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Now, Next and Beyond

Global Mobility's response
to COVID-19

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Contact

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The RES Forum is an independent, highly engaged and international community of senior in-house International Human Resources professionals with more than 1600 members in over 45 countries. We are not influenced by external parties or third-party vendors. We share information to make our working lives easier and to assist in solving difficult work challenges. We collaborate on shared projects and initiatives, and we learn together. Our agenda, set entirely by our membership, is delivered through a spectrum of services, including data analytics, Global Mobility and International HR thought leadership and advanced learning and accreditation programmes in the area of Global Mobility management.

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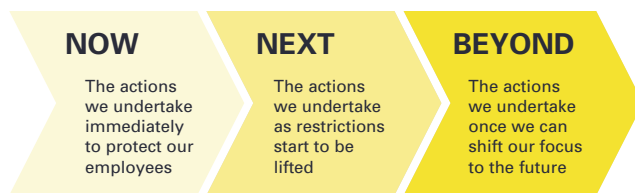
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Introduction

Welcome to our first piece of thought leadership in cooperation with The RES Forum, the first of a number to come.

At EY we are reflecting on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on Global Mobility in 3 phases:



The minority of EY clients expect to return to business as usual in the “next” and “beyond” phases. The majority believe that COVID-19 will have a material impact on their mobility programme in terms of strategy, volumes, mobility types, organisation and delivery.

For the purposes of this executive summary we have structured our thoughts around the 8 drivers from our EY Mobility Transformation offering, incorporating our EY point of view, as well as indicative trends based on firm-wide client conversations.

TALENT

We believe we will see a stronger integration between workforce planning and global mobility. This means that organisations will look at multiple ways to acquire, manage and deploy their mobile talent, leveraging a range of virtual working, business travel, and foreign assignments. Mobility types may be mixed, with perhaps some short-term assignments replaced by virtual working combined with intermittent business trips. We expect a realignment and fusion of all mobility types, meaning that the mobility professional’s role will become broader, more complex, and more integrated across mobility types in the “beyond”.

ORGANIZATION

Due to repatriations, the flux in current assignee numbers and uncertainty as to future mobile employee volumes many organisations are struggling to manage scalability. Already trending prior to COVID-19, we are having multiple client conversations around managed services to scale Global Mobility organisations. The focus here is on increasing external supplier leverage for junior or “lower touch” programmes. We believe mobility will move to a patchwork of insourced, co-sourced and fully outsourced programs, distancing itself from any last vestiges of a “one-size-fits-all” service delivery approach.

PROGRAMME

Prior to COVID-19 we were consulting with clients on the need for virtual programmes to support talent acquisition efforts around scarce (often digital) skills. In the “next” and “beyond” phases we expect the desire for virtual mobility solutions to increase. This is due to post-COVID-19 caution around permanent relocation, embracing the positive aspects of virtual work experienced during lockdown, as well as generational and cost considerations.

PROCESS

We recommend you review what went well and what didn’t during the “now” phase, re-engineer processes accordingly and incorporate a (revised) crisis response plan. Efficiency, agility and extended timelines should be incorporated into any newly defined processes as we expect that future deployments will be more complex due to employee concerns, cost considerations and legislative challenges. Governments will require more paperwork on immunizations and medical status and will struggle with volumes.

TECHNOLOGY

In the world of “next” and “beyond” cost reduction will be a key driver. Beyond looking at pure demographics, this implies a change in the mobile employee experience, trending towards an increasingly technology-enabled approach with self-service. We expect a new golden age of HR tech with

increased usage of internal and external provider IT solutions and apps. Beyond assignment management technology, the broader corporate digital landscape will require enhancement to enable the increase in onshore/offshore virtual programmes described above.

DATA

In the “now” were you able to advise where all your mobile employees were, irrespective of mobility type? In the “next” and “beyond” will you be able to advise where they are, what they are doing, how they are performing and what they cost? We believe the days of Global Mobility being unable to provide costs per mobile employee and/or total costs across all mobile employees are now numbered.

PERFORMANCE

For EY, performance is about the internal brand of Global Mobility. In terms of the “now” how do you and your internal stakeholders rate yourselves in terms of having had a crisis plan in place, effective communications, successful repatriations, duty of care and “noise in the system”? In the “next” and “beyond” new legislation, integration across mobility types and employee caution will raise once again the performance bar for Global Mobility teams.

STRATEGY

At the heart of what we are saying is an almost certain requirement to review your mobility strategy. Is your mobility strategy still fit for purpose and aligned with a revised business and talent management landscape? External pressures such as protectionism and changing demographics, and internal pressures such as cost management, operational effectiveness and scalability, will impact your new strategy. Consider the drivers above to help define what your journey into the future in terms of the “next” and “beyond” may look like.

Please contact us to set up a virtual *EY Mobility Navigator workshop* which will help you in mapping where you are today on each of the drivers above, where you want to be after COVID-19, and which activities prioritized based on impact and urgency are required to get you there.

Finally potential compliance changes driven by COVID-19 should be mentioned.

