



The NEW RELOCATION, A_{to}Z

**What's changed in mobility?
Everything—from the appraisal
process and compliance to
employee experience and new
work styles to attract Gen Z**

By Geoff Williams



Last year was like no other, impacting every area of the mobility industry, from how technology has become a key part of the appraisal process to how we're embracing new work styles to attract Gen Z, the newest generation of workers. In the coming year, relocation professionals are also keeping a close eye on compliance issues as related to immigration and taxes, how the pandemic has impacted and will continue to impact housing and corporate housing, and why employee experience matters more than ever.

It's "the new relocation"—and it's changing how all of us do business.

A: Appraisals. Transferees are always interested in hearing the good—or bad—news about the worth of their house. While the pandemic has made this once-routine process much more challenging, appraisers are relying on technology such as drones or applications like Zoom to manage the ongoing need for home appraisals.

B: Brokers. For these real estate professionals who exclusively represent the buyer in real estate transactions, 2021 could well be a busy time. According to data from Realtor.com in November 2020, U.S. median listing prices grew 12.6% over the previous year due to a combination of eager buyers, lower mortgage rates, and reduced inventory, while total inventory is down 39%, another motivator.

C: Corporate housing. For these providers of fully furnished, short-term housing for employees and their families, continued attention and rigor in following U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, and local government guidelines has become business as usual. Other changes that have become standard are contactless check-ins and key retrievals, additional sanitization protocols, and use of technology to connect families with accommodations.

D: Data privacy. As data is transferred between companies to manage seamless transfers, companies are having to step up their own data privacy regulations. Anyone involved in talent mobility needs to be aware of the data privacy laws they need to adhere to—and the policies of their own company—as countries and states around the world are continuing to take a closer look at data privacy and develop laws to ensure it.

E: Employee experience. HR professionals, including talent mobility, are working to drive an exceptional employee experience from talent acquisition through talent retention initiatives, which includes enabling employees to enjoy international work experience. That in turn helps a company become an employer of choice.

F: Families (duty of care, schools, etc.). Duty of care has taken on a new meaning during the pandemic. Companies are asking tough questions: How will employers continue to keep their employees safe on both a short-term and long-term basis; what policies are they revamping to accommodate the changing needs of their employees; and how are families dealing with remote schooling?

G: Gig workers. The gig worker trend may not be going away, but how these individuals are classified from a worker perspective is still being evaluated. If they work gigs but work for a specified amount of time, are governments going to make the employer pay benefits or other requirements?

H: Household goods. Moves—and the need for housing and the transfer of household goods—are continuing. However, both are closely linked to pandemic case rates. Still, at this time, housing markets are generally robust, even as shippers are working to ensure safe delivery of HHG with delays as limited as possible. In the U.S. in particular, shipping is exploding as people continue their mass exodus out of urban areas, while global shipping has stalled a bit.

I: Immigration. Immigration promises to continue to be complicated, with the ongoing pandemic and immigration legislation in certain countries likely to slow the influx of workers. However, at the same time, COVID-19 may encourage countries to change laws to attract immigrants. Qatar, for instance, is now allowing foreign buyers who purchase a US\$1 million home to have permanent residency, or temporary

residency for a \$200,000 home. Also on the plus side of the ledger: In this age of social distancing and limited contact, expect to see more technological advances to help individuals process immigration paperwork faster and more efficiently over the next 12 months.

J: Jobs in mobility. Mobility will continue to earn a seat at the strategy table as CEOs and other senior leaders lean on the expertise of talent mobility professionals to guide them across multiple issues, including this new world of remote work, a potential rise in long-term assignments, and the compliance issues inherent in both, particularly as countries continue to take a closer look at stricter immigration rules.

K: Keys to unlocking talent. It's a phrase often heard in the industry. Relocating the right employee to a new country and culture often inspires new ideas and inspiration and helps employees find talents and skills that they sometimes didn't even know that they had. Mobility focuses on getting the right people to the right jobs and the right jobs to the right people, and the ability to tap into global labor pools through remote work and bridging skills gaps will help companies unlock the potential of their workforce.

L: Language and culture. Even with the rise in remote work, language and cultural skills remain important—perhaps even more important as we communicate via video tools and other technology in which meaning and tone can often be lost.

M: Mortgages. Low mortgage rates around the world should make buying a house attractive to anyone, including expats. Many lenders are also working to simplify the process for noncomplex purchases to help deals proceed through to completion.

N: Nomads. It seems a safe bet that in 2021, there will be more demand for digital nomads as remote work continues. According to a report by Forbes in early 2020, 4.8 million Britons identified as self-employed and 57 million Americans identified as freelancers—well before COVID-19. Some are predicting that 2021 is the year when growth in the digital nomad lifestyle will explode, and these nomads are expected to enjoy more job opportunities and more tech tools to ease their way.

