

## **BEYOND THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE: FAMILY AND INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY OF THE HIGHLY SKILLED**

**NÚRIA VERGÉS BOSCH**

UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA

[nuria.verges@ub.edu](mailto:nuria.verges@ub.edu)

**ANA M. GONZÁLEZ RAMOS**

UNIVERSITAT OBERTA DE CATALUNYA

[agonzalezram.@uoc.edu](mailto:agonzalezram.@uoc.edu)

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**Abstract:** International mobility of the highly skilled has become one of the cornerstones of development in the current knowledge society. Correspondingly, highly skilled personnel are impelled to move abroad in order to improve their competences and build influential professional networks. Mobility implies some advantages involving personal, social and family opportunities when movers experience handicaps in their country of origin. For movers, mobility becomes a new challenge beyond the work-family balance, particularly for women who usually take on the lion's share of childcare and domestic tasks within the family.

The literature exploring the gender dimension in relation to international mobility points to complex outcomes. Firstly, women are taking on a more active role in international mobility processes, even when they have family. Secondly, family and international mobility are interrelated both for men and for women, although family could become a hindrance, particularly for women. Thirdly, international mobility and women's career development may interfere with family formation or modify traditional family values. Finally, families moving abroad constitute a challenge for public policy, since they present a new area of problems.

We aim to analyse the relationship between international mobility and family based on in-depth interviews from a purposive sample of highly skilled personnel in science and technology. The results of our research suggest that international mobility of the highly skilled has effects on the family and vice versa; however, while international mobility and family are compatible, measures and policies to reconcile them are still insufficient.

**Key Words:** international mobility, family, highly qualified, work-life balance.

## **Introduction**

International mobility of highly skilled personnel is not a new phenomenon; however, its importance has grown in a society marked by globalization. In this context, international mobility becomes central to strengthening the careers of the highly skilled, or those with tertiary degrees who seek to increase their knowledge, professional networks and experience in centres of excellence. In turn, it is also central to business and R&D systems from all countries and cities seeking to attract talent and improve their competitiveness on a global scale through the mobility of their professionals (OECD, 2007, 2008a and 2008b; Favell, 2008). In addition to recent increasing rates, the flows have varied qualitatively by place of origin and destination, and in terms of other sociodemographic variables such as gender (Schaaper and Wyckoff, 2006; Ackers, 2008; González and Vergés, 2010; Kofman, 2012).

We define international mobility as an international movement, temporary or permanent, for training, work, social or personal reasons. For the purpose of this paper, we are interested in collective, not only personal, circumstances. In most studies and institutional reports, as well as mobility policies and attraction programs, international mobility seems to be focused on the individual, or the professional who moves without a partner, children or family ties, ignoring the other actors involved in the process, despite the fact that family and professions are intertwined along the life course of highly skilled personnel (González and Vergés, 2011 and 2013). Firstly, partners, children and family are usually invisibilized in professional spheres and, as a result, in mobility processes. Secondly, according to empirical evidence, family reasons can hardly be separated from other reasons, such as professional or academic progress when addressing international mobility. The survey of Spanish Human Resources in Science and Technology (2009) shows that personal and family reasons are behind roughly 40% of the decisions to move for professional and educational purposes, and even slightly more prevalent for men than women.

Essentially, scientific institutions have created a career model which reflects traditional men's professional trajectories as a norm (Ackers, 2008; Bangilhole and Goode, 2001). Therefore, men and women develop their careers under an ideal model where single scientists are able to move from one country to another when and where it is necessary for educational or professional purposes without partners, children or any family interfering. The design of mobility policies disregards the existence of family members as well as the particularities of men and women movers along their life cycle (González and Vergés, 2011). Collective influences coming from the family, gender issues and social networks have been ignored in international migration (Kofman, 2000; Purkayastha, 2005).