The OECD Secretariat issued an Analysis of Tax Treaties and the Impact of the COVID-19 on 3 April 2020:

- **Permanent Establishment:** The analysis does not cover situations where individuals are working from the local office of a subsidiary in the host country where no COVID-19 restrictions apply, but due to restrictions the individual is unable to return to the home country.
- **Employment Income:** The analysis comments on the stimulus packages proposed by governments (such as wage subsidies to employers); however, it does not comment on the taxability of employment income for cross-border employees stranded due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- **Residence Status:** Tax administrations should consider a more reasonable period when assessing individual residence status due to exceptional circumstances created by the pandemic. Formal guidance should be issued such that unplanned days of presence in a given country do not impact residence status.
- **Social Security:** Where an individual has traveled to another country with a valid Certificate of Coverage due to expire during the period of COVID-19 disruption, local authorities should extend validity to cover the required period. Guidance is to be issued to ensure that the pandemic does not lead to unanticipated social security contributions.
- **Compliance Deadlines:** Competent authorities may undertake measures to ease corporate cash flow burden for statutory payments. Equally, deadlines for making such statutory payments may be extended, and penalties and interest for late filing or payment suspended.

We trust the above is helpful as an executive summary in terms of the “now, next and beyond”.

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Global Mobility's Response to COVID-19: Now, Next and Beyond

COVID-19 has led to a worldwide crisis and no global mobility (GM) department had foreseen the impact and sheer breadth of the current pandemic. This report looks at the COVID-19 crisis planning, GM action as well as short- and long-term impact of the pandemic and develops a range of highly pertinent insights and recommendations for action. Importantly, we design a GM COVID-19 crisis model that illuminates the now, next and beyond of global work in these unprecedented times.

With this survey, the RES Forum was among the very first to academically investigate how COVID-19 affects globally active companies. We reached out to the RES Forum members in March and April 2020 and received responses from 53 companies. This sample represents a variety of industries and essentially covers Global Mobility experts overseeing international assignees in almost all countries worldwide.

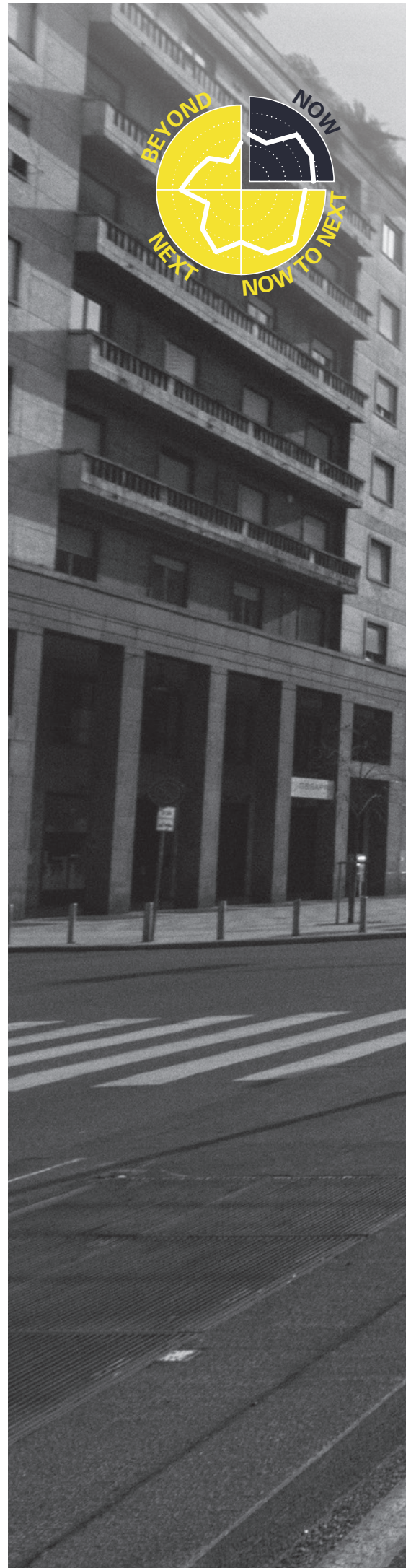
The survey was structured in four sections. Section 1 gained information about the situation now in terms of crisis planning. Section 2 investigated activities undertaken by multinational corporations (MNCs) to bring us from the now to the next in terms of crisis action. Section 3 focused on the next that allows us to assess the crisis impact in the short term. Section 4 explored the beyond to understand scenarios for the impact in the long term. Therefore, we could draw from a broad pool of knowledge that allowed us to develop a GM COVID-19 CRISIS MODEL underpinned by the rich data derived from the RES Forum member companies.

Now:

Crisis planning

The first part of the GM COVID-19 CRISIS MODEL starts in the “now” and consists of crisis planning. While some media was reporting about COVID-19 as early as December 2019, the magnitude of the crisis was quite a surprise to most of us. In fact, four in five respondents (79%) state that they were somewhat, moderately, or totally surprised, while only a minority of 5% state that they were not at all and another 15% only moderately surprised. To follow up on this, we have asked respondents to describe, in their own words, the current situation regarding COVID-19 in their company. Figure 1 illustrates, in a word cloud, the terms most-often used. When narrowing down all the statements, for most companies a similar picture can be drawn: many assignees have been repatriated, all business travel is on hold, and most people in the companies are working from home – wherever applicable. Some companies are already in a stage of business continuity; others are still working their way towards this goal.

Figure 1: Word cloud based on respondent's regarding COVID-19 in their organisation



About half of all companies (49%) have a major incident response policy in place that has now been employed while another 28% developed one following the COVID-19 outbreak. While only a minority (6%) has no policy in place, the remaining companies are either still developing or modifying and adapting their policies, for instance, implementing social distancing regulations, office rotation schedules, or providing face masks. It is worthwhile to add that some, mainly small, companies do not have a policy intentionally as they prefer to handle international employees on a case-by-case basis.