O: Orientation and onboarding. The new remote work environment means that traditional



Compliance—and COVID-19

A closer look at immigration and taxes in 2021

Every country is different in how it handles expats working from home, and it's easy to see why countries and companies want to keep track of where an expat is working. For instance, if you have a Canadian employee working in Switzerland but taking a lengthy trip to Ireland to care for ailing parents in the evening and work during the day, what country is entitled to the taxes on the employee's wages? If your employee becomes injured on the job and wants the employer to pay for those injuries, was the expat really on the job if he or she was staying with parents?

That may be an unlikely hypothetical, but you get the point. Compliance questions are going to come up in 2021—and beyond—says Johnie Townsend, tax manager at KPMG, a global network of professional firms providing audit, tax, and advisory services. "With so many people being able to work remotely and productively outside the traditional brick-and-mortar workplace, employers have seen an uptick in requests from employees to move to more desirable living locations," she says. "This—coupled with the competition for talent—will force employers to consider allowing for some form of 'working from anywhere.'"

Working anywhere sounds great, and it is, but it can create headaches for human resource departments and other professionals.

"In certain cases, this can create significant individual, payroll, and corporate tax consequences, along with new compliance requirements, that employers will need to evaluate and assess," Townsend says. "In addition, employers will need to create some governance, processes, and policies to manage these 'work anywhere' requests."

Of course, compliance questions were already an issue in the relocation space. "For the last decade, there have been quite a few studies about how the new generation of employees put less value in traditional methods of work and more in having flexibility at work that allows them to have a full and

varied life," Townsend says, adding, "The pandemic thrust this evolution into warp speed."

Immigration will likely be even more of a challenge for the relocation industry as well. Immigration authorities in some countries are scrutinizing expats' work permits and work visas more closely than ever. Granted, many countries fervently *want* expats working in their country as a boost to the economy, but because of the pandemic devastating many other nations' location economies and creating high unemployment, some governments may make it harder for corporations to transfer employees—if it's believed that local employees can do the job that expats are doing.

Some affluent expats—to get around the limitations some countries are imposing—are actually applying for a second citizenship in order to obtain a second passport. For example, it's been estimated that applications from United Arab Emirates expats for second passports in 2020 shot up by 30%.

As a result of these many complications, demand is increasing for integrated services to streamline an employee's transition overseas, taking into account their family's unique circumstances. Global mobility professionals will need to aim to bring immigration, tax, and relocation service providers together to help manage these issues and work toward ensuring a more streamlined process, according to Erickson Immigration Group. This will not only ease compliance issues, but it will also boost employee experience, another area of focus for the new year. According to Salman Cheema, Erickson Immigration Group managing attorney – international practice, "When immigration, tax, and relocation teams work together, facilitated by in-house global mobility, employees—and their families—feel cared for and supported through one of the biggest changes in their personal and professional life, with the end result being a focused, engaged, and retained employee and family."

orientation and onboarding processes must transform. Technology has become essential in smoothing the introduction to a new organization, allowing new hires to continue to experience company culture—one key to employee

satisfaction and retention. A little creativity helps, too: Personalized swag bags and other deliverable content or scheduled chats with employees from all parts of the organization are two ideas companies can employ.

P: Policies. It's almost a given that policies will be evolving more rapidly than ever in 2021, as corporations continue to mitigate the coronavirus. The policies that will change the most rapidly will likely involve the transferee's family, with family concerns about safety and children's education often dictating whether an expat wants to stay with or leave an assignment. But changes will be at every corner. Since July 2020, for instance, Singapore has twice tightened rules around employment visas for foreigners by raising minimum salaries. The coming year looks no less complicated.

Q: EQ-CQ-IQ. These were important in the past and will continue to be in the future. EQ refers to emotional intelligence; CQ, cultural intelligence; and IQ, ordinary intelligence. Anyone working in a global environment must have all three in order to succeed—especially with increased stress and anxiety around work and family. Expats in particular need these skills to adapt in a new location.

R: RFPs. Generally, at the beginning of a move, a company will ask a relocation company for a request for proposal. RFPs are commonplace as companies continue to look for great partners to help them manage their mobile workforce. Pending the virus, RFPs should be on the rise as companies and employees slowly return to a more normal style of work and reevaluate their policies and how they fit into their new business normal. At the same time, procurement departments at corporations are getting more involved in negotiations and vetting, while service providers are trying to streamline the process.

S: Software. Technology and new software are continuing to change the mobility landscape and elevate the employee experience. Tech tools are enabling us to transform how we identify diverse talent, manage performance, upskill employees, prepare expats and families for relocation, manage compliance, and so much more.

T: Taxes. 2020 and 2021 are going to be heavy years around tax compliance. While governments lifted some restrictions on when individuals were liable or not for tax payments—based on their time in a country due to the pandemic—this may not continue. Companies will need to be vigilant in knowing where their employees are located. Remote work and

distributed workforces will also add complexities in tracking employees globally and the tax obligations that may be associated with them from a personal and corporate tax perspective.