In this article, we recognize the ongoing importance of international mobility for highly qualified personnel but we adopt a critical view of this phenomenon in order to delve into the relationship between family development and international mobility of the highly skilled. We assume that international mobility processes are closely related to family formation and, thus, we question how this relationship could be improved. To answer this question, we took into account women's experiences and differences both in the selection of the sample and during the process of analysis. According to a qualitative approach, we took the voices of highly skilled movers in order to define their circumstances and feelings. In this regard, we understand "family" as open to the self-definitions of the interviewees, which comprise legal marriages as well as unmarried couples or step-families.

In this paper, we first review the literature that explores international mobility with gender and family issues. In the next section, we present our analysis based on interviews with 120 highly skilled personnel (59 women and 61 men) with international mobility experiences, either moving to or from Spain. We expose our main results showing that international mobility and family are closely related and mutually affect each other, and that this issue is not being adequately addressed by existing mobility policies because of the complex international mobility family reality. Finally, we summarise the main results of this research emphasising the challenges that international mobility poses for the family.

### **Gender and Family Issues in International Mobility**

The feminisation trend of highly skilled migration stresses the importance of gender issues in international mobility. Despite the fact that international data indicate similar mobility rates of women and men in OECD countries, there are actually higher mobility rates among women in non-OECD countries, especially for Africa and Latin America, when we compare highly educated groups of women and men (OECD, 2007 and 2008). Therefore, women from countries with fewer resources are more likely than men of the same nationality to move to other countries if they have professional competences (Docquier et al., 2009). This could be related to different reasons summarised in the following sketch list, all of which have been suggested in previous literature (Pedraza, 1991; Skachkova, 2007; OECD, 2007; Shauman, 2010; Creese et al., 2011; Kofman, 2012):

- The need to maintain the subsistence of the family which is difficult in the country of

origin. The provision of health and education for children becomes essential to women migrants.

- In the past, women's migration projects were associated with the migration projects of their families; in other words, women usually accompanied their partners. Currently, women lead the projects alone or along with their partners and children.
- The abandonment of the traditional role of women. Women may be betting on their careers and this may lead to following a professional trajectory abroad.
- The need for women to leave their country to progress professionally. They could be experiencing labour and social difficulties in their country of origin due to sexist and discriminatory practices in professional spheres.
- Freedom, love or the search for independence and personal identity increase the motivation for women to move abroad, as women suffer under gender repressive regimes to a greater extent than men.

Previous research shows that family formation hinders both the careers of women and their international mobility processes. In this sense, some authors expose that women and men show similar mobility rates when they are young and at the beginning of their careers, but that this trend changes as they get older and advance professionally (Adler, 1984; Cooper and Makin, 1985). This change is primarily attributed to family reasons. According to some scholars, women might have more difficulties than men to move abroad because of their family. Ackers (2004 and 2005) emphasises that women with children experience hardship when moving abroad. She suggests that men tend to be subjected to very few constraints, while women's careers are strongly conditioned by family strategies.

In the same vein, family has been reported as an influential factor on mobility of the highly skilled. Research by Varrell (2011) about highly-skilled Indian migrants explains that the intersection of the changing economy and intergenerational issues prevents international circulation of IT migrants. Furthermore, González and Lamolla (2013) report family as a primary motivation of the highly skilled to return to the country of origin in order to provide company and care for elderly family members. They found that women and men are equally motivated by intergenerational relationships when they feel an elderly parent needs company and attention.

Likewise, partners may interfere in women's mobility patterns. On the one hand, according to some authors (Mincer, 1978; Amit, 2007), women migrants have been traditionally impelled to adapt to

their partners' professional strategies about mobility and tend to be influenced by their partners' goals. Nevertheless, in scientific careers it is common to find couples working in the same area or in similar professional environments. Dual-career couples have similar objectives regarding marriage, professional progression, international mobility and parenthood. In this context, men and women might support each other along their life course (González and Vergés, 2012) developing similar strategies for both partners in the couple. In fact, empirical evidence about dual-career couples shows that women are more likely than men to have partners from the same profession (Schiebinger et al., 2008), which reflects how women are conditioned by their partners' professional decisions. Despite this broad spectrum of literature, there are insufficient studies addressing how relationships transform as a consequence of international experiences, one of the aims of the present article.

