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Humanitarians without borders:
work, mobility and wellbeing in UNHCR

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Introduction

This report sets out some key findings about the experience of working for UNHCR, based on analysis of online survey data and a small number of in-depth interviews with staff. The fieldwork for this project was conducted between June and December 2010.

This project draws on a larger British Academy funded study investigating what is distinctive about global professionals in three sectors: multinational corporations (MNCs), international NGOs and UN agencies. By comparing the experiences of workers in different organisations, cities and countries, this research provides a fascinating insight into emergent patterns of globalization and work. Through analysing the experiences of staff in UN agencies and international NGOs – as well as MNCs – this study redresses the tendency in existing research to neglect forms of mobility that are not driven by the pursuit of capital, but rather helping people in need.

UNHCR employs around 7190 staff, of whom 24 per cent are international. The organisation works in 123 countries. This study analyses the attitudes and narratives of a small subset of 48 international staff who are located across the organisation in 16 countries, including the organization's headquarters in Geneva, offices in Jordan, Kenya and South Africa, as well as hardship duty stations in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sudan).

The online survey was launched with international staff at the UNHCR in June 2010. It was designed to address the following themes: employment, mobility and work history; family, friends and social ties; and, identity, attachments and values. This data thereby provides evidence about multiple social fields and the interplay between personal and professional facets of employees' lives.

Participants were recruited via an invitation email that was circulated to 90 employees in the organisation who were either currently, or had recently been, working away from the headquarters at different duty stations. 48 participants responded to the invitation; this constitutes an opportunity sample with a response rate of 53 per cent.

Although this sample is small, relative to the entire population of international UNHCR staff, the following analysis allows for indicative relationships between key variables relating to wellbeing and mobility to be identified. In addition, the qualitative material from the open survey questions and in-depth interviews adds depth and insight into processes within the organisation.

Basic demographic information about the participants in the study are set out here in order to introduce the characteristics of the sample that are relevant in the subsequent analysis and to disclose potential bias within the sample, relative to the total numbers of staff members:

Gender and age: The gender balance is even (1:1). The age-profile is somewhat skewed in comparison with the total population of UNHCR staff, and since none of the respondents are aged 21-30, 20 per cent are aged 31-40, 45 per cent 41-50 and 30 per cent 51-60. The mean age for the sample is 46, and as against the total staff mean age of 40.5.[1]

Citizenship by region: There is no predominant citizenship of amongst participants; although, employees who have citizenship in the Global North are slightly over-represented (60 per cent) relative to the composition of the total population of UNHCR staff. The citizenship of participants is used to establish a simple distinction between those from rich and poor countries using the World Bank's indicators of development and GNI index. Although this collapses significant diversity within the sample it serves to illustrate broad distinctions that are useful in the subsequent analysis.

Education: These employees represent a group of highly educated and skilled workers since two thirds have postgraduate or professional qualifications, and the remaining quarter have undergraduate degrees.

Relationships: Since transnational careers can have a profound effect on the families and opportunities for partnership formation of transnational professionals it is significant to note that 50 per cent of female participants in this sample are single, whereas less than a quarter of the men are single. Three-quarters of the male participants are in a relationship, although a high proportion of these are living apart from their partners due to the insecure locations in which many of them work (e.g. Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq).

Mobility: Mobility here is measured by two variables: the number of times they have relocated to another country (for 3 months or longer) for their jobs and the number of work trips (that do not involve relocation) that they had undertaken in the preceding 12 months. For this sample, 8 out of 10 respondents have relocated 5 or more times in their career; the median number of relocations is 8; and 4 out of 10 staff had undertaken 5 or more work trips in the preceding year and the median number of work trips per year is 4.

Mobility for work

Wellbeing at work is shaped by the relationship between the individual and the organisation. The UNHCR's rotation policy is the distinctive system by which the mobility of staff members is organised. Given the status of rotation as a pillar of organisational practice and culture (Wigley 2005), how it is received and incorporated into people's lives is a critical question for this study.

