



The future of Global Mobility
**Are you ready for
remobilization?**

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How do you “do” Global Mobility during an unprecedented global health crisis? There are plenty of responsibilities and activities that require attention, even under lockdown and closed borders. But as rules start to relax it’s important to start getting ready for remobilization and consider the following two horizons.



Managing Global Mobility expectations and needs within today’s constrained reality



Remobilization activities and responding to the new normal

The Covid-19 situation remains fluid and so are our industry’s priorities. We’ve put together a list of primary considerations to help inform your organization’s preparation for the future of international mobility.

1. Employee mental health and well-being

Many Global Mobility teams, their HR partners and external mobility partners are working closely together to support employees and their families who were already on assignment – or had recently transferred permanently to a new location – when the pandemic began. It is no surprise that they are experiencing different levels of stress, concern, homesickness, culture shock and connection to their communities.

Imagine having packed up your belongings, said goodbye to friends and family, and arrived in a new country, with a new culture and a new language. If you have children, they were starting a new school.

If you have a partner, they may have just left a career behind. If you have extended families and elderly parents, they are now further away and will be facing their own stress and challenges due to the crisis. For those employees who were less than six months into the start of their assignment or transfer, they probably found themselves in the earliest stages of adjustment when the global health crisis began.

For employees, transferees and their families who were well established in the host or new location, with local friendships and routines, there are still many potential emotional strains. Local healthcare

systems may be unfamiliar, visas may be about to expire, family members are still at a distance and many may not be fluent, or even confident, in the local language.

As discussed in our “Big global mobility trends to watch in 2020” article, employee mental health is a key part of an organization’s duty of care strategy. An important first step to addressing mental health issues in your global mobility program is to help remove the stigma. The current crisis is opening a door to these conversations because its impact is universal. Promoting employee well-being strategies can also promote mental health in the workplace. Many companies are responding to the crisis by putting an added emphasis on well-being programs that include exercise, nutrition and mindfulness along with updated versions of work-life balance.

Putting strategies in place to reassure and support your mobile populations

- Find the right balance between over- and under-communicating with a mobility population, using more than one approach depending on individual preferences (text,

email, phone calls, video conferencing, etc.). Some employees say they aren’t getting enough communication and others have said they have had anxiety from over-communication.

- Raise an awareness about mental health issues among the Global Mobility team but let them know they don’t have to be the experts. Ensure that your team can recommend and rely on trained professionals like those found in an employee assistance program (EAP) or through International SOS (ISOS).
- Provide mental health and well-being information to all employees and their families, so that everyone can have information and resources available when they need it. Some companies are scheduling webinars with mental health and well-being presenters for their mobility populations.
- Develop a basic script for your Global Mobility team and update it when there is new information, so that your mobility population is getting a similar message. This ensures there aren’t big disparities in who is hearing what message during a crisis.





2. Proactive conversations with business partners

The terms “pipeline” and “backlog” are popping up with increasing frequency as part of the remobilization discussion. Many Mobility teams are focused on the growing pipeline of employees who will be needed to fill all kinds of assignments and transfers once borders re-open and people are able to move. Business leaders are looking at projects currently on hold, signed contracts with clients and

open positions waiting to be filled. These will require the use of short- and long-term assignments, new hires, permanent transfers, commuters and business travelers. It is critical for Mobility teams to have proactive conversations with their business partners to ensure that they understand that with remobilization the tap might turn on – but authorizations cannot all happen on day one.



Scheduling regular conversations

- Raise an awareness of the challenges of having a “backlog” in the pipeline and agree on ways to get ahead of it, where possible, and manage expectations.
- Ask business partners to prioritize the open positions that need to be filled and identify skill sets required.
- Review employees currently in the pipeline and ensure that details that will impact “ready to move” are captured, including variables such as home and host location combinations, family situations, willingness to go and immigration requirements. Make sure your external partners are kept in the loop in anticipation of your internal planning with business partners.
- Some Mobility teams are already talking about addressing future assignments on a case-by-case basis due to new complexities and variables that might determine “go/no go” for an employee.
- As the pandemic shifts geographically, assess those countries that begin to open to determine business conditions, national guidelines, and availability of relocation and expat services in impacted locations, including quality of medical care available, household goods shipments, schools reopening and accepting new students, destination service providers, availability of temporary and permanent housing, pricing adjustments, etc.
- Consider whether the use of business travel and short-term assignments might need to be temporarily delayed in case the airport hassle, potential quarantine and health risks become too great in the early stages of remobilization.
- Meet with project managers to determine new timelines for upcoming transfers.
- Create a pipeline for waves of moves based on the many variables, so that there are realistic numbers of authorizations in each wave; have alternative plans in order to adjust as needed.