When looking at the reach of the major incident response, our data show that 43% of companies have a global policy in place. Another 14% implemented a regional policy, 35% work on a country-by-country basis and the remainder uses a mix of the three. Interestingly, the limitations of a global policy become apparent in some companies. For instance, some assignees refused to repatriate when they were in a country where health provision is perceived as superior to their home country. On the contrary, others opted for emergency leave when they saw themselves confronted with a (potentially) dire medical situation in the host country.

In the current crisis, companies are taking their Duty of Care very seriously (see also RES Quarterly Report on Duty of Care, 2020). This is reassuring and demonstrates that health and safety of their global workforce has indeed a very high priority. Given

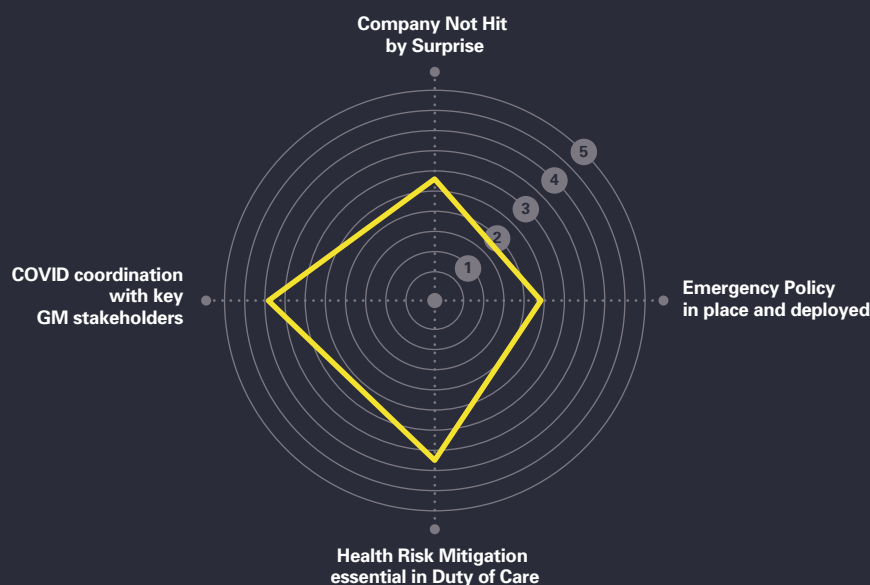
the importance of operational implementation, the strategic plans need to be coordinated with key GM stakeholders. Almost two in five companies (38%) have fully coordinated and implemented their COVID-19 plans with all key stakeholders with the rest having achieved a reasonable degree of coordination and implementation. Hence, with respect to COVID-19 crisis planning, we can depict an overview radar graphic that captures how prepared companies were when the crisis first hit them. Figure 2 outlines the extent and quality of COVID-19 planning and coordination.

It is clear that many companies were taken by surprise by the emergence of COVID-19 and that a substantial number of MNCs still need to fully develop and deploy their major incident response approaches. While the firm focus on Duty of Care was certainly helpful, some still need to intensify their coordination efforts. Only through this can they improve their crisis preparedness from which successful action should flow.

Key Messages

- **Less than half of MNCs (49%) have fully implemented a major incident response policy**
- **A solid Duty of Care programme before the crisis paid off in terms of switching to crisis mode**
- **COVID-19 coordination with key GM stakeholders is working well**

Figure 2: The COVID-19 CRISIS ACTION FRAMEWORK – NOW: Crisis Planning



From now to next: Crisis action



Having looked at the initial response to the crisis planning and the immediate next steps, we now turn to (strategic) crisis action. In particular, we explore the details of the policies implemented from a Global Mobility perspective, which takes us on the journey from “now to next”. Figure 3 shows the level of implementation for six of those policies and procedures. First, our data demonstrates a very mixed picture regarding the implementation of COVID-19 crisis policies and procedures specifically developed for Global Mobility. About one quarter (26%) has not or has hardly implemented such procedures, while 21% report somewhat, 25% widely, and 28% full implementation. In other words, about half of the companies has already strongly acted to account for the specific needs around Global Mobility, while the other half is lagging somewhat behind. The strongest area of crisis action, offered and fully implemented by close to two thirds of companies (61%), is providing medical insurance and medical assistance programmes to globally mobile staff.

In order to get a better understanding of the hierarchy of processes, we asked our respondents to verbalise, from their own perspective, what in their companies the top 3 aspects to manage the COVID-19 crisis are. The most prominent are switching to remote work and suspending business travel. Aspects also include the implementation of additional policies that support their staff and global assignees during the period of the pandemic crisis, provision of more support as well as implementation of business continuity plans. One notable aspect is that quite a number of companies have altered their remuneration policies to ensure people are actually taking time off when they are sick and allowing for extended leave and flexible work hours if the personal situation of the assignee requires it. What is interesting though are the differences in ranking and prioritisation. In fact, while all companies are dealing

with the same problems, the urgency of measures is indeed different and reflects how companies decided to strategically react to the crisis. Further pertinent information to help prioritise the risk response areas and activities could be gleaned through choosing a data-driven approach, actually quantifying risk.

“This has changed as the situation has worsened. At first it was all non-essential travel, but it is now all travel suspended as countries close borders and implement restrictions”

Senior Global Mobility Manager, EMEA.

