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Global Mobility of Employees: Issues, results and impacts of the GLOMO project

Maïke Andresen, Anh Nguyen and Ha Luong

The “**GLOMO**” (Global Mobility of Employees) project is an international research cooperation, focused on the global mobility of employees in EU countries to address growing labour, skills and talent shortages.

Responding to key European challenges

Strong migration flows within Europe and to and from the European Union represent an important challenge of the twenty-first century. The starting point of the GLOMO project was a lack of study results in expatriation research on the role of context and multi-level studies (Andresen, Suutari and Brewster, 2020). Recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and wars in Syria and Ukraine have shown that countries, organisations and individuals would benefit from a better understanding of global mobility. In order to ensure that Europe is prepared to cope with increasing migration flows, the research objectives of the GLOMO project are to:

- systematically generate knowledge on the phenomenon of mobility and its implications
- determine the relevant implications for individual, organisational, national and European stakeholders, including an 'International Employer' audit tool.

The research results draw a vivid and diverse picture of international expatriates' life ranging from career, well-being and identity over retention and integration to political participation. This has led to several breakthroughs.

Main results of the GLOMO project to date

A first breakthrough relates to in-depth insights into the **careers of expatriates**. Transferability of career capital, access to social networks as well as functional career crafting strategies matter to be employable, and contribute to the attainment of career success. Expatriates come with their own *career capital*—capabilities, networks as well as life and career drivers—seeking a good (better?) future abroad or upon return to the home country. Therefore, the GLOMO insights into the ways that expatriates can transfer career capital between home and host nations are highly relevant to making the most of the challenging situation many expatriates find themselves in. Studies

show that the international transfer of career capital is affected by individual, organisational and broader contextual level factors that are bound by the aspect of time (Oleškevičiūtė *et al.*, 2022). Some factors are national migration policies, organisational support and individuals' long-term expatriation and previous experience. Restrictive migration policies can discourage international talent, causing difficulties in transferring educational credentials between countries and negatively affecting expatriates' employability. While employers in domestic job markets value international work experience more often than those in international job markets, repatriates perceive a lower degree of career capital than expatriates who continue working abroad (Andresen, 2021). As an essential element of career capital, *social capital* can promote desirable outcomes among expatriates, repatriates and organisations. At the individual level, a positive impact of expatriates' and repatriates' social capital on objective career success and well-being is noticeable. Moreover, repatriates' social capital can enhance knowledge transfer and performance within organisations (Escobar-Borrueal *et al.*, 2022). Finally, career capital and social capital especially ease the employment-seeking period for expatriates and repatriates and increase their *employability competences* (Andresen,

2021; Luong, 2022). Expatriates may perceive the development of their career capital abroad as *career success*. Assigned expatriates' *career success* is influenced by such factors as job characteristics, the job fit after the assignment, the degree of career adaptability, expatriation type (with expatriation type moderating some of the relationships) (Mello *et al.*, 2022), as well as by expatriates' *career crafting* strategies. Self-initiated expatriates show to proactively craft their careers to deal with the complexity, chance and change abroad and, thus, to ensure fulfilment and alignment in their career and life (Suarez *et al.*, 2022).

A second area relates to **global mobility management**. GLOMO findings suggest that although self-initiated expatriates develop their career capital, much like assigned expatriates and are markedly proactive in their learning and socialisation approach, they are not considered expatriates by human resource management and global mobility professionals (Abdul Hadi, 2022). This is why, unlike assigned expatriates, who usually receive support from their employing organisation before, during and after their international assignment, self-initiated expatriates are responsible for relocation and have to take care of all informal and formal steps related



GLOMO Global Mobility of Employees



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to their employment and legal stay abroad themselves. Another challenge for expatriates is learning the host country's *language* for work or social purposes. It is, therefore, a facilitation for many expatriates that multinational organisations are increasingly adopting English as a functional language, both officially and unofficially. Our sub-project suggests that an interdependent and self-reinforcing relationship between language ideology and legitimisation strategies maintains the organisational role of English (Vulchanov, 2022).

