

Global mobility of employees: creating an audit tool to support good practice

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Promoting labour mobility across Europe is an objective that can have multiple positive effects on individuals, organisations, cities, regions and states across the European Union (EU), including facilitating intra-EU mobility and European integration. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie project Global Mobility of Employees (GLOMO) aims to explore direct and indirect enabling mechanisms, structures and outcomes of global mobility. With the help of the EU's Horizon 2020 programme, academics from universities across Europe, including University of Bamberg, Germany; Cranfield University, United Kingdom; Copenhagen Business School, Denmark; University of Vaasa, Finland and Toulouse Business School, France, set up a training network that comprises a large web of companies, institutions and interdisciplinary experts. A wide range of information about GLOMO work is available from the website www.glomo.eu, managed by Cranfield University.

One of the key aims of the GLOMO initiative is to investigate global mobility and to enable organisations to improve their approaches. Inspired by an idea from Professor Maike Andresen, the network condensed its insights and developed a global mobility audit tool that is available to organisations. The GLOMO research yielded a wealth of results that have been communicated in dozens of academic and practitioner papers through workshops and webinars. However, to make the audit tool more accessible and easier to apply for organisations, the tool has been deliberately developed to be practically useful and to be simple to operationalise. The contents of the tool are geared to allowing organisations of any size (from SMEs to MNCs) to reflect on their global mobility approaches, data and insights and to spread good practice. In the following, we outline the different elements of the global mobility audit tool.

Demographics

Demographics enable a more systematic understanding of the context of the organisation. Nine questions deliver

some information that researchers will be able to use in order to gain a better understanding of the multinational corporations (MNCs) and other organisations that use the tool. At times, companies are triggered to collect key information which may be useful in the identification of key diversity data, such as in relation to potential gender and diversity management in international work and working. Example items are:

- How many employees are currently on an international assignment?
- What is your organisation's percentage of female international assignees?
- To what extent is global mobility and diversity management integrated into your organisation?

Workforce flow

Global mobility flows are often captured by the expatriation cycle. This cycle charts the journey of an individual careerist from before expatriation, via working abroad to repatriation. Crucially, it outlines the strategic planning requirements of organisations so that a business case can be developed for particular assignments. Given that there is a mutual dependency of individuals on the organisation when moving abroad and living in a host environment and, equally, from organisations on their expatriates as these often conduct highly important work, it is crucial for organisations to undertake good planning in advance. The audit questions reflect the complexity and need for planning before, during and after the assignment and are starting to emphasise the various links that are needed to make working abroad more successful. In addition, some digital and data aspects are explored. Sample audit statements, to which recipients are invited to select their level of agreement, are:

- My organisation maps and tracks talent mobility needs based on future requirements.
- Talent mobility objectives (e.g. personal development, knowledge transfer) are systematically tracked.

- My organisation plans for international assignees' repatriation right after the assignment starts.
- We have a pool of potential candidates for international assignments we approach when there is an opening.
- Our strategic workforce planning is fully integrated with global mobility.

Training and rewards

Talent development and career management are a huge part of company-sponsored global mobility. In terms of pre-departure or on-assignment training, the audit tool explores culture-general training (e.g. cultural self-awareness), culture-specific training (e.g. host country language training, specific cultural preference of the host, case studies), didactic training (e.g. cultural assimilation information or providing general country information) or experiential training (providing simulations, role plays, cross-cultural negotiations or virtual reality training means). In addition, the career impact of working abroad in terms of expatriates' motivations, professional networks and work capabilities are hugely important for their domestic and international career journeys. In terms of development, the audit tool aims to explore the approaches and quality of training provision for expatriates and the impact on their careers.

- Our pre-departure trainings contribute to a general personal and professional development of our international assignees.
- International assignees are supported in acquiring career capital beyond the international experience itself.
- International assignees receive individual support/coaching to increase their career capital.

Expatriation is a substantial investment in global leaders and managers. It also uproots individuals regarding the tax and social payment compliance they face, both in their home and host countries. Research has shown that compliance is one of the key issues for organisations to master when operating abroad.



It is, therefore, crucial to design and implement approaches that manage the risks to companies and individuals while complying with national and international laws and regulations. In addition, working abroad should not harm career and developmental planning for individuals. Some sample audit items are:

- Employees on international assignments are retained in the home country pension plan (or get equivalent benefits abroad).
- If desired by the international assignee, my organisation offers support for their international tax filings and returns.
- In general, international assignments are appropriately rewarded financially by my organisation.
- Our organisation offers additional allowances (e.g. disturbance allowances) for employees who frequently travel as part of their role.
- Our organisation offers individualised/flexible benefits packages to globally mobile employees.

