

# The Changing Role of Talent Mobility in the New “Normal”

*Without the special circumstances surrounding a worldwide pandemic, global mobility often acts behind the scenes. The functions of global mobility — deploying and enabling talent effectively—can drastically impact growth, yet are often overlooked.*



As Vice President, Global Talent Mobility, Asia-Pacific, Rob directs a broad spectrum of activity, leading some of the region’s most complex outsourced corporate relocation engagements, driving operational excellence and account relationships for key clients. Throughout the past decade, engagements under Rob’s direction have won multiple industry and client awards. In addition, he is responsible for Cartus Asia’s Moving Services business, all India service hub activity and multi-location operational teams for Cartus.

Global mobility teams, in-house and outsourced, can enable world-recognised business success. While many aspects have undeniably changed due to COVID-19, it is important to recall the key—and frequently unsung—deliverables of global mobility:

Recruitment Optimization—Timelines and Practicalities	Consistency in the Employee Experience	Risk Mitigation in Establishment of New Geographies	Global Talent Strategy Execution
Cost visibility, understanding and control	Global organizational skills (cultural acuity) development	Leadership development and stewardship	Repatriation management
Goal focus for assignments	Compliance gatekeeping	Retaining top talent	Business advisory (e.g. immigration and taxation)

In the last six months, the impact of the pandemic has restricted movement and swiftly closed off international borders.

Organisations have turned to expert advice on mobility, immigration, international taxation, and international HR in order to understand national responses and how they impact their business’s most important asset—its people.

The function of global mobility, thrust into the spotlight, has a fundamental role in designing what is frequently deemed the “new normal.”

## Macro Reality

**Highly regulated travel between countries or regions**

**Remote working is mandated for the majority; working in shared office space is suspended to varying degrees**

**Re-shaping business forecasts through alteration to product and service demand from customers**

**Reliance on global supply chains is called into question**

While there is ongoing discussion about what will happen “after the coronavirus is gone,” evidence-based dialogues are generally accepting of a future which includes SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for COVID-19.

This is evidenced by dramatic shifts in core business activities, most notably the closing of offices and working permanently from home. Agile adaptation, rather than watchful waiting, appears to be a smart course of action.

Global mobility as a function is becoming a beacon of hope for organisations in adaptation mode.

At a recent series of online events by Cartus Corporate Connections, senior global mobility leaders in Asia outlined key emerging trends and observations from within their sectors and organisations that are being driven by current circumstances. The four headline areas included:

- **Global workplace:** What is the overall strategy for adapting workplace arrangements?
- **Relocation travel:** How do organisations balance employee safety, business needs, and cost-control inside broader organisational strategies?
- **Talent development:** What is the new course of action for the development and mobilisation of employees?
- **Digital transformation:** How is technology modernisation being accelerated and what is its impact on the mobile workforce?

## Global Workforce

Government rules, safe social distancing, and the necessity to avoid group gatherings inform corporate decision-making. Organisations must reassess processes based on regulations in an ever-changing global landscape.

In order to determine long-term support, surveys have been conducted on short-term telecommuting and flexible working arrangements to determine mobile employee needs and opportunity areas.

The findings suggested that remote team management, employee wellness and health, new-hire onboarding, and leadership forums are the top considerations.

Also critical, but less so within the scope of global mobility, is ensuring that IT infrastructure is both practical and accessible and that the new hire experience remains comparable to programmes prior to COVID-19.

Mobile employees stranded in third-country locations, or even their home country, require support from several intertwined and co-dependent standpoints—logistical, compliance, and emotional.

Mobility teams monitor and assess the best way to get support and provide updates to leaders. Often, mobile employees are senior leaders with broad responsibilities, so understanding the latest immigration rules, quarantine requirements, and overall risks associated with movement is key to their business function.

The importance of collecting all relevant data from varied sources and advising the business accordingly is more prominent than ever before.

For example, an Indian national based in Singapore is stranded at another location due to border closings. It is essential to consider the following questions:

- What is the ‘permanent establishment’ risk of having them accomplish mission-critical regional work for six months?
- What should be done about their cost of living allowances and local property management?
- How can the cost of temporary accommodation be minimised, and how will their expired employment pass in Singapore be updated?
- How will the employee be affected by becoming distanced from their family?



## Travel

Fast and frequent modification of jurisdiction timing and rules will continue to occur. As employee safety and welfare remain paramount concerns, the need for a travel risk assessment tool is increasingly clear.

Pre-approvals and heavy controls on travel remain broadly in place and are likely to continue after the initial virus waves subside or a vaccine becomes available.

Higher-level organisational sign-offs are being seen as necessary.

Travel process changes are expected to include more contactless check-ins, reduced luggage benefits, and of course, testing and quarantine in varying degrees.

Given the changing landscape, the current recommendation is to handle emerging needs on a case-by-case basis and with careful assessment as opposed to taking an all-encompassing approach through a “Band-Aid” policy.

## Talent Development

Mobility professionals form a key link in the global talent chain at all levels. The concern now is to define the chain and how it needs to adapt in order to continue to meet business goals.

Organisations must close the gap between local and assignee populations to ensure globalisation and growth. To safeguard the journey within the organisation as COVID-19 repercussions are managed, it is critical to consider local HR principles and to understand individual employees.

Onboarding new hires or transferees must succeed both logistically and in making the new employee feel at home within their role and the company culture. Onboarding activities are now conducted virtually on various platforms.

L&D opportunities for all employees are more vital than ever. Some fundamentals may need to be revisited—managing remote teams, health and wellness orientations. In fact, several sizeable surveys cite training for managers as the most important aspect of flexible working arrangements.

Most critically, the pandemic has not dimmed the importance of mobile assignments, domestic and international, as these provide global growth and genuine development.

While there is an increased hesitancy to relocate at this time, there are many who view relocation as an essential part of their career plan.

In support of these talent imperatives, mobility professionals are focused on the following emerging areas:

- **Multi-skilled assignees:** Can transferees—at least in the short term—perform beyond what the original job description suggests? What additional business needs can they meet to help the company use fewer resources? Consequentially, how does this assist in the development of skills and career aspirations?
- **Mobility risk assessment:** Review shifting tax and immigration implications for the work arrangements in place for the employee.
- **Budget and timeline assessment:** Create visibility for the additional costs and timelines associated with a chosen course of action.
- **Policy development in times of crisis:** Ensure assignees and their families are given necessary support and advise the business around principle-based decisions that safeguard employee well-being and compensation matters.
- **Assignment goals and ROI:** Develop critical local talent pipelines for assignees while ensuring the importance of reaching overarching goals.
- **Virtual assignments:** Consider the benefits of virtual assignment arrangements and policies. Complexity levels can increase significantly in regards to compliance, logistics, leadership, and development if the assignee is not in their host country.



## Digitalisation

As organisations and their employees adapt to an increasingly digitalised way of life, mobility experts are frequently addressing the requirements of a mobile workforce.

Tracking employees is one critical area; ensuring a viable way of doing so is a necessity. Also, consider pre-requisites for virtual assignments, as well as the robustness and availability of technology support for ongoing cross-border situations.

Healthy, two-way communication is essential between the global mobility and IT support teams.

In summary, amid the uncertainties of 2020, high-performance organisations look to global mobility to continue to provide agile support, deliver fast recommendations, and execute fundamental talent strategies.

Better equipped to respond to the quickly evolving global situation, organisations are empowered by global mobility—beyond basic relocation functions—to grow internationally and to develop today and into the future.

If you would like to **reinvent** your relocation plan, do **contact us** and we will be happy to **tailor a plan** for you.