

**ATTRIBUTES INFLUENCING THE GLOBAL  
MOBILITY OF SELF-INITIATED FEMALE  
EXPATRIATES**

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**ABSTRACT**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>For some time now, female expatriates have been an underrepresented group in expatriate research due to their relative scarcity in international assignments compared to male expatriates (Bastida, 2018). The reasons for this have been long studied and initial barriers regarding women to pursue international careers have been busted. (Adler, 1987). This thesis is grounded upon the note as to address the current gap in research of women expatriates to better understand the relationship of different attributes and features and global mobility intensions and success. For the interest of the study, the focus group has been limited to self-initiated expatriate (SIE) women as they often don't receive the same holistic support for global mobility as traditional expatriates.</p> <p>The research contribution of this study is important as female expatriates are still being in a minority position regarding expatriates in general. Thus, it is important to understand the means and motives of their global mobility initiatives and intentions to seek for an international assignment. As Bastida (2018) points out, through increased level of international experience, women can be able to accelerate their opportunities to strive for higher managerial positions - a subject of great relevance regarding equality and modern business.</p> <p>The study was conducted by interviewing 6 SIE's in Luxembourg from 6 different countries. The interviews discussed the different attributes such as human capital, demographic attributes as well as networks and how they affect global mobility intensions of these women. From the interviews, education was highly regarded as impacting motives for global mobility. Importance of internationally oriented education was heightened as supporting global mobility initiatives as education that doesn't promote internationality in any aspect affected global mobility by debilitating it. Other important attributes found in the study were gender, nationality, and networks. With gender was referred the gender-bias industry and organizational position wise as being discouraging as nationality had implications towards racial prejudice that has significant negative implications towards global mobility. Networks such as family and colleagues can support global mobility and make it more accessible especially for SIE's without prior international experience.</p> <p>The study has implications towards educational bodies, companies as well as governments on how they can better support, generate and retain global mobility of SIE women. However, further research is required to discuss how different attributes</p>	

influence global mobility intentions of SIE women more holistically in different geographical settings. The author proposes that differences on the relationship of certain attributes to global mobility exist in different contexts and geographical locations.

Key words

Female self-initiated expatriates, global mobility, human capital

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Tiivistelmä

Naispuoliset ekspatriaatit ovat jo jonkin aikaa olleet aliedustettuina ekspatriaattitutkimuksessa, sillä heitä esiintyy vielä niukasti kansainvälisissä tehtävissä miehiin verrattuna (Bastida, 2018). Syitä tähän on tutkittu pitkään ja alkuperäisiä esteitä naisten kansainväliseen liikkuvuuteen on jo murrettu. (Adler, 1987). Tämä tutkimus pyrkii täydentämään aikaisempaa tutkimusta ymmärtämällä paremmin eri ominaisuuksien, kuten demografisten-, sosio-ekonomisten- sekä verkostojen vaikutusta itseohjautuvien naisekspatriaattien kansainväliseen liikkuvuuteen. Erityisenä kiinnostuksen kohteena on myös näiden naisten aiempi kokemus sekä koulutustausta. Tutkimus on rajattu koskemaan yksinomaan itseohjautuvia naisekspatriaatteja, sillä he eivät usein saa yhtä kattavaa tukea kuin perinteiset ekspatriaatit saavat.

Tämän tutkimuksen tutkimuspanos on tärkeä, sillä naispuoliset ekspatriaatit ovat edelleen vähemmistössä verraten miesekspatriaatteihin. Siksi on tärkeää ymmärtää heidän heidän kansainvälisen liikkuvuuden keinot, motiivit sekä aiheet hakeutua kansainvälisiin tehtäviin. Kuten Bastida (2018), huomauttaa, kansainvälisen kokemuksen lisääntymisen myötä, erityisesti naiset voivat edistää mahdollisuuksiaan pyrkiä korkeampiin johtotehtäviin, joka on tasa-arvon ja nykyaikaisen liiketoiminnan kannalta tärkeä aihe.

Tutkimus toteutettiin haastattelemalla kuutta eri kansallisuutta omaavaa itseohjautuvaa naisekspatriaattia Luxembourgiin. Haastatteluissa keskusteltiin eri ominaisuuksista, kuten inhimillisestä pääomasta, demografisista ominaisuuksista sekä verkostoista ja siitä miten nämä vaikuttavat näiden naisten kansainväliseen liikkuvuuteen. Haastattelujen

perusteella, erityisesti koulutusta pidettiin tärkeänä kansainvälisen liikkuvuuden kannalta. Kansainvälisesti suuntautuneen koulutuksen merkitys korostui tärkeänä vaikuttajana kun taas koulutus joka ei tue kansainvälistymistä millään muotoa, asetti rajoitteita kansainväliselle liikkuvuudelle. Muita tärkeitä tutkimuksessa havaittuja ominaisuuksia olivat sukupuoli, kansallisuus sekä verkostot. Sukupuolen kohdalla viitattiin sukupuolten epätasaiseen jakautumiseen tietyllä alalla sekä tietyissä rooleissa organisaatioissa joka koettiin lannistavana. Kansallisuudella taas oli vaikutuksia erityisesti ennakkoluuloihin sekä koettuun rasismiin, jolla on kielteisiä vaikutuksia kansainväliseen liikkuvuuteen. Verkostot, kuten perhe ja kollegat, voivat tukea kansainvälistä liikkuvuutta ja edistää sen saavutettavuutta etenkin itseohjautuville ekspatriaateille joilla ei ole aikaisempaa kansainvälistä kokemusta.

Tutkimuksen perusteella voidaan tuoda esiin kehityskohteita erityisesti koulutusorganisaatiolle, yrityksille sekä valtiollisille tekijöille siitä, kuinka nämä voivat paremmin tukea, luoda ja ylläpitää itseohjautuvien ekspatriaattinaisten kansainvälistä liikkuvuutta. Lisätutkimusta tarvitaan kuitenkin, jotta voidaan keskustella siitä, kuinka erilaiset ominaisuudet vaikuttavat itseohjautuviin naisekspatriaattien kansainväliseen liikkuvuuteen kokonaisvaltaisemmin eri maantieteellisissä ympäristöissä. Tutkimuksen kirjoittaja olettaa, että tiettyjen ominaisuuksien suhde kansainväliseen liikkuvuuteen vaihtelee eri yhteyksissä ja maantieteellisissä ympäristöissä.

Asiasanat

Kansainvälinen liikkuvuus, inhimillinen pääoma, naisekspatriaatit

Säilytyspaikka

Jyväskylän Yliopiston Kirjasto

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the study

For some time now, female expatriates have been an underrepresented group in expatriate research due to their relative scarcity in international assignments compared to male expatriates (Bastida, 2018). The reason for this has previously been speculated to be related to women's own unwillingness to pursue international careers due to responsibilities regarding family and housekeeping. However, research has shown this not to be the case, but the underrepresentation of female expatriates has rather been due to companies viewing women to be unfit for international assignments. Such assumptions were often based on the perception of women's marital and family obligations as well as dual-career marriages. (Adler, 1987).

However, due to the growing number of dual career couples and the busted myths behind women's willingness to pursue international assignments, we are seeing more representation of women in the field of expatriation. An important note by Caliguiri & Bonache (2016) however points out, that as the initial barriers preventing women to pursue international careers have been distinguished, it is important to further understand the obstacles and issues related to women performing in these positions. This thesis is grounded upon this note as to address the gap in research of women expatriates and to better understand the relationships of different personal attributes and features and global mobility intentions and continuity.

The topic of this thesis addresses the affects that individual attributes have on global mobility of female expatriates and their experienced international adjustment. Moreover, the aim of the thesis is to focus on variables such as human capital, social network and individual background and their relationship on women's intentions to pursue international professional experience. The author has also chosen to further define the group of female expatriates to self-initiated (female) expatriates, hereinafter referred as 'SIE'. Such limitation has been applied as SIE's tend to face greater amount of uncertainty do the lack of resources and support related to traditional, company backed expatriates (Doherty, Dickmann & Mills, 2011). As the pursuing of an international professional experience comes from the own initiative of the SIE, besides greater ambiguity, these expatriates often exercise greater level of independence and flexibility in their assignments which is why limiting the sample size to SIE's is appropriate in providing more in-depth analysis of the motives and barriers SIE women face.

Similar earlier research on the topic has been conducted by Ceili & Howe-Walsh (2008), who studied SIE women working in Cayman Islands. In their research, the authors identified positive perceptions for future career

development as a key motivator for SIE women to pursue international assignments. This dimension is also distinguished by Richardson & Mallon (2005) and Richardson & McKenna (2006), who highlight personal learning, experimentation, and cross-country skills among others to be perceived to have a positive effect on one's career prospects. Another key finding from the research by Ceili & Howe-Walsh (2008) was that in her sample, SIE women didn't notably report having experienced discrimination due to their gender but rather because of their identity as expatriates. Such discrimination had been rooted especially in the attitudes of the local people but was also at times reinforced by governmental policies. However, besides the more general discrimination of expatriates as a group of people, some women reported having faced exclusive networks enforced by male colleagues that women were excluded of and perceptions of having to justify one's position and decisions more than their male counterparts were also reported.

Ceili & Howe-Walsh (2008) research focused largely on the motives SIE women held in pursuing international assignments but covered little the specifics of the background of these women. The sample size being interviewed for the study was also homogenous, especially in the sense of human capital in which all the women being interviewed were of manager level and thus represent a limited sub-group of SIE women. Thus, to complement the research on SIE women, this thesis aims to provide more heterogenous sample, including women from different positions and professional expertise. This is especially important for the objective of understanding the relationship between human capital and global mobility.

## 1.2 Relevance

Due to the escalation of globalization, companies are having increasing presence in foreign markets in which international expertise of top management is growingly sought after. Research has also shown international professional experience plays a notable role on the strategic decisions of managers. (Piaskowska & Trojanowski, 2014). Also, distinguished by Georgakakis, Dauth & Ruigrok (2016), the acquisition of international experience accelerates manager's personal career development to an extent. Due to these findings, it is fair to say, that international experience benefits both organizations as well as employees themselves in being able to better respond to foreign business practices, cultural differences as well as foreign opportunities that may have important strategic implications for organizational development (Piaskowska & Trojanowski, 2014).

As more recent research has proved, even though still underrepresented among expatriates globally, women are not any less capable or effective in international assignments. As Bastida (2018), in her research points out, women are just as effective as men in international assignments, but they also experience higher levels of interaction, work and general adjustment than

their male counterparts. Thus, she suggests that due to the increasing need of international competence within companies' talent pools, it is important that organizations better endorse international assignments, regardless of the gender of their employees. Also, an important note is that if women were able to gather more international experience, they could further improve their opportunities for higher management positions. (Bastida, 2018).

Today however, professionals both men and women have better capabilities in gaining international experience and are less dependent on an organization to provide such opportunities. This can be seen as the rising of self-initiated expatriates which often value self-directed career management and boundaryless careers. (Doherty et al., 2011). Such proactive group of expatriates offer companies cost-effective choice of acquiring international experience compared to often risky and costly alternative of traditional company sent expatriate schemes. However, SIE's commonly lack company specific experience which requires more specific approach on employee selection but also understanding of their differing motives in comparison to a traditional expatriate. Besides a more protean approach regarding one's career, SIE's better value openness and truthfulness regarding recruitment, job previews as well as living conditions. (Doherty et al., 2011).

As professional international experience is an increasingly valued by employers and it has proven to have positive impact on a person's career development (British Council, 2014), it is meaningful to understand the attributes and traits that contribute to expatriate's success and adjustment on an international assignment. Especially as female expatriates are still being in a minority position regarding expatriates in general, it is important to understand the means and motives of their global mobility initiatives and intentions to seek for an international assignment. As Bastida (2018) points out, through increased level of international experience, women can be able to accelerate their opportunities to strive for higher managerial positions – a subject of great relevance regarding equality and modern business.

### **1.3 Research aims and research question**

The attributes that contribute to one's decisions regarding career paths and development have been long studied, especially in the field of psychology and cognition studies (Akosah-Twumasi, Emeto, Lindsay, Tsey & Malau-Aduli, 2018). According to Lent, Brown & Hackett (2000), the direction of one's career choices are influenced through attributes in one's personality such as self-efficacy, confidence, and outcome expectations. However, these attributes are heavily associated to and moderated by external factors such as ethnicity, culture, gender, social networks, and socio-economic status, emphasizing the complex relationship between personal attributes and external influences (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Lent et al., 2000).