Many companies have enhanced their communication. A pressing question is whether people currently (still) on assignment are actually “receiving” this message. To be more precise, we wanted to know how respondents perceive the quality of communication in relation to COVID-19. While a little more than half (57%) report a (very) high quality, 40% believe that communication is only moderate or even worse (4%). Especially those with a subpar communication quality argue that the amount of communication is simply too high and that they have scaled back in order for assignees to not be overloaded.

Having a closer look at travel suspension shows that in two thirds of all companies (67%), all business

Figure 3: Level of implementation of policies and procedures



Figure 4: Impact of COVID-19 on international assignments

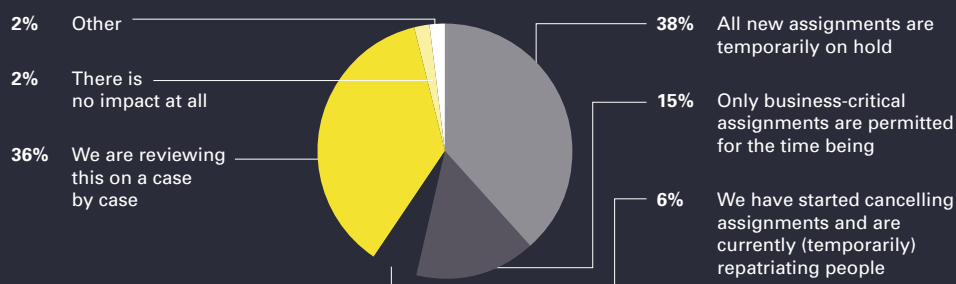
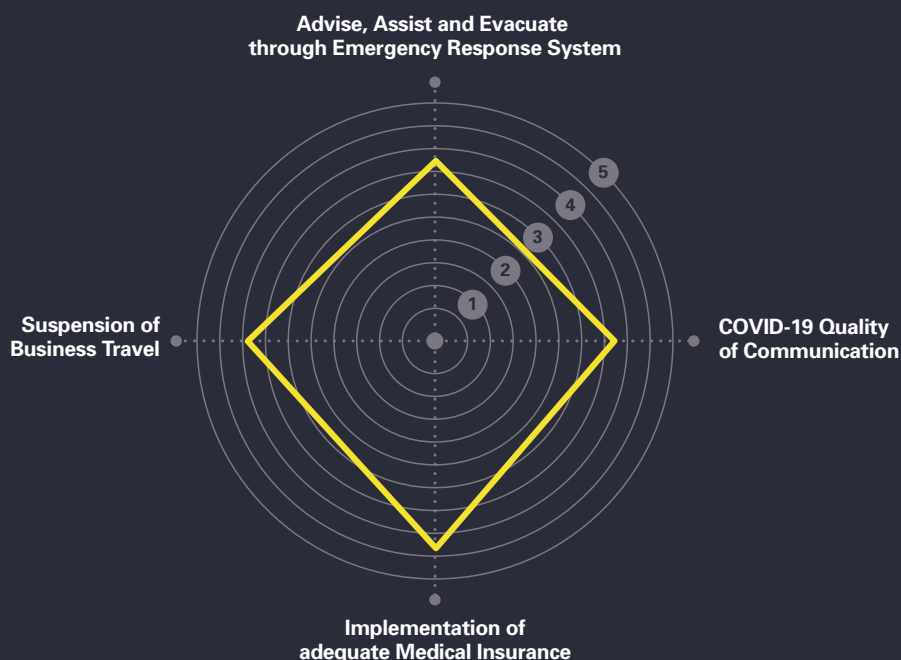


Figure 5: The COVID-19 CRISIS ACTION FRAMEWORK – FROM NOW TO NEXT: Crisis Action



travel, nationally and internationally, was stopped. 15% are somewhat more lenient, allowing staff to travel for business-critical missions and another 12% suspended all international travel but allow for some domestic travel. In terms of duration of the travel suspension, in almost all cases this was “until further notice”. However, there seems to be consensus that this mainly depends on governmental regulations and, therefore, is out of the companies’ control.

One of the major implications the COVID-19 crisis has on Global Mobility is certainly the impact on current and planned assignments, as Figure 4 depicts. In fact, only 4% report that there is no or minimal impact.

In almost two out of five companies, all new assignments are currently on hold, while approximately one in six only allow business-critical assignments to start or continue. Moreover, one in twenty have started to cancel all assignments, current and planned, and are (temporarily) repatriating people. About one third applies a mix of approaches, reviewing case by case.

Our COVID-19 CRISIS ACTION figure shows that companies have been by and large successful in the implementation of adequate medical assistance and insurance. However, our model reveals that there are still some substantial gaps when looking at whether and how firms have advised, assisted and evacuated their international workers through their emergency response systems. It seems clear that where MNCs did not plan well enough and/or were caught out by the emergence of the pandemic that they perceived gaps. In addition, the quality of communication could be improved. Interestingly, while many companies have suspended all international and domestic business travel, some are continuing to allow business critical journeys, even internationally.

