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## *When the Unexpected Becomes Reality*

Discussions and recommendations around crisis management

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**U.S. Immigration Fee Increases**  
A CHANCE TO RETHINK IMMIGRATION STRATEGIES

**International Remote Work**  
CHALLENGES FOR GLOBAL MOBILITY TEAMS

**Managing Expats as an Expat**  
HOW THEY APPROACH THE JOB DIFFERENTLY

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Best Practices for  
When the Unexpected  
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ISSUE 1 2024

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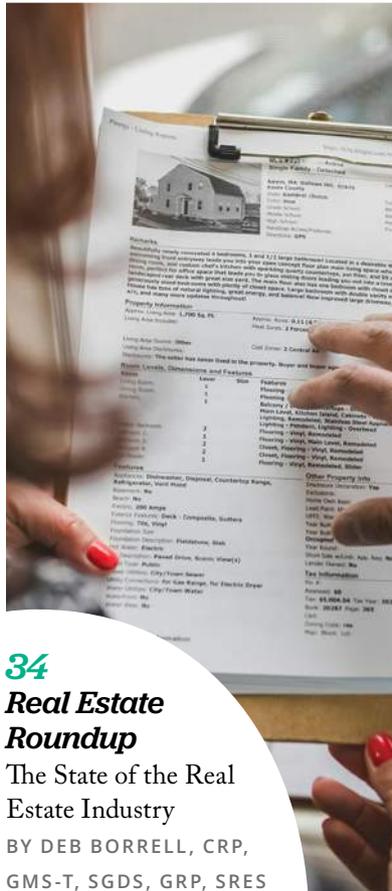
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# Mobility

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**About WERC**

WERC is the workforce mobility association for professionals who oversee, manage, or support U.S. domestic and international employee transfers. The organization was founded in 1964 to help members overcome the challenges of workforce mobility.

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# EVENTS Calendar

May  
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## Regional Summit

7 MAY

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## Regional Summit

14-15 MAY

Singapore

October  
2024

## Global Workforce Symposium

22-25 OCTOBER

National Harbor, near Washington, D.C.

All events can be found at [worldwideerc.org/events-conferences](https://worldwideerc.org/events-conferences).

## Webinars

### Navigating the Changing Landscape of Buyer Broker Compensation – Challenges for the Talent Mobility Industry

The recent jury verdict in the Sitzer/Burnett class action lawsuit has resulted in stakeholders across the real estate sector and connected industries, including talent mobility, reevaluating their processes and practices, and looking at changes related to buyer broker compensation. These changes will result in significant changes across the talent mobility industry, including, but not limited to, RMC commission practices, company policy requirements, and additional financial costs to be borne by transferring employees and/or their company.

This webinar brings together industry leaders to provide an overview of the Sitzer/Burnett decision and its impact, the growing landscape of additional litigation cases in process or being filed across the United States, and the potential ramifications of these cases on the talent mobility industry.

All webinars can be found at [worldwideerc.org/events-webinars](https://worldwideerc.org/events-webinars).

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## Leading WERC into a New Era

*I am deeply honored* to step into the role of president and CEO of WERC, especially as we embark on our 60th anniversary year. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for the warm welcome and unwavering support I have received from each one of you

Many have asked why I decided to embark on this journey. The genesis of this commitment traces back to my early adulthood, leaving my home in India to pursue education in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It was during this time that my passion for global talent mobility ignited, eventually leading my co-founder and me to establish Monaeo from the ground up. The core objective was to alleviate the daunting aspects of global movement, making it less intimidating, painful, and costly.

Recognizing the integral role played by deeply dedicated individuals in various industry sectors such as tax, immigration, payroll, relocation management, and more, I have been influenced and inspired to join their ranks in shaping WERC into an educator, advocate, partner, and champion—serving as an enabler for the seamless global movement of talent across borders. Having been able to do just that through my service on the board, I am privileged to continue my service leading the organization as president and CEO.

For the people, by the people, and with the people. This ethos lies at the heart of WERC's renewed mission. Our members are not just participants; they are the very core of our activities. It is your dedication, expertise, and passion that drive our collective efforts forward, and it is my utmost priority to ensure that your voices are heard and your needs are met.

However, amid the commitment to advancement and possibilities for growth, it is important to acknowledge the unprecedented changes facing the industry. With a background primarily in investing and building tech and software, I've witnessed the transformative impact technology can have on services, sometimes enhancing and, at other times, replacing people-centric approaches.

Beyond technological evolution, the industry grapples with challenges posed by shifting revenue models, the evolving nature of mobility, and the relentless forces of globalization. In navigating this intricate landscape, WERC stands poised to address these threats, and really opportunities, shaping the future of global talent mobility, and I



am thrilled and honored to be an integral part of shaping WERC's, and our industry's, future—positioning us to embrace the opportunities and confront the challenges in new and impactful ways.

At WERC, our vision extends beyond leadership; we aspire to be the global authority and convening platform for the global talent mobility industry. Together, we will harness the power of collaboration, innovation, and advocacy to drive positive change and shape the future of talent mobility on a global scale.

I am truly grateful for the trust and confidence bestowed upon me by the board and the entire WERC community. I look forward to working alongside each and every one of you as we embark on this exciting journey together. Onward!

**Anupam Singhal**  
President and CEO  
WERC

# WERC Advocates for Moving Tax Deduction Reinstatement

BY TRISTAN NORTH



**W**ERC is further ramping up its effort to reinstate the moving tax deduction and reduction, as the suspension of the deduction expires on 31 December 2025. The deduction was suspended along with numerous other targeted tax incentive provisions as part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in order to help offset the cost of the concurrent cut in corporate tax rates. While the moving tax deduction was only suspended, we will need to advocate strongly, as targeted tax provisions will once again be on the chopping block to help offset an extension of the individual tax cuts that expire at the same time many suspended tax provisions are set to be reinstated.

## BACKGROUND

As part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, the moving expense deduction, and the exclusion from income of moving expense payments by employers to move their employees, were eliminated for the tax years 2017 to 2025. The deduction and exclusion together make up a vital tax relief tool

that makes relocation for work more affordable and supports worker mobility—the lynchpin of a strong economy—and a moving industry that supports 480,000 jobs annually.

The moving expense deduction was first established by Congress in 1964 and had enjoyed bipartisan support. In its last form, the deduction was already severely limited as to eligible costs and subject to stringent tests that limit its use to those employees moving substantial distances for legitimate business reasons. Specifically, it could only be claimed on an individual's (or an employer's) costs to move more than 50 miles for a full-time job. It is estimated to provide \$1 billion in tax relief each year, which is significant to those businesses and individuals involved in a relocation but a small price considering the positive economic impact on the U.S. economy and talent mobility.

## EARLIER REINSTATING EFFORTS

WERC and the Moving & Storage Conference of the American Trucking Association (ATA)



were unsuccessful in preserving the moving tax deduction during consideration of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act as Congress looked to offset lower corporate tax rates. During the efforts for COVID-19 pandemic relief, WERC, ATA, and the International Association of Movers (IAM) advocated for reinstatement of the deduction to promote talent mobility and strengthen the U.S. economy at a time of economic uncertainty. Although Congress did not end up addressing any of the tax provisions from 2017, it was important for ATA, IAM, and WERC to remind lawmakers of the importance of the positive impact of the provisions on talent mobility and helping the

global economy in preparation for the upcoming negotiations next year.

#### **CURRENT EFFORTS TO REINSTATE DEDUCTION**

The ATA, IAM, and WERC have formed a more formal effort, the Relocation Mobility Coalition, which is advocating for the reinstatement of the moving tax deduction, and we are currently in discussions with the National Association of Realtors (NAR), Senior Executive Association (SEA), and other organizations that have indicated support for the effort. WERC and our partners are currently expanding our coalition as well as setting the



The ATA, IAM, and WERC have formed a more formal effort, the Relocation Mobility Coalition, which is advocating for the reinstatement of the moving tax deduction.

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foundation through collecting data and reaching out to potential Hill champions to advocate in support of the deduction.

To help support our cause, WERC recently conducted the “RMC Moving Expense Distance Expense Survey” in which we reached out to relocation management companies to collect data on the distance of employee relocations. This data will help substantiate the appropriate distance for the most meaningful tax relief for employers and employees for a relocation.

In 1993 and 2017, impact analyses were conducted by economists Joseph Cordes and Eugene Steuerle to examine the economic impact of the moving tax reduction. Much has changed in mobility and remote work since the last report, and the coalition will be looking to update the paper.