According to Purkayastha (2005) women suffer from cumulative disadvantages when moving abroad. Focusing on legal and racial discrimination, the author explains that due to the subordinated position that women hold, they are frequently considered the weakest component of the mobility strategy. McLaren and Dyck (2004) state that maintaining a subordinate role in the family leads to deskilling women's competences. In a family migration project, women usually end up performing housekeeping tasks and abandoning their professional goals. The researchers also suggest that women should adapt their competences in a reskilling process according to the new demands on the host labour market. By contrast, other authors (Green, 1997; Hardill, 2004) indicate that in dual-career households, men do not necessarily lead the mobility strategy, rather it is led by the partner with the highest income or career advancement expectations. These authors stress the capability of women in dual-career couples through the process of negotiation. Although this decision-making process is mediated by gender stereotypes, women may influence it in order to benefit as much as possible (Hood, 1983; Bielby and Bielby, 1992; Green, 1997; Abraham et al., 2010).

Research suggests that the pursuit of career goals and international mobility of women could also negatively affect the development of families. Male scientists are more likely to have a greater number of children and are more often married to partners outside their demanding environments than women scientists (Saltford, 2005; Schiebinger et al., 2008). This could be a reason why, among scientists, men with many children are more common than women with many children. Literature also shows low rates of fertility among women scientists. They most likely postpone motherhood and even reject it (Brooks, 1997; Kemkes-Grottenthaler, 2003; Bassett, 2005; Baker, 2012). Women, more often than men, experience unbalanced situations between family and professional spheres, which impedes the way to follow a lineal career like their male counterparts in scientific

institutions (Bagilhole and Goode, 2001).

The ease with which women juggle motherhood while pursuing professional aspirations depends on infrastructure and how much support the host county provides. This balancing act seems easier if women come from a higher social class, thus suggesting a correlation with external resources. Highly skilled families without economic resources might become transnational families where some members of the family are geographically separated from the others (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Parreñas, 2005). Moreover, women who prioritise their profession over their family might suffer a great deal in social and family circles. In summary, international mobility generates difficulties when managing personal life, contributes to the separation of partners and children and provokes social criticisms. This explains why many highly skilled women choose to reject motherhood from the beginning or delay it until they gain career stability. By contrast, empirical evidence shows that women are greatly motivated to migrate for their children's well-being. In this sense, Creese et al. (2011) remark that highly skilled women in movement want to give more security and resources to their children in terms of health and education.

Finally, another dimension of analysis focuses on the role of women in relation to social change. Hanson (2010: 18) questions to what extent mobility can be an agent of change for gender relations and how gender can be an agent of change in creating more sustainable mobility. Although her research does not focus on international mobility, she tries to shed light on the role of mobility strategies in the careers of women and the influence of gender on mobility. Returning to her proposal we will try to delve into this subject by specifically addressing international mobility. From the international mobility dimension, Charrad (2010) suggests that women make autonomous decisions and exhibit agency across cultures, which gives more opportunities to women in movement.

### **Methodological Strategies**

This article stems from two previous broader investigations: Firstly, we examine the research project titled "Curricular effects of the international mobility of graduates in the ICT area in Spain" conducted in 2008-2009; and secondly, we look at the project titled "Human Resource Flows in Science and Technology. Seeking Excellence through Talent", carried out from 2009 to 2012. Both projects analysed international mobility processes of the highly skilled and were conducted through methodological triangulation that combined quantitative and qualitative methods. In this article we focus our analysis on the qualitative data which provide a useful analysis from an intersectional

approach, for example, according to social class, race and age of the interviewees.

We aim to analyse talent circulation in relation to the family from/to Spain. More specifically we analyse how family affects international mobility and vice versa. We hypothesise that family and international mobility are closely related and we question how this relationship could be improved.

The analysis of this work is based on 120 in-depth interviews conducted in the aforementioned studies. We interviewed highly qualified personnel in science and technology careers who were selected from an intensive search through university and research centre directories, as well as cases that appeared in the media, and also through a snowball process from first stage interviewees in different areas of knowledge.