Finally, the GLOMO results showed the important **role of both the host country** and the home country. Breakthroughs in the area of the host country include refined criteria to understand the types of physical, psychological, institutional and interactional factors that constitute *hostile environments* in the eyes of expatriates (Raupp *et al.*, 2022).

Moreover, *identity construction* and sense-making processes of expatriates when crossing cultural and linguistic boundaries are explored. For example, an analysis of how transnational EU citizens live and experience EU border crossings in the context of such a crisis as the recent pandemic showed that EU citizenship, a symbol for the shared feeling of belonging, needs re-assessing (Martel *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, in the host country, aspects in expatriates'

private life—such as their well-being and their partners' positive emotions—were found to significantly benefit expatriates' performance, career success and retention. Social support from the organisation and the family showed to be a key factor determining expatriates' well-being abroad. Work-private life conflicts and expatriation-specific demands, in turn, are reflected in reduced expatriate performance and willingness to stay (Biswas *et al.*, 2021). These challenges are especially high for expatriate spouses. The spouse with lower human capital is more likely to be a tied mover in line with human capital theory; being female remains a main determinant of who is a tied mover within a couple in support of the gender-norms theories. Tied movers are more likely to be separated and marginalised and less likely to be integrated and assimilated as well as participate in the labour force in comparison with lead movers (Freitas Monteiro, 2021). By contrast, the simultaneous embeddedness of expatriates in the host community, organisation, and career structures positively contributes to work outcomes (Nguyen and Andresen, 2019).

It also shows that the home country plays a significant role. For instance, promoting expatriates' simultaneous embeddedness in both the home and host nations—rather than solely in the host country—is optimal for expatriates' long-term retention, career development, and

life satisfaction (Nguyen and Andresen, 2021). Also, home country characteristics—such as the extent of terrorism and vibrancy of democratic institutions—have emerged as important roles in several outcomes, such as expatriates' political participation and intention to return home (Bassetto and Freitas Monteiro, 2022; Bozhinoska-Lazarova, 2020).

Practical implications

At the state level, successful expatriation can be promoted through the facilitation of foreign certificate and degree recognition, which in turn contributes to increasing expatriates' employability. Moreover, further efforts from the governments to facilitate family unification and integration of expatriates' family members are valuable.

With regards to the role of employers, we recommend further support in terms of strategic career development and family settlement for expatriates, especially for those who initiated their relocation by themselves without affluent relocation benefits. In addition, GLOMO results enable employers to understand their international employees better, to work out training initiatives to help them cope with a variety of challenges abroad and to design interventions that enable a **better transfer of career capital**.

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PROJECT SUMMARY

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action 'Global Mobility of Employees' (GLOMO) strives for a comprehensive investigation of global mobility into EU countries and within the EU and its impact on international careers.

Using qualitative and quantitative research methods, 15 early-stage researchers and their supervisors explore the conditions for career mobility and advancement among self-initiated expatriates in Europe.

The studies analyse key variables at the micro-level of individual employees, meso-level variables across a sample of different companies and macro-level factors capturing different institutional contexts at the national level.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The University of Bamberg (Coordinating Institution), Copenhagen Business School, Cranfield University, Institute for Employment Research, Toulouse Business School, University of Vaasa.

GLOMO cooperates with 11 major international corporate partners (including Airbus SAS and Siemens Gamesa), national governments (i.e. the EU representation of the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) and political decision-makers.

PROJECT LEAD PROFILE

Maike Andresen is chair of human resource management and organisational behaviour at the University of Bamberg. She served as the University's vice-president for research from 2015–2018 and is the initiator of the GLOMO project, which she coordinated for 4.5 years between 2017–2021. Her main research areas are in the field of international mobility of employees, (global) careers and flexibilisation of work.

Thomas Saalfeld is a professor of comparative politics at the University of Bamberg. He serves as his university's vice-president for research and is a member of the executive committee of the European Consortium for Political Research. One of his main research interests is the political representation and participation of citizens of immigrant origin in European democracies.



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