### **WE WILL NEED YOUR HELP IN REINSTATEMENT**

Getting the moving tax deduction and reduction reinstated will be a challenge, as Congress looks to offset extending the individual tax cuts from 2017. WERC and our partners will need the help of regional employee relocation councils, relocation management companies, and our individual members to reach out to their members of Congress in support of reinstating the deduction. We are setting the foundation with Congress to facilitate the effort and will be providing our members with the tools necessary to do the outreach.

Be sure to attend the WERC Global Workforce Symposium near Washington, D.C., in October where we will be launching the outreach effort with meetings for attendees with their members of Congress.

### **BILL PROTECTING TRANSFEREE SENSITIVE DATA SIGNED INTO LAW**

On 9 February, President Biden signed into law the Moving Americans Privacy Protection Act (MAPPA) (H.R. 1568). Enactment of H.R. 1568 marks an enormous victory for the bill champions, our industry partners, WERC, and transferees after a near-decade-long push to protect the sensitive data of transferees.



## **Enactment of H.R. 1568 marks an enormous victory after a near- decade-long push to protect the sensitive data of transferees.**

Transferees, including military personnel, are required to submit personally identifiable information (PII) including Social Security numbers, passports numbers, and other sensitive data to be part of vessel manifests when they are shipping their personal household goods to U.S. ports. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is required to sell the manifest data on vessel shipments to data brokerage firms that post the information online to paid subscribers.

The intent of data brokers is to provide an analysis and trends on shipments to clients not intending to expose the PII of transferees. Inadvertently making public the PII of transferees exposes them to identity theft, financial fraud, and unwanted solicitations. MAPPA closes a loophole in the Tariff Act of 1930 by directing the Secretary of the Treasury to remove the PII of individuals shipping their personal household goods to the U.S. before making the vessel manifests available to data brokers.

Senators Steve Daines (R-MT), Gary Peters (D-MI), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), and Roger Marshall (R-KS), and Congressmen Mike Walz (R-FL) and Bill Pascrell (D-NJ), as well as the leaders of the Senate Finance and House Ways and Means Committee championed the passage of MAPPA. The ATA, IAM, and WERC along with the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), NAR, and SEA advocated for protecting the data of transferees and military personnel. *m*

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Tristan North is WERC's government affairs adviser.

# The Numbers

## The State of Remote Work

*During the pandemic*, there was a significant surge in remote work, but this trend has since been on a gradual decline. Many corporate leaders are advocating for a return to office-based work, but there's a prevailing doubt among senior management that this push to return to the office will be successful.

The Survey of Business Uncertainty, conducted jointly by the Atlanta Federal Reserve Bank, the University of Chicago, and Stanford, regularly polls senior executives from

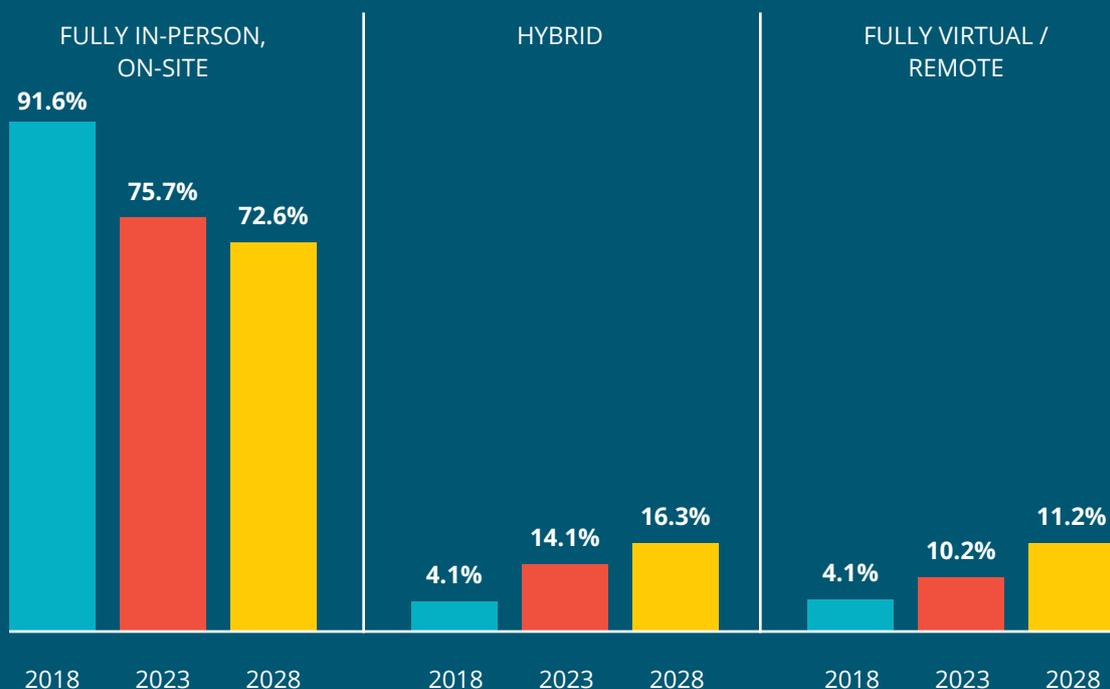
approximately 500 U.S. businesses spanning various sectors and regions.

In the latest survey conducted in July 2023, executives were asked about their expectations regarding the composition of their firm's workforce in five years' time, specifically regarding the proportion of employees expected to work fully in person, in a hybrid setup, or fully remotely by 2028.

Some of the results:

### U.S. Executives Expect Remote Work to Keep Increasing

Management doesn't expect a return to pre-pandemic office life. What share of your firm's full-time employees are in each category?



Source: Survey of Business Uncertainty

Other statistics:

90%

of companies plan to implement return-to-office policies by the end of 2024, according to a new report from Resume Builder.



2%

of respondents said their company never plans to require employees to work in person.

Evidence suggests that working from home is valued by employees about the same as an

8%

pay increase, on average.

About

51%

of employers currently require some or all employees to work in person, while 39% plan to by the end of 2024, and 8% plan to by 2025 or later.

It can help reduce turnover by as much as

35%



# ***CRISIS MANAGEMENT:*** **BEST PRACTICES FOR WHEN THE UNEXPECTED BECOMES REALITY**

**WERC corporate members gathered during a roundtable to discuss, suggest, and recommend practical steps to protect employees and organizations during times of crisis.**

By Anca Maritescu



In the dynamic climate of today's business world, uncertainties and crises are unavoidable parts of operations. Companies looking to insulate themselves from associated risks need to consider natural disasters, cybersecurity threats, political and social instability, and other dangers that can strike at any time, without warning. To anticipate, manage, and recover from such disruptions, organizations must establish a robust crisis management process, which should be adaptable and scalable.

In November 2023, WERC hosted a member-led Corporate Roundtable where best practices around crisis management were discussed. While each event and company are unique, attendees found that there are commonalities when dealing with the unexpected.

### **1. Crisis Management Does Not Begin Once an Emergency Has Occurred**

To be ready, advanced preparation is needed. During the session, an enterprise's data was identified as a crucial factor in being disaster-ready.

During the initial COVID-19 lockdowns, the most discussed data point was location. Many employers realized that their employees were not where initially believed, and some were in areas from where they could not legally work. Leadership looked toward global mobility to help gather and maintain information around employee location. As remote work has increased in popularity, knowing where your people are is more important than ever, as it helps understand who is affected by a particular crisis, as well as the extent to which their ability to perform their job will be compromised.

## 2. Knowing the Nationalities of Employees Matters

Should an employee need to be evacuated, understanding where they have a right to work can help in making fast decisions under pressure. Implementing a robust Human Resources Information System (HRIS) is an integral part of keeping and managing this type of information.

## 3. Communication Is a Key Component of Preparation

Even when management knows employees' locations, if they cannot communicate with them, it becomes harder to ensure safety and business continuity. It is recommended that organizations employ several avenues, such as phone, email, push alerts, check-in requests, and messaging apps to offer employees the ability to connect and remain aware of latest developments.

Attendees also discussed several practical takeaways that mobility professionals and their employers can implement when addressing crises:

- For fast response, organizations should have a crisis management team (CMT), comprised of stakeholders from across the company. The team should be well defined, including names, roles, decision-making rights, and limits. There

should be clarity on who will be providing what type of information to stakeholders as well as communication methods available to each individual.