We considered a number of variables in our selection process, taking into account the main characteristics of mobility patterns derived from literature related to international mobility and gender, as well as our own research objectives (Hill Collins and Andersen, 1992; Ackers, 2005; Xie and Shauman, 2010, González Ramos and Vergés, 2011). We interviewed selected respondents and their partners in order to envisage two perspectives of their different life events and international mobility processes.

**Figure 1. Profiles of the Interviewees**

<b>Nationality</b>			<b>Status</b>	
Spanish	Living in Spain	46	Student/Grantee	14
	Living outside Spain	35	Professional HRST	100
Foreigner	Latin America	16	Abandonment/ Retirement	6
	Europe	12	<b>Place of work</b>	
	Others	11	Academy	63
<b>Geographical distribution</b>			OPIs	40
Madrid	40		Companies	17
Catalunya	28		<b>Fields of Knowledge</b>	
Others Spain	17		TIC	39
Others Outside Spain	35		Biotechnology	16
<b>Age</b>			Other Physics & Natural Sc.	26
25-45	45		Human., Econ. & Social Sc.	39
> 45	75		<b>Dependants while abroad</b>	
<b>Gender</b>				

Women	59	Yes	48
Men	61	No	72

As shown in Figure 1 we considered interviewees’ birthplace and current place of residence. The majority of our interviewees were from Spain but about half of them were living abroad at the time of the interview. The rest of them were highly skilled personnel from abroad, mostly from Latin America and Eastern Europe, which is the most common origin of highly skilled workers who come to Spain. This composition of the sample provides important data about the inflows and outflows in Spain.

We also considered age, career stage and professional status. These are important variables to examine when studying career trajectories, as adopting a life course approach enriches the exploration of the data. The majority of our interviewees were over 45 years old, which allowed us to follow their careers and international mobility experiences to a greater extent; we also interviewed people younger than 45 to provide a rich intergenerational analysis.

In order to capture a broader picture of international mobility of the highly skilled, we included diverse knowledge fields in our sample as well as different sectors. We interviewed professionals from information and communication technology, biosciences & natural sciences & physics, social sciences & humanities & economic fields. A great number of interviewees were from the academic sector but we also interviewed highly skilled managers from private companies.

As our research is developed under a gender perspective and seeks specifically to focus on the gender dimension of international mobility of the highly skilled, we considered factors such as gender and dependents during the stay. As seen in Figure 1, around half of our interviewees were women; it is worth noting that women had fewer children than men, although the majority of both sexes were childless at the time of the interviews.

**The Role of Women and Family Issues in International Mobility**

Through the interviews we established that mobility strategies vary greatly among couples. Some women in dual-career couples were pulled to mobility by their older and more experienced partners who acted as mentors for the younger women. In some cases, love was the motivating factor for the mobility strategy of highly skilled women who held professional positions in their partner’s country of origin. Some women were focused on family and children, abandoning their professional careers



and goals to follow their partners across countries. There were also highly skilled women among our interviewees who experienced extreme difficulties in accessing the labour market in the destination country, which provoked deskilling of their professional competences. In those cases, they continued training and tried not to interrupt their careers by looking for a job opportunity, mostly in a different area or through self-employment. Finally, in a case in which the partner with the least amount of opportunity was a man, he ended up returning to the home country out of frustration because of a lack of decent employment, ultimately breaking up the family and ending up a single parent.

