

Emergency response planning

When employees and their families are working abroad, there must be procedures in place so that organisations can respond to unforeseen emergencies.

These should cover emergencies at the individual and mass level to enable speedy evacuation.

EMERGENCY EVENTS

The world today is both geopolitically and climatically unstable. Unpredictable events such as invasions, terrorism, and natural disasters (such as floods and fires) can take place without warning. Organisations must be prepared to evacuate their employees and families at short notice.

Accidents and emergencies (including unexpected ill-health conditions) can occur. Planning at the individual level is needed so that the organisational response is efficient and effective.

PLANNING ACTIONS

Having an emergency response plan forms part of an employer's duty of care. Policy and procedures must be in place. Everyone with responsibility for international assignees must be trained to know what to do and whom to contact to sign off decisions.

International assignees and their families should receive briefing/training in safety/security and risk management appropriate to their host location and on where to go for help should an emergency arise.

International assignees and family members must possess up-to-date documentation (passports and visas) so that they can be evacuated swiftly.

Relocated personnel should be in contact with relevant local suppliers/support services. Global mobility professionals should maintain strong links with local support firms as this can be very useful should an emergency arise.

When selecting people for an international assignment, preparatory actions should include requiring mobile staff to undertake relevant medical examinations. It is important that employees know where to go to receive medical help in an emergency.

TAKING ACTION

When an emergency happens, next-of-kin will need to be informed. Up-to-date details of these people must be maintained.

If assignees are on single status assignments, family members may wish to travel to see the employee should they be involved in a medical emergency. Support for family members separated from their loved ones in such circumstances should be put in place.

If individuals have limited local language skills, managing the conversations with medical personnel can prove difficult and stressful. Engaging interpreters/chaperones if appropriate or evacuating the employee to a hospital where there is the necessary language capability may be necessary.

Medical insurance policies should be checked to ensure that they cover emergency ill-health repatriation.

WHY EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING IS NEEDED

The lack of a response plan or a poorly effected response will lead to reputational/brand damage and potentially legal claims. At the individual level, employees and their families can suffer from trauma and shock affecting their ability to function effectively.



In terms of workforce attraction and retention, there will be negative talent implications.

A poor or ineffective response will damage an organisation's ability to motivate people to work abroad in the future, reducing the international talent pool.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Cases where emergency evacuations have been carried out should be reviewed to determine what went well and what could have been improved. Any gaps in the smooth running of the process should be assessed to see what actions could be employed in future to improve organisational procedures and actions.

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