

Emerging multinational benefits guide

Data sourced from

 **Beaurest**Insights

HOWDEN



Are you a multinational employer without a multinational benefits strategy?



This guide is for you

You might not think of yourself as a multinational business



Perhaps you're a small business that opened an office in Singapore, a tech firm that hired a developer in Portugal, or a manufacturer with a supply chain that now features in three time zones.

Without realising it, you became a 'multinational' as soon as you had employees in more than one country.

And there are many reasons why your benefits strategy needs to reflect that.

You're not alone

The trend is global, but the UK illustrates the scale. Data from research platform Beauhurst shows that 234,000 UK-based companies now operate across 128 countries, while 115,000 internationally-owned companies are active in the UK - up 54% since 2016.

And this isn't just a large-business story. Nearly 84% of those UK companies that have expanded internationally have just 250 or fewer employees – these are businesses that have become international by necessity rather than design, and therefore often without the HR infrastructure to match.

Once that pattern is replicated across other economies, the number of small and mid-sized businesses managing employees across borders globally runs into the millions.

Every one of them faces the same fundamental challenge: employees in more than one country, each with different rules, expectations and requirements. And as businesses expand at pace, employee benefits tend to get left behind – added bit by

bit, with no overarching strategy around what's most suitable, and no single view of what's being offered, what it costs, or whether it's even compliant.

Research from REBA found that 50% of multinational employers don't have a global or multinational benefits strategy in place¹. And Origin's 2025 Global Benefits Intelligence Report found that 82% of HR professionals are concerned about a lack of visibility into their organisation's global benefits inventory, with almost half admitting they can't compile a complete overview of their benefits data².

The longer this goes without a strategy behind it, the harder it is to unpick – and the greater the exposure to cost, compliance and retention risk.

This guide is for the businesses in that gap - growing internationally, often at pace, and keen to get their benefits strategy right.



Key questions:

Do you have employees in more than one country? If so, do you have a single view of what benefits you're offering, what they cost, and whether they're compliant?

What does

this challenge

actually

look like?



Imagine that you're Norway-headquartered company with 150 employees. Over the past three years, you've opened offices in Dublin and Singapore, hired a small team in Brazil, and have a handful of remote workers located across Europe. Each office set up its own benefits locally - a health plan here, a pension arrangement there - usually on the recommendation of whoever was handling HR regionally at the time.

Now the CEO wants to know what you're spending on benefits globally, the CFO wants to understand your compliance exposure, and a senior hire in Dublin has just asked why their cover is different from what their Singapore counterpart receives.

But you can't answer these questions: You've become a multinational employer without a multinational benefits strategy.

“The most common situation is a business that has grown internationally faster than its HR infrastructure has kept pace. They often have a patchwork of locally arranged policies, sometimes taken out by office managers or finance teams rather than HR, with no central visibility of what exists, what it costs, or whether it's compliant.”

Mark Ramsook, Managing Director
Global Employee Benefits Services, Howden

The same dynamics apply in reverse. A Seattle-based company hiring its first team in London faces unfamiliar statutory requirements around pensions auto-enrolment and sick pay.

An Australian firm expanding into Southeast Asia encounters insurance regulations and cultural expectations it never anticipated.

The challenge is the same: benefits set up locally, without a global framework, that quickly become unmanageable.



More businesses are expanding internationally than ever before

50% of multinationals have no global benefits strategy.

Outbound: UK → World

234,000

UK-based companies now operate across **128 countries**.

18% ↑

increase in the number of UK companies going multinational (2016-2025).

Inbound: World → UK

115,000

internationally-owned companies are active in the UK.

54% ↑

increase in internationally-owned businesses now active in the UK (2016-2025).

