

Career Interrupted – The Impact of International Relocation on the Career Trajectories of Expat Women

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Abstract

International relocation can accelerate careers, but for many expatriate women who move as accompanying partners without immediate work rights, it interrupts them. This study examines how such women experience, interpret, and respond to career disruption in host-country contexts. Guided by Career Construction Theory (CCT) and Intersectionality, we analysed open-ended surveys (n = 45) and semi-structured interviews (n = 12) conducted online from July to October 2025. Data were examined using a six-phase Thematic Analysis. The sample covered eight professions and seven host countries, with most participants in mid-career.

Findings show a patterned sequence of disruption and response. Structural filters, including visa and work-rights timing, credential non-recognition, language thresholds, and “local experience” screens, commonly erased prior status and produced enforced gaps or downgrading (Migration Policy Institute, 2024; European Court of Auditors, 2024). Women mobilised two main routes back into meaningful work. Requalification included local licensing, bridging courses, supervised practice, or further study. Reinvention included entrepreneurship, freelancing, sector pivots, and remote or portfolio work. Progress along either route depended on conversion factors that turned effort into opportunity: warm introductions, mentoring or sponsorship, community know-how, and redistribution of care and time at home. Identity work was visible throughout, moving from status loss and label shock to the gradual re-authoring of a professional narrative as recognition returned.

We introduce the Expat Women’s Career Reinvention (EWCR) Model to explain how constraints and supports interact with adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence)

to shape three outcomes: requalification, reinvention, and reintegration. The model reframes resilience as necessary but insufficient and locates continuity in institutional recognition and social capital as well as personal agency. Practical implications include partner work-rights facilitation, transparent credential pathways, bridging education, networked onboarding, and childcare or time supports (European University Association, 2024; Employment and Social Development Canada, 2025). Limitations include an emphasis on OECD-type recognition and permit regimes and the qualitative design's focus on analytic rather than statistical generalisation. Future work should test EWCR propositions with mixed methods and examine non-OECD contexts.

Keywords: expatriate women, accompanying partners, career interruption, career adaptability, intersectionality, credential recognition, global mobility, requalification, reinvention, reintegration

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

International mobility has become a mainstream, though uneven, feature of professional life as organisations expand across borders and dual-career families make transnational decisions (Andresen, Bergdolt, & Margenfeld, 2013; (McNulty & Hutchings, 2016). For many expatriate women who relocate as accompanying partners, the move occurs without immediate work rights or a secured role in the host country. Research studies have also shown that males are often the leading migrant, with female partners being the ‘following or trailing’ migrant (Wachter & Holz-Rau, 2022; Preston & Grimes, 2019). The result is a predictable pattern of disruption that begins at the border and extends into labour-market entry. Common barriers include credential non-recognition, “local experience” screens, language thresholds, and administrative delays linked to partner-visa timing (Harvey, 1998; Kanstrén, 2021; Valk, Van der Velde, Van Engen, & Godbole, 2014; Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012). These barriers erase prior status and delay or downgrade labour-market re-entry.

The consequences are cumulative. In the short term, women experience enforced gaps, income loss, and underemployment that does not reflect prior expertise. Over time, stalled access to professional communities and titles affects identity and agency, not only employment status or salary trajectory (Kanstrén, 2021). These patterns are not simply the result of individual choices. They emerge from the interaction of policy regimes that control work rights and credential recognition, organisational hiring practices that privilege local signals, and household dynamics that shape the time available for job search, requalification, and networking.

This study addresses that problem by examining how expatriate women experience and navigate interruption when they relocate without immediate work rights. It frames the issue as both psychosocial and structural. It connects narrative identity and career adaptability to the institutional rules and market filters that enable or block continuity. The section that follows outlines why the current literature only partially captures this interaction and why a

combined theoretical lens is needed to explain the outcomes observed in practice (Fee, 2025; Permits Foundation, 2022).

1.2 Why the Current Literature Is Insufficient

The mainstream literature on global mobility focuses on corporate-assigned expatriates who receive structured employer support such as sponsored permits, relocation services, and internal networks (Andresen, Bergdolt, & Margenfeld, 2013; McNulty & Hutchings, 2016). By comparison, research on accompanying partners and self-initiated expatriates is thinner, especially when the move occurs without immediate work rights or a pre-secured host-country role (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014). This imbalance creates three blind spots that matter for understanding women's trajectories. Newer work argues for reframing partner trajectories as a core mobility question rather than a peripheral welfare issue (Fee, 2025).

First, outcomes are often reduced to employment status and time in role. Such measures underplay identity work, loss of status, and the emotional labour involved in rebuilding recognition after migration. These are central to how careers are experienced and narrated, yet they are frequently treated as peripheral to the “real” outcome of job placement (Kanstrén, 2021).

Second, the policy context is not consistently integrated into explanations of success or setback. Work-rights pathways, credential recognition regimes, and language thresholds shape opportunity sets before an application is ever submitted. Without this context, adaptability risks being framed as a personal trait that should overcome any barrier, rather than as a resource that converts only when rules and supports allow it to do so (Valk, Van der Velde, Van Engen, & Godbole, 2014).

Third, invisible labour is still undercounted. The logistical, emotional, and cognitive work of settling housing, schooling, healthcare, and social networks absorbs the very time needed for job search, requalification, and networking. When this labour is not measured, delays are misattributed to motivation or fit rather than to the competing demands that relocation creates (McNulty & Hutchings, 2016).

Taken together, these gaps produce a partial picture. They do not fully explain why similarly qualified women face different outcomes after relocation, nor do they map the specific levers that move a person from interruption to requalification, reinvention, or reintegration. This study responds by integrating Career Construction Theory, which foregrounds narrative identity and adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence), with Intersectionality, which clarifies how gender, migration status, class, race or ethnicity, and caregiving responsibilities interact with policy regimes and labour-market structures. The combination offers a fuller account of how institutional rules and supports shape what adaptability can achieve in practice.

1.3 Conceptual Lenses and Positioning

This study uses two complementary lenses to interpret women's experiences of career interruption and recovery after relocation. The first is **Career Construction Theory (CCT)**,

which views careers as evolving narratives that people construct and revise over time. Its focal resource, **career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence)**, helps explain how individuals anticipate change, take action, explore options, and persist when plans are disrupted (Savickas, 2013). In this study, CCT guides attention to identity work, turning points, and the strategies women use to convert effort into opportunity.

The second lens is **Intersectionality**, which explains why similar relocations can yield different outcomes. Gender, migration status, class, race or ethnicity, and caregiving responsibilities interact with **policy regimes** such as work-rights pathways and credential recognition, and with **labour-market structures** such as licensing, language thresholds, and “local experience” screens (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality keeps these structures in view so that delays and downgrades are not misread as individual deficits.

Together these lenses position career interruption as both **psychosocial** and **institutional**. CCT clarifies how women make sense of interruption and mobilise adaptability, while Intersectionality clarifies how rules and resources shape what that adaptability can achieve. This combined stance directs the analysis that follows, informs the design of the study’s instruments, and underpins the **Expat Women’s Career Reinvention (EWCRI) Model** introduced later in the literature review.

1.4 Scope, Definitions, and Terminology (for Consistency Across the Paper)

This study focuses on women who relocate internationally as accompanying partners without immediate access to host-country work rights or a pre-secured role. The scope covers regulated or semi-regulated labour markets typical of OECD-type regimes where credential portability and licensing matter. The findings are analytically generalisable to similar recognition and permit settings. Transfer to other contexts depends on work-rights parity, language requirements, and credential compacts.

Key terms used consistently in this article

- **Accompanying partner.** A qualified professional who relocates primarily because of a spouse or partner’s assignment or a family decision, and who arrives without guaranteed host-country work rights or an employer-sponsored role.
- **Deskilling.** The devaluation or non-recognition of prior credentials and experience in the host context, including enforced role downgrading due to licensing rules, “local experience” screens, or time out of the workforce.
- **Career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence).** The personal resources that support anticipation, action, exploration, and persistence during change (Savickas, 2013).
- **Requalification.** The completion of host-country requirements that restore formal recognition, such as licensing exams, bridging courses, supervised practice, or additional study.

- **Reinvention.** A strategic redirection of career path, including entrepreneurship, freelancing, sector pivots, or remote and portfolio work, sustained beyond short-term stopgaps.
- **Reintegration.** Return to a commensurate role in the host labour market, defined as comparable level and scope to pre-relocation roles, or clear upward movement evidenced by promotion or expanded responsibility.

Terminology notes. The legacy label “trailing spouse” is used only when referring to prior literature. Throughout this article we use **accompanying partner** to reflect professional identity and capability (Harvey, 1998; Kanstrén, 2021).

1.5 Purpose, Contribution, and the EWCR Model

The purpose of this study is to explain how international relocation shapes career interruption and recovery for expatriate women who move as accompanying partners without immediate work rights, and to identify the levers that support timely and commensurate re-entry into host labour markets.

This article contributes in four ways

1. **Integrated explanation.** It combines Career Construction Theory and Intersectionality to show how personal resources, including career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence), interact with policy regimes and labour-market structures. This integration explains why outcomes diverge among similarly qualified women.
2. **Underserved population.** It centres accompanying partners who arrive without guaranteed work rights or pre-secured roles. Their trajectories are often absent from corporate-expatriate focused research, yet they are critical to understanding gendered patterns in global mobility.
3. **EWCR Model.** It introduces the Expat Women’s Career Reinvention (EWCR) Model, developed by the author, which maps how constraints and supports combine with adaptability and identity work to yield three observable outcomes: requalification, reinvention, and reintegration. The model provides a basis for practical design of supports and for future hypothesis testing.
4. **Actionable guidance.** It translates findings into concrete recommendations for employers, policymakers, professional bodies, and universities. Examples include partner work-rights facilitation, transparent credential pathways, bridging education aligned to licensing, networked onboarding, and childcare or time supports.

Alignment with the research questions

- **RQ1** focuses on how women experience and interpret interruption and identity change after relocation.
- **RQ2** examines how structural factors and psychosocial processes shape pathways out of interruption.

- **RQ3** identifies the supports and networks that enable reintegration or, when absent, push women toward reinvention.

These contributions aim to advance scholarship on global mobility while offering a clear framework for practice.

1.6 Research Questions

This study addresses the following questions:

RQ1. How does international relocation shape the vocational identities of expatriate women who arrive without immediate access to host-country work rights?

RQ2. In what ways do structural factors, including policy, credentialing, language, labour-market conditions, and psychosocial processes, including identity work and career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence), influence career interruption and the routes out of it?

RQ3. Which supports and networks, including warm introductions, mentoring or sponsorship, community know-how, and redistribution of care and time, most enable timely reintegration into commensurate roles, and under what conditions does reinvention become the more viable path?

