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## Guest editorial: Careers of self-initiated expatriates: exploring the impact of context

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**“CAREERS OF SELF-INITIATED EXPATRIATES:  
EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF CONTEXT”**

**Guest Editorial**

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**The role of context in expatriation research**

Why do we need expatriation? Who are expatriates? What are their experiences? Who benefits? What are the challenges of international work? For decades, the international mobility literature has concentrated on these and related issues. This special-issue introduction provides an overview of pertinent research insights, relevant current questions, and promising future areas of investigation on the micro (individual), meso (organizational), and macro (society/context) levels. In particular, it presents the contributions included in this special issue, highlighting the highly diverse contexts in which self-initiated expatriates' careers are launched and unfold over time.

An expatriate is defined as “*an individual who moves to another country while changing the dominant place of residence and executes legal work abroad*” (Andresen et al., 2014, p. 2308), with the relocation being initiated either by an organization (assigned expatriates) or the individual (self-initiated expatriates [SIEs]) (Andresen et al., 2014). Both also could be characterized as migrants, often highly qualified, who travel, study, learn, work, and may even retire in different countries and cultures (Andresen et al., 2014; Biemann & Andresen, 2010;

Guo & Al Ariss, 2015). Overall, there is also the encompassing notion of global mobility in the management literature integrating various forms of expatriation (Bonache et al., 2021).

Following Perlmutter's (1969) exploration of the *tortuous evolution of the multinational corporation* (MNC), he and Heenan (Perlmutter & Heenan, 1974) observed and proposed staffing solutions for managerial leadership jobs at international subsidiaries. Their work focused on corporate (assigned) expatriates sent abroad for specific positions or work missions, often by an MNC. Thus, their focus was highly intra-company and context-specific, as it helped understand the organizational drivers of expatriation (meso level). SIEs have attracted more recent attention in management research (Andresen et al., 2014, 2015, 2020; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014; Dickmann et al., 2018; Doherty et al., 2011; Doherty, 2013; Habti & Elo, 2019), even though independent migrants and travelers seeking new opportunities exist throughout human history. A recent expert review (Brewster et al., 2021) identified four key themes addressed in research on SIEs in the past 20 years: (1) the analysis of the types of and distinctions among SIEs; (2) motivation to undertake self-initiated expatriation; (3) SIEs' adjustment to their new countries; and (4) SIEs' careers and outcomes (see also Stoermer et al., 2021). This review found that research on SIEs often focuses on micro-level and macro-level issues, while research on assigned expatriates often tends to cover organizational (meso-level) issues. It might be interesting to investigate further the employer context's (meso level) influence on SIEs' experiences and career patterns.

Below, we depict some recent insights into research on SIEs at the micro, meso, and macro levels without claiming to be exhaustive. When examining expatriates as individuals (micro level), the focus in current research is mainly on performance and adjustment issues. For example, Andresen et al. (2020) developed a theory of personal initiative by SIEs and offered a conceptual model on how such personal self-starting, proactive, and persistent drivers impact SIEs' performance, job satisfaction, adjustment, and employability. Beyond micro-level economic influences, many other factors are present at the organizational level (meso level)

that impact expatriation's processes, experiences, and outcomes. For example, Chen et al. (2022) offered a concept for expatriate effectiveness in terms of task, contextual and adaptive performance, highlighting the importance of measurement in a cross-cultural environment. Finally, few research efforts have examined wider contextual issues concerning expatriation with respect to factors outside of the organization. For example, labor markets' macro-level economic context may exert significant influence on availability of international talent. In this area, the investigation of qualified, skilled migrants has received more positive consideration over the years through recognition of various contributions that a skilled, international workforce has been bringing to the global economy (Crowley-Henry et al., 2018).