Another attribute especially linked to career success is human capital, which entails the skills and knowledge gathered through education and experience. A study by Unger, Rauch, Frese & Rosenbuch (2011), demonstrated that particularly in an entrepreneurial sense, knowledge and skills in task-related contexts are a significant determination of success. Other researches as well have appointed human capital to be linked with higher capacity to acquire new skills and technologies, increased income, and greater potential future opportunities (Wößmann, 2003; Barro, 2001; Schultz, 1961). As opportunities of gaining human capital is based partly on personal attributes but also related to external conditions (Goldin, 2016), it is interesting to consider its distribution in the sense of global mobility and as a subject of this research.

As the aim of this research is to distinguish the relationship of different attributes and global mobility of SIE women, the following research question has been structured:

*RQ: How human capital, network, socio-economic factors, and their interplay affect global mobility of self-initiated female expatriates?*

The research question will be approached by interviewing a sample of SIE women, working in Luxembourg but not of a Luxembourgish nationality. The research will be in a form of qualitative study, utilizing thematic interviews to gain insight of the SIE women's backgrounds, experiences and perceptions of the attributes affecting their intentions for global mobility and international assignments. In contextualizing the data derived from the interviews, the study reviews previous literature in forming the framework and connections between the studied variables. The aim of the study is to provide a relationship between social capital, individual background, human capital and global mobility of SIE women.

## **1.4 Structure of the study**

This master's thesis is structured by first introducing the research questions on which the research aims to answer. Following this, the thesis introduces the theory derived from prior research conducted on human capital, self-initiated expatriates, and global mobility. Various sources have been used to conduct a thorough theoretical background for the thesis on which the research is grounded upon and references to prior research are used throughout the study. From previous research, the theoretical framework is formed and following the introduction of the methodology used to conduct the study. The methodology part introduces qualitative research as well as it also discusses the use of thematic analysis as a mechanism to conduct the findings. The findings are supported by direct quotations derived from the interviews held as well as incorporates analysis on the findings. The thesis concludes in discussion and conclusions

which also include the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research.

## 2 HUMAN CAPITAL AS A PREDICTOR OF CAREER SUCCESS

Goldin (2016), defines human capital as “ – *the stock of skills that the labor force possesses*”. Human capital is often acquired through education, training, and experience in which a person can acquire useful skills and knowledge for one’s use. However, as Schultz (1961) notes, it shouldn’t be taken for granted that the ways in which someone is enabled to gain human capital, i.e., through education, would inevitably result to human capital. For this reason, it is meaningful to distinguish the different approaches to human capital, which Unger, et al. (2011) have divided into outcomes of human capital investments (knowledge and skills) and human capital investments (education and experience). According to their study of entrepreneurial success, Unger, et al. (2011), determined outcomes of human capital investments to have a more significant effect on the outcome compared to human capital investments. Thus, highlighting and complementing the notion of Schultz (1961), that rather than emphasizing the sources of human capital, it is more meaningful for researchers to seek to understand the processes in which people acquire new knowledge and learning.

In many ways, human capital has been linked to career development, opportunities, and success (Akosah-Twumasi, 2018). The ways in which human capital enhances one’s career prospects is linked to increased economic implications for companies, governments as well as the individual themselves. Because of this, human capital can be considered to be an investment as acquiring knowledge and skills require a level of consumption to increase future income. Also, because human capital is essentially a personal investment in which people differ in the level of human capital one has, employees and their output can be regarded distinctively when considering the human capital investments, they have made. (Wößmann, 2003). Thus, human capital can be used as a way to determine one’s capabilities and differentiate the skills and capabilities of different individuals.

### 2.1 Human capital as an investment

According to Unger, et al. (2011), human capital investments can be defined as those initiatives to acquire competence through education, on-the-job training, and other sources of experience. Through these processes, one may or may not gain human capital, essentially depending on the individual characteristics of a person as well as the environment they operate in. Even though the transformation of human capital investments into real human capital varies largely among individuals, research has shown that especially reflective orientation and metacognitive activities are linked to the transformation of

experience and schooling into tangible knowledge (Unger, et al., 2011; Kolb, 1984; Ford et al., 1998; Keith & Frese, 2005). In these concepts, the mediating effect is on understanding the meaning of events that enable one to transfer particular experience into new information and knowledge (Kolb, 1984; Unger, et al., 2011) as well as being able to control one's cognitions (Ford et al., 1998; Unger, et al., 2011). Building on this notion, it isn't purposeful to perceive human capital through numeric terms such as years spent in a particular schooling but rather what has been learnt and how has the learning been acquired (Unger, et al., 2011).

Even though recent research has undermined the human capital investments in contrast to the actual outcomes, the traditional sources of acquiring human capital such as schools and other institutions have got a significant role in the formulation of human capital as well as the availability and reach of human capital. Goldin (2014), distinguishes the extensive transmission of human capital as a fundamental differentiating factor between humans and other species in which institutions are in a significant role as enabling the transmission of human capital for larger masses of people. Thus, even though the transmission of knowledge can and often does take place outside of formal institutions, schools are in an essential role for knowledge to reach large extent of people and in this manner expedite the transmitting of human capital for everyone. (Goldin, 2014).

Because of the role that schools, and institutions have on the development of skills, knowledge, and experience, one's educational background can often be perceived as an indicator of the extent of human capital. Throughout the years, recruiters have increasingly demonstrated the need for skilled and educated workers which has only heightened through the development of new technologies and the superior skills needed to cope with them. As Goldin (2014), puts it: "*Technological advances throughout the last century increased demands for yet more human capital*".

When discussing about human capital, it is important to also consider the subject of organizational perspective as well, as to why should organizations invest in human capital and why has it become such a hot topic for recruiters. Firstly, human resources are often considered to be the human capital of a company and thus the key intangible asset a company holds (Amen & Amir, 2016). Moreover, human capital can be perceived as the driving force and source of a company's success, competitiveness, and value (Drábek, Lorincová & Javorčíková, 2016). Complemented by Goldin (2014), the need for investments in human capital are only growing in the future in which it is vital for companies to ensure the continuity and growth of their business in the rapidly changing market conditions (Drábek et al., 2016).

As human capital investments are appreciated and sought for by companies and recruiters, it is fair to say that such formal initiatives are useful to make in order to enhance one's future professional opportunities. However, Mirowsky & Ross (1998), point out that investing in human capital will not only increase one's potential in the working life and increase future earnings, but human capital investments have indications to an individual's personal

development as well. Through education, people have heightened ability to act as an effective agent in their own lives, gain improved physical functioning and perceived health. In a way, it can be argued that education fosters health so that educated people are better encouraging and enabled to a healthy lifestyle which they will further impose on their children. Thus, as an investment, human capital poses implications reaching through generations. (Mirowsky & Ross, 1998). Moreover, it should be considered whether human capital is thus inherited so, that the acquiring of it is not inclusive.

## 2.2 Implications to career development for women

Herr (2001), considers career development to involve the influencing factors and processes of an individual's career behaviour which is affected by different psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic and factors of chance as well as different practices that are used to forwards ones professional development or enable them to pursue more effective career decision (Sears, 1982; Spokane, 1991, p.22). According to human capital theory by Becker (1964), an individuals career development is to a long extent bound to the quantity and quality of the assets one brings to the labour market which ultimately designate the compensation they will receive (Becker, 1964; Ballout, 2007; Agarwal, 1981).

Reimers-Hild, Fritz & King (2007) add entrepreneurial approach as a significant determinator of an individual's career development and highlight its significance especially for the career development of women. In their research, the authors claim that especially in the modern day, entrepreneurial approach to career development is essential to achieve to success and ownership of one's career. A key component for entrepreneurial career development however is human capital by which investing in human capital can increase earning power, professional opportunities, and overall career advancement. From the perspective of women, this is especially important as many of the aspects of career development can be recognized as a current matter of professional gender equality. (Reimers-Hild et al., 2007).

As stated, entrepreneurial approach to career development is heightened when discussing human capital initiatives for women. This is emphasized in the finding that women are enabled to obtain greater personal, social as well as economic well-being by entrepreneurially investing in human capital. In this sense, formal education has shown to have the greatest impact on especially advancing the earning power of women as demonstrated in Table 1 and Table 2 by Reimers-Hild et al., (2007).



**Table 1.** *Women's usual median weekly, monthly and yearly earnings by educational attainment*

Level of Education	Median Weekly Earnings (2004)*	Monthly Earnings (4 weeks)	Yearly Earnings (52 weeks)
Less than a high school diploma	\$334	\$1,336	\$17,368
High school diploma	\$488	\$1,952	\$25,376
Some college or associate degree	\$577	\$2,308	\$30,004
Bachelor's degree and higher	\$860	\$3,440	\$44,720

\* Figures taken from Table 1. Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by selected characteristics, 2004 annual averages, U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005), Highlights of women's earnings in 2004, p. 7.

**Table 2.** *Difference in earnings between the categories of having less than a high school diploma and a Bachelor's degree and higher*

Level of Education	Median Weekly Earnings* (2004)	Monthly Earnings (4 weeks)	Yearly Earnings (52 weeks)
Less than a high school diploma	\$334	\$1,336	\$17,368
Bachelor's degree and higher	\$860	\$3,440	\$44,720
Difference	+\$526	+\$2,104	+\$27,352
Difference over 40 year time period			\$1,094,080

\* Figures taken from Table 1. Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by selected characteristics, 2004 annual averages, U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005), Highlights of women's earnings in 2004, p. 7.

*Figure 1 Earning power of women in contrast to their education (Reimers-Hild et al., 2007).*

In many ways, the implications of formal education as a source of human capital have heightened associations to career development for women than in comparison for men. This is due to historical shift in the recognition and appreciation towards women's education that had previously been undermined. However, even though human capital poses as a more significant determinant for career success for women than men, human capital is nevertheless being realized as lower earnings than men. (Reimers-Hild et al., 2007). Thus, even though human capital is important for career development for all, women are often required to acquire greater levels of human capital through education and credentials in order to compete with their male equivalents in organizational setting. (Byrd-Blake, 2004; Davies-Netzley, 1998). Thus, according to Kirchmeyer

(1998), human capital may hold significantly more impact on career development for men than in comparison for women in regards of promotions and salary.

## 2.3 Career success

In general, with success is meant a positive outcome of a certain event or effort. However, as to what is deemed as success is highly context bound in which from it is important to recognize the different perspectives to view a certain outcome. Success also isn't necessarily a constant outlook on given consequences but can be converted into failure through swift in perspectives. All this highlights the subjectivity of experienced success and thus makes it difficult to provide a standard to the concept. Going deeper into the concept is also career success which has transformed from being mostly measured through advancement in the corporate latter to be more inclusive of the many different aspects of success. (Gunz & Heslin, 2005).

Career success can be divided into objective and subjective success which has enabled better measurement of career success in general. This division also emphasizes the complexity and diversity within career success as either the fulfilment of objective or subjective success is enough to experience career success. However, some researchers state that essentially, subjective career success holds greater implications and meaning for the individual as do objective career success as this can be linked to profoundly following a deeper calling in life. (Gunz & Heslin, 2005; Hall, 2002).

When discussing human capital and its implications to an individual's career development, researchers often associate career success with human capital. Besides traditional attributes of human capital such as education and qualifications, demographic factors such as age, race and marital status as well as socio-demographic attributes have been proven to hold implications towards career success. (Ballout, 2007; Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005; Kirchmeyer, 1998). Research suggests that human capital explains a significant proportion of the variation of career success, especially in regards of earnings. The most significant determinator of both objective and subjective career success among human capital has confirmed to be education and experience of which importance is only heightened in the increasingly volatile environment. (Ballout, 2007; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Chenevert & Tremblay, 2002).