- The company should have a strong business continuity plan, which should be tested regularly and consider various emergency types. For those companies hiring internationally, decisions should be made in advance on whether additional or different types of support will be provided to foreign nationals versus locals, as well as when such support would come into play. Related to this topic, the type of support the company would provide families/depends, if any, should be known. During the roundtable, it became obvious that definition of family can also vary. Some attendees offer assistance to employees only, some to spouses and kids as well, but others go a step further and include pets or elderly parents. These conversations should be had long before crisis strikes and communicated to employees.
- The company must also have a comprehensive list of suppliers they can rely on for information gathering, advice, and support. Attendees mentioned several such supplier types. Some rely on external travel health and security risk management providers, while for others, these functions are in-house. One company relied on their employer of record (EOR) to help find locations where they could immediately relocate employees from areas where conflict arose. Others discussed relying heavily on their immigration providers for help. All agreed that these relationships must be managed and maintained in calm times. It is not sufficient to know you can rely on an external provider, but who to call and what information they might need from the start. Having these conversations early can lead to a more rapid, clear, and effective response.
- Ensure your employee population is travel-ready, especially foreign nationals. Employees should be encouraged to keep their passports valid, with at least six months left before expiration. Many countries require six-months validity at the time of entrance. Employees should also keep in mind that the duration to issue new passports varies by country.



Roundtable attendees recommended that even organizations that exclusively work from the office should ensure that key personnel can work remotely in case of a crisis.



### **Additional Considerations for Dealing With a Crisis**

Once a crisis has begun and the crisis management team is active, roundtable participants indicated that their focus turns to addressing immediate needs. For the company, this can mean implementing the business continuity plan. For employees, the needs might vary but can include medical care, evacuation, or simply unbiased and correct information. One reason employees will look to the company for information assistance is the wide availability of misinformation. Relying on experts within your organization and supply chain can ensure stakeholders are better prepared to access resources or even evacuate safely.

Roundtable attendees recommended that even organizations that exclusively work from the office should ensure that key personnel can work remotely in case of a crisis. One participant mentioned their office being equipped with generators, but some employees might not be able to travel.

Decisions around flexible working hours might also have to be made to accommodate those that need time to manage other crisis-related factors during business hours. A flexible and adaptable crisis management plan that is well communicated and available to employees will increase the chances of success.

HR and mobility teams, participants noted, must be ready to offer information on what type of help is available, including eligibility criteria for evacuation, medical, immigration, or relocation support, as needed. Suppliers should be able to offer information on items such as visa-free entry destinations for employees facing evacuation, as well as countries allowing work from home for the employer, and places offering quick or easy issuance of work authorizations. Constant communication between all stakeholders will be paramount for support implementation.

Once the immediate and short-term needs have been addressed, attendees indicated the



organization should begin assessing its long-term needs, which might include adjustments to the business continuity plan, decisions over the need for ongoing or long-term support, necessary relocation packages, and job description changes, as needed. Communication needs might also change as new perspectives are identified or new personnel are added to the crisis management team.



Roundtable attendees believed that it is imperative for company leadership to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of its crisis response.

Additionally, participants discussed ensuring that organizations factor in when and how to decide when a crisis is over. Certain disruptions might require short-term adjustments, but in other times a “new normal” begins. Companies will need to decide what is considered the end of the crisis, and what that means for its employees.

No matter the size and scope of the organization, roundtable attendees believed that it is imperative for company leadership to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of its crisis response. Transparent conversations will help ensure future crises are responded to quickly and effectively. The response must be reviewed immediately, and also continuously, as the company grows, enters new markets, hires in and from areas not previously supported, or even adds additional product or service lines. As the company changes, so will its needs. No one plan works for every organization, but the best plans are well communicated and both flexible and scalable to be able to address the above and any other previously unconsidered factors.

WERC hosts regular Corporate Roundtables for in-house mobility professional members of WERC throughout the year. Visit [worldwideerc.org/corporate-hr-networking](http://worldwideerc.org/corporate-hr-networking) to learn more and to sign up for a future roundtable session. *M*

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Anca Maritescu is the business development manager at WERC.

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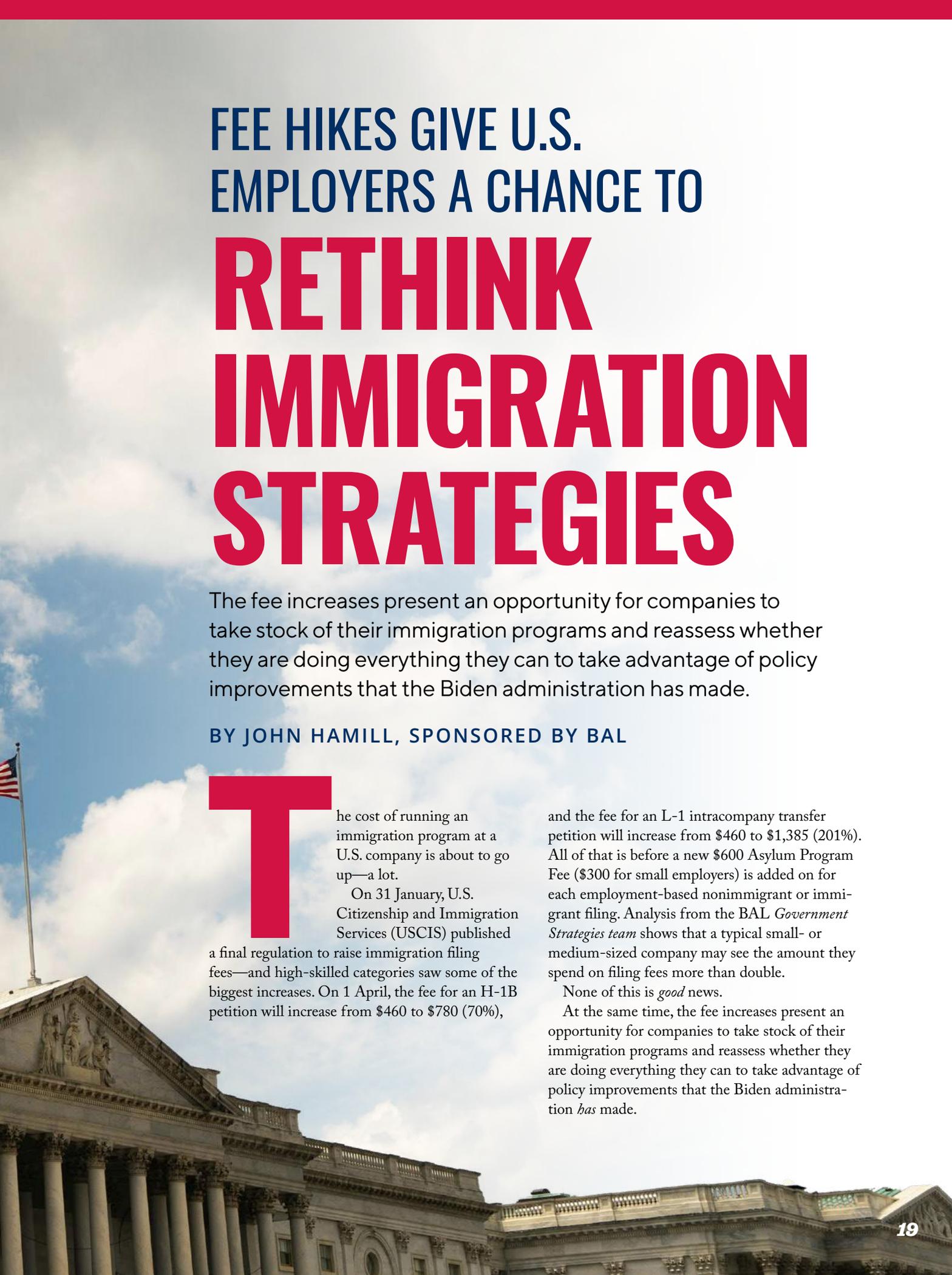
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# FEE HIKES GIVE U.S. EMPLOYERS A CHANCE TO RETHINK IMMIGRATION STRATEGIES

The fee increases present an opportunity for companies to take stock of their immigration programs and reassess whether they are doing everything they can to take advantage of policy improvements that the Biden administration has made.

BY JOHN HAMILL, SPONSORED BY BAL

**T**he cost of running an immigration program at a U.S. company is about to go up—a lot. On 31 January, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) published a final regulation to raise immigration filing fees—and high-skilled categories saw some of the biggest increases. On 1 April, the fee for an H-1B petition will increase from \$460 to \$780 (70%),

and the fee for an L-1 intracompany transfer petition will increase from \$460 to \$1,385 (201%). All of that is before a new \$600 Asylum Program Fee (\$300 for small employers) is added on for each employment-based nonimmigrant or immigrant filing. Analysis from the BAL *Government Strategies team* shows that a typical small- or medium-sized company may see the amount they spend on filing fees more than double.

None of this is *good news*.

At the same time, the fee increases present an opportunity for companies to take stock of their immigration programs and reassess whether they are doing everything they can to take advantage of policy improvements that the Biden administration *has* made.