Key Messages

- **About half of the companies are lagging in the development of suitable action addressing the specific needs of Global Mobility in the pandemic**
- **Two thirds completely suspended all business travel, nationally and internationally**
- **MNCs need to concentrate more on the quality of communication and their emergency response**



Next: crisis impact in the short-term



Turning from corporate to individual reactions, we now investigate the “next” crisis reaction by stakeholders, concentrating on short-term impact. Focusing on key stakeholders, we wanted to know from Global Mobility experts in which areas they see the highest risk of negative mental health effects affecting international assignees due to COVID-19. Overall, respondents indicate that in most companies there is considerable risk for all areas, albeit with some variation depending on the company and specific area. The lowest percentage of companies expecting high and extreme risk related to increased alcohol consumption and substance abuse, with 29% and 26%, respectively. The biggest concern, on the contrary, is worries about family, where 86% see a high or extreme risk to negatively impact assignees’ mental health. The risk of the remaining categories is somewhere in between, for details please refer to Figure 6.

COVID-19 and the resulting lockdowns and governmental measures have had a tremendous impact on the global economy and this certainly affects the companies in our sample in general. The survey found that two thirds (65%) of companies believe that COVID-19 negatively affects international assignees in terms of them achieving Global Mobility objectives. One can expect a range of knock-on effects with respect to the perceived importance of global work or the recruitment and selection of assignees. Broader implications of this volatile and uncertain environment with regard to company and industry-wide GM effects are discussed in the conclusions.

Notably, a number of respondents indicated that the impact right now is moderate, but with regard to the huge uncertainty it is hard to impossible to predict whether and in what direction this may change.

We also asked Global Mobility experts to assess the risk of potential negative impact on five of areas (see

Figure 6: Risk associated with various areas on assignee mental health

Feeling insecure and vulnerable



Worries about level of medical assistance and health standards



Being in an unfamiliar environment during a crisis time



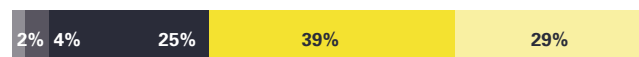
Excessive stress and workload due to the crisis situation



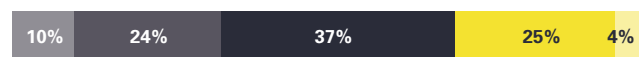
Worry about family



Feelings of loneliness and isolation



Increase consumption of alcohol



Increased risk of substance abuse



- 1 - Not implemented
- 2 - Somewhat implemented
- 3 - Somewhat implemented
- 4 - Fully implemented
- 5 - Fully implemented



Figure 7). First, there is certainly a high to extreme risk of higher regulatory measures (like enforced isolation), with more than half of the companies (55%) mentioning this. In a similar vein, 54% believe that the ability to build local networks will be lower. Moreover, one third (33%) hold that the ability to perform the job will be lower and 31% expect that due to incomplete and/or changing information from the company, assignees will be dissatisfied. Finally, one quarter (25%) predict that COVID-19 will lead to a lower ability to adapt to foreign cultures. These are quite severe risks and it is essential to closely monitor this development in order to be able to mitigate these effects before they fully unfold.

Finally, we turn to global service vendor organisations and to what extent the cooperation with them is impacted by COVID-19. Overall, the effects are rather limited. For two thirds (67%) there is no or minimal negative impact, for one quarter (24%) the impact is somewhat negative. Only 8% report a high and significant negative impact.

The COVID-19 CRISIS IMPACT (NEXT: short-term) part of our crisis model clearly shows that there is a high risk to the mental health of global workers. They experience a large degree of excessive stress in relation to the coronavirus pandemic, worry about health and family and also experience loneliness and isolation, perhaps at a much greater rate than domestic employees. Firms are called to rethink their communication, integration and psychological support mechanisms to help their assignees. Given the impact on employee wellbeing, it is not surprising that GM experts also believe that assignee performance with respect to their cultural adjustment, networking abilities and job performance will suffer. In turn, experts see little negative impact of their company's cooperation with GM service vendors. In fact, some have commented that they find their outsourcing service providers very helpful in this time of crisis.

Key Messages

- **More than two thirds of MNCs see a high or extreme risk for assignees' mental health**
- **Two thirds believe there is no or only a minimal effect on their cooperation with global service vendor organisations**
- **About one third expects a decrease in assignee satisfaction due to incomplete and/or changing information from the company**

Figure 7: General risk associated with various areas

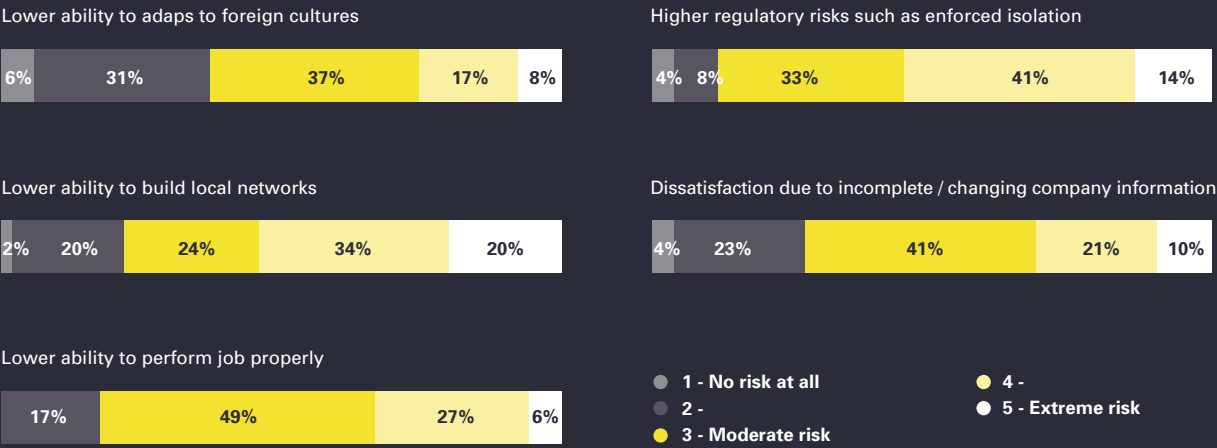


Figure 8: The COVID-19 CRISIS ACTION FRAMEWORK – NEXT: Crisis Impact (short-term)



