

EXPAT

Staying Active

PARTNER

& Finding Work

Carine Bormans

Marie Geukens



LANNOO
CAMPUS

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Preface

Life consists of many mornings

Malian saying

What would it be like to live and work in another country? Away from the daily drudgery of home, the cold weather, the annoying boss, the hectic pace. A new life in another country. Maybe not forever, but for a while? Absolutely! Many people dream about it. Perhaps you and your partner have already taken the first step and are looking for a job in development cooperation, in a multinational corporation, or in the service of your Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And then one day your partner says: 'Pack your bags: we're about to leave.' You feel euphoric yet apprehensive. Perhaps the dream is on hold now that you have a good job yourself. Maybe your initially enthusiastic reply — 'I'm so happy for you!' — quickly becomes a doubtful 'But what am I going to do?'

We have written this book for you, the expat partner. Research and personal stories underline the importance of embarking on a foreign adventure as a happy partner. In these times of gender equality, a career – and almost everyone has a job nowadays – undoubtedly contributes to that happiness. NetExpat's *Relocating Partner Survey Report 2018* makes this crystal clear. Furthermore, according to HR managers the main reason why individuals turn down an international assignment is because the partner does not want to give up his/her career. This is especially the case for male expat partners (around 10% of expat partners are male). In the same report the top response (71%) to the question 'What are the most common reasons for failed foreign assignments?' is 'an unhappy, non-integrated partner'. It is therefore crucial that you, the expat partner, are also comfortable with the overseas posting.

These days, most couples take decisions about a life abroad jointly. Often, the partner is just as highly skilled as the expat: according to the same NetExpat survey, 82% of partners have a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree. For the recent batch of expats the figure rises to almost 91%. Expats and partners increasingly treat each other as equals, but if one of them decides to accept a job abroad, the other might feel that their role is of secondary importance. You will have plenty of things to keep you busy: adapting to a new culture, moving to a new house, a new school — and curriculum — for the children, the home and its interior decoration, work permits, the recognition of diplomas. This can lead to pressure for the individual and the couple. These are all aspects of the relocation in which the added value of the partner cannot and should not be underestimated. To help you with the challenges of a life as an expat, you will find a list of suggested reading at the end of the book.

This no-nonsense book is about jobs, jobs, jobs. For many, this seems key to feel satisfied and integrated. Clearly the expat partner will have many questions when the possibility of a move abroad becomes real. What if you stop working here? Will you find work there? If so, what kind of work? What impact will the move have on your professional development? You might know what you want, but not how to achieve it. You know you want to work, but how do you decide whether or not to accept a particular job? How can you be more conscious about the choices? Based on a pie chart containing five pieces, this book is a step-by-step guide to choosing the specific job that fits you at a particular stage in your life. Each slice of pie represents one specific aspect of what a job entails: depending on where you are in life, you will find some aspects more important than others. This book is designed to help you to think clearly about how and why to look for work when you move abroad as an expat partner.

The book is also intended as a tool for coaches, trainers and supervisors of expats and their partner. It can help HR departments when sending staff abroad, be it in the public or private sectors. Supporting expats and their partner takes many forms. One employee or partner might benefit from group sessions, while another may need individual coaching. This self-help book provides advice in either case.

The pie model is a concept of Carine Bormans. As an expat partner, she has been travelling the world with her husband, who is a diplomat, for more than thirty years. As a Family Officer in the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she has informed and guided many expat families based on this simple model, which can help expat partners in their search for a balance between moving abroad and pursuing a career.

Marie Geukens was first exposed to the model at one of Carine's workshops, and immediately saw its potential. Before long, they put their heads together. With her background as an editor and expat partner, Marie proved to be the ideal teammate to turn Carine's ideas into a book. Throughout their careers, they have met many expat partners. Some of them – consciously or unconsciously – have implemented this model. This book also describes the experiences of expat partners. For privacy reasons, names and locations have been changed.

What is it you want?

Many can benefit from this model: those who make a career choice, become unemployed, retire, or emigrate. The model allows you to look at work from different angles: the meaning of work is interpreted in different ways. This model is all about the value you attribute to your work.

Expat partners are the central theme in this book. Dictionaries generally describe an expatriate as someone who has citizenship in at least one country, but who is living and working for a certain period of time in another. That person could choose to reside in another country out of conviction, or for the sake of adventure. It can involve different periods in different countries. An expat usually sets out with the idea that one day, he or she will return home.

In the twenty-first century, there is much pressure to have financial independence. Many expat partners are therefore happy to have some sort of career whilst abroad. The French expat organisation Expat Communication carried out an extensive survey of expat partners.