The fee increases are the first since 2016, and USCIS has said it will put the additional revenue to good use—not only by helping them meet the challenge of expanded humanitarian programs but also by improving processing times and reducing backlogs for employment-based filings. While the business community was clear that it would have liked to see USCIS implement additional efficiencies before raising fees, the administration has shown good faith by working to streamline programs with its current funding level. Consider:

- **Improvements to the H-1B program.** Just days after it published the regulation to raise fees, USCIS published a separate regulation to overhaul the H-1B registration and selection process. The big change is a switch from a petitioner- to a beneficiary-centric lottery, so that each H-1B beneficiary may be selected only once, no matter how many registrations are submitted on their behalf. This change is designed to eliminate incentives for bad actors to submit multiple H-1B registrations for the same individual—and has the potential

to reduce the overall number of registrations and boost the H-1B selection rate. The change enjoys broad support in the business community. So do the introduction of online H-1B filings and a new pilot program that allows some H-1B holders to renew their visas in the U.S. without going abroad.

- **Extended employment authorization.** In September 2023, USCIS increased the maximum validity of Employment Authorization Documents (along with Advance Parole travel documents) to five years for employees with pending green card applications. This change did not draw as much attention as the H-1B overhaul but has proved to be a boon to employers. Previously, green card applicants had to renew their employment authorization every two years. The longer validity saves not only time and money but also adds predictability. Improved EAD processing times are an additional benefit.
- **Flexibility in the green card process.** With the labor certification process (PERM) becoming increasingly difficult, employers continue to turn

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for more information!



Despite higher fees, there is ample evidence that it is a good idea to invest in foreign workers now, at a time of generally favorable policies.

toward national interest waivers as a green card strategy. This trend is due in part to the increased difficulty of the PERM process when employers have had layoffs. The administration published new guidance on national interest waivers for EB-2 visas in January 2022 and made EB-2 visas a priority in an executive order on intelligence published last fall. The Department of Labor has also asked for public input on whether to revise its list of Schedule A job classifications that do not require labor certification. This list has not been updated since 2004.

- **Improved visa processing abroad.** The U.S. State Department issued more than 10.4 million nonimmigrant visas in the last fiscal year. This figure was nearly a record and the highest total since 2015. It also highlights a marked turnaround in visa processing efficiency at U.S. embassies in consulates following years of reduced staffing and delayed wait times. State Department fees also went up last spring. And while the State Department and USCIS are different agencies with different challenges, the success in improving visa processing abroad is consistent with the Biden administration's broader overall efforts to improve immigration services.

Understandably, we have heard plenty at BAL from employers frustrated with how dramatically fees are increasing. What we have not heard, however, is that employers plan on cutting back their immigration programs dramatically. This is good

news—and not only because it means companies will continue to recruit top workers to help keep them competitive.

Despite higher fees, there is ample evidence that it is a good idea to invest in foreign workers now, at a time of generally favorable policies. Take the H-1B program as one example. The H-1B registration fee will increase from \$10 to \$215 for next year's cap registration, giving employers an incentive to put eligible employees in the lottery this year if they can. On top of that, if beneficiaries are not selected, they have more favorable options for H-1B alternatives now than they previously did. The administration has added new qualifying fields of study to its STEM Designated Degree Program List, making more recent graduates eligible for extended Optional Practical Training. Officials also provided clarifying guidance on O-1 "extraordinary ability" visa criteria, making this category an increasingly common option.

None of the administration's immigration programs are ensured to continue under future administrations. In the current political environment, there is no telling how long they will last.

Donald Trump has emerged as the Republican party's presumptive nominee for president. Whatever you think of Trump's politics, it is plainly true that when he was in office, it was harder to recruit and retain high-skilled foreign workers. H-1B denial rates skyrocketed and processing backlogs ballooned at understaffed agencies. COVID-19 only made the problems worse.

Nobody knows what Trump may do if he wins this year's election, but it certainly seems unlikely he would decrease immigration fees. Employers could be stuck with higher rates for reduced services.

The adage "never let a crisis go to waste" is instructive as employers face higher costs and uncertainty about the future of favorable immigration policies. While no one enjoys paying higher fees, employers should review their immigration strategies to take advantage of easier processes now before it's too late. *m*

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John Hamill is a partner and head of BAL's New York office focused on corporate clients with a range of immigration-specific issues and challenges.



INTERNATIONAL REMOTE WORK:  
**TOP CHALLENGES  
FOR GLOBAL  
MOBILITY TEAMS  
IN 2024**



Global mobility teams need to be involved in the internal business discussions about the potential implementation of these methods of working across international borders.

By Helen Mildred

**W**hen we think of the top-five challenges facing global mobility teams for 2024 and beyond, international remote working—where an employee wishes to work from a different country than their original employing location either for a limited time or on a more permanent basis—is at the top of the list.

#### **Background**

International remote work arrangements are widely thought to have arisen in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, where international remote working was an enforced reaction to support employees and maintain business continuity in exceptional circumstances. However, although the pandemic did lead to a significant increase in interest in these arrangements, they are not new and have been considered as potential alternatives to physically relocating employees for as long as technology has been available to enable employees

to, in theory, work from anywhere with a good internet connection.

The difference we have seen over the last three or four years has been a shift in employee expectations about what is possible or desired from a workplace flexibility perspective. Even when pandemic restrictions had lifted, the employee mindset had changed, and the traditional way of working in a fixed location was no longer considered to be the only option.

### Why Is International Remote Work Offered by Companies?

There is a key theme as to what drives companies to consider international remote work requests: the attraction and retention of key talent.

The vast increase in the number of people working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic led to employees requesting to work from locations other than their current “home” country. While companies may not be willing to permit this arrangement on a long-term basis, flexibility in choice of work location has been used effectively as a benefit to offer employees, especially within certain industry sectors, or relating to specific types of roles or among a younger staff cohort, where it is often most feasible. There is a danger that not

offering this option can adversely impact an organization’s talent attraction and retention strategy.

### What Can Global Mobility Teams Do?

Global mobility teams need to be involved in the internal business discussions about the potential implementation of these methods of working across international borders. From a compensation and benefits perspective, policies need to align with other practices in your suite of mobility solutions.

### Challenges

There are a number of challenges associated with a rise in employee requests for work location flexibility but also ways that international remote working can be managed to provide a benefit to employees and mitigate compliance risks to the business.

Compliance issues will remain the first hurdle to overcome for employers to be able to manage a successful international remote work arrangement, with the right to work in the chosen host country the first non-negotiable element. Employees should be encouraged to take ownership for their own immigration needs, and a lack of options to legally work in the host country would mean a denial of the request for flexibility.

Assuming that there is a legal right to work, there are additional compliance and regulatory challenges that need to be addressed before the arrangement can be approved.

### Income Tax Liabilities

Ensuring that the employee is compliant with income tax liabilities is relatively straightforward when managing a long-term assignment. However, in the case of international remote work, there will more often be a challenge associated with the fact that the employee’s source of income may be from services performed for a company in one location, while the employee is resident in another. This may be complicated further by the question of where the company responsible for paying the employee is based. This will likely give rise to concerns that the employee’s income tax liability may increase significantly during an assignment.

Many employers may take the stance that if the employee wishes to work from a different country, any consequences in terms of additional tax



There is a key theme as to what drives companies to consider international remote work requests: the attraction and retention of key talent.



liability should be their own responsibility. In principle, this would be a fair assessment. However, in the interests of retaining key employees, a responsible HR function will seek to make the employee aware of the potential implications of choosing to work elsewhere from a tax liability perspective. This allows employees to make an informed decision rather than pursuing a desire to work elsewhere and then deciding to leave the company and work for a local employer in their new location of residence after discovering their tax liability has increased significantly.

### **Corporate Tax Liability and Permanent Establishment**

Corporate tax liability is an important consideration when it comes to international remote work arrangements. Companies can't simply excuse themselves of any responsibility for additional taxes associated with this type of arrangement, as there is the issue of corporate tax liability and the risk associated with a permanent establishment through remote working. Countries classify the concept of a permanent establishment differently, but the general concept means if a company is based in Country A but also has operations in Country B, it may be liable to pay taxes on income derived from Country A's operations in Country B and/or vice versa owing to the company's ownership structure. The risk in the context

of international remote working is that some jurisdictions may treat an employee's presence in their country as sufficient to create a permanent establishment, which means that not only is the employee liable to pay taxes on their income in that location, but the company may also be liable to pay corporate taxes on the same income in that location, creating potentially an even greater cost to the company.

