



Women and International Careers

Challenges, Opportunities and Advice



Published by Vipe and Innovation Norway, June 2007. The Report is a result of a cooperation project between Vipe and Innovation Norway which was implemented in the spring of 2007.

This document represents an excerpt from the report, and includes its summary and introduction, so that the reader is able to get an overview of its content. The unabridged report is available in Norwegian only and is published at www.vipe.no Questions relating to the Project and the Report Women and International Careers may be directed to the general manager of Vipe, Ms, Vibeke Horn either by phone +47-45 66 12 10 or per e-mail: vibeke@vipe.no

In the autumn of 2007 until the summer of 2008 the issues of this project will be discussed further in an extended co-operation project between Innovation Norway, the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, The Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, and the consultancy firm Vipe. This phase of the Project shall result in the following: A good practice guide for enterprises with desire to recruit the best minds, irrespective of gender, for international posts and assignments. The good practice guide will be launched in the early summer of 2008, and it can be downloaded from various Internet sites belonging to the various cooperation partners:



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Summary

Since 2003, the consultancy firm Vipe has been advising the Norwegian private sector as well as public authorities in Norway on different types of internationalisation processes, such as for instance export and relocation seminars. In the course of arranging these seminars, we have come to feel that women are in the majority as far as these processes go. In order to ascertain whether, and if so why this is so, Vipe in cooperation with Innovation Norway implemented the Project entitled Women and international Careers in the spring of 2007.

After carrying out random checks at Norwegian enterprises doing business internationally, the figures confirmed our impression: Between 3 and 25 percent of workers stationed abroad in the enterprises that participated in our survey were women.

Do these disproportionate numbers in relation to international relocation represent a challenge? As the percentage of employees working abroad for major Norwegian corporations has doubled in 15 years, the answer to this question is undoubtedly yes. 30 of the largest Norwegian corporations have 65 percent of their workforce stationed abroad, and the need for international relocation of competent Norwegian workers is likely to increase in the time ahead. The problem is that Norwegian employees to a greater extent than previously are reluctant to venture beyond Norwegian borders. Given this situation it is important to give priority to increasing the recruitment among the under-represented half of the workforce which women represent.

Through interviews with 23 women and two men who all had experience with living and working abroad, we have been able to gather information about the possibilities and challenges these individuals have experienced through opting for an international career. Our objectives have been, on the one hand to provide recruitment advice aimed at a future, international, labour market, and on the other hand to inspire women standing on the threshold to the great, big world to dare take the plunge. From 1. June 2007 onwards, several of these interviews will be published as podcasts on Vipe's homepage: www.vipe.no.

In addition to an introduction, and a conclusion, the Report consists of three chapters: Chapter 1 presents the challenges linked to an international career, while Chapter 2 examines the opportunities presented by international relocation. Chapter 3 offers advice on internationalisation and recruitment.

In our opinion, the most important challenges which the interviews revealed proved to be the dilemma of ensuring that the career of your spouse does not suffer on account of one

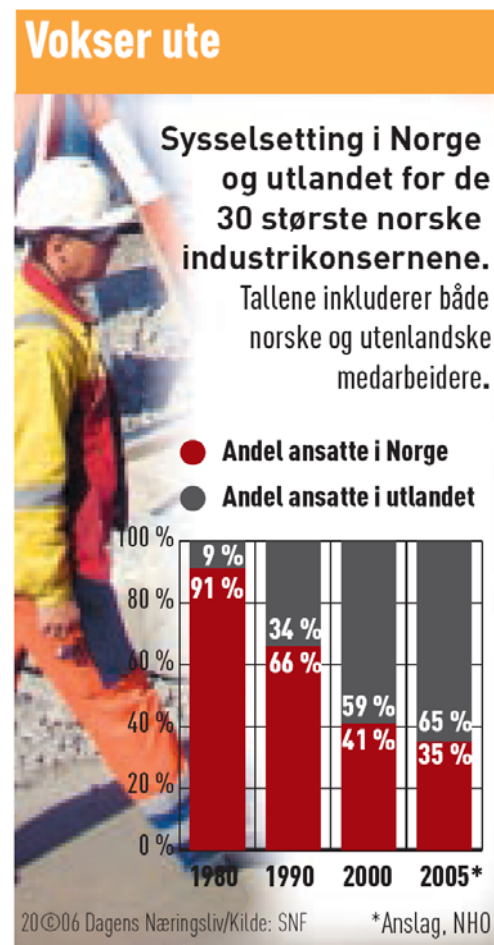
party moving abroad, and repatriation. When asked about the opportunities represented by an international career, the most common responses were a personal perspective and development of management skills. The interesting thing was that several of the findings applied to the men as well. If that is the case, one possible approach might be to ascertain what expectations today's workers – both male and female- have to an attractive employer. The gauntlet is hereby thrown.

