

Global Issues in 2021: A Conversation With Forum Chair Nino Nelissen



Nino Nelissen, SGMS-T, founder and managing director of the Netherlands-based Executive Mobility Group, is chair of the Worldwide ERC® Global Forum, which tracks non-U.S. government-related public

policy issues that impact the cross-border transfer of employees. Nelissen recently shared his views on significant issues of priority to the forum.

Mobility: Tell us about the priorities you and your forum have been focusing on so far in 2021.

One element we focus on a lot is talent displacement and the consequences it has on the supply chain. I come from a time when everything was pretty straightforward, everybody could train for a certain profession, and that would be something you could do until retirement. The accelerated pace of change in business and industry today is creating shortages of talent and skills gaps. When I look at the speed of the energy transition, for example, that will affect the need for certain skills for certain jobs, and that will have a big impact.

A second focus is changes in the world order. The current world order was established after World War II by the countries that won the war. Now other economies such as China are emerging that are not part of that world order. China, for example, is not part of the OECD, which has a major role in developing tax policy. In the long run, a lot of ways of thinking that we're used to today will change, and the relative importance of players on the world stage will continue to evolve.

That's also something that we often focus on in our updates.

Of course, COVID-19 is something you can't get around. It's there, it's huge, it affects every little fiber of the mobility industry, and what makes it particularly complicated—and I'm just focusing on Europe now—is how fast the regulations change and impact the flexibility of what you can do.

Mobility: What do you view as the lasting impact or legacy of COVID-19 on the mobility industry?

I don't think we ever realized how vulnerable the world is. COVID-19 has made us more sensitive to that vulnerability. The reaction to the supply chain disruption caused by the ship stuck in the Suez Canal is a small example of this increased awareness. The disruption caused by COVID will also have a psychological effect, to some extent comparable to what people who have been in a war zone experience: realizing that many freedoms we took for granted all of a sudden disappear for an undefined period of time. I don't think we will take our freedoms for granted the way we used to.

Regarding our industry, I don't see business travel returning to pre-pandemic levels for the next five to seven years. On the other hand, with so many people now able to work remotely and who may choose where they want to live, the decline in business travel will be at least partially offset by employees who choose to live remotely but will need to return to their offices when face-to-face meetings are necessary.

The other lasting impact is that we learned to work together with technology tools. That will take away some of the barriers to collaborating

internationally that some people experienced pre-COVID. What you saw before was that the industry focused on people in its facilities to work with. Now it's just as easy for someone in Asia or South America to speak to someone in the U.S. as it is to speak to someone in the next room. That will boost international collaboration, and that will be positive for our industry.

Mobility: What is the role of the Global Forum in carrying out the public policy principles of reform adopted by Worldwide ERC® earlier this year?

I think what we mainly want to do is create awareness of the differences in policies from country to country and leverage the expertise of our members to help influence policy in directions that are more favorable for our industry. Most policies have been put in place to serve the particular needs of the jurisdiction that formulated them, so we have seen a wide range of responses to the same issues. One country might open its borders, another country might not, and the country that doesn't open its borders might be losing out on the skills that they might need. And the country that opens up has an entirely different set of problems.

I think what might be good is to have more of an awareness of learning what the consequences are of certain policies. One of the things our industry can do is present the evidence that a different policy might work better or might work well, to create a broader view with those who need to make the decisions about what's best for a certain country. The role of our forum is to create a platform for people to share what they see happening in their locations and educate others about the success stories, and also the failures of particular policies, in order to come to a next step in how countries can operate to be economically more successful as a result of mobility.

In addition to our principles for reform, we are also excited about the recent joint declaration from Worldwide ERC®, the Canadian

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Employee Relocation Council, and the European Relocation Association. As associations that represent the professionals who deploy talent, this first-ever declaration enables us together to deliver solutions for modernizing relocation and mobility policies and practices, in order to drive economic recovery and meet the new workforce realities of a post-COVID world.

Mobility: How is the work of the Global Forum assisting Worldwide ERC® members?

Something I am trying to encourage more is the sharing of information. I'd like to see more people take a more active role, because everybody has an opinion, everybody sees something around them. I think with the more than 5,400 members we have, if we can all share our thinking, that's a huge amount of collective wisdom we have.

I think there's a little bit of hesitation about participating on the part of some of our members. There are a lot of people who have a lot of interesting things to say but are quiet because they think that what they have to say is not that interesting, and that's too bad. Everybody has something to contribute.

Especially with the website of Worldwide ERC®, it becomes a lot easier to share information, because in the past we've mainly had to do that in face-to-face meetings that were held twice a year. Now we have a platform where we can easily exchange ideas, information, and suggestions, in our Community and in particular the Government Affairs Global Forum. One of the things I also would like to do is encourage people to read those contributions, add their own, and join the Community conversation.

Mobility: Speaking from the Global Forum's specific area of responsibility, what do you see as the greatest challenge to the mobility industry?

From the point of view of the Global Forum, where we have a very big challenge is that I expect that more and more people will simply live where they want to live, rather than where their work is. As office presence is required from time to time, I expect people to travel to their office five, six, seven times a year or whatever, or spend a week there, and do what is necessary. That causes a lot of issues, and what you see is that the laws are not yet ready for this development.

Many of the laws and regulations governing the world of work were drafted with a completely different picture of the way people work. It wasn't

long ago that many workers lived a very secluded life—they might not travel much farther than, say, 50 miles from their place of origin. And that's still what you see in the laws. When you look at health and safety regulations, immigration laws, tax laws, employment laws, in most countries they are all not ready for this new group of workers who will decide they don't want to live near Paris, where their office is, but they do want to live near a beach in Spain, and they simply do it. What I think is very important is that, in that case, the French employer will have a situation that's workable for their employees from many perspectives. I think that's a very big challenge that's ahead of us to make sure that the world, the laws, the regulations are ready for this new and growing group of workers. *m*