A way of mitigating this risk is to limit the amount of time that people can spend performing work internationally or impose a restriction on the types of duties performed. In countries where the company does not have an entity, the option of using an "employer of record" has emerged as a possible solution. However, there are also limitations with this arrangement. These include the need to limit the roles and tasks that the employee can perform (for example, the employee can't generally act as a representative of their employer or sign agreements on behalf of their employing entity).

### **Which Employment Legislation Will Apply?**

An additional concern is which labor laws will apply to the employee while working remotely. In the case of long-term assignments, this tends to be straightforward in that the employee and employer must act in compliance with the labor laws of the country to which the employee is assigned.



Any company seeking to utilize international remote working will need to consult employment law specialists in the locations where they expect their workers to be based and where the employer is based in order to determine which employment laws will apply to the employee.

### Data Security

An area often overlooked but of significant importance is data protection and security. An employee working remotely may be based in one country but accessing data such as employee records, confidential financial information, or other sensitive information on a computer network or servers in another country. There may be legislation or contracts between companies and their clients that prevent this from happening. For example, common inclusions in commercial contracts are clauses prohibiting one party from transferring data in relation to their commercial relationship to its operations and employees based in other countries. Furthermore, legislation needs to be considered. For example, the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) provides rules on personal information and what companies need to do to keep it secure including when accessing it.

Many countries have legislation regarding the storage of personal data and will levy penalties, including fines, in the event of a breach, with the

EU's presently the most severe. This means that companies will need to take measures to ensure that when their staff are accessing their networks from other countries, they are doing so securely.

### Salaries for International Remote Workers

For international remote working, the situation may be simpler in cases where an employee requests to leave the country where they were hired and work remotely from overseas. Once the legal considerations discussed above have been made, companies may be happy to take a hands-off approach and simply maintain the current salary, letting employees manage the tax and cost consequences of living overseas. However, if companies do want to take a more active approach, they need to not only consider if they are prepared to meet any costs in addition to the current salary but also what the fundamental amount they are prepared to pay for the role is, and how that is determined.

These considerations are also necessary for cases where companies may be directly hiring employees from overseas but with no expectation of them relocating to the location where the role is to be performed, a kind of "international remote hiring." If a company finds that the skills and expertise they need are not available in the country they need them, nor within the organization, they may elect to recruit external talent from any part of the

globe and, if the job can be done remotely, have no need to relocate those employees away from their current location.

For these more complex cases, companies may firstly want to make an assessment of the tax and social security situation and, as employees are unlikely to be able to make an accurate assessment themselves, provide the employee with some guidance. While some employees may be willing to take a reduction in net income in order to live overseas in a favored location, the question of whether the company is willing to pay for any additional employer costs, such as payroll taxes or social security contributions, remains.

Another consequence of employees choosing to work overseas is that their salary is likely to be paid in a different currency to the one they need for day-to-day living. In addition to the administrative issues associated with this, companies need to decide if they will make any considerations for exchange rate fluctuations.

Ultimately, companies may be forced to consider how they determine the market rate salary for a job that can be done from anywhere. And if employees are free to work from anywhere, and they can work from multiple countries, this becomes an almost impossible task to determine the market rate salary.

So, although international remote working is mostly driven by employee choice, and companies are unlikely to provide much assistance in the vast majority of cases, a fully hands-off approach might not be suitable. Some may at least consider it part of their duty of care, or part of internal approval processes, to provide an assessment of the impact to the employee so they are fully informed about their decision. As part of this, a net-to-net comparison can be run to provide an assessment of how much better or worse off an employee is likely to be. This kind of calculation enables companies to assess either on a net level only, or by factoring in relative buying power and housing costs to find the salary they would need to provide to protect their employee's net salary when they are working overseas. This kind of calculation can therefore demonstrate the value of the salary to the employee and make sure that there are no surprises in store.

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The challenge now is for companies to formulate flexible and reasonable policies and integrate these into their current suite of policies.

#### Advantages

When considering international flexible working, the benefits to the company are harder to quantify. Mainly they function as an employee attraction and retention tool, with many employees wanting flexibility in their physical work location. In an increasingly competitive global job market, attracting and retaining the right talent is an increasingly difficult prospect; allowing more flexibility is one way to ensure employee satisfaction.

#### Policies Are Key

The challenge now is for companies to formulate flexible and reasonable policies and integrate these into their current suite of policies. Crucially, processes should be put in place for deciding what type of assignment is appropriate in different circumstances to avoid excessive discussion and exceptions. Given the potential volume of requests for international flexible working that companies may have to deal with (the majority likely not on a permanent basis but for one or two weeks here and there), we would also recommend a transparent decision-making process in which the majority of decisions can be made quickly and cost-effectively. *m*

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Helen Mildred is the head of consultancy at ECA International.



# MANAGING EXPATS *AS AN EXPAT*

How did the expatriate life experience help us, as mobility professionals, approach the job differently? Did we alter policies, programs, benefits, and internal services because of our personal experience? Were there any aspects of the move we had never imagined could be so tough?

By Klaudia Krawczyk



It goes without saying that global mobility is an extremely complex and challenging field of human resource management. It requires a thorough knowledge of immigration, tax, Social Security regulations, vendor management skills, and, most importantly, the assignee-focused duty of care—visa, shipment, flight tickets, school for kids, pet moving, flat search, settling in. It's a lot. Now, imagine that apart from assisting your mobility population with their relocation needs, you need to figure out one more transfer: yours.

Having managed expatriates as an expat myself for multiple years now—from Shanghai through Budapest, Hungary, to Hong Kong—I started to reflect on how international exposure influenced my attitude toward running a global mobility program, facing the relocation hardships, and managing people's expectations from the role. I am not an isolated case in the mobility profession, so I have engaged in conversations with colleagues who also moved abroad to manage expatriate populations.

How did the expat life experience help us, as mobility professionals, approach the job differently? Did we alter policies, programs, benefits, and internal services because of our personal experience? Were there any aspects of the move we had never imagined could be so tough?

### **'Why Try to Treat Everyone the Same When No One Is?'**

When designing a mobility policy, we tend to focus on serving the company's business needs, assuring compliance and meeting transferees' expectations with the proposed benefit package. However, how can one policy meet the real needs and wants of hundreds of employees of different backgrounds and personal circumstances? That's the thing: alone, it can't.

"Two families with kids the same age, spouses holding the same jobs, and going from the same home country to the same host country will have 1,001 different things to deal with and expectations to manage," says Mark Derksen, head of global mobility at getir. He confirms that the international experience, which for him started in





Durban, South Africa, and went through London, Amsterdam, and Barcelona, strongly influenced his approach toward global mobility and resulted in altering the company's policies as well as his ways of working. Derksen puts focus on the importance of working not only based on guidelines and budget, but, more importantly, listening to people and finding out what they really need. "Why try to treat everyone the same when no one is?" he asks.

Bianka Konczos-Budai, global mobility region head at Nokia, agrees that concentrating solely on compliance, cost, or process quality causes global mobility professionals to lose the sense of how decisions directly impact employees, "leaving them out of the equation." Konczos-Budai's personal experience during assignments in California and New Jersey gave her a more tangible and practical understanding of what employees are going through. It helped her to realize which actions, services, and supported areas add actual value for

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“A policy is just a piece of paper—what counts is the logic behind it and how it reconciles the experience of people moving, of the people receiving the mobile employees and the business realities.”

transferees and family members in different stages of the process.

The necessity for flexibility in global mobility policies is also accentuated by David Enser, managing partner at RES Forum, who, over the years, has relocated several times, e.g., to Japan, Germany, and Hong Kong. "What suits one may not suit another," says Enser. He claims that, as mobility professionals, we should treat every case individually, "with unique wants, needs, and motivations."

A policy serves as a basis for each mobility program; however, without the right approach from the mobility professionals, it cannot serve its purposes. Olivier Meier, principal at Mercer, who moved within Europe multiple times, says, "A policy is just a piece of paper—what counts is the logic behind it and how it reconciles the experience of people moving, of the people receiving the mobile employees and the business realities."

### Misled by Distance and Expectations

We often expect inter-regional moves, which fall between countries situated thousands of miles apart, to be the most complex, challenging, and nerve-wrecking. Shipment costs, long flights, time zone differences, and visa delays are just a few of many factors that could contribute to that. But is this true?

Almost two years ago, Dora Nagy, relocation partner, moved from Budapest, Hungary, to Malaga, Spain, with her husband. She was more than surprised to realize how little official information was available in English even though Spain is seen as a popular destination among expats. "I was expecting to be able to gather information upon arrival on the website of official sources and authorities in English; however, they are all in Spanish only." Nagy explains how important it is not to blindly follow our expectations and instead look at it from a more technical angle of mobility. "I believe it would make the overall experience of our relocating colleagues significantly smoother and more pleasant," she says.