Fastest-growing industries among emerging outbound companies:

#1

AI

#2

Software-as-a-Service (SaaS)

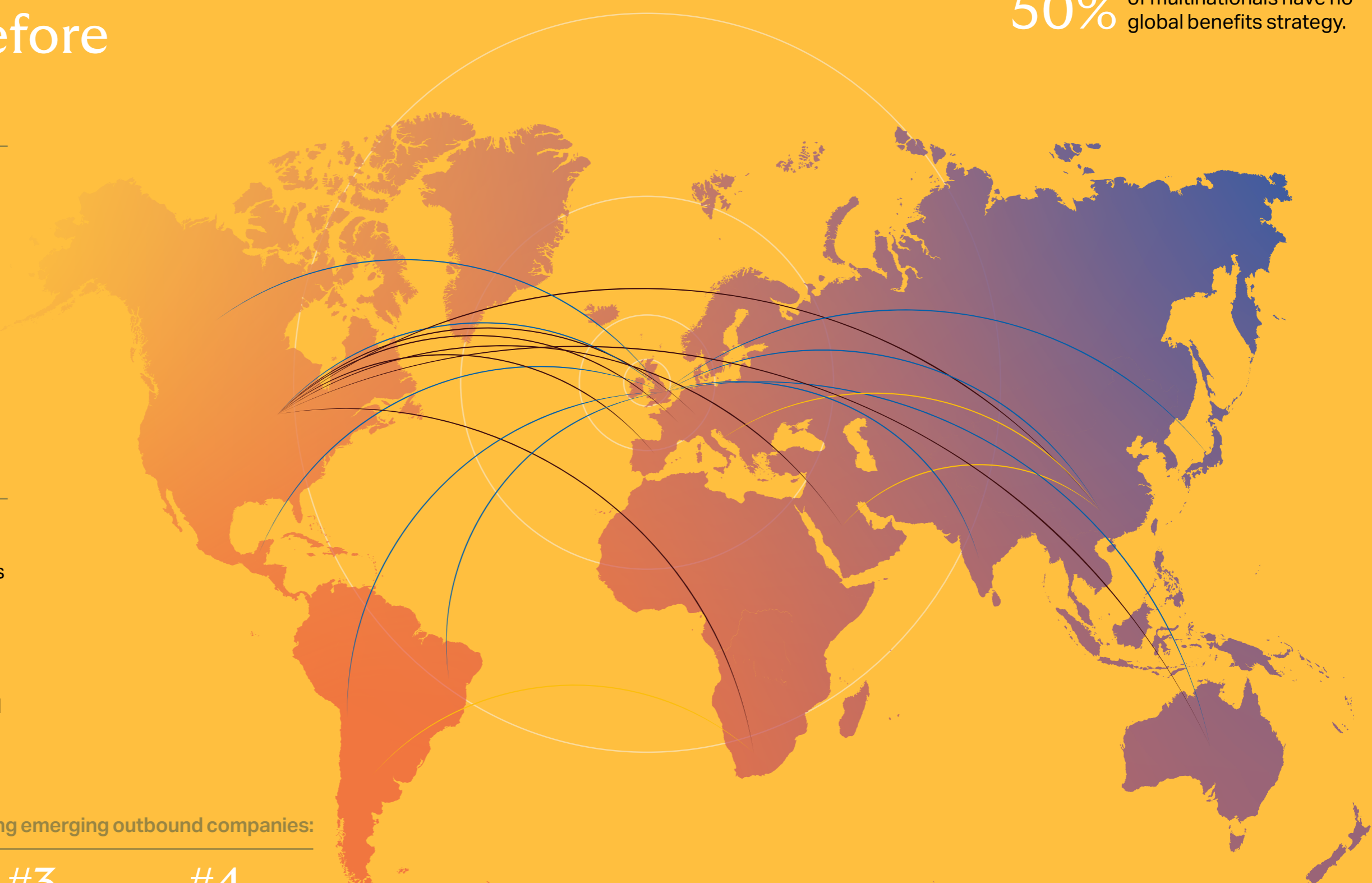
#3

Robots and automation

#4

Data provision and analysis

This is the UK picture. Multiply it across every major economy, and the scale of the emerging multinational market becomes clear.



Which sectors are foreign businesses operating in when they come into the UK?

Industry	Number of companies
Digital and technologies	15,700
Application software	14,100
Professional and business services	10,600
Creative industries	8,260
Financial services	8,230
Property development and construction	5,470
Manufacturing	4,300
Cars, motorcycles and other road vehicles	3,620
Restaurants, pubs, cafes and takeaways	3,230
Technology consultancy and IT and telecommunications support	3,020

Which sectors UK businesses are in when they expand internationally?

