

# Options for a Spouse/Partner Assistance Program

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Dual-career issues are not new, but the challenges they present to employers are complex. The key concerns expressed by so many expatriate spouses and partners when accompanying the assignee overseas include a vast array of factors:

- Financial – loss of income, loss of pension rights
- Career-related – loss of career track, inability to continue with a career path on repatriation
- Personal – boredom, loneliness, isolation, lack of structure in their lives due to the inability to continue working
- Practical – lack of available jobs in the host location, visas/work permits required to undertake host-country jobs, cultural and language issues

So what can employers do to help alleviate the inevitable difficulties that a spouse/partner will face once the reality of life in the host country settles in? Alternative mobility strategies (such as commuter and short-term assignments) are able to help the situation in some ways, yet, in others, only provoke the emergence of other challenges – for example, while the assignee is abroad for a few months, the spouse/partner in the home country is left to handle all domestic matters alone.

While employers are not expected to provide the solution to every individual family's situation, there are some policy provisions that may help address dual-career issues.

## Job Search Assistance

- Visa and work-permit assistance in those host countries that permit a spouse/partner to be employed
- Intra-company and inter-company job search assistance and networking for either paid positions or volunteer opportunities
- Resume/CV writing assistance, particularly for those who have not updated their credentials in a while
- Pre-departure and reentry job hunting trips, and reentry outplacement to get a head start at either end of the assignment before the actual move or repatriation occurs
- Retention of a search firm to aid in networking and finding appropriate positions
- Company employment or consultant opportunities where company policies allow this option



## Financial Assistance

- Tuition and/or training reimbursement if the spouse/partner is seeking new skills or wishes to continue formal or informal education
- Tax equalization for second income
- Lump sum for a cafeteria selection of assistance programs or any support at the discretion of the spouse/partner

## Personal Assistance

- Pre-acceptance assessment counseling sessions and site visit to ensure that the assignee and spouse/partner are the right “fit” for the assignment, the host country, and so on
- Career and life planning counseling to help the spouse/partner acclimate to the new situation and consider some short- and long-term goals
- Couple/family counseling at any point before or during the assignment, especially if the family has any type of serious personal situation that needs to be addressed or the assignment proves more difficult for the family than expected

## Assignment Assistance

- Specially adapted cross-cultural and language training to ease the family into the new environment
- Relocation assistance to help the spouse/partner settle in and network quickly with neighborhood contacts, expatriate communities, and so on
- Shorter-term work assignments, where feasible, to allow the spouse/partner to remain in the home country and retain current employment
- Professional development trips to enhance the spouse/partner’s portfolio of experience and education
- Child-care provisions to enable the spouse/partner to work/volunteer

In the final analysis, it is the assignees and their spouses/partners who must resolve the difficulties. If they choose to accept an assignment in a foreign country, they need to educate themselves about the possibilities of employment and take advantage of any assistance that the company may provide.

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