

# How Is The Industry Opening Up

Since the pandemic began, EuRA members across the world have been supporting assignees in a time of great uncertainty and fear. I have had the privilege of interviewing relocation service providers across the globe for our YouTube channel and a lot has changed since the end of February. The initial frozen fear we all felt as the world started to shut down passed quickly in our industry as members responded to the challenges facing their assignees. One of the questions I was asking in those early days was ‘how are your teams coping?’, and the answers I got back were unequivocal; they were coping amazingly well with their central concern being supporting their assignees during what is an incredibly difficult life change at the best of times. In the throes of a pandemic, in lockdown, unable to experience any of the highs of an international assignment, the work, collaboration and support of global mobility managers and service providers gave an essential practical and psychological lifeline to people in transition.

So now we find ourselves on the edge of a world opening up and for many countries coming out of lockdown is far more difficult than going into it. Europe is opening its borders again and most countries are relaxing their quarantine rules for new arrivals. However, it looks like global travel is still some way off and the practicalities of the day to day work of providers is hampered by the different rates at which governments are opening offices essential for assignees, such as immigration and social security.

So how are mobility providers working now to support the globally mobile community in a new climate of social distancing and travel restrictions?

At the end of May we published a Guidance Document for EuRA members looking at best practice when working with assignees as well as best practice for the teams themselves. “Doing Business with

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COVID-19” highlights the risk management mitigations our industry faces and helps members to develop their own policy to assure global mobility managers and their assignees that they are working with their very best interests at heart. But is the necessity of doing business so differently changing the landscape of our high touch, human industry?

Klaus Kremers’ from Palladium Mobility operates across Germany and the rules are being implemented very differently from state to state. This is making rules across the operation hard to implement so best practice is key:

“There are two former East German states, Saxony and Thuringia, whose Prime Ministers’ want to liberate everything from early June as they do not have so many infections. Every states’ Prime Minister can set their own rules, they can say ‘we close the schools, we don’t allow hotels and restaurants to open’ whereas in Bavaria for example, there is pressure to re-open the beer gardens, but how do you do that while keeping a distance

of 1.5 meters? This lack of political unity is what makes it so difficult”

Many people I’ve spoken to have had to have long strategy meetings with their teams to figure out who is comfortable with what processes fitting into governmental rules. Erika Strohmeyer serves her clients moving people into Austria;

“We have regular team meetings and the topic of people now being able to come into Austria from Germany came up, and we therefore had to find out if the team were comfortable with our clients sitting in their car. After long, long discussions we decided no, it is a company decision that we will not have people in our cars, they will accompany by taxi, or rental car or some other alternative which is in line with government guidelines. But then the government changed the rules and now four people who are not from the same household can be in the same car, so now we are re-writing the policy and this is how it works at the moment!”

Spain implemented one of the toughest lockdowns in Europe and as different regions start to open up again, so providers are balancing the different rules with best practice for clients and teams. Christine Martin of Olympic Advisors works across the country and has implemented a single set of rules;

“Across our remote teams we have had lots of group calls to establish the processes we will be working with, and that collective work was critical. We think we will play safe, for the client and the transferee, but also for our teams. We have worked on different protocols for different situations that we intend to apply until the end of 2020. Obviously things can change at any time, but we’re all very flexible now! We will communicate remotely and face to face but visits will be carried out in a different way. Transportation will be individual and consultants will pre-visit all accommodation options and film them to be sent in advance to the transferee. There will be less of an orientation as such, but we will be sure the transferee has all the information they need so they can do the visits by themselves, but at the same time be on a call with the consultant to answer questions. After, there will be second face to face meeting with the transferee to be sure they have made a decision they’re happy with, and to go over the next steps”.

Over the past few years, in response to making service portfolios more diverse within their operations, many EuRA members

have implemented new virtual ways of working with transferees to streamline particular programmes to fit their clients. Jennipher Christensen of IPR Consulting in the US has seen the advantages of her flexible programmes really come into force during the pandemic;

“We want to be really careful about everybody’s health and safety. Our area consultants are so critical to what we do, we want to be respectful of them and we’re asking them what they’re comfortable with. Some of them are taking care of elderly parents and they’re loving the idea of virtual services. As to the relocating employee themselves, we want to be really respectful of their health and safety. First of all, they’re in a new country. We want to keep them safe so we’re really dealing with everyone’s needs on a case by case basis. We certainly have processes in place, but we’re looking at every individual situation and working out what will work best. It can be structuring an area tour in separate cars connected with phones on bluetooth to the area consultant doing a video tour with folks who may be in quarantine for the first 14 days. There are options and we’re keeping an open mind for what will work best for everyone”.

Åse Löfgren Gunsten of Nordic Relocation Relocation operates across

Sweden and given the different approach the government took in terms of lockdown, is working closely with her clients and teams to work out how best to move forward as assignees are coming into the country;

“Because there are a few of us who have had COVID-19, we decided as a team to get tested last week and 50% of the Stockholm office are immune now, they have the anti-bodies. This means that what we can do is knowing the team members who have had it, any concerns from clients can be lessened knowing they can work with someone who is less likely to be a risk. We still limit the numbers of people in car, so we have a family coming in next week, parents and two teenagers, and we will organise the orientation to be done twice, with just two family members in each and not all four”.

Across the world, relocation providers are facing starting up again with the same concern and dedication to serving their clients that they have always had, but with a new level of care. At the start of EuRA’s interview series on YouTube I spoke with Beverly Sunn, CEO of Asia Pacific Properties in Hong Kong, who summed the people of our industry up perfectly;

“In mobility what we do isn’t a matter of work, it’s a matter of passion and compassion”.



**DOM TIDEY**

Dom Tidey is the COO of EuRA with specific responsibility for new projects, conferences and education programmes. Dom has worked with EuRA since 1998 having studied law at university and working in social services. In 2003 he completed his masters degree and returned to EuRA spearheading the development of the EARP and later, the EuRA Global Quality Seal and most recently, the MIM certification online training programmes. Dom works closely with EuRA’s Board and Strategic Consultants to manage EuRA’s key programmes in legal, quality, education, research and member services.

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