"This is no one's fault other than my own for assuming in the first place," says Avrom Goldberg, a senior vice president for global client services at Weichert Workforce Mobility, who moved and traveled cross-regionally throughout his whole



life. His mobility journey took him through Amsterdam, Brussels, London, and Hong Kong in late 2001, where he has been since. Still, even with such a rich experience of moving and managing moves of others, he got “caught up” by an innocent looking 130-mile relocation between Amsterdam and Brussels.

“The experience mirrored the cliché about the U.K. and the U.S. being two countries separated only by the same language,” Goldberg says. “When you move a short distance, or even a longer distance to what you believe to be a proximate or similar culture, the actual experience of how large the differences between these two cultures can come with genuine shock.”

Goldberg explains that, despite the language similarities (Dutch is the only official language of the Netherlands and is one of three official languages of Belgium, spoken by 60% of the Belgian population) and the proximity of the two countries, the business etiquette and other aspects of the culture could hardly be more different. For example, there are differences in directness of communication. Speed is an attribute of efficiency and execution for one nation and quite the opposite for the other, he says.

“It is utterly confounding when you assume you know what to expect and none of your expectations are met,” Goldberg says. He admits that he was much more prepared for the move from Europe to Asia when it comes to cultural differences. The false impression of distance between Belgium and the Netherlands misled his expectations.

### **Not Necessarily Home Sweet Home**

Cultural shock is a widely known phenomenon among expatriates. If you move between extremely distinct locations (e.g., differing in aspects of culture, clothing, etc.), you might feel a bit out of place. It is very common and usually passes after the initial period in the new country. But how about the reverse situation? Imagine that you have been living abroad for years and the time to go home comes. You have great memories associated with this place—your favourite spots, friends, and family waiting for you. You can’t wait to be back! Only when the day of your craved repatriation comes, you realize nothing is as you left it. This is reverse cultural shock. It’s much less spoken about, but it happens equally frequent and does not spare anyone, including mobility professionals.



When I moved from Lodz, Poland, to Shanghai, I could not understand how the most down-to-earth actions were not possible without a mobile phone, access to the internet, and the right app installed. I could not pay for my lunch, as nobody wanted cash, and I was barely able to use the taxi service or metro. I also remember the multiple face scans and fingerprint reads at the airport. Everyone was always in a rush in this fascinating city that never sleeps. I thought I would never get used to that, and I was so wrong. Before I realized, I adjusted to the local customs, cuisine, and having my cell always on me. Then it was time to come back home, and I quickly knew that one year in China spoiled me enough to complain about lack of the same convenient tech solutions in my home country.

Derksen experienced something similar upon coming back to the Netherlands after six years away. He admits that a lot of things changed in his “old” home country during this time. He recalls the funny story when he got fined while using public transportation in his first week because he did not have the right ticket. Being away from the country forces us to re-adjust and discover what has changed. Many expats will easily realize how

“silly things,” as Derksen calls them, “will throw them off guard.”

### One Move, Two Careers

Global mobility closely intertwines with talent management and has a strong influence on career progression. But what’s interesting, Meier says, is that the impact can be both positive and negative. For this reason, it is very important for an expatriate to have “an ongoing reflection about career and lifestyle,” he says. In addition, he emphasizes the complexity around multiple moves, which might not constitute such “a well-structured, step-by-step career progression,” as it does for one-time moves with a more straightforward repatriation and reintegration into the previous role. “The reality is much more complex,” he says. “The moves will have an impact on your career progression and force you to consider different roles and make difficult trade-offs between lifestyle and family issues on one side and career objectives on the other side.”

If we think about it more broadly, as mobility professionals, we quickly realize that the same level of complexity can pertain to the careers of expat couples. Regardless of who follows whom, the



“Traditional mobility programs assume non-working or trailing spouses, but this is typically not the case anymore, which highlights the need for more spouse support than before.”

impact will be tremendous. This thought brings us to Shefali Modi, chief operating officer at Benivo, who moved from London to Amsterdam accompanied by her husband and daughter. “The most common reason for a move failing is the partner not settling in,” she says. Modi points out that we all should be doing more when it comes to career talks and progression. “Over 90% of partners had given up on their careers, and most were not happy about it,” she says.

Dual career planning is also seen as a challenge to Konczos-Budai, especially when it comes to the aspects of finance and “making decisions by balancing two careers.” She mentions that even with the company providing support for the spouse, aligning the career of the spouse to the new environment remains “a big challenge.” “Traditional mobility programs assume non-working or trailing spouses, but this is typically not the case anymore, which highlights the need for more spouse support than before,” she says.

Another angle of complexity around “plus-one” moves has been flagged by Michael Piker, global DE&I and reward director at Flutter. He notices that many mobility policies tend not to support same-sex couples. Having lived in nine countries,

Piker points out that some countries do not recognize dependency of the same-sex-oriented spouses and, even if they do, the visa processing times can be extremely lengthy.

### **Walking the Talk**

Despite the uniqueness of each testimonial presented, there is one thing all the people I interviewed have in common: a positive view on having international living exposure while managing global mobility. Ruth Lockwood, head of strategic sales for Southeast Asia at Santa Fe Relocation, who moved through 11 countries, says there was nothing more rewarding than sharing her “heartfelt” rather than just “a professional” viewpoint with assignees being transferred from South Africa to Singapore, just like her. The opinion is echoed by Julia Hasillo, global mobility manager at Cognizant, who, after her assignment to London, “could relate to employees in a different way and look for solutions from their angle.” Enser adds, “I like to think that I’ve walked what I talk, so to speak. I understand the fears and barriers that can exist.”

Based on my own experience and that of those quoted here, I can confirm that global mobility is one of those professions in which mastering the theory might not be enough. We can alter the policies, look for the best relocation vendors, and provide the most competitive benefits in the market, but what we really should remember is that people see things differently, and have individual needs, assumptions, expectations, and backgrounds. As a result, there are certain aspects of relocation that can be easily planned as per the policy and applicable laws, but there is always another part that cannot be simply written into the process. It’s a human touch—the most important benefit that mobility professionals should all give. *m*

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**Klaudia Krawczyk** is a global mobility professional with seven years of experience in managing expatriates. Over the course of her tenure, Krawczyk moved between Poland, China, Hungary, and Hong Kong, allowing her to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that come with living and working abroad.