Dabic et al. (2015, p. 316) reminded us in their paper covering four decades (1970–2012) of research on expatriates that “new contexts and organizations should be included in the research agenda, while an effort must be made in systematic approaches and in building higher order content in the international HRM field.” Andersen (2021) conducted a recent bibliometric review of the expatriate literature from 1998 to 2017 and identified current research trends using graphic mapping and social network analysis. He identified clusters around four core themes: (1) expatriate adjustment; (2) expatriates and MNCs; (3) careers; and (4) methodological advances. However, as can be seen, an emphasis remains on the micro (individual) level, with some research at the meso (organizational) level, without considering the larger macro-level context.

It is therefore interesting to note that, for SIEs, Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry (2013, p. 91) have argued: “A deeper understanding of SIE for management scholars would ultimately, in turn, lead to better inclusive practices across the organizational and national spectrums for accommodating individuals on international mobility. The benefits of these meso-organizational and macro-national contributions would also enhance the micro-individual experience of SIEs.” Furthermore, Andresen et al. (2020) and Mello et al. (2022) recently emphasized the need to investigate further the institutional context's impact on expatriation

outcomes. Their reviews indicated that very few studies have examined the institutional context's impact on expatriates' career success. When the available expatriation research was analyzed, significant findings often were reported (e.g., Breitenmoser et al., 2018; Schmid & Wurster, 2017). Szkudlarek et al. (2021) pinpointed an important issue in organizations and societies' international context: the lack of consideration of the academic conceptualization of international mobility in the case of refugees. Indeed, the contexts of societies that refugees flee from and migrate to – including in some cases various countries that refugees pass through – also would shed some light on their experiences and, ultimately, their career paths. Overall, international adjustment concepts seem incomplete because they mainly rely on micro- and meso-level factors at the expense of critical macro-level factors.

Arguing that context should be integrated more prominently into SIE research gives rise to the question of what particular component of context should one be interested in? In principle, researchers could examine several facets. In the following section, we refer to overarching changes in the macro context in terms of economy, politics, society, and climate that influence the scope and direction of expatriation and imply new challenges for organizations, to derive implications for research on global mobility management and career management. This research agenda is followed by a presentation of the articles included in this special issue.

### **Current Contextual Changes and Their Implications for the Global Mobility of Employees and Management**

To meet increased demand for labor arising from shortages of skilled workers in many countries, particularly in the Northern Hemisphere, an increasing number of organizations are recruiting workers from abroad or relocating business activities to countries that have an adequate supply of labor. Questions in this context are: Which countries are suitable for recruitment or relocation? How willing are employees and employers to move? The question of global labor mobility has become more topical, particularly since 2020, a period marked by

the *COVID-19 pandemic*, *de-/globalization*, and *climate debates*, as well as the *war in Ukraine*. Is it still reasonable and justifiable for employers to transfer employees abroad or recruit from abroad, given risks related to these employees' health and safety, and any climate impacts associated with mobility? In the event of de-globalization, how important will international business activity be in the future?

### **The Volume and Direction of Global Mobility Have Changed**

Contrary to popular belief, we are not living in a time of unprecedented, rising mass mobility worldwide. While the absolute number of globally mobile individuals has increased from 225 million at the end of the 19th century to 281 million in 2020, the relative number of globally mobile individuals has decreased from 14 percent to about 3.6 percent, as the global population has risen from 1.6 billion to 8 billion (De Haas et al., 2019; IOM, 2022). Global mobility is a normal process of social and societal development. Even though global labor mobility is not increasing in percentage terms and has been relatively constant over the past few decades, companies are facing new challenges due to expatriates' changing direction and geographical distribution.

In terms of the *direction of global mobility*, new patterns can be seen in both countries of origin and destination countries. For centuries, Europeans settled in other parts of the world due to colonization, flight from wars, and religious persecution, mostly in what is now the USA (Hatton & Williamson, 1994). In the second half of the 20th century, this pattern reversed itself, and Europe became a global migration magnet, e.g., in 2019, 30 percent of the world's internationally mobile people (87 million) settled in Europe (Khanna, 2021).