Beyond:

Crisis impact in the long-term



Overall, companies have the impression that their current measures to manage COVID-19 are reasonably successful. About half (51%) think that these are somewhat successful while the rest believe that they have an even more positive impact. Therefore, it is now time to look at the “beyond” of the COVID-19 crisis, exploring the situation in the near- and long-term. In terms of negative effects in one year’s time there is generally little information and great insecurity. However, the effects are, by a majority of organisations, seen as somewhat negative (53%) with another 29% expecting that these might be even more negative. In other words, what we experience right now may only be the thin end of the wedge.

Looking even further into the future, in one to three years when the coronavirus pandemic has been officially declared as “over”, we see that many companies are predicting a lasting effect.

“Cost awareness will increase and the number of assignments will be reduced”

VP Global Mobility EMEA

The results show that more than four in five respondents (82%) anticipate a moderate to significant effect of increased use of virtual work. In addition, three quarters (76%) believe that business travel will reduce, half that short term assignments will decrease (52%) and a slightly higher share (58%) that long term assignments will be less frequent.

These effects seem to be driven by a better capability and willingness to work virtually, by cost drivers

that are likely to become more important and by risk management considerations. Ultimately, they may affect the mindset of organisations and are likely to lead to a rethinking of global work, its costs, risks and benefits.

“I do not believe that ‘business as usual’ will return. We are talking about how to apply the positive learnings from this in changing how we work.”

Senior Global Mobility Manager, North America

Finally, moving beyond Global Mobility, do GM experts believe that their business models and operating approaches will change as a result of COVID-19? About half do not envisage any changes to their international operations or supply chains.

However, about a third see moderate changes and 34% think that there will be a decrease of international operations. Furthermore, a third argues that there will be more local sourcing and a stronger drive to diversify risks for instance through increasing the number of suppliers.

The long-term COVID-19 crisis impact, exploring the “beyond”, is seen to be substantial and might lead to a radical rethinking of global work approaches. While there was a substantial variance on when the respondents thought that a resemblance of ‘normality’ would reoccur in their organisations – the span was

from July 2020 to 2025 – many argued that ‘business as usual’ would never return. In fact, some held the belief that even before COVID-19, for them the concept of business as usual did not exist anymore.

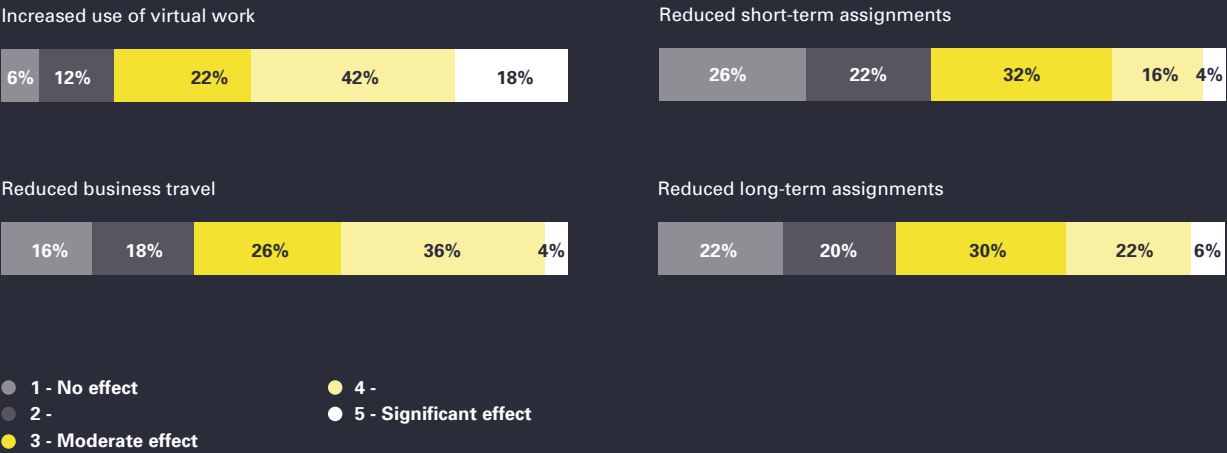
While few experts believed that their company would have a substantial decrease of international operations in the long term, many thought that virtual work in particular will increase substantially in the next one to three years. This might replace, to some extent, international business travel and short as well as long-term assignments. While it is difficult to imagine that global assignments will cease, we may well see substantial modifications in how and why global work will be undertaken. In the next section we integrate the COVID-19 GM crisis model and develop some propositions for the future of global work.