Another aspect of career success presented in previous research, is the influence of organizational support as well as social capital for career success. Research has especially highlighted the need for building networks and relationships with individuals both inside and outside of the organization. (Reimers-Hild et al., 2007). Especially when discussing the career success of women, personal support from one's network has proven to contribute to the subjective career success. (Ballout, 2007; Nabi, 2001). Thus, Reimers-Hild et al. (2007), emphasize the importance for women to invest in social capital in addition

to human capital in order to access information of the opportunities that might enhance their chances of career success. In regards of social capital, organizations play a key part in providing support in forms of mentoring, networking, and ensuing of supportive work relationships that better enable people to achieve perceived career success. (Ballout, 2007). Especially for women, such organizational investments in social capital may enable them to better build their careers within an organization by giving them access to the correct trainings, opportunities and networks that helps women to achieve higher positions in their careers. (Reimers-Hild et al., 2007).

### **2.3.1 Socio-economic status as a determinant for career success**

Previous research has implied that socio-economic factors impact individuals' prospects for career success. (Ng, et al., 2005; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Ballout, 2007; Chenevert & Tremblay, 2002). Especially the perception of one's belonging in a certain social class has implications on the heritage of opportunities. Primarily, socio-economic status affects people's abilities to acquire formal human capital which is in many circumstances perceived as a perquisite for career success. Thus, socio-economic status in its intrinsic value isn't a proper measure of career success when considering occupational or task related success. However, as academic credentials and grades are essential for high level positions, people's socio-economic status has clear implications on the accessibility of career success. (Kuncel, Rose, Ejiogu & Yang, 2014).

However, in the sense of cognitive ability, education and received grades are shown to predict job performance, so that even though not equally accessible to all, education is rightly valued by organizations. (Kuncel, Hezlett & Ones, 2004). Based on this, socio-economic status can be seen as gatekeeping certain attributes of human capital which furthermore have far reaching implications to career success. (Kuncel, et al., 2014).

### **2.3.2 Barriers of career success for women**

Even though women's position in the labour markets have been strengthened throughout the years so that women are increasingly been involved in the managerial functions of different organizations, women are still facing certain barriers and restraints when regarding career development and career success (Kirchmeyer, 1998; Chenevert & Tremblay, 2002). In many ways, women face differing responsibilities professionally as well as outside of work than men, which all contribute to their career development. A significant contributor for the pace and direction of women's careers is the possibility of maternity in which women and men are perceived to hold differing roles and responsibilities both in their domestic life as well as in an organizational sense (Chenevert & Tremblay, 2002). Reimers-Hild et al. (2007), complement this notion in stating that maternity and family obligations may act as a perceived time constrain for women in their careers. Konrad & Cannings (1991), introduced a concept of the "mommy track"

which implies the career paths and positions specifically designed for women, often being in a form of low-profile positions which don't offer significant opportunities for promotion or career development.

As women face prejudice regarding their commitments to family and other social obligations, Kirchmeyer (1998), distinguishes family determinants to often hold negative implications for women's career success. As men tend to benefit from having a spouse, even if the spouse was to be unemployed, women having a spouse is often perceived as another obligation and occupation of time. Especially having children poses a negative association to women's career as married women with children can be seen as not being as devoted to work as caring for a marriage as well as children prevents them from investing time in the acquisition of human capital and career development. (Neumark & MacLennan, 1994; Chenevert & Tremblay, 2002).

Reimers-Hild et al. (2007), distinguish several barriers women face in acquiring human- and social capital which are often vital for career success. The authors point out that especially limited access to education, skills training and network building act as key constraints for women to pursue career success. Other structural barriers also exist that corroborate to inequality between women and men such as pay gaps that are heightened in certain industries and sectors (Chenevert & Tremblay, 2002). In order to break through these potential barriers, it can be considered whether women need to act as a more active initiator in pursuing their career than men due to the prejudices affecting their commitments and capabilities. (Reimers-Hild et al., 2007).

### **3 INTERNATIONALIZATION AS AN ORIENTATION OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

As companies have started to pursue market shares outside of their domestic field, they are increasingly in need of international competence among their employees and managers. Thus, for organizations, acquiring internationally skilled and oriented workforce is important strategy wise in order to maintain and build international presence (Biemann & Braakmann, 2013). As organizations increasingly value international experience among their employees, this poses as a career enhancing opportunity for individual employees as well. Indeed, research has implied that international orientation demonstrates career improving effects, especially in regard of managerial positions. (Biemann & Braakmann, 2013; Ciampa, 2005; Fisher, 2005; Myers & Pringle, 2005).

As the importance of international experience among employees has claimed its position when assessing one's competence, it is fair to link the concept to human capital. In the context of human capital, international experience enables employees to develop new skills and knowledge of a different culture and/or different organizational unit. Thus, international experience adds to an individual's human capital which may imply better prospects for career success. Research has indicated that international experience yields most benefit career wise in early careers due to the accumulation of human capital throughout their working years (Biemann & Braakmann, 2013). Bernhardt & Scoones (1993) also distinguish the impact that previous international experience poses on future international opportunities as initial experience tends to better yield future chances of internationalization for individuals. Also, complementing the importance of social capital in career success, international experience enables individuals to better acquire international networks and relationships that may benefit them in future (Biemann & Braakmann, 2013; Daily, Certo & Dalton, 2000).

#### **3.1 Expatriates**

Expatriates are people working overseas for a certain timeboxed assignment or for a particular period of time so that their intention is to essentially move back to one's home country in the future (Kraimer, Wayne & Jaworski, 2001). The often-discussed traditional type of expatriates are so called "organizational expatriates" that are sent to an international assignment by their domestic organization. These types of expatriates are often sent by a multinational company (MNC) to a foreign unit to perform a specific job or agenda within a determined time period of usually 6 months to 5 years. (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). The motives of organizational expatriates are usually linked to career

progression, because especially in an MNC, international experience is often the prerequisite for top management positions. (Carpenter, Sanders & Gregersen, 2001; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009).

For organizations, expatriate programs are important in fostering and generating competitive edge needed to understand and manage global functions. In the time of increased internationalization, it is no longer enough for managers to solely visit their global units few times a year as in gaining the necessary experience, they are required live within that foreign business for several years. After the years spent in the foreign unit, these managers are expected to return to their domestic branch to which they will then be able to share and adapt the knowledge acquired abroad. First and foremost, organizations perceive expatriates to provide them with better strategic edge and new perspectives which allows the organization to better form effective multinational strategies. (Webb, 1996).

### **3.1.1 Self-initiated expatriates**

Even though expatriates are often discussed about as a homogenous group of people, researchers have increasingly started to recognize self-initiated expatriates (SIE) aside from the traditional organizational expatriate (OE) (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). According to Doherty (2013), self-initiated expatriate, is a person who moves to a foreign location for employment, travel, or lifestyle reasons at their own initiative. What distinguishes these people from the traditional expatriate is that they act independent of an employer or an organizational assignment. According to Myers & Pringle (2005), from the whole expatriate population, SIE's make up larger and more potent proportion of the global market segment than OE's do.

Even though the objectives of SIE's and OE's are in many ways similar, acquiring of international experience and cross-cultural knowledge and skills to be benefitted of regarding future professional opportunities, SIE's motives somewhat differ from OE's due to the different context of expatriation (Myers & Pringle, 2005). Peltokorpi & Froese (2009), state that it is also important to distinguish the differences between OE's and SIE's but also to distinguish SIE's from travellers or immigrants as SIE's are driven by distinct professional motives regarding employment but are also determined to return the country of origin after a certain period of time. One of the key differences between SIE's and OE's motives is in the level of structured approach to gain professional international experience. As stated, OE's are often sent by a MNC in which international experience is highly valued and often an expected trait among top management. In the case of SIE's, the motives of pursuing international assignments comes more from the individual themselves so that the objective is often linked to self-development or some other personal agenda. (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009).

Another attribute regarding SIE's distinctively is the amount and level of resources they have on their international assignment. As the initiative comes from the individual themselves, SIE's don't often have any organizational

ties that would provide them with resources such as cross-cultural training, allowance, housing benefits etc., that OE's typically have (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Doherty et al., 2011). Exceptions of course apply if the host country organization offers such support for their foreign employee. Because of the higher level of independence of SIE's, they typically tend to be more proactive in seeking information and acquiring knowledge of the host country as they don't have company backed resources. Also, as SIE's don't often have as structured plan regarding the international assignment as OE's do, they tend to be more flexible in the duration of their stay as well as being more open for different types of tasks and positions. (Doherty et al., 2011).

### 3.1.2 Women expatriates

Initially, Adler (1987), properly sparked the interest towards research on female expatriates, as in her time the female international managers were of few. In her research, Adler (1987), breaks the myths about women being unwilling or uninterested in pursuing international assignments but rather the lack of female representation in the expatriate population was because the reluctance from companies to send women to international assignments. The reason companies were hesitant in sending women abroad, was the perception of foreign countries having prejudice towards women's capabilities but also that because of dual-career marriages, women would not have interest in pursuing international assignments due to family obligations. As for single women, companies expressed concern for their safety or potential experiences of loneliness.

As Adler (1987) was able to distinguish the real reason for female underrepresentation in international assignments, companies have started to include women more in their expatriate programmes and we are currently seeing increasingly more international managers being female. However, female expatriates are still a minority and they are facing distinct obstacles compared to male expatriates. According to Linehan & Scullion (2001), the main barrier for women being better offered international assignments is for them to first be able to acquire a senior management position in their home country. Previous research has also stated, that especially among the traditional organization backed expatriates' women are in a clear minority position (Doherty et al., 2011; Adler, 1987). Thus, it can be discussed whether the underrepresentation of female expatriates' roots from structural gender bias in top management positions.

Complementing the research by Adler (1987), Janssens, Cappellen & Zanoni (2006), view the barriers female expatriates face to be essentially a structural issue in which women are constrained by societal norms and values regarding gender which ultimately affects their opportunities to position themselves in organizational hierarchies. Certainly, in their study, Janssens et al., (2006), categorized the common barriers women expatriates face into three groups: gender, hierarchy, and culture. However, according to their study, after distinguishing the three discourses, expatriate women have been able to exploit these concepts for their benefit, leading to professional success and indicating

women to ultimately be active agents during international assignments rather than solely being a victim of the situation.

Moreover, even though the barriers to pursue international assignment for women are higher, the implications of foreign experience to career development may be heightened as well. According to Myers & Pringle (2005), women expatriates often have better desire to stay on an assignment longer which provides them with greater experience and acceleration for future global careers. Especially SIE women are perceived to be active agents of their careers and to proactively develop their capabilities and career prospects. They are thought to be more career focused than OE's by taking the initiative to enhance both their personal and professional development but also demonstrating greater tolerance of uncertainty and newness. (Ceili & Howe-Walsh, 2008).

### **3.2 International adjustment**

Even though international assignments are increasingly common practice among multinational companies, approximately 40 percent of those fail, in which inadequate adjustment to the host country's culture accounts for a significant portion. The high failure rate comes essentially with a hefty bill, in which companies lose significant amount of money annually. In order for companies to best assure a successful international assignment, they should especially focus on selecting the right person for the international job, adequately prepare them for life in the host country as well as provide them with cross-cultural training and support them also on the site as well as when they return to the home country. (Webb, 1996).

Study by Kraimer et al., (2011), discovered a positive correlation between international adjustment and on job performance. According to their research, expatriates who adjust well to the host country working environment and are comfortable in communicating with host country nationals, tend to be higher performers on task and expatriate contextual performance (Kraimer et al., 2011). An important implication here is that interaction between the expatriate and host country nationals enable better overall adjustment and performance. Thus, Kraimer et al. (2011), suggest that organizations should focus on providing expatriates with proper training in host country language and provide them with opportunities to socialize with the locals so that the expatriates wouldn't be separated as their own unit in contrast to the host nationals.

The need for interaction between expatriates and host country locals is important for all kind of expatriates, but Peltokorpi & Froese (2009), found that SIE's and OE's typically approach local interaction distinctively. According to their research, SIE's are generally more adjusted to interact with host country nationals, potentially due to their higher motivation and frequency in interacting with the local people. OE's tend to rather socialize with other OE's as they aren't



often as prepared with knowledge of the host country culture and conditions. SIE's get adjusted better even though they don't receive the often-extensive support system that OE's do and might need to compromise their current living standards. However, due to this, SIE's are often more tolerant for alternative aspects of living compared to OE's. (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009).