The *geographical distribution* of internationally mobile people also is changing. Individuals from an increasing number of countries of origin are moving to a decreasing number of destination countries, e.g., the USA, Canada, the EU, Australia, New Zealand, and the Gulf States. This new mobility pattern has elicited increases in the international mix of these destination countries' populations, e.g., Germany (Khanna, 2021). Consequently, among

companies, not only is the proportion of international workers and customers increasing, but also their diversity as a result of the wider range of countries of origin. From an ESG<sup>1</sup> perspective, management of diversity and global mobility is becoming more relevant in overcoming challenges related to cultures, languages, cultural intelligence, etc. Moreover, a battle for talent has ignited despite global mobility, as highly qualified international workers can choose where to go based on the lowest tax rates, the best public services, affordable housing, quality education and healthcare, and predictable policies, among other factors. Talent exists regardless of nationality, so talent management is gaining importance within companies.

### **Expatriation: Quo Vadis?**

Particularly during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), a massive reduction in expatriation occurred. Looking to the future, given the current strong environmental changes in relation to the pandemic, climate change, war, and possible de-globalization, the question is whether international talent will remain in their home countries in the future, return to countries they were in before the pandemic, or find a new destination country. On one hand, factors such as climate change or war could trigger an *increase* in global mobility. On the other hand, post-pandemic and de-globalization trends could *reduce* expatriation. Depending on the scenario, the international labor supply for companies in the most popular destination countries is changing.

### ***Climate Change and War Direct International Workers to New Destinations***

With 18.8 million total new displacements in 2017 (GRID, 2018), the number of climate refugees already exceeds the number of political refugees. It has been predicted that a rise in global temperature of one degree centigrade will increase the number of climate refugees to 200 million, and a rise of two degrees will increase the number to 1 billion or more (Xu et al., 2020). Khanna (2021) estimated that Scandinavia could become an attractive destination

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<sup>1</sup> Environmental, Social, and Governance factors

considering the region's relatively moderate climate changes, with a possible fivefold increase in the current number of inhabitants. Wars lead to companies withdrawing expatriates who are working in crisis areas, breaking off business relations with warring countries, and/or closing foreign branches. Simultaneously, workers employed in war-torn countries leave their home countries on their own initiative and seek employment in safer countries (Beutell et al., 2017).

These changes induced by climate change and war pose complex implications for SIEs and organizational global mobility management. Geopolitical considerations and hostile environments are contextual conditions that may influence expatriation and SIEs. Calm political environments and more stable governments are attractive to migrants and expatriates. However, extreme conditions from natural disasters, terrorism, persecution, genocide, and war will make people want to move to safer places, and due to such extreme factors, as well as socioeconomic reasons, they might become SIEs. However, localization of staff in hostile countries and contexts also is posing human resource management challenges for MNCs and international organizations (Bader et al., 2019; Dickmann et al., 2019). Some of the resulting core research themes are as follows:

- One possible consideration for companies is to *relocate work tasks* to countries where labor will be available in the future (e.g., Scandinavia, Canada) or integrate workers as *virtual employees*.
- Every crisis in a country is an opportunity for more stable countries to poach talent. To attract climate and war refugees, companies and countries need to position themselves as *attractive places to work*.
- Attitudes and behaviors of workers expatriating as a result of climate or war also need to be considered. About one-third to one-half of all people who experience a difficult event continue to develop and become psychologically stronger. As part of this *post-traumatic growth*, people question and reorient themselves, including career changes (see Brooks et al., 2020). Companies can use resilience training or



coaching to help international workers with traumatic experiences develop a growth mindset and become highly employable by learning to view crisis situations as challenges from which something new can be learned and new skills acquired.

- Companies can benefit from an international workforce with a *cosmopolitan identity* (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt, 2018). Identity no longer should be viewed simplistically, which often had meant that it was equated to nationality. For young cosmopolitans, identity is cumulative, not substitutive, i.e., they value making new connections more than remaining loyal to their country of origin. Within companies, language training, intercultural coaching, etc., can help avoid misunderstandings in the workforce.

