

transfer

INFORMATION FOR REPATRIATING PROFESSIONALS

Moving and living abroad

Development Service
Experiences of
Spouses and Families



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as a five-person
family

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Dear Reader,

The subject of “Family Members and Development Service”, in all of its facets, is one that is very close to our heart. We already dealt with the theme of “Third Culture Kids” in an interview last year in *transfer* (01-2017). This year, we would like to devote a whole issue to the subject. So as to also reach non-German-speaking development service professionals and their spouses or partners, this *transfer* is for the first time appearing in a German and an English edition.

Anyone who decides to engage in development service has to accept that they will be leaving a familiar environment for a foreign country with a different culture. However, not only the development service professionals have to be willing to accept different living and working conditions, but also the other members of their family.

Time and again, in discussion with returning development workers, we hear how important it is to have the support of one’s partner and family members. For example, one returnee said of her accompanying husband: “Without his continual appreciation, I would never have had a chance of making it.” And studies also prove this aspect.



But what does it mean to go on development service with your partner? Giving up your own workplace and looking for a new occupation at the site? Looking after the children? Accompanying does not just mean supporting your partner in the development service, but also shaping your own life in the country of deployment and establishing your own areas of activity.

And it is not just leaving together that poses questions – new challenges can also emerge when returning after development service. For example, children can in many cases regard the country of deployment as more of a home than their parents’ home country.

Some relationships and families come into being during development service. The “return” to Germany is then more like a move to a new, sometimes even foreign country.

And there are also couples who maintain relationships over long distances, because partners cannot always go with them. The reasons for this are many and varied. And here too, there are various challenges to be overcome.

There are many facets to the subject of moving and living abroad. The contributions of spouses as well as expatriation and repatriation experts in this edition show the variety of experiences.

Happy reading!

Silke Wesemann

Silke Wesemann

Editorial

Challenging and enriching

From Germany to Tanzania as a five-person family

We are in the middle of a traffic jam in Dar es Salaam. Next to the cars, vendors are walking up and down, offering absolutely everything from windscreen wipers to cushions, bedclothes and vegetables to aquariums and puppies. It feels as if the temperature and humidity are rising every minute, and while we adults are observing the bustle around us in wonder, our children are bored and very thirsty. Unfortunately, the street vendors do not have any water for sale.

In May 2017, we moved with our children – Ronja (7), Kalle (5) and Mats (2) – from Erlangen in Germany to the Indian Ocean, to Lindi in Tanzania, where my husband is working for GIZ as a Paediatrician and Development Advisor. Of course, we gave it a lot of thought in advance, but despite this we were not really prepared for what awaited us.

LOTS OF IMPROVISATION NECESSARY

In particular, we underestimated the difficulties of our arrival in Lindi with the children – even from a purely logistical standpoint. There was no house we could move straight into, so we stayed in a hotel at first. After moving into our own four walls, our time was then taken up organising things that would be taken for granted in Germany: water, transporting five people without a car of our own, electricity, cash, communication, shopping. At the same time, however, right from the first day my husband had professional commitments, working full time, including trips lasting several days.

As a tip for other families – if we had to do something similar again, one of us parents would probably “go out ahead”. How helpful this is depends, of course, on the

possibilities of obtaining relevant information in the run-up or finding people on site able to take over the initial “care”. Being able to form your own impression on the spot is certainly worth a lot!

Without three children “in tow”, one can also endure days without a midday meal, if – as in our case – there is no street-food before sundown because of Ramadan, but you do not have your own kitchen either. For some aspects of day-to-day life, the approach “Everything will be okay!” can also work with children, but when it comes to fundamental things like food, a place to sleep, and running water it becomes difficult. An orientation phase for the whole family, without my husband having to start work immediately, would certainly have been helpful for us.

CHILDCARE AND SCHOOL

My role as an accompanying partner (AP) has been very closely interconnected with the children’s day-to-day life from the beginning. This is a big adjustment for me, in comparison with the superb forest kindergarten that our children attended in Germany. I have very limited scope for freely dividing up

my time here. At the moment our seven-year-old daughter is attending a local primary school for half-days on four weekdays. And on Wednesdays I complete the German primary school programme with her at home. From eight to eleven o’clock, our five-year-old son is at the pre-school of a Catholic parish, which is run by a nun.



© privat

Wiebke Bornschlegl with her children upon arriving in Tanzania in May 2017

Now, a good year after our move, there are still many challenges, but also countless things that are going very well. There are now few reminders of the genuinely stressful early days, which lasted six to eight months and were unexpectedly and extremely challenging because of two bereavements in the family.

And three-year-old Mats is at home with me or with our invaluable gardener Hamisi and the home help Pili.

The Catholic pre-school is a really beautiful place for children up to six years old and we are very happy to have found it. The children there are looked after and taught in an esteeming, non-violent, approachable and age-appropriate way. The situation at the primary school, on the other hand, is more difficult. Corporal punishment with canes is legal in Tanzania and is practiced at this school. Even if our daughter was never personally affected by this, she still of course notices the punishments of her fellow students. For us this means regular meetings with the school administration and recurrent brooding over whether it is acceptable for us to send her there. On the other hand, we would like to make it possible for her to have regular good contact to children of her age, which is primarily possible at this school due to the rather isolated location of our house. It is a big challenge that arises in various aspects of life but especially in the school situation: one must try to not link every conflict to the big picture. In Germany too, many children dislike getting up early and in Germany too there are teachers and fellow students that one likes more or less than the others. Nevertheless, the search for a good school and alternatives, such as a correspondence school, is always a recurring issue.

As far as the acclimatisation of the children is concerned, their age plays a major role, in our experience. For example, it was more difficult for Ronja, our eldest, to leave behind good friends and relatives in Germany. And Mats, the youngest, found things easiest when it came to the languages aspect – after a good year here, one can address him in German, English or Swahili and he will reply in each case without hesitation.

CONTACT TO THE LOCAL PEOPLE

For me personally, the challenge of learning the language has remained, as has my desire to establish contacts with the local population. As white Europeans – for example already due to having our own car – we are clearly in an exposed position, which shows itself in day-to-day life in different ways, e.g. through the generally large amount of attention, shouts, requests for financial support.

I am glad to have now established good contact with a church choir and to be able to take part in the rehearsals here every week. Contact is considerably less



complicated for my husband due to his daily work at the hospital and training courses in the district. It is also difficult to establish contact to the parents of our children's friends – although many children regularly come to play in our garden, the parents are normally not involved.

The Bornschlegl family on the beach of the Indian Ocean in Lindi

CONCLUSION

In summary, I can say that I find our time in Tanzania as challenging as it is enriching. I still cannot give a summarising appraisal of the acclimatisation of the children – their ages and personalities, and as a consequence also their adjustment to the new environment in Lindi are too different. In my opinion, there is no right or wrong approach and the individual differences are so large that generalised statements are not particularly helpful. It is certainly good to brace oneself for a stressful time and especially to bring plenty of patience. Working out one's own freedoms and the lack of options for one's own occupational life are subjects that are on my mind. Contact to the local population is a constant challenge – for the children too, who here experience a completely different kind of interaction between children.

It is impressive, motivating and fun to see how the children and also we ourselves are gradually adjusting to this foreign environment, getting to know people, finding friends, learning a new language, questioning things such as our own standards and values and taking up new ones as enriching or valuable. And last but not least: the gorgeous location directly by the Indian Ocean helps when it comes to organising our leisure time!

Wiebke Bornschlegl, since 2017 in Tanzania, GIZ

FURTHER INFO

If interested, you can read more on different subjects on our blog [intotheafrica](https://www.intotheafrica.de) – for example, there is a detailed article there on the school situation. Interested readers are welcome to contact me by e-mail at:

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A long-distance relationship

You have to feel out, how long you can be separated from one another.

No wahala (No problem); okada (motorcycle); A dey try (I am trying), all these words are familiar to me. While Julia was preparing to leave for Sierra Leone, I learnt that there are similarities between Krio, the local language of Sierra Leone and Nigerian Pidgin, a colloquial language in Nigeria and my native language. So I thought: "It'll be okay to go to Sierra Leone, at least I can understand the language."

I still remember the day Julia told me she wanted to apply for a job in Sierra Leone advertised by Bread for the World. When she finally received an invitation to attend the orientation course and interview, I knew it was serious. What was this going to mean for our relationship?

Illustration: Olamide Raimi



Olamide Raimi studies medicine in Bonn; his partner **Julia Krojer** was in Sierra Leone from 2013 - 2017 for DÜ/EED/BfdW

I am a medical student in Germany and my aim has always been to complete my studies here, while hers was to fulfil her dream by working in Africa. We have always tried to help each other to fulfil our individual dreams, so we made a list, comparing the pros and cons of her travelling. The pro list was longer, so I agreed to her working on another continent, but I wondered if our relationship would last.

DEPARTING FOR SIERRA LEONE

In August 2013, Julia left for Sierra Leone to work for an organisation called the Sierra Leone Adult Education Association (SLADEA) as a Documentation and PR Officer. We planned to see each other again in the Christmas holidays in Nigeria. This was our longest time apart during the whole three and a half years of her work with Bread for the World.

Deciding to leave one country for another poses challenges when you are in a relationship, especially when one partner is otherwise engaged. I was studying and had exams to prepare for. I would have to travel often and prepare for my exams abroad in an unfamiliar place with certain distractions. I expected a difficult situation.

I visited her for the first time in January, 2014; I was in Sierra Leone for about four months. She came over for a visit to Germany in August 2014 and we finally got married. After our marriage, she returned alone to Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Our marriage led to many changes, such as our responsibilities towards each other and my position amongst her working colleagues. Our roles at home were different in that I had to do more of the caring. Germany is so much safer: I didn't have to worry about her when she went out, even at night. In Sierra Leone, by contrast, she became dependent on me for her safety, e.g., when men tried to force themselves on her. This happens in almost every country, but more frequently in African countries. Because of this, I was very concerned for her safety and acted as her bodyguard. Being with her drastically reduced these experiences.

2015 was the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The seconded personnel were evacuated from Sierra Leone and Liberia. We travelled to Uganda and stayed there for three months for Julia's research on the Ebola virus. We went back during the Ebola virus outbreak, I decided to intern at a clinic in Sierra Leone, so I could be closer to Julia and boost my own curriculum vitae. This plan failed, however, because it was evaluated as too risky. Nevertheless, I had a long break from university and stayed with Julia for three months.

After getting married, nothing else changed in our relationship, except that I felt I was totally dependent on her. In Germany I worked but in Sierra Leone I couldn't, because she was there by contract and I wasn't. She earned the money and I was entirely financially dependent on her. I didn't like this and pondered ways of earn-

ing money. Then suddenly, because of my IT knowledge and creative skills, I had the opportunity to work in other parts of her organisation. I went on official trips with them and even represented the organisation at meetings.

