

# How workplace relocation has been impacted by the pandemic

Over the past year, how we work has changed significantly. What has become blindingly obvious is that there has never been greater flexibility in how and where companies are allowing their employees to work.

---

Where companies were once tentatively considering or gently introducing flexible and remote working, working from home has forced them not only to embrace it fully, but to also consider what they're going to do once COVID restrictions start to relax.

This is a matter of hot debate, and there are a lot of unknowns. What will the future of work look like? Are offices a thing of the past? How can employers support employees as the impact of remote working is felt? And with the big tech players making moves to introduce remote working and 'work from anywhere' policies – most recently Salesforce and Spotify – how long will it take for other, smaller companies to follow suit?

With the global employee relocation management market – valued at \$29B in 2017 – set to grow by 3.3% by 2024, what we're now seeing is an unprecedented migration, with many serviced-based workers actively considering relocating to destinations outside of traditional corporates HQs.

# The benefits of remote working

One positive from the pandemic-enforced working from home situation is that employee productivity has not been impacted, thus paving the way for employers to relax their perspective on remote working.

Prior to the pandemic, one survey found 65% of employees felt they could be just as productive working remotely as in a traditional office, while research undertaken by Microsoft during the pandemic shows that productivity has remained unaffected, and has even increased in many companies.

Employees' work-life balance has also benefited from working remotely. A reduced commute time and the ability to work anywhere – not just from home – has resulted in happier employees (up to 75% in the UK) and some significant cost savings for employers.

The pandemic has shown that many employees can be successful working from anywhere and this has accelerated the trend towards relocators being more digitally-minded and interested in moving for lifestyle reasons rather than purely for their career. Many large corporates are investing in new roles to support this population, such as Okta's recently appointed new head of dynamic work.

Not only that, but being able to offer relocation support to employees is a huge advantage in attracting and retaining talent in the new hybrid world of work. As long as employees are tax compliant and have the appropriate visa, there's nothing to stop them relocating to a completely new country.

Indeed, IBM recently found that 54% of US employees want to carry on working remotely after the pandemic: that's more than half the workforce potentially looking for total location independence.

*Unsplash © Timo Wielink*

## The hybrid world of work: how to make it happen

With employees working remotely, where should you start when it comes to offering relocation benefits to your employees? Of course, relocation agents exist but they tend to be pricey and far too localised to support the new wave of relocators. Digital-first solutions could well be the key: enabling employees to access high quality, affordable relocation support, whether they want to move to another part of the country or another part of the world.

There are also a number of factors that employers should keep in mind from the off. They need to understand and be compliant with local tax systems; their employees must have a right to work; and they can't be at risk of setting up a Permanent Entity. Beyond the practical requirements – including immigration and tax being taken care of – there are the more pastoral elements to think about.

For example, businesses need to support their staff in working from anywhere: there needs to be a duty of care. Office spaces have been the main connection for many employees so it is likely that the daily opportunity to build relationships and interact with colleagues socially will be missed. HR departments will need to provide as many virtual benefits, support and care as possible if they lose that physical connection with their employees on a permanent basis. They also need to ensure that employees have a good workspace and aren't stressed about moving.

We are, quite possibly, on the threshold of one of the biggest migrations of the global workforce, and it's highly likely that employers will offer far more in terms of flexible working terms and set-up than they've ever done previously. Whether it's being closer to family or the opportunity to explore a new place or way of life, the barriers to relocation are melting away. Where would you go?

Paul Bennett is cofounder of *Perchpeek*, the AI-powered relocation agent. Perchpeek provides an end-to-end relocation service for a new generation of relocators – those who can work from anywhere – as well as helping some of the world's top companies attract and retain top talent.