The interviews also explore how interviewees made the decision to move abroad, and the circumstances surrounding their move, including who made the decision in the family and how it was made. Therefore, we know who led the mobility process and the reasoning behind their decisions. Contrary to what most literature states (Mincer, 1978; Purkayastha, 2005), there were very few cases of women among our interviewees who followed their partners' mobility decision. They usually showed consensual negotiation in such a way that they and their partners, sometimes even their entire family, discussed the decisions and agreed about the opportunity to move abroad. As Green (1997) and Hardill (2004) pointed out, some women lead the international mobility strategy because they have the best opportunity for moving abroad. The following quotation highlights this situation:

*Initially I went alone because I was the one with the contract. He had to do his teaching at the institute. After a few months, he requested a leave for three months to see how we could fit there, it was an unpaid leave of three months. And he went to London, he saw that it was good to stay there, then he asked to leave, and we were both together there. (I45, Spanish woman, senior, university professor, without children)*

There are many reasons that drive highly skilled personnel to move abroad. These reasons may change in successive steps of the mobility strategy and may vary by place of origin and destination. The differences seem to be conditioned by social position and upward aspiration. For example, Latin Americans and Eastern Europeans, especially women, are more commonly motivated by the economic welfare situation of the family. Therefore, we must state that international mobility processes appear to be motivated by the will to advance professionally or academically, but also by personal, political or family reasons.

*The idea was already there, by both. However, there was a moment when I felt the time had come and I said "Come on, it's time, let's go" ... Because many things came together, because at that time the earthquake happened, around '85 maybe, I worked as a journalist in Mexico City but ... We were in a recession, we were in what you cannot imagine... what a crisis! A tremendous devaluation of the Mexican peso in two, three years ... And I lost the house, lost the house we had in Mexico City with the earthquake, my job was also going through a bad situation because we had too much pressure ...I worked at Televisa then, with [name omitted] in a program that was very nice, but we had more and more work, more pressure and less rewards. Economic pressure, pressure from hard work and then I started to ... To talk about certain things ... with my analysis of what was happening, corruption and so on... because there were many people who did not like what I said ... Then there was a lot of pressure and sometimes threats to my daughters, to me ... I should no longer talk about certain things, it was not convenient to stay... (I33, Mexican woman, senior, journalist, two daughters)*

Family reasons are particularly important for the highly skilled who come from developing countries because they contribute to the economic welfare and safety of their family members. Women from Russia, Ukraine, Mexico or Argentina stress the economic situation in parallel with good opportunities for finding a stimulating line of research or graduating in an advanced studies program abroad. Many of these women express their concern about the lack of opportunities in their country of origin and discrimination in terms of salary, stability or career progression. As they cannot advance in their careers, the family reap fewer benefits than they initially expect, considering the professional's educational credentials.

Family reasons, particularly aging parents, may also play a role in determining when to return to the origin country (González Ramos and Lamolla Kristiansen, 2013). As stated in the following quotation, men show more of a tendency than in the past to return to care for elderly parents, suggesting a change in traditional family roles:

*We are trying to find a way in which we can keep doing the things that are important to us and spend time with the family. In other words, we are getting old and they are getting old, everyone is in their 70s. In fact, her mother, father and a sister have died, and now my family is pulling us to move there to enjoy our nieces and nephews, I'd like to meet them, too. Then there's the personal side, I cannot deny it. (32, Mexican man, senior, scientist, two daughters)*

Family reasons might influence scientists to not move or to change their patterns of mobility. Both women and men, in a similar way, tend to shorten their time abroad or take the decision of moving to a particular place when they think they have enough services or benefits for their children. The following quotation illustrates this situation:

*If you have children moving costs are much more ... If your partner works or not conditions that. If the partner does not work it is easier to move if you have children ... If you have children, a home and a family, it might not be worth it to move. (187, Spanish woman, junior, university professor, one child)*

### **International Mobility as a Challenge for Family Formation**

International mobility also implies a challenge to those who want to form a family. On the one hand, as shown in the summary of their characteristics, many mobile couples, especially women, have few or no children. Literature attributes this to the delay of motherhood and the difficulties associated with the work-life balance under current gender regimes where the male breadwinner model still predominates (Ackers, 2005; Skachkova, 2007; Kofman, 2012). Among interviewees some women delay motherhood until they hold a stable job while some regret never having children after trying for a long time. Women from older generations stress that it is now easier and more acceptable than in the past to balance work and family when children are totally separate from professional work. One woman states:

*Motherhood was invisible in work environments and there was a separation between work and family (142, Spanish woman, senior scientist, currently abroad after getting divorced and her daughter is an adult).*