Alix Carnot, their head of Expat Intelligence and International Careers, analysed the results in her book *Chéri(e) on s'expatri(e)!*. To the question: 'Is it inevitable that one of the two will give up their career while abroad?', 40% of the couples interviewed replied that they both managed to have jobs. It is a long and winding road, but it is possible. Other significant statistics in the book confirm stereotypical gender inequalities: among expat partners over 50, only 10% are men. This is not age-related, because among 30-year-olds, this is 11%. 91% of expat partners are women, 60% of whom do not work during an overseas posting. It remains mainly a female issue, but it is not our intention to exclude men from this book.

Priorities: do you have any?

You can apply the pie model when you are faced with a decision. The exercise requires you to set priorities. Your options thus become clearer and you can make more informed choices. These not only depend on the stage you have reached in your life, and your environment, but also on what is important in your life *at that time*. Stages of life change us. So does spending part of your life in a different culture. 20% of expat partners decide not to work: instead, they consciously choose to focus on the children, or to make more time for themselves, or to get to know their host country more thoroughly. The remaining 80% look for work. The main reasons are to avoid gaps in the CV and to keep competencies up to date.

The impact of work on your life

According to the Collins Cobuild English dictionary, 'to work' means, among other things:

work (works, working, worked)

- 1. Spending time and effort doing a task that needs to be done, or trying to achieve something;*
- 2. To have a job, usually paid; to do the things you are paid or required to do in your job.*

This book focuses on the second definition: you perform labour and are remunerated for it. Work brings with it a range of benefits: salary, health insurance, pension, a collegiate workplace, and status, ... For people from developed countries, this is the norm. You enjoy the certainty and it makes your life structured and safe.

The moment you stop working, for example because you are going abroad, those benefits stop. That can be scary or disruptive. How do you cope? Can you replicate that structure? If so, how?

How to use this book

The book comprises three main parts. In the first, we explain the five aspects of work – the five slices of pie. Each aspect involves specific questions, to which you need to find the answers, either on your own or with your partner. Some of you may want to consult an expert. To make it more concrete, we have included personal testimonials from a selection of expat partners. This is one step closer to a new reality.

In the second part, we use our own personal stories to illustrate how we have applied the model in our own expat life — sometimes whether we wanted to or not. Work is essential for both of us, but because our personalities differ, we attach different importance to the aspects of work. This provides a broad picture of obstacles and opportunities, frustration and courage, luck, and conscious choices.

And finally, Part 3 deals with ‘flow’. This was essential because work gives us both great satisfaction. You experience flow during an activity when you forget about time – and yourself – and at the same time thoroughly enjoy yourself. You use all your skills when you carry out this activity and you know that you will successfully complete the task. These are ‘optimal experiences’, enabling you to lead a full and rewarding life. Work offers many such moments. What if these disappear because you have to give up your job? Here, too, we want to contextualise things so that you can experience your flow again.

The book is also a plea to view an opportunity overseas with an open mind and level-headed realism. After all, life is about more than just work. Working in a new environment, in another country or situation, can be enriching and fulfilling. This book is intended not only for those who are unsure about the prospect of travelling as an expat partner, but also for those who are already abroad. It may be that, after reading this and reviewing your priorities clearly, you decide not to go abroad. That of course is a legitimate choice. But above all, we hope to prepare you for a successful expat experience. Either way, we do not regret our own – at times adventurous – expat life.

PART 1

What does work mean



The five aspects

The five aspects of an active professional career have an impact on your life. Depending on the stage of life you have reached, one aspect will be more important than another. To make the choice that suits you best, it is crucial that you have a full understanding of all five aspects, and what they mean to you.

Salary

If you work as an employee, you receive a salary. At the very least, this will be the minimum salary, but for most expat partners it is a lot higher before they go abroad. The survey by Expat Communications published in *Le livre blanc* shows that 72% of expat partners have a master's degree. In her book *Conjoint d'expatrié: votre carrière continue!* expat expert Stéphanie Talleux states that 54% of expat partners working abroad are overqualified and their potential often remains under-utilised. If you stop work to go abroad, you will become financially dependent on the expat, unless you have other sources of income.

Social and financial securities

If you work, especially as an employee, you are entitled to social security with specific rights such as the accrual of a pension, invalidity benefits, unemployment insurance, health insurance, etc. These rights were acquired during the twentieth century and codified in labour and pension legislation. They differ from country to country. They offer financial and social support and are vital to one's peace of mind. If you stop accruing these benefits, there will be long-term consequences.