Staff members at UNHCR are subject to its particular matrix of demands, incentives, opportunities and constraints. Rotation involves the ranking of duty stations based on a hierarchy related to degrees of comfort or hardship (H and A – E) whereby H (headquarters),

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[1] Source: staff intranet (accessed 15-04-11).

A and B denote comfortable duty stations (typically, offices in capital cities) and E denotes extreme hardship (for example: duty stations in Afghanistan or Sudan). International staff are relocated for fixed periods depending on their posting's place in this hierarchy (typically, 4-5 years for an H or A-rated station, as against 2 years maximum for an E).

The time limit imposed on assignments at E duty stations is intended to protect staff from burnout caused by working in extreme conditions. The ways in which employees describe this process of relocation is indicative of the way in which the UNHCR achieves acceptance of the system amongst its international staff, hence organisational trust or discontentment.

In organisational theory the question of how to create 'compliance' with organisational agendas is a fundamental one. Etzioni (1975: 3-5) sets out three ways of eliciting compliance with subordinates in organisations using coercive, remunerative and normative power. In Etzioni's framework these power-*means* involve physical, material and symbolic rewards and deprivations, respectively.

It is generally accepted that a normative (symbolic) 'hearts and minds' approach is the most effective one (Anthony 1977: 251-2). Thus, in the UNHCR, the reasons that staff comply with mandatory rotation is critical to their wellbeing and – ultimately – underpins the efficacy of the organisation. In this analysis, I examine employees' reasons for their mobility as indicative of their attitudes to the system.

Survey respondents were asked their reasons for accepting their most recent job or assignment? This question was designed to capture individuals' orientations towards mobility. They were asked to select from a list of reasons and rank whether they were not at all or not very important, fairly important or very important to them. Although this question relies on people's memories – and their retrospective recollection of reasoning that maybe distorted by hindsight – it nonetheless provides some insight into self-conscious processes of reconciliation between the individual and the organisation.

BOX 1.1 Reasons for mobility based on respondents' most recent assignment

1. Making a difference to society by improving people's lives

2. Gaining professional experience and skills

3. To learn about different cultures or ways of life

4. To live near or with my partner/family

5. Future (expected) career advancement

Box 1.1 lists the reasons selected by UNHCR staff in order of popularity. This analysis suggests that commitment to the UNHCR mandate to protect refugees is at the forefront of many staff members' minds when making decisions about assignments. The response most frequently ranked as very important as a reason for accepting their previous assignment is 'making a difference to society by improving people's lives' (55 per cent) and fairly important (37 per cent); this is followed by 'gaining professional experience and skills' (45 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively); a quarter selected: 'to live near or with my partner/family' and a quarter selected 'to learn about different cultures and ways of life' as very important to them; this latter reason is ranked by a significant proportion of respondents as fairly important (44 per cent). A quarter of respondents cite 'future career advancement' as very important for them, and it is fairly important for a third of them.

Most of these reasons for mobility are not associated with a specific category of employees by age, gender or region. That is, women and men in the organisation are equally likely to identify with reasons 1 and 2 (Box 1.1); and neither does age emerge as significantly associated with reasoning here. However, staff members whose countries of citizenship are in the 'Global South' are more likely to choose 'future (expected) career advancement' than those from the 'Global North' ($p<0.05$); and men are significantly more likely to select this reason for accepting their most recent assignment than women ($p<0.1$).

Almost half of the respondents offered additional statements to explain their responses. These reasons shed light on the complexity of 'choices' facing staff on rotation. Three respondents describe intrinsic work-centred aspects of their assignments, for example, implementing a particular project, and the more generic: "Good supervisor and interesting operation."

Others are less specific, and refer to their commitment to humanitarian work and/or the UN in general: "Just believe in what I'm doing and reasons for which I'm doing it."

However the majority of responses feature an account of the system – either with or without any personal reflections on it. Some recount in detail how they're reconciling individual aspirations, family commitments and the organisational process:

> UNHCR has a rotation policy so movement is required. My present duty station was selected as it suited my professional and personal circumstances.

> My motivation is humanitarian work. My husband is also in the same field. Having small children, having the family together and pursuing careers in humanitarian work best explains our situation.