1.7 Significance

This study reframes career continuity after relocation as a product of rules, resources, and relationships, not only of individual motivation. By integrating Career Construction Theory with Intersectionality, it shows how adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) converts into outcomes only when policy settings and supports allow it to do so. The analysis therefore shifts employer and policymaker attention from generic “resilience” programs to practical career-continuity levers such as partner work-rights facilitation, transparent credential recognition, bridging education, and networked onboarding. For researchers, the Expat Women’s Career Reinvention (EWCR) Model offers a testable framework that links constraints, supports, strategies, and outcomes.

The article proceeds as follows. **Section 2** reviews the literature and positions the EWCR Model within current debates on mobility, deskilling, invisible labour, and partner policy. **Section 3** details the methodology, including design, sampling, instruments, analysis, ethics, and trustworthiness. **Section 4** presents results, combining descriptive patterns with human-centred excerpts and a summary-of-themes table. **Section 5** discusses findings through the two lenses and examines boundary conditions for the EWCR Model. **Section 6** translates findings into actionable recommendations for employers, policymakers, professional bodies, and universities. **Section 7** concludes with implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Abbreviations used from here onward: CCT = Career Construction Theory; EWCR Model = Expat Women’s Career Reinvention Model; SIEs = self-initiated expatriates.

1.8 Article Roadmap

This article follows APA 7 style. Citations and reference entries use author–date format, and tables and figures follow APA placement and captioning. Abbreviations are defined at first use and then used consistently: CCT refers to Career Construction Theory, EWCR Model refers to the Expat Women’s Career Reinvention Model, and SIEs refers to self-initiated expatriates. The term “accompanying partner” is used throughout, while “trailing spouse” appears only when referencing prior literature.

Figures and tables appear near first mention. Figure 1 presents the EWCR Model in the literature review. Figure 2 appears in the results section as a journey map that summarises the interruption and recovery arc. Table 1 appears in the results section as a summary of themes and mechanisms. Appendices provide instruments, codebook notes, and supplementary tables. Cross-references to sections, figures, tables, and appendices are labelled explicitly to guide the reader.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global Career Mobility: Patterns, Asymmetries, and Stakes

Globalisation has reshaped how careers are built, and cross-border movement is now common, although uptake and outcomes remain uneven across sectors and countries (Andresen, Bergdolt, & Margenfeld, 2013). The mainstream literature focuses on corporate-assigned expatriates who receive structured employer support, including sponsored permits, relocation services, and access to internal networks (McNulty & Hutchings, 2016). By contrast, the experiences of self-initiated expatriates and accompanying partners are covered less consistently, especially when moves occur without immediate work rights or a pre-secured role in the host country (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014). Recent analyses foreground partner constraints even when the assignee receives structured support (Fee, 2025).

For many women in these latter groups, mobility correlates with interruption rather than linear advancement. Common mechanisms include visa and work-rights timing, credential non-recognition, language thresholds, requirements for “local experience,” and segmented labour markets that privilege domestic signals over portable ones (Valk, Van der Velde, Van Engen, & Godbole, 2014). These mechanisms delay or downgrade entry even when prior performance and qualifications are strong. They also have cumulative effects: enforced gaps and underemployment in the short term, and erosion of professional identity and agency over time.

Conceptual boundary for this study. An **accompanying partner** is a qualified professional who relocates primarily because of a spouse or partner’s assignment or a family decision and arrives without guaranteed host-country work rights or an employer-sponsored role. The analysis focuses on regulated or semi-regulated labour markets typical of OECD-type regimes, where credential recognition and licensing have material effects on access to commensurate roles.

2.2 The “Trailing Spouse” Label and Why Language Matters

The term “trailing spouse” emerged in corporate mobility to describe partners who accompany the primary assignee during an international posting (Harvey, 1998). Although it once served a descriptive purpose, the label has been widely critiqued because it implies dependence, passivity, and a lack of professional identity (Kanstrén, 2021). In practice, it narrows how organisations and policymakers see talent by framing the household as single-career, even when both adults hold qualifications and work histories. It also shapes expectations at the point of arrival. When a partner is introduced as an appendage rather than as a professional, early interactions with employers, regulators, and networks can shift from “What can you contribute?” to “How can we help you adjust?”, which affects confidence, access, and the types of support offered (McNulty & Hutchings, 2016).

Language choices therefore have policy consequences. If the partner is categorised informally as a dependent, programme design tends to focus on social integration and wellbeing, while career-continuity levers such as permit facilitation, credential recognition, supervised practice, or employer introductions receive less attention. The label can also influence self-presentation. Several studies note that women resist the tag because it clashes with how they see themselves, and because it risks eroding professional identity at the very moment recognition is most needed (Kanstrén, 2021).

In this article, the term **accompanying partner** is used in place of “trailing spouse” except when referring to prior literature. The alternative foregrounds capability and professional status and aligns with the study’s aim to examine career continuity, not only social adjustment. This change is more than semantics. It sets the stage for analysing how rules, supports, and networks can convert prior expertise into commensurate roles, and it clarifies why interventions should be evaluated on career outcomes as well as settlement outcomes.

2.3 Theoretical foundations: Career Construction Theory and Intersectionality

This study draws on two complementary perspectives to interpret how women experience and navigate relocation-related career interruption. The first is **Career Construction Theory (CCT)**, which understands careers as evolving stories that people build and revise as circumstances change. CCT highlights **career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence)** as a set of resources that support anticipation, action, exploration, and persistence when plans are disrupted (Savickas, 2013). In this project, CCT sensitises analysis to narrative identity, turning points, and the strategies women use to translate effort into opportunities, such as requalification or reinvention.

The second perspective is **Intersectionality**, which examines how multiple social positions and systems of power combine to produce uneven outcomes. Gender, migration status, class, race or ethnicity, and caregiving responsibilities interact with **policy regimes** that govern work rights and credential recognition and with **labour-market structures** that include licensing rules, language thresholds, and requirements for local experience (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality keeps these structures in view so that delays, downgrades, and prolonged gaps are not misread as individual shortcomings.

The lenses address different parts of the same problem. CCT focuses on meaning-making and agency. Intersectionality focuses on the institutional conditions that shape what agency can achieve. Used together, they explain both why careers feel ruptured and why similarly qualified women encounter different pathways back into meaningful work. This combined stance informs instrument design in the methods section, frames interpretation of results, and underpins the **Expat Women's Career Reinvention (EWCR) Model** that is introduced later in the literature review.

2.4 Deskilling: Mechanisms and Consequences

Deskilling refers to the devaluation or non-recognition of prior education, credentials, and experience in the host context. It is one of the most consistent mechanisms linking relocation to interruption for accompanying partners. Four processes recur in the literature. First, **credential recognition and licensing** requirements can delay or block entry when degrees are not treated as equivalent or when supervised practice is mandatory before independent work is allowed. Second, **language thresholds** set formal or informal cut-offs for employability, even in roles that are otherwise skills-aligned. Third, **requirements for "local experience"** operate as a screening device that favours insiders and turns international experience into a weak signal. Fourth, **time-out effects** emerge when long permit timelines or family logistics force gaps that employers later interpret as evidence of skill atrophy. These processes undermine the transfer of human capital and contribute to longer gaps and downgraded entry for qualified migrants across high income destinations (Migration Policy Institute, 2024; European Court of Auditors, 2024).

These processes have cumulative consequences. In the short run, women encounter **enforced gaps, downgrading, and underemployment** that do not reflect their prior scope of responsibility. Over time, stalled access to professional communities, titles, and supervision routes reduces opportunities for learning and advancement. Identity can erode when prior achievements are not recognised or cannot be signalled effectively in the new market. Studies document the overlap between deskilling and emotional strain, including frustration, loss of confidence, and reluctance to re-enter at a significantly lower level than before (Kanstrén, 2021; Valk, Van der Velde, Van Engen, & Godbole, 2014).

Career Construction Theory helps explain how deskilling functions as a **narrative rupture** that disrupts the story people tell about their work and value. Intersectionality clarifies why similar credentials face different fates across groups and contexts. Recognition rules, language policy, and market norms do not operate on a level field. They intersect with gender, migration status, class, race or ethnicity, and caregiving responsibilities to shape **who** waits, **how long** they wait, and **what** options remain viable when the waiting ends.

2.5 Invisible Labour and Emotional Load

International relocation generates a stream of tasks that rarely appear in mobility dashboards but shape career outcomes in practice. This **invisible labour** includes finding housing, enrolling children in schools, organising healthcare, navigating transport and banking, and building everyday social ties. In many households, women carry a disproportionate share of

this logistical, emotional, and cognitive work, especially during the first year after arrival (McNulty & Hutchings, 2016). The time cost is direct. Hours spent translating documents, attending appointments, and solving daily problems are hours not available for job search, requalification courses, supervised practice, or targeted networking. Recent quantitative and qualitative work links settlement-related non work stressors to partner wellbeing and slower re-entry, reinforcing the identity costs described here (Aegerter et al., 2025).

The emotional load compounds the time cost. Participants in prior studies describe feeling useful at home but professionally absent, and they report a loss of confidence when applications receive no response or when available roles are well below prior level. These reactions are not only private feelings. They interact with institutional processes that already slow entry, including permit timelines and recognition steps, which can stretch months into a year or more (Kanstrén, 2021). The combination of high household demand and slow institutional supply generates a cycle in which effort produces few early returns, reinforcing self-doubt and delaying re-entry.

Career Construction Theory clarifies how this invisible labour becomes part of the career narrative. As identity shifts from recognised professional to problem-solver for the family, women must actively rebuild a sense of competence and momentum through small wins, such as completing a module or securing a warm introduction. Intersectionality helps explain variation in this burden. Household income, access to childcare, language proficiency, and community ties shape how much invisible labour must be done by the partner and how fast it can be outsourced or shared. These resources are not evenly distributed across migrants, and they influence whether a person can pursue requalification, accept a supervised practice role, or pilot a small business.

The policy and practice implications follow. Programmes that treat partners as social dependents rather than as professionals tend to provide language or cultural events while overlooking career-time levers, such as subsidised childcare during licensing, clear recognition maps, or structured introductions to professional associations. Reframing the partner as a professional with time-bound needs for recognition and networks anchors support in career continuity rather than in adjustment alone (McNulty, Y., & Hutchings, K. 2016; Kanstrén, 2021).

2.6 Requalification and Reinvention: Unequal Routes Back

After arrival, most accompanying partners who seek meaningful work follow one of two broad routes. The first is **requalification**, which restores formal recognition through licensing exams, bridging courses, supervised practice, or further study. The second is **reinvention**, which creates an alternative path through entrepreneurship, freelancing, sector pivots, or remote and portfolio roles (Kanstrén, 2021; Andresen, Bergdolt, & Margenfeld, 2013).

