



Mobility Matters: **Is relocation still a tool for employee engagement?**

Part 3: An assignee's wellbeing -
Balancing an improved quality of life
with mental health challenges



Foreword

Through this series we set out to understand more about how HR managers from around the world currently view mobility as a way to engage and retain employees.

As we emerge from the shadow of the pandemic, we found the importance of using relocation as an incentive to candidates in job adverts, which 54% of respondents have done, and also by using it in the career progression paths as a way of retaining employees, which nine out of ten have done. By being used like this, strategic decisions are made to embed mobility into career journeys.

This section of our research examines a vital factor of relocation: maintaining an assignee's wellbeing as they live and work away from their home country.

We are grateful for the insight of Michelle Taylor, HR Director at a leading solutions provider in the in-flight entertainment industry, and the perspective of Caitlin Pyett, Global Consulting Lead, at Crown World Mobility.

We hope you find the conclusions in this and the previous two parts of our research interesting and that they give you a greater understanding of how relocation and mobility are viewed as an employee engagement tool.

Jurgen Zyderveld

Group Vice President, Crown World Mobility

Introduction

The opportunity to travel with work is one that appeals to many people. Employers are keen to deploy mobility as a means of both attracting and retaining talent. In this series of reports, we set out to explore how the global mobility landscape continues to evolve. The pandemic began a revolution in ways of working and the approach to work, both of which have been key contributors to the frequently cited ‘Great Resignation’. With that in mind, we wanted to learn more about how mobility can be used as a way of attracting and retaining talent today.

We asked 251 HR professionals in the United States, the UK and Ireland, Singapore, France and Germany, 26 questions about assigning employees to a project overseas:



Each respondent held the title of either Senior Manager, Director/VP or C-level/business owner



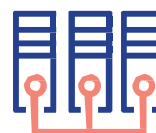
62% of respondents were male, 38% were female



The most common age group of respondents was between 25-years-old and 44-years-old



The most common aggregated revenue of respondents' companies was between \$201m-\$500m



The most common sectors in which the respondents' companies worked in were accounting and finance, IT, and manufacturing and distribution

The survey asked respondents a series of questions surrounding their business's practices around relocation and its effects on employees. Analysis of the results has shown that employee mobility should, and does, play a key role in engaging and retaining employees. This section of our findings looks at an assignee's wellbeing and balancing an improved quality of life on assignment with mental health challenges they encounter while living and working abroad. Our two additional reports examine:




Assessing suitability and tackling hesitancy



Mobility as a means of improving productivity

An assignee's wellbeing: balancing an improved quality of life with mental health challenges

Following the pandemic, wellbeing is



Caitlin Pyett
Global Consulting Lead,
Crown World Mobility

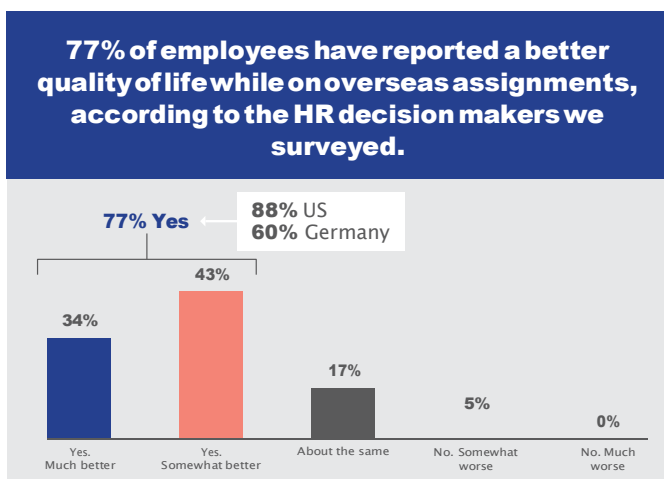
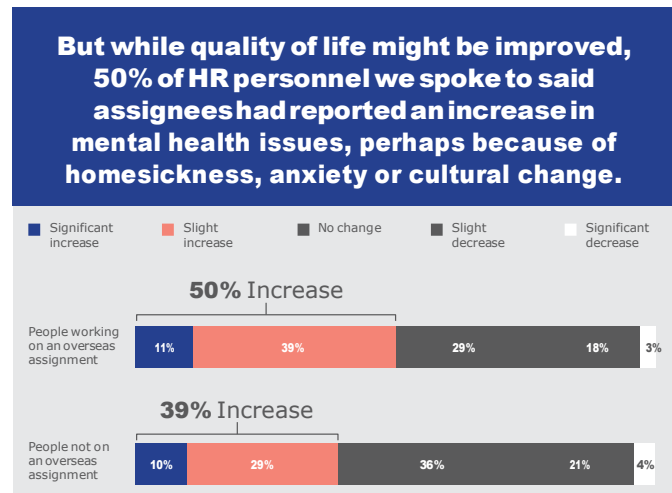
“You get to reset yourself and leave behind some of the things which were causing you stress at home”