### ***De-Globalization and Pandemic Increase Virtual International Mobility***

The COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine war and associated energy crisis in Europe, and the uncertain future of Taiwan as one of the most important chip manufacturing countries have demonstrated how fragile international supply chains can be. Entire industries have had to cut their production back; consequently, companies and countries' tendency to de-globalize to become more independent has emerged. The flow of permanent migration to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries fell by more than 30 percent in 2020 to around 3.7 million people, the lowest level since 2003. As part of this, companies' international labor mobility also fell massively (by 53 percent) (OECD, 2021). For example, the European Chamber of Commerce estimates that half of all expatriate workers sent to China left the country between 2019 and 2022, with more to follow (Tan, 2022). Furthermore, an increasing number of employees who self-initiated work abroad have returned to their home countries. While the COVID-19 pandemic, individual health concerns, and governmental (immigration and health) policies certainly have shaped these data substantially, the situation has given rise to a much more pronounced use of technology in international work (Crown World Mobility, 2022; Selmer et al., 2022a). However, although much work can be done online,

after several years of experience, employers and employees increasingly have realized that sometimes local and international staff are needed, and that business travel is required to maintain face-to-face exchanges. Much of the global economy and supply chains only work if people can be mobile.

Therefore, companies today must implement new forms of work to meet economic conditions, their own requirements, and workforce needs. Individual employees' increasing freedom to decide where they want to live and work could lead to more self-initiated expatriations. This leads to the following research themes:

- Workers increasingly want to be able to work virtually as so-called “*international remote workers*,” either from their preferred locations abroad (cf. the increasing number of countries with so-called nomadic visas) or from their permanent residences (where they are located) for their preferred employers abroad, regardless of where the employers are based.
- Companies also are seeking to save on mobility costs via *virtual assignments of workers*. According to market research firm International Data Corporation, some 1.5 billion professionals could do their work from home, representing nearly 40 percent of the global workforce (IDC, 2021).
- The combination of global education and identity, remote work, and changing growth markets also is expected to increase significantly the number of so-called “*perma-pats*,” i.e., expatriates who repeatedly change countries and, if necessary, employers (Andresen & Biemann, 2013).
- *Country attractiveness* in relation to economic pull-factors and personal motives for *quality of life* can be at the forefront of global mobility, attenuating differentiations (Doherty et al., 2011) between SIEs, assigned expatriates, and migrants (Szkudlarek

et al., 2021). Adaptation issues for expatriates – as well as corporate support, either expected or truly needed – are likely to increase in a more complex VUCA<sup>2</sup> world.

- Employers in the future may use the principle of “*citizenship arbitrage*” or “*citizenship by investment*” as a management tool to circumvent lengthy and complicated visa requirements when hiring SIEs.

To sum up, global mobility management within companies must be more than the development of assignment guidelines and the determination of remuneration packages. If employers want to find and retain (qualified) expatriates, creating suitable places also is essential. *Where* SIEs are located is as important to them as *who* they are, and the more people take the opportunity to expatriate to shape their own lives, the more important the former (*where*) becomes in shaping the latter (*who*). Organizations, nations, and societies must work hand in hand to shape these places (Vaiman et al., 2018). Individualization contributes to the *diversity of international assignments and formats of global work*, also indicating new challenges in theory and practice for the management of international employees, MNCs, and international organizations (Collings et al., 2009; Shaffer et al., 2012).

### **Current Contextual Changes and Their Implications for SIEs’ Career Management**

Earlier, we developed arguments to understand expatriation’s context and its implications for expatriates and global mobility management more holistically. To strengthen this approach, we also will need to better understand the patterns of international work and its implications for career management. Thus, we ask: Do SIEs continue to work in an international career context or repatriate?