Requalification tends to produce the most stable match between skills and roles because it targets regulated entry points. It also carries high upfront costs. People need time to study, fees for courses and assessments, and access to placements or supervision. Where recognition pathways are transparent and short modules are aligned with regulatory requirements,

progression may be more direct, and candidates may encounter fewer avoidable delays. Where requirements are opaque or capacity is limited, delays accumulate and candidates face the risk of partial completion without employability gains. Progress depends on **conversion factors** that turn effort into opportunities, including clear guidance from professional bodies, warm introductions to supervisors, and childcare or schedule flexibility during study and placements. Where recognition maps are transparent and short modules are aligned to regulatory requirements, progression is faster and with fewer dead ends (European University Association, 2024).

Reinvention offers faster entry when recognition is slow or uncertain. It relies on portable capabilities such as analysis, advising, design, sales, and teaching, and on transnational or online markets. It can preserve identity and maintain skills, but it often brings **precarity** through variable income, weak benefits, and weaker signalling to local employers. Some women treat reinvention as a bridge that supports them while they complete requalification steps. Others adopt it as a durable strategy, especially when entrepreneurship or remote work matches family logistics and market opportunity. Reinvention expands options through entrepreneurship and remote or portfolio work but often carries precarity and weaker local signalling in employer driven markets (Migration Policy Institute, 2024).

The two routes are not equivalent options available to all at all times. Access to requalification hinges on savings, credit, and time. Access to reinvention hinges on networks, digital infrastructure, and confidence to sell services without institutional backing. Career Construction Theory clarifies how women appraise these constraints and select actions that fit their adaptability resources (**concern, control, curiosity, and confidence**). Intersectionality explains why the same actions yield different returns across groups and settings, as work rights timing, credential policy, language requirements, and market norms interact with class, race or ethnicity, and caregiving responsibilities (Valk, Van der Velde, Van Engen, & Godbole, 2014).

Two practical patterns recur in prior research. First, sequenced strategies may be more effective than single-track efforts. Candidates who combine short, visible credentials with supervised practice or targeted introductions may create a more direct route to interviews and offers. Second, networked signals may partly compensate for weak local experience signals. Sponsor-style introductions and professional association membership can provide access that cold applications do not always achieve.

2.7 Global Mobility Policies: From Adjustment to Continuity

Many mobility frameworks still assume a primary earner with a dependent partner. Support for the partner often focuses on language classes and social activities. These are useful for settlement, but they do not secure recognition, supervised practice, or interviews. The result is a gap between what programmes offer and what accompanying partners need to achieve career continuity. Studies suggest that where employers and authorities facilitate permits, provide clearer credential-recognition pathways, and improve access to professional networks, re-entry may be more direct, and prolonged underemployment may be less likely. (Andresen, Bergdolt, & Margenfeld, 2013; McNulty, Y., & Hutchings, K. 2016; (Kastrán, 2021)).

Policies also set the tempo of recovery. Partner permits that are processed quickly reduce enforced gaps. Transparent recognition maps shorten planning time and reduce the risk of investing in courses that do not lead to employability. Access to supervised practice creates a path back into regulated work that does not require a full restart. When these elements are missing, women are more likely to face prolonged waiting or to accept roles well below their prior level while they rebuild local signals. Programmes that include partner work rights, clearer recognition routes, supervised practice, and curated introductions have been associated with stronger attraction, retention, and reintegration outcomes. (Permits Foundation, 2022)

A shift from adjustment to continuity implies a different mix of support. For employers and global mobility teams, this includes coordination with immigration providers to anticipate permit steps for the partner, funding for bridging requirements, and introductions to professional bodies and potential supervisors. For professional regulators, it includes public guidance on recognition routes, predictable timelines, and provisional practice where safe. For public policy, it includes partner work rights in shortage areas, time limited childcare credits during requalification, and platforms that connect partners to small and medium employers. The goal is not only settlement but timely access to commensurate roles, which preserves human capital and supports the success of the international move itself (Andresen et al., 2013; McNulty, Y., & Hutchings, K. 2016; Kanstrén, 2021).

2.8 The Expat Women's Career Reinvention Model

This study introduces the Expat Women's Career Reinvention Model as an analytic framework linking structural conditions, individual adaptive resources, career strategies, and career outcomes. The model is informed by Career Construction Theory and Intersectionality.

The model begins with structural conditions that shape the opportunity set available to accompanying partners. These conditions include work-rights timing, credential recognition, language requirements, labour-market expectations, and access to local professional networks. They influence whether prior qualifications and experience can be converted into opportunities in the host country.

Career adaptability operates within this environment as an individual adaptive resource. Its four dimensions, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, support planning, action, exploration, and persistence. Adaptability is not treated as a mechanism that automatically produces career recovery, nor as a substitute for institutional access. Rather, its influence is conditioned by structural constraints and support. Where recognition pathways are clear, work rights are available, supervised practice exists, and networks provide access, adaptability is more likely to translate into progress. Where these conditions are weak or absent, highly adaptable individuals may still experience prolonged interruption.

The model identifies four groups of conversion factors: recognition clarity, supervised practice capacity, networked access, and redistribution of care and time. These factors shape whether personal effort becomes a concrete opportunity, such as an interview, supervised placement, client engagement, qualification milestone, or commensurate role.

Two principal strategies are identified. Requalification refers to efforts to restore formal recognition through licensing, bridging courses, supervised practice, or further study. Reinvention refers to the creation of an alternative route through entrepreneurship, consulting, freelancing, sector change, or remote and portfolio work. These routes are not mutually exclusive and may occur sequentially or in combination.

The model identifies three possible outcomes: requalification, reinvention, and reintegration. Reintegration refers to entry into a commensurate role or meaningful upward movement towards one. Reinvention may remain a temporary bridge or develop into a sustainable career path. Requalification may lead directly to reintegration or may operate alongside reinvention during a longer recovery process.

The model does not assume that every participant follows the same sequence. Its purpose is to explain how structural conditions and adaptive resources interact to shape different pathways. In settings with reciprocal work rights, portable credentials, and strong professional networks, direct reintegration may occur relatively quickly. In settings with restrictive permits, slow recognition, limited supervised practice, and weak network access, interruption may last longer and reinvention may become the more viable route.

The model therefore reframes resilience as necessary but insufficient. Career recovery is understood as the product of personal agency interacting with institutional recognition, social capital, and access to time and resources.

A directional proposition follows from this logic: clearer and faster credential recognition is expected to shorten the time required to reach a commensurate role, particularly in regulated professions and among participants with limited initial network access.

The figure illustrates how structural constraints and supports condition the relationship between career adaptability, strategy selection, and career outcomes.

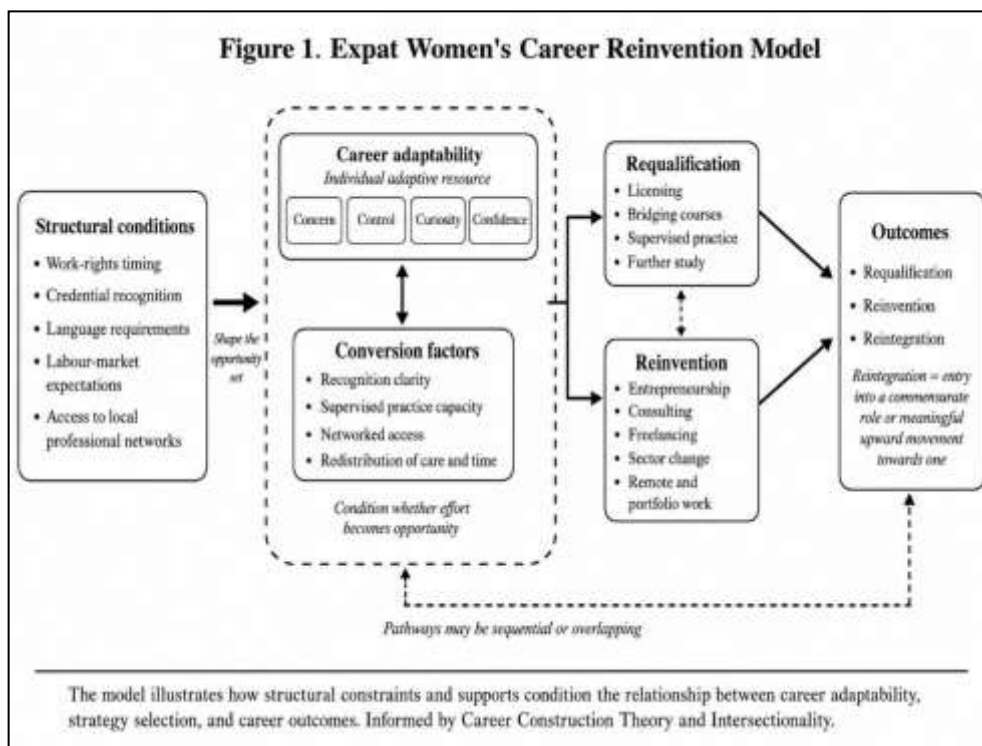


Figure 1. Expat Women's Career Reinvention Model

2.9 Research Gaps and Study Rationale

The existing literature explains parts of the relocation story but leaves several gaps that matter for practice and theory.

Population gap. Accompanying partners who arrive without immediate work rights are underrepresented compared with corporate assigned expatriates who receive structured support. Their trajectories are not well documented in a way that connects policy settings to career outcomes.

Analytical gap. Many studies track employment status and salary while giving limited attention to identity work, invisible labour, and the practical conversion factors that turn effort into opportunity. As a result, the link between experience, recognition, and re-entry remains thin.

Theoretical gap. Career Construction Theory and gender or migration perspectives are often used in isolation. Without a combined lens, it is difficult to explain why adaptability produces different results across settings where policy and market rules vary.

Applied gap. Few evaluated interventions map specific levers to outcomes. Examples include partner work rights, credential recognition routes, supervised practice capacity, childcare or time supports, and networked onboarding. There is little evidence on which combinations shorten time to a commensurate role.

Rationale and response.

This study addresses these gaps by centering the voices of accompanying partners and examining how work rights, recognition, and networks shape what adaptability can achieve. It integrates Career Construction Theory with Intersectionality to connect narrative identity and agency with institutional rules and labour-market filters. The multi-source qualitative design uses open-ended surveys to identify recurring patterns across the sample and semi-structured interviews to explore sequence, meaning, and mechanism in greater depth. The Expat Women's Career Reinvention Model provides a framework linking constraints and supports strategies and outcomes. The research questions focus on lived experience and identity, the interaction of structural and psychosocial factors, and the support that enable reintegration. The study therefore aims to advance scholarship while informing the design of career-continuity measures in global mobility programs.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy

This study uses an interpretivist, phenomenological stance to understand how women make sense of relocation, interruption, and recovery. Interpretivism treats reality as socially constructed and best understood through the meanings that people assign to their experiences. Phenomenology focuses on the essence of those experiences as described by participants rather than on variables measured at a distance. This stance is appropriate because the core phenomena, “identity, recognition, and agency”, unfold through stories, emotions, and situated decisions rather than through simple counts alone. (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Schwandt, 2014).