Developing professional skills

When you work you develop professional skills. This process continues throughout your career. If you stop working, you stop learning and developing specific skills related to your job — not only the necessary knowledge and technological competence, but also team spirit and collaboration, negotiating, analysing work-related issues and finding solutions.

Social contacts and the need for structure

Parents, school, after-school activities provide a strict time-schedule from our birth onwards. During our student days, this structure is often much looser — which is not always an advantage. But in the labour market we need to conform to working hours, at least for most jobs. If you lose your job, you lose some structure in your life and find yourself with a lot of spare time on your hands. Many people cannot handle this: a self-imposed structure and filling the day or week is not easy.

Along with a fixed work structure, do not underestimate the importance of daily contact with work colleagues. Chatting over a morning coffee, dropping in on a colleague, working in a team: these social contacts are an essential part of our life. If you stop working, the daily and weekly routine, as well as social interaction, will disappear.

Identity

Identity is perhaps the most challenging aspect. It involves so much. If you ask people, 'What do you do?', the most common reply is 'I am a [insert the name of their profession here]'. Society expects that answer. People with a specific profession, such as doctors, journalists, dentists, nurses, diplomats or managers, often identify first and foremost with their job. This is not the case for everyone. But if you strongly identify yourself with your profession, discontinuing your professional activity will be even more challenging.

All in good time

Every decision revolves around that one key question: what motivates you in a job? Why do you want that job? Or, to put it another way, which aspect attracts you the most?

If you are planning on a foreign adventure with your expat and you want to preserve all five aspects, your initial situation is more complicated and your choices are more limited. Depending on the profession, it should be possible for some individuals to fulfil all five aspects whilst abroad. But for the majority this will not be the case.

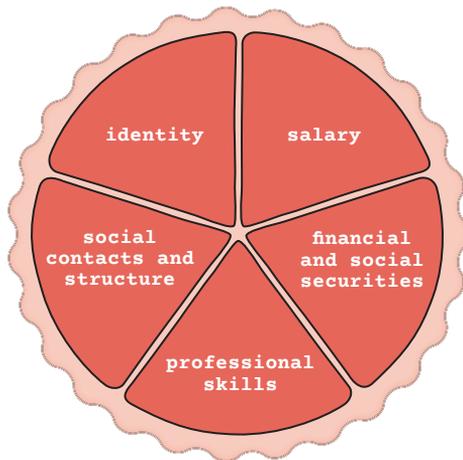
Yet working abroad is easier than you might imagine. It depends on what you want to get out of the job. After all, with a clear understanding of what each aspect means to you at that point in your life, you can opt for a specific job opportunity more consciously and more clearly.

The most important question here is: 'What motivates you to work?'

According to Alix Carnot, continuity in the CV and retention of skills are the key motivators that drive expat partners to finding work. Of these, 33% do so because they want a degree of independence, 11% because they want to maintain their standard of living, and 8% because they feel the need to be part of a collective endeavour. She continues: 'These figures are about expat partners who do not need two incomes to survive while abroad. Their motivation is mainly due to concern about finding a job again on their return home and the need for their own project. That being so, is a local job the best way to safeguard your employability and self-development? In the constantly changing context of the culture shock at the start of the posting overseas, motivation is often vague and variable.' We believe you can mitigate this by considering beforehand which aspect(s) of work you find important at the time. You can do this by using Carine's pie model.

Which slice of the pie remains on your plate?

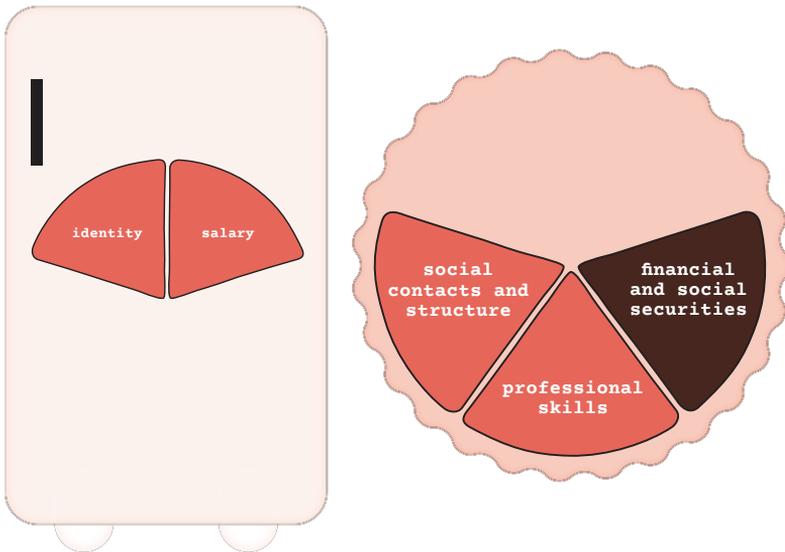
Each aspect is of equal importance. That is why we place them in juxtaposed triangles or wedges. This is how a pie is created. Now the insight begins. Ask yourself the question 'Which piece of the pie do I want?', and make your choice.



