

What is good for the goose - is good for the gander?



Both companies and governments still seem to be on a learning curve when it comes to the spouses of employees dispatched on foreign assignments. In her regular Expatica column, Cultural Clues, Hilly van Swol-Ulbrich answers a question from a reader struggling with dual career issues and the unique stresses placed on spouses.

Pauline wrote,

My husband and I were relocated by my company. The assignment is for a two-year period, which we are nearly to the end of.

Our relocation and experience here have been somewhat unique, mostly because of the way my company chose to structure our expat contract and the mere fact that my husband moved here for my career.

No support was given for him as my spouse and in retrospect we would never accept a contract again that did not provide for spousal support. He seems to be in a unique situation that also comes with unique challenges, since most couples are typically being relocated for the man's career.

I would be interested in sharing our experiences with you and curious to hear if you know of other people in our situation.

Dear Pauline,

First off thank you for sharing your experiences with me. And I am sorry to say that your unique experiences are not so unique after all.

Many spouses get no support at all and I am sure you agree that gender ought to make no difference. But this is where most companies "out themselves" as not diverse enough in their thinking, assuming the spouse will be at home with kids.

But this dark cloud for the dual-career couples does have a silver lining with a growing number of companies adapting their expat policies.

A recent international study by KPMG (www.kpmgvirtualihr.com) clearly shows the trend: a majority of the companies offer some kind of assistance. This ranges from:

- lossed pay compensation (if only you would be that lucky)
- assistance with the job-hunting
- arranging the necessary work permits
- covering studies fees

Most often lump sums between EUR 5,000 and EUR 7,500 are offered either up front and/or per calendar year. The amounts are payable against receipts - others will not use this control mechanism.

Who can help?

For coaching and advice there is: www.netexpat.com.

For Pauline and all the others in the Netherlands consider a recruitment agency specialised in hiring internationals: www.undutchables.com

But the famous? Hilf dir selbst, so hilft dir Gott? self-help mechanism is still a must:
www.womensinternational.net

I will do my best to push for a male trailing spouses chapter in the new shared networks for spouses.

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Hilly van Swol-Ulbrich is managing partner of CONSULTus. Her website is www.Consultus.net. She reserves the right to decide which questions she considers relevant for her column. She will, however, not answer any questions dealing with tax or legal matters.