

Should I Stay or Should I Go? - A Migrant's Dilemma

Last month, Elżbieta A. Prucnal, Senior Consultant at Hays Construction and Property in Wrocław looked at the culture shock that many encounter when moving to a new country for work. This month she explores the dilemma faced by migrants who return to their home country.

Should I stay or should I go? That is the question that many migrants ask themselves. This month I look at some of the consequences of returning home after a period of working overseas. I explore the reasons why they decide to return home, and why it is not always an easy move, and I also give a few tips to make settling into the "old-new" culture a little easier.

Why return to the home country?

There are many reasons why people choose to migrate abroad, and also many reasons why they want to return to their home country. The most common reasons are usually related to personal, economic or political circumstances. A significant number of migrants return to their home country after short or medium term period of working in another country, usually after they have earned sufficient money to open new business, or buy property or land. Sometimes the migrants just don't feel like they have settled, and sense that they will forever feel like a guest. Many migrants move together as a family group, so if one or two family members decide to return to the home country, the rest of the family has to be taken into consideration. Sometimes, the economic climate changes, and it is no longer viable to work in the host country, especially if opportunities become scarce, or exchange rates become less favourable. Often, it is simply a case of homesickness – missing family and friends at home, and a strong sense of nostalgia.

Why it is so difficult to return home?

Returning home is an adaptation process. You became used to the new environment and the new cul-

ture for so long, and now you have to go through the whole process but in reverse – you feel like a stranger in your home country, in exactly the same way as you did when you arrived in the host country.

Possible psychological problems to returning to the home country.

If you read my article on culture shock last month, you will probably recognise that there are quite a few similarities in the psychological problems that are often encountered:

loss of identity – you don't know who you really are feelings of being lost, overlooked, exploited

loneliness – you hanker your friends from abroad anger, irritability and melancholy a sense of being powerless and unable to solve simple problems feelings of inadequacy or insecurity depression and ill health identifying with the foreign culture or idealising the foreign country and lifestyle

Family

Children often face problems in education, having to shift from one language, curriculum, teaching style and education system to another. They also have to leave friends behind, which is difficult at any age. A further issue is if they were born in the host country – your home country is then foreign to them.

Work

Returning to the labour market is not without its problems. You may find it difficult to find a role that meets your expectations, and you may find that you have to set your sights a little lower. A different working environment may also provide a headache, as every country has its own style of doing business. For instance, there are quite a few differences between a Polish

working environment and one in the United Kingdom.

Times change

A year ago, I could have said to a Pole in the United Kingdom, "Come back to Poland – there are plenty of opportunities waiting for you here, and you can earn as much as you would anywhere else in Europe". But as the economic downturn is increasing its bite, you just can't tell how things are going to work out, and it is impossible to forecast a situation. Unemployment is sadly a fact of life, and it can be tough coming to terms with it. It is important to recognise that others are likely to be in the same boat.

Tips to help you and your family adapt to life in the home country

First of all, make a plan – but be flexible with it

Do your research and find out the current situation of the labour market

Have you acquired any new skills during your time in another country? A foreign language for instance, can be a major asset

Be specific – target a particular town or region, and investigate the opportunities there

Make contact with a recruitment consultant in your home country, who will have a clear picture of the labour market, and will be able to give you specific advice

Resume your network from your home country – get in contact with a former employer or friends from college.

Make sure that you get a reference from your current employer – and better still, find out if there are opportunities with your current employer in your home country.

Try to acquire some professional qualifications in the host country – these should help you to advance your career.

Be realistic in your approach – don't expect to get results overnight.

Talk to friends who have returned to their home country – they should be only too happy to help, and will tell you about what worked for them, as well as what didn't.

Have you got somewhere to live? Make sure that you have comfortable accommodation.

A network of family and friends is crucial – they are your lifeline. Also make sure that you maintain contact with people from your professional life, as they can be an excellent source of information

The beginning or the end?

Living and working in another country is not without its problems, but the advantages can certainly outweigh the disadvantages. So many people have had really positive experiences of working in another country. Anyone asking themselves the question "should I stay or should I go?" can only really answer the question for themselves. Not everyone is up to living a cosmopolitan – or even nomadic – life, and that's fine. At the end of the day, it's all about making the decision that is right at that moment in time. ■

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