

## **A shifting Middle East:** Understanding workforce risk and exposure

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Developments across the Middle East have placed employers in unfamiliar territory. Existing HR and mobility frameworks were not built to absorb the kind of sustained, multi-layered uncertainty that characterises the current environment. The impact extends well beyond the immediate: compensation structures, mobility policies, and hiring plans are all being reassessed.



**Three phases of workforce response**

Employers are navigating their workforce strategy across three distinct horizons.



**The second wave of risk**



For many employers, **Phase 1 is already behind them**. Secondees were repatriated. Remote work policies were set up or applied, and in some cases extended. Duty of care communications were issued. Travel advisories were updated. Affected employees received support.



But **a second wave of risk** is now emerging, quieter, less visible, and in some respects more consequential. Employees are continuing to make personal decisions at pace. Some have relocated families out of the region; many have enrolled their children abroad. Some have requested to work indefinitely from another country. Others may already be doing so without formally notifying HR.





Remote working arrangements operating without proper oversight can create **significant compliance exposures** that accumulate silently in the background, across immigration, tax (both individual and corporate), payroll, and social security, often across multiple jurisdictions simultaneously. Further, some regulated industries restrict what activities can be conducted based on geography.





## Looking Ahead: Further Considerations for Employers

In a four-part series, we will explore the following key considerations for employers across the region, alongside practical steps organizations may wish to consider as they assess workforce impact, mobility risk and operational preparedness.

- **Workforce Visibility and Scenario Planning**

Do you have accurate, real-time visibility of your workforce, including location, nationality, and immigration status? Without this foundation, scenario planning becomes reactive rather than controlled. Visibility and employee data is the prerequisite for every decision that follows.
- **Remote Working and Cross-Border Compliance**

As employees work across borders, employers are being exposed to immigration, tax, payroll, and social security obligations in jurisdictions they may not have anticipated. Understanding where these exposures arise, before they crystallise into liabilities, is essential.
- **Workforce Visibility and Scenario Planning**

Employers are facing increasing pressure to reassess both workforce structure and compensation approaches. In practice, this is not a single-direction response – while some organizations are introducing additional compensation measures, others are re-evaluating costs and workforce structure. The more complex challenge lies in how these decisions are made consistently across role location, talent retention, and organizational priorities.
- **From Insight to Action: A Practical Employer Checklist**

Awareness is not enough. Employers need to move from understanding their exposure to acting on it. Our forthcoming checklist brings together the key considerations across workforce visibility, cross-border risk, and compensation designed to support more structured, confident decision-making.

As this situation continues to evolve, the employers best positioned to navigate it will be those who have moved beyond reactive management and towards a clear, structured understanding of their workforce exposure across the region.

For further discussion, please reach out to the Deloitte Middle East GES Response team – [DMEGESResponse@deloitte.com](mailto:DMEGESResponse@deloitte.com)



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