The pie and its five aspects

The wedges that remain on the dish are important: you will want to keep them. Those of lower (or no) importance can be put in the refrigerator. This requires you to set your priorities.

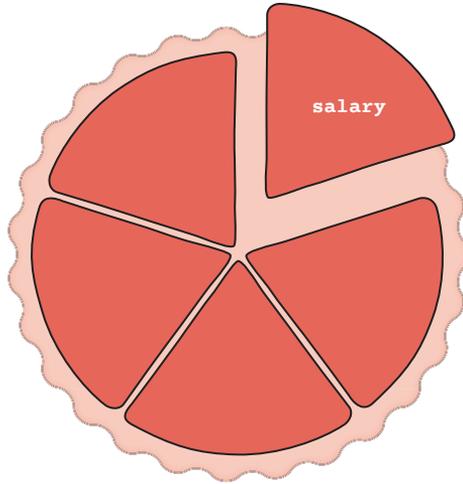
An example:



The aspect that you have already acquired and remains important is coloured in black. The aspect that you are striving for is in red. In this way you can identify your objectives.

Salary

*Money. Do you want it?
'Yes', says Marie. 'No', says Carine.*



Clearly you want to be paid for your work. The primary function of money is to pay your bills, but it also represents appreciation and recognition. The purpose of a salary is thus two-fold: as a source of income and savings on the one hand; and as social recognition for the achievements provided on the other. Let us take a closer look.

Spending and saving

You work and thus receive a salary or some other form of compensation. In our society men and women have an equal right to work. This can be as an employee, employer or self-employed person. It is also possible from home. Performance is rewarded by payment. You

use that money to pay your bills, to make your life more agreeable, to save. If you move abroad, your work and your income can often be lost – unless you have other sources of income, such as rent. According to Alix Carnot the greatest challenge for 61% of expat partners is the loss of financial independence. You become financially dependent on the person for whom you give up your job, and that can cause friction.

How do you deal with this as a couple? Several issues need to be addressed. Do you each have your own bank account, or does everything go into a joint account? Will that remain the case, or not? Do you split everything fifty-fifty or is there a different apportionment? Do you ask your partner to help cover your expenses? If so, on a weekly or monthly basis? How do you handle savings? And what about when you return? What if you, as the partner, can no longer work, or have to take on a less well-paid job as a result of your career break?

There are many questions to consider and discuss, because downsizing to one income has an effect on the entire family. According to a 2018 NetExpat survey, most expat partners find their salary significant (56%) or critical (13%) for the family's income. 31% indicate that their salary is irrelevant. We should, however, make a distinction between short- and long-term assignments abroad. The second family income plays a more crucial role when it comes to a short appointment of, say, a few months. Longer assignments often involve more attractive financial rewards for the expat, to the extent that this can reduce the importance of the second income. According to the survey, if the move abroad is permanent the second income becomes a necessity. In addition, we noticed that the younger the employee, the more important the second income: not only is the expat's salary not as high, but there are also no reserves built up from a double income.

Salary as social recognition for the services provided

The reality is that a surgeon earns more than a bus driver. Advanced studies, specific professions and greater responsibilities usually attract a corresponding income. Generally, you will not want to work if you do not get paid for it, or if the payment is insufficient. There is a general acknowledgement that, if you have fulfilled a certain work-related task, you are entitled to be paid for it. This is an important recognition. Only exceptionally are we willing to work for free. Salary also gives you status, within your own family, with your friends, and in the wider world in which you move.

Working for a lower wage is often regarded as an injustice and a loss of status. Research by Yvonne McNulty, Professor of Social Sciences at the University of Singapore, shows that unpaid or underpaid work is unattractive to many expat partners. Some resented that they were 'supporting the local citizens for free', and perceived that they themselves were 'not good enough to be employed, pay my taxes and be given my independence'. Most expat partners look for work abroad to develop themselves or to retain or improve professional skills. These two objectives do not necessarily require a salary for them to be achieved. It is important to agree with your partner how to mitigate the loss of one income.

For example, you can meet these objectives through voluntary work. And even though this is not a plea for voluntary work it might, in your specific situation, be an option to do temporary unpaid work, or to work for a lower salary. Try to not lose sight of the bigger picture and not exclude this possibility.