hiking trails in and around the city, so we can go hiking whenever we want.”

– Mike M., editor who moved from New York City to Boulder with his family of five.

With record-low interest rates bringing out first-time buyers in droves and new construction slowing down during COVID-19, housing inventory is squeezed to the max. The market could get even tighter if a first-time homebuyer credit that President Biden has proposed gets turned into legislation, **extending \$15,000 in down payment assistance to first-time buyers.**

Communities that are affordable and have housing stock available that suits the unique needs of house hunters in a pandemic are well-positioned. Specifically, respondents with a higher household income are more likely to be interested in homes with dedicated workspaces. On average, except for retirees, at least half of the respondents needed more space due to the impact of COVID-19. The need

for more indoor, outdoor, work, home-school and gym space as well as technology has increased more for people of color than other demographic groups.



If you were house shopping today, would you be interested in a home with any of the following:

Dedicated workspace:
25%

Smart technology for virtual workers:
18%

More indoor space:
23%

Home gym area:
17%

More outdoor space:
20%

Dedicated space for home-school or virtual school:
16%

(Percentage of respondents who listed these amenities as their top choice)

“My partner and I made the decision to move because our 1,100-square-foot house was not cutting it, since we both work from home and have two kids in online school. We ended up moving further out from Portland and landed in Vancouver, Washington. We got a 2,600-square-foot house on a one-third acre lot with enough bedrooms for each of us to have a home office. It’s reduced our stress. Bonus: Washington has lenient laws when it comes to adding an (accessory dwelling unit) in the backyard.”

– Dusti A., a business strategist in Vancouver, Washington

Learn more about how Livability Media can work for you

Livability Media is a full-service media and content marketing company that helps cities, regions and states attract talent and business investment.

Attracting millions of users each year, **Livability.com showcases what makes communities great places to live and appeal to people considering relocation.**

Through proprietary research studies and engaging daily content, Livability.com highlights community amenities,

education, sustainability, transportation and housing.

For its annual Top 100 Best Cities, Livability.com ranks more than 2,000 cities based on cutting-edge research about what truly matters to potential relocators, including affordability, career opportunities and diversity.

To learn more about how you can put the power of Livability.com to work for your community, contact Jordan Moore, executive vice president of Livability Media at jmoore@livmedia.com.



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