Career Construction Theory directs attention to narrative identity and to **adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence)** as resources that people draw on when plans are disrupted (Savickas, 2013). Intersectionality keeps structural positioning in view by highlighting how gender, migration status, class, race or ethnicity, language, and caregiving responsibilities interact with work rights, credential rules, and labour market norms (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Using these lenses together supports an account that respects lived experience while locating it within institutional settings that shape opportunity.

3.2 Research Design

The study used a multi-source qualitative design to capture both breadth and depth in participants' accounts of relocation-related career interruption. Two qualitative instruments were used in sequence. First, an open-ended survey gathered narrative responses across professions, host countries, relocation histories, work-rights conditions, credential recognition experiences, and career recovery routes. Second, semi-structured interviews provided deeper insight into turning points, barriers, support, identity shifts, and decision making.

This design was appropriate because the study aimed to explain how women interpreted interruption and navigated routes back into meaningful work, rather than to estimate population prevalence or test causal effects. The survey provided a broader descriptive map of recurring experiences across forty-five respondents. The interviews provided depth on

sequence, context, and mechanism through twelve follow-up conversations.

Instrument design followed the research questions. Items for RQ1 focused on vocational identity, meaning making, and perceived status loss or recovery. Items for RQ2 focused on structural constraints and psychosocial processes, including work-rights timing, credential recognition, language thresholds, local experience requirements, identity work, and career adaptability. Items for RQ3 focused on supports and networks, including warm introductions, mentoring or sponsorship, community knowledge, and the redistribution of care and time. The survey instrument appears in Appendix A, and the interview guide appears in Appendix B.

The study does not claim statistical generalisation. Its purpose is analytic generalisation: to identify mechanisms and patterns that may transfer to similar relocation, recognition, and permit contexts.

3.3 Participant Selection and Eligibility

Sampling followed a purposive strategy designed to recruit women whose experiences matched the study focus and to secure variation across occupations and host countries. Three eligibility criteria applied. First, participants had completed at least one international relocation within the past ten years. Second, they had moved as accompanying partners without immediate access to host country work rights or a pre secured role. Third, they reported a career gap, deskilling, or a shift toward requalification or reinvention that they linked to the relocation.

Recruitment targeted professional communities where accompanying partners seek information and support. Invitations were circulated through expatriate networks, professional associations, and LinkedIn groups, and through targeted social media posts. Interested respondents completed a short screening to confirm eligibility and to indicate willingness to be contacted for interview. The screening recorded profession, host country, number of relocations, passport status, and a brief narrative of the most recent move.

To support analytic depth and transferability, the sampling plan sought diversity across sector, seniority, age, and host country. It favoured occupations where credential recognition matters, such as teaching, accounting, and health related roles, while also including fields where reinvention is more common, such as consulting, marketing, recruitment, and real estate. The plan also aimed to balance single passport and dual passport holders and to include households with and without dependent children, since care responsibilities affect time for requalification and networking.

The survey accepted all eligible volunteers until the target of forty-five responses was reached. The interview sample was drawn from survey respondents who indicated willingness to speak further and who increased variation on profession and host country. Selection also considered the stage of the recovery pathway so that interviews included women still navigating recognition, women pursuing reinvention, and women who had reached a commensurate role.

This approach ensured that the data reflected both common mechanisms and contextual differences. It also aligned the sample with the research questions by foregrounding cases where policy settings, recognition routes, supports, and networks were salient to outcomes.

3.4 Participants and Recruitment

The study analysed forty-five survey responses and twelve follow-up interviews drawn from that pool. Respondents represented eight professions: banking and finance (9), teaching (8), insurance (5), real estate (4), chartered accountancy (6), human resources (5), recruitment (4), and consulting (4). This mix intentionally included fields where credential recognition is salient, such as teaching and accounting, as well as fields where reinvention, remote work, and portfolio work are more common, such as consulting, recruitment, human resources, real estate, and finance. Most respondents were mid-career and had held specialist, supervisory, or managerial responsibilities before relocation.

Participants were based in Italy (12), Malta (10), the United Kingdom (8), Portugal (5), Mauritius (4), Germany (3), and Ireland (3). Thirty-one respondents held dual passports and fourteen held a single passport. Mobility histories indicated one international move for twenty-three respondents, two moves for fourteen respondents, and three or more moves for eight respondents. These characteristics reflect the study's focus on recognition and permit regimes in contexts where credential portability, language, work rights, and local labour-market signals can affect access to commensurate roles.

The interview subset of twelve participants was purposively sampled to widen variation by profession, host country, seniority, and recovery stage. It included women who were still navigating recognition steps, women pursuing reinvention, and women who had already reached a commensurate role. Interviews were conducted online between July and October 2025, were audio recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and averaged forty minutes. Pseudonyms were used, and participants could withdraw at any time. Detailed distributions appear in Section 4.1 and in Appendix D, Table S1.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected between July and October 2025 using the six-phase approach to thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke. The first stage consisted of an open-ended online survey. The survey included eligibility screening, demographic and professional background questions, relocation history, host-country context, work-rights status, credential recognition experience, perceived career interruption, routes pursued after relocation and supports or barriers encountered. Respondents were also invited to indicate whether they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

The second stage consisted of semi-structured interviews with twelve participants drawn from the survey pool. Interviewees were purposively selected to widen variation by profession, host country, seniority, passport status, mobility history, and stage of career recovery. The interview sample included participants still navigating recognition processes, participants pursuing reinvention, and participants who had reached a commensurate role.

Interviews were conducted online and lasted approximately forty minutes on average. Each interview followed the same guide but allowed follow-up questions to explore participant-specific experiences. Questions addressed the first months after arrival, the effect of work-rights timing, credential recognition, language and local experience requirements, changes in vocational identity, the role of family and community support, and the decision to pursue requalification, reinvention, or reintegration.

Participants received information about the study before taking part. Consent was obtained digitally for the survey and again before the interview where applicable. Interviews were audio recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were checked against the recordings before coding. Names, employers, schools, small locations, and other identifying details were removed or generalised during transcription and analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the six-phase approach to thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The phases were familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, development of candidate themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the report. The aim was to move from descriptive accounts towards patterned explanations linking constraints, supports, strategies, and outcomes.

The analysis began with repeated reading of the survey responses and interview transcripts. Early notes focused on relocation context, recognition and permit barriers, career identity, support, turning points, and recovery routes. Analytic memos were written after each interview to capture first impressions, possible codes, and points requiring comparison with other accounts.

Coding was conducted manually using a de-identified working dataset. Initial codes were descriptive and remained close to participant language. Examples included permit timing, credential recognition, language threshold, local experience screen, underemployment, warm introduction, mentoring, community knowledge, redistributed care time, requalification action, reinvention action, and identity shift. Codes were then grouped into broader categories reflecting mechanism and function.

Candidate themes were developed through constant comparison across the survey and interview data. Permit timing, credential recognition, language thresholds, and local experience requirements were grouped as structural filters. Warm introductions, mentoring or sponsorship, community knowledge, and redistribution of care and time were grouped as conversion factors. Requalification and reinvention were treated as routes rather than fixed participant types. Candidate themes were reviewed against the full dataset, including discrepant and boundary cases.

Survey responses were used to identify recurring patterns within the purposive sample, while interview data provided depth on sequence, mechanism, and meaning. Counts from the survey are reported descriptively and are not used as prevalence estimates. Quotations were selected to illustrate common experiences, turning points, and boundary cases. They were lightly edited only to remove fillers or identifying details.

New descriptive codes levelled off by interview ten. Interviews eleven and twelve did not generate new code categories but added nuance to existing themes, particularly around credential-recognition pathways and the conditions under which reinvention became preferable to requalification. This was treated as evidence of analytic sufficiency rather than statistical saturation.

Career Construction Theory and Intersectionality were applied as sensitising lenses after inductive coding. Career Construction Theory supported interpretation of identity work and career adaptability, including concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Intersectionality supported interpretation of why similar actions produced different outcomes depending on work rights, credential rules, language, caregiving responsibilities, income, and network access.

3.7 Operational Definitions Used in Coding

To support consistent coding and interpretation, the study used working definitions for the key constructs that recur across the analysis. These definitions guided coding decisions, theme development, and the interpretation of findings.

Commensurate role. A role in the host country that is broadly comparable in level, responsibility, and scope to the participant's pre-relocation role. Where salary information was available, salary comparability was considered as a supporting indicator rather than as the sole measure.

Deskilling. A loss of recognised professional status that resulted from the non-recognition of prior credentials or experience, or from enforced role downgrading linked to licensing rules, requests for local experience, language thresholds, permit timing, or time out of the workforce.

Requalification. The completion of host-country steps required to restore formal recognition. Examples include licensing exams, bridging courses, supervised practice, local registration, or additional study required by a regulator, employer, or professional body.

Reinvention. A strategic redirection into meaningful work outside the original recognition route. Examples include entrepreneurship, freelancing, sector pivots, consulting, remote work, or portfolio work sustained beyond a short-term stopgap.

Reintegration. Entry into a commensurate role or clear upward movement toward a commensurate role after relocation. In this study, reintegration was interpreted in relation to responsibility, professional recognition, scope of work, and career trajectory rather than job title alone.

Career adaptability. The personal resources described in Career Construction Theory that support effective action during change. The four facets are concern, control, curiosity, and confidence.

Identity work. Deliberate reflection and action through which participants revised how they described their professional selves, including how they narrated past expertise, explained

career interruption, and framed future plans.

Work-rights timing. The sequence and duration of administrative steps that shaped permission to work in the host country. This included initial waiting periods on partner visas and the time required to obtain or convert to a work-authorising permit.

Credential recognition. The formal or informal process through which foreign education, professional qualifications, licensing, and experience were evaluated in the host context.

Local experience screen. A stated or implied requirement for recent host-country experience that functioned as a filter during recruitment or professional re-entry.

Warm introduction. A contact-based referral that resulted in a conversation, interview, supervised practice lead, client lead, or other concrete opportunity.

Mentoring and sponsorship. Mentoring refers to advice, guidance, and feedback on strategy. Sponsorship refers to active advocacy that opened access to roles, supervisors, clients, or decision makers.

Supervised practice. A period of work or professional exposure under oversight, usually required before independent practice or full professional recognition was possible.

Conversion factors. Conditions that helped turn effort into opportunity. Examples include protected time for study or applications, childcare or care support, savings for fees, access to mentors or sponsors, warm introductions, and community knowledge about procedures, offices, or employers.

Time to commensurate role. The elapsed period between arrival, or first eligibility to work, and the participant's first commensurate role or meaningful upward movement toward such a role. Where participants pursued requalification, timing was considered from the first concrete recognition step, such as an application, course enrolment, or supervised practice placement.