Industry	Number of companies
Digital and technologies	25,600
Professional and business services	22,000
Creative industries	21,100
Application software	19,100
Manufacturing	17,400
Online retailing	16,500
Cars, motorcycles and other road vehicles	14,800
Distribution and wholesale	12,600
Clothes	11,100
Parts and components	8,410

Which countries' businesses are coming into the UK?

Top growing inbound locations

Source: Beauhurst

Country location	Total companies	% growth 2016-2026
Australia	3,200	102%
Hong Kong	1,980	159%
United Arab Emirates	1,890	294%
India	1,610	107%
China	1,210	129%
Israel	721	186%
Turkey	643	238%
New Zealand	381	110%
Portugal	274	121%
Poland	241	194%
Czech Republic	230	117%
Pakistan	211	859%
Saudi Arabia	163	191%
Egypt	157	648%
Qatar	153	115%
Nigeria	136	548%

Which countries are UK businesses expanding into?

Top growing outbound locations 2016-2026

Source: Beauhurst

Country location	Total companies	% growth 2016-2026
France	19,700	29.6%
Australia	7,290	32.2%
United States	2,480	74.1%
Ireland	2,380	28.2%
Turkey	2,030	44.1%
United Arab Emirates	1,950	35.0%
Romania	1,080	27.7%
Israel	463	24.8%
Singapore	356	127.0%
Pakistan	185	37.0%
Bangladesh	151	36.0%
Azerbaijan	120	26.3%
Liechtenstein	111	27.6%

Methodology: All calculations are based on bespoke modelling developed by analysts at Beauhurst Insights for Howden Employee Benefits' Emerging Multinationals Guide with research undertaken in May 2026. Calculations show both the number of externally headquartered businesses expanding into the UK (inbound) and UK headquartered businesses extending operations internationally (outbound).

Beauhurst's inbound identification is based on corporate structure data. Corporate structure is a verifiable signal of whether a non-UK company is active in the UK, either through a branch office, a registered overseas entity, or a UK legal entity incorporated by an overseas parent. When it comes to outbound businesses, Beauhurst has extrapolated outbound signals from its proprietary data, drawing on multiple indicators including analysis of Companies House reporting and website insights. Results have been adapted to remove companies operating overseas in name only eg Holding Companies.

This situation is more common than you might think. When your firm has employees in diverse political, legal and cultural environments, there are several areas where getting it wrong can carry consequences.

Let's take a closer look:

Employee health, wellbeing and safety

What's a statutory obligation in one country may be a voluntary benefit in another. Health insurance that's essential in the US (where the average annual employer-sponsored premium was \$26,993 for family coverage in 2025, according to KFF³) is a nice-to-have in the UK, where the NHS provides publicly funded healthcare. Meanwhile, in markets such as Singapore, employer obligations around medical benefits are tied to specific legislation that doesn't necessarily map onto UK equivalents.

Legal and regulatory compliance

Employment law can differ widely across different jurisdictions - maternity leave alone ranges from 39 weeks in the UK to 12 weeks (unpaid) in the US and 14 weeks at full pay in Germany. Working hours, notice periods and termination procedures each bring their own obligations.

Tax and regulatory traps

Insurance regulations, tax treatment of benefits, and local compliance requirements can also vary widely - what's standard in your locale may be non-compliant in another. Companies that apply a single benefits structure across borders can find themselves in breach of local rules without realising it.

Cultural sensitivity

Benefits that are valued in one region may be irrelevant or even inappropriate in another. Approaches to mental health, family leave, and flexible working vary significantly across cultures, and a benefits package that doesn't account for these risks alienating the people it's designed to attract.

Employee communications

If your employees don't know what they're covered for, don't understand how to use their benefits, or can't navigate the clinical pathways available to them, the investment is wasted. Howden's 2026 Global Employee Health Report found that 86% of employers believe their health plan meets employee needs, but 25% of employees disagree⁴.

Cost

When benefits are arranged market by market, businesses often end up with a different broker in each country – and no single view of what's in place, what it costs, or where the gaps are. The result is weaker buying power, duplicated cover, and benefits spend that isn't working as hard as it should.