The main interest in expatriation research has been on expatriates’ experiences abroad, though more recently, increasing interest is evident in the repatriation stage (see, e.g., Chiang et al., 2018) and expatriation’s broader career implications (Mello et al., 2022). The same focus

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<sup>2</sup> Volatile, uncertain, complex & ambiguous. [See, e.g., —see for ex.: What VUCA Really Means for You \(hbr.org\)](#)

appears in research on SIEs. Overall, the literature on SIEs' repatriation remains limited (Selmer et al., 2022b), with the most emphasis on the single expatriation process as a unit of analysis, while less attention has been paid to the more long-term career angle. However, expatriates may decide to remain in their host countries more permanently, either by working for the same employer or looking for other career options in their host countries. They also may re-expatriate to other countries. This longer-term angle is important, particularly among SIEs, as we already know that they tend to remain abroad longer than assigned expatriates (Andresen & Biemann, 2013) and have greater interest in more permanent global careers than assigned expatriates (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Overall, a rather high proportion of expatriates has experienced several periods working abroad. To better understand SIEs' careers, we still need more research in these areas. We also need a better understanding of contextual factors that impact these career choices, as well as such choices' effects, as careers are always careers in context (Mayrhofer et al., 2007).

Regarding the repatriation stage of the assignment cycle, extant research has examined repatriation adjustment, training, and support during repatriation, as well as expatriation's career impacts (Chiang et al., 2018). What is typical with SIEs is that they have left their employer organizations when seeking jobs abroad on their own. Thus, during the repatriation stage, they need to find new jobs back in their home countries after being abroad for many years. However, given that most do not have any repatriation agreements in their job contracts and normally do not have access to repatriation support programs, they must deal with the transition of coming "home" on their own. The type of new employer organization still may make a difference, as large MNCs also may offer training and relocation support for international recruitments, while at less international companies, such support may not be available. Furthermore, many individual and family-related contextual factors may impact repatriation adjustment, e.g., dual career couples often face adjustment challenges abroad when it is difficult for expatriate partners to create careers in the host country. Thus, they might be

eager to repatriate to continue their careers; therefore, repatriation may be a positive experience that they have embraced. Family issues play an important role overall in expatriation, as such career choices impact not only expatriates, but also their families. Thus, family situation – e.g., age and educational possibilities related to children – also must be considered when contemplating whether to remain abroad or repatriate.

The findings on career impacts from expatriation after repatriation have led to rather mixed findings; thus, it has been stated that in future studies, we should consider more thoroughly that very different types of SIEs exist, and that they function in very different contexts abroad, as well as upon return (Selmer et al., 2022b). Thus, this may explain the mixed findings in the field, e.g., expatriates' career stage and their education level may impact career outcomes (O'Connor, 2018; Schmid & Wurster, 2017). Andresen et al. (2020) and Mello et al. (2022) have called for more attention to be paid to the role of expatriate careers' institutional aspects in future research. For example, the value of working in developed contexts with high levels of technological and managerial knowledge could be expected to elicit a more positive impact on expatriates' careers after expatriation than experience gained from working in less-developed contexts. Also, the economic situation in the home country naturally impacts the job market situation in that country; thus, findings reported during different stages of economic cycles could lead to different outcomes. Also discussed is the importance of "fit," i.e., whether one who lands a job in an international organization that includes international responsibilities can benefit more from expatriation, as a good fit is likely to exist when an individual's competencies match job requirements (Mello et al., 2022). It also has been discussed that different cultures may appreciate employees' international experience differently; thus, career impacts from expatriation may differ across cultures (Andresen et al., 2020). It also has been stressed that findings on expatriation's career impacts may differ depending on when the measurement takes place: More long-term impacts may differ from experiences reported shortly

after global moves, as it may take time to reintegrate into the home country's labor market (Begley et al., 2008; O'Connor, 2018; Suutari et al., 2018).