According to Selmer & Lam (2004), cross-cultural training is at key importance for cultural adjustment and hence for the success of an international assignment. However, even though important, cross-cultural training isn't always effective and thus can fail to accommodate international adjustment. Based on this notion, Selmer & Lam (2004), underline the importance of personal traits of expatriates so, that companies should emphasize global mindset as a key determinant of successful international adjustment. In their study, the authors determine four criterion that accommodate successful international adjustment of expatriates, which are: spousal support, communication skills, interpersonal sensitivity as well as cultural and social interests. In addition to these criteria, people with global mindset are often characterised with higher tendency and preference for international positions and lower settling-down preferences. (Selmer & Lam, 2004; Franke & Nicholson, 2002).

### 3.2.1 Third culture kids

In their research, Selmer & Lam (2004), discussed a concept of the "third culture kids" (TCK) that imply to people who have lived a certain period of their lives in a foreign country and thus have been exposed to other cultures and behavioural norms. In incorporating the different cultures and norms they have been subject to; these people are able to form their own cultural frame consisting of nuances of different cultures and thus creating a "third culture".

TCK's are often linked to being children of expatriate parents and thus having been exposed to foreign cultures from early on in their life. These people are more adaptable and culturally aware of other cultures and by being already equipped with a global mindset, the odds for them to adjust and succeed in an international assignment are higher and less costly (Ceili & Howe-Walsh, 2008). TCK's demonstrate different perceptions of "being international" or global mobility compared to their peers and had heightened qualities of open-mindedness, respect and tolerance of others, flexibility, and cultural identity. They also held more preferences towards international career, travel, learning a foreign language but also having lower preferences of settling down. The attributes linked to TCK's are perceived to be positive indicators of performance in an international assignment as well as general international adjustment. (Selmer & Lam, 2004).

What Selmer & Lam (2004) emphasize in their study is, that even though TCK's can be considered to a long extent to be "readymade" expatriates, the concept of high adaptability can also include anyone who has previous experience in living abroad, in a distinctive culture of their own. Such people can be for example self-initiated expatriates, who have acquired international

experience on their own initiative. (Selmer & Lam, 2004; Ceili & Howe-Walsh, 2008).

### **3.2.2 International adjustment of female expatriates and discrimination**

As mentioned by Janssens et al. (2006), expatriate women often face distinct barriers when completing international assignments that can also challenge their overall adjustment to a new foreign culture. Indeed, according to the research by Adler (1987), the host nationals don't tend to discriminate against female expatriates based on their gender, but if such prejudice appears, it is based on the expatriate status in general. However, what poses as an obstacle for female expatriates' international adjustment, are the preconceptions coming from organizations if they can't provide confidence and commitment towards their female expatriates. If the company isn't able to take expatriate women seriously, this is often mirrored by host nationals which ultimately compromises the adjustment of the expatriate and moreover the overall success of the assignment. (Adler, 1987).

Kollinger (2005), argues that the existence of discrimination against female expatriates is a key determinant of them being a minority among the expat population. Even though Adler (1987) points out that the discrimination from the host country nationals isn't based on gender, Tzeng (2006), points out that gender discrimination exists though it often comes from males from the same ethnic and cultural background. An interesting notion that Tzeng (2006) made in her research was that Caucasian women were more prone to gender discrimination from their male peers and managers than Asian women were, thus implying that gender discrimination and the level of it is also affected by race. The conception of race is also enforced by the notion that in contrast to Caucasian expatriate women, Asian expatriate women experienced more difficulties considering local norms of female behaviour in Taiwan, as they didn't share the same association as "foreign people" as Caucasian women did. This remark suggests that gender discrimination comes most apparent from male peers of same ethnicity.

Another implication of gender discrimination of expat woman that rose from the study by Tzeng (2006) was that female expatriates felt that they couldn't confront their male peers without being considered as a "traitor". They also reported incidents where when in discussing about negative experiences in the work environment, their male counterparts perceived them to be overly sensitive or emotional. Such implications are complemented in the study by Ceili & Howe-Walsh (2008), that found that some expatriate women felt that they needed to defend their position in an international assignment more than their male peers did and were secluded from the "old boys' network" that took place at work.

However, even though the research on whether expatriate women face discrimination regarding their gender is somewhat divided, it seems that traditional, organization sent women tend are more prone to such biases, perhaps due to the fact that they are more likely to work among male colleagues with the

same ethnicity. This suggestion is based on the notion by Ceili & Howe-Walsh (2008), that SIE women didn't report significant discrimination regarding their gender but rather due to their status as foreigners. This is complementary with the earlier findings by Adler (1987), that the discrimination of expatriate women is rarely based upon prejudices regarding their gender but rather their foreignness as expats.

### 3.2.3 Dual career couples

An important aspect for both the enforcement of female expatriates as well as international adjustment of expatriates has been the upcoming of dual career marriages in which both partners are actively working outside of the home. The perception of women in dual career marriages, has contributed to the previous reluctance of sending women abroad, as it was perceived that especially women in dual career relationships wouldn't be interested in pursuing an international assignment. During those times, the expatriate programs were designed for arrangements in which only one of the partners work and the other stays at home, thus not accommodating dual career couples well. Especially for women expatriates, the modification of the traditional dual career couple arrangements was crucial as they particularly wanted to incorporate their partners to the decision making of going abroad as well as to have flexibility in the conditions of staying abroad, suited best for their given situation. (Adler, 1987).

Today, the expatriate profile has changed so, that a typical expatriate will most likely be single or if married, their spouse is likely to have a career as well. Whatever the situation is, previous research has supported the finding that international assignments affect wide range of people affiliated with the expatriate who are also part of the key determinants of the success of the international assignment. (Doherty et al., 2011; Adler, 1987; Janssens, et al., 2006; Caliuguri & Bonache, 2016). In many ways, the concept of dual career couples is linked to overall work-life balance (Doherty et al., 2011), and especially the accommodation of the satisfaction of the spouse is in the essence of successful international assignment (Caliuguri & Bonache, 2016). According to the study by Caliuguri & Bonache (2016), a spouse's inability to adjust to the new environment is the most common factor for the failure of an international assignment.

Doherty et al. (2011), state that the concept of dual career couples and work-family balance is especially relevant when discussing self-initiated expatriates. According to Richardson (2006), social and family relationships are in the essence of the SIE's association with the host country. Especially spouse and children had a strong role in determining the international adjustment of the SIE. The most common issues regarding dual career couple's adjustment are the limited career opportunities for the spouse of the expat as well as the possible new expectations and responsibilities for the accompanying partner. Such responsibilities can be in the form of for example parental or social demands that are expected to be reduced from the expatriate's obligations. (Caliuguri & Bonache, 2016)

The significance of spousal and family adjustment is also emphasized by Tzeng (2006), who highlights the family aspect especially in the international adjustment of female expatriates. According to her study, a female expatriate's international assignment is more likely to be interrupted or even withdrawn by issues regarding their spouses and moreover their perceived marital responsibilities. Thus, many women pursuing international experience may choose to do so when single, as dual-career couples and moreover families require greater support and arrangements from the husband, children, childcare, relatives, colleagues, company, and government.

Even though dual career couples have gotten increasingly common, as have women expatriates, many traditional problems regarding family life and responsibilities still exist which especially affect women expatriates' opportunities to pursue professional international experience. This happens because regardless of the career progression or responsibilities of women, they are still often perceived to be the primary caretaker of the family. (Tzeng, 2006).

## 4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The previous chapters have introduced a literature review that forms the theoretical framework for this study. The earlier research presented demonstrates the relationship between human capital and career success which furthermore goes deeper into specifying international experience as a form of human capital. Key concepts regarding the essential objective of the study are also presented, such as the theory of a self-initiated expatriate and female expatriates in general. Moreover, the aim of this study is to examine the relationship that human capital, social capital, and other individual attributes have on the willingness to pursue international assignments of SIE women in the current time and thus provide a bridge between the central concepts. To the authors best knowledge, the relationship between individual attributes and the global mobility of SIE women hasn't been studied in such specified manner and thus presents an appropriate gap in research for this study to address. As the theoretical framework has been built upon extensive background of research, we are able to have a through initial understanding of the essential concepts regarding the phenomena from which the author can further frame the structure of this study.

As previously presented, the concept of human capital is essential to this study, as it is often perceived as a key determinant for one's career progress (Wößmann, 2003; Akosah-Twumasi, 2018). Human capital is something that people hold individually that is often acquired through education, training or other relative experience and is thought to correlate to the skills and competence one has (Goldin, 2016). In addition to human capital, other personal attributes that distinguish people from each other in the working market are social capital, networks, demographic traits as well as socio-economic factors (Ng, et al., 2005; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Ballout, 2007; Chenevert & Tremblay, 2002; Reimers-Hild et al., 2007). Based on this, we are able to note that what predicts career progression are multiple factors that some the individual can have an influence on, and others that can't be affected.

Viewing the earlier research especially by Adler (1987), we are able to understand the progress of female careers and furthermore their role in the international business world. In her study, Adler (1987), demonstrates the way of which women have come from being predominantly the family caretaker without formal professional careers to taking their own agency of their careers, pursuing the same opportunities as their male counterparts do. However, the development of women's involvement in the corporate world hasn't come overnight and women still face distinct barriers and biases regarding their capabilities (Adler, 1987; Janssens et al., 2006). Especially when regarding international opportunities, women are still underrepresented in the expatriate population. (Adler, 1987).

However, it is important to note that acquiring international experience today, is no longer bound to an organization and their willingness to provide an expatriate assignment, but increasingly more people are acquiring such experience proactively. Research has introduced the concept of a self-initiated expatriate that pursue international experience on their own initiative, moving abroad to seek employment or other objectives for a certain period of time. (Doherty, 2013). Such approach gives also women the option to acquire experience on their own and it has been implied that SIE's make up the majority of the expat population (Myers & Pringle, 2005).

Though, as the means to international experience and other attributes of human capital are available for a larger audience today and much of the barriers preventing people of seeking similar opportunities have been busted, it is important to review the factors that affect the willingness of people to pursue international assignments (Adler, 1987). This study is specifically focused on female SIE's in order to understand their experience and expectations on how their personal attributes and life choices have affected their decision to acquire international experience. The objective the study is to recognize the traits that influence one's decision and capabilities to go to work abroad out of their own initiative, without having the extensive support system of a sending company.

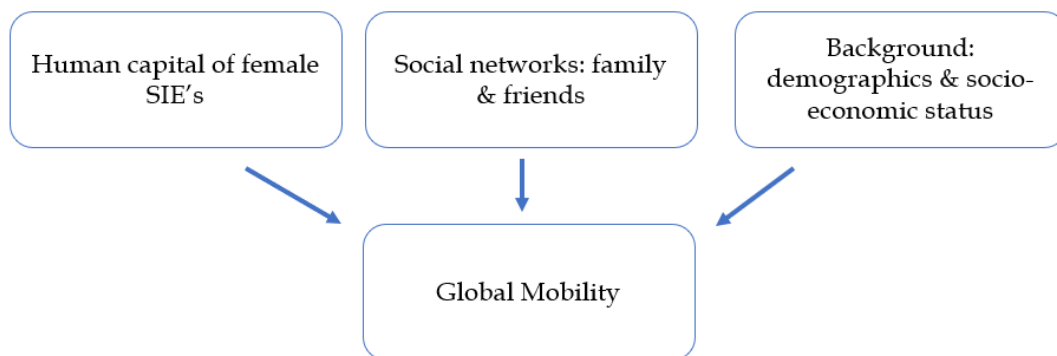


Figure 2: Theoretical framework

## 5 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter will introduce the qualitative research methodology applied to conduct this study. The chapter will begin in discussing the qualitative methods applied to approach the research and will continue in further explaining the data collection and initial analysis.

### 5.1 Qualitative research

According to Pathak, Jena & Kalra (2013), “*qualitative research focuses in understanding a research query as a humanistic or idealistic approach.*” Qualitative research is an appropriate approach especially if the objective is to understand certain beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior and/or interactions in a descriptive manner. According to Froggatt (2001), qualitative data takes the approach that reality is not given but constructs in a social environment, which supports the use of qualitative methods in this particular study. One type of qualitative research which is also applied in this study, is an interview study that enables the participants of the study to have a voice in sharing their experiences and perspectives of certain situations or phenomena. A key advantage of such approach is that with an interview, researchers are able to enhance the involvement of everyone participating in the study. Also, the interview setting allows more informal relationship between the researcher and the interviewee, potentially making the situation more organic. (Pathak, et al., 2013).