Key questions:

Do you know what your legal obligations are in every country where you have employees? Are your benefits compliant with local tax rules? And do you have a clear view of what you're spending on benefits across all your markets?

³ Employer Benefits Survey, KFF 2025

⁴ Global Employee Health Report, Howden 2026

The cost of getting it wrong



Employee-related costs – salaries, benefits and taxes – can account for around 70% of a typical business’s outlay⁵. Getting the return on that investment wrong can affect the business as a whole, not just the HR team.

But it’s not just about cost. When local offices arrange benefits independently the result is compliance risk – the type that only surfaces when something goes wrong: a claim that’s rejected, an audit that raises questions, or an employee dispute.

“As companies expand, they often let local offices arrange benefits independently, use global policies that aren’t locally admitted, or apply home-country thinking to very different regulatory environments. This creates hidden compliance risk, which only surfaces when something goes wrong”

Anne Terry, Managing Director
Multi-national Clients, Howden Employee Benefits

Then there’s retention. Replacing employees who leave costs approximately 200% of salary for managers and 80% for professionals in technical roles⁶, and benefits play a direct role here. Howden’s 2026 Global Employee Health Report found that 61% of employees are more likely to stay with an employer that offers a good healthcare package, while 47% view health benefits as important when looking for a new role. This means that your benefits package is a real differentiator – not just a nice to have.

There’s also a potential productivity cost. Global employee engagement has fallen to just 20%⁷ - its lowest level since 2020 – costing the world economy an estimated \$10 trillion in lost productivity, or 9% of GDP. Multiply that by the added complexity of managing absenteeism and presenteeism across multiple countries, each with different healthcare systems and cultural expectations, and the exposure grows quickly.

The issue for many companies isn’t just about whether to invest in employee benefits, but more about whether the current approach is delivering value – or even draining it.

Key questions:
What is your employee turnover costing you - and could a stronger benefits strategy change that?
Can you show your board that your benefits investment is delivering a return?

⁵ Top small business statistics, Forbes 2026

⁶ Employee turnover is preventable but often ignored, Gallup, 2024

⁷ State of the Global Workplace, The Human Side of the AI Revolution, Gallup 2026

Why one-size-fits-all doesn't work



It's tempting, when you're scaling internationally, to apply the same benefits package everywhere. But in practice, a universal approach often creates more problems than it solves.

A life insurance policy that pays four times salary might feel generous to a UK employee, but barely adequate in the US. Disability and social security provision is well-structured in much of mainland Europe, but may be non-existent elsewhere. In Asia Pacific, the variation between Japan, Singapore, Australia and India is so significant that applying a single regional framework carries real risk.

What looks like equality on paper can feel deeply unequal in practice.

Then there are the legal risks. As Mark Ramsook explains:

“Businesses assume their global private medical or group life policy covers them, without realising there are mandatory local frameworks they are required to participate in - sometimes with significant penalties for non-compliance.

The Middle East is a good example, where end-of-service gratuity and mandatory savings scheme requirements are often missed by companies setting up for the first time. Asia Pacific is another area where the variation between markets is significant and the consequences of getting it wrong are material.”

REBA's research found that 67% of employers identified implementing fairness across countries as a priority, but this is fundamentally a governance question, not just an HR one. When your CFO asks about compliance exposure, or your board wants to understand the return on your benefits investment, fairness alone isn't a sufficient answer.

The right approach sets minimum standards and principles centrally - defining what governance looks like, what compliance requires, and what outcomes you expect - then gives local markets the flexibility to deliver against those standards in ways that are legally compliant, culturally appropriate, and competitively relevant. That's a framework your leadership can stand behind and your employees will actually value.

Getting this right requires local expertise that most businesses don't have in-house. It also requires a partner who thinks strategically, not just transactionally.

This is where Howden can help. We specialise in growing and mid-sized multinationals – businesses too complex for a local broker, but that don't get the attention they deserve from the largest global consultancies.



Key questions:

Are your benefits designed to be fair across markets, or just identical?

Do you know whether your global policy is actually compliant in every country where you operate?

