

Business travel post-COVID-19 – considerations for Global Mobility and Immigration teams

Global Mobility teams need to take control of business travel now more than ever.

In many organisations, business travel is rarely on the radar of the mobility team. Where there is a business travel owner, their main focus is typically travel booking and security, with the acquisition of business visas outsourced to third parties. Few mobility managers feel they truly own and/or trust business traveller compliance, especially from an immigration perspective.

For many organisations there has been no desire or perceived need to look at business travel through a strategic lens. This may need to change.

Why? Business travel in a post-COVID-19 world represents wide-scale change impacting revenue, employee experience, employee relations and costs of travel. In the recovery phase, when business travel starts up again, there will be many challenges which have rarely been encountered before. Borders will open and potentially close at short notice, new requirements will likely be introduced at a moment's notice and individuals may be able to travel but may not want to. These are challenges which global mobility and HR teams have the ideal skill set to deal with.





Global workforce strategy –

Has COVID-19 changed your attitude to business travel? Will there be a reduction in business travel? Will the activities undertaken change? Might short-term assignments replace business trips in number? Will that be a long-term change?



Employer duty of care –

Can you be certain where all your employees are in the world? Can you easily monitor changing entry restrictions/requirements globally? Can you communicate those changes quickly to impacted employees with upcoming/ongoing business trips? What is the impact on employees if you require them to undertake travel? What if employees want to travel before you are ready to allow it?



Communication strategy –

How will you ensure entry restrictions and requirements are understood by employees and by the business in a post-COVID-19 world? What will your stance be on business travel?



Speed to deploy – Can you get someone to a country faster with a work permit than a business visa?



Critical travel – Where an employee must urgently travel for business critical reasons, such as to fulfil a contract term or repair an item of equipment, it is unlikely a business visa approval will be left to chance – the business will likely mandate Mobility's involvement.



Increased complexity – What if business visas become more difficult to obtain? For example, previously issued Chinese visas are not currently valid and a new, tougher set of requirements applies. Might health certificates be needed? Who will own these complex applications which may be more akin to a work permit?



Case strategy – Availability of consular appointments cannot be assumed. The country of destination might be open to travellers but the ability to travel there may depend on the country of origin. Travel bans for certain origin countries, as well as unavailability of mandated documents, means the selection of the right candidate will be key for the trip.



Budget and Policy – Will you allow all business travel post-COVID-19? Or limit to essential travel to avoid costly emergency repatriation? When will you feel comfortable returning to a BAU approach? Might employees become more demanding about, for example, which airlines to fly with or class of travel? Will you support this additional cost?



Employment law considerations

– Will you mandate essential travel?
What if the employee says no?



Compliance – Not only will the question of business visa vs work permit continue to be key, there may be further rules to follow whilst on a business visit. And breaking these could have an impact on the company as well as the individual.

Getting back to the volume of business trips undertaken before the crisis seems a long way off. This gives an opportunity to move business travel programmes to the Mobility team. Do you now have an opportunity to ‘tame the beast’ of business travel compliance?

In our next article on business travel programmes, we will be looking at Asia and the emerging green shoots of recovery, to help understand what the future of travel might be.

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