After work I tried to support Julia as best I could. I prepared dinner, did the grocery shopping and took care of other tasks, which made things easier for her.

NOT AS EASY AS EXPECTED

Travelling away and returning has positives and negatives. I spent about 16 months with Julia outside Germany. Visiting different regions is a form of education. I knew Sierra Leone on a theoretical level, but being there was different. I met Sierra Leoneans and learnt a lot about their country, which is a beautiful place.

Being an African with a Nigerian passport, travel wasn't an easy experience because of the tight security. This is normal for many African countries. I often underwent thorough checks at airports, which I found unpleasant. Several times, my partner passed through the security checks while I was delayed. She usually came back to ask the security if everything was alright, and then they were forced to let me go.



Illustration: Olamide Raimi

To be frank, a long-distance relationship isn't as easy as I thought it would be. When I was in Germany it was often difficult to contact Julia. We spent days without phone calls because of bad connections. This happened so many times that we would argue when we could finally call each other again. I began to sense changes in her as a result of her long stay abroad. It suddenly dawned on me that the long distance wasn't a friend. This led us to deciding never to spend more than three months apart. This worked out better. If I couldn't go to Sierra Leone due to my studies, she found an opportunity to visit me in Germany. And that kept the relationship alive.

AN EDUCATIONAL TIME

I learnt a lot in those 42 months. A lot of things I never knew about development aid and organisations. Positive and negative aspects of course. No one is perfect. I met many people from different organisations, even

doctors and others in various medical fields who had plans similar to my own. I also got to know the different behaviour patterns Julia possesses in different situations. I believe I came to understand her much more than I would have if we had never spent time apart.

To anyone planning to conduct a long-distance relationship like I did, I'd advise you not to stay away from each other for too long.

The maximum period apart can always vary in different relationships. Each partner should be able to sense when he or she starts to become uncomfortable with the other's absence. This will reveal how long you can go without seeing each other. You must also understand that women and men perceive things differently. Each partner has to help the other get over his or her fears. Learn to work together and things will go as planned.

The good habits your partner associates with you are extremely important. It is very easy to adopt new habits when alone in a different world. Focus can easily be lost without a reminder. Your partner can remind you of your goals in that specific country. And when your partner isn't with you, avoid adopting new habits you know your partner would dislike.

Helping your partner achieve his or her dreams doesn't mean you won't achieve yours. In helping a partner to achieve a dream, you might achieve a lot more than you ever thought you could.

I'd like to end with an African proverb: "If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together".



Illustration: Olamide Raimi



The Grahm family with colleagues from United Mission to Nepal

First volunteer work, then a development worker contract

Moving to Kathmandu as a family

When I met my future husband, he had already been accepted as an applicant to the EED (the Church Development Service). We were married in 1998. At that time, no concrete offer for a position in the development service had been made yet, but I can't claim that I was clueless as to what was awaiting me. What that meant for my future personal life and career, however, was something I couldn't possibly have imagined. The EED only deploys families together, so I also had to occupy myself with the issue of development cooperation. I ended up also applying to the EED as a specialist. As a graduate industrial engineer (FH), in the field of advertising and advertising technology, I was accepted among the group of applicants with placement opportunities, but there was no specific vacancy at the time.

Then, in the year 2001, my husband was asked to go to Kathmandu for four years, to join the United Mission to Nepal (UMN). At that time, I was working for the advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather in Frankfurt, as their customer contact for the Schwäbisch Hall building society. Fortunately, they accepted my request for a leave of absence right away. This not only made me feel more secure while abroad – knowing I'd be able to return to my former job – I also felt it was a sign of appreciation for the work I had done.

ARRIVAL IN NEPAL

Before our departure, I participated in the preparation programme for accompanying partners. Apart from regional studies, this mostly meant issues such as house-keeping and domestic staff. And indeed, these turned out to matter quite a bit. When we arrived in Kathmandu, Nanu Didi was already inside our home, opening the

door to welcome us with a freshly-baked cake and the first groceries had already been bought. In Nepal, I was able to continue my professional career partly thanks to Nanu Didi, our housekeeper. The more hours I spent working, the more hours she also worked, looking after our daughter and the household. But first, there was a three-month language & orientation program (LOP). At that time, our daughter Lina was one and a half years old. During some of the LOP sessions, I was able to take Lina with me, other times, she stayed with Nanu Didi. Everyone - including the accompanying partners - then took part in a one-week work orientation. That is how I met the team of the Communication Office.

After three months, my husband started his full-time employment and I stayed at home with the baby – a very traditional division of labour.

LOOKING INTO VOLUNTEER WORK

Luckily, it did not take long for me to make new friends and create a social network. A group of young mothers and their small children soon invited me to their weekly gatherings. Many of my new friends had found volunteer work where they were directly in touch with and helping people in need. Some, for example, visited and supported hospital patients who did not have any family or relatives.

I remember being very impressed by how everyone was so committed in some form or another. I wanted that for myself as well and decided to offer my talents where they would be able to create the greatest impact – whether in a regular job or on a volunteer basis. I was soon able to start a mini-part time job in the department of the UMN that dealt with women's causes – one

afternoon per week. My volunteering then quickly evolved into a regular part-time job in the Communication Office, where I worked as a Marketing Advisor.

A DEVELOPMENT WORKER CONTRACT OF MY OWN

15 months after our arrival in Nepal, with the support of the EED, I also received a development worker's contract. This did not alter our family maintenance allowance, but I was now covered by social insurance. After the end of the EED contract, I would have been entitled to claim unemployment benefits, which I luckily never had to do. It also meant that contributions were paid to my pension scheme, which I will appreciate once I retire.

By now, I was fully integrated into the everyday work of the department: this meant producing printed materials for public relations, supporting various projects, helping with donor relations and information, and the like. Then, the 50th anniversary of the UMN was approaching, and they asked me to fill the vacant "Team Leader of the 50th Anniversary Celebrations" position. I happily accepted and soon found myself in a whirlwind of preparations for national and international events of all kinds. Volunteers, friends and supporters of the UMN from many different countries contributed fascinating material, which our team then turned into "products": for example a fundraising appeal in seven different languages. And all this despite the fact that foreign languages had never been my forte. By that time, however, I was already working and dreaming in English. I have my patient English-speaking colleagues and friends to thank for this.

RISING TO THE EXECUTIVE LEVEL

In February 2004, they offered me the position of Marketing Director, and I accepted this job as well, now leading the busy marketing department with its nine employees. In my role as Marketing Director, having concluded the 50th anniversary celebrations, I now belonged to UMN's top management team and had a seat and vote in the Leadership-Team. At that time, the UMN employed about 1,200 people.

A career at the UMN had not been my intention when I went to Nepal with my husband. However, joining first as a volunteer, then working part-time, then becoming a consultant and part of the management team was always compatible with my status as an accompanying partner.

When I led the working group that was preparing the anniversary festivities, and especially later when I had joined the Leadership-Team - responsible for projects and a group of staff - my work and I became more and more visible, both internally at the UMN and for the EED. Making my employment contract more secure was both confirmation and motivation for me at the same time. However, most of my validation and appreciation came from the work itself. I like to remember the great feeling I had when I helped to organise our successful interna-

tional fundraising campaign. It was wonderful to then decide how the funds we had raised were going to be used for efficient and visible support measures in UMN projects.

RETURNING TO GERMANY

As we were getting ready to return to Germany, my mother-in-law passed away and our son was born. So, back in Germany, we moved into her home in a village in the Kraichgau. My husband resumed working in Ofenbach, commuting to Kraichgau on weekends to be with us. Due to the previous leave of absence that I had taken for the time abroad, I was now entitled to take parental leave instead of taking up my former job again. Towards the end of my parental leave, however, it became more and more obvious to me that I no longer fit into the world of a large advertising agency, and so I ended this employment relationship. During the week, alone with two kids, I was unable to find employment with any of the local businesses - that was a bitter disillusionment.

In order to increase my job opportunities, I spent several months training as a desktop publisher. That way, I planned to not only give advice on marketing measures and advertising strategies but also wanted to become able to implement these myself. As a one-woman advertising agency, I started to offer my services locally, doing press work, advertising campaigns, vehicle labelling and corporate design development. My customers were craftspeople and service providers.

Many years after my return, in the summer of 2016, I attended a seminar offered by the Förderungswerk, the reintegration program of the Association of German Development Services. Following this seminar and equipped with fresh self-confidence, only two applications were necessary to lead to two promising vacancies.

Our children have by now become independent, and I have returned to the world of working in an office, together with colleagues. In 2016, I ended my life as a freelancer and am now a regular employee again. I work in the field of print production for the Protestant Superior Church Council of the Protestant Church in Baden.



Sigrun Graham
industrial engineer,
Dipl. Wirtschaftsingenieurin,
2001 - 2005: Nepal, EED

Discovering a known and unknown land as a new home

Closing one chapter, opening another and remaining open



Limor, Romy, Lia, Noa and Christina Bermann-Harms, and Dubi the bear in front of their townhouse in Berlin.

Christina Bermann-Harms, 2008 - 2010: Israel/Palestine, ForumZFD 2013 - 2018: Israel/Palestine, EIRENE

I got to know my life-partner Limor in 1999, at a German-Israeli-Palestinian-Swedish Youth Camp – we were teamers for the Israeli and the German organization respectively. This was my first deep dive into the complexity of the triangle Germany-Israel-Palestine. It was followed by 16 years in the context of Israel and Palestine, most of them as an employee of the Civil Peace Service (CPS) in the context of conflict transformation and for the support of Palestinian and Jewish human rights advocates – while Limor pursued her own career in the education sector. The time flew by and now we are a German-Israeli family: two mothers, three daughters aged ten, ten and eleven, a dog, several cats and fish – feminist and secular; grandparents who survived the Holocaust or who went to war for Nazi Germany or who benefited from the exiling of the Jewish Germans. Always in the field of tension between German, Israeli and Palestinian politics and society.

In 2018, we added a further chapter to the adventure novel “Exploration of the Different Contexts”: at the end of March I was offered a position in an international NGO in Berlin. After some initial jitters we plucked up courage – and then everything had to move very quickly. I was meant to already start in my new position at the end of April, while Limor and our daughters would stay in Israel until the end of the school year in July. Two aspects were especially important to us in the

planning: the first was bringing our time in Israel to a close – but without burning bridges. After all, Israel is part of our family identity.

And the other was to prepare well for our time in Germany with the children, to provide them with a good foundation for their integration into a complex German society that is itself changing, with increasing antisemitism and xenophobia.

GOODBYE, ISRAEL

It was essential for us to close the chapter “Israel” in a planned and deliberate way, in order to free up energy for new experiences and impressions: we encouraged our daughters to help

decide what we wanted to take with us, and what can be sold, given as a gift or even thrown away. And we were looking for ways to remember times and experiences that would soon belong to the past.

