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# Wellbeing in 2021

Global Mobility's  
next big challenge

Report written by David Enser and Alan Fergusson



# Contact

## About The RES Forum

The RES Forum is an independent, highly engaged and international community of senior in-house International Human Resources professionals with more than 1600 members in over 45 countries. We are not influenced by external parties or third-party vendors. We share information to make our working lives easier and to assist in solving difficult work challenges. We collaborate on shared projects and initiatives, and we learn together. Our agenda, set entirely by our membership, is delivered through a spectrum of services, including data analytics, Global Mobility and International HR thought leadership and advanced learning and accreditation programmes in the area of Global Mobility management.

The RES Forum cooperates with leading academics in the field of Global Mobility. The main goal is to enhance the practical perspective of the RES Forum with a more academic research approach. We aim to match the understanding of pressing issues in HR management with research expertise in order to achieve academic thought leadership in the field of global HR management.

### The RES FORUM

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Thank you to all of The RES Forum Members who took part in the research for this report. Without you, this report would not have been possible.

# In association with



WBN is delighted to work with the RES Forum as your International Benefits Technical Partner and we are excited to bring you our first joint research with RES Forum members. Wellbeing is a very general term, but it is recognised as one of the main drivers globally in relation to employee engagement, experience and value proposition. This has been amplified by COVID-19 and the challenges this brings. It is clear wellbeing isn't just a Global Mobility issue, but one that normally sits in a wider HR context, but with assignments expensive and wellbeing often not dealt with in isolation, we feel that RES Forum members can help shape the agenda within their firms. WBN brokers will use this research with their clients and prospects. In turn, it is hoped that this engagement on the analytics will deliver a meaningful benefit to the RES Forum.



## The Worldwide Broker Network

Worldwide Broker Network (WBN) members deliver outstanding consultancy on Employee Benefits globally to multinational employers of any size. Through our network of highly regarded partner firms we can access solutions for your global workforce, expats, short-term and long-term assignees and local-country employees, and assist you in designing and delivering a global benefits strategy.

We would be delighted to discuss how WBN can support your employee benefits programme.

Visit us at [wbnglobal.com](http://wbnglobal.com) or get in touch via [email](#).





# Wellbeing in 2021 Global Mobility's next big challenge

**Wellbeing is such a multi-faceted term.**

The global wellness industry is fragmented, complex, and can be somewhat confusing (especially across borders). It is such an enormous market and there are so many spokes on the wheel.

The primary responsibility as an organization should be focused on defining it, whether corporately, globally, or locally. I believe many employees have a lack of understanding about what the wellbeing program encompasses and what the intent of it is on a larger scale.

The results clearly indicate that wellbeing is critical to nurture and support within an organization. However, creating a holistic corporate wellbeing program can be challenging, especially for Global Mobility programs.

If the population (including leaders, employees, global employees, etc.) understood how wellbeing is focused on "making employees healthier" and in turn "helping employees perform better," I think there would be an increase in the acceptance of such programs, even with roadblocks such as company culture.

**Tanja Lumpp**  
Global Benefits Specialist  
Hylant (WBN member)  
Toledo, Ohio

# Introduction

In 2020, wellbeing was arguably the number one HR issue. That's unlikely to change as we head into 2021

Yes, it's been discussed for many years. But only now are we seeing it transition from a loose collection of initiatives to a key pillar of HR strategy.

From an employer's value proposition to their employee engagement plan, wellbeing is key to the integration of different company-provided benefits. Importantly, it also features highly in the approach to motivating and caring for employees.



This survey looks at how different companies approach wellbeing, and how that approach is supported through Global Mobility policy and philosophy.

## What did we find?

Wellbeing is central to HR strategy, but doesn't figure as much when it comes to Global Mobility's plans. A little digging, however, showed that HR's wellbeing strategy has a role to play in Global Mobility's thinking.

It's clear that respondents value wellbeing, with two thirds rating it highly important. So, while it might be more obviously part of HR strategy, it's possible that the Global Mobility function doesn't give themselves enough credit when it comes to wellbeing initiatives.