U: Untapped talent (including diversity, equity, and inclusion). As companies everywhere wake up to the need for systemic change in order to embed diversity, equity, and inclusion into their day-to-day practices, those changes will likely reveal untapped talent. Often, you have the right person for the job within a company—or if you consider relocating them to the job site where you need them.

V: Vendors. Vendors within the mobility ecosystem continue to partner in order to further the industry and the role we play in the support of talent globally.

W: Worldwide. The world may have changed, but global markets will continue, and companies still will need to rely on global talent. As we continue to navigate ongoing changes due to the pandemic and other disruptive events, Worldwide ERC® remains at the forefront of where work is going.

X: Expenses and flexibility. For the foreseeable future, expenses and budgets are going to be prone to dramatic change as travel restrictions may change on the spur of the moment or flights may be canceled. Relocation professionals will need to stay nimble, and their clients are going to need to stay informed and to be conditioned to expect the unexpected.

Y: YP40. Mobility professionals under 40 will want to connect with Worldwide ERC's Young Professionals Under 40, or YP40, group. This dynamic community helps young relocation and mobility professionals build relationships with each other and industry experts—to establish mentorships, build networks, and deepen everyone's careers.

Z: Gen Z. For this newest generation of expats and relocation professionals—born in the mid-1990s to about 2010—it's essential that managers understand what drives Gen Z, including smart technology, work-life balance, and learning styles that lean on collaboration and hands-on methods. *m*

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Focus on Employee Experience

Including families, the impact of software and technology, and DE&I

Fortunately, says Lisa Johnson, the director of world mobility consulting services for Crown World Mobility, the employee experience in 2021 looks to be much better than in 2020, with several improvements likely in store.

Technology will help companies be even more flexible. Johnson thinks that once vaccines begin to eliminate danger from social interactions, many corporations will even be less stringent about where work is done, as long as it gets done and any compliance issues are addressed. "It's easy to think about all the things that we've been missing in the pandemic, but I've been able to find a lot of silver linings, and one of those that stands out is the added flexibility that working remotely has given people," Johnson says. "I think the lockdowns have given some companies that were hesitant about letting people work from home willingness to be more flexible going forward."

Global employee relocation management software is also going to help mobility professionals, especially with staying compliant and ensuring that, for instance, the paperwork of an expat on assignment doesn't go out of date before he or she returns home. According to Beroe, a procurement intelligence firm, the relocation management software market is currently at US\$31.5 billion and, before the pandemic started, was forecast to grow more than 3% to 4% in 2021. That mobility professionals are more reliant than ever on technology may mean there will be even more growth.

More attention devoted to assignees—and their families—regarding mental health. "To me, employee experience falls under the duty-of-care umbrella, and I think that evolved a lot in 2020," Johnson says. "Companies had to focus on duty of care, including mental health and well-being."

She feels that going forward this year and beyond, it's going to be easier for companies to talk about mental health and the fact that after uprooting their lives, assignees may struggle—since as a result of the pandemic, people may be more open to discussing these issues, which will be a positive change for the transferees and the relocation professionals or corporate executives who work with them.

She cites, for example, mental health webinars that are becoming more common in the industry,

24-hour help hotlines that were set up for assignees during the early days of the pandemic when everybody was on edge, and more frequent discussions about how to reduce stress for assignees.

"The last year has been a difficult experience for everybody, and I think we're in a much more comfortable space in how we support mental health," says Johnson, who believes the conversation about mental health in the relocation industry is 10 years ahead of where we might have been without the pandemic. "We're more focused than ever on the well-being of assignees and their families, and that's exciting to me."

Opportunities for more transferees, which helps everyone. Johnson points out that 2020 wasn't *only* about the coronavirus.

"The social justice movement that ignited from the killing of George Floyd wasn't just a U.S. experience. It triggered a response from other countries and global companies. CEOs stood up and said, 'We need to do more.'"

Johnson thinks this won't go away in 2021. She cites research that Crown did in the waning days of 2019 before all of this happened, that showed that while most companies recognized that diversity, equity, and inclusion was a critical priority, most mobility teams don't have a diversity focus in their programs. Mobility teams will need to start adding that component because research shows that having international experience can help professionals get ahead. Having diversity programs embedded in mobility strategies would help further that goal.

But DE&I would also help companies become innovation hubs. When you have a wide mix of people with varied backgrounds, knowledge, contacts, and values, spread out around the world, those corporations' brain trusts arguably have far more depth and substance than companies that are more limited.

"I'm looking for those companies that focus on diversity in their mobility programs to lead our industry, to lead loudly, and say, 'Let's make this a mandate.' I think a lot of people would be very excited about that," Johnson says.

Whether that happens in 2021 or not, Johnson says, "I don't see this social justice movement going away."