For the children, closure also meant saying farewell to friends and our extended Israeli family. At first, we wanted to keep the farewell phase as short as possible, but relatively soon it became apparent that the move was so much on the children’s minds that “secrecy” was out of the question. The announced leave-taking then caused some friends to immediately distance themselves – but at the same time the majority of the friends intensified the friendships.

Lia deliberately met children that she had not yet got to know, because if she did not seek contact now she would have no opportunity after our move – and she did not want to miss such opportunities.

Noa, on the other hand, spent every free second with her three best friends, without whom she could hardly imagine life. In the last month, the three slept over at one of their respective friends almost every night. Everything was crowned by surprise parties arranged by their friends, and the “official” farewell celebration which Limor organized for them. In addition to this they discussed how they could stay in contact with their friends: some already said that they would visit us in Berlin, others decided to phone every day, others counted on our

next holiday in Israel. So in retrospect the three months of slow leave-taking proved to be helpful. Unexpectedly, we received support from a television team that wanted to shoot a documentary film about Israeli families' relocation abroad. After initial doubts, we saw this offer as a way to make a very special record of our move for our children. The television team interviewed us and the Israeli grandparents, but the focus was on the children. Each of them received their own camera and filmed themselves when they wanted to record their feelings or thoughts about the move (we checked their statements were "inoffensive" before the television team got to see them). They will still keep the cameras until spring 2019. This way we have the opportunity to add another layer of reflections of our impressions and feelings.

HELLO GERMANY

Before I started at my new position, we flew to Berlin for a week to gather impressions. We checked out different residential properties together and took our daughters with us to different schools. When, at the end of May, we received the information that our favourite school had actually accepted us, it came as an enormous relief for the children but also for us. Looking for a home together was also an important step in arriving: thanks to the concrete apartment showings we were able to discuss the different needs and wishes of our family members, and how these could be fulfilled. The family council then voted for a particular row house that we moved into in the middle of July.

On the day of their arrival, the girls ran excitedly through the new apartment – delighted that there were already mattresses with animal motif bedclothes and wardrobes. First, the toys, games, bears, cuddly toys and clothes brought in eight suitcases were put away. In the end, everyone had a room of their own, to arrange just how they wanted.

Romy was eager to try out her German: wherever she was, in the supermarket or at the post office – she spoke German. But then a few youths heard her talking and made fun of it. In the evening she could not go to sleep: "What if I can't find any friends, because I speak German so badly?" Following this, she thought again of the children's films in which the "newcomers" always had to first prove themselves in a new class before being accepted. Our eleven-year-old Noa was also mainly worried that her German would not be good enough for her to understand everything at school. This bothered her so much that she despaired when she did not understand every word during the story reading before bedtime.

Such challenges offered the opportunity for us to discuss our respective experiences – when have the different members of the family felt alone and excluded? What did they do? What else could one have done? And – very important from our point of view – there was also the message that everything is not always sweetness and light, nor does it have to be. We grow from chal-

lenges and even failures – and it is entirely legitimate to be afraid, and to be upset when other people make fun of you.

Another important task consisted of building up a social network in Berlin. Of course, this included long-time friends and former and new colleagues, but we also deliberately looked for contact with Israelis living in Berlin with children.

In addition, we looked for a neighbourhood inhabited mostly by families with young children. Noa, Lia and Romy are very open girls, who normally find it easy to strike up a conversation. In our Berlin neighbourhood, there are a lot of children who grow up bilingual. But our girls were too shy to speak to these children themselves. When we invited the other children to play with them, our daughters were horrified – and we were baffled at first.

A few days later, all three took part in a one-day event for Israeli children – and our daughters were so enthusiastic, they even forgot to say goodbye to us as they went off with the group. When asked what the difference was between these children and the others, they explained that it was the language. They felt too uncomfortable with their German to approach the neighbourhood children in a relaxed way and in expectation of a positive response.

Intercultural differences were also apparent: In Israel our daughters were regarded as relatively calm – here they were regarded as quite loud and were received a few times unfriendly comments from old ladies on the underground. This led to the question of why it should bother other people when children pass the time by dancing and singing to beat the boredom of a railway journey.

And there was astonishment at the contradictions to be found in German culture as in any other culture: "Why does it say in the underground that it is forbidden to consume food and drink there – but in the afternoon so many people there drink lots of beer?" "Why do you sometimes have to show your bus ticket and sometimes do not?" Such questions indicate the advantages of the change in perspective made possible by a move from one context to another. To some extent, this will decrease the more we become a part of German society. Hopefully, we will retain it to some degree, however, because questions such as these preserve one's curiosity and ability to criticize things that are supposedly normal. With this in mind – may we keep the tension and dynamism between inside and outside, belonging and being different.

The next two adventures are already on the agenda: the first day at school and the search for a new job for Limor.



Helmut Bendsen (right)
with extended family

Reflecting without anger

A fulfilled life as an accompanying partner with highs and lows

My career as an accompanying partner (AP) began way back in 1991 and lasted for almost 25 years, until my wife Hannelore retired. 25 years – from the point of view of today's GIZ, an unbelievably long time as an AP. There will no longer be anyone like me, so I will probably go down as the “dinosaur” in the history of APs.

HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

Surveying was the field of my training, and I learned it from scratch. After my time as a trainee, I qualified for the Higher Technical Administration Service. A secure career as a civil servant was taking shape.

We decided to go into development cooperation, however, and in Botswana both found work as experts for the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). In that country, we then worked for various employers for ten years. We got married and had two children. When our daughter reached school-age, we decided to return to Germany.

We bought a house but soon felt the pull of faraway countries again, so we applied for jobs at the German Development Service (DED), which still existed back then. During an event for the selection of new staff, they offered Hannelore a job in the Dominican Republic, I was offered one in Yemen. Since we definitely wanted to stay together as a family, we ended up choosing the Dominican Republic. That was the start of my life as an accompanying partner.

GOING TO CENTRAL AMERICA AS A FAMILY

Well-prepared, the whole family left for the Dominican Republic in April 1991. At first, my job was to clean up

the house and garden. Lots of helping hands were offered and pretty soon we had two housekeepers and a gardener. Where did this leave me? Our three-year-old son “justified” my existence, definitely needing me on a regular basis. But in a country such as the Dominican Republic where machismo isn't exactly a rare occurrence, I often felt like an oddball, someone to be pitied. Insults and snide remarks went over my head, however, as my mediocre Spanish skills kept me enveloped in blissful ignorance.

Hannelore's task was to produce a map of the vegetation of the entire country using digital satellite image analysis. It took a long time before the necessary software and hardware arrived. Our son became more independent, and I started to do volunteer work for the “Natural Resource Inventory Authority.” Thanks to my training as a geodesist, I enjoyed working with complex geoinformation systems. So just add an M to the AP, and you'll know what I was working on. Thanks to this job-sharing arrangement, which the ministry respected and valued, we were able to work very flexible hours. That was a huge advantage for us as a family.

JOINING MY WIFE IN BOTSWANA

After more than a year off back in Germany, we contacted the DED again. Hannelore was offered a job at the Okavango Research Centre at the University of Botswana.

Being an AP in Botswana presented a completely different situation. We quickly realised that we weren't going to be able to continue our job-sharing arrangement from the Dominican Republic. Hannelore's colleagues were

worried that I would become an unpleasant competitor. So I did some work from home, helping her with the bookkeeping, proof-reading for many publications and acting as her driver and mechanic during business trips. Schools did not exist there in the way we knew them in Europe, so we became involved in a parents' initiative and started running our own little school. We converted an old chicken house, which was located on our property, and turned it into a school. Teachers from various countries taught the nine students of different ages. In addition to academic education, the concept of this school also included a focus on strengthening the social skills of the students.

Our "Chickenhouse School" kept me busy - there was always enough to do. Most of the time, I was dealing with organisational issues or logistics of some kind. For our own kids, those were their favourite school years. After more than seven years, we returned to Germany. Our daughter had started studying at the university and our son had just completed high school in Windhoek, where the nearest secondary school was located.

UZBEKISTAN: JUST THE TWO OF US

Then, in 2009, we were due to leave for Madagascar, this time without the children. Our bags were packed, all the preparations complete. One week before we were supposed to travel, there was a coup and our deployment was cancelled. We went to Uzbekistan instead – a completely different kind of challenge. Hannelore was supposed to support the local association of mountain farmers in developing rural tourism. We were the only foreigners in a small remote village in the mountains. At home, I wasn't busy enough, so I again contributed to the work that my wife was doing, in the NGO team. The Uzbek partners were happy about the additional support. I charted hiking trails, produced maps and was involved in the publication of brochures. Living conditions in Uzbekistan were not easy and constantly challenged my manual skills. Still, we really enjoyed those years. Our work there was very successful and respected, and the Uzbeks taught us what true hospitality means and how important it is to stick together as a family.

CONCLUSION

During my many years as an AP, staying in touch with the "mothership" and the country office of the respective deploying organisation was always very important. Thanks to my training and skills I was predestined to take care of most of the administrative and financial tasks. That way, my wife was able to focus on the actual project that she had been assigned to. And, during the years in which Hannelore represented the interests of development cooperation vis-à-vis the DED and the GIZ, there were quite a few disputes during which I was able to contribute my knowledge of the rules and regulations.

The integration and appreciation of the AP's declined noticeably over the years. At the beginning I received a



Helmut Bendsen
geodesist,
Dipl. Ing. Vermessungswesen

1991 - 1998:
Dominican Republic, DED
2000 - 2007: Botswana, DED
2009 - 2016: Uzbekistan, DED/GIZ

50 percent support payment, which was later reduced to 20 percent. During the early years there was no question about my participating in all the DED events. Later, I had to pay in order to attend the annual Christmas party. And after the merger, which resulted in the GIZ, I often felt treated like an outdated relic. Special regulations regarding the development service were mostly unknown to the new administration at first and compliance with these rules had to be insisted upon.

We've now been enjoying our retirement for the past two years, but sharper tongues claim that I already started my retirement 27 years ago. But I know that I had a fulfilling life as an AP, even though there were highs and lows of course. What remains are the many contacts with the people in the three host countries and the friendships with other development workers. As a family, we were lucky to spend many happy years together in other countries, and our children grew up trilingually. The greatest disadvantage for me is the pension scheme. My monthly pension is below 100 Euro, and my health insurance is covered by the family insurance. My status as an "ex-AP" means that I have become a financially dependent "appendage" of my beloved wife.

This kind of life, which we chose voluntarily, will no longer be possible within the current GIZ context – and that is something I find really unfortunate.



In South Africa, **Elvira Herschel-Kummer** has performed voluntary work in day care for schoolchildren

Finding the scarlet thread

On the search for identity and perspective

Why am I writing about my experiences as an AP? There are several reasons for this: firstly, I have often been asked what AP stands for. Sometimes even professionals in the development cooperation seem to be unfamiliar with this term. Secondly, the time as an AP has had a lasting effect on my life and that of my husband, and made it exciting. I left the country with him, that makes me an Accompanying Partner.

