



World Mobility Perspectives: 2016 Global Mobility Trends

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2016 Global Mobility Trends



It is a fabulous time to be a mobility professional, particularly if you are able to embrace and lead change. If you are new to our industry, you may not appreciate the shifts that are upon us, but they are significant game changers.

It is Crown World Mobility's tradition to reflect on world events and shifts that influence the business environment, and how the mobility function and its tools will change to meet new and evolving challenges. From this reflection comes our annual list of trends. It gives you a lens from which you can assess your current policies and programs, and plan for next steps and strategies in the months ahead. We hope to leave you ready to embrace innovation and lead the changes that are in our midst.

Technology is pivotal, leading to the überization of just about everything, including our growing desire for real-time data and mobile services. Restaurants and stores increasingly use touchscreens to take and track your order and, even in the least-developed economies, mobile phone-based money transfers are quickly becoming the norm.

Another industry changer stems from large demographic shifts and a growing corporate focus on recruiting and retaining talent. As one generation begins to retire, older Millennials are becoming managers, just as the first of the Gen Zeds (born between 1994-2010) finish college. Succession planning, developing next generation talent and integrating diversity – geographical, generational and gender being three of the big ones – into people strategies are all key. We see the impact of this on corporate benefits, like expanding maternity and paternity leave, flexibility in the workplace environment – hours, amenities, clothes – and, yes, shifts in mobility program design.

Where does this leave us in mobility as we begin 2016? We see more complexity than ever before. Companies need to offer more mobility for less. Mobility policies need to have the flexibility to be successfully implemented in some of the strongest economies (from Australia to France, Hong Kong, Switzerland, the U.S. and the U.K.), as well as in some of the most challenging, emerging or developing economies (Argentina, Egypt, Myanmar or Nigeria). Policies must meet the needs of different types of assignments and assignees. There is a necessary increased focus on our employees' security and corporate compliance strategies. It's complicated and makes our jobs more interesting than ever before.

“... Innovation requires the ability to collaborate and share ideas with other people, and to sit down and talk with customers and get their feedback and understand their needs.”

Bill Gates, Founder and Technology Adviser, Microsoft

I. Recruiting talent

Mobility's links to recruiting talent include business growth into new markets and recruiting from a talent pool that increasingly wants international career opportunities. For the first, businesses are more often finding that their next growth location is in a new country – one where they lack both infrastructure and talent on the ground. This means that many of the skills needed to successfully launch the initiative may come from international assignments or transfers, and requires a strong relationship between mobility and recruiting. Recruiters are on the frontline of staffing – and mobility policies are evolving to support their particular needs; offering greater flexibility within policies satisfies a wider variety of business or employee situations.

The second recruiting focus for mobility recognizes that there is an increasing desire for new hires to want, and expect, an international opportunity at some point in their careers. Companies need to create low-cost ways to provide these early-career moves to stay competitive and attract the right talent.

Whether it is domestic or international recruiting scenarios that include relocation, we anticipate that Mobility Consultants will work more directly with recruiters and potential hires to establish the high-value candidate's needs – identifying the right policy type to assist the recruiter with “selling” the job. Mobility professionals will begin to train recruiters to allow them to speak to the specific needs of a high-value recruit. This is an area to keep an eye on as the mobility role evolves.





2. Über mobility

Millennial assignees may have led the charge toward mobile apps for employee mobility, but the trend is catching on with assignees of all generations. Employees want the information they need for their move at their fingertips. They want it to be interactive and immediate. In the age of Über, mobility apps and features are a leading development in the world of employee mobility. And what's next? Virtual Reality (VR) technology is already on the market, primarily for gaming industries, and it will certainly spread. Will VR home finding trips be too far off?

Some companies are already seeing a backlash against the all-self-help approach, with the pendulum swinging too far. Even the Millennials don't know what they don't know. The key in the next year is to find the right combination for smart mobility. Some companies that ran with self-help approaches now require more of a balance – such as an upfront program orientation to identify needs and respond to employee and family questions. An interactive element that, say, a “YouTube” video lacks, so far. There is certainly more to come on this topic.

3. Cost control

Cost savings is always a top ten trend. Most companies are good at reviewing their policies every two years to ensure that they are:

- Up to date with market practices
- Competitive in their industry
- Responsible – in terms of providing too much (or too little) support to meet their employees' and families' needs

Companies now highlight immigration and tax compliance in their policies as a rule, and require more participation from their employees, not less. Meaning that mobility policies of the past, that led to an employee's financial windfall, are no longer acceptable. Corporate global values support cross-cultural and language training, and are no longer easily sacrificed for negligible cost savings.