Key Messages

- **Use of virtual work will experience a moderate to significant increase in more than 80% of all companies**
- **76% believe that business travel will be reduced even long beyond the crisis**
- **A bit more than half predict a drop in short and long term assignments, respectively**



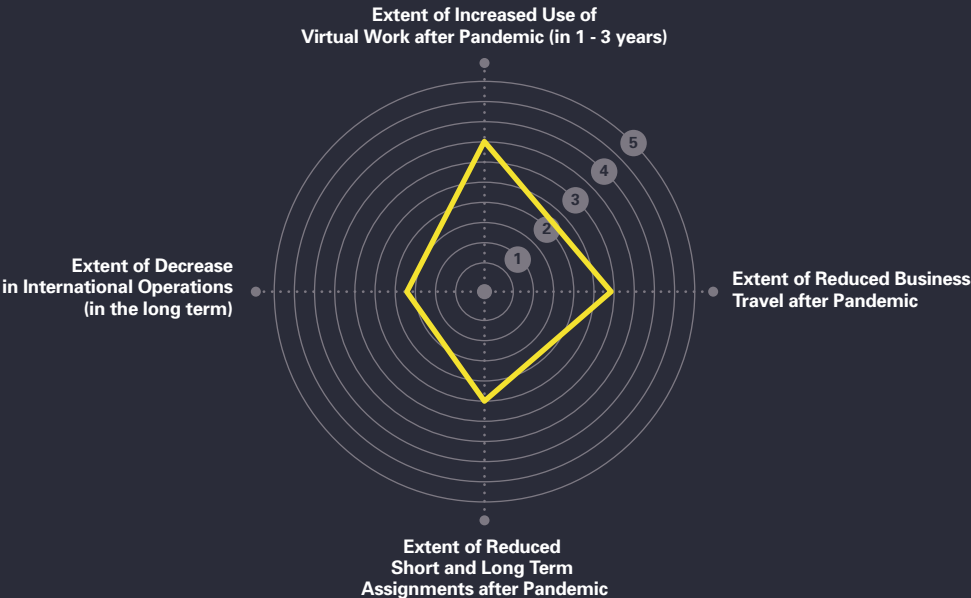
Figure 9: Expected effects of COVID-19 in the near future



“I would hope that we are better adapted to working virtually”.

VP Cross-Border Employment, APAC

Figure 10: The COVID-19 CRISIS ACTION FRAMEWORK – BEYOND: Crisis Impact (long-term)



Shaping the beyond – insights and actions for the future

This report has compiled data and insights into the COVID-19 crisis and how it has affected Global Mobility. We have looked at four phases of GM crisis management that included planning, action, short- and long-term impacts. Combining the data results in the framework depicted in Figure 11 allows us to make sense of the now, next and beyond phases of mastering a major crisis such as COVID-19.

Now: Crisis Planning

How MNCs have designed their major incident response policies in the past allows them to operationalise these successfully for challenges today. While it was

obviously hard to not be taken by surprise by COVID-19, where companies had laid the groundwork for crisis planning well, they had a better chance to have their emergency policies in place, coordinated with their key stakeholders and successfully deployed. A recent RES Forum report on hostile environments – which incorporated psychological, institutional and physical dangers – depicted the various forms of threats to the health and welfare of assignees (The RES Forum, 2020). In addition, the Duty of Care report allows firms to integrate best practices in their GM programme planning. Overall, we expect MNCs to review and refine their GM planning with a particular focus on physical and mental wellbeing.

Figure 11: The GM CRISIS FRAMEWORK



From Now To Next: Crisis Action

The focus in the COVID-19 crisis up to now has been primarily about action to manage and alleviate the current challenges. Those companies that had done their homework in the past are most likely to be in a better position to advise, assist and evacuate where necessary and to provide adequate medical assistance and insurance. Indeed, their communication activities will have benefited from the advanced planning and increased clarity of crisis reaction and options. Nevertheless, the RES Forum data shows that crisis action could have been better – perhaps understandably in a situation that is shaped by high degrees of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA). The current crisis is a wake-up call to assess corporate and GM actions during times of COVID-19 and how to refine crisis action. It will also give pointers as to the degree to which global processes are suitable in a crisis that has many local facets and depends on local health systems and government regulations. Cross-sector learning – e.g. from the aid sector or medical/pharmaceutical organizations – is likely to be beneficial.

“I envisage a golden era for choice and efficiency in relation to many GM services. This will mean the rise of GM Technology Providers and the fall of traditional GM intermediaries.”

David Enser, RES Forum

Next: Crisis Impact In The Short-Term

The data clearly shows that global assignees suffer from excessive stress, worry about their family and may feel lonely and isolated. In addition, their job performance and cultural adjustment are called into question. For the time immediately after countries relax their COVID-19 restrictions such as social distancing, MNCs may need to intensify their efforts to integrate and provide more psychological support to global workers. However, this needs to be handled in a sensitive way and an assessment should take place with regard to the actual

local situation. It might be that individuals simply want to have more flexible time to meet up with friends and wider family or go onto holidays. Given that business activities are likely to ramp up substantially in the immediate aftermath of COVID-19 there needs to be a sensible balancing of conflicting pressures.

Beyond: Crisis Impact In The Long-Term

The data gives a fascinating glimpse into the long-term effects of COVID-19 on Global Mobility. The experts expect a reduction in traditional forms of working abroad as an assignee and less extensive business travel. In turn, the massive expansion of virtual work that we currently experience is seen to carry over, albeit probably in a reduced form, into the future. The likely areas that are impacted strongly include global and local talent and leadership development, organisation-wide career planning as well as succession systems. Moreover, technology investments are likely to be ramped up. For instance, assignee tracking may become even more important and as firms move to forms of ‘blended assignments’ (more virtual interaction and global work potentially being done by people only part time in their host destination(s)) more effort will go into technology that will enable them to work more effectively. Additionally, it is likely that companies pay (even) more attention to other GM areas in which they can use technology, for instance GM and cultural training or how to streamline GM processes by using platforms that bundle GM services and/or by going directly to local providers, thereby cutting out intermediaries. We are likely to see a substantial impact on GM departments and their work. These may trigger further developments if the changes are deemed to be increasing the effectiveness or efficiency of international work. However extensive these changes will turn out to be, they will necessitate an improved skillset of GM professionals. These are indeed dynamic and challenging times for Global Mobility. In order to lead the way into these times, we offer five action steps.