When my husband received a development aid contract from the EED/BfdW for South Africa and we were packing our suitcases, one thing was clear to me: Personal and interpersonal skills, adaptability and flexibility should be solid foundations for a life as an accompanying partner. I also regarded my skills profile as a nurse as a key factor in finding my role as an AP.

In the official and for me unaccustomed role as “wife of development worker Ulrich Kummer” – that was the description in the travel document – I travelled together with my husband to South Africa, often called the Rainbow Nation. Following the motto “everything will be fine”, I imagined with joy and motivation the challenge of living and working among the less privileged Cape Town’s townships. I would find some task in the project or outside of it.

CHALLENGES

What did that mean in day-to-day life? First of all, I faced challenges in the form of alteration work to our house. It took long until we were able to unpack our household goods and create a pleasant living situation for ourselves. My husband was working on the project

and I tried to master our everyday life with all of its new structures.

As immediate neighbours we were often in the role of “substitute parents” both for German youths from the “Weltwärts” programme and for international students who were firmly integrated into the organisation. I still remember quite clearly how, in some situations, well-meant (safety) advices collided head-on with the attitudes of young people from a European setting. As an accompanying partner I was not an official part of the staff of the organisation, but took on responsibility for all kinds of youthful crises.

The everyday challenges also included the responsibility transferred to us for a dog, a cat and 17 pregnant goats, which soon multiplied into a herd of 34. This was to be the start of an enduring love for animals. Following the motto “do it yourself”, I got to know gardening on sandy ground under African sun and discovered my preference for self-supply from my own garden.

There is no doubt that there were countless challenges for me – including those I do not like to remember: from a knife attack on the beach and many doctor’s visits to almost daily fires behind our house to break-ins and disturbed nights.

THE QUESTION OF ONE’S OWN IDENTITY

Whereas I was initially occupied above all with everyday tasks and adjustment to a completely different and unfamiliar life, I gradually developed the desire to follow my own scarlet thread. I did not want to lose myself, but

instead to pursue an activity that gave me an identity of my own.

When I was asked whether I wanted to work in day care for school children, in the context of “our” project, I accepted straight away. It was a pleasure for me to prepare myself on subjects such as a healthy diet and way of life and to discuss them together with the children.

Later I took the opportunity to extend my English language skills and attended a language school, which was also financially supported by EED/BfdW. In this period I then also developed my own friendships with our own enterprises – relationships which are still lively today. I felt how I was starting to “refinish something” and to work on my own identity.

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

The biggest challenge was then the decision to pursue an extra-occupational university course in “Medical Management” in Magdeburg from South Africa. I noticed my long-cherished desire to study while I was on a preparatory course for APs in Bad Honnef. Was this opportunity for occupational further development now going to come to fruition?

My husband supported me in this decision-making phase and motivated me to follow this scarlet thread in my life. But how was I going to master this challenge in very practical terms? My professional experience was all in practical work and not (yet) in the writing of scientific work and projects.

LIVING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

On its homepage the university advertised their courses with the slogan “Come to the lectures by plane from South Africa.” Yes, that is what I was doing. I regularly went to Germany to the attendance periods and examinations and was thus able to see my family and friends in the two years that still remained of our stay in South Africa.

I followed the majority of the lectures via Skype, however, because the university had acquired a camera because of me. And suddenly it was obvious that I was changing my time management in favour of the course. I was in the process of creating for myself a future-oriented structure of my own.

BACK IN GERMANY

Two years later, I was a happy university graduate. At first I planned to go into refugee work professionally, because I felt well-equipped for this with my range of international experience. In addition, I had also looked into the subject of the health care of disabled refugee children in my bachelor thesis.

What actually happened was very different, however: I had established contact with the AGdD, in order to receive help and advice on the application procedure. My focus in this was on medical industry, because I had, after all, extended my skills as a nurse through the course. The first application, with the support and really

kind, capable assistance of the AGdD, went so well that I was accepted straight away and am still employed for an unlimited period in nursing management at a maximum care hospital. Here, among other things, I am responsible for interns and volunteers doing a one year social service, and more and more frequently these are people with a migrant background. The scarlet thread in my life continues. I am really very pleased about this.

REPRESENTING AP INTERESTS

Accompanying Partners are known to play a decisive role in the success of deployments. Despite this, most of them ultimately stand entirely alone before the fact that they are expected to temporarily give up an enormous amount: above all their own identity or own occupational career. In my opinion, the previous “development worker/ deploying organisation relationship” should be turned into a triangle relationship, that involves the accompanying partner from the beginning and after the return, in order to both take their interests more into account and better value their performance and contribution.

Since our return I am now a selected and active member of the Returnee Committee (RKA) of Brot für die Welt, which deals with concerns of the development workers and returnees. Here I can cultivate newly found friendships, get involved and communicate with like-minded people, and beyond this give the APs a voice.



© privat
Elvira Herschel-Kummer
2009 - 2013: South Africa,
EED/BfdW

*In transfer 1/2017,
Angela Grünert
and Susanne
Blochberger report
on their work in
Brot für die Welt's
returnee committee.
[www.agdd.de/
transfer](http://www.agdd.de/transfer)*

AGdD'S ADVISORY SERVICES ON CAREER ORIENTATION

You can take advantage of our advisory services on career orientation already during your development service.

Go to www.agdd.de/beratung to enquire about consultations or write us an email at: info@agdd.de

Interview:

Handle your time abroad with confidence



©Melanie Köcher

Dr Ute Ohme is a musicologist and systemic coach. She has lived and worked abroad several times for longer periods, in Nepal, Zimbabwe, Turkey, and South Africa.

She was already actively engaged in addressing the concerns of “accompanying partners” during her time abroad. She now works in Berlin as a coach, focusing on the themes of International Mobility and Career Planning.

www.ohme-counseling.com
www.karriere-mobil.de

- **Mrs Ohme, you have lived abroad several times together with your husband, who works for the BMZ. What were the biggest challenges for you in this context?**

Well, of course there was a variety of challenges, the first of these was making the decision to go abroad in the first place. This also takes place in the context of a partnership or family, of course. But it is definitely important that you do not simply “go along”, but instead make your own active decision. The next challenge lies in the many practical questions relating to the relinquishing of the old site and the setting-up of the new one. Going abroad is of course more than a move. You have to say your farewells, build up new contacts, you might need to learn a new language, and then there is the matter of being able to find your way in a new country and a new culture. On top of that, there is a family responsibility to bear if you are travelling with children. And finally there will be more farewells before your return.

In my opinion, it is important to see and accept that there are really different phases in this whole process. After initial enthusiasm you can repeatedly find yourself going through stressful times, which have to be overcome with the necessary tolerance for frustration. A big challenge for me was having to find my own niche, over and over again. Whereas the partner has a specific, defined task, it is frequently not immediately clear to the accompanying partner what their life is going to be like. To let yourself in for this you need courage, openness, and lots of energy. If you can achieve this, then of course special opportunities will open up for you. For example, many accompanying partners maintain acquaintances or friendships with people from different countries for a long time.

- **What role did you assume during your stays abroad?**

There was not only one role, but several—some of which were deliberately chosen, others arose, or were bestowed upon me by others. Firstly, of course, I was the mother of children abroad, which is to say of children who also had to deal with two changes per post. Then, I was the family manager with many practical tasks: administrative questions, insurance questions and the like. For me it was always very important to find and develop my own role as an accompanying partner: as a musicologist, in my first stay of several years in Zimbabwe, I naturally sought contact to the culture and thus also to lots of exciting people. As a lecturer and organiser of music projects, I was a kind of cultural intermediary. I later achieved something similar in Turkey and South Africa. And of course I was always a partner and thus also a supporter. This is a role that has changed somewhat over the course of time. Previously, the posting organisations still expected you to support your partner to ensure that their task abroad was a good success: you were both regarded as more of a unit.

A change has occurred here. Now it is more accepted and even desired for you to pursue your own paths and interests.

- **How were you able to develop abroad, from a professional standpoint?**

I always sought out projects abroad very actively or organised them myself, first, as I mentioned, as a musicologist and then in adult education. These were normally unpaid activities, but in my professional fields. Through these, I gained insights for which I am very grateful. I cannot say, however, that I was able to develop my CV in this time – in the normal career sense. There were simply too many changes for this in my case, including within Germany. I later managed, however, to put together the different aspects of my professional activities and life experiences in a coherent picture with a golden thread and to work out a new career for myself – including through various kinds of training.

- **What advice can you give to partners of returning skilled personnel as regards their career re-entry?**

Above all, I would like to encourage them to always be confident about their own history, their professional biography and their time abroad, in which we learn a great deal and have valuable experiences. It is good to reflect upon these competences, to become aware of them, and make use of them.

Then I would advise you not to wait until you have returned before looking into the question of your working life. It is better to stay on the ball and to pursue the occupation actively if it is important to you. This does not at all have to be a formal appointment, because this is often not easily possible. There are also other ways to keep active.

- **How have you dealt with the “gaps” in your curriculum vitae?**

There are not actually any gaps in a curriculum vitae. It

is much more a case of periods in which we have not worked “officially”. It is sensible to state that you were abroad, and to describe what you did there.

I myself dealt with this creatively and used a different structure in my CV from what is usual: I arranged my curriculum vitae according to my respective place of residence and the duration of the stay, including my times in Germany. Under these headings, I then listed my activities and did not differentiate between formal employment and self-organised unpaid projects.

- **How important, in your opinion, are preparation and follow-up for accompanying partners?**

That is a very important subject! And I regard it as necessary for the corresponding services to really cater to the specific situation of the accompanying partners. They should, for example, include the options of the partners and above all contain very concrete information for the occupational activity.

Such services must not, however, be restricted to preparation and follow-up, they should be continually conceptualised. Many questions only arise once you have gotten to know your new location and its possibilities and limitations.

During my stay in South Africa, I started, together with a colleague, to organise workshops on site for accompanying partners, with a very positive response. To have purposeful discussions with like-minded people and to benefit from the experiences of others is especially important during the stay.

I continue to believe it is helpful to start preparing for your return while you are still at the location, because this step is not infrequently underestimated by accompanying partners. That is why I do not like talking about “outbound accompanying” partners (OAPs), but of accompanying partners. I now find the term of OAPs somewhat unsuitable, because the process of international mobility is more complicated than just an “outward voyage”.

- **You now advise and coach people who are internationally mobile. For example, in Berlin, you provided a project for the assistance of occupational integration or re-integration of returnees from abroad. What did this involve?**

This was a series of workshops for returnees and accompanying partners, who first came to Berlin. This was a case of reviewing and reappraisal, as well as looking into the future and working on a personal re-integration plan or integration plan. For example, we dealt with the fragmentation of one’s professional biography, and had very positive discussions about the opportunities of the new beginning.