Introduction

Working internationally is not a basic human right. However, Norwegian corporations are becoming increasingly dependent on that their employees are willing to work abroad. Figures from the Institute for Research in Economics and Business Administration (NSF) illustrate this fact. In 1980, the 30 largest industrial corporations had 9 percent of their workforce stationed abroad. Today, the percentage is 65 percent.¹ This means that it would be advantages for the enterprises to recruit from the largest candidate base possible within their own corporation. But is this being done today?

Since 2003 Vipe has been asked to contribute to various export and internationalisation events by Norwegian enterprises and public authorities. During the course of these years, we have noted how few women there are at these events. It seems to be primarily men who choose to work outside Norway. This made us curious as to why this is the case.

A quick survey among the largest corporations in Norway that station a percentage of their workers abroad confirmed our view. Generally, Norwegian women who choose to relocate internationally represent a clear minority. Our survey showed that between 3 and 25 percent of the personnel who live and work abroad are women². The good news concerning these figures is that the gender distribution in our survey is more even than what the situation indicates for the majority of foreign enterprises.



The illustration above shows how the largest Norwegian corporations have the majority of their employees (65%) abroad today.

¹The survey relating to the number of Norwegians working for a Norwegian corporation abroad was carried out by the Institute for Research in Economics and Business Administration (NSF) in 1980 (9 percent, 1990 (44 percent) and 2000 (59 percent), while the estimate for 2005 has been made by the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise. The figure is from the financial newspaper Dagens Næringsliv 7. August 2006.
² The figures were compiled based on information obtained per phone and/or email from Aker Kværner, Norsk Hydro, Telenor, Yara International, DnB NOR, Total E&P Norge, Orkla, Norske Skog, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs., Jotun, Innovation Norway and Statoil.

In European corporation nine in ten workers stationed abroad are men (Mercer Human Resource Consulting, 2006), while for North American corporations, the corresponding figure for women may be as low as 6 percent. (Sheida Hodge, 1999; Linda Stroh, 2005). The percentage rate for women is currently on the rise.

Through this survey Vipe and Innovation Norway would like to look into whether there is anything that can be done to make more women want to work internationally. The Norwegian labour market is able to lay claim to the highest labour force participation throughout Europe for both men and women.

An important reason for this high labour force participation is the degree of flexibility which employees are offered in this country. While part-time work is less common outside Scandinavia, it is something which we here in this country take for granted. (Eurostat and the Gender Equality Barometer 2005). What we have been able to ascertain is that there are female executives and female employees working abroad both for both the public and private actors, but so far little attention has been given to discovering why there are so few of them. Our initiative represents an attempt to discover what individuals with experience from international relocation feel would be good measures to motivate Norwegians to work outside Norway.

Why, then, have Vipe and Innovation Norway elected to give special focus to women in this context? As previously mentioned one of the keywords here is the desire to be able to pick candidates from the largest possible candidate base. In addition, the corporate battle for expert competence is increasing in a pressured labour market. In 2006, the Norwegian financial newspaper Dagens Næringsliv reported that Norwegian enterprises find that it is more difficult to recruit employees for assignments abroad today compared to a few years back (Dagens Næringsliv, 7. August 2006). It might be that some potential, but less visible groups are being overlooked. Is it simply that employers think too narrowly when attempting to locate the best candidate to fill the new post at the sales division in Qatar or the post as director in Paris? Would it help to consider more women?

The life-work balance is increasingly becoming a strategic advantage for enterprises wanting to attract the best minds. Enterprises that are able to adjust to the expectations of the new generation with regard to combining a career and a family life are likely to be regarded as attractive places to work. What is the reason for this sudden urge to please potential employees? Aside from the economic boom in recent years, the access to labour within Norway's primary export sectors (petroleum, energy, fishery and technology) is currently declining fast. Moreover, the post World War 2 baby boomers are about to retire, and as a result the balance of power is shifting from the employer to the employee, and thus the employer will have to respond to new demands: What values

does the company have? Which management and organisation cultures dominate the enterprise? Is it possible to combine parenthood and a career in this company? Is it attractive for me to work internationally for this corporation?

These issues are often referred to as employer branding, and is among other things reflected in the annual list of the best places to work in Norway conducted by the consultancy firm Great Place to Work. The number of enterprises that implement their survey has increased dramatically in recent years, something which may be interpreted as a reflection of the need to stand out to potential employees. Among other things, the consultancy firm employ the work-life balance as a key indicator for selecting their top company³.

In order to find the causes behind the situation described by Dagens Næringsliv, Vipe and Innovation Norway chose to interview 23 women and two men who are currently working or who had recently been working abroad. All respondents had vast international experience and held executive positions in both the public and the private sector, thus representing a group of people with power and positions. We asked them to advise enterprises on how to motivate more Norwegians to work internationally, and we asked them if they had any good advice for women considering international relocation.

³ Among other things, the company Great Places to Work measures the extent to which the work-life balance is a reality or just a popular phase, cf. the presentation of their measurement tool: <http://greatplacetowork.no/great/dimensjoner.php>