> As I was living in a duty station (DS) that became non-family and subject to regular disruptions of the security situation I had to find a secure environment where to live with my two young children. I applied to other DS in Africa, but only got the post here.

These statements highlight potential tensions between individual preferences and the UNHCR system whereby duty stations are classified – as 'family' or 'non-family' – and opportunities are effectively ranked *for them* depending on their family situation, health and job-specific criteria.

It is not possible to discern from the descriptive explanations of rotation offered by many respondents where they stand personally with respect to their willingness or reluctance to comply with it. However, it may be instructive that only two respondents explicitly describe a mismatch between their preferences and the onus on them to work internationally:

> My preferred choice is to work in my own country, but due to job insecurities within UNHCR and repetitive post cuts I had to "go international".

Given the difficulties interpreting people's attitudes to rotation from some of their survey responses, the interviews I conducted provided a valuable insight into processes of reconciliation between individuals and the organisation, in other words the 'compliance relationship' (Etzioni 1975: 4). They revealed how many people offset the difficulties associated with rotation by their capacity to make a difference 'in the field':
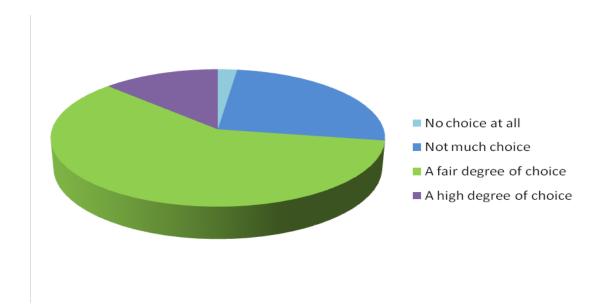
> I'm a field man first! Like I said, the reasons I stayed with UNHCR is because I can see the results of my efforts right in front of my eyes - and that is something special. No other job can give me that satisfaction.

> I feel that you need to be a special kind of person willing to take risks, to suffer a bit, to face hardship conditions in some cases, to face the fact that you may need to be separated from the family. Yet very fulfilling, very rewarding, the help that you provide to people – which is not related necessarily to the amount of income that you're getting, but this feeling of interest in others and to help others.

In studies relating to work and wellbeing exercising agency, or having a sense of control over one's life, is found to be a critical aspect of both job satisfaction and happiness (Graham 2011; Khattab and Fenton 2009). Thus, a further question intended to examine the nexus between the individual and organisation asked staff how much 'choice' they had regarding the countries that they had relocated to for their jobs.

It revealed that only 13 per cent perceived a high degree of choice, 60 per cent a 'fair degree of choice', and 27 per cent not much choice or no choice at all (aggregating the latter two categories). Thus, a sizeable minority of respondents perceive themselves as subject to organisational directives, rather than exercising choice, in this fundamental aspect of their jobs (see figure 1.1).

FIGURE 1.1 Pie chart showing perceptions of choice amongst international UNHCR staff about the countries that they relocate to for their jobs

Given the intensity of internal competition for positions country choice is actually very limited for all international staff members, although they do have choice about which posts, hence destinations, to apply for. Nonetheless, the remaining 73 per cent perceive themselves as having a fair or high degree of choice. Thus, how 'choice' is perceived and understood clearly depends on differing expectations and experiences (see figure 1.1).

When this aspect of 'choice' is incorporated into the analysis of job satisfaction and life satisfaction in order to examine whether it affects the wellbeing of international staff at UNHCR, it does not appear to affect their job satisfaction or overall life satisfaction. Having said that, limited choice about the amount of work travel undertaken does significantly correlate with lower life satisfaction (see section 3.7).

There is some evidence to suggest that length of time in the organisation (job tenure) affects perceived degree of choice ($p < 0.05$) – however the numbers were too small here to be decisive; yet, critically, managerial status, gender and region of citizenship (Global South or Global North) do not appear to affect country 'choice', thus underlining the centrality of 'fairness' to operation of the system (see Wigley 2005: 39-41).