As said, qualitative research enables the introduction of individual experiences in a descriptive manner (Pathak, et al., 2013). This level is important as meaning is constructed in different interactions of individuals and the surrounding world. Thus, what is considered as reality is composed subjectively in which it isn't something fixed or measurable in agreed upon methods and therefore isn't always appropriate to be studied with numeric measures. However, qualitative research can be of different nature, depending on the objective of the intention. Such orientations could be for example interpretive or critical qualitative research in which the difference lies upon whether the aim is to study individual experiences, or the situation and its constructs exchange with reality. (Merriam, 2002).

### 5.2 Interpretive qualitative study

In applying interpretive qualitative study approach, the researcher is looking to understand the ways in which participants make meaning of a certain situation

or phenomenon, essentially seeking a descriptive conclusion with an inductive strategy. Generally, the objective of such an approach is to discover a given phenomenon and the perspectives of the people involved through either an interview, observation, or other means of analysis. The data will then be analyzed to distinguish reoccurring patterns or themes that arise from the data from which descriptive analysis can be made in contrast to the theoretical framework formed on the basis of earlier research. (Merriam, 2002).

The data of this study have been collected from a series of semi-constructed interviews in which the interview is guided with prepared questions on the different nuances of the research theme in a consistent manner. The questions are used to direct the conversation of the interview throughout the different themes, topics, and issues, accommodating discussion outside the planned structure. With semi-structured interviews, the researcher is enabled with better flexibility and potential to uncover hidden aspects of human behavior. Similarly, such approach enables the interviewee to describe their experiences in their own terms from which the researcher can then better understand the constructs of the interviewee's social world (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The applying of semi-structured interviews regarding this study is appropriate as the objective is to uncover the subjective experiences and perceptions SIE women have regarding their background and competence in regards of global mobility. Semi-structured interviews suit this purpose the best, as such subjective experiences are best shared in conversation in which the participant will be able to find their own words and phrases to best suit their perspective. As is stated by Longhurst (2003), semi-structured interviews allow the participant to explore the issues and nuances they feel are important, which the researcher will interpret in careful and systematic manner.

### **5.3 Data collection**

The data was collected through series of semi-structured interviews between November 2021- March 2022. The interviewees were contacted by email after distinguishing their suitability regarding the purpose of the study. Altogether 6 self-initiated female expatriates were interviewed individually, and the interviews lasted from 28 minutes to 45 minutes. Altogether, the researcher transcribed close to 4 hours of interviews, generating 41 pages of transcription. The conducted interviews and interviewees are described in Figure 3.



Interviewee	Age	Role	Nationality	Years of working abroad	Education	Marital status
Expat 1	27	Business Partner/mid-senior	Irish	4,5	Bachelor of arts & sociology	Single
Expat 2	31	Service Advisor	Hungarian	2,5	Master's in applied mathematics	Single
Expat 3	25	Intern	Indian	1,5	Bachelor of IT & engineering	In a relationship
Expat 4	27	Manager/junior level	British	>1	Bachelor of business & economics	Single
Expat 5	35	Senior Business Development Principal	Portuguese	10	Master's in economics	Married, 1 child
Expat 6	27	Intern	Nigerian	1,5	Bachelor's in library & information science	Married, 1 child

Figure 3. Conducted interviews

The interviewees were all identified as self-expatriate women and they all worked for the same company in the field of telecommunications & technology in Luxembourg. As displayed in Figure 3, the SIE's are all of different nationality and from different educational background. The average age of the SIE's was 28 years old, most of them being single though two of them were married at the time and had children.

The interview questions were formed throughout processing of previous research and studies, focusing on the experienced effect of attributes such as gender, age, social and demographic background on intentions towards global mobility and adjustment to international setting. The questions were mostly open ended, though incorporated some closed-ended questions as well. The interviews aimed to provoke reflection among the interviewees as the nature of the study is to be descriptive of the various experiences of SIE women from different backgrounds. Thus, the answers of the SIE's reflected their personal impressions, experiences and interactions working abroad. The length of global mobility among the SIE's varied between 1-10 years but all of them were determined of returning to their country of origin eventually.

The motive of pursuing global mobility was to a large extent very similar among the SIE's but the ability for global mobility was perceived somewhat different, depending on the individual background. Perceptions whether attributes such as gender, age, marital status and age influenced global mobility, were also largely moderated by the background, especially by an SIE's nationality, generating different experiences of experienced discrimination when working abroad. The approach towards discrimination and inappropriate behavior was also very much moderated through an SIE's age and furthermore previous experiences in one's professional life.

## 5.4 Data Analysis

Following the collection of data, the interview recordings were transcribed for analyzing. According to LeCompte (2000), it's beneficial to approach the analyzing of data as assembling a jigsaw puzzle, putting separate pieces of information together, forming connections to unveil the bigger picture. The previous research done by other researchers in this metaphor works as the picture of a puzzle box, guiding the work and provoking new ideas on the way. The key objective of analysis though is to structure the data in order for the author to make implications and tell the underlying meaning of the findings to the reader. (LeCompte, 2000).

For the purpose of this study, thematic analysis has been used to construct the analysis and furthermore the findings. According to Clarke & Baun (2014), "*thematic analysis is a method for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning across qualitative data*". Thematic analysis is broadly used in qualitative research and it can be used widely across fields and research questions (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules 2017). Essentially, thematic analysis is about identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data. In its nature of not being tied to any specific epistemological perspective, it's a flexible method in approaching data analysis and identifying important and interesting themes to address in research (Maquire & Delahunt, 2017).

When conducting thematic analysis, themes and furthermore subthemes were created out of the data in order to structure the data and construct findings. A few main themes clearly arose from the data that provide implications and furthermore correlation with the research questions such as education, experience, and networks and how these relate to the global mobility of SIE women. Subthemes identified were related to one having received education abroad, prior international experience, mobility from certain country or geographical area as well as family and professional networks.

It can be argued that the proper analysis of qualitative data can be perceived to be even heightened in comparison to quantitative data. The reason for this is, that contrary to quantitative data, direct, clear and measurable implications of qualitative data are much more ambiguous. The researcher needs to be aware of possible, sometimes even unconscious biases that might affect their implications of the data. Because of this, it's important that the analysis will be approached from a structured basis, creating taxonomies of things and phenomenon's by different levels of abstraction. (LeCompte, 2000).

In a sense, the creating of patterns and thus distinguishing concepts in the data, is part of the coding of qualitative data. The coding is performed by distinguishing and creating links among different concepts to discover their wider effect for the context (Froggatt 2001).

According to Elliott & Timulak (2005:152), the analysis of descriptive qualitative data requires flexibility in developing ways and methods to the ongoing analysis. The key for a successful and thoroughly formed analysis is for

the author to be systematic and organized in auditing the use of data so that the connection of the analysis to the context of the data can be traced back and easily located. The importance of the organization of the data is also highlighted by Froggatt (2001), who distinguishes the proper managing and essentially the traceability of the data as an ongoing concern in the process of analysis.

## 6 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter will introduce and analyse the findings that emerged from the qualitative interviews. The discussion will further expand the results through the context of the introduced theory on self-initiated female expatriates, individual attributes such as gender, age, and nationality as well as the wider concept of global mobility. The approach taken is exploratory in being based on individual experiences and perceptions. The aim of the analysis essentially is to answer the research questions introduced in the first chapter and to correspond to the theoretical framework.

### 6.1 Findings

This section will introduce the findings that arose from the data. The findings are presented and structured through the different themes and subthemes identified and analyzed accordingly. To elaborate on the finding, direct quotes from the interviews are used and highlighted throughout the sections. To further contextualize the findings, figure 5 has been created which displays the different dimensions constructed from the analysis and their relationship to the global mobility of SIE women. The dimensions have been divided into positively and negatively associated attributes, though many of them can affect global mobility in complex ways in which the outcome of the relationship is dependent on individual situations.

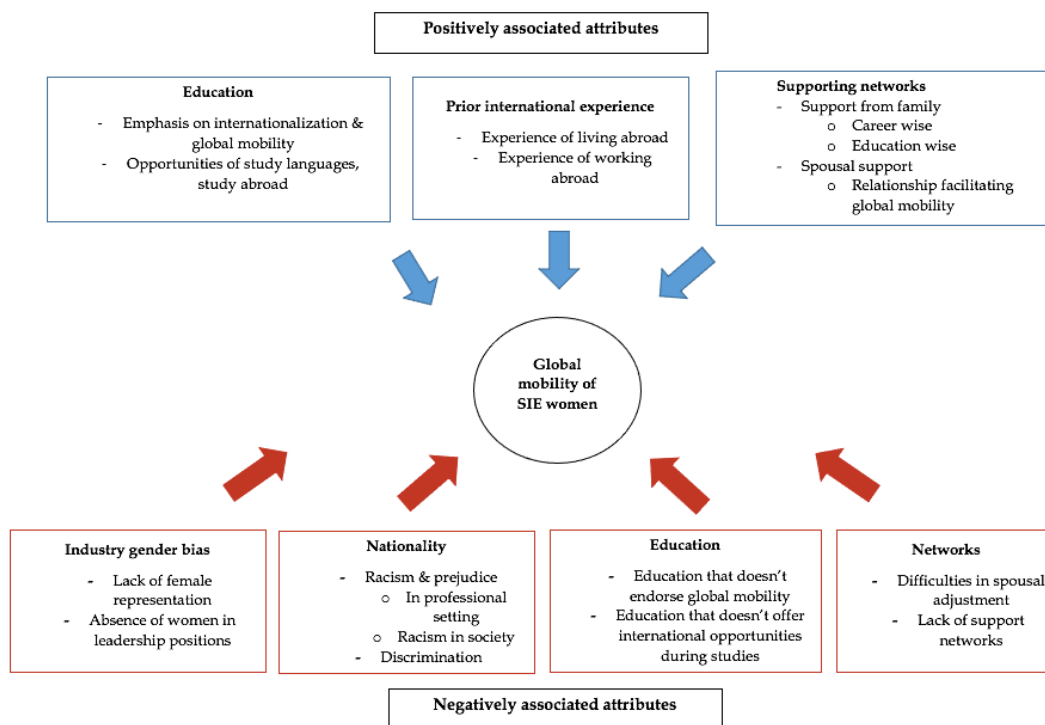


Figure 4: Relationship of key attributes and global mobility

### 6.1.1 Influence of prior work experience for global mobility

Each interview started with mapping out the essential motive of each expatriate female to pursue global mobility, as discussed in previous studies international experience is often viewed as a form of human capital by hiring companies (Biemann & Braakmann, 2013 Ciampa, 2005; Fisher, 2005; Myers & Pringle, 2005). Such conception was highly present among the SIE's as well all of them distinguished global mobility to enhance their career prospects in the sense of international professional experience.

However, the extent to which factors such as benefits, compensation and working conditions influenced global mobility, was somewhat divided. As most of the SIE's didn't mention benefits or working conditions as influencers for global mobility, interviewee 2 (Hungarian) and interviewee 3 (Indian) put a lot of emphasis on the enhanced opportunities career and pay wise by going to work abroad. As described by the SIE's themselves:

*Interviewee 2: " ...--to be honest, I didn't really want to move, but when they offered me this opportunity, I realized that to me, it's something I cannot reject, I cannot say no - of course first of all because financially but secondly because this is a great experience professionally. -- But to be fully honest, for the same salary or anything I wouldn't move away from Hungary..."*

*Interviewee 3: "The primary reason would be the work life balance that I did not seem to enjoy much back in my home country. The second would be the value of an employee in terms of their skills. It's my observation, that every individual or employee or potential candidate is given the appropriate recognition and financial compensations when it comes to their skill and education."*

As described by Frieze (2010), motives to enhance one's life to better is generally one of the most common underlying reasons for global mobility. According to Frieze's (2010) study, economic motives often root from achievement motivation which essentially describes people who have high desire to do well and work hard to achieve economic success. Alshahrani (2021), recognizes this as push-pull motivator, as seeking increased monetary opportunities from abroad in opposition to the disadvantages at home. As to the other SIE's who valued international experience as the general motive behind global mobility, according to Frieze (2010), these women have a sense of mobile personality by seeking to fulfill such "emigration desires" as an intrinsic value itself.