These working definitions appear in shortened form in Appendix C.

3.8 Trustworthiness and Analytic Rigour

The study applied procedures to support credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. These procedures were selected to make the qualitative analysis transparent and to show how findings were developed from the data.

Credibility. Credibility was supported through the use of two qualitative sources: open-ended survey responses and semi-structured interviews. Survey responses provided breadth across forty-five participants, while interviews provided depth across twelve cases. Patterns identified in the survey were checked against interview accounts, and interview themes were compared back to survey responses to test whether they reflected broader patterns in the dataset.

A small member-checking process was also used. Four interview participants were selected to represent different recovery stages: one participant still navigating recognition, one pursuing

requalification, one pursuing reinvention, and one who had reached a commensurate role. Each received a short-written summary of the interview interpretation and was asked to confirm whether the sequence and meaning had been represented accurately. Feedback clarified timing and wording in two cases but did not alter the main themes.

Peer debriefs were conducted with two research colleagues after every three interviews. These discussions challenged early interpretations and helped refine theme boundaries. For example, early coding treated requalification and reinvention as participant categories. Following peer debriefing, these were reframed as routes that could overlap or occur sequentially. Peer discussion also led to clearer separation between structural filters, such as work-rights timing and credential recognition, and conversion factors, such as warm introductions, mentoring, and care-time redistribution.

Dependability. Dependability was supported through an audit trail. The audit trail included instrument drafts, screening criteria, recruitment wording, codebook versions, analytic memos, theme-development notes, and decisions about merging or renaming codes. Code labels were version controlled so that changes to definitions and theme groupings could be traced. Memos written after each interview documented first impressions, possible alternative interpretations, and links to the research questions.

Confirmability. Coding was completed by a single primary coder. This is acknowledged as a limitation. To reduce the risk of idiosyncratic interpretation, the study used reflexive memos, peer debriefs, discrepant case analysis, and a de-identified working dataset. Reflexive notes documented points at which the researcher's own experience of relocation could influence interpretation. Discrepant cases were retained and used to qualify claims, particularly where participants did not follow the dominant interruption-to-reinvention pattern.

No formal second-coder reliability process was undertaken. This decision is consistent with the interpretivist design, which prioritised depth, meaning, and contextual interpretation rather than inter-rater reliability. However, peer debriefing provided an external challenge to theme development and helped reduce premature closure.

Transferability. Transferability was supported by thick description of participant characteristics, host countries, professional backgrounds, passport status, and mobility histories. Section 4.1 and Appendix D, Table S1 report the sample distribution. The manuscript also defines key constructs in Section 3.7 so that readers can judge whether the findings apply to other relocation and recognition contexts. The study aims for analytic rather than statistical generalisation.

Analytic sufficiency. New descriptive codes levelled off by interview ten. Interviews eleven and twelve did not produce new code categories but added nuance to existing categories, especially around recognition pathways and the timing of reinvention. Analytic sufficiency was therefore judged on the basis that the final interviews refined theme boundaries rather than generating new themes.

Together, these procedures strengthen transparency while remaining aligned with the study's interpretivist and phenomenological orientation.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This project followed established standards for minimal-risk human subjects research. Procedures were designed to protect autonomy, privacy, confidentiality, and participant wellbeing during both the open-ended survey and the semi-structured interviews.

Informed consent. Before participation, each person received information explaining the purpose of the study, what participation involved, potential risks and benefits, the voluntary nature of involvement, and how the data would be used. Consent was obtained digitally for the survey and again before the interview where applicable. Participants could ask questions, decline any item, and stop participating at any time.

Voluntariness and right to withdraw. Participation was voluntary. Individuals could withdraw without providing a reason. Where an interview participant withdrew, the recording and transcript would be deleted and no material from that interview would be retained.

Confidentiality and anonymity. Survey responses and interview transcripts were de-identified before analysis. Pseudonyms replaced participant names. References to specific employers, schools, clinics, small locations, or other potentially identifying details were removed or generalised. The file linking pseudonyms to contact details was stored separately from the research dataset.

Sensitive topics and participant wellbeing. The instruments invited reflection on career experiences but did not require participants to disclose private family matters or detailed immigration information beyond what they chose to share. Participants could skip any question. Interview pacing allowed breaks where needed.

Data security and retention. Audio files, transcripts, survey responses, and working analysis files were stored securely with restricted access. A de-identified dataset was used for coding and analysis. Materials will be retained for five years and then securely destroyed.

Compliance. Procedures aligned with institutional expectations for minimal-risk qualitative research and with applicable data-protection principles. No incentives were offered.

3.10 Role of the Researcher

The researcher has lived experience of international relocation and career disruption. To manage positionality, we used reflexive memos and bracketing to surface assumptions; interpretations were discussed during peer debriefs to minimise projection while preserving empathetic understanding. Notes after each interview captured immediate reflections and potential influence on questioning.

3.11 Data Management and Security

Audio files, transcripts, and survey data were stored on encrypted drives with restricted access. A de-identified working dataset supported analysis; a separate key file mapping pseudonyms to participants was stored offline. Materials will be retained for five years and then securely destroyed, consistent with institutional policy.

3.12 Limitations of the Design

The design privileges depth and context over statistical generalisation. The sample emphasises OECD-type contexts and accompanying partners without immediate work rights; findings are therefore analytically generalisable. Future work should incorporate non-OECD settings and mixed-methods testing of the EWCR proposition (e.g., effects of fast-track recognition on time-to-commensurate role).

4. Results

4.1 Participant Profile

The survey dataset included forty-five women across eight professions and seven host countries. The professional distribution was banking and finance (9), teaching (8), insurance (5), real estate (4), chartered accountancy (6), human resources (5), recruitment (4), and consulting (4). Participants were based in Italy (12), Malta (10), the United Kingdom (8), Portugal (5), Mauritius (4), Germany (3), and Ireland (3).

Thirty-one respondents held dual passports and fourteen held a single passport. Mobility histories included one international move for twenty-three respondents, two moves for fourteen respondents, and three or more moves for eight respondents. Participants ranged from their early thirties to mid-fifties, and most had held specialist, supervisory, or managerial responsibilities before relocation.

The interview subset comprised twelve volunteers from the survey pool. It was selected to include variation by profession, host country, seniority, passport status, mobility history, and recovery stage. The subset included women still navigating recognition processes, women pursuing requalification, women pursuing reinvention, and women who had already reached a commensurate role. Interviews were conducted online between July and October 2025, were audio recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and averaged forty minutes. Further distribution details are provided in Appendix D, Table S1.

4.2 Descriptive Patterns in the Survey Data

The counts reported in this section describe patterns within this purposive sample only. They are not presented as prevalence estimates and should not be generalised statistically beyond the study participants.

Three descriptive patterns were visible in the survey data.

First, twenty-nine of forty-five respondents reported a break in employment, a downgrade in role, or a mismatch between their prior skills and the roles available to them after arrival. These accounts linked disruption to permit timing, credential recognition, language thresholds, local experience requirements, and the early practical demands of settlement.

Second, eighteen of the forty-five respondents reported some form of reinvention, including entrepreneurship, freelancing, sector pivots, remote work, consulting, or portfolio work.

Third, twenty-five of forty-five respondents described active identity renegotiation. These

participants narrated a shift from recognised professional status to newcomer status and then a gradual rebuilding of confidence through small wins, such as completing a course, securing a warm introduction, receiving local guidance, or landing an initial client.

Open-ended survey responses also identified recurring barriers and supports. Frequently reported barriers included credential non-recognition, work-rights timing, lack of local networks, language thresholds, and local experience requirements. Frequently reported supports included warm introductions, mentoring or sponsorship, community knowledge about recognition processes, and redistribution of care and time within the household.

4.3 Thematic Findings From the Interviews

The themes are organised around the research questions. RQ1 focuses on lived experience and vocational identity. RQ2 focuses on structural and psychosocial influences on interruption and recovery. RQ3 focuses on the supports and networks that enable reintegration or make reinvention more viable. Quotations are lightly edited for fluency and to remove identifying details, while preserving participant meaning.

4.3.1 Disrupted Trajectories: “My Career Did not Travel With me”

Participants described relocation as a reset of professional status. This reset was not experienced as a simple pause. It was narrated as a loss of recognition, momentum, confidence, and access to familiar professional signals.

Credential non-recognition was a strong mechanism of disruption. One participant explained:

“I had fifteen years in finance. In Germany they said my degree did not count, so I should start again. It felt like my CV expired at the border.”

(P07, banking and finance, Germany, two relocations)

A participant from a regulated profession described a similar pattern:

“I was qualified before we moved, but in the new country I could not use the title in the same way. I had to prove what I had already proved years before.”

(P11, chartered accountancy, Italy, one relocation)

Work-rights timing created a second form of interruption. For some participants, the delay between arrival and eligibility to work changed the quality of available opportunities:

“I landed ready to work. Then the partner visa clock started. It was months of waiting. By the time I could apply, the roles I wanted were gone.”

(P02, human resources, United Kingdom, one relocation)

Another participant linked waiting time to later employer doubts:

“The gap was not because I stopped wanting to work. It was because I was not allowed to work. But when I started applying, the gap became something I had to explain.”

(P05, recruitment, Malta, two relocations)

Underemployment was often used as an entry tactic, but it carried emotional costs. One participant said:

“Back home I had responsibility and people came to me for decisions. In Malta I took a front-desk role just to get local experience. It helped me enter the market, but it was hard on my confidence.”

(P12, real estate, Malta, one relocation)

These accounts show how structural filters, including permit timing, credential recognition, language thresholds, and local experience requirements, reset status irrespective of prior merit. In Career Construction Theory terms, these filters produced narrative rupture. Through an intersectional lens, the same filters operated unevenly depending on host-country rules, passport status, language, household resources, and care responsibilities.

4.3.2 Adaptation and Reinvention: Making a Path When the Door Stays Shut

Participants did not respond passively to interruption. They mobilised different strategies depending on available time, money, recognition routes, networks, and family arrangements. Two main routes were visible: requalification and reinvention. Some participants pursued both in sequence.

Requalification was used to restore credibility in the host market:

“To be taken seriously here, I needed a local stamp. I did a Master’s and later used that as my bridge back into the conversation.”

(P03, human resources, United Kingdom, one relocation)

Another participant described requalification as necessary but slow:

“The course helped, but it was not only the course. I needed someone to explain the steps, which documents mattered, and where to go next. Without that, I would have lost another year.”

(P09, teaching, Malta, two relocations)

Reinvention appeared where recognition was slow, unclear, or not worth the immediate cost:

“No one would hire me at my previous level. So, I thought, if the door will not open, I must build a side door. That is how my consulting work started.”

