

Global Mobility of Employees: understanding societal, organisational and individual patterns

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Promoting labour mobility across Europe has been a long-term central objective of the European Union (EU) which aims to tackle increasing labour and skill shortages across its member states. Cross-border labour mobility is expected to benefit both individual citizens, employers and the aggregate economy. In addition, intra-EU mobility is a means to foster European integration. Even before the onset of COVID-19, migration into and within Europe was still short of the EU's target levels, and the pandemic has led to the restriction of freedom of movement with subsequent lower expatriation rates.

Despite a favourable legal framework for mobility in the EU, migrants faced a wide range of problems and obstacles that hamper cross-border labour mobility, even before the pandemic. Immigrants' employment prospects are below those of natives, and over-qualification, i.e. employment below skill levels, is widespread in most European countries. Consequently, the growth potential of immigrants is far from realised. There is considerable scope to make existing labour mobility more

efficient and beneficial for all parties involved. To understand the relevant phenomena in more depth, multi-level research is needed to explore societal, organisational and individual patterns that shape the reasons for, experiences and consequences of working abroad.

Little is known about transnational mobility patterns, the length of migration episodes and how active migrants participate in public life in their host countries. There are many open questions on the macro, meso and micro levels. For instance:

- What are the subtle elements of psychological, interactional or institutional threats perceived by foreign workers, and how do they cope with such hostile environments?
- How do organisations maximise the benefits of increased diversity, create a culture and language that enhances expatriates' engagement and augments their performance and retention?
- What are the elements that help people on foreign sojourns to successfully

embed in their local communities and their employing organisations, and what shapes their career journeys and success?

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action 'Global Mobility of Employees' (GLOMO) project tackles these and other questions.

GLOMO objectives

The GLOMO objectives are to: (a) systematically generate knowledge about the mobility phenomenon and its implications (success factors, effects and added value); (b) provide training to develop 15 early-stage researchers (ESRs) to explore the complex multidisciplinary phenomenon of mobility; and (c) explore and suggest relevant implications for individuals, organisations, European societies and economies. With the help of the EU's Horizon 2020 programme, academics from universities across Europe—including the University of Bamberg, Germany; Cranfield University, UK; Copenhagen Business School, Denmark; University of Vaasa, Finland; and Toulouse Business School, France—