It was very important for the participants to have a forum in which they could address their specific situation; for example, the great flexibility that they have to muster, or that they often have very mixed CVs which are difficult for employers to understand.

In these workshops it became clear how important the subject of “career” is: the financial dependency that arises without your own gainful employment was men-

tioned time and again as a great burden.

Some did not want to pursue the concept of “accompanying” at all. They regarded themselves much more as DCCs, as Dual Career Couples. Nowadays, it is normal for both partners in a relationship to practice an occupation, and this does not necessarily come to an end with international mobility.

In the context of this project, an internet portal www.karriere-mobil.de was created with a whole series of articles on the subject of “Accompanying and Career”.

- **You play a part in the AGdD forums for accompanying partners. Which subjects are dealt with in these forums?**

It is about offering a protected space in which sensitive subjects can be addressed. As in my Berlin project, we make it possible to look back on one’s past life situation, transition, current situation, and future prospects. Practical subjects also come up, such as methods for competence analysis. I find it especially valuable that the participants can benefit so much from sharing their experiences, asking each other questions and an intense exchange of information. Some people have told us that they would have liked to have had such a forum after their return or entry into Germany.

- **What kinds of support services would be necessary to make occupational stays abroad attractive for couples and families?**

I see with pleasure that some posting organisations are now paying more attention to the situation of the accompanying partners and developing appropriate services. This also applies to many posting companies, which have recognised that possible dissatisfaction of the accompanying partners can jeopardise the posting, and that willingness to go abroad falls when the partners do not want to interrupt their careers.

Despite this, I would like to see more consideration of the situation of the accompanying partners, or better the DCCs, and of the families, including the children.

More continuity is needed, in order to accompany the whole process, such as in the form of coaching services during the time abroad, or home leave, or in the form of internet-based workshop formats that can be used from abroad. This will certainly have to include topics such as dealing with claims from unemployment insurance or what you need to look out for in online activities.

And last but not least, these would not just be services for support; this would show clearer appreciation of the accompanying partners.

- **We thank you for this conversation, Mrs Ohme.**

Interview:
Dieter Kroppenberg

EXCHANGE FORUM FOR ACCOMPANYING PARTNERS

In 2019 the AGdD will be offering a discussion forum explicitly aimed at accompanying and returned partners, who would like to orient themselves occupationally and personally. In a small group, you can consider your situation and exchange information on your special resources and opportunities. It is planned to provide the forum in two languages (in German and English). Further info available at www.agdd.de/seminare

Difficult times in Bolivia

Joining the development service as a young family

At an altitude of almost 4,000 meters, breathing starts to get difficult. For me – five months pregnant – getting used to the thin air is even more difficult than for others. Every move feels like high-performance sports, and I just cannot handle everything the way I am used to.

Climbing the 20 steps inside our house, in order to reach and enjoy our garden, is a huge challenge for me.

UNDERESTIMATING THE ALTITUDE

Getting started in La Paz was much more difficult than we thought. We were perhaps also a bit too optimistic, or even naive, in our estimates about how long it would take us to adapt. On the other hand: it just is not possible to know ahead of time how the altitude will affect each person and how long it will take that person to adapt to it, especially if that person is pregnant. We also failed to really think through what it means to become involved in the “development service” as a family: my partner worked full-time, which in Bolivia means six days a week, from Monday to Saturday. Three days include working hours until nine p.m., the other three end at six p.m. Except for when our daughter born, when he was given two extra days off. Getting to where he worked took him between one to two hours, depending on the transport and traffic

situation and whether the bus drivers were on strike or not, for example. This means that my husband would leave the house at around 7:30 a.m. and not return until either eight p.m. or 10:30 p.m.

HOW WE ENDED UP IN BOLIVIA

We wanted to go out and explore the world, wanted to do something useful. We informed ourselves about various interesting development cooperation projects and participated in courses and workshops. We both applied to different projects abroad. I have a degree in educational science with a focus on social pedagogy and art therapy. I have additional qualifications and many years of experience in the field of violence against women and crisis intervention. My husband has worked in several

fields at once, and for example has experience as a peace expert. His involvement in a project of the Civil Peace Service is what eventually brought us to Bolivia. I am originally from Chile. Bolivia, as a neighbouring country, had always fascinated me. There are just as many differences as there are similarities between the two countries. Some aspects were completely new for me, while others were familiar. And since Spanish is my native language, I was of course able to immediately communicate without any problems in La Paz.

TIME FLIES

My husband worked in two neighbourhoods of El Alto, as a peace expert in various school projects. El Alto is a relatively young city, 500 meters above La Paz. It originally grew out of poor areas and slums that had sprung up around the airport and the industrial areas near the city. El Alto is a patchwork of disorganized and constantly growing neighbourhoods, and is expanding mostly due to domestic migration: poverty migrants, displaced farmers, indigenous people, climate refugees or “simply” people in search of better working and living conditions – those are the people of El Alto with its high potential for conflict.

During our stay, we lived in La Paz, mostly because of the better health care options, which we needed for myself in the situation I was in. My pregnancy and the birth of our daughter turned out to be quite strenuous at this high altitude. She was a premature birth, but she was able to survive because she had enough weight. Still, her life was repeatedly in danger during her first year. My days were filled with taking care of the baby and constantly rushing to and from various doctors and laboratories. In Bolivia, many of the tests and medical examinations are done in separate institutes and laboratories. You have to show up personally to make an appointment, then you go there for the appointment itself and then you need to come back to pick up the results in order to be able to hand them over to your doctor.

We lived in La Paz for three and a half years. Time went by so quickly, I did not get much of a chance to see the country. But even though my personal situation was characterized by the difficult birth and the health problems and vulnerability of my young daughter, I experienced La Paz as a vibrant and diverse city. I only got to know very few of its facets. And there is the entire country still, with all its cultural highlights and contrasts, that I want to go and explore someday.



Ingrid Reyes-Päcke with her daughter at the airport in El Alto

2012 - 2015: Bolivia, EIRENE

How to “return home” with children



Children often find it hard to say goodbye, especially when they only know their parents' home country from spending their vacations there. The following recommendations can help to make “returning” easier.

Start preparing your children for their goodbye early enough. Talk to them about the upcoming move, about the changes that will take place and about the new country that they will be calling their home. Make sure your children have enough time to say goodbye to their

friends and other significant people in their lives. Involve your children when making decisions, for example regarding how they want to say goodbye to, what they would like their new home and their room to look like. Older children can also become involved in small tasks, which will make the move more tangible for them. Think about which places you would like to visit together once more before you leave. What else would you like to do together one last time before you leave, and how do you want to celebrate your farewell? Take enough time for your child and try to stay relaxed about the move yourself. That will make your child feel more comfortable and secure.

Sources:

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Further tips and information are available on our online portal www.agdd.de/rueckkehr-mit-familie

Returning with partners from non-EU countries

When experts abroad find a new partner and that person is from a non-EU country, they must consider additional aspects when returning.

In order to start work, training, further education or studies in Germany, certified and translated copies of any certificates or diplomas are required (school leaving certificates, university entrance qualifications, university degrees, vocational training). Make sure to take care of this before you return/come to Germany. Foreign qualifications will not automatically be accepted.

WORKING IN GERMANY

Additionally, foreigners who want to work in Germany will need a work permit. The prerequisites for employment in Germany depend first and foremost on whether you are a national of a member state of the European Union, the European Economic Area, Switzerland or a non-member country. The conditions for work permits change every now and then, and it makes sense to obtain the most recent information directly from the Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees or the Employment Agency.

www.auswaertiges-amt.de

www.bamf.de

www.arbeitsagentur.de

For foreign specialists, the “Zentrale Auslands- und Fachvermittlung” ZAV (central agency for jobs and expertise abroad) offers information and placement opportunities. Comprehensive recommendations on issues such as “living and working in Germany” are available for example at www.make-it-in-germany.de.

You can find information regarding the evaluation of foreign educational certificates on the platform of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs: www.kmk.org

The “Recognition in Germany” portal and the “BQ-Portal” also provide information on the acceptance of professional qualifications acquired abroad:

www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de

www.bq-portal.de

The aim of the “Integration through Qualification (IQ)” funding program is to improve labour market opportunities for people with an immigration background. A major focus is advice on the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad. You can also get advice on qualifications in the context of the recognition laws of the federal government and the federal states in Germany.

You can find additional information on this website:

www.netzwerk-iq.de

STUDYING IN GERMANY

In addition to the recognition of certificates and university entrance qualifications, various requirements have to be fulfilled in order to be able to study in Germany. It is best to obtain the information directly from the respective universities. The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Rectors' Conference provide information on opportunities and requirements. There are also various distance learning courses.

www.daad.de/en/

www.hochschulkompass.de

THE “ANKOMMEN” APP

The “Ankommen” or Arrival app serves as a guide for the first weeks in Germany and contains a variety of information about the education system, entering the job market, and everyday life in Germany — from doctor's visits to road traffic.

www.ankommenapp.de

Coming full circle

Before, in and after Uganda

Our five-year stay in Uganda ended in 1999 and was followed by partly intense bouts of "home"-sickness – a somewhat unexpected yearning for this far-away country we had lived in. One incident in recent years proved to me once again how strongly the time in Uganda influenced us as a family: our son, who was only seven years old when we left, surprised us with a tattoo of a map of Africa on his arm. These years abroad also had such an impact on my own life that I continue to split my past up into a time before, in and after Uganda. The same is true for the development of my professional career.

BEFORE AND IN UGANDA

Before moving to Uganda, I taught prospective educators at a vocational school for social pedagogy.

In Uganda, my husband worked as a teacher. As a so-called "accompanying partner", I looked after our three children, but also tried to find a rewarding and meaningful area of activity for myself. I managed quite well as a mother but finding any kind of additional occupation was very challenging. I had a hard time adapting to my "just" a housewife status and to "this is Mrs. Martin, the wife of Mr. Martin" introductions - especially during the first year.

Overall, I felt badly prepared for this situation or – to be honest – completely unprepared. So already during my time in Uganda, I started thinking about how accompanying partners, who join their husbands or wives without a contract of their own, could arrive in their host countries better prepared for the challenges awaiting them.

AFTER UGANDA

Right after our return I started working on further developing my idea. Returning to my job as a "conventional" teacher somehow would not have worked for me anymore. So I started to offer workshops, consultations and seminars to development cooperation- and church organisations and to commercial businesses. They were designed to better prepare accompanying partners for their role abroad.

During this process, my focus widened to include additional themes that started to seem relevant to me such as:

- What are the challenges that couples face abroad?
- What is it like to move abroad as a family?
- How do you deal with the immense and sometimes unexpected effects that the final return to the home country can have - what can help to cope with these?

