

3 Mobility Trends to Expect in 2021

Angela Gutu, Director, Global Account Management
Yathy Abdul Fatah, Director, Global Account Management

How Outsourcing Can Support Leaner Global Mobility Teams

The world is embarking on a new stage of the pandemic as COVID-19 vaccine deployment has begun in varying phases. As company stakeholders are starting to think about a post-COVID-19 world, they are planning to leverage potential business opportunities that could present themselves, while internal teams are preparing to support those organizational goals through mobility. They are investing in scenario-mapping discussions with business units, reviewing their service provider partnerships and mobility programs, and assessing current internal talent needs.

3 Mobility Trends to Expect in 2021

- 1. The Mobility Function will be Leaner and More Agile*
- 2. The Mobility Function Will Remain Increasingly Active in Program and Organizational Strategy and Oversight*
- 3. The Mobility Function Will Become Even More Engaged in The Employee Experience*

3 Mobility Trends to Expect in 2021 and How Outsourcing Can Help

In this SIRVA article, we'll discuss three trends we expect to continue in the coming year, considerations for each, and how outsourcing mobility can support internal teams during this exciting yet challenging new mobility landscape.

1. The Mobility Function will be Leaner and More Agile –

Fewer people taking on more work will be the norm. In many cases, recent staff reductions have resulted in organizations losing some of their institutional and expert knowledge. Although we expect remobilizations to increase during the middle of next year, mobility teams will be unlikely to increase in size, at least during the immediate aftermath of the pandemic. Adaptation will be an ongoing process and will require a fresh approach to reorganizing resources, curating knowledge, and engaging external partners.

Consider, as an example, a decision made by a global company:

Leadership saw these turbulent times as an opportunity to perform scenario modelling and to look for the most efficient internal (versus external) resource allocation. The decision to adopt a leaner in-house mobility team with a centralized, outsourced shared-services model has already yielded many benefits. **Through consultancy with SIRVA, the company receives timely market and competitor benchmarking data, which directly translates into a more successful and adaptable mobility program.**

It is important to keep in mind that the re-opening of borders and lifting of travel restrictions will happen very gradually, but not necessarily in a linear (or consistently forward-moving) manner. We anticipate that normalization will start with several green lanes between a small number of countries, followed by broader travel bubbles as we have seen in areas of Asia. A global standard such as the one [suggested by the International Air Transport Association](#) (or an equivalent) may need to be in place before businesses can make reasonable assumptions about the full resumption of talent movement across the globe.

The above represents only a few of many variables that mobility professionals will have to consider in a very uncertain world. Simply trying to stay abreast of the latest immigration changes – and those that are yet to come into effect – will be a challenge for already busy teams. Partnering with an external mobility or relocation management company provides instant access to global resources, expertise, and networks that make managing mobility easier.

2. The Mobility Function Will Remain Increasingly Active in Program and Organizational Strategy and Oversight –

A variety of areas present opportunities for mobility to play a strategic role. These include:

- **Business Contingency Protocols:** Mobility practitioners play a crucial role in reviewing their organizations' existing business contingency protocols. These have often proven to be ineffective in the context of COVID-19. The effects happened simultaneously at local, regional, and global levels, impacting both employees and organizations in all business verticals. The level of immediate disruption was unprecedented. Working with our clients in 2020, we experienced the need for more resilient protocols for black-swan-type events such as the pandemic.

Building resilience was one of the main objectives for another global company: Their dispersed talent pool operates in far-flung, non-traditional expat locations across the globe. While responding to the pandemic, the company identified gaps in their business contingency protocols and decided to engage an external vendor with a well-established supply chain to support all their relocating employees, particularly those in the most security-sensitive locations.

In addition to needing robust vendor management protocols and a broad footprint, the company was outsourcing mobility services for the first time and needed to understand the best methodology for re-designing their policies with improved fairness and consistent delivery in mind.

The employee benefits of partnering with SIRVA were immediately felt and appreciated. They received the appropriate breadth and depth of support in ways that were market competitive and better aligned with their circumstances. [Technology](#) played a critical role, as well. For the first time, the organization could estimate costs, secure approvals, initiate moves, and obtain reports, all through a centralized platform.

Organizations working through a centralized relocation management company (RMC) model may find it easier to perform an in-depth pressure-test assessment of their business contingency protocols, primarily due to the ease-of-administration that comes

with having fewer partners to communicate with, but also because of the RMC's existing technology and the diverse logistical expertise they have developed as a result of 'being on the ground' locally with their talent, all around the world.