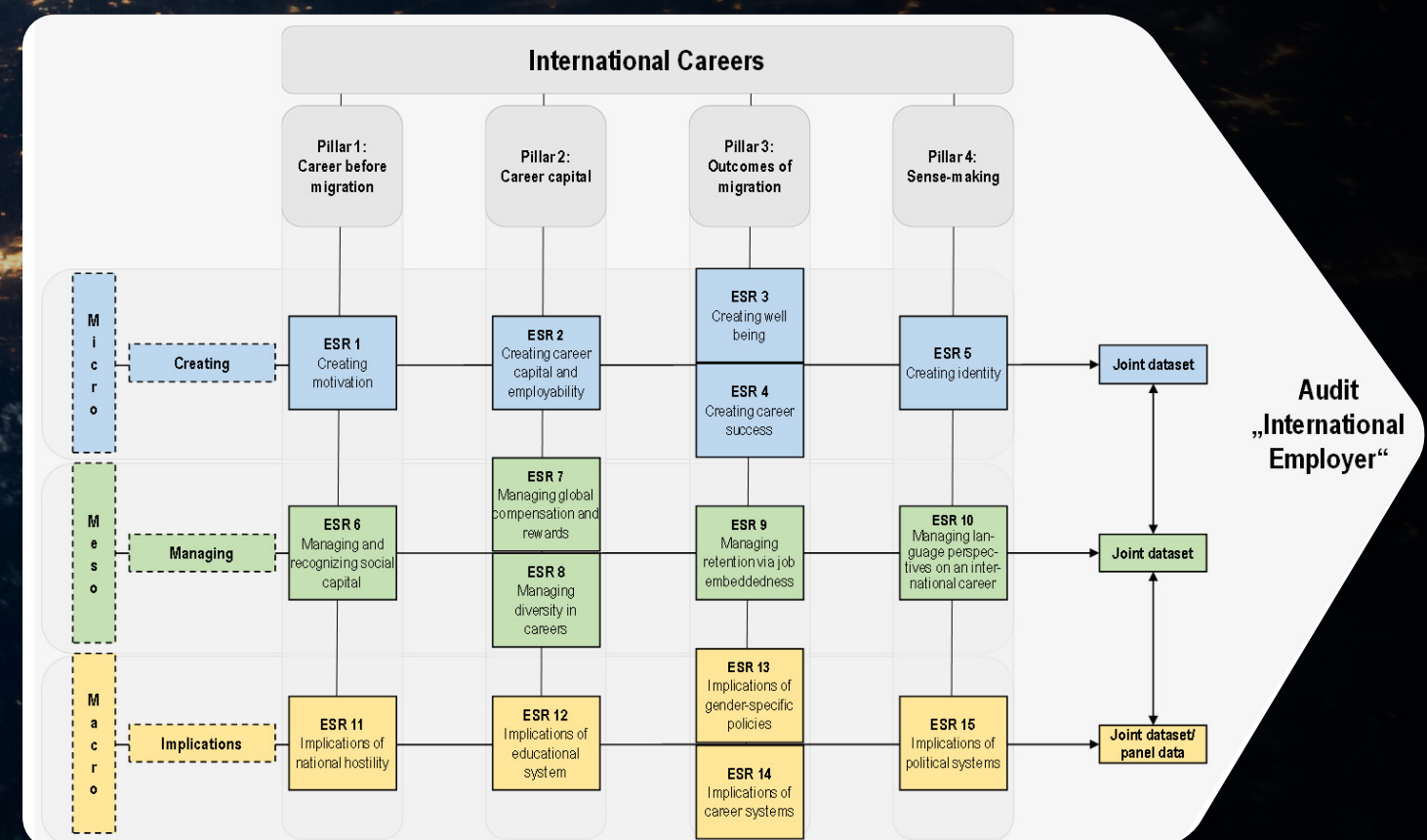


Figure 1: GLOMO's cross-level research approach.

set up a training network that comprises a large web of companies, institutions and interdisciplinary experts.

GLOMO is a unique project. It has created an ambitious large scale global mobility research network. This network encompasses ESRs who undertake their doctoral work through the project on interrelated macro, meso and micro levels guided by their academic supervisors and partnered experts. So that this endeavour goes beyond an 'ivory tower' initiative, the support of companies (e.g. Siemens Gamesa, Airbus) and further organisations (e.g. Institute of Employment Research IAB Nuremberg) were enlisted. These organisations provided valuable insights and hosted ESRs for several month-long work periods. An overview of the multi-level research approach is provided in Figure 1.

GLOMO uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative research to fulfil three essential purposes.

- Analyse how successful the cross-border mobility of different types of employees is in the European mobility space (e.g. gender, age, career stage, qualification level, educational and professional background, country of origin, language skills). GLOMO researchers identified successful patterns such as how the transition between career systems and labour markets proceed and which factors on the societal and organisational to individual-level enable and facilitate global labour mobility. In addition, we also explored unsuccessful patterns, i.e. which factors on the micro, meso and macro levels hinder international labour mobility.
- Determine the effects and added value of the European mobility space for individuals (e.g. in terms of careers), organisations (e.g. in terms of performance) and the European community (e.g. in terms of economic returns resulting from a rise in the levels and quality of the employment of migrants).

- Provide further relevant insights that help manage cross-border labour mobility and international career development in practice. While each of the 15 sub-projects will advance our theoretical understanding and provide practical recommendations, there is also an effort to condense these insights into a tool for organisations. This will be achieved by developing the audit "International Employer" and follow-up activities to transfer this knowledge by auditing and consulting enterprises as well as public organisations.

Sub-projects

There are 15 sub-projects within GLOMO, split equally between focussing on individual, organisational and societal focus.

Individual (micro) issues

Project one examines the primary reasons behind individual willingness to move internationally. The project aims to develop a framework of antecedents and motivational mechanisms of self-initiated expatriates.