According to this woman, the separation from her daughter because of mobility projects and pursuing professional goals was strongly criticised by relatives and close friends. Although there is little research on this type of family judgment, the importance of criticisms and social stereotypes from close family and friends is extremely important, as other women stated in their interviews. In fact, some young career-oriented women remain hesitant to have children and allude to this argument as a reason for rejecting motherhood:

*There was a time when I thought about that... but back then the opportunity did not arise ... and right now I have no desire to have children, it's too late. When I started doing the*

*thesis I was aware of it, but I was very conscious of what this implies, because I've had nephews since I was nine years old. Thus, I know perfectly the life my sisters had. I could always perfectly compare who could work and who could not, and I have always been comparing them in social terms, which always leaves the coincidence that the one who has to quit the job is the woman, the one who always has to sacrifice the career is the woman, or in that sense I've always had pretty clear that having children, and how it works, does not really suit me... That is why you have to choose ... In my case, look, I do not know if that compensates. Ok, if it happens that would be phenomenal, you raise your child and that's it. But if I have to say "Yes, I want to have a child, I want to be a mother". Nope. (I92, Spanish woman, senior, scientist, without children)*

While international mobility may hinder the maintenance of family relationships, couples and families do survive international mobility processes. As the following quotation shows, couples combine visits on holiday periods with short visits to maintain their emotional ties. Moreover, their strategies have recently been facilitated by a greater ease in communication, both in relation to changes in transport and communication technologies.

*I had a boyfriend who is now my husband, and to spend a year where you have to keep a long distance relationship is not as easy as when you see each other every day. However, we had a serious relationship and many things could be overcome in other ways (...) Normally, we used the holiday periods to spend together in Germany, precisely because we said: "let's take advantage of the fact that I have a house there and a car to see a different world". (I106, Spanish woman, senior accounting officer, without children)*

Most couples interviewed seem to overcome this situation of separation and had even consolidated their relationships. They felt very satisfied with their relationships, even if they involved multiple strategies that implied high levels of personal and professional planning, as we pointed out in previous literature (González and Vergés, 2012). Such strategies have proven easier and more successful to carry out in dual-career couples and, in many cases, mobility appears to have strengthened the family's ties. Furthermore, it could be argued that international mobility can lead to a process of strengthening the nuclear family at the expense of maintaining an extended family, as noted in the following quote.

*There [in London] the concept was totally different. The family is the nuclear family, that is, the couple and their children. Parents may be living hundreds of miles away. Thus, mothers*

*need to know exactly what to do as soon as they get home. I was very well organized in this respect. I found myself there in the same situation as they are. I had a mother and a grandmother here. So I was completely alone there (I23, Spanish woman, senior manager in pharmaceutical company, one child)*

Interviewees explained the difficulties they experienced in their relationships because of international mobility. Some of these problems were related to the process of finding accommodation coupled with the job search. Mobility also brings important personal transformations which may lead to family ruptures and lone parenthood. Divorce, separation and/or the creation of new stepfamilies are common types of contemporary families whose tendency may be boosted by mobility. The following quotation summarises how this situation may evolve.

*Yes, I was married, and well, we divorced in the end...I think it is very difficult to move a relationship to another country for a long period of time, because in order to stabilize, the two have to find what they want in the other country. When I came here, I never wanted to go back (...). And she ended up working in an American school, here in Seville, which was the closest she could find to what she did before. However, the school system is very different from what she knew there, and she was actually desperate to return and work in the system with a different philosophy. And finally it did not work and we divorced. And then ... I met my current wife and we have two daughters, aged 6 and 3, and here we are fine, she is from Almeria ...(I44, English man, senior scientist, two children)*

### **International Mobility and Family: Challenge for Public Policies**

As international mobility implies a great impact on families, it should drive major changes for public policies. International mobility increases the chances of transnational families where members might be split in different countries (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Parreñas, 2005) and the existence of families which might have residence in more than one country. Regarding transnational families, interviewees take the decisions of moving abroad leaving their partners and children when they are in precarious situations.