On contrary to especially interviewee 2 (Hungarian), some of the SIE's saw global mobility as an opportunity both in personal and professional sense as described:

*Interviewee 4: "For me, it was like why not, it sounded like a very cool role, I had never lived in Luxembourg so for me moving country doesn't shake me that much because I've done it before so yea it was more of a yea I'll do it, sounds like a good opportunity so I'll just go for it."*

However as discussed further on in the analysis, for the SIE's who were married, even though professional development was highly regarded in their decision to go abroad, the initial push for global mobility was at least to some extent affected by their partner:

*Interviewee 5: "So, the reason I moved to London was because my boyfriend, now husband, at the time was in London so when I did a 5-year degree. -- It was in London where I met him, and eventually long distance doesn't work so I moved to London. And I didn't have a job or anything, I just moved without work."*

As the traditional perception of dual career marriages in regards of global mobility has shifted from women solely following their male partners abroad to take care of home, the married interviewees were determined to build their careers though moving abroad. Thus, in accordance with previous research (Adler, 1987; Doherty et al., 2011; Adler, 1987; Janssens, et al., 2006; Caliuguri & Bonache, 2016), expatriate couples these days are more likely to both pursue a career abroad rather than either of them to be in the more traditional "supporting role" primarily being a caretaker of the home.

### **6.1.2 Influence of education for global mobility**

All of the SIE's worked in the same company in various business roles and had completed some level of a university degree, though the level of the degree as well as the subject varied. Interestingly, the majority of the SIE's didn't work in a role typical for their field of studies though education was perceived to be an important factor and enabler for their career. The importance of education and furthermore acquired entrepreneurial approach as human capital for career development was also discussed by Reimers-Hild et al. (2007), which is especially important for women and professional gender-equality.

What emphasizes the importance of a degree in career sense, even if not specifically from the respective field, is that many of the SIE's had begun their careers as interns. Typically, in Europe and in UK, interns need to be recognized as students which underscores the role of education for early careers. However, as today careers are seen more flexible and protean (Doherty et al., 2011), the field of education does no-longer determine and give boundaries to one's career, which can be seen in this study as well.

When discussing the relationship of education to global mobility, it came apparent that the international aspect of one's education, as to how much students were encouraged to go abroad had great effect on their motivation and openness towards global mobility. International mobility was also distinguished by Ikonen & Nikunen (2019), as an important invest for future career success by young adults. Furthermore, international mobility can be perceived as an orientation of entrepreneurial approach which according to Reimers-Hild et al. (2007), is a significant determinator for career success.

*Interviewee 1: "Not everyone went to university, but a lot of people did, and it was always about having that international opportunity. I went to a European school, so we were told that we were the children of Europe. -- It was very much 'go off to wherever you want' whether it is, to work, to study or what not - to travel. So, it was a very international way of thinking."*

The SIE's that were encouraged for global mobility in their education, were much more positive towards working abroad and more open about the opportunities global mobility may provide them regardless of the end-location. Some of the SIE's also emphasized Erasmus programs as enabling them or their peers to seek for international experience which further on influenced their motivation for global mobility.

*Interviewee 4: -- a lot of people do the Erasmus or do the year abroad so it's quite a big thing."*

*Interviewee 5: "Of course, that experience gave me that 'wow I want to go and try something else'."*

The influence of school's encouragement towards global mobility and especially the motivation behind global mobility can be distinguished when comparing the experiences, the SIE's had of the internationality subject in their education. It came apparent that if global mobility or internationality in general wasn't

encouraged in one's studies, this highly affected their motivation and willingness towards global mobility in the future as well.

*Interviewee 2: "No, absolutely not. Because we didn't even have this Erasmus opportunity so no. -- I didn't want to go either. I didn't really mind when I studied there because I didn't plan to go abroad. Basically, in one month before I decided to move to Luxembourg. I didn't want to move to Luxembourg or didn't want to go abroad and it was quite scary to realize that I have to. And okay I didn't have to, but this was a smart choice. So no, I never wanted to go abroad."*

Especially in the case of interviewee 2, the decision to strive for global mobility was largely based on financial and professional incentives and not from inner motivation. The SIE distinguished though that it would have been beneficial whether global mobility would've been something that had been encouraged through her education which might make global mobility more accessible and interesting for students. This furthermore implies, that education has a great deal in either facilitating or disabling intension for global mobility.

*Interviewee 2: "I was a bit scared of living abroad because it's far from my family. So, if for example in the university they would have had a good relationship with other universities, let's say 'okay now you can go for a month to study abroad', maybe I would have seen that living abroad is not a nightmare or you can survive it, but no. So, I had no experience not even my family, not even my close friends."*

The possibility for language studies in one's education as reducing possible barriers for global mobility were also brought up in the interviews. Possibility to study languages not only makes global mobility more accessible but also more appealing for future career.

*Interviewee 2: "-- We didn't even have to study languages in the university, so we had some middle level knowledge to receive our diploma but otherwise nothing else. So no, I think it's not a good thing but unfortunately this is Hungarian education - it's really not focusing on languages to encourage the students to learn languages so no, not."*

*Interviewee 1: "At school we had the ability to learn different languages, so I did French as a second language, I did Spanish as a third language, then at university I did Italian and German. And having the ability to learn so many different languages definitely also supports that (global mobility) or drives international experience as well, in my opinion."*

Language has also been distinguished by Hamid, Hoang & Kirkpatrick (2019), as a way to gatekeep global mobility and thus people who have had the opportunity to study more languages have less barriers for global mobility. This said, it makes sense that for the SIE's who weren't thought different languages, even English, global mobility, which often requires one to work with a foreign language, is much more distant than to a person who is well educated on languages.

As all of the SIE's have got some level of a university degree, it can be assumed that their ability to acquire education has had an impact for global mobility career wise. However, as can be distinguished from the interviews, the



tendency for global mobility varies greatly based on the endorsement of internationality within the universities. As the barrier for global mobility was seemingly heightened for the SIE who came from an educational background where internationality and language studies weren't a part of, it is likely that women with such backgrounds are more likely to not pursue global mobility. What is important to note though, that it is quite likely that this also applies for men as well, as not having the encouragement of pursuing a global career.

Moreover, this implies that programs such as Erasmus and other student exchange programs can affect global mobility initiatives of their students after graduation. At least, such programs lower the perceived barrier of global mobility as well as makes internationality more familiar as a concept for students which has implications to their likelihood of acquiring an international career. As stated by Biemann & Braakmann (2013), internationality is something that is increasingly sought after by companies regarding human capital. Thus, for universities, the level of internationality can be a differentiating factor as to how they are perceived by employers. This said, universities would benefit in aiming to recognize such drawbacks in their structure that prevent their students to acquire international experience which affects their intentions for global mobility in the future.

### 6.1.3 Influence of networks for global mobility

The level of prior networks the SIE's had when moving abroad varied such as friends, family etc. However, all the interviewees distinguished networks to have an effect on global mobility and how easy, in a sense, pursuing global mobility and career abroad would be. As highlighted by Reimers-Hild et al. (2007), building relationships and networks both in and out of an organizational context was important career wise. Especially in the context of global mobility, building on social capital in the form of networks can have implications for success of global mobility and furthermore overall adjustment of SIE's.

*Interviewee 6: " -- It (networks) made it easier. If I was coming without knowing anybody, no knowledge about what any course is about - It'd be a little bit not difficult but not very easy. But I had somebody to speak with, sharing some courses and materials with me to get me ready. So, the networks were super useful for me."*

*Interviewee 2: "One of the things I wanted to come is because I already knew the team here because I worked closely together with them (previously). -- I wouldn't say it was really important because I know I will have colleagues, but it was some kind of comfort for me that if I really need something, I can contact them"*

The influence of networks was emphasized especially when moving abroad during the Covid-19 pandemic which brought in increased uncertainty. However, the extent to which the lack of previous networks affects confidence and success

of global mobility of SIE's is largely dependent on personality attributes. Though, a key contributor for global mobility when there are yet not any established networks is prior experience of working, studying, or living abroad. Such prior experience can make one more confident in pursuing global mobility in a new country as well as convinced in one's own capabilities of creating connections from the very beginning.

*Interviewee 4: "So I was sixteen when we as a family moved to Switzerland, so I was then at the international school for two years. So, I think... Growing up in London is already an international place but then going to the international school also kind of made me realize that you can live anywhere and find people who are, you know, likeminded and meet different people. -- Because we had done it as a family together it opened my eyes to, okay if I move abroad it's actually fine. It's not the end of the world or if things don't work out that's also okay."*

Discussing networks at home, especially family ties, most of the SIE's distinguished family to play an important part for global mobility, both in the sense of supporting one's decision to move abroad but also to provide mental support when living in another country. All SIE's were convinced that their families would support them in their career decisions no matter what but underlined the social and symbolic aspect of having the support of their family. Importance of such networks were also brought up in the findings of Ballout (2007) & Nabi (2001), so that support from one's networks contributes to overall career success especially in the sense of women.

*Interviewee 4: "I definitely couldn't do it without the emotional support or anything of my family, so I know that's a huge factor - okay how far away do I want to move? You know, can I still see them every month or every three months, whatever it is."*

*Interviewee 6: "My family is my bedrock. I speak to my mother every night. So, I rant about my day to her and after talking to my mother I feel good no matter the stress I face so everything has just disappeared. So, one of the things that keeps me going as a woman in an international environment is my family - my mother especially."*

For some of the SIE's, the importance of their family's support can be perceived to be rooted in the gratitude towards the opportunities their parents have provided them so that they can seek global mobility. This also touches on the fact, that family background has implications to the possibilities and accessibility for global mobility. This is also linked to earlier research on how socio-economic status affects overall opportunities in life but especially education and moreover human capital (Kuncel, Rose, Ejiogu & Yang, 2014). This finding was also apparent in the interviews, as the interviewees who were born and native of a third-world country gave much more emphasis on family's support on enabling the acquiring of education. Taking this into consideration, all of the interviewees however came from a fortunate background in being able to acquire the skills and education necessary to strive for global mobility.

*Interviewee 3: "So, my parents have worked hard enough to give their kids the comfort, so I've been fortunate enough to have the best education in the best of schools and colleges which has helped me to reach where I am right now."*

Besides family though, for the SIE's who weren't single but married, spousal support was one of the key factors of pursuing global mobility and living abroad. For both of the SIE's who were married, the support and mindset of their husbands were incremental for them to pursue global careers. In the case of interviewee 5, her husband and child had moved to Luxembourg with her after she had applied and secured a job there. Thus, the more traditional setting in which the wife follows the husband abroad was turned around. Though, as stated, the modern setting of expatriate couples often introduces a dual-career couple, in which both partners have a career, rather than the other being the primary breadwinner of the household. However, when the SIE's husband faced difficulties in finding a job in Luxembourg, this posed a severe issue for the couple and almost made the expatriate female to give up her career in the new country to move back home.

*Interviewee 5: " We didn't anticipate that it would take ages for my husband to find a job. He applied for 18 months - a year and a half, not even an interview, not even a response sometimes.*

*-- So, my husband had started applying for jobs from June 2020 and then we were kind of resigning ourselves and thought this is not working, we're leaving Luxembourg. Because after a while you cannot just keep it up because my husband was not happy with the situation as well.*

*And then eventually on the last day, because I told my job if by the 15th of December, he does not find a job, I'm leaving on 31st of January. And on the 10th of December he got a job offer, so it was the last minute possible. Because I was already looking for companies to move, tenancy agreements, speaking with a landlord I was doing all of that already because I thought it's not going to happen."*

The above supports previous findings of expatriate success as spousal satisfaction has been distinguished as one of the most significant determinants of the success of international assignment, most common issues seen as limited career opportunities of the spouse (Caliuguri & Bonache, 2016). Especially when there are also children involved, the role of the spouse is often heightened in the sense of keeping the family together, linking to general work-life balance as well which is emphasized among SIE's (Doherty et al., 2011). Some researchers also consider the issue to weigh even more when considering the success of a female expatriate (Tzeng, 2006).