Michelle Taylor
HR Director

Mental health concerns

An improved quality of life

When senior HR managers ask assignees about their quality of life, 77% report that the employee had said it was either much or somewhat better. “When I visit a new area, I do the kind of things I wouldn’t necessarily do at home,” begins Michelle Taylor, HR Director at a leading solutions provider in the in-flight entertainment industry. “You explore, which helps wellbeing. You get to reset yourself and leave behind some of the things which were causing you stress at home.”



However, while they may report an increase in assignees’ quality of life, half of respondents say they have also seen an increase in mental health issues in their colleagues. “This could be simple homesickness or anxiety over the cultural change, or the welfare of family with you, and that you have left behind,” suggests Michelle.

Yet 39% of respondents said they had also seen an increase in the same issues from people not on assignments. This points towards workplace mental wellbeing as a global concern.



Managing wellbeing

Looking after an assignee is more complex than managing them in their home location. Time differences may not allow for sufficient one-to-one conversations, while language barriers and different cultures may make it difficult for the assignee to engage with their direct line manager overseas. This may account for 42% of respondents replying that the wellbeing of assignees is the biggest challenge they face.

An assignee's working pattern can also impact on their wellbeing. Permanent home working on assignment throws up all sorts of wellbeing issues according to Caitlin Pyett, Director of Account Management, Asia, at Crown World Mobility. "Working from the confines of their home may have a detrimental effect on cultural assimilation," she says. "It prevents the assignee from learning how to interact with teams of different cultures and feel comfortable in different locations," she adds.

However, Caitlin is certain that global circumstances have shifted the agenda when it comes to employee welfare: "Following the pandemic, wellbeing is now front of mind for HR.

"Companies can offer more practical support now. On-the-ground assistance can ensure the security and health aspects of policies are appropriate to the location. This is particularly useful where the company has moved to a cash versus benefits approach; ensuring the appropriate orientation, settling in and destination support is covered so that integration is smooth with as little stress as possible," she continues.

"Managers...need to be able to identify mental health cues"

Michelle Taylor
HR Director

Michelle adds: "After I have assigned colleagues overseas, I arrange for them to have regular check-ins with a member of the HR team.

"We've made sure this person understands the culture in the assignee's new territory, so they have that local support. We offer an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), counselling and mental health support online.

"Managers play an important role. They need to be able to identify mental health cues and signs as well as deal with the issues and signpost the employee to support," she continues.

Family matters

"An assignment won't be a success if the accompanying family is unhappy," says Caitlin. "The family's wellbeing should be considered in tandem with the assignee's. Intercultural and language training should be extended to all. Even simple touches, like HR remembering to ask after family members and taking the time to understand their concerns too, helps everyone feel comfortable," she adds.

"An assignment won't be a success if the accompanying family is unhappy"

Caitlin Pyett
Global Consulting Lead, Crown World Mobility

Welcome home?



