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Relocation firms see increase in residents leaving the UAE

Veathika Jain | August 4, 2016



A Dubai removal crew from Move One pack up a family's belongings

Relocation firms say they are seeing their busiest summer in years as families return to their home countries, with some citing redundancies and the cost of living among the reasons.

The arrival of summer and the end of the school year is often a convenient time for families to leave if their time in the UAE has come to an end.

But some of the largest moving firms said they have seen a spike in business this summer.

Curt Clements, CEO of Move One, said the company has seen “an unusually high amount of expats leaving the UAE and the region in comparison to past years”.

He said: “This is about three to four times more than normal. The top 10 movers in the country would probably have packed out a 100 to 150 families per day in June.”

Earlier this year, Dubai Statistics Centre said the cost of education had risen almost 5 per cent in the first three months of the year, compared to the same period in 2015. Then in June, Dubai and Abu Dhabi rose in Mercer's global ranking of the world's most expensive cities to live in.

Clements said: “We are seeing an abnormally high amount of downsizing, where the family go home and the father or mother stay in Dubai and travel back monthly.”

Clements said that those coming into the UAE tend to be younger, single employees. “We are seeing a different mix of transferees,” he added.

Mike Arnold, from Santa Fe Relocations, told 7DAYS the number of leavers is up 20 per cent, with the UK, France, Australia and the US the top destinations. He said the number of incoming expats is 40 per cent of what was seen last year.

Meanwhile, Crown Relocations saw a 40 per cent rise in enquiring about moving in the first six months of the year. The firm's number of actual moves rose by 25 per cent, suggesting some chose not to go after all.

General Manager Mark Neave pointed to “an erosion of disposable income”.

He said: “We have seen a trend of people leaving Dubai in recent months that have lived here for twenty years or more, as prices have increased over the last few years.

“There is also a trend for some companies to relocate their younger, single and more mobile employees overseas as this does reduce expatriate costs such as housing, schooling and visas.”

Chirantan Joshi, CEO of E-Movers, has also seen increased demand, but pointed out that the UAE is a transient country, and it is inevitable families will move on.

He said: “There are a lot of people here on projects, like in construction and teachers, who come on two year contracts.

“And a lot of these contracts are not renewed or negotiated.”

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Trefor Murphy, CEO of Cooper Fitch in Dubai

‘Claims of an exodus are overblown’

The CEO of one recruitment and HR firm has said many firms are still hiring and rumours of an “exodus” are exaggerated.

Trefor Murphy, CEO of Cooper Fitch in Dubai, said although the oil and gas industry has taken a hit, there is still strong demand for professionals in the UAE.

He said: “There is a huge amount of talk of an exodus from the UAE, I am not subscribing to this. As I go to DIFC, malls... etc, it's a bit quieter but I think they are being frugal and minding their finances.”

He also said a “massive inflow” of firms into the UAE in the past three years would inevitably cool off.

Murphy said there are opportunities for young professionals and that many firms are looking for fresh blood with “different experience”.