Young children might also bring in more dependency on other networks such as family, bringing about the significance of networks as a support function in global mobility.

*Interviewee 6: " I had him (the child) in Luxembourg. So, he was conceived and born in Luxembourg. There's a lot of support systems but no matter the kind of support, social security - they can't be compared to having family around."*

*Interviewee 5: " --I don't have family in here and I don't have friends, so whenever we need something, we don't have anyone to help me and sometimes I'm wishing my son could go for the afternoon to his grandparents to leave me alone -never happens."*

All the SIE's did agree on the fact that global mobility is easier for single women as it reduces dependency on others as well as responsibilities in often already confusing environment. It was also recognized to have a possible impact on career as single people are more prone in being career focused. Single status also increases the likelihood of pursuing global mobility in yet another country as many of the SIE's recognized, that if they were to find a partner from the country they're working at, this would likely make them want to settle more in the current location. Furthermore, this also has implications on the continuity of global mobility as to whether the married interviewees would be able to, in a sense, continue global mobility further in another country as well as to when they'd return to their home country. The married SIE's were both married to partners of same nationality though, which also raises the questions as to what the situation would be in the case of partners with different nationalities.

However, not only do partners act as a complicating or disabling factor in the sense of global mobility, but partners can also facilitate global mobility and act as an enabler for a SIE. This came apparent from Interviewee 5, who essentially moved abroad to build a career because her partner already lived and worked there. Thus, especially for women in their early careers, such relationships can act as a driving force for global mobility rather than preventing it.

#### **6.1.4 Other individual attributes & global mobility**

Discussing global mobility and the effect of personal attributes such as gender, age or nationality, factors such as nationality and race were heightened in effecting the experiences the SIE's had when working abroad. Few of the SIE's had experienced gender having affected their careers while working abroad, as some SIE's raised it to be more of an issue in their own home country which was a factor for them wanting to pursue global mobility. Interviewee 2 brought up that gaining international experience would help her to tackle gender-based discrimination in her home country.

*Interviewee 2: "In a multinational company, still male colleagues are more dominant and if you have nothing, even if you, I don't say that recruiters in Hungary that "okay you are a female, you won't be hired because you are a female" ... But just because sometimes I don't know, because of the pregnancy risk how to say, maybe they hire more male but if you have something plus like an international experience then maybe they will choose you because of this. -- But on the other hand, in Hungary sometimes they are not hiring 30+ female colleagues especially if they have a husband because they are afraid that she will go to 2-3 years for a maternity leave. Yes, that's something that quite often happens here unfortunately."*

Working especially in the technology industry which still this day is highly male dominated, gender-based discrimination is still blooming, depending on the company culture and the overall environment. As said gender as an attribute had affected some of the interviewees directly as some were worried more about the overall disparity of gender distribution in the industry.

*Interviewee 3: "One of the experiences in Europe, where I had a team full of men and barely 2 female team members including me, I did face a little intimidation. --It came in the form of racist comments, sexist jokes which were quite a thing as a norm in the company. Obviously, everyone has different perspectives, some accept it out of compulsion, some accept it out of comfort, but it wasn't necessarily really comfortable for me to work in the team."*

*Interviewee 5: "I experience that everywhere since I can remember. So, I think that Portugal was much worse, so when I moved to London I was like 'wow it's not so bad to be a woman you know'. -- But of course, you still feel that - even today you'll always feel that as a woman - there's always someone dismissing you, talking over you, mansplaining you. There's always someone and especially since I work in a very male focused environment, I work in technology. All of my peers are men, my boss is a man, my boss's boss is a man."*

*Interviewee 4: "It's not like discrimination, like direct discrimination but honestly, I'm very aware that women are lacking in technology. -- Working with middle aged white men all the time is very grating. Do they discriminate against me, no but you know how it is being a young girl at a technology company at the end of the day..."*

The question on the division of genders between different industries has been widely discussed in the past years, which has implications wider issues as well such as gender pay gap, women's career breaks and the lack of female representation in leadership positions (Blau & Kahn, 2020; Manning & Saidi, 2010; Kiamba, 2008: 7). Research supports the fact, that especially in the technology and IT-industry, women are underrepresented when comparing it to the general IT-population (Macarthur, 2008). What is meant by this is that women are as active if not more active than men, in the field of IT, such as computing or online social networking. According to Macarthur's research (2008), some of the underrepresentation could be explained by sexual discrimination. However, this wasn't brought up by the interviewees of this study but rather the discouraging ratio of women in the industry was experienced to be disappointing in itself.

One root cause for women's underrepresentation could also be in education as the division between men and female dominated fields can already be seen in the different fields and courses. Some researchers say that the division and "channeling" of women to especially in non-technical fields starts as early as primary school (Robinson, 1988). This has also been more widely distinguished by society in the recent years and programs to encourage women to study more technical fields have been created, such as WomenInTech and coding programs for girls. It's also been speculated that professional vocabulary is often quite male-centric which might be excluding to women in undesirable ways. In the

technology field this is often seen in imagery in which visual icons aren't generally gender neutral but represent male figures. (Macarthur, 2008).

What can be interpreted from this though is, that the gender bias in certain fields, in the context of this research, tech, can be perceived to be a barrier for female careers in the field but also furthermore global mobility. As a booming industry, tech companies are widely presented in global context in which the lack of female representation can act as a disabling factor for SIE women. Tackling such bias could essentially increase the intentions for global mobility of women as well as make the industry more approachable across genders.

As for age as an attribute, some of the SIE's had experienced biases, concern and underestimating regarding their age when either applying for a job abroad or being promoted by the foreign company.

*Interviewee 1: "I was 24 when I was promoted, and I was probably the youngest HR business partner that Luxembourg has ever had - is in (the company) and there was never any discrimination from HR perspective, but I think people looked at my age and people questioned it and questioned whether it was the right move or whether it was too early. Whether people said anything no, they didn't say anything directly to me, but I did hear some people did say a few things, just too young - it's a huge role, was I able for it, did I know what the role required, was I going to be successful in it?"*

What really divided experiences of effect on personal attributes in global mobility though, was nationality which is to a great extent linked to one's race as well. The SIE's who had experienced discrimination regarding their nationality perceived it to come from racist intentions and biases that others had either on their appearance or the way they spoke. Interviewee 3, who is of Indian nationality had experienced racist comments in her workplace in Belgium as interviewee 6 who is of Nigerian nationality, faced racial discrimination more broadly, affecting her everyday life:

*Interviewee 6: "When I first joined the masters, I was very vibrant. Back in Nigeria, I'm a very vibrant person and I came with the same spirit when I came to Luxembourg. So, my first day in class, I was like talking and everything and others were like 'we can't hear you' and every time I talked in the class, half of the class was like 'they can't hear me'. And my accent, I can understand they can't understand my accent and that was actually killing my morale and I came down and I became back to a very quiet person. -- It affected me. It affected my participation in class, and later on I realized I'm actually being affected, and I tried to buckle up again, but my nationality is to do with my accent."*

*Interviewee 6: "Like you want to go to a restaurant, and they tell you there is no space. During (a local fair) you try to get a seat and there's no space and right in front of you a white person and they gets this space. So, it's one of those things you live with."*

Racism and discrimination didn't come as a surprise for interviewee 6 but she was mentally prepared for such reception and exclusion which seemed to be a commonly known and felt issue for people of her nationality.

*Interviewee 6: "I came prepared to be discriminated because I'm not in my country. I have a lot of black friends that are always complaining about it and I don't complain about it because even though I know, it's something that needs to be complained about, right, but I know I'm not in my country and that's been my whole perception - they can do whatever they want to do, it's their country. -- That is why I can't live here forever. I need to go back to where I know where I belong, where I see familiar faces, where I'm not treated specially or in a bad way. The aim is to gain as much of an international experience here in an international environment and then go back."*

Interviewee 6 also recognized a linkage between gender and racial discrimination as being heightened especially among black females. A bias was pointed, as she perceived black men to be more vocal about racial discrimination, making the discrimination that black women face more oblivious.

*Interviewee 6: "I think most time, women tend to notice it more than men. That is my perception, men tend to just let it go so maybe men know how to deal with it, but women tend to take note of it more than men so maybe women are more discriminated than men. And then let me give you an example, in our class we have one black guy, and we have three black ladies. When a guy is talking everyone listens, as when one of the ladies talk - you can see the reaction that 'what are you saying?'. I don't know, because ladies like the guys, but when the black lady is talking, even if what the guy is saying is not that important, everyone listens. As to opposed when a black lady is speaking you can see the reaction that they are not listening, even if it's the same subject. It seems to be a gender thing."*

*"There's the thing, that people are doing this unconsciously that's why we need to constantly bring up the different kinds of bias that women are facing."*

Issues on racism and prejudice that affect especially black women in their career seem to be widely distinguished by research (McKinsey & Co, 2021). According to Dill & Duffy (2022), in the US, black women are overrepresented in low-wage employments which roots to racism and sexism as well as dating to all the way back to slavery and domestic service. However, racial discrimination is also present in Europe and according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, a quarter of black people face racism in work or when applying for work, especially impacting young people.

As was brought up by interviewee 6, racial discrimination didn't seem to play a role in a professional setting but was highly visible in education and in life outside of the office. What can be inspected is that even though such discrimination isn't present in a work setting, it still has clear implications on global mobility and adjustment. As stated in the interview, racial discrimination gives sort of a timeline for global mobility as the interviewee considered to not belong in the country, she was working in but was determined to return back to her country of origin to have such sense of belonging. As racial discrimination was already a widely distinguished issue in her community, it is probable that this can cause a barrier especially for black women to strive for global mobility and aim for a global career. As for many people, studying abroad is a major first step encouraging for global mobility in a professional sense, racism in education

can pose a major issue for excluding and discouraging women of color to pursue global mobility. It is also worth to note, that racism in the social community most likely reflects a level of racism in work settings as well which further creates barriers for global careers.

### 6.1.5 Global mobility and adjustment

Working abroad, away from one's homeland was reported being pleasant and encouraging for most of the interviewees. Majority recognized the tendency for global mobility in the future to have increased as the barriers for going abroad have decreased as of now having prior experience. Especially interviewees who had lived abroad several years and in multiple different locations, strongly wanted to pursue global mobility in the future as well before settling back in their home country.

*Interviewee 5: "I definitely want to move somewhere else before I end up back in London at some point. It's just when and where I go but because I'm single it's just me, I can go wherever I want whenever I want and don't really have to worry about anyone else."*

*Interviewee 4: "Right now what I foresee is, that I work as much as I can in Europe but when it comes to a point where I have to look after my parents, I may want to move back to India when I have gained a lot of experience."*

This was the case even with Interviewee 6, who had faced in a sense, strongest discrimination abroad and was determined to return to Nigeria eventually. In her case though, the decision to stay is also strongly affected by her marital status and the fact that she's got a child in Luxembourg.

*Interviewee 6: "It's very encouraging to move to another country, like I'm thinking of exploring maybe a PhD position in Belgium or France, somewhere close to Luxembourg."*

Thus, even though some of the interviewees did report on being hesitant or uncertain when considering global mobility, having worked abroad and having that experience greatly lowered the perceived barrier of global mobility in the future as well. This also links to the notion that if internationality would be brought up more whether it's in education or by social networks, this would possibly lower perceived barriers for global mobility. In a sense it could be expressed as "ripping out a band aid" as the hardest part is the beginning, but it gets easier once you've once done it, generating more courage and positive assumptions for the future.

Such notion can also be linked to nationality theory in a globalized world, as people aren't bound to their original nationality in a same sense, they might have been years back. Due to intense globalization, researchers have been



discussing about international nationality which takes form in a sense of shared public culture though it doesn't have the legitimate functions that actual nationalities have (Rubenstein, 2000). In the context of this study, one can perceive international nationality to be present in the way the some of the interviewees identify themselves as not being restricted by their original nationality but more as free citizen of the world. Though it is clear that for some, nationality still played a key role in how they would perceive their position in a foreign country, especially if their nationality is reflected in visible attributes such as skin color or accent. Furthermore, as is the definition of a SIE, all of these women did plan on returning back to their home country eventually, though the timelines for global mobility varied.