Overall these responses indicate tacit acceptance of mandatory rotation, as an expected condition of employment in the roles that they hold, rather than a source of contention for many. As one interviewee pragmatically puts it: 'it has its pros and its cons, like everything'.

However, a number of respondents raised concerns about the lack of help from the organisation to help manage their transitions into a new context. These aspects of relocating are primarily left to the individual staff member. Table 1.1 suggests that many of the social

aspects of relocating and preparing for transition are left up to the individual (and their colleagues) on their arrival at a duty station. Local provision, both formally and informally, can vary a great deal between sites.

Strikingly, only 15 per cent of staff report receiving information about a context before their arrival that they describe as 'helpful' (11 per cent describe it as 'not very helpful') and a quarter report that they have received 'helpful' information after arrival (although for a further 24 per cent, it is classified as 'Provided but not very helpful'). 10 per cent of respondents state that they did not require information or training to help them adjust.

In roughly two thirds of cases, mentoring, intercultural and language training are simply not provided at all. Yet, notably, most of those who have been offered these forms of support describe it as helpful. In the following analysis mentoring – that is, the support of a mentor or line manager – emerges as key factor that correlates significantly with several aspects of job satisfaction (see section 3.5).

TABLE 1.1: Thinking about your most recent international assignment, did your organisation provide the following assistance for you and – if provided – was it helpful?

Social assistance & information	Not provided	Not required	Offered but not taken up	Provided but not very helpful	Provided and helpful	TOTAL %
Mentoring	60	13	0	4	23	100
Intercultural training	79	11	0	0	11	100
Language training	66	9	9	0	17	100
Information about the context *before* arrival	61	13	0	11	15	100
Information about the context *after* arrival	44	9	0	24	24	100
Practical assistance						
Transport for belongings	7	13	2	11	67	100
Help finding accommodation	62	11	2	4	21	100
Providing accommodation	77	6	0	4	13	100
Financial support for children's education	6	34	6	0	53	100
Help for your family to accompany you	21	23	2	9	45	100

The provision of practical assistance appears to be more standardised across duty stations. Variation arises for staff due to their varying circumstances rather than provision. Help for relocating with one's family, transporting belongings and financial support for children's education is routinely provided, and – in most cases – helpful when taken up. On the other hand, accommodation is not routinely provided and help finding accommodation is limited; except in cases, as one respondent mentions, when their accommodation in a UNHCR compound is 'mandatory for security reasons'.

The follow-up question asking respondents to explain their answers revealed differing perspectives on the topic of organisational assistance. A number of respondents describe the lack of support or system for relocation:

> The reality is that very little support [is offered] before an international staff member moves to a new duty station.

> The main challenge is that you are not provided any support to settle down, nor with time to do so. Thus, all has to be done during weekends and lunch breaks (enrolling kids in school, finding a house, a car, signing insurance contracts…). In other non-Western contexts no support is provided either…

> There is no system in place to provide accurate, updated info about the new country prior to arrival and [it is] practically non-existent after arrival. It is more through colleagues . . . that information is made available.

The above response indicates how important personal networks are and that sharing information informally between colleagues is the way that many UNHCR staff deal with the process of relocation. Others describe their self-sufficiency, in this respect, as follows:

> There is no formal language or settling in provision. After more than 17 years in UNHCR I have become self-sufficient.

> Usually, before applying, I read a lot about the country and document myself. I prepare a list of words that would help me to communicate with people…

Although many respondents acknowledge the lack of support and system to provide information and help prepare staff for relocation, they do not explicitly complain about its absence. Nonetheless, these statements do indicate that placing the onus on individuals to find information about the context and organising basic aspects of their lives – such as, finding housing , doctors and schools – is time-consuming, and can detract from their ability to do their jobs effectively on arrival.

