

Will Covid fast-track changes in Global Mobility?

Industry professionals weigh in



There have been decades in our industry where little change has happened; some might reflect that the same discussions happen over and over – the move from a tactical to strategic approach, and the fact that female-assignee percentages are barely advancing. And then, as someone famous once said, there are months where it feels like decades happen. We find ourselves in such a moment today. As the Global Mobility industry starts to lift its head from the initial Covid-19 response and into recovery, there are some developments to grab onto as we see the possibility for significant and long-awaited changes. Crown World Mobility's recent survey of more than 100 Global Mobility professionals, across a wide range of companies and regions, sheds light on a number of noteworthy predictions.

A quick look back at phase one: Responding to the crisis

China's lockdown began in Wuhan on January 23, 2020, and by March 11 the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) a global pandemic. Unsurprisingly, our survey launched during May shows that the majority of participants were primarily focusing on providing support for current assignees along with crisis management and business continuity needs within their organizations.

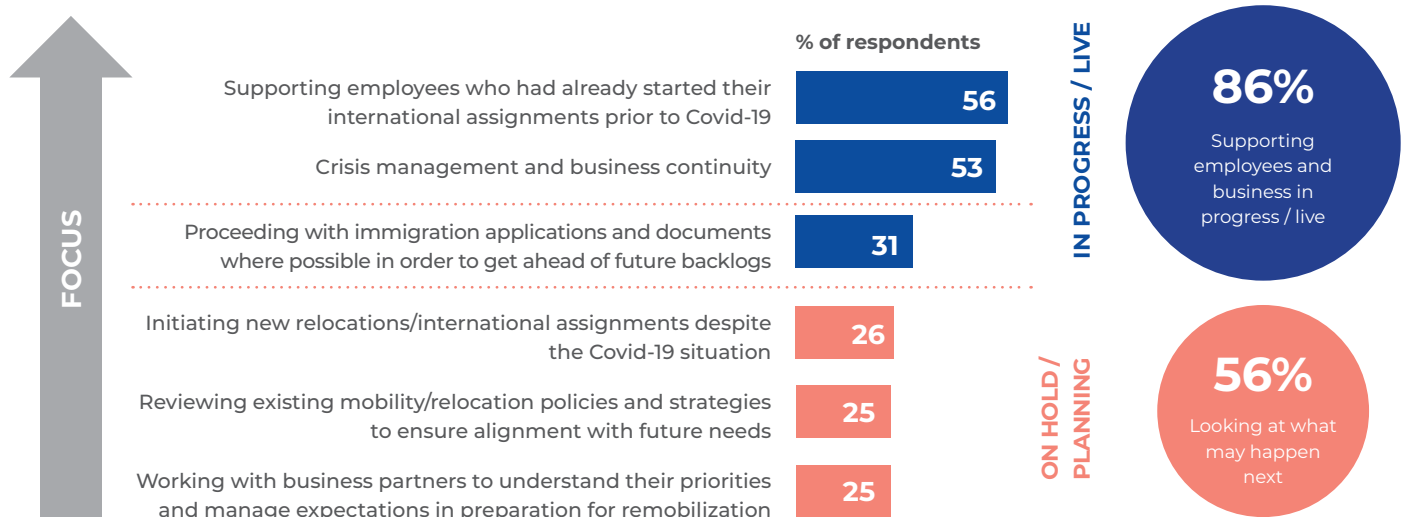
Top three activities supporting current assignees and those in the pipeline:

1. Frequent communication
2. Immigration
3. Mental health and well-being

Participants also cited a number of other concerns that required attention:

- Juggling personal and team adjustments with the logistical and emotional aspects of remote working
- Life under quarantine
- Living with variables such as toddlers or school-aged children at home, elderly parents and underlying health conditions
- Internet challenges
- Salary/Staff reductions
- Changes in roles and responsibilities
- Increased working hours