Reputation and the employee value proposition

Companies are, unsurprisingly, concerned about their reputation. However, global mobility opportunities can be used to shape organisations' employee value proposition (EVP) and improve their standing as global employers. Therefore, many organisations can invest in global mobility to strengthen their reputation

and attractiveness to gain or retain talent in their different national and international markets. Some of the areas that the audit tool explores are outlined below.

- My organisation has a reputation as a 'global player'.
- Global mobility / international assignment opportunities are a crucial part of our EVP.
- We advertise international assignment opportunities in our job descriptions when hiring domestically.
- My organisation evaluates our EVP with a view to attracting and engaging global talent.
- Global mobility is a competitive advantage and incentive for employees to work for our organisation.

Performance management

Managing the performance of global careerists and ensuring that the assignment's goals are being reached is highly important for organisations. After all, global employers often invest heavily in their globally mobile staff. Therefore, setting up global performance management and monitoring, improving and reflecting on their approaches are highly important. Interestingly, while performance appraisal is part of the 'DNA' of most organisations—despite their shortcomings—a high-quality, systematic approach to understanding the success of assignments is far less common. For example, a systemic approach reviewing the pre-departure, on-assignment and post-return achievement and mapping

them onto departmental objectives and time horizons can increase the sophistication of global mobility work and also offer feedback for continuous evolution and improvement. Sample items of the GLOMO audit tool are presented below:

- Each international assignment has a clear goal definition.
- The performance evaluation of international assignees involves stakeholders from both home and host country.
- Performance during international assignments is tracked systematically.
- Each single assignment, once completed, undergoes a standardised debriefing with success evaluation.
- We use metrics / analytics to monitor overall performance of global mobility programmes.

Cultural intelligence

Cultural Intelligence is very important to expatriates' adjustment and the assignments' success. The GLOMO audit tool has drawn up a part that goes beyond the organisational perspective to address individuals and their cultural intelligence. This is provided to organisations to use with their global talent pool, be they expatriation candidates or current global workers. In fact, part of this could be used for the selection of expatriates as long as other elements—principally professional competencies, situational readiness and some personality factors—are also incorporated. Some of the key items are:

- I enjoy talking with people from different cultures.
- I have the ability to accurately understand the feelings of people from other cultures.
- I think a lot about the influence that culture has on my behaviour and that of others who are culturally different.
- I can change my behaviour to suit different cultural situations and people.
- I am aware of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with someone from another culture.

Outlook: the GLOMO audit tool supports organisations to refine their global mobility approaches

The GLOMO audit tool has been informed, enriched, and enhanced by the research of the 15 ESRs of the programme and developed with several rounds of revisions and tests. The instrument 'International Employer' is thought to be applicable to public and private non-academic organisations of various sizes, from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to multinational corporations (MNCs) with global operations in many countries. The audit tool should be helping organisations to offer high-quality employment conditions for international employees and hence constitutes a performance support instrument as well as a contribution to employer attractiveness for internationally mobile employees. A first draft of the audit tools has been tested with Airbus as the corporate beneficiary of the GLOMO research project. Following the test and discussion of the instrument, strengths and weaknesses have been identified. Furthermore, several partner organisations in the project (including IPC from the Netherlands; The RES FORUM, UK; and Siemens Gamesa in Denmark) plus other smaller companies and consultants across Europe have further refined the tool.

A workshop in April 2022 served to inform members of industry, politics, the general public, managers and entrepreneurs about the contents and

functioning of the audit 'International Employer' and to determine adaptations for SMEs and public organisations. During the workshop, the tool was seen as useful in benchmarking, and it was widely hoped to inspire good global mobility practices. Furthermore, such an audit tool could be refined by up-to-date GM research in the future, offering also a contribution to a more perennial outcome from the GLOMO research project. This would continue to support the initial intention of the project with the audit 'International Employer' was to stimulate and institutionalise sustained intersectoral knowledge transfer, foster the practical application of research results and, hence, increase the innovation capacity of the European industries. Overall, the audit tool is perceived as providing relevant insights that help to manage cross-border labour mobility and international career development in practice.

More information about GLOMO can be found at www.glomo.eu/

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PROJECT SUMMARY

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action 'Global Mobility of Employees' (GLOMO) strives for a comprehensive investigation on 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 eleven 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 initiator of the GLOMO project that 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.



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