(P19, consulting, Portugal, two relocations)

A participant who moved into remote work described the trade-off clearly:

“Remote clients kept me current, but it was unstable. I had work, but I had to keep proving myself every month.”

(P22, consulting, Malta, two relocations)

These strategies reflect career adaptability in action. Concern appeared in planning and anticipating future employability. Control appeared in decisions to study, apply, network, or start independent work. Curiosity appeared in exploring new sectors, remote clients, and portfolio work. Confidence appeared in persistence after rejection. However, adaptability did

not operate alone. It converted into outcomes only where there was enough time, information, finance, and network access to support action.

4.3.3 Supports and Networks as Conversion Factors

Supportive relationships and practical knowledge often determined whether effort became opportunity. Warm introductions helped participants bypass weak local signalling:

“A fellow expatriate introduced me to her manager. One coffee later I had an interview. Without that, my CV was just floating.”

(P21, recruitment, Portugal, three relocations)

Mentoring helped participants translate their experience into local market language:

“The mentor did not give me a job, but she helped me understand how to explain myself here. That changed how people heard my experience.”

(P14, banking and finance, Ireland, one relocation)

Community knowledge shortened the practical learning curve:

“The expatriate group told me exactly which office handled recognition faster and what documents to take. That saved months.”

(P11, chartered accountancy, Italy, one relocation)

Redistribution of care and time at home enabled participants to act on opportunities:

“When my husband took over school runs, I finally had time to complete the licensing course and apply properly.”

(P09, teaching, Malta, two relocations)

These supports functioned as conversion factors. They did not replace skill or effort. Rather, they helped convert existing skill and effort into interviews, applications, supervised practice, courses, client leads, or renewed confidence.

4.3.4 Emotional and Identity Work: From “His Wife” to Professional Again

Career interruption was experienced not only as a labour-market problem but also as an identity disruption. Participants described the emotional difficulty of being socially introduced through their partner rather than through their own professional identity.

One participant described the loss sharply:

“At home I was the manager. Here I was introduced as his wife. I smiled, but inside I shrank two sizes.”

(P16, chartered accountancy, Italy, one relocation)

Another participant connected identity loss to repeated rejection:

“Every unanswered application made me question whether I was still good at what I used to do. It was not only about a job. It was about whether my experience still counted.”

(P08, insurance, United Kingdom, one relocation)

Identity recovery was often linked to small, concrete forms of recognition:

“The first time someone asked for my advice again, I felt something come back. It reminded me that I had not lost the skill. I had lost the platform.”

(P18, consulting, Mauritius, two relocations)

Another participant described reinvention as a route back to professional self-belief:

“I stopped waiting for recognition and created work that used my skills. The title came later. Confidence came first.”

(P28, insurance, United Kingdom, two relocations)

These accounts show that identity repair is both psychosocial and institutional. Confidence recovered faster when participants had visible steps, usable networks, local validation, or income-generating work. Persistent non-recognition prolonged disruption, even among highly motivated participants.

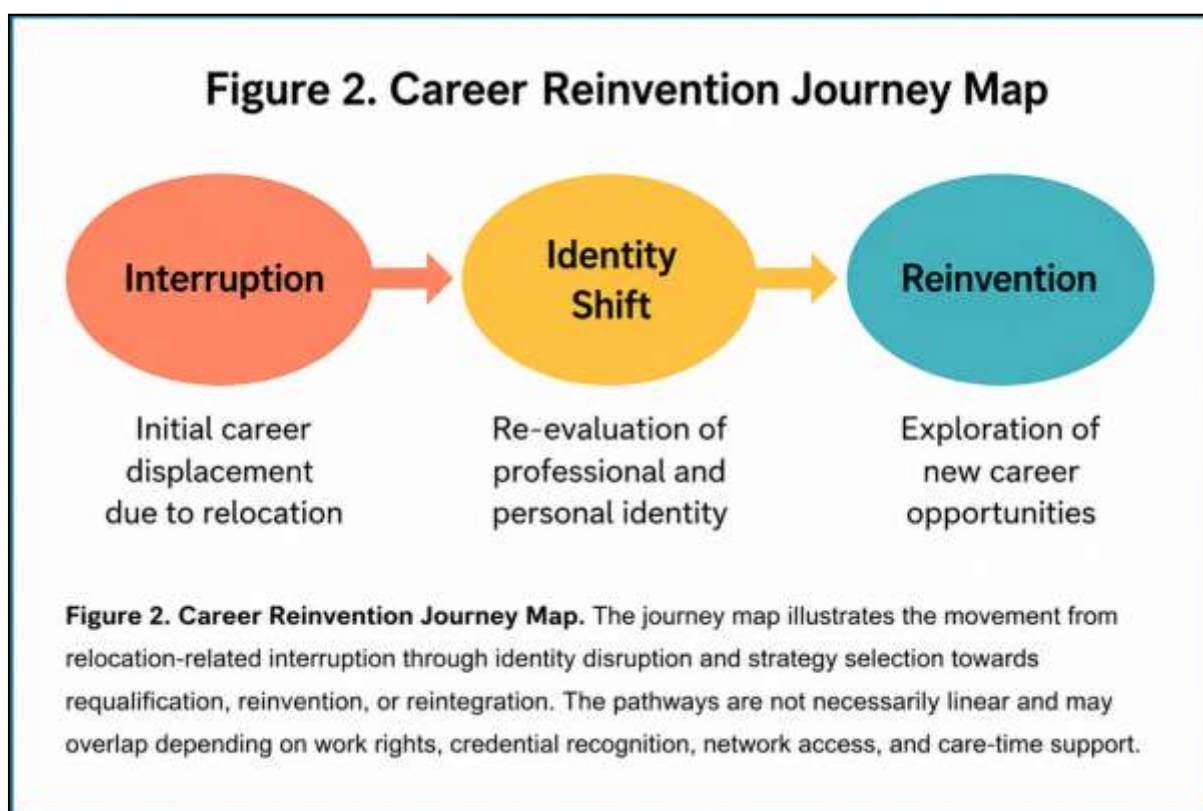


Figure 2. Career Reinvention Journey Map

A visual pathway” showing key stages expat women experience: Interruption → Identity Shift → Reinvention.

4.4 Disconfirming and Boundary Cases

Two boundary cases qualified the dominant pattern and helped refine the EWCR Model.

The first case involved a participant who experienced relatively quick reintegration. Unlike many others, she had work rights shortly after arrival, strong English proficiency, a portable professional background, and a warm introduction into a local employer network. She still experienced uncertainty, but the interruption was shorter and less identity threatening.

“I cannot say it was easy, but I had the right passport, I could work quickly, and someone introduced me to the right people. That changed everything.”

(P06, banking and finance, Ireland, one relocation)

This case qualified the disruption theme by showing that relocation does not inevitably lead to prolonged interruption. Where work rights, language, credential portability, and network access align early, direct reintegration is more likely. This boundary case sharpened the model by clarifying that structural filters vary in intensity across host contexts and participant circumstances.

The second case involved a participant with strong motivation and high adaptability who nevertheless remained stalled. She had completed several applications, attended networking events, and explored requalification, but recognition rules and limited supervised practice opportunities blocked progress.

“People kept telling me to be resilient. I was resilient. I was applying, studying, asking questions, going to events. But there was no clear route into supervised practice, so I kept circling the same problem.”

(P10, teaching, Germany, two relocations)

This case qualified the adaptation theme by showing that adaptability is not sufficient when institutional routes remain closed or unclear. It strengthened the interpretation that career recovery depends on conversion factors, not only personal agency. The case also helped separate effort from outcome in the analysis and supported the paper’s central claim that resilience must be read alongside rules, recognition, and access.

4.5 Cross-Theme Dynamics and the EWCR Logic (Bridging to Discussion)

The themes point to a consistent sequence that links constraints, supports, strategies, and outcomes. The pattern aligns with the Expat Women’s Career Reinvention Model and clarifies why similarly qualified women diverge after arrival.

Sequence and interaction

Most participants began with a status reset driven by permit timing, credential recognition, language thresholds, and requests for local experience. These filters slowed access and

produced gaps or downgrades. Women then mobilised strategies that reflected available resources. Where recognition maps were clear, supervised practice was available, and family time could be reallocated, requalification progressed. Where recognition was slow or opaque, or where time and finance were tight, reinvention provided the earliest viable path. Supports such as warm introductions, mentoring, and community know how converted effort into concrete opportunities. Identity work ran in parallel. Confidence and agency recovered faster when recognition steps were visible and when networks signalled professional status.

Conversion factors

Three conversion factors were especially visible. First, clarity of rules and steps increased persistence and reduced wasted effort. Second, access to people who could sponsor, supervise, or introduce accelerated interviews and placements. Third, time and care support at home enabled study, applications, and meetings. In cases with all three factors, requalification or direct reintegration was common. In cases with one or two factors, reinvention tended to dominate in the short term.

Boundary conditions

Outcomes varied by host context. Settings with reciprocal work rights and automatic credential portability produced quicker direct reintegration. Settings with strict licensing and slow permit processes produced longer gaps and a higher share of reinvention. Personal resources also mattered. Savings, credit, and digital access shaped the feasibility of study, supervised practice, or entrepreneurship. These differences do not negate the shared pattern. They indicate which levers shift a person from interruption toward a commensurate role.

Implications for the model

The findings support an institutional reading of adaptability. Concern, control, curiosity, and confidence were visible across cases, but they produced outcomes only when rules and supports allowed them to do so. The EWCR Model should therefore be interpreted as a system that links personal resources to institutional pathways. The actionable levers are recognition speed, supervised practice capacity, curated introductions, and time support during study and early job search.

Illustrative pathway

A typical reintegration arc began with permit waiting and recognition checks, moved to a short credential that opened access to supervised practice, and then progressed towards a commensurate role.

A typical reinvention arc began with permit waiting and stalled applications, moved to remote or local self-employment to maintain skills and income, and then either stabilised as a portfolio career or later returned to requalification once time and finance allowed.

This cross-theme logic explains why a single intervention rarely shifts outcomes. Progress depends on a bundle of levers that reduce delay, increase access, and create time. The next subsection provides brief answers to the research questions.

4.6 Brief Answer to the Research Questions (for Reader Orientation)

RQ1. Vocational identity after relocation

Relocation without immediate work rights produced a reset of status for most participants. Early experiences included enforced gaps, underemployment, and weak signalling of past expertise. These experiences were narrated as loss of recognition and confidence, followed by gradual recovery as small wins accumulated. Identity repair accelerated when recognition steps were visible and when networks affirmed professional status.

RQ2. Structural and psychosocial influences on interruption and recovery

Structural factors set the tempo of recovery. Permit timing, credential recognition rules, language thresholds, and requests for local experience delayed or downgraded entry. Psychosocial processes shaped how participants responded. Career adaptability, defined here as concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, supported planning, action, exploration, and persistence. Adaptability converted into outcomes only when rules were clear, supervised practice was available, and time and finance could be arranged. Without these conditions, effort produced slower returns.