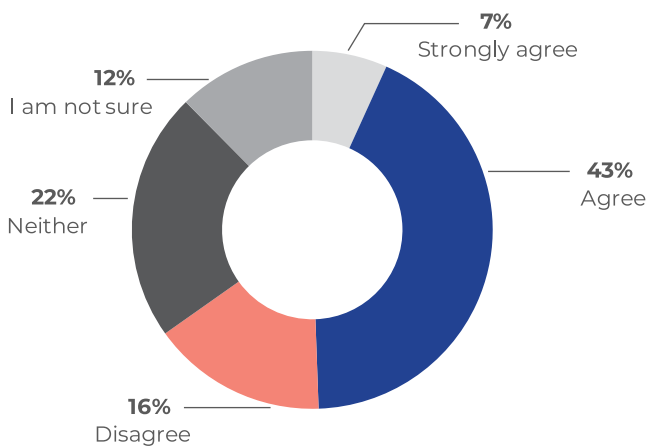
Where was Global Mobility's initial focus in response to Covid?



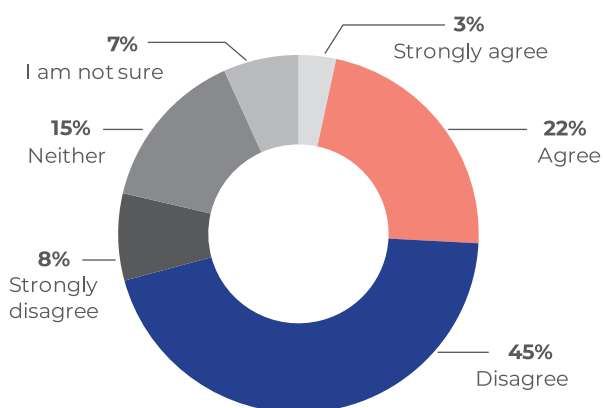
Participants shared other areas of focus as they shift to plan for remobilization

You might hear people talking about moving into a “post-Covid world.” But without the development of an effective vaccine, it is more accurate to describe recovery as more of a “post-crisis” phase. Post-crisis relates to a shift in how organizations approach crisis management. Survey participants believe there will be a short-term impact on Global Mobility:

“Our employees are going to be open to pursuing an international assignment post-covid restrictions”



“I believe the Global Mobility industry will be back to normal by the end of the year”



Participants identified the following short-term impacts:

Personal impacts: working from home, temporary pay cuts and missing face-to-face interactions.

Relocating employee impacts: postponing new assignments, arriving during lockdown, remote working in a new role, virtual onboarding and inability for home leave.

Organizational impacts: working from home, slowing of client projects, preparedness, drop in sales, hiring pause, strong fundamentals and changes in priorities.

Global Mobility industry impacts: travel challenges, more thought put into the need for assignments, more health controls, different countries with different regulations and virtual teams.

Many strategies for recovery have a “safety first” or “peace of mind” approach. A common explanation is that, while no one knows exactly what will happen as we move forward during the global pandemic, we are first and foremost committed to Duty of Care. As a result, we see the continued rise of virtual solutions and new technology emerging to complement traditional human support for relocating employees. During the Covid-era we can expect to see more services highlighting “contact free,” “contactless,” and “zero human interaction (ZHI).”

Our Global Skills Director, Jo Danehl, is seeing a shift in attitudes firsthand:

“Employees whose assignments were put on hold when the crisis hit used more language training hours than what we typically see. Today there is a shift back towards people wanting post-arrival training now that they feel their move has regained momentum.”

Thriving in the new normal

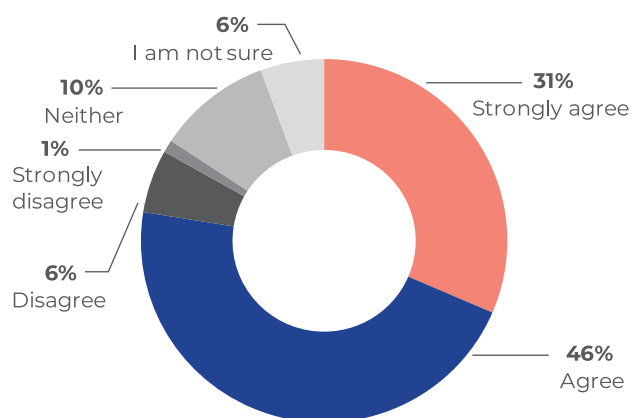
Global Mobility vs. Talent Mobility – Being strategic is no longer optional

As experts have long described, once you have moved through the storm that a crisis brings, it is essential to reflect and identify long-term learnings, because that's where change occurs.