I soon discovered, however, that the market for these kinds of offers was rather small, so I went back to my professional roots after a couple of years. In addition to offering seminars and consultations, I started to work in the area of integration at kindergartens and elementary schools.

Soon, I added further freelance assignments such as supporting families in handling their business with the youth welfare office and - most recently - working on a project of the Protestant Church in Württemberg: By providing advice and coaching, we support kindergartens in developing inclusive concepts for themselves. This includes dealing with children and parents who have an immigration background. The training of sensitivity towards other cultural backgrounds is an important element here.

All these freelance activities – diverse as they may seem – feel very connected in some way. They all require a similar set of skills, whether one is accompanying children with special needs or families in difficult situations, or working with partners and families who are going abroad or returning to Germany. What one needs is an openness for other cultures, for other forms or standards of life that do not overlap with one's own. It is important to be able to deal with values and norms that do not match one's own, and I often find myself immersing myself in new and often surprising experiences. I increasingly feel that I can combine my experience as a social pedagogue with that of my stay abroad in ever new ways. It feels like coming full circle. A beautiful experience.



Ilona Greiner and her family in Uganda

1995 – 1999: Uganda, CFI

SUGGESTED READING

Regarding the "going abroad and returning with your family" issue, I recommend the following books:

- Jochen Schuppener, Christine Schuppener: „30 Minuten - Rückkehr aus dem Ausland“ (GABAL)
- Heidrun Schröder-Kühne, Marianne Richter: „Familienmanagement im Ausland“ (Reise Know How)
- David Pollock, Ruth Reken, Georg Pflüger: „Third Culture Kids-Aufwachsen in mehreren Kulturen“ (edition TCK)

Debriefing – valuable support upon return

I was with Christliche Fachkräfte International (CFI) in Mozambique as an accompanying partner for six years. Our partner on-site was the Evangelical Church of Christ in Mozambique. My husband Christian worked in agriculture and I was also working with the church in various fields. Our three children were born during this time.

Several months before we returned we received the “Re-Entry Book” by Peter Jordan from CFI. CFI also informed us, in several e-mails, about everything that we had to take into account and organise in order to bring the stay to a good conclusion and to have a good start in Germany.

One month after our return to Germany, I was also able to attend a debriefing with my husband. This was financed by CFI and carried out by a married couple that had specialised in work with people in posting and return situations.

On the first day, we started off by talking through the phases of return, looking at our expectations before the posting, and finally reflected on everything that had happened in the past six years: beautiful and formative experiences like the intensive cooperation with the people on site, their gratitude and cheerfulness, but also difficult and sad things, including illnesses and even deaths of friends in Mozambique, an attack, and in the end also saying goodbye.

On the second day, we then considered the different stages of our stay until our departure from Mozambique.

On the final day, the objective was to find out what kind of characteristics and competences one has brought

from the posting abroad and which of these can be of use here.

These were three intensive, but beautiful days and it did us good to receive such an overview of our time in Mozambique. Personally, I found it helpful to get tips on handling the children, who did after all have to go through a major adjustment. And it was interesting to go through the debriefing as a couple and to see specifically what had influenced the other person.

The information and preparations before the return and the debriefing gave us helpful support for our re-entry in Europe. You need to be very patient with yourself. It is important to not just look back through “crying eyes”, but to see and recognise the valuable things you have brought from your time abroad that you can also use in Germany – such as understanding of a different culture and satisfaction with life.



The Schlötterer family with their children shortly before the journey back from Mozambique.

2011 - 2017:
Mozambique, CFI

CFI-Debriefing

Christliche Fachkräfte International e.V. (CFI) offers debriefings for their returning development service professionals including accompanying family members. Various external neutral coaching and consulting firms are commissioned to support personnel in intercultural transitions, who, together with the returning development service professionals and their accompanying family members, consider and reflect on the whole deployment abroad, mostly chronologically. Here, the de-briefers focus in particular on emotionally and physically challenging situations during the stay abroad.

They support all returnees, in keeping with their situation and age, including the children. The return is often especially challenging for children, because they have to leave everything behind in their “home” abroad. Depending on how long they have been

abroad, they may only know Germany as a holiday resort. This change is a “crisis” event. Obviously, the returned partners and children, as well as the development service professionals, need time in which they can reflect on, consider, and digest what they have experienced.

During the debriefing, the intercultural coaches with psychological training also inquire especially to see if there are symptoms indicating depression, exhaustion depression, adaptive disorder, or trauma etc. according to ICD-10*). If these are present, they initiate further measures in agreement with the returnees and if necessary with the sending organisation.

*) ICD-10: “International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems” published by WHO

To Germany, for love

The Association of Binational Families and Partnerships, iaf e.V.



Nicole and Louis got to know each other in their work in a social project somewhere in South America. They spent a lot of time with each other, fell in love, and decided to stay together. They enjoyed this time, but Nicole's posting drew to an end. After long discussions the couple decided to continue their life together in Germany – and now?

Couples that take such a decision can turn to the Association of Binational Families and Partnerships. They are also welcome to do this in the run-up by e-mail, because certain conditions need to be met for entry into Germany, which have to be clarified in the individual case.

BEFORE ARRIVING

A visa is usually required for arrival, so couples cannot arrive in the federal territory together. The German partner travels ahead and activates his or her residence here. Only then can the application be made for the subsequent immigration of the spouse in the country of origin. The couple must accordingly be married to each other or intend to marry in Germany. If they wish to live in cohabitation, then no residence permit is granted.

In the application for subsequent immigration of the spouse, both partners are to present documents and evidence of simple German language skills at Level A1. One must contact the respective German embassy for recognition of foreign final degrees or professional qualifications. If children are involved, whether one's own or from another relationship, then further regulations are also to be taken into account for their arrival – and possibly also for the outbound journey, regarding which the Association of Binational Families and Partnerships provides advice and lots of information at www.verband-binationaler.de.

Based on experience, subsequent immigration can take several months, during which the couple lives separately from each other and can only maintain contact virtually.

AFTER ARRIVING

After arrival in Germany, the everyday life of the binational couple is punctuated by further visits to the authorities: whether it be meeting the obligation to register or concluding a health insurance policy, in order to apply for the residence permit with work permit from the local aliens authority. Attendance of an integration course is also compulsory.

The couple organises their everyday life around this and has to reinvent themselves in the process – in a different country with a different infrastructure, different language, different rules and people. The couple should keep its journey in view and be aware of their own resources, recognise the expectations of the family or social environments, but not accept them without question. Above all, the couple needs time and peace, to sort out all the aspects of everyday life with each other, to the satisfaction of both partners. The psychological stress of this phase is not to be underestimated, if, for example, the foreign partners are confronted with a longer period of unwanted unemployment. In these phases you get to know yourself in a new way.

ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT

The native partners are often too overwhelmed to recognise and cater to the specific needs and interests of the other, on top of their own arrival. It is important to make time for each other, to speak to each other, to open up, to share wishes, expectations and hopes. This can increase understanding for each other and give a clear view of existing structural circumstances that affect the couple from outside.

The Association of Binational Families also offers assistance and support in these phases and processes by telephone and e-mail. And in several cities – such as Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen, Hannover, Bonn, Leipzig, Munich, and Frankfurt am Main – one can also be personally advised.

With its resources, the association cannot afford to accompany couples on visits to authorities, but in some situations it intervenes in authorities.

Other services such as open or themed meetings show how individual the paths of different couples are and how many facets there are to choose from. The opportunity and enrichment of binational relationships, whether in Germany or abroad, lies in seeing and accepting these aspects. Binational couples quickly learn to also see conflicts positively as part of a development that challenges but also satisfies.

Hiltrud
Stöcker-Zafari
Verband binationaler
Familien und Partner-
schaften, iaf e.V.

AIZ Training Program:

Joining your partner abroad – adventure or time out?

If you want your deployment abroad to be effective and successful, a happy accompanying partner (AP) at your side is one of the most important prerequisites. Partners who support and actively shape the stay abroad will often experience this time as very enriching. At the same time, they will be a stabilizing factor for the family system. As part of your preparation, before your departure, the AIZ course “Partner and Family” can help to reflect partnership- and family roles, to look at career development options and to build up and profit from networks. “Where are we going? What will happen to the children? How can I continue my career? How can my partner and I prepare for future challenges in the host country?” are typical questions. “There are many advantages, but relationships might also be put to a test. Abroad, possible conflicts will appear magnified. Everyone should be aware of this,” explains Sabine Scharfe, the trainer. This course is especially useful for APs who are accompanying their partners abroad for the first time. Within a protected space, they can profit from the support and the exchange of ideas with like-minded people. Also partners who have worked abroad as specialists themselves, and now find themselves in the role of an AP, will benefit from this course.

During the five-day course, there are various units focusing on specific issues such as the departure with children. The course helps participants to clearly realize what their goals are, and to develop realistic ideas about implementing them abroad. Participants also learn how they can offer their newly acquired special skills on the European labor market after their return.

Often, specific questions will come up once the couple/family has arrived abroad. The course therefore also offers up to three additional coaching sessions with the trainers, which participants highly appreciate. “Should I leave my child in the local school with its authoritarian methods? How do I deal with the nanny who, instead of playing with my child, lets it watch TV all the time? Should I return home to care for my mother who has fallen ill?” These are typical situations that one can discuss and reflect on together with a professional coach.

Participants consistently rate the course very positively. For years, the overall satisfaction has been close to 100 percent. “The training should be mandatory for all APs and those who go abroad on a contract,” says trainer Barbara Huefner-Kemper. In the YouTube video that you can watch via the following link, you will get a lively impression of participants of the course:



© GIZ/Asja Caspari

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SBCNzI2P8E&feature=youtu.be>

Scene from AP training at AIZ

Not surprisingly, the diversity of the world is reflected in the wide range of attitudes of the AP towards their stay abroad. For some, it sounds like a great adventure, others look forward to taking time off from a strenuous job. Still others want to take the opportunity to participate in distance learning courses, perhaps to get an additional degree, or they might want to finish a book project or volunteer for an NGO.

Christine Fach,
Project Director
at AIZ

THE ACADEMY FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION (AIZ)

The AIZ is the GIZ's internal training academy. It qualifies specialists and managers in international cooperation so that they can actively shape changes and make knowledge globally available. On behalf of the BMZ, the AIZ offers the program “Key qualifications for international cooperation” in order to prepare experts for their activities abroad. The AIZ offers the “Accompanying partner and family” courses as part of this program. If certain criteria are fulfilled, the course may be booked free of charge. For more information about preparations for stays abroad, participation in the courses or to register for them, please check our website:
www.giz.de/akademie/en/html/36.html
or call the AIZ customer service: +49 (0)228-4460 3333.

