

*ERC's International Initiatives Advisory Council and other global thought leaders provided insight for these pivotal points.*

### **1. The Expats, They Are A-Changin'**

Expats aren't easy to spot anymore! They come from many different cultures and countries, have increasingly diverse spouse and family issues, may be a front-line operations type training for technical experience or an executive placed to develop a new facility: the point is, globalization of our worldwide workforce isn't just for the fast-tracked few anymore (and more frequently these days, they're female).

### **2. Moves Are Up, Unless They're Down**

The global pundits say that nearly everywhere, whether by inches or yards, global mobility activity is increasing. From the expected burgeoning of the Asia-Pacific market into locations like Mexico and the United States, there are rising numbers on the horizon. And this higher volume is expected to encourage the industry through spring and summer of 2004. What can change these numbers? Short-term drops driven by changes in business models, say some, and all agree that strategic planning is difficult, as the numbers will change in an instant if another major event like a terrorist action or a SARS-like outbreak occurs.

### **3. How to Win the Battle for Talent?**

L-1 and HB-1 visa concerns are looming in a year where U.S. politicians train their sights on issues to gain votes. Further restrictions on immigration are expected. This action will further squeeze the global talent war, already escalating in Asian workplaces and exacerbated by professional estimates of labor shortages by 2010. And companies who have scaled back pay packages may find themselves in a competitive bind when the shortage hits with full force.

### **4. Programs: The Search for a Better Fit**

"Localization" is the watchword for many companies. As more companies see the benefit of transitioning assignees from heavy-cost, fully-loaded packages, as well as the benefit of maintaining a strong local workforce, localizations rise. There's also a strong upward surge in short-term assignments. But even as the decline in traditional expat packages may help control costs, these short-term, localized and hybrid assignment packages still carry complex pay, benefits, pension and employee relations issues.

### **5. Step Right Up and Transfer Yourself!**

A younger, more tech-savvy pool of workers and increasingly sophisticated electronic information delivery is changing the way some companies are paying for and servicing assignments. A trend toward lump-sum assistance translates into more "self-service" moves and sometimes shifts the service provider's role into one where effective counseling is as valuable as their management of the service.

### **6. Fanning the Flames on the Hot Spots**

Companies keep surging into Asia (and regionally within Asia). In fact, inter-regional moves are also on the rise in two other major areas: Europe and Latin America. There's no let-up in the growing popularity of locations like India and Ireland for call and operations centers, and despite the decline in outward-bound U.S. expatriates, the United States is now the top destination for expatriates.

### **7. We're Becoming Culture Vultures**

Intercultural training is gaining respect and catching on with companies for short-term business trips and longer assignments; training on negotiation and business practices is also on the rise. There's an abundance of selection and assessment aids that companies can use to identify a likely global assignment candidate, but experts caution: when it comes right down to it, the best candidate will have the people skills and appreciation of cultural issues to make the grade.

### **8. Dreams and Nightmares: Security**

Security is on everyone's wish list, but all agree that there are some givens: Americans are increasingly viewed in a negative light given the war effort, and for the first time, the United States is viewed by some as a hazardous destination. Though some locations are clearly high-risk areas, there's no telling where volatility might erupt. All of this makes the argument for stronger intercultural training and crisis management planning more insistent. Tightened port security is a fact of life for those who move household goods, and new security issues emerge almost weekly in our more tenuous world.

### **9. It's a Revolution of Evolution**

Most companies today keep the home fires burning even as they're kindling business in other regions and countries, or are learning how to address the needs of global companies and transferees on their own soil. The global workforce mobility industry is at different stages of maturity based on one's geographic region: for example, the United States is highly evolved while areas like the Asia-Pacific region, whose industry is less mature, is eager for information, networking, and education.

### **10. We're Getting Smarter and Working Harder**

Short-term planning with a long-term perspective is key. Global mobility professionals need to keep one eye on the current environment and one on what may come the next day, the next week, the next month. One caveat for all of us handling international assignments is that we need to take a serious look at our budgets, shift our expectations from a timing perspective and adjust them for rising expenses. As one professional said: "I'm moving more people with fewer staff in an increasingly complex world."