One change that many in our industry are expecting is the acceleration of the long discussed move from the traditional, transactional Global Mobility approach, to one based more on a strategic Talent Mobility approach. Coming out of this crisis, Global Mobility professionals are predicting that business partners will require a more strategic focus on mobility than they have had in the past, and that Global Mobility leaders will rise to meet the challenges that emerge.

Participants had a positive outlook when asked about the long-term impact of the crisis and the future direction of their organization.

“I feel confident about the future direction of our organization post-covid restrictions”



“The pandemic represents a rare but narrow window of opportunity to reflect, reimagine, and reset our world.”

Klaus Schwab

Founder and Executive Chairman,
World Economic Forum

What are the silver linings for the Mobility industry?

Global Mobility professionals were asked about what they expect to be the long term “silver linings” to the Covid-19 crisis. Identifying positive aspects coming out of an otherwise negative situation, some common themes emerged.

A sample from more than 40 participant comments reveals a number of positive changes we could see on the other side of this crisis:

“More respect for mobility practitioners – I think organizations for whom Mobility is a second thought added onto a HR or recruiter role will have suffered for not having the right talent at this time.”

“Greater understanding for different possible scenarios and how to best handle them.”

“Transition to better deals that include health support options – vaccinations, tests, hospitalization, housing support, etc., since primary consideration is the health and safety of employees.”

“We have been leaned on heavily during this time due to contacts and knowledge, this should be appreciated and give Mobility more of a seat at the table.”

“Accelerate changes we were only considering in the past like more digital services to manage flexible relocation benefits, better cost tracking and virtual services to the employees.”

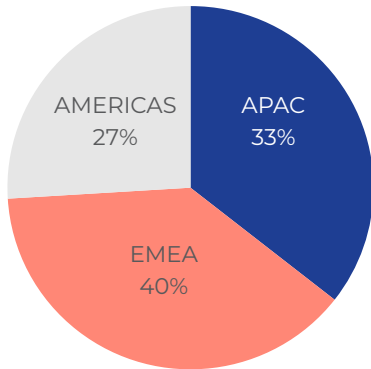
“In an extra special situation, there is now an extra effort from the Global Mobility provider – this shows that the supplier can approach the assignee more frequently with extra attention once things normalize. It also shows that a lot of services can be done virtually, therefore for time saving, the virtual possibilities can apply in the future.”

The Covid-19 crisis is not over, however, the first few months are behind us and there is fast-moving change our industry can benefit from. Windows and doors are opening to move more Global Mobility professionals into leadership roles as our organizations work to recover and establish new paths forward.

Companies that look to “return to normal” will fall behind. Companies that look to reprioritize, innovate, embrace the uncomfortable and update will be at an advantage. Covid-19 and its threats have impacted everyone around the globe. That bond will help to bring our industry together with stronger collaboration as we enter into the next stages of remobilization, anticipate the future and a time when our organizations can thrive in the new normal.

About the survey participants

HQ region



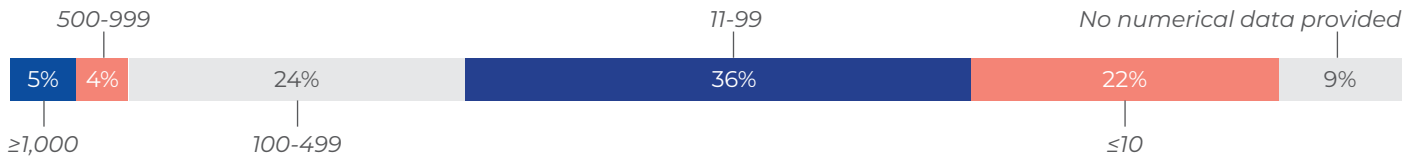
Industry

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Manufacturing/Engineering | 17% |
| Consumer Goods/Retail | 13% |
| Telecommunications /Media/Technology | 11% |
| Nonprofit/Education/Government | 10% |
| Pharmaceutical/Healthcare | 10% |

Other industry participants included Financial Services, Professional Services, Automotive, Transportation/Logistics, Real Estate, Oil/Gas/Energy and Hospitality

Size of mobility program

(annual employee relocations)



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@crownew.com or visit our website at crownworldmobility.com.

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