Five things to get right



If you're an emerging multinational (or a growing business that's starting to realise it is one) you probably already feel your benefits need more structure. These five areas will help you to create the foundations.

Get your strategy aligned to your business

01

A good benefits strategy needs to connect to your business goals, your people strategy and your growth plans – not simply sit in an HR silo. This means building a framework before the complexity becomes unmanageable.

The starting point is relatively simple: what do you want your benefits to achieve, and how does that connect to where the business is heading? Without that clarity, every new market becomes another ad hoc arrangement.

Get smarter about financing and cost control

02

Review your broker and provider arrangements across every market. If you're using a different broker in each country, it means that no one holds the full picture, and you're almost certainly paying more than you need to while missing opportunities to negotiate better terms.

Bringing this together does two things. Commercially, a coordinated structure gives you buying power, removes duplication, and frees up budget to invest in the benefits your employees actually value. Just as importantly, aligning behind one partner working across all your markets gives you a single view of your whole programme, consistent standards in every country, and one point of accountability when something needs sorting. It's the difference between placement and strategic support.

One fast-growing financial services Howden client had 15 different brokers and no central strategy. Howden consolidated this into a single global framework across 8 countries, delivering approximately 12% savings while identifying compliance gaps and eliminating regulatory risk.

That's one example. Across our multinational client base, the pattern is consistent: businesses that consolidate from fragmented local arrangements into a coordinated global programme typically see cost reductions, improved compliance posture, and - critically - a benefits package their people actually understand and use.

15 brokers consolidated into one global framework, 8 countries harmonised, resulting in 12% savings.

One client, a US-based technology company, saved 16% on its annual benefits spend (equivalent to \$1.6m) after Howden simplified its approach, consolidated providers and removed duplications.

Get governance and compliance sorted early

03

Multi-jurisdiction compliance is where emerging multinationals are most exposed. Map your compliance obligations in every market where you have employees - insurance, pensions, working conditions, data protection. Don't assume a global policy covers you: every market has its own mandatory frameworks, and the penalties for non-compliance can result in unexpected tax liabilities, statutory fines and reputational damage.

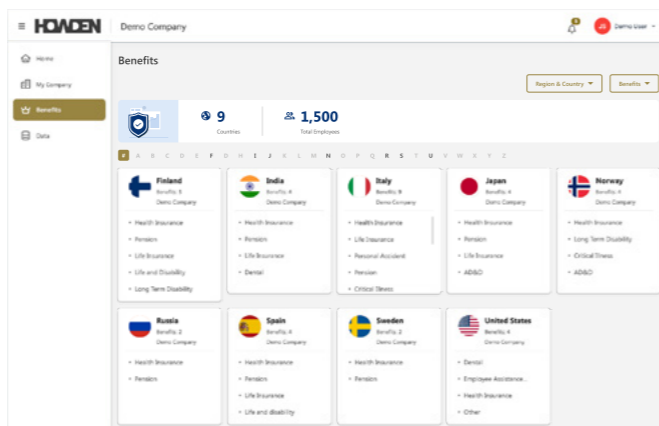
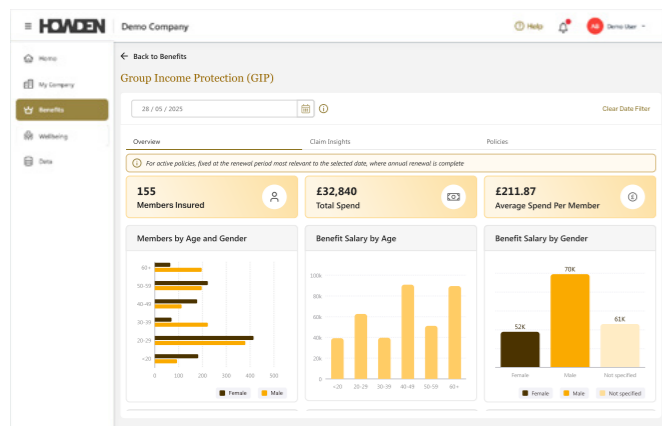
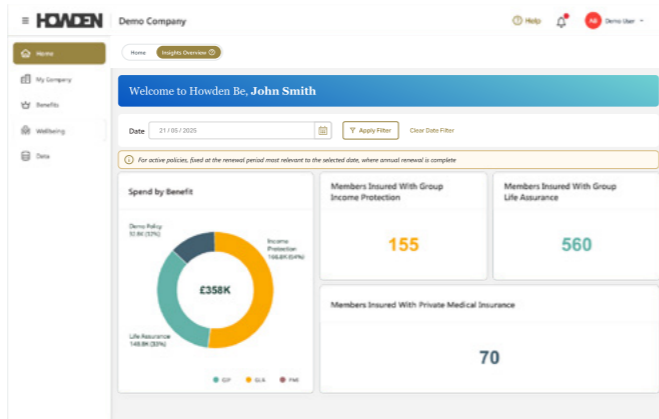


