



27 November 2009

Highly skilled spouses want to work during assignments abroad

Global survey sharpens focus on partner employment needs

A lack of spouse employment opportunities adversely affects global mobility of highly skilled international staff.

This is the key finding of a survey of 3300 expatriate partners of highly skilled staff on foreign postings with 200 companies, embassies and international organisations.

Permits Foundation, which conducted the survey among partners of 120 nationalities in as many host countries, says that granting work permits for partners can create a "triple win" for employers, families and host countries.

Almost 60 per cent of partners said that they would be unlikely to relocate in future to a country where it is difficult to get a work permit. By contrast, countries that enable partners to work were attractive destinations for 96% of respondents.

Permits Foundation advocates improvement of work permit regulations for partners of expatriate employees worldwide. It wants legally resident partners to have an open permission to work during an assignment. The foundation has set up employer networks in India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and Russia to progress discussions in these countries.

"This new evidence sends an important signal to governments that want to attract top international talent", says Gill Gordon, chairman of Permits Foundation and Director of Executive Compensation at Schlumberger, based in the UK. "Partners are also highly educated, with diverse professional backgrounds. If permitted to work, they too contribute to the local economy."

The survey also provides insight into partner aspirations and the positive effects of having a job. Almost 90% of partners in the survey were employed before expatriation. This figure fell to 35% during the posting. Three quarters of those who were not working want to work. This is particularly so among the younger age groups, men, graduates and unmarried partners. Most partners who work said that this had a positive impact on adjustment to the host location and willingness to complete the assignment.

"This is the first large-scale survey to look at employment and work permit issues from the partner perspective." said Siobhan Cummins, managing director of ORC Worldwide's operations in Europe, Middle East and Africa. "Acknowledging partner employment needs will enhance international mobility. The survey is a welcome addition to resources that employers can consult when developing policies to support dual career couples."

More information:

Survey summary report: http://permitsfoundation.com/docs/permits_survey_summary.pdf

Final report: http://permitsfoundation.com/docs/permits_survey_final_report.pdf

Contact: Kathleen van der Wilk-Carlton PermitsFoundation@shell.com Tel +31703191930.