One interviewee described at length the amount of time and energy he invested in researching options, prior to accepting an assignment. He elaborates on the 'cons' of rotation here:

> At the same time it has a lot of difficult areas because you also start up with new friends, you have to look for a new house, you have to look for a new school, you have to get doctors, I mean all of the elements that come with changing a country, you have to deal with them every two or three or four years or five years depending on where. So this is quite stressful in many cases. You have to look for a house, you have to look for a school, and then that's the first thing in my case that I do, first I look for the school for the kids and then I worry about the house. And many times, well sometimes, . . . I have been searching about information about the schools of the countries where I may go before I worry about the conditions of the country.

This detailed account from an interview with a staff member of 20 years illustrates the complex and multifaceted aspects of relocation that are reflected in people's everyday lives and concerns. Despite acceptance of rotation by many survey respondents (see also Wigley 2005), in-depth interviews reveal the personal investment and costs involved that the system perpetuates. These include: time invested in research, periods of separation from their families, and relationship break down (see section 2). Moreover – as the above interviewee notes – timing affects not only the individual but often their partner's ability to work and career prospects, yet the scheduling of rotation rarely takes these factors into account.

Another interviewee proposes the pragmatic solution of being allowed to work half time for an initial period following arrival, so that the staff member has time to organise the basics, find somewhere to live and orient oneself to the city – in terms of neighbourhoods – as well adjusting to a new job. She describes relocation and the process of settling into a new place, as follows: "Initially, it's quite stressful trying to find a work-life balance."

Her suggestion would alleviate the pressure of learning about a job and adjusting to a new location at the same time. Indeed, despite the benefits associated with relocating to Geneva a number respondents detail the difficulties of finding accommodation and settling in the city.

In multinational corporations, 'pre-assignment visits' (also known as 'look-see' trips, Malewski 2005) are incorporated into many expatriate relocation packages in order to manage expectations prior to commencing an assignment and, ultimately, to help ensure the success of the transfer. Since the cost of such pre-assignment visits may be prohibitive for the UNHCR, *time allowances* prior to and following relocation for staff members to research housing, schools and other aspects of settling in a new place would at least lower the stress often experienced by staff on arrival.

Relationships, identities and home

A consequence of geographical mobility that has a profound influence on the wellbeing of employees relates to their capacity to sustain relationships with their family, partners and friends. As discussed in the previous section, mobility can affect children and partners on relocation as much as UNHCR staff themselves.

Moreover, it often entails – what some scholars call – the 'stretching' of social ties across distance (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). They refer to the declining need for face-to-face contact for families and communities to be connected, due to advances in technology and access to cheaper and more frequent flights. In this section, I set out to examine how far this perspective resonates with the experience of international UNHCR staff.

39 per cent of staff participating in the survey are single; 52 per cent are married, and the remaining 9 per cent are in are relationship and not married. Of those 61 per cent who are in a relationship, 60 per cent of women and men are living with their partner, whereas 40 per cent are living apart from their partner.
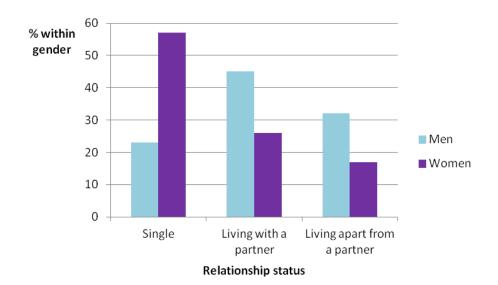
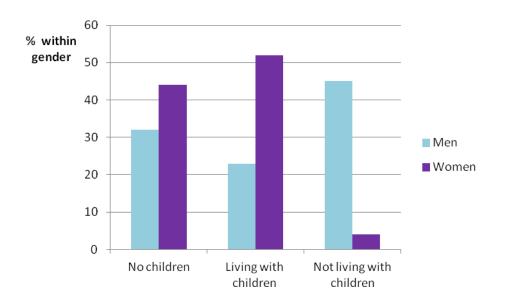*FIGURE 2.1 A graph showing the relationship status of staff by gender*

Although, the survey did not question people directly about the reason for living apart from their partner in these cases, respondents' reflections to open questions reveal that a serious cost of mobility facing many international UNHCR staff stems from them having to do so due to the place in which they are located for their job. Many staff describe the downside of relocation in terms of its effect upon their relationships with their partners; whereas others emphasize the difficulties establishing a 'meaningful relationship' with a partner:

One interviewee elaborated on these difficulties emphatically as follows:

You must understand one very important thing, many of us from the UNHCR, many of us who have served many years – I say many but not all – for many of us our marriages were impacted. You know, I was in Iran for 2 years in the field, I was away from my family and I was not able to cope with being a husband and father to my family because they were elsewhere, and this is something that impacts on many of us. I went through a divorce.