Recommended reading

The Association of Binational Families, iaf e.V. has published a number of helpful guides and publications. Here are some examples:

- **Binationaler Alltag in Deutschland. Ratgeber für Ausländerrecht und Internationales Familienrecht**
- **Vielfalt ist unser Reichtum. Warum Heterogenität eine Chance für die Bildung unserer Kinder ist**
- **Wie Kinder mehrsprachig aufwachsen. Ein Ratgeber**

A comprehensive list of publications can be found on the website of the Association of Binational Families: www.verband-binationaler.de

Master thesis on accompanying family members

During our exchanges with experts who have worked abroad, we repeatedly hear about how important it is to them to feel supported by their partners and families. We therefore know that we need to pay attention to the involvement of the accompanying family members during the secondment process. The same is true for the time of their return. Partners and children - as well as the professionals themselves - may face all sorts of challenges during their reintegration. Brigitte Binder, education officer at AGdD, can confirm this experience. For Jana Holling's master thesis, which deals with the "Reintegration process of German repatriates from the perspective of intercultural counselling," she shared her expertise in an interview.

Various discussions with experts have shown that the attitude of the accompanying persons plays a major role, and that their wellbeing is crucial for the success of a posting: "If the family is not well, this has a direct effect on the deployed worker, who will experience the situation as extremely stressful. In the end, many stays abroad fail, because accompanying family members are unhappy (...)"

The thesis also includes an examination of the return process of seconded experts and their accompanying family members. The author notes that German companies have so far seen little need for return accompaniment, even though studies stress that the return adjustment is often more difficult than expected.

The individual personalities and cultural identities of the expatriates go through processes of change during their stays abroad and in the course of their return. These processes can put a strain on the individual's psyche. The same is true for family members who have gone abroad as accompanying partners or children, so they should be taken into account and included in any preparational and reintegrational processes

If you would like to participate in the master thesis "Returning to the foreign familiar: The reintegration process of German repatriates from the perspective of intercultural counselling", you are invited to contact Jana Holling directly: jana.holling@web.de

Change in the AGEH Management



As of 1 April 2018, Dr. Claudia Lücking-Michel has taken over the management of AGEH. She succeeds the retiring Michael Steeb who had been the Managing Director for many years.

Dr. Claudia Lücking-Michel has a PhD in theology and previously worked as a member of the German Bundestag. As a parliamentarian, she often focused on issues concerning development policy. She was also Secretary General of the Cusanuswerk and Head of Department at the Bishop's Relief Organisation Misereor.

AGdD-Webinar in November: How to use social networks to find a job

How can you apply social media to improve your application strategy? How do you find out about vacancies early on? And how can information gathered from the social networks help you to score during a job interview?

Olivera Wahl, owner of "Starke Freunde ('powerful friends') - Social Media Marketing and Social Media Recruiting," will answer these and many other questions in this webinar. She will explain how you can expand your network and connect network activities online and offline. The webinar is aimed exclusively at professionals during and after their development service and will most likely take place in November. The exact date will be announced on our website:

www.agdd.de/seminare

Development Workers Act

The Development Workers Act is available as a download in English: www.agdd.de/ehfg-en

Development service at the open day at BMZ



BMZ State Secretary Martin Jäger (on the right) paid a visit to our stand. Here, he is in conversation with returned development service professionals and the AGdD Chairwoman Judith Ohene.

On 25 August 2018 the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) opened its doors in Berlin to present the work of different organisations on the subject of "Sustainable development goals" to interested visitors. In addition to this there was a varied

stage programme with discussions, music and culinary delicacies from all over the world. The AGdD provided information about the development service and its work in the association.

Use our special services for returning development service professionals and family members

In the AGdD reintegration programme, we offer returning professionals comprehensive information on the subject of return and occupational reintegration after development service. Spouses and children of professionals are also warmly invited to attend our seminars and to make use of webinars or advisory services.

The most important focuses of our seminar-programme are professional (re-)orientation, trends in the labour market and career opportunities, making successful job applications and identifying one's key competencies. In addition to this, we will next year once again be providing a discussion forum for accompanying partners.

We possess a large network and contacts to sending institutions, organisations, and experts in the context of development cooperation, and promote discussion and networking among returning professionals and their families.

Our employees are continually receiving training to ensure an up-to-date and high-quality range of services. We always stay informed about current specialist discussions and trends in practice through our membership in professional associations for training and facilitation as well as capacity building and further training.

The marketplace is open – join in!

New function in our network for development service professionals ConnectED

Would you like to publicise an event? Do you have a vacancy to fill? Or are you on the search for contacts on certain subjects?

In our network for development service professionals, ConnectED, it is now possible for you to publish ads and pictures in a virtual marketplace. You can also be kept up-to-date about new entries via the notification function.

The use of ConnectED including the marketplace is free of charge for active and former development service professionals and family members!

www.agdd.de/connectED

Next Issue – we are looking for authors

The next *transfer* will be devoted to the (former) development service professionals and their family members who come from an EU country other than Germany or are returning to another country. With this issue, we want to deliberately look outside the German "box". This issue will also be bilingual.

Write us an e-mail: redaktion@agdd.de

You can write in German or English.

Voluntary work in my own occupation as a pastor

As an accompanying husband in Tanzania

From 2004 to 2010 I lived and worked as the accompanying husband of a development worker in Northwest Tanzania. My wife and I were both working in the same partner organisation, the North-Western Diocese of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Tanzania. My wife served as coordinator of the then newly founded Desk for Conflict Resolution and Human Rights. Before leaving Germany I was a theologian and ordained pastor of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland. Although contract-wise I was only an accompanying husband, I nevertheless knew from the beginning that I would be allowed to work in Tanzania in my own profession.

job offer to set up and coordinate the Desk for Conflict Resolution and Human Rights in Northwest Tanzania. The position was announced by the United Evangelical Mission, a communion of Protestant churches in three continents, to which my home church also belongs. This meant that, as a pastor from a sister church, I would be able to get involved and contribute on a voluntary basis, even without any contract. So I did not hesitate to take on the role of the “accompanying husband”.

PAID – UNPAID

Previously, I had worked full-time as a pastor in parishes. I was now going to be doing this voluntarily in the North-Western Diocese. This needed some formal framework. Thus, I got a part-time job description of my own right from the beginning. I was assigned to the team of the Youth and Students’ Coordinator in the Education Department of the diocese, to teach the subject of Bible knowledge in secondary schools and to assist the coordinator in his work. This included planning youth activities at the diocesan level and coordinating the groups of Tanzania Students’ Christian Fellowship in the secondary schools of the region. The fact that I did not have a work contract and was working as a volunteer did not matter at all to the team and our cooperation. The young people and

students were not even aware of this. For them I was just one of the pastors of the diocese.

APPRECIATED

In Tanzania, a pastor is regarded as a person of high social status, independent of the relatively low payment. I benefitted from this status as well. For the North-Western Diocese, I was a pastor from a sister church working as a missionary in their church. I was thus treated equal



Saying goodbye to Tanzania: **Martin Schmitz-Bethge** and his wife **Dr. Anthea Bethge** are presented with a drum as a traditional present

ACCOMPANYING

In the years before our departure to Tanzania I went through the last phases of training as a pastor in my home church. During these years I was placed into positions by my church. My job placements thus determined our place of residence and thereby also my wife’s professional options.

We had decided to reverse this in the next phase of our life. In that situation, my wife got interested in the

to the pastors of the diocese. Like all the other active pastors, I became a voting member of the synod, the church's parliament, which consists of pastors and elected representatives of the parishes. At my first synod, which took place around four months after our arrival, I was invited to lead the morning prayer. My wife also attended the synod as leader of a church desk, but did not have a vote.

Due to my role as a pastor, I received recognition for my work more easily than my wife for hers. Pastors of all denominations in Tanzania wear a clerical collar, so did I. I was therefore easily recognisable in my professional role. My wife, by contrast, was regarded by some as "decoration in my office", which actually had been her office for years, the office of her desk.

The following incident fuelled the discussion between my wife and myself: after about half a year, my wife holds her first major seminar in one of the church districts of the diocese. It is a major success, and the work of the new desk picks up momentum. A short time afterwards, the same church district receives a delegation from its German partner district. On the anniversary of the partnership, a consultation is held for several days, in which Tanzanians and Germans want to reflect on what has been achieved, and set new goals. My wife is invited as facilitator of all plenary sessions, and we both translate as well as we are able to at that point, because the consultation is deliberately not held in English, but in Swahili and German. These are exhausting days for both of us. A week later, after everything has gone smoothly, the District Pastor visits the church office. As guests do, he conveys greetings from his church district and talks about the recent highlight: "We had a great consultation with our brothers and sisters from Germany. We thank Pastor Martin, who honoured us with his presence. And he also brought his wife along."

GROWING

After our first half year in Tanzania, my superior, the Youth and Students' Coordinator, revealed to me that he had been granted leave for a six-month postgraduate course. I was to stand in for him during this time. This became an important learning opportunity for me. I hit the road running and had to organise the upcoming most important youth event in the diocese: the "Youth and Bishop's Day" with around 1,500 participants from all parishes. It was a big challenge to work out how this was done under Tanzanian conditions. I learned a lot. In our second three-year term, I myself was appointed as Youth and Students' Coordinator. I grew personally and professionally thanks to this and other challenges.

RETURNING

After our time in Tanzania, it would have been my turn again to determine our place of residence according to my career development. But in my home church the chances for re-entry were poor. There were too many theologians and virtually no vacant positions. On top of



Martin Schmitz-Bethge, pastor
2004 - 2010: Tanzania, EED/BfdW

this, I realised that the experience I had gained in Tanzania appeared to be of little value for German parishes. Instead my wife found a job at EIRENE in Neuwied. Even after our return I somehow remained an accompanying husband. Suddenly I had a lot of time to see to the renovation of our flat, and to handle the reverse culture shock of re-entry. After just under a year of unemployment, the members of a Mennonite congregation in Neuwied elected me as their full-time paid pastor. The members of this small, independent congregation share a huge variety of migration experiences. Here, I feel that the experiences of otherness I gained in Tanzania are valued.



Visit to an indigenous community: **Christiane Kämpf de Salazar** and **Mauricio Salazar** in Chiapas

From Heidelberg to Mexico

Living in two worlds

After stressful weeks of preparation and leave-taking, we set off to Mexico City in 2009. We, that was my husband, who had a contract as a experienced specialist and was transferred from services overseas/EED to an NGO, our three children aged 14, 16 and 18 and myself as an accompanying partner or AP for short.

The joint decision-making process had already started a year previously. What would it mean if, for at least 3 years, possibly even longer, we shifted the centre of our lives from Heidelberg to Mexico? What would that mean for each one of us, professionally, academically, and in our personal lives? Mexico was not an unknown country for us, because we had already been on holiday there and all members of the family spoke Spanish. But of course there is a big difference between going on holiday somewhere and living there.

There was a mix and balance of pleasant anticipation of the new and sadness because of the departure from the familiar. A few personal favourite objects, hard-drives with photos and videos and the prospect of keeping in contact with friends via Skype or Facebook, were important and were to make the beginning easier.

