

# Why Have Dual Career Couples Become A Hot Topic In HR?

**Companies that attract and retain high-calibre candidates have integrated the management of dual career couples into their HR policy. They have understood that expat partners are no longer willing to sacrifice their careers to follow them, and that a partner is key to the success of an expatriation. Talented, versatile, highly educated, and financially independent, their expectations must be taken into account.**

A few years ago, contacting an expat's partner directly was seen as crossing a line. Companies were hesitant to interfere with the private lives of employees, and as such had not accounted for them in their HR policies. However, a recent report has shown that 61% of recruitment professionals consider dual careers and partner issues to be of increasing importance to their organisation (Permits Foundation, 2022). Many companies are therefore shifting away from their previous approach; an expat and their partner are inextricable from one another, and the wellbeing of the partner is key to the success of the expatriation as a whole.

TotalEnergies can be considered a role model in this field. In their offices across the world, they host an event every year for expats and their partners; speeches directly address the partners, reminding them of their importance to the expatriation, and the value of this simple act of recognition is undeniable. Moreover, they have integration programmes in place, and partners are an integral part of their HR policy.

In many ways, the company are not sending one employee abroad, but two. Making sure to set aside the time and resources to support an expat couple ensures successful expatriations as the partner is often the unremunerated driving force for integration. They are the Logistics Manager, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wellbeing Manager, Medical Assistant, the Tour Guide, Event Planner, and often a parent too. So, if they're not doing well, the whole expatriation can fall apart. Furthermore, relocation and compensation costs may go to waste if an expatriation fails, so investing in integration programmes for expats and their partners and becoming

members organisations that provide professional opportunities to expat partners such as the IDCN, is a worthwhile investment. Not only does this save the company money in the long-term, but it also improves the quality of life of the expat, whose happiness is likely to come through in their work. This in turn improves the company's reputation as an employer, assuring that they will be able to secure high-profile talent in the future.

Whilst many companies, such as TotalEnergies and L'Oréal, have been trailblazers in supporting expats and their partners, report from the Permits Foundation found that HR professionals in Europe place more emphasis on wellbeing at work, a work/life balance, and the general wellbeing of employees than anywhere else, and only 11% of companies sufficiently support their employees through expatriation (Permits Foundation, 2022). Moreover, their report found that 59% of the companies they studied had had employees reject expatriation opportunities because of concerns regarding the partner's career or employment, and 44% had seen employees return home early from an international assignment because of concerns about the partner's career or employment.

So, who are these partners? What are their personal and professional expectations, and how can we prioritise them?

73% of expat spouses work full-time prior to moving abroad (source), 72.4% of them have a bachelor's degree, and 68% speak at least three languages. They are recognised in their field of expertise, and 80% of them want to work abroad to have a purpose and to avoid financial dependency and gaps in their CV.

"Managing the Double Careers of Expat Couples" is a practical and interactive book which gets to the heart of this issue. There are lots of books written about expats for expats, so why are there so few addressed to the people supporting them? Armelle has interviewed global mobility experts from companies such as TotalEnergies and L'Oréal, and over 100 expats and expat partners, to better understand the new developments in this field.

In addition to personal accounts, the book contains practical advice and calls to action which underline the importance of equipping expats and expat partners with the linguistic and cultural knowledge they need to integrate. The tips and advice available

include concrete actions that Global Mobility professionals can take. These are proven to be effective and are supported by statistics from recent studies conducted on expatriation and dual career couples. From the expatriation phenomena of 'culture shock' and 'trailing spouse syndrome' to the common causes of failed expatriations, the book provides a comprehensive outline of the expatriation experience from both sides.



## ARMELLE PERBEN

As an expat partner, Armelle has lived in seven countries (England, Benin, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, India, and Mozambique) all whilst raising five children who

are now between 2 and 18 years old. What's more, two were born abroad.

She is very committed to the issue of gender equality, having volunteered for the Professional Women's Network for seven years, two of which she spent on the board. Armelle is the current CEO of Absolutely French, a centre for integration through French language learning, which she founded in 2012 after returning from expatriation. "Everything started as a result of anger and frustration. I returned from expatriation in India where I had been with my husband. Equipped with a degree in International Business, the ability to speak several languages including Chinese, and having made contacts in different countries, I could only think of one thing: finding a job in purchasing. On paper, it was a no brainer. I was qualified and wanted to get stuck in. But the reality was quite different..." She noticed that other expat partners had the same need for a specific school, adapted for their needs and "blank CV". After a few years, Armelle decided to go even further and founded Absolutely Talented. Absolutely Talented is the first careers fair organised exclusively for expat partners in Paris. It has two objectives: to show that expat partners are talented, and to increase their visibility amongst recruiters.