This year we will see a cost management focus on matching the right program with the assignment need. With more self-selected and entry-level assignees there is a greater interest in low-cost mobility policies – and managed lump sum is still hot. They are better value and more companies are adapting their approach to take advantage of the savings when you marry the tax-efficient direct service approach with the flexibility of a lump sum. And there's a bonus, too: employee satisfaction is much higher when they receive service support.

4. Data analytics

Mobility programs capture vast amounts of data and they are beginning to use that information to help programs run smoother, more cost effectively and provide a better service. Smarter mobility programs capture and use data about assignee/transferee demographics, spend, locations, move types, exceptions, compliance, etc. to address employee mobility more strategically.

Companies not only look at the employee and family experience, but also whether mobility is meeting business needs and analyzing the HR/mobility team experience in terms of managing the process or program. For those mobility programs with more sophisticated data analytical capabilities, they can see details such as:

- Regions where female assignees are or aren't on the rise
- Which key emerging markets are or aren't able to send employees on outbound assignments to gain critical international experience

For companies newer to tracking data or early in centralizing their mobility programs, just knowing who is where, having a sense of exceptions and post-assignment retention are all places to start. For all companies, smarter mobility is this year's trend.





5. LGBT moves

Another byproduct of the increase in the global reach of many companies is the recognition that not all locations where companies do business are safe or legal for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) assignees.

Not all immigration laws acknowledge same-sex marriages. Countries in many regions, including Africa, the Middle East, Southern Asia and parts of Eastern Europe pose potential threats and challenges. Supporting LGBT assignees requires mobility teams to be informed and to adjust policies to support same-sex couples and other assignees who may require special preparations and considerations.

A focus on LGBT moves highlights the emerging area of diversity in mobility. Global companies in industries competing for talent recognize the bottom-line benefits of recruiting and retaining a diverse employee population. The changing faces of employee demographics pushes the mobility industry and its professionals to develop new skills and knowledge, adjust policies and create mobility support to meet these changes.

6. Flexibility and employee choices

Recognizing that “one size fits all” does not meet the needs of most assignees or businesses, companies are building choice and options into their policies. Core policy typically reflects a company’s values and priorities, and flex elements support budget parameters and employee preferences. Flexibility for the company may mean different levels of benefits for different assignment types. Flexibility for employees may include a cash allowance in place of some services, such as choosing a furniture allowance in place of shipping household goods.

7. Risk and compliance

Companies have begun to integrate corporate risk management into their mobility programs and duty of care considerations for their employees. Duty of care support emphasizes security and emergency awareness and preparation (for the employee and family) – and evacuation services.

Corporate risk management steps include compliance with company guidelines for safe travel. For example, using a company travel-booking site and practices, so companies can always know where their assignees are at any given time.

Companies recognize that immigration and business practice compliance are critical to a business' success – and an employee's well-being. To support this, companies are including education and support in their policies more than ever before.



8. Permanent transfers

Permanent transfer typically refers to relocation where there is no expectation of repatriation or reassignment. There has been a notable increase in this move type and it is expected that it will continue to be a trend in the coming year. While in most cases permanent transfers are one-way moves, in some cases these moves are expected to be temporary.

Applying a permanent relocation policy in lieu of a temporary assignment policy has cost advantages. Unfortunately, this may also open up a company to tax and immigration liabilities. As a result, companies that are seeking a lower-cost alternative to temporary assignments would be better served by developing a local plus temporary assignment policy, instead of a permanent relocation policy.

Effects of using the permanent relocation policy for temporary assignments:

- The policy does not provide often needed home-country support, such as storage or property management
- The compensation assumption for a permanent transfer policy is host-based – which means breaking home benefits and contracts as well as paying for home and host housing on the local payroll
- Employee and family expectations may not always be addressed and managed since the pre-departure communication for a temporary assignment is different from that of a permanent move



9. Self-initiated moves

Another trend that started with Millennials, is the growth of self-initiated moves. Millennials want international experiences – and many are willing to do it without extensive support or expectation of repatriation. Companies want employees to have international experiences without the full cost of a typical expatriate assignment. Self-initiated moves serve both interests, with basic policies primarily emphasizing compliance-related support and limited assistance.

10. Family considerations

Companies need to increasingly focus on aligning mobility programs and policies to the many different types of family scenarios among our employees. Especially when these scenarios are at odds with immigration regulations of their host countries. This includes addressing the needs of dual-career families, split-families, single or divorced employees with child custody and same-sex couples – as well as providing support for employees' parents who are recognized as dependents. Mobility programs and our industry are becoming more creative when removing barriers to mobility that non-traditional families face.

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