Expatriates also may make other kinds of career choices instead of choosing to repatriate. The rich variety of expatriate and re-expatriate career patterns is baffling. Studies have indicated that it is common for expatriates to have several expatriation experiences and, thus, decide to re-expatriate after one international experience (Ho et al., 2016). Others decide to remain more permanently in their host countries (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010) and, thus, become "*perma-pats*" (see Andresen & Biemann, 2013). Discussions on moving expatriates to permanent local contracts appear in the literature on assigned expatriates when they decide to remain in their host countries longer and when companies limit the length of expatriate contracts. Among SIEs, it may mean that they may continue working in the same position abroad, as they typically already have permanent local contracts. Some SIEs also may choose to find new jobs within MNCs and may even become assigned expatriates, as SIEs tend to change types of jobs and employers more often (McNulty & Vance, 2017). Some expatriates also become entrepreneurs in their host countries, settle down, and become migrants (Selmer et al., 2018). More research is needed on SIEs making such decisions, as insight on career outcomes related to such decisions is needed, as well as on the impacts from different contextual factors during such processes.

Similarly, the need for future research on re-expatriation situations has been emphasized (e.g., Akkan et al., 2022). It has been discussed in the discourse that such decisions may be impacted both by pull factors (e.g., interest in international work environments and constant development opportunities that such career offers) and push factors (e.g., a lack of suitable career and job options back in the home country, as well as danger and deprivation in the home country). Experienced global careerists have been found to emphasize issues such as meaningfulness of the job, development opportunities, and high levels of autonomy when making their career decisions (Suutari et al., 2012). While this study emphasized the nature of

global work and international work environment among important factors, Ho et al. (2016) found three push-pull factors associated with home and host countries that significantly impact repatriates' intention to re-expatriate on their own: dissatisfaction with career and life in their home countries; reverse culture shock; and expected career, family, and quality-of-life outcomes from re-expatriation. In turn, Tharenou and Caulfield (2010) reported that SIEs have been found to identify with multicultural environments and, thus, also may want to continue working in such career environments in the future. As global work experiences are demanding and transitional experiences for individuals (Kraimer et al., 2022), there has been interest in understanding what kind of impacts they make on individuals' identity. It has been reported that global careerists develop a global career identity (Akkan et al., 2022; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007), e.g., they also are often highly committed to working in global career environments in the future, view their job markets as global, and constantly are looking for new challenges and development opportunities. Ho et al. (2023) reported that different aspects of identity – e.g., career identity, family identity, and social identity – are connected with an inclination toward re-expatriation. Recently, Lazarova et al. (2023) raised the question of whether the more limited availability of global mobility opportunities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic will impact such internationally oriented professionals' retention within companies.

All these studies emphasize the importance of different contextual factors that relate to jobs, organizations, and home and host countries in global careerists' decision making on their careers. However, our understanding of the connections between previous expatriation experiences and future global work involvement remains limited (Akkan et al., 2022). Overall, future studies should pay more attention to holistic career journeys in which people often move frequently between different international positions (McNulty & Vance, 2017; Suutari et al., 2012). Thus, these studies should involve data on prolonged, if not whole, career periods (Kovalenko & Mortelmans, 2014). Furthermore, expatriation studies also should pay attention to how career experiences both abroad and during repatriation impact re-expatriation intentions

and future global mobility, leading to long-term global careers (Mello et al., 2022). Furthermore, studies linking expatriate experiences and global work-related outcomes predominantly have investigated the direct effect of such experiences, thereby overlooking intermediate variables' potential explanatory influence (Akkan et al., 2022).

### **Summary of the manuscripts included in this special issue**

A previous special issue on “Career Development International” in 2013 already focused on SIEs (Doherty et al., 2013a, 2013b), offering contributions to advance the still early stage of development in SIE research, which was in need of enhanced conceptual and empirical bases. Thus, this new special issue takes research on SIEs further with special consideration of the context of SIEs' careers and well-being. Therefore, this issue offers more recent in-depth research studies on SIEs in various contexts with micro-, meso-, and macro-level perspectives and evolving forms of work. This special issue features eight papers that address some of the issues discussed above.

The first paper, “*Self-Initiated Expatriation: A Career Perspective Through a Social Chronology Lens*,” written by Hugh Gunz, is a conceptual paper that theorizes the link between the construct of self-initiated expatriation and the construct of career. The author applies the Social Chronology Framework (SCF) and suggests that viewing self-initiated expatriation as an episode in a career opens novel possibilities for combining self-initiated expatriation and career. SCF views careers through three perspectives: the space within which the career takes place; the career actor; and the time during which the career plays out. By examining SIEs through each of these three perspectives in turn, the author develops a research agenda for future research in the area of self-initiated expatriation.