Whether or not this is case, wellbeing has never been more important and COVID-19 forces us to take a fresh look at how it's managed.

As we move into 2021, we look at how Global Mobility can reconsider their approach to wellbeing. And understand how to place it at the heart of their strategy.

Perhaps Global Mobility is doing more than they give themselves credit for. When looking under the wellbeing heading, it maybe isn't thought of as an area covered by Global Mobility, but in many cases it is one and the same thing.

# Does it matter?

Image by Mick on Unsplash

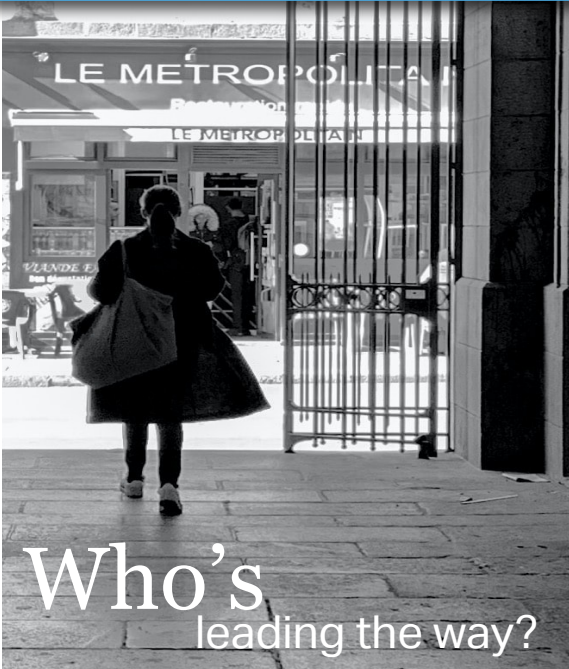
**Assignments can be mentally demanding, especially in the world of short-term commuting. Considering the current environment of isolation and social distancing, perhaps it's time take a new look at wellbeing.**

Initially introduced in the USA to drive down health insurance costs, wellbeing has been transformed throughout the years. This survey demonstrates a good understanding of its importance, as well as agreement on the reasons for implementing wellbeing initiatives. As for insurance costs? We come to that later.

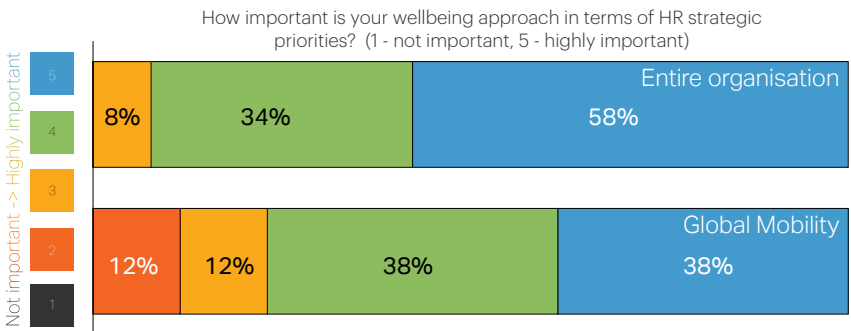
The results show that wellbeing is more likely to form part of the HR strategy than that of Global Mobility. That said, it's clear that Global Mobility also recognise its importance. What's more, HR's approach to wellbeing is often reflected in Global Mobility programmes.

The question is, is this good enough? Should Global Mobility take ownership of its own wellbeing agenda, and develop a strategy specific to the challenges of international assignments?