*Luckily five years ago my husband came and now he is working at the university on short term contracts. At least the two of us are together now, but we just had a period when I was in Oviedo and he was in the Basque country. In the past 12 years we have lived together*

*only for two years. That is a hard life, and our children were rarely able to live with the entire family. However, despite all this I think our children have received at least the possibility to study. My son has finished his degree. He got his PhD in a Russian University. Our children grew up during Perestroika, which were very difficult economic times for families working in education and science in Russia. At least we have given them the opportunity to study, to eat well and study, and for that part our role as parents has been done well. (I14, Russian woman, senior scientist, a daughter and a son)*

This Russian woman lived apart from her husband and oldest son for 12 years. During that time, they tried various strategies of reunification but were met with legal, visa and work problems. She is currently in Spain with her daughter and husband, but her son was married in Russia, where he resides, which indefinitely impedes the likelihood of them being together.

In transnational families many different nationalities may coexist and children do not necessarily have the same nationality as their parents. Similarly, the languages and cultural references may be different from parents or close family members and may even change across time due to successive mobility processes. The following quotation introduces this topic:

*I have a daughter who is six years old. She was born travelling. We settled in England when she was 16 months and now when they ask, “So, where are you from?”, she says “Spain”, and then, “from where?” and she answers, “from Manchester” (I72, Spanish woman, senior cultural activities officer, a daughter)*

International mobility increases the chances of transnational marriages, thus making family decisions more complex, particularly concerning children, and perpetuating the chances of continual movement. Parents involved in transnational families need to resolve questions such as what nationality they will give to their children, what language they will speak with them or with each other, or even if they should return or leave from their home country to provide their children with better opportunities. They are usually met with legal and educational systems that are still unprepared for these kinds of family transformations. The following quotation is an example of language difficulties and the clash of cultures:

*[About her youngest daughter] She writes in Spanish “agua” for “water”, but instead she wrote it with “w”, “awa”. The teacher directly failed her instead of understanding that the child did not know much Spanish and that she was doing enough with trying to write in Spanish. So, the first year was hard. Then, you realize you’re not really from anywhere,*

*when you're here you miss there, and when you're there you miss this, but you become very flexible... (I13, Spanish woman, senior manager of multinational company, three children)*

Through the interviews we identified a series of measures to be implemented that could favour international mobility of highly skilled personnel. As seen in Figure 3 many of the measures are related to the family, since policies for attracting talent, as well as company measures to attract managers, are usually centred on individual professionals, disregarding the fact that these professionals often move with partners and children.

**Figure 3. Measures and Policies Related to International Mobility and the Family**

<b>International Mobility Policies and Measures</b>			
<b>Welfare</b>	Standard of living maintained	<b>Family</b>	Compensate the partner
	Standard living improved		Partner involved in planning
	Travel expenses		Partner employment assistance
	Salary increase (10-15 per cent)		Access to quality child care
	Housing and travel costs		Education costs of children
	Social Security and healthcare		Access and funding for quality schools
<b>Professional</b>	Assignment part of career plan		Training for the family
	In contact with head office		Legal Assistance for partner working permits
	Assignment as training		Professional counseling for partner/family
	Assignment as a promotion		Language training for the family
	Performance bonus		Family law
<b>Preparation</b>		<b>Return</b>	Promotion upon return
			Return and reintegration planning
			Assignment of less than two years
			Additional in different countries
			Competencies used upon return
<b>Social live</b>			Additional in same country
			Expenses for return visit
			Mentor in home country
			Three paid visits to home country

Meet colleagues and social life

Bonus for annual vacation

Figure 3 leads us to ask the question: to what extent are the companies, institutions and governments of our countries prepared to address the challenges that international mobility of the highly qualified brings to the table? These measures are particularly important in countries such as Spain, where society still operates under a gender regime and only men are considered as breadwinners. In fact, as the following interviewee shows, the Spanish system is still coming up short for families with intensive mobility strategies and transnational families.