Managing an assignee’s wellbeing does not end when their return flight lands on home soil. There are also management challenges when they are repatriated. Principally, according to 38% of respondents to our survey, this will be the reintegration of the employee into teams where hierarchies or other structures may have changed. Fifty per cent of respondents said that finding new roles for returning assignees is difficult. Similarly, 53% said they have had to make redundancies at the end of an assignment.

“If an employee has returned unexpectedly from a permanent relocation, then of course, sometimes there isn’t a role for them to come back to. When it has been planned for them to return at a specific time, it’s easier,” comments Michelle.

“Looking after an employee on their return potentially starts before they have even left,” says Caitlin. “Connections with home can either be lost or minimised to the point where the assignee starts to feel that they belong in the host location, personally and professionally.”

If there have been seismic social, economic or political changes since their departure, re-integration can be difficult. “Mental adjustment

“If the intention is always that they will return, there needs to be a stronger focus on retaining ties to home”

Caitlin Pyett
Global Consulting Lead, Crown World Mobility

to the assignment location is welcome from a wellbeing perspective, but if the intention is always that they will return, there needs to be a stronger focus on retaining ties to home,” says Caitlin.’

“Being mindful and sensitive to... issues – even if no direct support is offered – can make a huge difference in terms of how the company’s support is perceived”

Caitlin Pyett
Global Consulting Lead, Crown World Mobility

“Goals and targets should be identified with input from home and host country managers, with progress monitored by both parties throughout the assignment. When the time comes for the assignee to return, there then isn’t the sense of disconnect that can happen when ties have been cut. Reverse culture shock should also be acknowledged. The assignee and their family may benefit from some tailored training focusing on reintegration.

“It’s also important to look at whether the assignee has a property which is ready to move into, flexibility on the location of temporary accommodation for the first few weeks upon return and considering whether their family can slot back into schools or jobs easily.

“Being mindful and sensitive to these issues – even if no direct support is offered – can make a huge difference in terms of how the company’s support is perceived,” says Caitlin.

Change is already here

The survey's findings on physical and mental wellbeing indicate a sense of change pervading into HR departments that is influencing mobility programmes. "We are now seeing this 'human-centric' approach filtering down to assignment practices and policies, which demonstrates a commitment to assignee wellbeing. It is much more normal for companies to discuss mental health issues, especially with evidence that an assignee's mental health can be negatively affected," claims Caitlin.

"To help, employers can focus on soft skills like intercultural and language training. They are also addressing diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) and considering the needs of minorities after widening the view of a 'standard' assignee. This addresses wellbeing too, where traditional policies may have been too rigid.

"We are now seeing this 'human-centric' approach... It is much more normal for companies to discuss mental health issues"

Caitlin Pyett
Global Consulting Lead, Crown World Mobility

"Employee resource groups like expat networks, assignment-specific mentoring groups and activity groups for assignees all positively impact wellbeing," she concludes.

Conclusion

Despite its many advantages, relocation and subsequent reintegration when returning home can take their toll on an employee. There are demonstrable benefits to relocation in terms of productivity and employee retention, but these should not prevent employers from understanding that assignments can be tough going. Although attitudes are changing and policies that help the mental wellbeing of assignees are becoming more common, it is also important to note that employees not on assignment have also reported problems with their mental health and this is a global issue. For relocation to remain an important tool in employee engagement, wellbeing needs to be maintained at all points.

If global relocation is a process that you would like to include in your company's offerings to current and potential employees, Crown World Mobility will be happy to discuss opening up this world of possibilities.

Crown World Mobility helps corporations manage global talent and talented individuals perform on the global stage.

We work with all stakeholders to find the right solution, implementing a global mobility program that is successful for everyone. Services include research and consulting, assignment management, immigration services, compensation administration and employee and family support.

How the world works better | crownrelo.co.nz/worldmobility/

Discover Crown

*A complete range of services
to help you and your business*

crownrelo.co.nz/worldmobility/

- **World Mobility**
- **Relocations**
- **Records Management**
- **Fine Art**
- **Logistics**
- **Workspace**