*Threading wellbeing through Global Mobility strategy is a win all round. It puts wellbeing front and centre and it is quick and easy to join the dots within Global Mobility programmes*



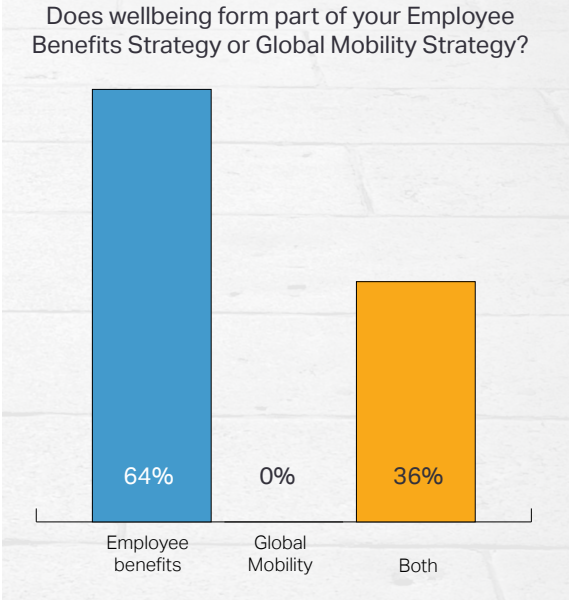
Who's leading the way?



In terms of the entire organisation, 100% of respondents believe wellbeing is important to the business. When it came to Global Mobility specifically, it was rated slightly lower, at 89%. Given the demands of international working, it's surprising that wellbeing doesn't sit higher up the Global Mobility agenda.

Although Global Mobility were slightly behind HR when it comes to the importance of wellbeing, the real insight comes from the 12% who see it as being not that important at all. Is this a reflection of the fact that HR strategy flows into Global Mobility or is there a minority who don't fully understand the role of wellbeing in Global Mobility?

Whichever is true, we should ask ourselves whether HR strategy goes far enough in meeting the demands of international working. If not, we must make the case for a Global Mobility specific wellbeing strategy and understand how it can be fully implemented across our global community.



# What's stopping you?

The leadership in some organisations may not value the principles underpinned by wellbeing.

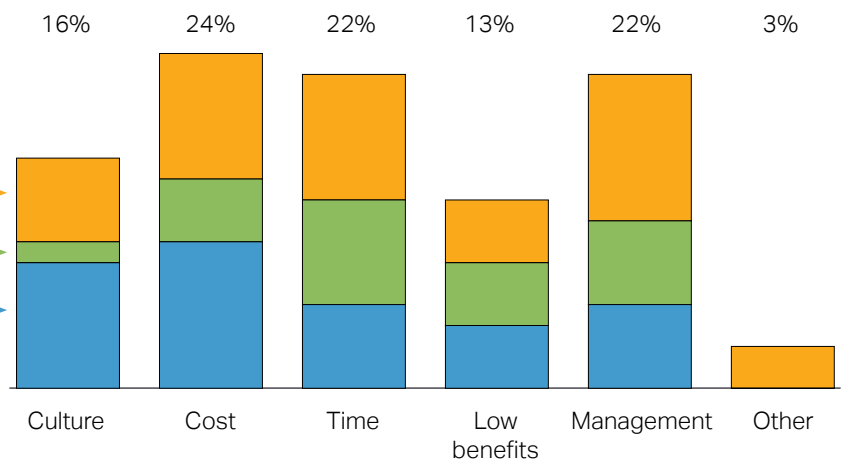
WBN brokers feel this is a missed opportunity.

## Biggest barriers

While we understand the importance of wellbeing, Global Mobility has some catching up to do when it comes to setting the agenda. Recognising this fact is a crucial step forward, but what stops the wellbeing approach being advanced across the business? And how do those reasons vary when it comes to Global Mobility?

Cost ranked highest amongst reasons for not advancing the wellbeing agenda. Out of the 24% score against Cost, over 40% came from the perspective of the entire organisation. From a Global Mobility point of view, Cost ranked third, equal with Low Benefit.

The biggest barrier amongst Global Mobility was Time, closely followed by concerns over Management Buy-In. In fact, these two rank highly overall, suggesting that wellbeing strategies are not only considered difficult to implement, but also points to leadership not valuing the principles underlined by wellbeing.



## Measuring effectiveness

When it comes to measuring success in wellbeing, it seems Global Mobility is a long way behind. While only 52% answered yes on behalf of the entire organisation, it was a remarkable 0% for Global Mobility. Given how important wellbeing is to our respondents, it's surprising that more businesses don't measure its effectiveness. Perhaps cost and time are factors here as well.

