



# Ensuring the assignment

By Tom Wilkinson, managing director, [AXA PPP Insurance](#)

Managing a global workforce is no longer about sending their teams around the world and benefiting from career prospects at the same time.

This growing trend of people moving abroad to live and work is reflected in an anticipated almost doubling in international assignee numbers between 1998 and 2020, according to a report by management consultancy PwC entitled [Talent mobility 2020 and beyond](#).

But there are a number of reasons that people decide to move overseas for work, as our [own research reveals](#). Key drivers include a search for new adventures (56%), better work/life balance (40%) and better career opportunities (17%).

Employers have also started realising that tapping into these desires is a fantastic way of attracting and retaining talent while expanding operations and market reach into new countries at the same time. It not only heightens employees' sense of engagement with the business, but also helps enhance their resilience, adaptability and communication skills. Staff also have the opportunity to learn fresh skills and ideas from working with new colleagues, which in turn increases their value and ability to contribute positively to the organisation.



# What international work — for everyone

## International

task only limited to multinational companies. Businesses of all sizes are now expanding from employees' increasing desire to experience the expat lifestyle while boosting their

### Key challenges

But sending employees abroad presents its own challenges. As a result, a specialised new kind of job role is starting to emerge on the HR landscape - that of international global mobility manager who can understand the unique needs of workers living in new and unfamiliar places. Important considerations in this context include: cultural differences, whether local language skills will be necessary, and what information may be required about local schools, housing and taxes.

A comprehensive employee support package can help lessen these very practical stresses and strains on expats, making it easier for them to settle into their new environment and hit the ground running at work. Accommodation issues, the cost of living and finding schooling for children are among the biggest hurdles they will face. Therefore, comprehensive guidance to help staff and their families settle into their new home will be greatly appreciated.

Our research also shows that 83% of expats-to-be are concerned about finding good healthcare provision in their target country - although nearly one in five erroneously believe that travel insurance alone will be enough to cover costs. Getting this wrong can lead to very costly mistakes for both expats and their employers, however, and so provision should always be included within the overall support package.

### Bigger picture

Helping employees and their family members to acclimatise once they are in situ can also be difficult. Our research indicates that about a fifth of expats find it difficult to settle, build a social life or get to grips with local laws. As a result, it is important for employers to ensure that people are as well informed and prepared as possible before they go.

It is also worth noting that large numbers of overseas assignments fail because partners or family are unhappy. This means that it is crucial for employers to look at the wider picture and ►



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consider the wellbeing not only of their workers but of their family too. Even putting them in contact with expat communities to share mutual experiences can help.

Another important consideration is ensuring regular communication. Staying in touch with international assignees is essential to ensuring they feel supported and still connected to the business back home - particularly at the start and end of assignments.

## Benefits of regular communication

When employees first move, they may need regular support and information updates to help smooth the transition. They will be learning an enormous amount and may feel a little overwhelmed. Ensuring that they have someone on the other end of a phone with whom to discuss any issues can help to ease this process.

The same applies when a staff member finishes their assignment. They are likely to need support and regular communication to help with the transition home. Things may have changed within the business or their home country that could make a return more difficult.

Therefore, managing expectations may be necessary to help them settle back into normal life. They might also need reassurance as to what the new reality both at home and at work will look like.

Ultimately, the challenges of sending employees abroad can always be overcome with careful planning and investment. Although it may seem resource-intensive, providing a dedicated team to support them every step of the way will ensure that they settle in and are as productive as possible in their new roles. ■



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**International**. He is also a director on the boards of other companies including AXA Mansard Insurance in Nigeria and ICAS Southern Africa, which provides behavioural risk management services. Tom has in the past worked for a variety of global firms, including IBM and Credit Suisse, and has lived in Japan, Denmark, Switzerland, France, the US and Italy.