3. Immigration planning

Even under normal circumstances, obtaining visas and work permits are critical when planning for international assignments or transfers. The timing for filing paperwork and processing applications is not always predictable, yet, when getting ready for a move, obtaining the visa and work papers determine the timing of many other steps, including the employee's arrival in the new location.

Some might think that during this pandemic, while borders are closed and travel bans are in place, the immigration process is at a standstill, but the opposite is true. Immigration teams supporting the Mobility industry are providing daily and weekly updates to

organizations on evolving country-specific guidelines, norms and attitudes around movement within and across borders, and locations where governments are showing lenience and understanding for expiring visas and permits (and where they aren't).

Immigration specialists know those countries and cities where immigration and labor authorities are partially working remotely to process applications. Some are accepting online applications. It is important for companies to take action where possible, so that once borders re-open and consulates are fully operating, they will have saved time and caught up with the backlog in many cases.





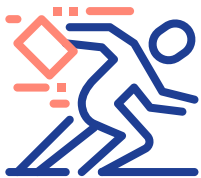
Steps you can take with immigration partners to avoid the inevitable backlog

- Contact immigration providers so that they can start assessing the cases and develop case strategies.
- Once everyone agrees with the timelines and case strategies, HR and Global Mobility can initiate the cases so that the immigration team can proceed with documentation procurement, and with preparing and drafting documents and applications for filing with the respective labor and immigration authorities (where possible).
- Start the first phase of the work permit process, such as filing petitions with the labor and immigration authorities in countries that allow it.
- Know that consulates continue to provide assistance and some urgent services to their nationals, even if they are not issuing visas.
- Understand that processing times at the labor and immigration authorities can take between six weeks and six months during normal circumstances. Starting the process and paperwork now could save considerable time during the adjudication process.

4. Employees in the assignment and transfer pipeline

For those employees in your organization who were already far along in the relocation process, they are probably experiencing what we might call “the long goodbye.” In some cases, their furniture had already been shipped or put into storage, and current jobs had wound down as travel restrictions came into force. In fact, those employees may have started their new roles even though they are still in their home location, and therefore find themselves on a “virtual assignment” status.

There are at least two categories of employee emotions for those who were already in the pipeline:



Still excited to go; “chomping at the bit!”



Hesitant to proceed with the international opportunity; more of a wait-and-see mentality

In terms of communication and addressing mental health and well-being concerns, Global Mobility teams are using similar approaches described under the first section. And recognizing that there will be variables that need to be re-examined on more of a case-by-case basis to re-determine an employee’s willingness to go. Pre-covid the availability of international schools might have been important, where in a post-crisis environment, there might be more focus on the medical care that will be available.

It is also important to recognize that there are plenty of additional actions that can be taken while the employee waits. Under normal pre-departure scenarios, a frequent barrier to employees taking advantage of support and preparation for an international move is that there just isn’t enough time. The pause on the move will allow for some employees and their families to take advantage of the delay. The biggest opportunity is for companies and employees to take advantage of virtual support that has been made available.





High-touch virtual support

- Pre-departure cross-cultural training is available virtually from most providers; it is good to know that strategies around the employee and family's well-being, adjustment, and managing the stress of a move are also common modules in a cross-cultural training program. The employee and family have the opportunity to get to know the new location, culture, healthcare system, daily living and expat community infrastructure in advance, which may help to alleviate the uncertainty and stress while they wait. Many companies recognize it as an excellent benefit to encourage as part of your organization's support.
- Language training has been available in a virtual format for many years and is another example of employees and their families preparing to hit the ground running – and feel better prepared to communicate and adapt to the new location before they go.
- Partner support is a service increasingly available to accompanying partners in instances of dual-career couples – employees whose spouse/partner has a career being put on hold or disrupted for the international assignment or transfer. It is another example of a type of support that often doesn't begin until arrival in the new location; however, there is no reason why the coaching and support cannot begin in advance to get a head start on understanding the opportunities and job search market prior to arrival. This proactive step may also alleviate any anxiety around the job transition for the accompanying partner.
- Virtual home surveys were available as an option prior to Covid-19 and are a great opportunity for employees who want to prepare for moving day, and get their household goods assessed and ready for packing.