Get your data working for you

04

Consolidate your benefits data into a single view across every market. If you're currently relying on spreadsheets, PDFs and email chains scattered across multiple brokers, you're making decisions in the dark.

Bringing that together is part of what we do for you. Our service uses Howden Be, the technology that consolidates your benefits data and reports on it across markets, giving you live visibility of your policies and costs. So you can make decisions on current information, and see what's working across your whole employee benefits programme.



Source: Howden Be dashboard



Get the employee experience right

05

Invest in year-round benefits communications, not just a one-off enrolment email. Make sure employees know what they're covered for, how to access it, and where to go when they need help. Recognise that what works in one market won't work in another - and that a benefits strategy is only as good as the experience employees actually have of it.

How Howden can help

If you've read this far and recognised your own business in some of what's described, you're not alone. Most emerging multinationals reach a point where the patchwork approach that got them this far simply stops working.

Usually there's a specific trigger: headcount scaling internationally and the offering can't keep up, benefits costs rising or renewals becoming harder to manage, an acquisition that's suddenly added new countries to the mix, or a key hire lost to a competitor with a stronger package. Whatever the prompt, it tends to come with the same realisation: the business needs more strategic support, not just placement and administration.



We also have a dedicated US practice, giving us particular depth in the world's largest employee benefits market – which accounts for 40% of global benefits spend. Whether you're expanding into the US or you're a US-headquartered business growing internationally, our US team works closely with our global network to make sure nothing gets missed between markets.

The question is what to do next.

That's where we come in. We specialise in growing and mid-sized multinationals – businesses too complex for a local broker, but that don't get the attention they deserve from the largest global consultancies.

Most brokers give you a different contact in every country. Our Multinational Client Practice brings together programme strategy, global oversight, international and expat coverage, and dedicated coordination for clients entering or expanding across new markets – all under a single model. One relationship. One thread of accountability. Consistent, high-quality delivery wherever your people are.

Chapter 7

This is what makes us different:

Global reach, local depth.

We have expertise in over 40 countries, with local teams who understand what's legally required, culturally expected, and competitively necessary in each market.

Integrated broking, advisory and technology.

We combine benefits broking, advisory consulting and Howden Be into a single proposition. You get clear, measurable outcomes, not just insurance placement.

Senior expertise without layers.

You work directly with experienced advisers who understand your business. When you call, you reach the person who knows your programme, not a service desk.

Accountability for outcomes.

As an employee-owned business, our interests are aligned with yours. We're accountable for results – value on investment, cost savings, compliance – not just for turning up at renewal.

Why Howden and not the alternatives?

The largest global consultancies focus on the biggest programmes. If you're a 200-person business with employees in four countries, you won't get their senior attention. Local brokers, meanwhile, can't coordinate across borders: they know their market, not yours.

Howden works in the space neither can occupy. We have genuine global reach – local expertise in more than 40 countries and a technology platform that gives you real-time visibility across every market. But we operate with the responsiveness and senior access of a specialist firm.



Already working with Howden in one country?

If your business has employees, entities or operations in other markets – even just one other country – ask your Howden contact to connect you with our Multinational Client Practice. That's often where the conversation starts.

Whether you need help setting up benefits in your first overseas market, bringing structure to a programme that's grown organically, or simply getting a clear picture of what you're already spending – we're here to help.

Get in touch: GBM@howdengroup.com

Book your diagnostic

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