The second paper, “*The Influence of Complexity, Chance, and Change on the Career Crafting Strategies of SIEs*” – written by Blanca Suarez-Bilbao, Maike Andresen, Marian Crowley-Henry, and Edward P. O'Connor – analyzes how externalities in the form of complexity, chance, and change influence SIEs' career trajectories. The paper applies the



concept of career crafting to an international context and examines externalities' impact on SIEs' careers. Therefore, the paper unpacks the dynamic nature of career crafting and investigates how SIEs improve person-career fit over time and circumstance. By doing so, the authors combine two previously separate theories, extend the application of career crafting to an international career context, and emphasize the role of temporality and the whole-life view of career in SIEs' career-crafting approach.

The third paper, "*Toward a Dynamic Conceptual Model for Understanding the Impact of Social Isolation on SIE Women's Adjustment and Career Development*," by Riana Schreuders, examines close personal relationships' influence on SIE women's career decisions and social isolation's effect on their work and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper demonstrates that decreased social interaction during a crisis and the result that the organization becomes the main point of contact with the host culture affect both performance and well-being negatively. The paper contributes to the literature through a dynamic theoretical expansion of the so-far-mainly static adjustment models.

The fourth paper, "*Transnational Sensemaking Narratives of Highly Skilled Canadian Immigrants' Career Change*" – by Dunja Palic, Luciana Nardon, and Amrita Hari – investigates how highly skilled immigrants make sense of their career changes in the host country's labor market. The paper identifies four career change narratives: mourning the past; accepting the present; recreating the past; and starting fresh. The paper highlights how tensions between home and host country career contexts shape immigrants' sensemaking narratives of their international career changes. The paper concludes by encouraging scholars and practitioners to take a transnational contextual approach to guide immigrants' career transitions and integration into the new social environment.

The fifth paper, "*Career Success of Expatriates: The Impacts of Career Capital, Expatriate Type, Career Type, and Career Stage*" – by Rodrigo Mello, Vesa Suutari, and Michael Dickmann – investigates whether career capital (CC) development abroad, expatriate

type, career type, and career stage affect expatriates' career success in terms of perceived marketability and the number of promotions. The paper demonstrates that CC developed abroad positively impacts perceived marketability and the number of promotions. While career type, whether the international worker was an assigned expatriate or SIE, did not predict the number of promotions, the paper found that repatriates reported a greater degree of perceived marketability than those continuing an international career.

The sixth paper, "*Self-Initiated Expatriates From Emerging Markets: Career Benefits Arising From Personal Initiative*," by Prashanth N. Bharadwaj and Robert Buchanan, examines self-initiated professional expatriates' perceptions of their subjective/intangible and objective/tangible successes in both home and host countries. The paper found that SIEs from India perceived greater subjective benefits (financial independence and social status) from US careers than from careers in India. The paper focuses its findings in particular on female professional SIEs who experienced greater improved social status when based in the US compared with males. However, India-based females perceived their opportunity for financial success at a significantly lower level compared with their male counterparts. Their perceived status within Indian organizations was even lower.

The seventh paper, "*Surviving Limbo: Critical Career Capital Aspects for Entrepreneur Immigrants in an Extreme Context*," by Gamze Arman, examines the adjustment of a unique group of Turkish entrepreneur immigrants in the United Kingdom whose initial experiences upon their move were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. The paper identifies both key career capital aspects that hinder entrepreneurial effort and key facilitating career capital aspects. By doing this, the paper contributes to the literature primarily by integrating career capital framework with different elements of the context. Furthermore, it represents the first effort to adopt the framework to identify entrepreneur immigrants' critical career capital aspects.