## 7 DISCUSSION & LIMITATIONS

In this master's thesis the focus was on discussing the relationship of different attributes to the global mobility of SIE women and how they pursue their career internationally. As per the research questions, the study places the focal point on human capital in relation to global mobility and further on, what contributes to human capital and thus global mobility. The study forms clear implications towards human capital, essentially formal education, as either facilitating or limiting global mobility for women. Similarly, whether personal and background attributes were associated negatively or positively to global mobility of SIE women, was largely dependent on individual situations and perceptions.

Clear distinction towards global mobility is made between women who come from an international setting and from an internationally oriented educational background to the women who come from an environment, where internationality hasn't been supported or endorsed in any way. From the data, it was implicit that women who are more exposed to global mobility in general have much more positive and confident outlook towards living and working abroad and pursuing an international career. These women put more emphasis on global mobility as an intrinsic value rather than focusing on the career benefits global mobility might bring them. Though implications to one's career was mentioned and recognized by all the interviewees as global mobility providing them positive experience and learning career wise. Women coming from an educational background, where global mobility wasn't endorsed or offered, put more emphasis on the monetary value that global mobility might give them regarding their future career. However, not being exposed to internationality and global mobility way of thinking, made moving and working abroad distant and unpleasant option even when considering the positive career implications, thus proving to pose a barrier for global mobility.

Goldin (2016) defined human capital as “ – the stock of skills that the labor force possesses”. As most of the SIE's interviewed in this study were in their early career, their human capital was much based on the education and training they had received accompanied by short experiences of working as a trainee or an intern. Considering this, when referring to research question, educational background is very much descriptive of the human capital of the SIE's in the study.

*RQ: How human capital, network, socio-economic factors, and their interplay affect global mobility of self-initiated female expatriates?*

As discussed, human capital certainly enables global mobility both career opportunities wise as well as in a motivational sense. Prior experience and education open doors for international career and furthermore global mobility while also providing future career advantages in the form of knowledge and

wider international experience. It can also generate an outlook for a more accessible globalized world which one isn't bound by their nationality or country of origin. Moreover, human capital derived from education can prepare towards global mobility through programs that offer opportunities to go abroad for a period of time as well as foreign language studies that furthermore reduce the barrier to pursue global mobility. However, as stated, especially education can also provide obstacles for global mobility by making it seem as something distant and foreign. Interestingly, the barriers that education can create aren't typically formed in straightforwardly preventing global mobility but rather in not promoting internationalisation or bringing it about as an option for future career development. This nevertheless something that educational institutes can effect on by further providing and endorsing internationality through programs that enable students to go abroad and discuss global mobility as an option for future career projector.

The study implies, that human capital has the strongest effect on one's motivation and courage to strive for global mobility by either making global mobility to seem accessible and exciting or inaccessible and foreign. Especially in the case of SIE's this distinction is important, as the will to pursue global mobility is fully bound on their own effort and investments to go and work abroad. This said, through more internationally oriented education and professional experience, global mobility becomes more approachable, thus generating more SIE women. This is an important notion, due to the gender gap in global mobility, having women as an underrepresented group among expatriates (Kirk, 2019).

As per the findings, the different attributes contributing to human capital and moreover global mobility form more complex linkages, supporting the initial assumption of the strong effect that individual background has on the relationship between human capital and global mobility of SIE's. As all of the SIE's of this study came from various demographic and socio-economic backgrounds, putting different emphasis on networks, clear implications to the research question number two can be made.

Starting from demographic and socio-economic factors, in relation to Kirk (2019), notion to the lack of female representation within expatriate exposure, what came about was that gender-bias is also apparent within certain industries, in the context of this study, especially in tech. Women were also underrepresented in leadership positions which was seen as discouraging and frustrating among the interviewees. From this, it can be implied that gender bias feeds more gender bias in a sense that when there's a lack of female representation in certain fields and roles, women aren't as likely to apply for them either. This perception is also supported by Grover (2015), that by promoting more women in certain fields/roles, companies and managers can create a positive effect in generating more female candidates and furthermore break a glass ceiling. This furthermore has implications towards human capital in a sense of more women acquiring to certain fields of study and hence create more competent women in fields that are typically male-dominant. Moreover,

this directly affects global mobility for women as they will get more visibility and accessibility to different commercial fields and industries.

Another significant demographic attribute contributing to human capital and global mobility is nationality and furthermore racial attributes. What is apparent is that nationality has racial implications and certain nationalities are more prone to experience negative prejudices such as racism. Racism clearly affects negatively towards both human capital and global mobility as it can prevent one from going abroad and seeking international experience. As human capital is not only education but also the skills and knowledge one has, barriers for global mobility directly influence the extent, quality, and quantity of human capital. This furthermore feeds into biases and creates differentiation between nationalities. Thus, it can be implied that SIE's seeking global mobility that come from similar nationality to the host country's nationality have more favourable objectives to those that come from a differing nationality with visible racial differences.

Racism is also linked to perceived socio-economic status and one's position in society. As brought up in the interviews, racism creates bipartition in society to them who are national of that country and to those who are foreign there. The perception furthermore emphasises the feeling of foreignness in a country as someone who doesn't belong there and thus prejudice and racism takes place. This affects in a way, that in the context of this study, interviewee 6 was determined to essentially return to the country of origin, referring it as a place they belong and can prosper. This likely poses as a great barrier for people of certain nationality or race to pursue global mobility as racial prejudice is anticipated and thus, can affect significantly one's motivation for global mobility. Interestingly, the data states that this can especially affect female SIE's as racism and racial discrimination seems to be channelled especially towards women.

Regarding other socio-economic attributes, the most significant differentiating factor is marital status. As assumed, single SIE's perceive to have more flexibility and freedom towards global mobility as they aren't constricted by a spouse or children. They can make quick moves and decisions regarding relocation and in that sense, be more career focused. However, contrary to perceiving spouses and partners as solely restricting global mobility, especially in early careers, they can also facilitate global mobility. As was with interviewee 5, her initial decision to move to a different country and create a career there, was triggered by having a partner there. At this point of time though, she had just graduated which might have made such global mobility easier. It can be assumed, that global mobility during later in her career might have not been as swift and thus, the emphasis on early careers. Supporting the initial thinking around relationships forming barriers for global mobility, lack of support or difficulties in adjustment from the partners side can debilitate global mobility. The importance of spousal adjustment is heightened by Caliuguri & Bonache (2016) as well, as the satisfaction of a spouse during global mobility has great implications for the overall success of global mobility.

Young children also bring in extra responsibilities which can be heightened during global mobility due to the lack of networks. As emerged from the findings, SIE's with children put a lot of emphasis on wishing to have family around to support with taking care of children, a resource that can't be compensated through other channels.

Family can also be seen as part of having supportive networks which was highly important for all of the SIE's in the study. Support from family was seen as essential resource throughout global mobility, more in the sense of mental support rather than monetary support. The influence of family to human capital was also highlighted in the context of education by some of the SIE's, whose family's resources and influence effected the type and quality of education they had received. Other networks such as friends and colleagues were also brought up as an asset for global mobility. This aspect is also supported by the findings by Reimers-Hild et al. (2007), who discuss the importance of establishing networks inside and outside of organization for career success, especially in the context of women (Ballout, 2007; Nabi, 2001). Pre-established networks can significantly lower the barriers for global mobility in the form of generating confidence, providing information and giving support in a foreign environment. This too, however, is more appreciated by SIE's who haven't got extensive experience of living abroad than those who have, emphasising the distinction of prior international experience.

Overall, it is fair to say, that personal attributes have wide implications on human capital in the context of global mobility. Each attribute can either promote or create barriers for global mobility, as to what extent, it varies depending on the person and situation. Distinguishing these interplays and furthermore implications is important in order to make global mobility more equal and accessible opportunity for all, especially for women. When understanding how female SIE's pursue their careers internationally, we can further work on the barriers and typical downfalls of global mobility and tackle issues that create inequality and discrimination. Furthermore, the implications emphasise the importance of distinguishing and issuing the barriers women face in a wider context, industry wise in order to facilitate global mobility of SIE women.

## **7.1 Limitations of the study**

Addressing the limitations of the study, it's important to note the timely as well as geographical limitations. The study was conducted over a fairly short period of time and certain themes such as gender bias are constantly evolving as they are being distinguished in a wider scope and discussed in societies, companies, and media. The study was also conducted in Luxembourg by interviewing Luxembourg based female SIE's. Luxembourg is distinguished in being a highly multicultural environment with almost half of the country's population being

originally outside from Luxembourg. This said, it's likely that the relationship of different attributes can differ would the study take place in some other part of the world. Due to its multicultural setting and advanced commercial industry, Luxembourg is a popular country for expatriates all over the world and thus, its general environment is possibly more favorable for expats from different backgrounds.

Another limitation is also the number of interviewees as in this study, 6 SIE women were interviewed. Most of them were in their early careers, limiting their experience and perspectives of global mobility. This as well, will most likely develop over time and through more holistic experience of global mobility in different countries. All the interviewees also worked in the same industry; thus, the study doesn't account for industry specific differences, implying that the attributes in this study might not hold the same significance if the study would be widened for more diverse set of industries.

As the study didn't include any male interviewees, the experiences of male SIE's can't be compared with the women SIE's of this study, providing a direction for future research.

## 8 CONCLUSIONS

Global mobility is a constantly growing phenomenon among business professionals as well as within companies. Especially SIE's are emerging more and more, as people seek to actively develop their competencies and professional experience in international setting. This is also result of companies appreciating more international experience and talent in the globalized world (Biemann & Braakmann, 2013). This study puts focus on female SIE's and how they approach global mobility and the attributes contributing to this. The implications of study are important in understanding the relationship of different attributes and global mobility of SIE women which in contributing to the previous studies that address the different barriers women face when striving for global mobility.

As mentioned by Caliguirri & Bonache (2016), the initial barriers preventing women from pursuing international careers have been distinguished by previous studies, such as by Adler (1987). This study addresses the gap in research and contributes to the continuous SIE research by further bringing about the relationship of different personal attributes and global mobility intensions of SIE women. By better understanding how different attributes influence global mobility of SIE women, we can further break the barriers and support and increase the representation of women in the expat population.

Brought up in the findings, perhaps the most significant impact on global mobility of SIE women root in education, whether it's promotive or deliberating towards global mobility. Such differences on the outlook towards global mobility within education clearly differentiates how their students see global mobility as an option for their future career. Other important attributes were gender representation within an industry and managerial positions, racial prejudice as well as support from one's networks during global mobility. This furthermore elaborates the complex nature of the relationship of different attributes on global mobility of SIE women.

The findings of this study are useful for institutions such as universities on how they can better promote global mobility for their students, especially female students and thus contribute to more global careers. The study also offers insights for companies and furthermore government bodies by addressing the key points to support SIE women when working and living abroad, such as providing networks, issuing gender and racial bias, and considering providing cultural and/or language training for SIE's - a concept that is common among traditional expatriates. Addressing the potential barriers, companies as well as governments can attract as well as retain more female SIE's which ultimately benefits all parties.

## 8.1 Suggestions for future research

This study shed light to how certain individual attributes affect human capital and moreover global mobility. However, there are still more to uncover in the field of female SIE's, how international careers are formed and how to increase female representation among globally mobile professionals. As mentioned in the limitations of this study, a more holistic understanding could be formed by cross-examining male SIE's and whether they regard the relationship of other attributes to global mobility higher than their female counterparts. This way, more thorough implications can also be made on the biases that SIE women face and whether global mobility is proves to be more favorable for men in certain circumstances.

Similar research could also be conducted in other geographical areas, which the author assumes to provide significantly differing implications. As the environment for global mobility is very mature in Luxembourg, it would be of interest to see how the perceptions of SIE women change when changing the location to other parts of the world such as to Asia. By examining more senior level SIE's, more in-depth comprehension could be made on the different attributes as well as how they have perceived to evolve over time. In addition to this, it would be insightful to also study SIE women who haven't got a higher education as this could prove to have implications to the importance and relationship of human capital in regards of global mobility.

Lastly, it would be of interest to study the ways in which different entities and stakeholders take the possible barriers for SIE women to pursue global mobility into account. From such research, further implications could be made on the best practices which could provide concrete applications to support SIE women and furthermore tackle wider issues such as gender bias among expats and within industries.



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