*I think there is little and poor regulation, very badly regulated, because there is always one partner that loses out with it. When you move a director with her partner, these cases exist too, right? Obviously, the partner loses. In my case, it is the woman who loses and that is not regulated, not legislated, unlike other European countries that have legislation about that. In those countries they have a number of bonuses to avoid affecting the quality of life of the family. In Italy, for example, I know very well how it works there. As the director, she or he receives a salary, but if one goes with a partner there are a series of bonuses, also based on the number of children they have...even for the moving! Logically, if you move with children you need more square feet, and there are many other things to consider ... We do not have all that covered, I think it is still a pending issue for Spain. (I76, Spanish man, senior, cultural activities officer, one daughter)*

Moving internationally is compulsory for the development of successful professional careers. As a result, academic institutions and companies should take into account the need for family-related incentives when they seek to promote mobility among their highly skilled workers. There is a great variety of measures that could be implemented to facilitate international mobility processes, such as offering language training or a job to the partner, or covering children's education costs abroad. By implementing only a few incentives, the relationship between international mobility and family development could become more balanced and satisfying for highly skilled personnel. Finally, gaining widespread social comprehension comes down to increasing awareness in the host population in order to accept and ease the transition of families living abroad.



## **Final Remarks**

In this article we sought to examine the relationship between international mobility of the highly skilled and family development, thus contributing to its improvement. We relied on in-depth interviews with 120 highly skilled personnel with international mobility experiences, moving to or from Spain. While there is vast literature and empirical work aimed to explain the advancement of men and women in professional careers, our work specifically addresses how family and international mobility are mutually affecting each other. We aimed to expose new processes and propose necessary measures for transnational families and families of highly skilled personnel who are continuously in movement.

Although our results are limited to the Spanish context, we provided relevant contributions to the current debate about international mobility of highly skilled personnel. First, we provided information about a case in Southern Europe, an area still relatively unexplored in international literature. Second, we generated new and qualitative information to explore the conditions, motivations and strategies behind the processes of international mobility of the highly skilled, especially in relation to the formation of families from a gender perspective. Finally, we suggested some proposals in order to improve current international mobility policies and measures.

When we started to investigate the relationship of international mobility of highly qualified personnel with family development, we soon discovered that the relationship was more complex than what could arise a priori. While mobility of the highly skilled tends to be explained by professional and individual reasons and strategies, we found that these reasons and strategies cannot be separated from other personal and collective ones, especially the family, neither for women nor for men. Our analysis not only shows that family strategies are behind many of the international movements of the highly skilled, but also that women have been taking a leading role in international mobility decisions, either to leave or to return, and the subsequent circumstances related to family issues. For these reasons, we conclude that the family has important effects on international mobility of the highly skilled.

Similarly, international mobility significantly affects the formation and development of the family. Not only do highly skilled personnel, particularly women, adopt a strategy for having children, but mobility adds additional challenges to the work-life balance and, as a result, the continuity of the couple may be affected. Many of the couples that we interviewed encountered difficulties and required a strategic plan for their relationships. There were some couples who were separated physically, and many of them had to develop a careful strategy to maintain their relationships. Most

of the couples have remained together over the years, while others have been transformed into a new type of family, often single-parents or step-families. Mobility usually turns them into multinational families where some members have different nationalities, cultures and languages. Thus, diversity coexists in the same family group but the social context is homogeneous and insufficiently adapted to this variety. Therefore, it is still necessary to promote research that delves into the family development strategies behind the processes of international mobility for the highly skilled.

Finally, families with highly skilled members that experience international mobility processes represent new challenges for countries, cities and institutions seeking to attract talent. In fact, their experiences show us that there is still a lot of work to be done at the level of public policy and company measures to promote international mobility. In this sense, it proves insufficient to attract talent strictly through individual and professional measures. Support and incentives for partners and the rest of the family should be provided, whether linguistic, school or job related. Family development and international mobility processes are mutually affected by inadequate and insufficient public policy, therefore new measures are essential for promoting mobility, attracting talent and giving a proper response to the challenge of balancing family and international mobility of the highly skilled.

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