- **Supply Chain Framework Risks and Inefficiencies:** A supply chain framework in mobility typically involves dozens of partners operating in multiple geographies, with varying data privacy controls and systems-recovery protocols. This model can be a concern in light of those variables. Mobility professionals have been working closely with general counsels on compliance and duty-of-care matters, as they are uniquely positioned to inform legal departments regarding gaps that may exist under current circumstances. They may also propose a need for new parameters and models in which risks are further mitigated. Outsourcing with an experienced global RMC can be a benefit in this regard, as well: If the mobility provider utilizes an in-house network of providers, data is monitored through a single network, which minimizes risk. Additionally, when vendors/agencies are monitored through one system from end to end (and held to consistent standards), productivity, efficiency, and quality are maximized.

The industry expects the strategic role of talent mobility to continue to grow and, with it, the need to move from an operational role to one that is actively involved in business oversight and planning.

A global company made a decision that is a befitting example of the potential value that outsourcing can bring to more mature, tried-and-tested mobility programs. Due to their existing mobility program's success, the organization decided to further outsource parts of their framework to SIRVA. **Activities related to assignment assessment and family support – pre- and post-relocation – were entrusted to SIRVA.** This change was gradual and well-calibrated, derived from multi-stakeholder consultation, and underpinned by a desire to provide even greater bandwidth to the in-house mobility team. **Post-relocation surveys indicated that there was an improvement to customer experience. Relocating families found the support received to be better customized to their circumstances and the inquiry response time to be quicker.**

The overall message is that mobility professionals have been thrust into highly critical internal conversations, which demand time for research and reflection if they are to articulate their recommendations to legal and business lines/divisions. These activities require a great deal of prioritization and time management from mobility practitioners. Streamlining external partnerships through centralized control is a best practice, and is a route taken by many organizations.

3. The Mobility Function Will Become Even More Engaged in The Employee Experience –

As mobility teams continue to operate with reduced staffing, they contemplate how to best signal empathy and inclusiveness to the employees they serve. In addition to the meticulous monitoring of travel and immigration guidelines and the strengthening of their business contingency protocols, mobility practitioners are asking the right questions so they can be 'tuned-in' regarding the needs and voice of their talent. What do they think about the future? What are they feeling? What do successful deployments look like to them? What needs to be a 'high priority' in this new phase?

A start-up in Southeast Asia placed their employees' experience at the forefront of their decision to outsource mobility for the first time. The geography of their operations is expanding. Their products are diversifying. The talent profile they look for is always in flux.

Because the organization is so mindful of the employee experience, leadership's understanding of what their relocating employee population needed changed considerably as the pandemic evolved and impacted their mobile population. As a result, they required flexibility from their relocation partner to adjust service offerings. The policy changed substantially from the early stages of the outsourcing journey, and now aligns better with what the relocating talent feels is most relevant today. **SIRVA partnered with the company to successfully balance employee needs, cost pressures from business units, and the competitive nature of the talent ecosystem in which the organization operates. With an internal mobility function that is supported by only one staff member (with limited mobility industry**

knowledge), SIRVA has provided valuable support and strengthened the mobility value proposition, internally.

Active listening is a critical skill that mobility professionals display daily, but it takes time to correctly determine the current and evolving sentiments of the employees they help relocate. Understanding what is important to employees is a fundamental step in the re-design of mobility programs. External partnerships with mobility partners such as an RMC can be a valuable option for organizations that are committed to exploring new models when adapting to a post-COVID-19 world.

Supporting Smaller Mobility Teams by Outsourcing

In summary, the opportunities for the mobility function to contribute to and benefit the organization are numerous.

In a highly competitive talent market, companies need to demonstrate that they are vigilant and responsive. They need to signal that they understand what is necessary for talent to relocate in a world that is in turmoil and that they can design and execute bespoke, fit-for-local-purpose programs. Mobility professionals need to remain abreast of public policy on immigration and health, consulting with legal partners on business continuity and risk mitigation plans. It is also paramount that mobility teams align their planning and execution with business goals and objectives. It is of equal importance that they retain bandwidth to proactively signal empathy and inclusiveness to the globally mobile population they serve. Collectively, this is a tall order.

Implementing or strengthening external partnerships with relocation management companies provides support to internal teams by increasing organizational bandwidth and expanding access to global networks and expertise. As a result, these internal teams are free to focus on company strategy, compliance, and on strengthening the employee experience.

To learn more about how SIRVA can support your company and conduct a thorough review of your company's mobility structure, processes and policies, contact us at concierge@sirva.com.



Contributors

Jialin Chia, Senior Regional Marketing Manager, APAC & Middle East

Lisa Marie DeSanto, Content Marketing Manager