Notably, there is marked gender variation within this sample since over 55 per cent of female survey respondents are single, whereas less than a quarter of the male respondents are single. Moreover, although, female and male staff members in this sample are equally likely to have children (60 per cent), the proportion of parents who live with their children varies by gender. That is, all female staff who have a child under 16 years live with them whereas only 1 in 5 male staff who have children are currently living with them. 60 per cent of respondents who have children are living with their children all or some of the time.

FIGURE 2.2: A graph showing the proportion of staff with children and living with their children by gender

Clearly, relocating with a partner and children poses challenges for families. Yet these challenges can become particularly pronounced for staff who are no longer together with the father or mother of their child(ren), since living in different countries limits children's opportunities to maintain contact with both parents. The following respondent describes these challenges as follows:

What has been more challenging so far has been the management of the close family and the relation with the partner and father of my children, also due to the work requirements. Now that the children are

growing, moving with them and as a single mother could become a challenge.

Yet despite the considerable challenges facing international staff and their families on relocation, overall very few respondents report that 'international experience' has had a 'negative effect on their relationships with their families' (< 10 per cent) in response to a direct question in the online survey, whereas almost half report that 'international experience' has actually 'improved their relationships with their families'. The following account may help to explain why:

> While I have become more distant physically from my parents and siblings, we do keep close contact. The availability of cheaper telephone calls has improved our quality of keeping in touch significantly. Our nuclear family (my husband and children) are very close; as we rotate and leave friends/family behind and make new ones, the core family becomes very close.

Nonetheless, the efforts involved in keeping in touch with close family, elsewhere, *and* cultivating friendships 'in the field' takes its toll on some. Two respondents describe these efforts starkly as follows:

> As an international staff we have to sacrifice socialising with our close relatives and opt for "temporary friendships".

> Over time I find I spend less time cultivating a lot of friends – I get tired of making friends to watch either them or me leave.

A further set of questions asked respondents about the relatives and friends with whom they keep in touch most frequently. Although 90 per cent of all respondents are living in another country from their parents, almost all of those who are in touch with their parents see them at least once a year. They therefore appear to be succeeding in maintaining transnational relationships.
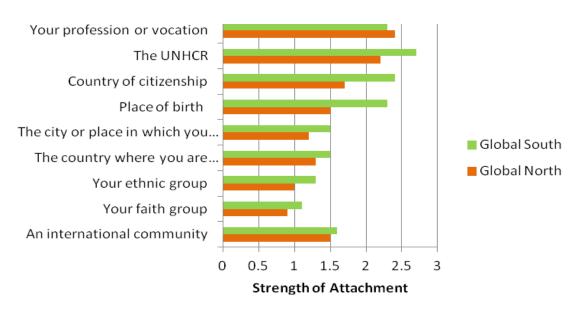
Similarly, over half report meeting with a school friend at least once a year and 6 out of 10 meet with a friend whom they know from a previous job at least once a year. Furthermore, almost all report having a good friend who works in the UNHCR; 4 out 10 states that they meet this good friend several times a month and 7 out of 10 communicate with them via telephone, text or the internet several times a month. Nonetheless, since 2 out of 10 respondents report not having met this good friend at all in the preceding 12 months, social ties between friends within the UNHCR are clearly also stretched across distance.

This brings us to the question of how much international staff identify with the UNHCR and feel a sense of belonging and attachment to the organisation that may help to offset some of the challenges of transitory living situations and geographical distance from close

family and friends. Respondents were asked about their attachments to different particular places, communities and work in order to analyse aspects of identity construction:

The analysis of their responses demonstrate that these international UNHCR staff have a high sense of attachment to their profession or vocation 48 per cent report that they are *strongly attached* and 41 per cent *fairly strongly attached* to their line of work; attachment to the UNHCR is similarly high 41 per cent are *strongly attached* and 55 per cent *fairly strong attached* to the organisation.