Project two maps career experiences of different types of self-initiated repatriates to explore the individuals' perception of career capital impact and associated career patterns. The work centres around understanding the process of and determining factors on the transfer of acquired knowledge, skills and behaviours, social capital and motivational energy across borders.

Project three investigates expatriates' well-being and work-family interface and related determinants and outcomes. It aids our understanding of the role of work-life conflict and work-life enrichment in the work-related and general well-being abroad and motivational processes among expatriates.

Project four analyses the longer-term career impacts of international work experiences among different types of international professionals, the

development during international work experiences using career capital theory and their impact on future career choices.

Project five explores internationally mobile employees' identity construction and sense-making processes within organisational and institutional settings. It pays particular attention to the experiences and choices of employees who cross linguistic boundaries.

Organisational (meso) topics

Project six looks at recognising and managing social capital. It develops a theory of internationals' social capital investigating the diversity of weak ties, applying a cross-cultural perspective on the ties' strength and a cross-cultural perspective on the function and value of social capital within organisations.

Project seven sets out to develop an understanding of the importance of the various logics of personnel administration and payroll systems in different European countries and cultural context configurations. It focuses on understanding the 'coal face' of expatriation and organisations' pay and performance management systems.

Project eight increases our understanding of the dynamics of self-initiated expatriates and local-plus expatriates as an organisational practice by comparing these different expatriates in terms of their career capital accumulation and possible corporate use of such diversity.

Project nine investigates factors at the individual, organisational and institutional levels that explain why foreign employees permanently stay in their country of residence or intend to stop their career abroad and leave their host country. It broadens our understanding beyond job and organisational embeddedness to also endorse the community embeddedness of expatriates.

Project ten explores which practices companies apply to cope with language barriers (i.e. language brokers, language

switching) and then analyses implications for organisations' HR practices and power distribution. The research added an individual perspective in order to explore how individual employees perceive such practices and adopt strategies for coping with them.

Societal (macro) perspective

Project 11 examines hostile environments from the perspective of individual expatriates. It goes beyond the commonly used understanding that hostile environments are predominantly caused by physical threats and builds a new, expanded framework that also incorporates psychological, institutional and interactional threats. The impact of these threats and the expatriates' coping activities are analysed, and a variety of practical recommendations are presented.

Project 12 investigates whether the Bologna process has contributed to an increase in the global mobility of both human capital and human capital investments and examines whether the adaptation of university systems within Europe has led to the higher mobility of students.

Project 13 explores the gender-specific determinants of migrants' human capital investments in host and sending countries and the causes of the differences in labour market performance and career patterns between female and male migrants in detail, concentrating on issues such as labour market participation, unemployment or wages.

Project 14 determines the differences in career norms across countries that explain why careers differ systematically across countries in terms of, for example, required career capitals and career paths. Taking the career subfield of IT as an example, we show how these career norms determine the employability and (re-) entry success of internationally mobile employees and their subsequent career development in organisations.

Project 15 studies the extent to which macro-level tendencies towards

the professionalisation of political campaigning in European democracies affect the chances of candidates of immigrant origin to be nominated by political parties, get elected by voters and how this affects collective sense-making.

Conclusion

In the current pandemic, we have seen that organisations have reduced their global mobility flows. Many firms have begun to use the increased freedom that international remote work can give to allow their employees to work, often for a short period, at a location of their choice. This has meant that some forms of global work, for instance, lengthening a foreign holiday, have become more prominent. As countries and societies increasingly learn to live with the pandemic, global mobility streams are picking up again. This means that the many exciting, practical insights from the GLOMO project continue to be relevant for policymakers, senior managers, global mobility professionals and individuals. The next articles in this series will summarise the theoretical and practical contributions of the GLOMO project.

For more information about GLOMO, visit www.glomo.eu



PROJECT SUMMARY

GLOMO strives for a comprehensive investigation of global mobility into EU countries and within the EU and its impact on international careers. Fifteen early-stage researchers and their supervisors explore career mobility and advancement conditions among self-initiated expatriates in Europe. Studies analyse key variables at the micro, meso and macro levels 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 SiemensGamesa), national governments (i.e. the EU representation of the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) and political decision-makers.

PROJECT LEAD PROFILE

Thomas Saalfeld is 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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