SCHOOL

The first few weeks were characterized by lots of bureaucracy and organisational tasks, and school life included occurrences that our children had not experienced at home. The school was on a campus that the students were not permitted to leave until the end of lessons. The lessons were partly in Spanish, partly in German. Subjects like Mexican literature or philosophy, which were taught in Spanish, were a big challenge at first, the additional Spanish lessons offered were helpful but at the same time an extra burden and addition to a timetable that was already very full. School filled the week Monday to Friday and due to academic structures

and large distances there was no opportunity to meet friends during the week or to pursue hobbies outside school.

Everyday school-life was much more strictly regimented than in Germany. One had to get involved with other people with other values and a different cultural background. This sometimes led to misunderstandings which were cleared up in the encounter and are now funny anecdotes.

MOBILITY – A CHALLENGE

The local public transport was good. There were underground trains, busses, minibuses and taxis, which were, however, inadequate for a city of these dimensions. Often several means of transport had to be used to arrive at one's destination. One problem was: not all means of transport were regarded as safe. There were minibuses that it was apparently better not to use, and taxis as well, although others were not a problem, and the underground was safe. But how did one know which means of transport was safe and which was not? The parents of our children's classmates did not make their children use local public transport. Many parents drove their children everywhere. And some young people already had a car and drove themselves. It took some time before we were able to judge roughly what was safe and what was not and until then we were all very limited in our mobility, this created dependencies that had not existed in Germany. It was therefore important to find shared solutions for the transport requirements of the individual family members.

SECURITY

When listening to the radio, watching television or talking with neighbours, the subject was always the lack of

security: home invasions, people injured by a Molotov attack in a bar, a car chase with a shoot out on the city highway in the south of Mexico City, and so on, and so on.

These reports unsettled us and so we asked around among our friends and colleagues how they and their children dealt with it. When our children were out and about with friends or on their own, then they regularly sent us SMS. When we did not receive a message, or a mobile phone was off or a battery was flat, then we parents did become nervous. It calmed us that our children, once they had found friends, were always out in groups and with locals who knew what they were doing. Communication was thus very important, as was the forming of networks with local people. It is worth addressing the question of security before the outward journey, preferably with role-plays and manuals, which are already available e.g. from the GIZ.

LEISURE

For one's own well-being it was important to have time and space for outside school, traineeship or work for hobbies and leisure.

What leisure spaces were there? Where were children and young people able to pursue their hobbies? How were they able to move in public spaces? Did they find like-minded people with whom they could skateboard, play rugby, cook, or dance? Approaching others via shared interests and hobbies was important for the children and helped them be at home in the new culture, opened up new perspectives and viewpoints, and new opportunities for communication and mutual understanding.

Mexican society is collective, centring around the family, joint activities are important, and this lifestyle was very

TIPS FROM THE AUTHOR:

- Involve everyone in the decision to relocate one's main place of residence;
- Take everyone's questions seriously;
- Take mementos and photos with you;
- Be aware that acclimatisation is a long process and is also connected with sorrow and loss;
- Pursue leisure activities at the location (sport, music, art, seeking out like-minded people);

What we lacked:

- Sufficient discussion by chat with (young) people in the same situation, both abroad and returning;
- Preparation for families with children, for example with role-plays on themes such as mental health or safety;
- Watching films together and speaking about it.

different from the more individual-oriented lifestyle in Germany. This also affected the organisation of leisure time and initially led to irritation when the friends were always out and about with their extended families at the weekend and did not have time for other activities. The cultural translation was a long-drawn-out process.

CONTACT TO GERMANY

The internet offered us the opportunity to stay in contact with friends and to find out what was happening in the other person's life. One could be with them straight away, virtually, but on the other hand one was also easily exposed to the risk of sinking into the virtual world.

The internet was also good for planning visits and seeing our new environments was also a good experience for visitors from Germany. Such shared experiences helped us to approach friends again upon our return, and were the basis for the continuation of the relationships in Germany.

For our children – and for us adults too – it would have been helpful to have had contact to people in the same situation, to exchange what we knew, e.g. with a chat with children of other experienced specialists or with other APs. This would have been a good opportunity to discuss new experiences and give each other tips.

RETURN

The return to Germany was a drastic change for our children. They had come to Mexico as part of our family and returned alone as young adults to Germany, to start a new phase of their lives and training.

We parents stayed in Mexico, because the work contract lasted for another year. This was a special situation for everyone: saying farewell to the familiar structures and the family group, to plan a new project in a new city, with new people. It was not a return to the Heimat, the home, with long-known structures, but instead the start of a new stage of life in a new city, equipped with new friendships and a rich store of experiences from several years spent in Mexico.



Maïke, Nina and Nils returned as young adults to Germany before their parents, to start a new stage of their lives and training.



Christiane Kämpf de Salazar and Mauricio Salazar.
2009 - 2015: Mexico, DÜ/EED

Mauricio Salazar is a principal instructor with the Protestant Academy Bad Boll. He worked at EED's partner organisation SERAPAZ.

Now at home in Berlin

From Papua New Guinea to Germany - and back

I am from Papua New Guinea (PNG) and met my German husband Frank in 2000 when he served as a development worker with the German Development Service (Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst - DED) in my country. I was a single mother with two young children, working as a research scientist. When I had my third son in 2003, I resigned from this post. Life was both exciting and challenging as we tried to blend two different cultures involving children and developing acceptance for each other as a family.

Luckily the DED contract allowed us a first impression of life on the other side of the globe. My first and unforgettable memory of Germany is of us rushing through super busy Frankfurt airport with children and luggage, trying to catch our connecting train to Osnabrück. Once on the train, we saw the beautiful greenery, farmlands and undisturbed forests, which soothed us after our exhausting ten-hour flight and the hectic airport.

A NEW LIFE IN GERMANY

In December 2005, we moved to Germany to a countryside village, and I loved it. The rolling hills, open spaces and farmland, the nearby forests and the peace and quiet helped me to overcome the sadness of leaving family, friends and my life in Papua New Guinea behind. While my husband looked for a job and our children continued their schooling and day care, I took up German language/integration courses and driving classes. When Frank had to move to Stuttgart for his new job with Bread for the World (BftW) a few months later, I at first remained in Osnabrück with the children. The boys had barely begun to settle in, and we did not want to move them again so soon. Since I had my driver's license by then, I could manage, and my parents-in-law were close by and helped us.

Life in the countryside was lovely but had its limitations. The winters were cold and sometimes too quiet and lonely. In Papua New Guinea, everyone greets each other with a smile, a nod or a few friendly words. Here, it wasn't so easy to connect with people, and they would sometimes grin awkwardly when I smiled and said hello. Because of the high crime rate in Papua New Guinea, I had grown up with constant fear and was always on high alert. It was very liberating to finally break free from these worries during long walks in the peaceful forests. It was wonderful to realise that I was now in a much safer environment.

Commuting to and from Stuttgart became a huge burden after about a year, so we ended up moving to Stuttgart. There, we experienced a positive change, because life became more multicultural, and we felt more involved and welcome. I had a good mix of friends from Germany and abroad and continued German classes up to level B2.



2003: Arah Ecke with her husband Frank and her children in Papua New Guinea

PREPARING TO LEAVE PAPUA NEW GUINEA

When Frank's DED contract neared its end in 2005, it suddenly dawned on me that I would be venturing out into a completely new culture, in a country on a different continent far from my home. Naturally, our sons were also anxious about leaving their childhood home, and we anticipated our new life in Germany with Frank as our main source of information.

RETURNING HOME

Next, my husband was offered work in the Pacific regional office in Madang in Papua New Guinea commencing in 2009. We were excited about the move back. This contract began with preparation courses in Bonn, including a specific one for "Accompanying Partners" (APs). Although I was returning home, I kept my mind open for reverse culture shock, even if three years away did not seem long. Sure enough, we had to steel ourselves against returning to a country with a high crime rate, but it was nice to be back.

While my husband worked for BftW, I took up jobs with health NGOs such as Pathfinder International and the Fred Hollows Foundation. I also studied management at the local university, which led to a job as program manager with Marie Stopes International. I knew, however, that I would be leaving once my husband's contract ended.

These seven years in Papua New Guinea saw our children complete primary and high school. When the time came to move to Germany once more, we all had to make some difficult decisions. Our two older, now adult sons decided to join us in Germany, where we arrived in Berlin at the end of 2015. In January 2016, my husband took up his new position at BftW.

RESETTLING IN BERLIN

Finding a flat in Berlin was difficult. Despite warnings about a partly racist population in this particular neighborhood, we moved to Alt Marzahn. We have indeed had our encounters with neo-Nazis, but we like the more natural and quieter life here, a bit outside of the inner city, and feel at home here.

Our older sons entered the federal volunteer service as a first step to re-integration. But finding a suitable school for our 13-year-old son was close to impossible. We ended up placing him in a bilingual school. For me, I first revived and expanded my language skills with a C level course at the local adult education school. At the same time, I began to volunteer with the Berliner Stadtmission (for homeless people) and became engaged with a refugee project in Neukölln. I enjoyed this work as it helped me to learn how to move around the city, meet people and most importantly, help the needy. For some time, I also attended German conversation groups in a "language cafe." Later, I registered with the employment office, took advantage of their job coaching, learned how to put together German job applications and in March 2018, found my current job with Diakonie Deutschland.

Although there are still obstacles to overcome, Berlin is now our home. Our children quickly found their way around this huge city and have made friends. Through my activities, I meet and exchange experiences with many Germans and non-Germans. Integration for me meant exploring my new environment, identifying what makes me comfortable or uncomfortable and learning to manage each issue as best as I can.



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Attending AGdD's day workshop for APs was helpful, and I am thankful for that. We were only three participants with similar backgrounds, but the reflection of our experiences motivated us to move forward in a foreign country. Perhaps one could also offer such programs to our children as they have their own challenges to deal with in the integration process.

2018: The Ecke family in Berlin

Arah Ecke met her husband Frank in Papua New Guinea. Frank Ecke was in Papua New Guinea from 1999 - 2005 and 2009 - 2015 for DED and DÜ/EED/BfdW respectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are my personal tips - especially for other non-German APs:

- Get started as soon as possible with integration/language courses and complete at least up to level B2.
- Follow news and events in Germany. Even if you don't understand everything, it will help to increase language skills while keeping you informed on current affairs.
- Know your interests and find out where and how you can continue to practice and enjoy them in a new environment.
- Seek the assistance of the employment office and prepare for a career change if necessary. Job coaching and relevant courses help a lot.
- Update your CV and make sure that gaps caused by transitions are explained accordingly; try to get your degrees and certificates prepared and possibly accepted (Anerkennung)
- Connect with other (returned) development workers, with locals and other foreigners so that you can exchange experiences and get tips on how to overcome common problems, find schools etc.

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