FIGURE 2.3 Bar chart showing levels of attachment to the UNHCR, places and communities by staff members' region of citizenship

Considering place-based identities, such as 'country of citizenship' and 'place of birth' shows that 29 per cent are *strongly attached* to their country of citizenship and 43 per cent fairly strongly attached to it; and they report similar levels of attachment to their place of birth. Thus what is most striking about this data is the relatively low sense of attachment that these international staff express about the place or country in which they are living for their work, only 7 per cent are *strongly* attached to either, and 33 per cent are *fairly strongly* attached to the place where they are living and working.

This data thereby demonstrates that attachment to occupation and organisation supersedes place-based or national attachments. Moreover, it is clear that the organisation does not merely signify an international community, of which staff are part, since when asked directly about attachment to an international community levels are significantly lower: only 12 per cent are strongly attached and 43 fairly strongly attached to an international community.

Figure 2.3 shows that attachment to the UNHCR, places and communities varies by region of origin. Staff members with citizenship in the Global South are more attached to the organisation ($p<0.01$), the place in which they are living and working ($p<<0.05$), their country of citizenship and place of birth ($p<0.1$) than staff who hold citizenship in the Global North.

In order to capture more subtle aspects of identity and belonging, respondents were asked the final open question: "And finally where - if anywhere - do you feel most at home?"

Home is taken to signify a sense of belonging and feeling at ease, hence being a useful indicator of wellbeing. Yet in this analysis only a quarter of UNHCR staff define home as something that travels with them, that is, they express what Nowicka (2007) calls a 'mobile construction' of home, which can be anywhere. These international staff who express a non-territorial definition of home often describe home in terms of the presence of their family, partner or children. Accordingly those who relocate alone – for whatever reason – may find the social aspects of establishing themselves in a new destination more challenging.

Over half of the sample defines home in terms of geographically fixed places, for example: 'my home country' and 1 in 10 answers imply nowhere, rather than the cosmopolitan ideal of anywhere. "Difficult to say after living in so many countries." "Nowhere – that's the problem!" One response aptly captures this ambiguity, as follows: "Everywhere and nowhere."

Wellbeing, work and life

The survey questioned respondents about how satisfied they are with the following aspects of their jobs: their sense of achievement, influence in the organisation, opportunities for progression, income, day-to-day work tasks, amount of work they have to do, amount of travel they have to do, work-life balance; and, the support received from mentors or line managers.

Figure 3.1 shows that most respondents are fairly or very satisfied with their sense of achievement in the organisation, job security and income; they tend to be fairly satisfied with the amount of work they have to do, least satisfied with their work-life balance; and not very satisfied with the support they receive from a mentor or line manager (6 out of 10 are not very or not at all satisfied). Over half the respondents are fairly or very satisfied with their opportunities for progression in the organisation, thus just under half are not at all or not very satisfied with these opportunities.
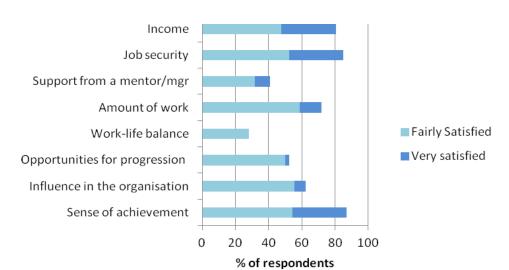
FIGURE 3.1: A Bar chart showing the extent of different dimensions of job satisfaction

These aspects of job satisfaction can loosely be categorised as individual (for example: sense of achievement), as somehow representing the employment relationship between the individual and organisation (for example: influence, work-life balance, support from a mentor or line-manager) and organisational (denoting systems, such as, income and job security). Although amount of work and travel are determined by the organisation they are not included in these categories since they tend to be shaped by unexpected demands and a number of factors that are both external and internal to the organisation, which can vary dramatically over time; they do not therefore necessarily reflect organisational systems directly.