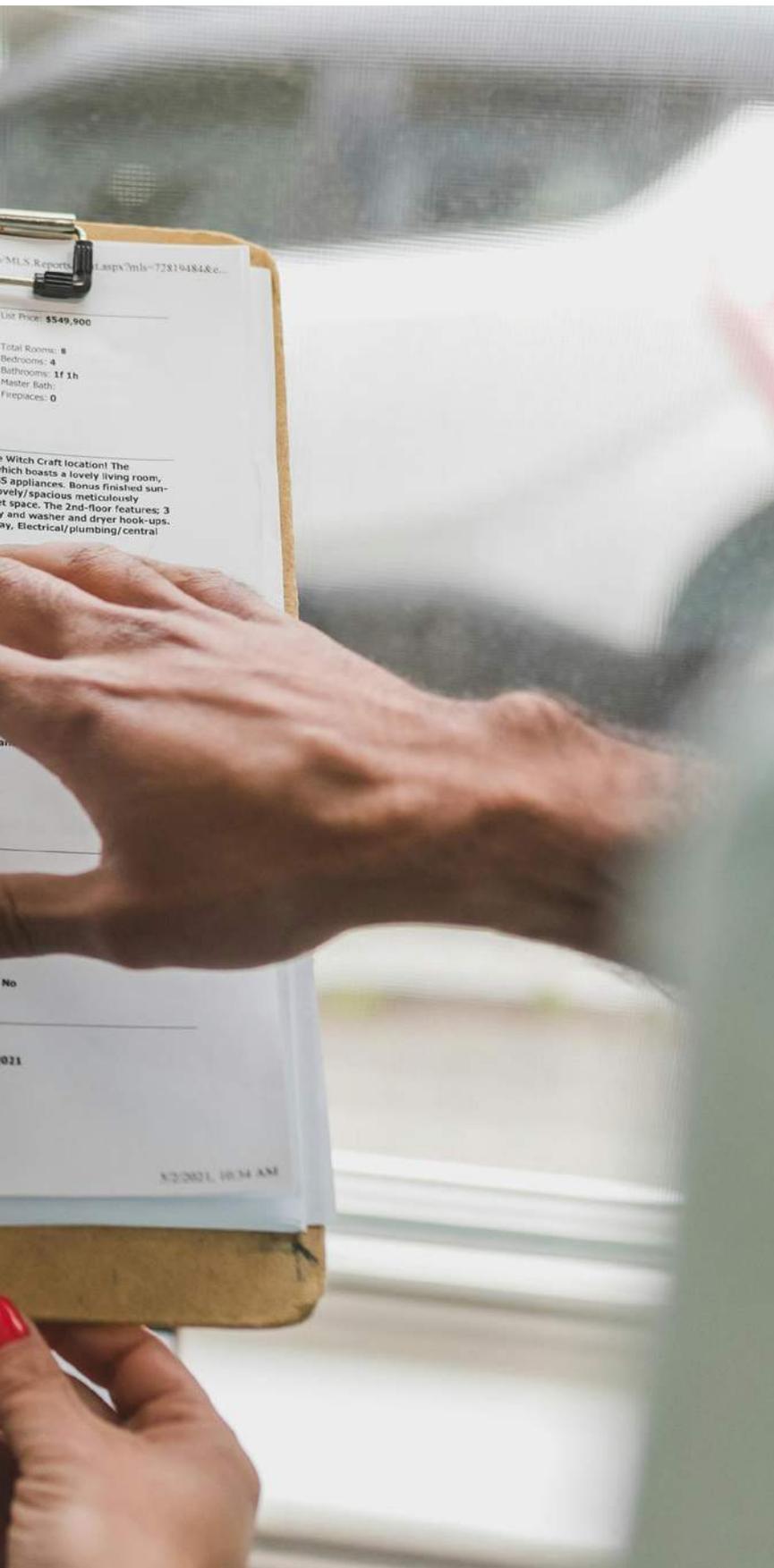
# The State of the Real Estate Industry

Content provided by the Relocation Directors Council

BY DEB BORRELL, CRP, GMS-T, SGDS, GRP, SRES

*We have seen* an enormous amount of change in the real estate industry over the past several years. With all the uncertainties taking place in both the real estate and relocation industries, one thing is certain: Change will keep occurring.





While some people love change, many do not, mostly because of the fear of the unknown. However, I have learned over the course of time that everything will fall into place with enough time, knowledge, preparation, and determination.

There may be some bumps along the way, but doesn't that make us stronger? We will continue to assess, learn, grow, and make progress to forge ahead. The real estate market looks different than it did after the late 2000s real estate crash. Approximately half of home ownership in the U.S. is now mortgage-free, and many homeowners have more equity than they ever did in the past with the increase in real estate values over course of the past 10 or so years.

I have spent a number of decades now in the corporate relocation and real estate sectors, and we are working through a number of challenges. Last year was interesting, to say the least. I have never seen as many uncertain transferees waiting on the sidelines to make housing decisions as I did this past year. Many homeowners in their departure locations chose to rent in lieu of buying in their new destination locations. We continue to hear about economic uncertainties, a softening of the job market, and the shifts from the "Great Resignation" to a plan to be back in the office. For many, it is a time of adjusting to the continuous changes.

Other transferees are once again working through hybrid work schedules and work-life balance. Many chose to move to more rural areas during the pandemic when they had more flexible work options by their employers. Now the options, in some cases, are swinging in the other direction. This is giving a population of transferees pause on deciding whether to take moves or not for various reasons. A Moody's Analytics report showed that roughly 20% of office space was not leased in the latter part of 2023 due in part to work trends, remote work, and overbuilding in the 1980s and 1990s. What will that mean for commercial real estate, and will this potentially offer an opportunity to transform commercial properties into additional residential space? Time will tell on that front.

Overall, real estate prices are still remaining strong in certain areas of the country, especially



in light of the tight inventory in many cases. Some areas of the country continue to hold or are rising slightly, with some declining prices in other markets. Real estate remains one of the most solid investments. In general, home prices are expected to have a slight upward trend in 2024, according to a number of research firms that specialize in real estate forecasts, including Freddie Mac, Zillow, and the National Association of Realtors.

The real estate sector has continued to see housing shortages for both sale and rentals, and this has been going on for a number of years. Last year was one where many chose to rent over buying. Buyers who could have purchased decided to rent for a number of reasons, including uncertainties in the economy, their job status, family dynamics, rising interest rates with the reduction of purchasing power, and the continued shortages of homes to buy. First-time homebuyers wanting to enter the housing market had a more difficult time between the interest rate increases and lack of more affordable housing. Staying in the lane of optimism and hearing that the Fed is going to hold interest rates over the next few months or more should

help those uncertain to decide whether to buy in the near future or continue to hold off.

There is an expectation of real estate sales growth at a steady rate over the course of the next year. My mind is made up that 2024 is going to be an improvement over 2023, and I am optimistic that it is going to keep going in the right direction—with some detours along the way. The interest rates will be dependent on the job data and inflation, and those rates will play a significant key factor in what is ahead in real estate and relocation for 2024. Stabilizing the interest rates in 2024 will bring more buyers to the table and off the fence compared to 2023. If the rates reduce, this will be an active year for homebuying and selling with those who have pent-up demand for housing. 2024 is also a presidential election year in the U.S. There will possibly be some company mergers and acquisitions in and outside our industry and over the course of the next decade, as well as layoffs in some sectors.

There is much going on in the legal sector focused on real estate with the Sitzler-Burnett National Association of Realtors lawsuits and now copycat lawsuits that have been popping up. When it comes to buyer broker

compensation, we do not know how this is going to play out. Will there be some answers in 2024? Possibly. We hear it may be another year or two before it is finalized. In the meantime, some companies are moving forward with decisions and others are taking a wait-and-see approach. In the end, there is going to be some kind of change in the industry, which may alter the way we all do business in real estate and relocation.

Whatever change that is, what we do know is that buyers need representation, and buyer's agents need to be compensated for their hard work and dedication to their clients. Buyers representing themselves is not a good outcome, and sellers placing "For Sale By Owner" signs in their yards without a proper execution of their listings is not going to produce the best outcome. Agency is an important component in the process. We have all been talking about how real estate brokerages and agents will need to be on top of their business, show their value, and how to verbally relay their value to their customers and clients and be able to answer compensation questions posed to them by clients and customers. This lawsuit outcome will potentially affect the way we do business in the future. It will affect commission structures as well as referral fees being paid to other brokerages and to relocation management companies (RMCs). RMCs will have to determine through communications with their client base how they are going to approach the new normal. It is our job as leaders in the industry to be engaged. To be engaged with each other, to be engaged with our real estate agents, and within our communities, and communicate often.

Technology is an area that is ever changing as well. There has been so much talk about artificial intelligence (AI) over the past year, and it is here to stay. It is time to learn what you can about AI and keep up with the knowledge curve. It will provide changes to our industry, and everyone needs to get on board the technology train. The technology of today will probably be obsolete in the next decade. AI will continue to improve and help enhance what we do to make it better. It is up to us to choose to use it in the proper manner.



**This lawsuit outcome will potentially affect the way we do business in the future. It will affect commission structures as well as referral fees being paid to other brokerages and to relocation management companies (RMCs).**

All in all, it is very exciting time in which we live, and these topics impact all of us. From challenges and changes, new opportunities and growth takes place. Let us draw from what we have learned over the past several years and use it for positive improvement. What we do each and every day is significant on so many levels and affects a lot of people and families. That is why we care and do what we do. *m*

Deb Borrell, CRP, GMS-T, SGDS, GRP, SRES, is the executive vice president of relocation at Allie Beth Allman & Associates. Borrell has over 30 years of experience in real estate and relocation.

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**Spotlight**

# Porto, Portugal

BY BETHANY LARRAÑAGA

*Nestled in northwest* Portugal, friendly Porto is one of the largest urban areas of Southwest Europe but maintains the charm of a small city. From the semi-Mediterranean climate to its historic architecture, Portugal's second largest city is considered by many to be the cultural capital of the country, with residents affectionately dubbed *Tripeiros* for their love of *Tripas a Modo do Porto*, the traditional dish of Porto. Expats will find themselves immersed in the best of Portuguese traditions in everyday life, and while the expat community in Porto is small compared to other major European cities, international presence is steadily growing.





***Snapshots***



***Kolkata, India***



***Lima, Peru***



## Doing Business

After an economic slowdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, Portugal has returned to its former standing as a center of international business. The country's economic forecast for 2024 has received an A rating from Moody's, Fitch, and DBRS, reopening doors for international investors and leading to an increase in demand for foreign talent. Porto's main industries include foreign investment and entrepreneurship, IT, manufacturing, and tourism. The startup industry is also gaining momentum, and the city's research centers deliver high-tech solutions for global clients.

Due to the importance of global business, international travel through Porto is a breeze—the Francisco Sá Carneiro Airport connects to 30 countries, and business in the capital city of Lisbon is easily accessible through high-speed rail.

