



Global Mobility for (Crash Test) Dummies

Key Takeaways

Gender gaps in data collection have serious consequences

Companies are increasingly investing in Environmental Social Governance (ESG) and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) initiatives, both of which are integral strategies in attracting and retaining talent

Global mobility can contribute to ESG and DE&I by making assignment information and opportunities more readily available throughout the organization, widening candidate selection processes and providing different types of policy support to encourage underrepresented individuals to be able to successfully take on assignments

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as Part of a Thoughtful Global Mobility and Talent Management Framework

In her book – *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* – Caroline Criado Perez describes the gender data gap and how the vast majority of information collected is based on male lifestyle patterns and male bodies. As an example, Criado Perez describes how a woman involved in a car crash is 47% more likely to be seriously injured than a man, and 17% more likely to die. This is a result of assuming a male crash test dummy as the driver of the vehicle without taking into consideration the physical differences between genders.

While global mobility professionals are far removed from the complexities of automobile safety design, this, among the many examples Criado Perez uses, highlights the prevalence of unconscious bias in society, and along with recent geopolitical events, underscores the need for impactful diversity, equity and inclusion approaches to talent management in organizations.

There is strong evidence to suggest that organizations are gaining an understanding of all aspects of Environmental Social Governance (ESG) and are investing accordingly. ESG refers to three key factors when measuring the sustainability and ethical impact of an investment in a business or company. These factors include how a company performs as a steward of nature. Social criteria examine how it manages relationships with employees, suppliers, customers and the communities where it operates. Governance deals with a company's leadership, executive pay, audits, international controls and shareholder rights.

There may be many aspects of gender equality as well as diversity and inclusion which appear beyond the scope of global mobility, however as talent management and global mobility become increasingly closer aligned, there are opportunities to ensure the suite of policies and processes which govern international assignments are free of the crash test dummy pitfalls Criado Perez references.

[According to Statista](#) investment in ESG increased from around 11.35 trillion U.S. dollars in 2012 to approximately 30.7 trillion in 2018. It's unsurprising therefore to find that two thirds of respondents to [Mercer's 2021 Global Talent Trends](#) report indicated ESG will be a crucial focus for them in 2021, and that 74% of respondents to a 2020 poll issued by the same company indicated an increased focus on DE&I, which forms one of the pillars under the 'governance' aspect of ESG. And with good reason, too: the [Deloitte 2021 Millennial and Gen Z report](#) indicates that 49% of Gen Z (those born mid-to-late 1990s through the early 2010s) made choices over the type of work they are prepared to do or organizations they'd work for based on personal ethics over the last two years (compared with 44% of Millennials). Future talent is engaged in this conversation and is actively making employer choices on this basis.

S&P Global Market Intelligence's Quantamental Research team provides further evidence as to why companies are pivoting in this direction. They looked at companies from the end of 2002 through May 2019 and found that those with female CFOs generated \$1.8 trillion more in gross profit than their sector average. Their analysis also found that companies with female CFOs also experienced bigger stock price returns relative to firms with male CFOs during the executives' first 24 months in the role. Despite these facts, a 2020 analysis by Mercer of over 1,100 organizations across the world found the representation of women in an organization decreased as the levels progress:

- Executives: 23%
- Senior managers: 29%
- Managers: 37%
- Professionals: 42%
- Support staff: 47%

The gender pay gap compounds the issue, even in developed countries like the U.S., where the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates women earned 82.3% of what men earned in 2020. Furthermore, the OECD reports that among OECD countries, the overall gender wage gap as of 2018 was 12.8%. Recent Eurostat data reveals that the issue is pervasive across every European country, including:

- France: 16.5%
- Germany: 19.2%
- Netherlands: 14.6%
- Sweden: 11.8%

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Against this context, the global mobility perspective of female assignees offers an unsurprising tableau. An excellent 2006 editorial in Relocate Magazine points to a 2005 ORC study which found that women's participation in international assignments stood at just 17%. Catalyst, a New York-based global not-for-profit organization that promotes women in the workplace reported the same percentage some seven years later in a 2012 report. Mercer's 2017 Worldwide Survey of International Assignment Policies and Practices survey put the figure at just 14%.

A recent [AIRINC report](#) showed positive indicators towards change, with 61% of respondents indicating they will make some modifications to their mobility program to align with the company's DE&I initiatives over the next 1-3 years and 19% reporting that their mobility program will be specifically designed to align with the company's DE&I initiatives.

This may be as simple as marketing and promoting the existing program, demonstrating to key stakeholders that there is flexibility and support within a diverse suite of policies which leaders can use to develop talent across the organization. In addition, ensuring mobility program information is readily and easily accessible to all employees can increase interest and participation.

DE&I initiatives often focus on other aspects of unintentional gender discrimination. We have seen several companies that disseminate information aimed at expatriate assignees, such as World Trade Resource (WTR), Sterling Lexicon's partner, enhance their website contents with data dedicated to the global LGBTQ+ community. The national legal frameworks regarding LGBTQ+ challenges all around the world, for example, are included with other useful information to help individuals make informed decisions about assignment locations.

Some organizations have taken the opportunity to rebrand aspects of their program to emphasize the flexible nature of benefits – hence the introduction of the diversity allowance. One organization we spoke with uses a 'host allowance' as part of its host-based long-term assignment (LTA) policy, which employees may use towards support with housing, schooling or any other lifestyle choice or requirement. Other companies are contemplating this approach to flexibility when offering cash-only support. The extent to which global mobility can influence the end-to-end process,



By Stuart Jackson,

Account Director, Sterling Lexicon

stuart.jackson@sterlinglexicon.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stuart Jackson is an account director at Sterling Lexicon with more than 20 years' experience of working with multi-national organizations to manage complex global mobility programs. A trusted advisor, Stuart is recognized for excellence in execution, collaboration and with a track record of designing and implementing successful, innovative mobility solutions.

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directly and indirectly, will undoubtedly contribute to greater gains in this area. Candidate selection and the culture around candidate selection is a subject worthy of consideration as more corporations make an international assignment a pre-requisite for advancement. Regardless of whether or not the global pandemic has an impact on this perception, there is an onus on global mobility to ensure there are diverse ways to facilitate international experience for employees of every background and family situation.

Furthermore, a significant number of organizations lack structure around candidate selection. This not only means scrutiny of the 'tap on the shoulder' selection approach, but equally, an examination of the processes, tools and support which help an employee self-identify issues and map a career path beneficial to them and the company. For example, we recently saw a single parent, having already turned down one assignment, agree to another, only to realize that family pressures and the intensity of the work, combined with settling-in to a foreign country, were too difficult. The employee's skills were clearly valued by the organization, but the talent mobility pathway offered, while helping to advance her career, was not congruous with her family situation. Global mobility cannot necessarily set this agenda, but perhaps, given the right tools and circumstances, mobility can influence how and when candidates are selected for international assignment.

These are challenging issues for mobility to grapple with and there are limitations to how mobility can ensure the mistakes of using a one-size-fits-all "crash test dummy" does not govern talent mobility decisions with respect to DE&I and ESG efforts. [Worldwide ERC](#) outlined some ways in which multinational corporations can increase DE&I through global mobility, including an internal review of personnel to ensure minorities are interspersed in different functions and at different levels throughout the organization. Additional ways in which DE&I goals can be met through global mobility is to make sure international work opportunities are publicized widely, and qualified women and minority candidates should be assigned a mentor, and when offered an international assignment, provided with an expatriate coach knowledgeable about the destination country. Supporting minority expatriates throughout the assignment lifecycle is important for personal as well as organizational success.