5. Global Mobility teams

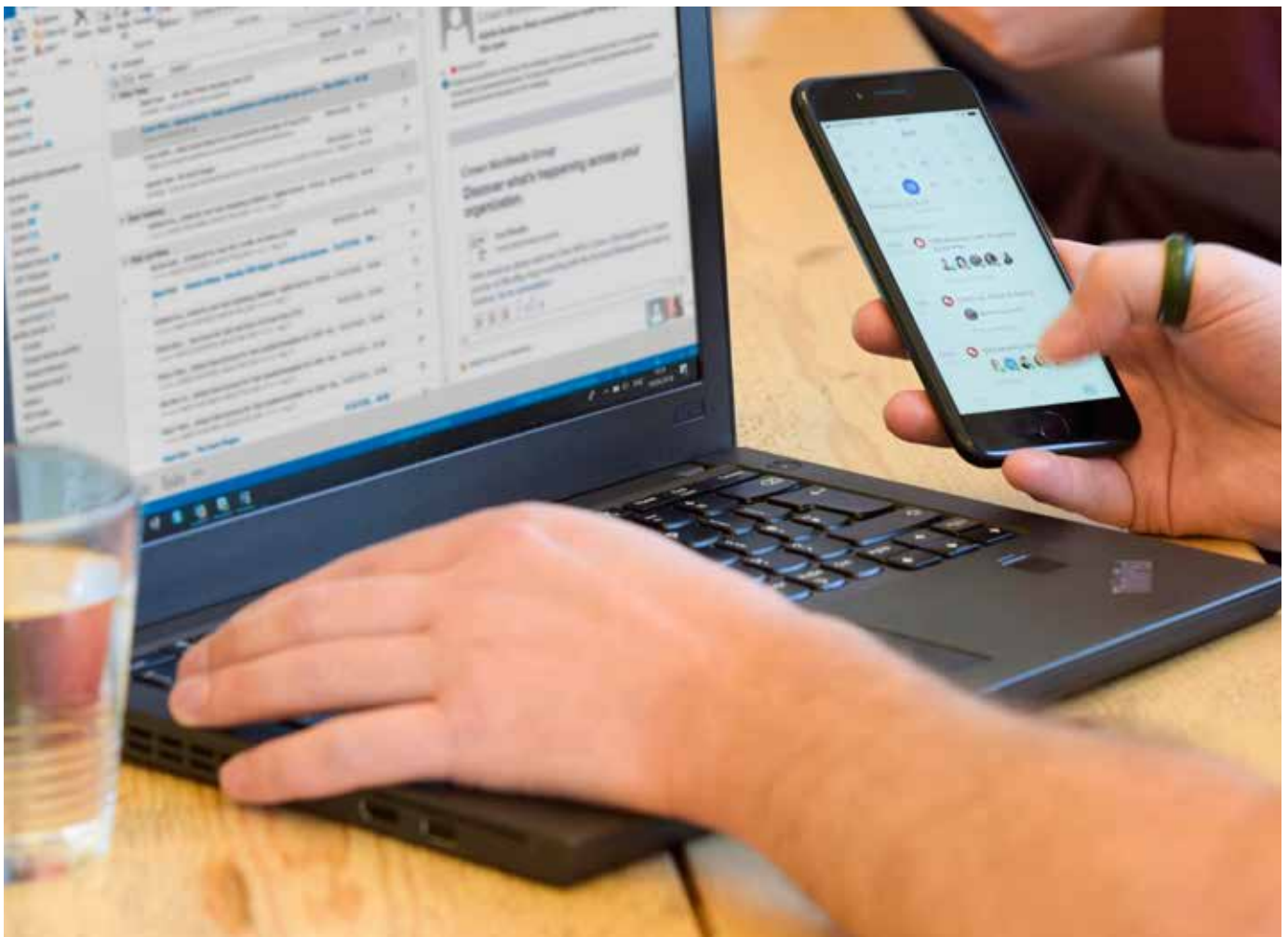
For the many Global Mobility teams that are busy communicating with and providing support to their stakeholders while preparing for remobilization, it is also important to focus on your own team members, the team process and taking care of yourself. Many of the tips offered in the above sections will ring true for your own global virtual teams. There are also a number of changes and realignments that can be considered for your programs, policies and strategies. “Business as usual” is going to be different. That said, in times of uncertainty, remember that your program’s core values can be your North Star as you adjust.



