

“COMING HOME” WORKING GROUP

FINDING A JOB

Members of the group: France, Greece

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RETURNING HOME: A NEW DEPARTURE

Welcome back!

FINDING A JOB, a matter of high importance

- Working is a very important topic in the agenda of EUFASA. “Offering information and guidance in this area increasingly becomes a key factor in the decision as to whether families go on an accompanied posting, or whether the MFA employee goes unaccompanied, or even decides to leave the MFA career, so that both partners can follow their careers” Working abroad report EUFASA conference, Berlin May 2007. The “working abroad” concern is intimately linked to the “working home” concern: increasing importance for the spouse to work both abroad and at home

- Job and own career is an important part of identity and life also for the partner. An increasing number of spouses of MFA officers express the wish to follow their own career (work and fulfillment in an attractive job)
- The number of separations is increasing, being able to remain independent is crucial
- In most European countries the question of pensions system is very much to the fore
- Your living conditions may be less attractive (size of accommodation, domestic staff), second income essential for lifestyle compatible with contemporaries
- Your overall status is lower and your standard of living has dropped, to get second income is not considered only as a way to increase financial flexibility but becomes essential
- Back home your environment will seem cramped and limited (you will not have as much opportunity to meet a wide mix of people, and the ones you do meet may have little interest in international matters)

PART I: RECOMMENDATIONS TO MFAs:

Because:

- MFAs have a duty to support international mobility, but for this support to be effective, it is essential that the employee and their family have a real plan which covers all of the mobility, including the return home;
- Expatriates, and even more so their spouses, appreciate any support offered to them, both when leaving and returning home;
- Just as nothing should be left to chance when preparing to leave, the same is true when returning home;
- The role of the Human Resources Department is, in the interest of the ministry and agents themselves, to ensure that the correct balance is struck between the personal and professional aspirations of all its employees and their family circle. This involves a real policy for families and spouses, which should be built on training (language training, scholarship programs leading to qualifications), tackling individual problems through personalized support (within MFAs - through the Social Action Mission or another MFA department) and information. It should also be based on dialogue with spouses themselves, represented by the MFAs' Spouses Association.

EUFASA recommends that:

- MFAs organize/finance trainings for spouses:

1. Training sessions on various aspects related to spouses' employment with professionals
 2. Language trainings for all languages
 3. Language training (in the country's national language) for FBS (Foreign Born Spouses)
 4. Computer training
- MFAs organize/finance competence/proficiency evaluation for spouses
 - MFAs help spouses/partners for professional reinsertion by offering them (through a reclassification department within the MFA or any specialized agency):
 1. Professional scheme working out
 2. Careers advice
 3. CV's writing tips
 4. Training interviews
 - MFAs implement the "recognition of experience" system, system of accreditation of experience whereby experience such as volunteer work experience could be officially accredited for degrees, diplomas and other qualifications with career relevance.
 - MFAs belong to international networks of human resources directors and professionals in international mobility
 - MFAs plan transfers in advance to give spouses time to prepare, make contacts and adapt

PART II: MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES OFFER SIGNIFICANT AND INCREASING BENEFITS TO EXPATRIATES' SPOUSES: BEST PRACTICES

How companies help employees/spouses re-adapt once they return home?

A/ THROUGH NETWORKS

International networks of human resources directors and professionals in international mobility.

Example: the Magellan network, over 140 companies from around the world are part of the network, around 100 of which are in France. It has **five roles**:

1. Development of exchanges between professionals
2. Provision of targeted information
3. Training
4. Research
5. Promotion of links with institutions

In order to help expatriates handle their reverse culture shock, HR directors' networks have created **welcome workshop for expatriates and their spouses**. This is a half-day, inter-company workshop with interactions between expatriates based around two questions:

1. If you were HR manager, what would you do to make things easier for returning expatriates? 2. What changed in your country while you were away?

Materials from these debates are made available to members to inform the debate and support their policies. Perspective on these interactions is given by a coordinator, who then introduces the idea of reverse culture shock and methods for dealing with it.

B/ THROUGH OUTPLACEMENT COMPANIES

Multinational companies offer to spouses (within 6 month of their return to France) benefits such as assistance through an external provider.

Assistance covers spouse career support for job search (personal coaching, help for drawing up a CV, participation in workshops on methods of finding a job again). Such programs usually cover a seven-month period, are financed by the employee's company, direct payment is made to the outplacement company and amounts to about 5 800 Euros per head.

C/ BY SIGNING THE CINDE¹ CONVENTION

If an expatriate works for a company that has signed up this convention,

his /her spouse can take up to a five- year leave of absence from his/her own job

(to benefit from this , the spouse has to belong to a company that has signed up this convention as well)

PART III: ONE EXAMPLE: Support offered by the French MFA to help spouses/partners reintegrate the labour market

1. To facilitate returning to employment in France, in April 2007 a **cooperation agreement** was signed between the ministry and the ANPE (French National Employment Agency), which specifically dealt with reclassification and support for agents' spouses/partners, who have personalized access to the reclassification cell of the department' HR sub-department: an appointment can be made with the cell coordinator for:
 - advice on careers,
 - drawing up a CV and job applications,
 - preparing for interviews
 - creating a career path

¹ CINDE: Centre inter-entreprises de l'expatriation

2. On the initiative of the Training Department, an **info-day on the employment of spouses/partners**, with professionals from the ANPE and the European Employment Services (EURES) network present to provide information and advice, takes place each year.
3. Provided there are places available, spouses/partners have access to **language and IT training** organized by the ministry at the central administration.
4. **Specific training is offered to foreign spouses:** beginner's or advanced French classes for non-French speaking spouses/partners as well as TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) sessions for people wanting to receive accreditation for their level of English.
5. **"Recognition of experience" system** (system of accreditation of experience whereby experience such as voluntary work could be officially accredited for degrees, diplomas and other qualifications with career relevance). People with at least three years' experience can have this experience validated and therefore receive a full or partial professional qualification without having to sit an exam, provided they submit an application and pass an interview with a selection board.
6. **At the Maison des Français de l'étranger** (Centre for French Nationals Abroad), an expert can inform you, through a personalized interview, whether your project matches your objectives and skills. It is also possible to carry out a competence assessment.

By being better informed, better trained and better advised, the agents and their spouses/partners will be able to reserve, in our exceptionally open professional context, as fulfilling a family life as possible.