However, with all the data being collected about the effectiveness of Global Mobility programmes in general, it would be easy to include and analyse data specific to wellbeing. This data could help demonstrate the real value of wellness to a leadership team that don't already have this clarity.

# Advancing wellbeing

## Biggest drivers

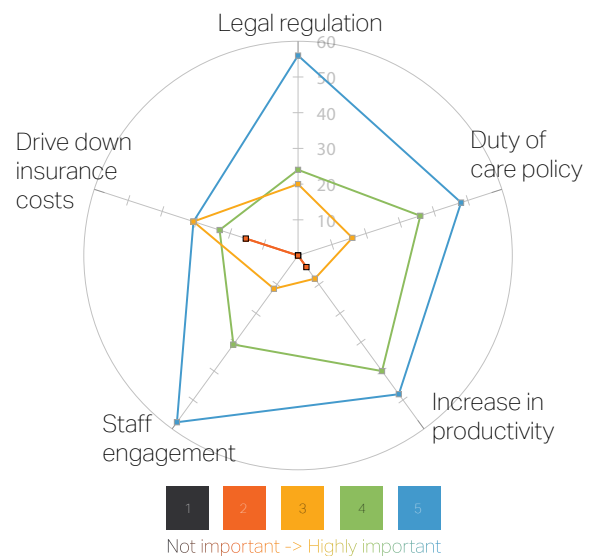
Nowadays insurance costs are much less of a factor when it comes to advancing the wellbeing agenda. Instead, productivity and staff engagement slightly edge duty of care and legal regulation as the biggest drivers.

This tallies with views on the most relevant components of a good wellbeing programme. Wellbeing apps (73%), employee assistance programmes (89%) and Telemedicine (virtual doctors / nurses) (75%) were all considered highly relevant.

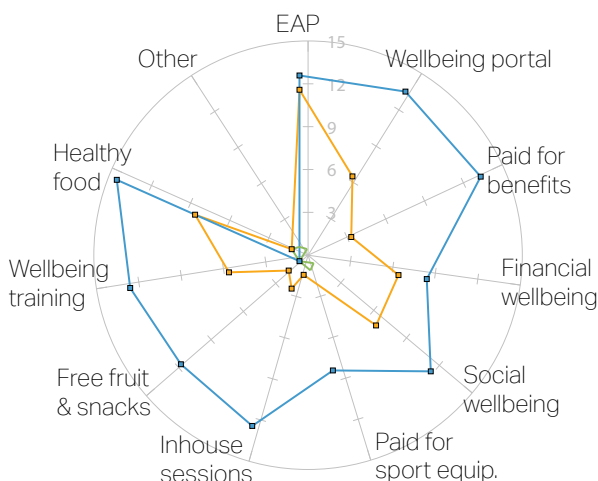
The last of these is reflected by consumer adoption of telehealth services increasing from 11% to 49% throughout 2020 (McKinsey). This is a trend that's likely to continue and, as such, it's important to clearly signpost these benefits to employees and Global Mobility assignees, so they're able to find and use them.

Where these supplementary benefits scored highly, increased financial wellbeing received more modest approval. 58% strongly agreed there was a need for increasing financial wellbeing across the entire organisation. When it came to Global Mobility specifically, 52% neither agreed nor disagreed. This is unsurprising, given the financial rewards often attached to international assignments.

How important are the following factors in advancing the wellbeing agenda in your entire organisation?



What wellbeing activities or services do you offer employees?



## What's on offer?

Global Mobility offer very few distinct wellbeing activities and services. In fact, the majority of these activities are rightly offered on behalf of the entire organisation. However, more detailed responses show that Global Mobility don't have complete clarity about the wellbeing benefits their assignees receive.

Often these benefits are offered at a local level with little global coordination or visibility. Is there a case that Global Mobility is making assumptions about the benefits their assignees receive? And is it always possible to guarantee the nature and quality of wellbeing services available to international workers compared with those in their home country?

