

Information from Cartus on Relocation and International Assignment Trends and Practices.

Supporting Dual Career Couples with Their Mobility Needs



These days, most companies perform periodic mobility policy reviews, look for process enhancements and efficiencies, and conduct cost containment exercises. However, their mobility program’s “soft” cost components, or intangible benefits, are often overlooked, such as the company’s willingness to support the continuation of a spouse’s career, providing flexible options, or including the spouse in the decision making and transition process.

Today’s family is very different than it was in the 1970s and, according to *HR Executive*, more than half of families in the U.S. today have two full-time earners. Indications are that this will become even more commonplace, as 78% of millennial families are dual-career couples.

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Organizations need to adapt, and having effective spousal support elements in policy can be a competitive advantage to support assignment acceptance, retention of key employees, and talent development. Recent Cartus research supports the need for flexibility, as “changing employee needs (family, spouse, elder care)” is the number two driver (at 42%) for flexibility in mobility programs.

CHALLENGES OF DUAL CAREER COUPLES AND ASSIGNMENTS

Due to the prevalence of dual career families, finding employees who will accept international assignments is becoming more and more challenging. According to Cartus research, the number one reason for employees to turn down an assignment is family or personal circumstances (69%), followed closely by spouse/partner employment issues (55%), and the main reason for failed assignments is the inability of the spouse and family to adapt to the host location.

Spousal assistance may include:

- Pre-departure trip/home finding trip
- Intercultural and language training
- Settling-in services
- Spouse/partner allowance
- Job search/transition assistance
- Reimbursement of accreditation courses

As a result of early assignment repatriation, companies have incorporated provisions to support the accompanying spouse/partner. This spousal assistance comes in various forms—pre-departure/home finding trip, intercultural and language training, settling-in services, spouse/partner allowance, job search/transition assistance, reimbursement of accreditation courses, etc.—all of which have been identified as desired benefits by relocating spouses.

On top of spouse/family challenges, work permits for spouses (if they are even allowed to work) can be very complex, with no two countries having the same immigration process. Some countries allow an upgrade or change of status if the spouse/partner finds an employer that will apply for the change of status on his/her behalf. Other countries grant automatic right to work to accompanying spouses. Because immigration regulations are always changing, it is difficult to keep up, so we recommend consulting with your designated immigration provider for up-to-date regulations and guidance on this process.

Working for the Same Company versus a Different Company

If the spouse/partner is working for the same company and is also receiving a relocation, typically there are different policy provisions than if the spouse/partner were at a different company.

For couples working for the same company—We have most often seen the policy provisions based on the higher level/higher salary employee (i.e., the more generous policy). Cartus survey feedback indicates that 70% of companies identify one employee as the lead employee who receives a full set of benefits, and the second employee is designated as the spouse/partner. There are some common exceptions, however. For example, the couple may not get double the temporary accommodation or household goods allowance, but they may still get two MEAs, both might receive a rental car, etc.



Couples working at different companies—When it is the partner relocating that works at another organization, the company may assist the spouse with a move as if it is an employee initiated/requested move. Some companies have a separate employee initiated policy, but even if they don't, the company will try to help the spouse find a job in the destination location where possible, and cover travel to the location, plus tax and immigration, but not offer much else in the way of support.

WHAT SHOULD ORGANIZATIONS CONSIDER WHEN PROVIDING DUAL CAREER SUPPORT?

Decision factors to consider when choosing dual career policy benefits may include:

- Definition of dual career (within the same company or with a different organization)
- Eligibility (married, legal partner, etc.)
- Level of company support (assignment allowances, taxes, repatriation, etc.)
- Maximum level of financial company support
- Review of Spousal Assignment policy support provisions
- Work permit regulations for the host country
- Alternative level of support when the spouse/partner is not authorized to work in the host country

BEST PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING DUAL CAREER FAMILIES

Following are a few best practice tips that can help you support dual career families and their mobility needs:

- **Communication and advance preparation** with the employee helps to set expectations and identify potential challenges.
- Consider **Spousal Assistance components** (resume re-write, review of labor market, researching and identifying job leads, reimbursement of accreditation courses, etc.), as part of the process. This can be through a professional career and transitional assistance company, or through an allowance that is reimbursed with receipts for approved activities.
- Consider establishing a **mentoring** program for planning before the assignment, career strategy support while on assignment, and post-assignment planning.
- Develop a strong **repatriation strategy** (in a recent Cartus survey, only 15% of respondents provided spouse/partner career re-entry assistance).

Because many organizations do not have formal Dual Career policy components in their policies, Global Mobility teams often review this policy element on an ad hoc basis. Unfortunately, when situations do arise, it requires a lot of time to review issues, develop alternatives, obtain management approval, etc. With this in mind, you may want to consider implementing a formal Dual Career Couple component in your relocation policy.

For more information on dual career couples and mobility, talent management, and other areas of relocation, contact us at cartussolutions@cartus.com or visit our **Resource Hub** on Cartus.com.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Harvard Business Review

<https://hbr.org/2018/05/talent-management-and-the-dual-career-couple>

<https://hbr.org/ideacast/2018/05/dual-career-couples-are-forcing-firms-to-rethink-talent-management.html>

HR Executive

<http://hrexecutive.com/dual-career-couples-demand-flexible-work/>

The Wall Street Journal

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-strategy-for-happy-dual-career-couples-1487699443>

Best Practices:

- Communication and advance preparation to identify challenges
- Consider adding spousal assistance components to your policy
- Consider establishing a mentor program
- Develop a strong repatriation strategy

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