The eighth paper, “*Exploring the Impact of National Context on Adjustment of Self-Initiated Expatriates: The Case of German Professionals in Britain*,” by Elena Samarsky, applies a multi-faceted literature approach and reviews literature on SIEs, migration studies, and research focused on hiring discrimination. On this basis, it explores the impact of national context on adjustment experience. The paper contributes to the adjustment theory literature by using the contextual angle and examining the impact of historical, legal, employment, and hiring context on adjustment.

### **Conclusions**

This special issue’s inception originated at the 2nd International Conference on Self-Initiated Expatriation, held at the University of Bamberg in connection to the Horizon 2020-financed Global Mobility of Employees (GLOMO) project (see [www.glomo.eu](http://www.glomo.eu)). This special issue showcases the breadth and depth of expatriation research. For the interested reader, it long has been clear that there is a strong interest in both self-initiated and assigned expatriates within global mobility and international careers, while other patterns from working abroad are also possible and are increasingly subject to academic and professional interest. These include permanent expatriates (perma-pats) or those individuals who want to re-expatriate after coming “home.” Furthermore, with remote (virtual) work, hybrid global work, workation, cross-border commuting, extended international business travel, digital nomads, etc. (cf. Baruch et al., 2013; Selmer et al., 2022a), global careers’ context and patterns are highly varied. However, many more factors are worthy of exploration, particularly the distinction between highly qualified and lesser qualified self-initiated expatriates, as well as the emergence and consequences of the myriad drivers of expatriation. Our introduction outlines a large number of further research areas, particularly those likely to illuminate the agency of individuals, organizations, and governments embedded in their context over time. Overall, we call for a more context-sensitive approach to truly understand these phenomena, the impetus for this special issue.

To argue that we need to investigate context is also an effort to try and understand expatriation more holistically. We believe that key levels – micro-, meso-, and macro-level issues – and their interrelationships are essential to our global careers and expatriation discourse. On the macro level, we have outlined the importance of economic factors which – while fueling the increase in global work in the past few decades, even centuries – may lead to (temporary?) de-globalization. It is certainly clear that perceived risks and attraction factors in individuals’ home and host location impact their willingness to expatriate. Other macro-context factors – including, but not restricted to, global climate change, geopolitics, hostile host environments, regions of excellence, institutional arrangements, and potential host-country populations’ willingness to accept and encourage immigration – are essential to understanding the big picture on global mobility.

Much earlier expatriation research tried to understand mobility strategies, policies, and practices to examine economic and wider organizational benefits. Given the high costs of company-sponsored assignments, researchers were interested in issues such as organizational drivers, appropriate company structures, pre-assignment preparation, performance and succession implications, and repatriate retention issues. More recently, the meso-level literature has begun to focus on broader issues, e.g., politics, duty of care implications, and language issues.

Some of the earliest global mobility research has concentrated on the micro-level context. Expatriates and their families’ cultural adjustment, followed by an assessment of various individual motivations to work abroad, has a long tradition. Psychological explorations – e.g., articles that concentrate on identity – have attracted many researchers. Individual career patterns and outcomes also have elicited many investigations. Several other factors too numerous to name here also have been examined. Beyond these, more work on areas such as expatriation happiness, career or life satisfaction, and various elements of personal and community integration and sustainability might be fruitful research avenues.

There is clearly a mutual dependency between individual assignees and their employers, creating many fascinating cross-level effects between micro and meso levels. Obviously, expatriates and their families are embedded in a macro context that will shape some of the rights and obligations they have, as well as some of the behaviors they are enacting. Countries that facilitate tolerance, mutual interest, and the integration of SIEs and migrants are probably experiencing a higher level of engagement by them. In turn, it is clear that strong connections exist between the macro and meso levels – including legal and taxation issues, and reactions to hostilities and dangers (or humanitarian crises), i.e., we still do not understand multiple facets of expatriation experiences overall. This calls for multi-level research that would help us continue to build the fascinating mosaic of knowledge in this compelling area. We hope that readers will enjoy this special issue and that the articles within it add to your understanding of the self-initiated expatriation context.

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