



**MATT MATTHEOU** LOOKS AT THE PROS AND CONS THAT NEED CAREFUL CONSIDERATION BEFORE YOU DIG OUT YOUR PASSPORT AND JUMP ON THE PLANE TO START A NEW CAREER IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY.

# Wish you were there

As globalisation gathers pace, more organisations are looking for people to move overseas with their companies, and for many UK professionals, the idea of working in Europe for a couple of years is an increasingly attractive option. Many people (quite rightly) see it as an opportunity – not only to experience a different culture, but also as an ideal way to expand their skills set and to gain greater and broader commercial exposure within an organisation.

That's all on the plus side, but there are many potential pitfalls and problems for both parties. There are various issues that both companies and individuals looking to facilitate/take up this option need to be aware of.

The location is very important and companies are aware that while some geographical locations are relatively easy to recruit for, others are

more challenging. The desirability of the host location as compared to home is very important to potential candidates. For example, the idea of spending two years in say Paris, Zurich or Amsterdam is an option which is attractive to many and more preferable to most people than two years in

Eastern Europe. These more difficult locations will usually require significant financial incentives for organisations to get people to go there. The other attraction of working in Western Europe for those with a family is that you do not need to uproot your family; many people commute back home for weekends, and most companies will pay for weekly flights back home.

There are many potential pitfalls which you will need to be aware of and investigate before making a move – the most common being can your spouse work in the host country, and if your partner is not a legal spouse, can they accompany you? In most multinational companies these issues will be sorted out by the HR department, but it is advisable to flag this up early on in the process.

Another thorny issue is inadequate assimilation support in the new host country. While this historically has been a critical issue, many larger multinational organisations have come on in leaps and bounds in the last 10 years. They are now more aware that lack of support can significantly delay the operational effectiveness of the employee and lead to an irreparably bad first impression of the

company. Some organisations now have cultural awareness training; they actively encourage, and, in some cases, provide language training.

A 'peer advisor' (usually a local employee at a similar grade) can in most cases be provided, and assistance given on domestic matters, that is assistance with relocation, house-hunting and advice on local schools etc. This is most evident in the more remote

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locations or those which are perceived to be culturally different from Western Europe, where organisations have learned the lesson that more support is needed.

With relocation in Europe on the increase, and a continued expansion of the EU eastwards to incorporate many former eastern bloc and Soviet states, this trend will probably continue as organisations take advantage of new markets for their products and services.

For specialist areas such as treasury, the local labour markets will not necessarily have people with the right technical skills, and as a result organisations will continue to look internationally (either internally or externally) to fill these roles.

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