Regarding Portuguese business etiquette, hospitality and consideration for others are key. Building relationships is the basis for doing business, with meetings often being held over coffee or a meal. Gift-giving is also a welcome gesture of goodwill, so consider bringing something small from your country of origin for business partners. Punctuality is a cornerstone of local politeness—ensure you arrive to meet colleagues early and business functions end on time.

Professional attire should be conservative, simple, and neat. It is typical for men to wear suits and ties, and for women to dress modestly. Avoid overly flashy or revealing clothing, and aim to make a polished impression.

## Family and Living

Despite the convenience and functionality of a city of its size, Tripeiros enjoy a relatively low cost of living when compared to other major European cities. Accommodations can be found all over the city for a wide price range, and reasonably priced real estate can be found for expats looking to purchase a home. Safety also receives top marks—Porto was named the safest country in Europe by the Global Peace Index in 2020 and has maintained its positioning as a high-ranking country in the years since.

Public transportation provides an accessible way to travel without a car. The city's vast network of buses and tramways connect residents and tourists alike across the metropolitan area. Concerning tourists, expats can expect Porto to become a bustling hub in the height of tourism season. While main attractions and popular areas can become crowded, small gems can be found for respite around the city.

For families, public schooling is available to residents starting at the age of 3, though curriculum is taught in Portuguese. There are several private and international schools also available in a number of languages. Most health care services are provided to residents for free, and affordable private health insurance can also be purchased starting at EUR€30/USD\$33 a month.

## Immigration and Permits

Expats considering relocation to Porto must obtain a Portuguese visa before arrival through their local embassy and a residency permit to remain in the country. Residents of fellow EU member states—as well as Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Norway, and Iceland—are exempt from visa requirements but still must apply for a residency permit. Applicants should plan to apply in advance; work permit applications can take up to 60 days to process, with an additional two to three months for entry visas. Family accompaniment visas can also be obtained for spouses or minors of the main visa holder. General visa fees for adults cost EUR€80/USD\$87.

## Unexpected

As a port city, Porto is a vibrant blend of green spaces, sunny beaches, and a lively cultural scene showcasing its old-world character. Architecture buffs can enjoy a number of interesting historical sites integrated into everyday life—for example, the city's oldest train station, São Bento, was built



on the site of a Benedictine monastery. Other architectural attractions include the Sé cathedral dating back to the 12th century, and Café Majestic, a renowned gathering place for great literary, artistic, and political minds dating back to 1921 and featuring a stunning Art Nouveau design.

The namesake of port wine, Porto also offers a feast for the senses through its many wine bars and fine dining establishments. Take a wine tour through multicolored buildings around the city, or visit the Port Wine Museum for a deep dive into the centuries-old legacy of Porto's wine scene. As their nickname would suggest, *Tripeiros* enjoy a rich culinary culture stemming from Porto's unique positioning as the port city. Ranging from traditional specialties of meat and seafood to local favorites like the *francesinha*, a hearty hangover cure in the form of a sandwich, the city's food scene pays tribute to the city's diverse culinary heritage and offers hearty options for all budgets.



## Kolkata, India

Lively Kolkata stands tall as the capital city of West Bengal and provides all the vibrancy of India's rich cultural traditions. While the anglicized version of the city name is *Calcutta*, the Bengali spelling of *Kolkata* is its official moniker. Rooted in its history as a port city, Kolkata is one of the country's major economic centers with key business areas of manufacturing, finance, trade, publishing, and entertainment. The financial sector plays a significant role in local commerce—the Calcutta Stock Exchange and a significant presence of foreign banks has marked the city as a center for international banking.

Compared to other major metropolitan areas like Bangalore and Mumbai, the cost of living in Kolkata is relatively low, and the real estate market has remained stable over the past few years. A range of living arrangements are available across the cities, from shared living arrangements to fully furnished apartments. Transportation is available by bus, taxi, and the metro railway. Owning a car offers faster

transportation than public options, but expect heavy traffic during rush hour periods.

Kolkata is known as the City of Joy for good reason. Residents share an enthusiasm for its culture, food, music, literature, and more. Exciting events like Bengali New Year and *Durga Puja* fill the streets with mesmerizing colors, beautiful traditional outfits, and tantalizing foods. Outside of the major holidays, celebrations of the arts such as the Kolkata International Film Festival and *Boi Para*—a dedicated book market—provide opportunities for enjoyment year-round.

Permanent residency in India can be obtained with the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card, and spousal visas can be obtained at the time of application if the marriage has been registered at least two years. Processing times for OCI range from five to six weeks and cost USD\$275 per applicant, plus additional fees. Person of Indian Origin (PIO) cards are also available for foreign nationals with Indian heritage or other distinct qualifiers outlined by India's Ministry of Home Affairs.



## Lima, Peru

Sitting on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, Peru's historic capital Lima is a tapestry of cultures. Residents—known as *Limeños*—boast an array of traditions stemming from the population's blend of cultural makeup, including Spanish, German, Croatian, and Japanese influences. Lima is home to the largest Japanese community in Latin America. With this mix of cultural influence, it's no surprise Lima is known as the Gastronomical Capital of the Americas, and the city center has been named a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Culinary excellence is far from Lima's only merit—it serves as the largest export city in South America and the regional center of the cargo industry. Lima is also the only capital city in South America founded on the coastline, making the *Callao* seaport one of the main throughlines for commerce and fishing of the continent. In addition to trade, Lima's standout industries include manufacturing, finance, and insurance.

In business transactions, hierarchy and respect are foundational. Formal language (e.g., referring to colleagues as *usted* instead of the less formal *tú*) should be used during business meetings, and decision-making comes from

higher-ranking partners. While gifts are not customary at the office, plan to bring a small token of appreciation, such as a bottle of wine or flowers, if invited to someone's home. Peruvians speak a dialect of Spanish called Peruvian Coastal Spanish, and an understanding of basic Spanish is advisable for newcomers, both in business and daily life.

The cost of living in Lima can be more expensive than other parts of the country, but still reasonable. Units with two to three bedrooms are common, though furnished accommodation can cost up to double the standard rate. The best of Peruvian health care can be found in Lima as the home of the country's top medical centers. However, it is advisable to seek private health care, as public clinics are commonly understaffed.

Resident work visas are granted through the Peruvian Labor Ministry and require a valid work contract of at least 12 months. These visas must be renewed annually, and after three years, expats are eligible to apply for a permanent resident visa. Resident work visas cost around S/163/USD\$44 before fees per applicant.

# Mobility Matters

Best in Travel: Top Cities to See in 2024

BY BETHANY LARRAÑAGA

*With the winter chill melting away, it's time for another exciting travel season. Explore the top destinations of 2024, along with the can't-miss attractions and hidden gems they have to offer.*



1

The French capital of Paris will be buzzing with excitement as the host city of the 2024 Summer Olympics and Paralympics, and some of the city's most iconic landmarks will be on full display during this year's games. In addition to the classics, take some time to explore some more unusual attractions, like the oldest house in the city built in 1407, the living façade at the Musée du Quai Branly, or Paris' zero point.  
*Source: parisjetaime.com*

The perfect blend of cultural immersion and natural respite, Kenya's capital city of Nairobi offers a brilliant array of options for every traveler. The Green City in the Sun is a perfect description for this lush and sunny destination—Nairobi is the only city in the world with a wildlife park (the Nairobi National Park) nestled within the city and is heralded as the safari capital of Africa.  
*Source: www.holidiffy.com*



2



3

Known as the cultural heart of Canada, Montréal is home to over 50 museums ranging from fine arts at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal to social history at the McCord Stewart Museum and sports at the Hockey Hall of Fame. Wherever your curiosity lies, Montréal's skill for blending education and entertainment creates opportunities to explore for all ages and backgrounds.  
*Source: www.mtl.org*



4

Historic Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a delight for day trips and extended stays alike. The city hosts Ottoman-era buildings showcasing intricate Islamic architecture. Group tours by riverboat are offered to view these architectural treasures up close, and a short backpacking trip from the city rewards travelers with stunning waterfalls. The perfect visit is rounded out with a slice of burek, a Moreish stuffed pastry tracing back to Turkey.  
*Source: www.lonelyplanet.com*



5

The city of Philadelphia's reputation for brotherly love doesn't just extend to our human counterparts. The city cheerfully houses over 30 dinosaur and Mesozoic reptile species—including a Tyrannosaurus rex—at The Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, the United States' oldest natural history museum. If you prefer to fast forward a few millennia, check out the Independence Visitor Center for other historic sites across the city.  
*Source: www.visitphilly.com*

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