RQ3. Supports and networks that enable reintegration and when reinvention dominates

Warm introductions, mentoring or sponsorship, and community know-how were the strongest enablers of interviews, supervised practice opportunities, and offers. Redistribution of care and time at home created the hours needed for study and applications. Where recognition processes were clearer and these supports were present, participants generally described a more direct path towards reintegration into a commensurate role. When recognition was slow or opaque and supports were thin, reinvention through entrepreneurship, freelancing, sector pivots, or remote work became the more viable route, at least in the short term.

5.1 Disrupted Trajectories as Structural Filters and Narrative Rupture

Permit timing, credential recognition, language thresholds, and local experience requirements appeared to operate as structural filters that slowed or reset labour-market entry for many participants. These mechanisms help explain the employment gaps, role downgrades, and mismatches described in the survey and interviews.

In Career Construction Theory terms, the first months in the host country were often narrated as a rupture in the career story. Recognition was interrupted, previous titles lost signalling value, and participants described a shift from established professional to uncertain newcomers. Intersectionality helps explain why similar rules produced different experiences among participants. Work-rights pathways, recognition regimes, language requirements, household resources, and caregiving responsibilities shaped the options available after arrival.

These findings suggest that career interruption is not produced by one barrier alone. A delay in work rights may create an employment gap, which may later be interpreted by employers as a loss of currency. Credential non-recognition may then combine with local experience requirements to deepen the interruption. The evidence therefore points to a cumulative

process rather than a single cause.

5.2 Adaptation, Requalification, and Reinvention

Requalification and reinvention emerged as strategic responses to context rather than as fixed participant types. The four adaptability resources, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, were visible across cases, but their effects varied.

Concern supported planning. Control appeared in decisions to study, apply, network, or create independent work. Curiosity supported exploration of alternative sectors and remote opportunities. Confidence supported persistence after rejection. These resources appeared more likely to produce progress where participants also had access to clear recognition pathways, time, finance, supervised practice, and professional networks.

The findings therefore suggest that adaptability enables action but does not remove structural barriers. Similar levels of effort may produce different outcomes where institutional conditions differ.

5.3 Supports and Networks as Conversion Factors

Warm introductions, mentoring, sponsorship, community knowledge, and redistributed care time appeared to change the pace and direction of recovery. These supports did not create skill or experience, but they helped participants convert existing capability into practical opportunities.

The evidence suggests that sponsor-style introductions may substitute, at least partly, for weak local signalling. Community knowledge may reduce wasted time by directing participants towards the correct offices, procedures, or professional contacts. Redistribution of care may create the time needed for study, applications, and supervised practice.

These findings should be interpreted as qualitative patterns rather than causal estimates. They nevertheless point to specific mechanisms that future research can test.

5.4 Emotional and Identity Work

Identity repair appeared to develop alongside formal recognition, network access, and renewed professional activity. Participants frequently described an initial loss of status and confidence followed by gradual recovery through small forms of recognition.

The findings suggest that identity work is not separate from labour-market outcomes. Confidence may influence willingness to accept temporary downgrading, continue through recognition processes, approach professional contacts, or experiment with reinvention. Institutional recognition and social validation appeared to support this recovery, although the study cannot establish a direct causal effect.

5.5 Boundary Conditions for the EWCR Model

The EWCR Model is most applicable in contexts where work-rights delays, credential recognition, licensing, and network access shape career entry. Where work rights are reciprocal and credentials are portable, the interruption may be shorter and direct

reintegration more feasible. Where recognition is slow or opaque, supervised practice is limited, or care demands are high, reinvention may become more prominent.

Personal and household resources also appear to shape the available route. Savings may support requalification. Digital access and prior client networks may support reinvention. These conditions should be treated as boundary conditions rather than universal predictors.

5.6 Implications for Research and Practice

The findings support the value of combining Career Construction Theory with Intersectionality. Career Construction Theory helps explain agency, narrative identity, and adaptability, while Intersectionality helps explain why similar efforts produce different outcomes across institutional and social contexts.

For practice, the findings suggest that employers and mobility teams should look beyond social adjustment and consider career continuity. Potential measures include clearer recognition guidance, introductions to professional bodies and employers, access to supervised practice, and time support during requalification.

These recommendations should be treated as evidence-informed options rather than proven interventions. Their effectiveness should be evaluated in different professions and host-country contexts.

5.7 Limitations and Transferability

The qualitative design prioritises depth and sequence over statistical inference. The sample is concentrated in settings where recognition and licensing are salient, and the participants are mostly mid-career. These choices fit the study aims but limit generalisation to similar contexts. The manuscript provides thick description of roles and host settings and offers working definitions so that readers can judge fit with their own contexts. The model is intended as a practical framework that can be adapted to different recognition and permit regimes.

Clarification for readers

Transferability is an informed judgement made by the reader. To support that judgement, Section 4.1 and Appendix D provide distributions by profession and host country, while Section 3.7 defines the key constructs exactly as they were used in coding.

5.8 Methodological Reflections and Boundary Conditions for Interpretation

The interpretivist, phenomenological stance shaped what the study could examine and what remained beyond its scope. The design privileged sequence, meaning, and mechanism over prevalence. The multi-source qualitative design addressed this limitation by combining an open-ended survey with in-depth interviews, allowing patterns to be compared across sources and examined against discrepant cases.

Two boundary conditions are central when interpreting findings. First, host contexts in this sample emphasised recognition and licensing. In settings with reciprocal work rights and

automatic credential portability, the interruption arc is shallower, and direct reintegration is more common. Second, the sample contains a high share of mid-career professionals with portable skills. In occupations with less portable skills or more stringent licensing, time to reintegration may be longer and reinvention more prevalent.

Three validity threats were addressed. Role proximity was managed through reflexive memos, peer debriefs, and a documented audit trail. Premature closure on themes was reduced by maintaining inductive coding until descriptive codes levelled off and by using theory only after that point. Survivorship bias was addressed by recruiting through communities that include both active job seekers and those focused on settlement and by retaining quotes that reflect stalls and switches as well as successes.

Clarification for readers

These reflections explain why we claim analytic generalisation. The goal is to provide a mechanism-based account that readers can test against their own contexts rather than to estimate population rates.

5.9 Propositions and Agenda for Future Research

The findings support a set of directional propositions for future testing. These propositions are not presented as causal results from the present study. They identify relationships suggested by the qualitative evidence and by the logic of the EWCRC Model.

P1. Recognition clarity and speed. Clearer and faster credential recognition is expected to reduce the time required to reach a commensurate role, particularly in regulated professions.

P2. Supervised practice capacity. Access to supervised practice is expected to increase the likelihood of reintegration where formal recognition depends on local experience or oversight.

P3. Networked access. Warm introductions, sponsorship, and professional association access are expected to improve the likelihood that applications lead to interviews, supervised opportunities, or offers.

P4. Time and care support. Redistribution of care responsibilities and access to protected time are expected to increase participation in requalification, job search, and professional networking.

P5. Bundled support. Combinations of recognition guidance, supervised practice, networked access, and time support are expected to be more effective than isolated interventions.

These propositions reflect the study's central argument that adaptability produces uneven outcomes because it operates within different institutional and household conditions. Future research should test these propositions using longitudinal and mixed-methods designs across professions and host countries.

Matched cohort studies could compare participants exposed to faster recognition processes with those following standard routes. Longitudinal qualitative studies could track how

identity, strategy, and career outcomes change during the first eighteen months after relocation. Survey-based studies could examine whether warm introductions, supervised practice, and care support predict shorter time to commensurate work.

Future analysis should also examine differences by migration status, profession, caregiving load, household resources, language proficiency, and prior network access. An intersectional approach is necessary because the same intervention may produce different outcomes depending on participants' starting conditions.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Overview

Recommendations translate the Expat Women's Career Reinvention Model into actions for employers, professional bodies, universities, and policymakers. Each action targets one or more propositions from Section 5.9 and focuses on recognition speed, supervised practice capacity, networked access, and time support.

6.2 Employers and Global Mobility Teams

Rationale. Employers may help reduce the duration and impact of interruption by aligning relocation services with career continuity rather than social adjustment alone.

Actions

1. **Partner permit anticipation** - Coordinate with immigration providers to pre-brief partners on new country context, steps, likely timelines, and earliest eligibility to work. Share a one-page roadmap during offer stage.
2. **Recognition map at onboarding** - Provide a role specific checklist that lists regulator contacts, document requirements, and known exam windows. Assign a single point of contact in HR.
3. **Supervised practice partnerships** - Create agreements with departments or client teams to host supervised practice placements for regulated professions. Set a minimum number of placements per quarter.
4. **Curated introductions** - Replace cold applications with sponsor style introductions to three relevant hiring managers or supervisors within the first three months in country.
5. **Protected time** - Offer time credits during requalification such as one afternoon per week for study or supervised practice during the first six months.
6. **Internal talent pools** - List partner skills in a managed pool and allow managers to request project-based work that maintains currency while recognition is in progress.

Firm-focused reviews and international partner surveys support these employer-led measures as possible ways to improve access to supervised and commensurate roles. (Fee, 2025; Permits Foundation, 2022).

Measurement

Track months to first supervised role and months to first commensurate role for partners connected to these supports versus historical baselines.

6.3 Professional Bodies and Regulators

Rationale. Recognition speed and supervised practice capacity appear to be important factors shaping the time required for reintegration.

Actions

1. **Public recognition maps** - Publish a step-by-step route with expected timelines, intake windows, fees, and contact points. Update quarterly.
2. **Pre-assessment service** - Offer rapid eligibility checks that confirm which documents are missing and which exams apply.
3. **Provisional or supervised practice** - Enable supervised practice under oversight while exams are pending where this is safe. Expand supervisor capacity through approved panels.
4. **Bridging modules** - Provide short, focused modules that align directly with exam content or local practice norms.
5. **Progress trackers** - Give candidates a digital dashboard that shows status by step and flags the next required action.

Publishing recognition maps, enabling provisional or supervised practice, and offering short bridging modules align with recent recommendations for faster, clearer credential pathways (European University Association, 2024; European Court of Auditors, 2024).

Measurement

Report median days from application to recognition decision, number of supervised practice places, and completion rates for bridging modules.

6.4 Universities, Colleges, and Accredited Providers

Rationale. Providers may strengthen the connection between learning and employability by aligning content and placement opportunities with regulatory requirements.

Actions

1. **Recognition aligned certificates** - Offer short credentials that map to specific recognition gaps and that are recognised by local regulators.
2. **Placement brokering** - Partner with employers to guarantee supervised practice slots tied to certificate completion.
3. **Career workshops** - Run practical sessions on portfolio signalling, interview conversion, and client acquisition for reinvention routes.