Action steps

1 (Re)consider your future GM strategy

More than half of the companies in this report predict a fundamental change in international assignments, both short-term and long-term. The implications going along with this are massive and will rattle an entire industry. Although this prediction is very much looking at the “beyond” of the COVID-19 crisis, right now is the time start thinking about what this change will mean for you, your business model, and your company in general. Now is the time to lay the strategic groundwork for the future.

2 Think digital

Our report shows it and your daily work routine shows it too: digital communication digital communication is going through the roof. The COVID-19 crisis has surely taken the use of digital communication media and other digital technologies to a new level. And while implemented on a large scale during a crisis, many of these tools will not go away afterwards. Therefore, it is now time to truly think digital. What are the processes you think cannot be digitalized and why? What are the barriers against digitalization in your company? These and other questions need to be answered right now in order to exploit the current momentum and, perhaps, shift from a “participant” to a true leader in the use of digital technologies.

3 Prepare an emergency plan with different scenarios

COVID-19 has shown that even the most unthinkable scenarios of yesterday may be facing MNCs today. A major learning from this crisis should be, as confirmed by our data, that those who have a plan will be in a much better position to act rather than just react. A solid emergency plan that accounts for different scenarios and defines what is to be done when and by whom may not be the blueprint to master every crisis. However, it puts companies in a much better position when the crisis hits.

4 Define “business critical” in times of normality, not calamity

A term that is used very regularly these days is “business critical”. Whether it is related to investments that can or cannot be done or travel that is suspended or permitted – if it is business critical, it has better chances to be executed. Not surprisingly, many stakeholders claim it for their endeavour. However, what actually is business critical, what is “just important”, and what can wait? This surely varies from company to company. However, defining it in times of normality will help in times of calamity as this prevents from having to take these key decisions hastily and under pressure.

5 Re-think your communication

Communication is key and especially in VUCA times, communication may transmit crucial information. However, many companies are at a point where their workforce is bombarded with communication and at some point it may be simply too much. People get overloaded and do not distinguish between truly important and less important information. A good communication quality, however, has been shown to be beneficial and right now, after the first weeks of crisis are over, may be a good time to re-visit your communication strategy and potentially make some changes.

Closing comments

Looking back at the last month, the last week, even the last days, the world as we know it is under threat; our way of living and working, of travelling, of not travelling, of collaborating with others, has already changed, perhaps forever.

At the same time, spontaneous clapping and cheering erupted through the streets of European capitals as people, isolated in their apartments or walking the streets at a safe distance, find strength and optimism in this simple collective gesture.

Great learning and positive action can come of crisis and upheaval – as such, the RES Forum remains resolute of belief in the uniqueness of our mobility industry and academia-acknowledged research agenda – giving full answers, industry and academia-backed, to the provocative questions as the Future of Work unfolds before us.

Operationally, in our age of digitalization, when faced with global crises, when data is paramount, how do so many organizations continue to struggle to master the topic as the world around us transforms?

What learnings can be found via engaging with RES members as to future tools and technologies that would make a positive impact on global working, collaboration and managing complex employee groups?

How do organizations deliver a compelling EVP to an ever increasingly diverse workforce, cutting across age, gender and ethnicity, perhaps newly wary of taking risks and being away from familiar networks and contacts?

How might we more broadly identify and mitigate employment risk in a hostile environment beyond the traditional perspective of terrorism and physical threats?

How should organizations collaborate with foreign subsidiaries as the world becomes more locally focused?



To hear how other organisations are mitigating and responding to this crisis, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gok7BiToCq4>

For the full RES Forum Live ep1 see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymypre5hWG0>

The raising of the importance of the role of GM professional continues to provide fruitful discourse - the world has become infinitely more complex, and within this new reality GM professionals can and do occupy unique roles as strategic advisors in challenging times.

Risk aware, financially and fiscally accountable, compliance-conscious, with employee-centric design skills, entrepreneurial communicators with a penchant for languages and a flair for all things foreign.

Sometimes this can mean finding new problems arising from old questions, such as how technology and digitalization can enhance our working world, help employees to seek out experiences on offer, protect our global employees and facilitate positive outcomes.

RES Forum's own technology agenda continues to be the most exciting stage of our growth to date – ConnectedGM.

- Digital innovation in managing employee experience, duty of care and complex compliance matters for cross-border employees
- Providing the tools to enable GM functions to elevate their role to the Strategic Advisory, and to influence and govern as their strategic value benefits. Smartly. Agilely. Flawlessly, Efficiently. SAFElly

We believe in combining the core skills of RES Forum – deep experience of HR leadership, organizational culture as well as HR & GM operations – with insights from our global RES Forum membership to co-create the future of digital GM

We will continue to bring innovation and change in HR practice through the combination of the risk, policy and practice insight of RES Forum and the evolutionary, compliance-centric and efficiency-led technologies of ConnectedGM.

David Enser
RES Forum Partner
Munich, May 2020



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