Stay strong and explore new ways of working

- Check in with each other and don't assume that your virtual home situation is the same as everyone else's. While a team's use of video in meetings is becoming the norm, remember that there will be days and moments where your colleagues are not feeling camera-ready, and that's okay.
- Assume good intentions and give people who are having a bad day, or a bad moment, a chance to try again, apologize or just move on.
- Create new ways to motivate, congratulate, celebrate and give feedback as a virtual team depending on the household and the location's current point in the crisis. Check-in with team members to see how they are doing, not just what they are doing.
- This may be a good time to assess your current program's tools, policies and infrastructure. A number of companies are upgrading their communication tools, reviewing and improving policy, and changing priorities and guidelines to meet their current situation. Examples include the emerging “temporary virtual assignees” who are starting assignments while still in their home country, and “virtual assignment guidelines” being put into place.
- Select an improvement in the area of EX (employee experience), Duty of Care or Diversity Mobility to have ready to go.
- Prepare for potential cost adjustments to the program in light of the crisis. Has anything changed? Mobility teams will need to manage expectations with business partners.
- With the emerging priority on Duty of Care and employee safety, discuss potential changes to existing policy related to the use of Airbnb-type options and DIY employee-choice strategy vs. vetted supply chains that ensure high standards.

- There are certain typical elements of a mobility policy that will need to be reviewed and the language updated for the post-crisis assignment or transfer environment, including:
 - Pre-assignment medical exams found in 75% of policies today (according to our 2019 Long-term Assignment Policy and Practices report). Existing medical conditions that were less concerning in the past might have more meaning today regarding an employee's decision to accept an assignment; awareness of new requirements for medical documentation for immigration may emerge.
 - The element covering personal matters is only addressed in 17% of policies today, but is an example of a no-cost way for companies to help their employees understand pre-assignment activities that allow them to depart with more peace of mind – encouraging employees to put wills, insurance and legal documents in order.
 - Health insurance coverage in policy may need to provide more details about host location medical programs and processes as part of an employee's decision-making information.
- Many companies have reduced headcount during this time. Consider how this may have impacted your own team make up as well as the global workforce your team supports; will any of the staffing reductions need to be addressed with the Talent team in your organization to see where mobility becomes a way to support staffing gaps?
- Communicate regularly and help set realistic expectations with your mobility partners; this crisis is impacting the Global Mobility industry in a number of ways and there are many companies, suppliers and partners who are working hard to keep their businesses running, meet standard and shifting client needs, and keep their employees safe and healthy. The more they know about your plans, the better they can make realistic business strategies for meeting your organization's current and future needs; we are all in this together!



Conclusion

No one has a crystal ball with exact dates and there remain many unknowns, but the rebound is coming! Global Mobility is using the time during this global crisis to support their existing mobile populations and to proactively prepare for remobilization with their many stakeholder groups. While some companies may think twice about immediately reinstating short international business trips for employees, now that we have seen the success of connecting virtually, there is no sign that this will replace the use of short- and long-term temporary assignments and permanent transfers.

There are many actions that could be underway to address current needs and to prepare for remobilization. One big takeaway, no matter which

stakeholder you are working with, is that with no precedent to follow, there has never been a better time to communicate more (rather than less) and to lead with empathy and kindness. There will be a new normal, and in some cases we will find an improved, more efficient and better prepared normal. Whatever the outcome, we are looking forward to addressing it as Crown continues to track and update information, make informed predictions and support you and our industry peers during this unprecedented and evolving situation.

Our industry has always been agile and empathetic. Stay well, continue to flatten the curve and find your silver linings!



This article was authored by Lisa Johnson of Crown World Mobility's Consulting Group. If you have any questions regarding this article or would like to find out more about other services, please contact Lisa at ljohnson@crownww.com or visit our website at crownworldmobility.com.

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