4. **Flexible delivery** - Provide evening or weekend options and recorded content to match care schedules.

Measurement

Publish placement rates within three months of course completion and time to first supervised role for graduates.

6.5 Public Policy and Economic Development

Rationale. Policy shapes the conditions within which adaptability can be translated into career opportunities by influencing work rights, childcare access, and credential-recognition processes.

Actions

1. Partner work rights in shortage areas. Grant immediate or facilitated work rights to accompanying partners who hold qualifications in shortage occupations.
2. Fast-track credential routes. Fund joint regulator-employer programmes that reduce recognition delays and expand supervised practice capacity.
3. Time-support credits. Provide time-limited childcare credits that can be used during recognised study or supervised practice.
4. Regional talent platforms. Create local platforms where accompanying partners can register their skills and receive curated introductions to small and medium-sized employers.

Partner work rights in shortage areas and time-limited care supports may contribute to stronger assignment acceptance, retention, and partner wellbeing (Permits Foundation, 2022).

Measurement.

Track regional indicators such as time to first commensurate role, underemployment among accompanying partners, and employer retention following international assignments.

6.6 Programme Design Principles

Across settings, effective initiatives share four features.

1. **Clarity first:** Publish exact steps, timelines, and contacts to reduce uncertainty and wasted effort.
2. **Capacity where it matters:** Increase supervised practice slots and supervisor panels in regulated fields.
3. **People as levers:** Replace generic networking with sponsor style introductions and association membership that signals credibility.
4. **Time as currency:** Protect time through schedule flexibility, credits, or childcare so that study and supervised practice can proceed.

6.7 Implementation Roadmap

Phase one, first ninety days: Publish recognition maps. Identify supervisor panels. Launch curated introductions for incoming partners.

Phase two, months four to nine: Stand up supervised practice partnerships. Offer first bridging modules. Introduce time credits and childcare support.

Phase three, months ten to eighteen: Evaluate outcomes against baseline. Expand capacity where conversion is strongest. Retire activities that do not move time to first supervised or commensurate role.

6.8 Monitoring and Evaluation

Align monitoring with the propositions in Section 5.9.

- **Speed.** Months to first supervised role and to first commensurate role.
- **Access.** Number of supervised placements, number of warm introductions, and mentor or sponsor matches.
- **Conversion.** Application to interview and interview to offer rates.
- **Equity.** Outcomes disaggregated by migration status, race or ethnicity where applicable, caregiving load, and household income.
- **Sustainability.** Income stability and client retention for reinvention cases at six and twelve months.

6.9 Risks and Mitigations

Risk 1: Partners may be channelled into reinvention due to slow recognition even when requalification would be optimal.

Mitigation: Publish realistic recognition timelines and place candidates in short, supervised roles while exams are pending.

Risk 2: Supervisor capacity may lag demand.

Mitigation: Incentivise supervisors with recognition of service, modest stipends, or reduced licence fees.

Risk 3: Supports may benefit those with stronger starting networks.

Mitigation. Prioritise curated introductions for candidates with low initial network access and monitor equity indicators.

7. Conclusion

This study examined how international relocation shapes career interruption and recovery for expatriate women who move as accompanying partners without immediate work rights. Using Career Construction Theory and Intersectionality, it traced a patterned sequence that begins with structural filters and continues through adaptation, requalification or reinvention,

and reintegration. The analysis showed that adaptability, defined as concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, enables action but does not by itself overcome policy settings, licensing rules, and labour market norms. Conversion into outcomes depends on recognition speed, supervised practice capacity, networked access, and time support.

The findings contribute three advances. First, they offer an integrated explanation that connects personal resources to institutional rules and to market signals. Second, they foreground an underserved population and document how recognition and permits shape real options, not only attitudes or aspirations. Third, they present the Expat Women's Career Reinvention Model as a practical map that links constraints, supports, strategies, and outcomes. The model explains why similarly qualified women follow different routes after arrival and identifies levers that shorten interruption and restore commensurate employment.

Implications for practice follow directly. Employers and mobility teams can anticipate permit steps, map recognition routes, fund bridging, create supervised practice placements, and replace cold applications with curated introductions. Professional bodies and regulators can publish recognition maps, expand supervisor panels, and allow provisional practice where safe. Universities and providers can align short credentials with recognition gaps and broker placements. Policymakers can enable partner work rights in shortage areas and provide time limited childcare credits during requalification. Monitoring should track months to first supervised role and to first commensurate role, conversion from interview to offer, and equity across groups.

The study has limits. It privileges depth overestimates of prevalence and focuses on contexts where recognition and licensing are salient. Transferability depends on the fit between those contexts and the reader's setting. The propositions outlined in the discussion provide a path for mixed-methods testing and programme evaluation across professions and host countries. Future work should test the effect of bundled interventions on time to reintegration and should examine non-OECD contexts where recognition and permit regimes differ.

In sum, continuity after relocation is produced through rules, resources, and relationships. Personal effort is necessary, but outcomes improve when systems are designed to convert effort into opportunity. The argument of this article is that career continuity for accompanying partners is achievable when recognition is faster, supervised practice is available, introductions are curated, and time is protected for study and early job search.

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Appendixes

Appendix A. Survey Instrument

Final open-ended survey used in July to October 2025, including eligibility screener and consent preamble. Referenced in Sections 3.2, 3.4, and 3.5.

Appendix A. Survey Instrument

Final open-ended survey used July–October 2025. Includes eligibility screener and consent preamble. Referenced in Sections 3.2, 3.4, 3.5.

1. Eligibility screener covering relocation timing, accompanying partner status without immediate work rights, and evidence of career gap or reinvention.
2. Consent preamble outlining purpose, voluntary participation, anonymity, and data handling.
3. Respondent profile fields: profession, host country, number of relocations, passport status.
4. Arrival conditions and first steps in the host country.
5. Work rights steps and timeline, including waiting periods and conversions.
6. Credential recognition: required documents, exams, supervised practice, and bridging.
7. Job search activities and outcomes including warm introductions and association membership.
8. Identity and wellbeing items focused on confidence and small wins.
9. Actions taken toward requalification, reinvention, or reintegration, and current status.

Appendix B. Interview Guide

Semi structured interview protocol with prompts and probes. Referenced in Sections 3.2, 3.4, and 3.5.

Appendix B. Interview Guide

Semi structured protocol with prompts and probes. Referenced in Sections 3.2, 3.4, 3.5.

1. Opening, consent confirmation, and participant context.
2. Relocation context including visa route, family responsibilities, and language use.
3. First months after arrival: searches, recognition steps, barriers encountered.
4. Decision points between requalification and reinvention, including reasons and timing.
5. Supports and networks: warm introductions, mentoring or sponsorship, community know-how.
6. Time and care: distribution of care and time available for study or applications.
7. Identity and meaning: labels, confidence, small wins, and narrative shifts.
8. Current status: supervised practice, commensurate role, portfolio or remote work.
9. Closing: advice for newcomers and permission to follow up.

Appendix C. Mini Codebook and Operational Definitions

Concise definitions used during coding and analysis, aligned to Section 3.6 terms. Referenced in Sections 3.6 and 5.7.

Appendix C. Mini Codebook and Operational Definitions

Concise definitions used during coding and analysis, aligned with the operational definitions in Section 3.7 and referenced in Sections 3.7 and 5.7.

1. **Commensurate role:** A role broadly comparable in level, responsibility, and scope to the participant's pre-relocation role. Where salary information was available, salary comparability was treated as a supporting indicator rather than the sole measure.
2. **Deskilling:** Loss of recognised professional status resulting from the non-recognition of credentials or experience, or from enforced role downgrading linked to licensing requirements, language thresholds, local experience expectations, permit timing, or time out of the workforce.
3. **Requalification:** Steps taken to restore formal recognition, including examinations, bridging courses, supervised practice, local registration, or further study required by a regulator or professional body.
4. **Reinvention:** Strategic redirection into meaningful work outside the original recognition route, including entrepreneurship, freelancing, consulting, sector change, remote work, or portfolio work.
5. **Reintegration:** Entry into a commensurate role or clear upward movement towards one, assessed through professional recognition, responsibility, scope of work, and career trajectory rather than job title alone.
6. **Career adaptability:** The resources described in Career Construction Theory that support anticipation, action, exploration, and persistence during change: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence.
7. **Identity work:** Reflection and action through which participants revised how they described their professional selves, interpreted interruption, and framed future plans.
8. **Work-rights timing:** The sequence and duration of administrative steps shaping permission to work in the host country.
9. **Credential recognition:** The formal or informal evaluation of foreign education, professional qualifications, licensing, and experience in the host context.
10. **Local experience screen:** A stated or implied requirement for recent host-country experience used as a filter during recruitment or professional re-entry.
11. **Warm introduction:** A contact-based referral that resulted in a conversation, interview, supervised practice lead, client lead, or other concrete opportunity.
12. **Mentoring and sponsorship:** Mentoring refers to advice, guidance, and feedback. Sponsorship refers to active advocacy that opens access to roles, supervisors, clients, or decision makers.
13. **Supervised practice:** A period of work or professional exposure under oversight before independent practice or full professional recognition is permitted.
14. **Conversion factors:** Conditions that help turn effort into opportunity, including protected time, childcare or care support, savings for fees, access to mentors or sponsors, warm introductions, and community knowledge.
15. **Time to commensurate role:** The period between arrival, or first eligibility to work, and the participant's first commensurate role or meaningful upward movement towards one.

Appendix D. Supplementary Tables

This appendix provides supplementary tabulated information supporting the results presented in Section 4.

Table S1. Participant distributions by profession, host country, passport status, and mobility history

Table S2. Reported barriers and supports identified in the survey, presented as raw counts

Table S1a. Profession distribution (Survey n = 45)	
Profession	Count (n)
Banking and finance	9
Teaching	8
Insurance	5
Real estate	4
Chartered accountancy	6
Human resources	5
Recruitment	4
Consulting	4

Table S1b. Host country distribution (Survey n = 45)	
Host country	Count (n)
Italy	12
Malta	10
United Kingdom	8
Portugal	5
Mauritius	4
Germany	3
Ireland	3

Table S1c. Passport status and mobility history (Survey n = 45)	
Category	Count (n)
Passport status Dual	31
Passport status Single	14
One relocation	23
Two relocations	14
Three or more relocations	8

Table S2. Reported barriers and supports with counts and relative frequencies from the survey. Referenced in Sections 4.2 and 5.3.

Table S2a. Reported barriers (Survey n = 45) — counts to be inserted		
Barrier	Count (n)	Share (%)
Credential non recognition		
Work rights timing		
Lack of local network		
Language threshold		
Local experience screen		
Table S2b. Reported supports (Survey n = 45) — counts to be inserted		
Support	Count (n)	Share (%)
Warm introductions		
Mentoring or sponsorship		
Community know-how		
Childcare or time redistribution		

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