



# Podcast transcript

## Flexibility and Agility and GM post COVID-19

Podcast with Louise Worbey, Global Mobility Lead, Global Mobility Central Team, KPMG International \*

*Musical intro*

**Announcer:**

Hello and welcome to the Future of Mobility, the KPMG podcast series for global mobility leaders where we talk about the key trends and issues surrounding global mobility departments and their functions. For today's episode, I spoke to Louise Worbey, Global Mobility Lead, Global Mobility Central Team, KPMG International.

Louise, thanks for taking the time to join me on the phone today.

**Louise:**

No problem, thanks for asking me.

**Announcer:**

**Louise, it seems the topic of choice for many businesses these days is, "How will COVID-19 affect Global Mobility in the long-term?". So, can I ask you to share some of your insights on the current situation?**

**Louise:**

Like most organizations we had the immediate issue of assignees moving, sometimes without much notice or visibility just due to the speed of border closures. And then we needed to check in with everyone, understand their circumstances and actually what they wanted to do because we were trying to follow a very assignee-led process. So now we're in a position where we are slowly restarting our program but in the interim, we have had an opportunity to pause, reflect and think about the future. It will undoubtedly be different in a number of ways for us all. And I certainly have learnt with Brexit, it's never too early to start scenario planning and think through the issues even if you can't necessarily solve them all at the time.

**Announcer:**

**And Louise, what would you say successful Global Mobility functions should be able to do confidently to succeed in a post COVID-19 world?**

**Louise:**

I would say they need to be open minded and they need to be flexible. The traditional models of global mobility were already under challenge. We've had a growth in remote workers, commuters, dual income families and that was something global mobility was getting its arms around. So, this in my view is just another thing, another dimension to be embraced. I'm seeing it as a new change in how we support our people and how we support our organizations appropriately.

**Announcer:**

**And what can a company or Global Mobility function do to ensure they can pivot plans or change course when needed?**

**Louise:**

For those who want to be quick off the starting blocks to remobilize its workforce, or restart their silent program, it will be really important to have detailed skills audit of its workforce. That should help inform how to maximize that potential and actually deploy people physically or virtually to the right places to accelerate their economic recovery, there is no point in just suddenly turning on the taps without thought. Having flexible policies in place which many organizations either have or have been looking at, that should have significant levers to pull to secure the right candidate or internal move and that will become even more important than before.

**Announcer:**

**Louise, how are you seeing businesses deal with virtual employees and new government restrictions or policies? What are some of the issues that are arising and how can businesses mitigate risk?**

**Louise:**

From what I'm hearing, I think in many organizations, expectations are high. That having employees work almost in their location of choice could be the new norm and the way forward. It's been done in the last six months, right? So, carry on.

But once this type of thinking gets to HR and global mobility hopefully – hopefully, it can be clarified, no it's not that simple. Short term, it may work and there have been a relaxation of some of the rules in certain locations but it's not the new norm unless the right due diligence is done and it has to balance the risk with the reward.

My team knows that I have often said that any move can be achieved, it's just a question of whether the cost of mitigating the risks presented outweigh the original business decision or anticipated return on investment sufficiently to make it a viable proposition.

**Announcer:**

**Louise, for an organization to move forward into the realm of multiple virtual assignments, what for you are some questions that will emerge and what will take time and analysis to resolve?**

**Louise:**

I think fundamentally you first need to understand if the roles you have can even be done virtually as in some industries they can't. Then there can be other issues around things like data management, I'm thinking particularly service industries dealing with client data. Do your clients consent to their data being used in whatever country your employee happened to be operating from? The main issues already under discussion is risk or around corporate tax aspects and permanent establishment and I can't stress that this is really important. It could well be the determining factor. But global mobility teams need to look at all the issues this creates and not just the headlines. Even if a virtual assignment can be approached and the risk could be balanced, it does cause future fundamental issues around things like compensation. If the work can be done from anywhere, what pay scale do you use? Home, host? As an organization are you going to value the work or are you going to value the location it's done from. Now that could be argued as outside the remit of global mobility, but ticking a box that PE is fine, is just the start of the issues around this topic that are going to need to be resolved.

**Announcer:**

**And Louise, what are some of the new trends you're hearing about from Global Mobility department's pre-and potentially post-COVID-19?**

**Louise:**

Personally, I hold the view that you cannot underestimate the emotional impact that COVID has had. And I think we're going to see employees rethinking and reevaluating how far away they are working from their families. That could potentially lead to a spike in a things like permanent transfers when the job market starts to stabilize.

I've spoken to some assignees who were previously commuting, working Monday to Friday in another country, coming home on weekends and some of them are really struggling with the idea of resuming that work pattern, given the time they've spent with their family and getting a sense of the family experiences and time that they're missing out on and that coupled with the power of technology to enable working from home is going to cause ripples throughout global mobility that we need to look into.

**Announcer:**

**So finally, Louise, to conclude our conversation, do you have any advice you give our listeners who are looking at the future of Global Mobility functions in a post COVID-19 world?**

**Louise:**

Well, I guess it's a measure of reassurance to those working in global mobility, my view is it will always be there. The benefits of immersing yourself full time in another country and benefiting personally and professionally from that cultural change still has enormous potential. I think it's normal to expect the volumes are going to drop for long-term assignment but that's not going to be forever.

And in that interim, organizations are going to want to manage the economics even more tightly, so we have to be creative about how we meet talent needs. Global mobility cannot position itself as the team that says 'no'. It's got to be a team that develops flexible, agile solutions, presents them to the business for consideration and it's a huge opportunity to step up.

**Announcer:**

Thanks, Louise and that sounds like a good place to wrap up. And thanks again for joining us on the podcast today. I know you've given our listeners a great deal to think about and consider.

**Louise:**

Thank you!

**Announcer:**

Please let us know what you think of this episode and if you have any ideas for future episodes, please email us at [tax@kpmg.com](mailto:tax@kpmg.com).

And remember, you can find our latest publications, articles and other material that address the issues discussed in this ongoing podcast series at [kpmg.com/futureofmobility](https://kpmg.com/futureofmobility).

Thanks for listening.

*Musical exit*

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