"Although global companies strongly consider wellbeing initiatives as a key element in their human resources strategy to drive productivity, only half of them do this on a global basis"

Gabriel Rico, Director at Fidex (WBN member), Mexico

## Global vs. local

To better understand this question, we looked at what services were offered globally vs. those offered locally. Half of the organisations provide wellbeing services locally and in some cases a global programme is enhanced at a local level.

There is, however, a clear appeal to global solutions. 85% claimed they would be more likely to use global wellbeing initiatives, which is supported by the surge in popularity of these services amongst our global EAP providers.

- Entire organisation
- Global mobility
- Both

# What's next for wellbeing?

## The COVID-19 effect

It's unsurprising that the impact of COVID-19 featured heavily in the comments. The pandemic put wellbeing on top of the priorities list. It's understandable that businesses are looking at different solutions.

Remote working and virtual assignments are suddenly more important. With them must come the right tools and resources, with the support to use them effectively. And, while practical solutions are essential, digital also plays an increasingly important role in wellbeing.

## Global strategy, local execution

The next few years will be both interesting and challenging for Global Mobility. We can be certain that focus will remain on wellbeing. Based on our survey, companies are already looking at global options for their wellbeing initiatives.

While this is beneficial, it's important to tailor programmes around the wellbeing of the globally mobile workforce. Whether that means adapting central strategy or offering additional initiatives, it's clear that this issue will only become more important over the coming years.

## All about perceptions

When asked if their wellbeing strategy was perceived as attractive, there was an emphatic yes at the entire organisation level, with a humble maybe from Global Mobility.

There's an opportunity for Global Mobility to ensure assignees' wellness needs are catered for. Then to measure the effectiveness within the context of the assignment.

The good news is, there are plenty of solutions available and the team at WBN is always happy to discuss how we can provide them for you.

**Get in touch** for more information on how WBN can support your wellbeing initiatives, globally and locally

Image by Summer Chan on Unsplash



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WBN Members have a detailed understanding of foreign insurance legislation and ensure clients' employees in those countries will receive necessary and competitive levels of benefits. We are passionate about the needs of clients as well as long term personal relationships. We are a dedicated team of connected experts working with each other to serve the needs of clients throughout the world.

**The WBN comprises a network of top quartile firms, independently owned and managed.**

The independence of our member firms means that chain-of-command challenges do not occur and decisions can be made quickly. We use mutually agreed-upon compensation for services, allowing clients to receive competitively priced products. Member firms pass through careful review processes before joining and are top quartile firms in their respective regions. All of this ultimately ensures top-quality products and services for clients.

**Member-to-Member accountability ensures quality while maintaining independence of member firms.**

While member firms are free from some of the limitations imposed by 'owned' networks, they are still accountable to each other on several levels. In the 360 Degree Review Process, member firms evaluate the performance of their peers. The WBN Service Code of Conduct also provides guidelines within which members can act. Members' professional standards are maintained at a high level through constant monitoring as well as an appreciation and respect for each other and a belief in WBN's vision.

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The WBN network allows clients to have constant access to online coverage and claims data. Local knowledge is available whenever it is needed, and members of the network provide it with a sense of urgency, understanding the costs of interruptions to production or business. WBN places a high value on collaboration. We have two global conferences per year, one located in the United States and the other in various cities throughout the world. This is in addition to other networking events. These are where relationships and trust are built.

**State-of-the-art information management technology securely speeds the collaboration process.**

To facilitate communication while keeping it secure, WBN utilizes WBNet Global Management, a proprietary data management, communication, and collaboration tool powered by Origami Risk. It is a totally new platform that replaces the two that came before it; WBN is committed to providing its members and clients with the newest and best technology available to meet their needs. Access to shared data 24/7 in multiple languages and currencies with unparalleled security gives members and clients peace of mind.

**Combined purchasing power has allowed WBN to expand our global reach.**

We have enhanced our service platform and increased our product offerings, offering high quality service to clients expanding beyond home borders.

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