Elsewhere in the survey respondents are asked the more encompassing question in order to capture their sense of wellbeing (see Graham 2011): "On the whole, thinking about your life, using this scale from 1 to 10, please could you select how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the life that you lead."

Using bivariate analysis to analyse responses to these two questions thereby facilitates understanding of the interplay between different aspects of wellbeing, by revealing significant correlations between variables. The following analysis is structured in three stages:

- firstly, identifying statistically significant relationships between different aspects of job satisfaction and life satisfaction;

- secondly, by exploring how individual demographic characteristics (gender, age, region and having children) are associated with relative job (dis)satisfactions and life satisfaction; and,

- thirdly, by analysing how job characteristics and work histories (namely, managerial status, number of relocations and frequency of work trips) influence these different aspects of contentment or discontentment with work and life.

TABLE 3.1: Spearmans rho correlations between aspects of job satisfaction and life satisfaction

| *How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your job?* | **Dimensions of job satisfaction** | | | | | | |
	A Sense of achieve-ment	B Influence in the UNHCR	C Work-life balance	D Amount of work	E Support from mentor or manager	F Income	**Life Satisfaction**
A Achievement	1	0.51**	-	0.29*	0.35*	-	0.38*
B Influence		1	-	0.41**	0.47**	0.36*	-
C Balance			1	0.41**	0.56**	-	-
D Workload				1	0.46**	-	0.43**
E Support					1	-	-
F Income						1	-

* p< 0.05; **p<0.01

From the first bivariate analysis we see that the only aspects of job satisfaction (JS) that have a direct and positive correlation with life satisfaction (LS) are sense of achievement and the amount of work you have to do. Table 3.1 shows that there is a clear and predictable correlation between job satisfaction with amount of work you have to do and work-life balance (p<0.01). Yet what I have called the 'bridging variables' that capture social aspects of the employment relationship between the individual and the organisation (influence and support from a mentor or manager) appear to correlate with a number of dimensions of job satisfaction, including sense of achievement, and thereby – at least indirectly – influence overall life satisfaction.

Although we cannot presume that causal relationships exist between these different aspects of job satisfaction, since support from a mentor or line manager correlates with influence in the organisation, work-life balance (R=0.47 and R=0.56 at the p<0.01 level) and sense of achievement (R=.0.35 at the p<0.05 level) it seems likely to bolster these other aspects of job satisfaction, hence limit potential dissatisfactions.

Notably, the second stage of the analysis revealed no significant variation by gender, age or region of citizenship (that is, comparing staff members with citizenship in the Global South

with those of the Global North), except that staff with citizenship in the Global South were more satisfied with their sense of achievement in the organisation.

However, analysis of how relationship status and living with children affect life satisfaction reveals that single staff members who do not have (or are not living with) children tend to have higher life satisfaction (mean = 8) than single staff living with children (mean = 6); staff with partners (with or without children) are in the middle (7.6).

Finally, the third stage of the analysis examined whether staff members' status in the organisation and mobility affect various dimensions of job satisfaction. These include: having line-managerial responsibility, length of time in the organisation, and the amount of travel the staff member undertakes for their job. It shows that length of time in the organisation (job tenure) does not inform aspects of job satisfaction to a significant extent. Unsurprisingly staff members with managerial responsibility were more satisfied with their influence in the organisation ($p<0.1$) and sense of achievement ($p<0.05$), than those without managerial responsibility; however, notably, the former are less satisfied with their incomes ($p<0.1$) (N.B. the sample of the non-managers included is too small to be decisive in this analysis).

Regarding amount of international travel that a staff member undertakes, those who go on 5 or less work trips a year are significantly more satisfied with their lives (LS) than those who travel more frequently (the median number of trips is 4; and 1 in 10 staff report 15-21 trips per year). Yet amount of travel (without relocation) does not significantly influence the different aspects of job satisfaction explored.

The effect of intense travel upon life satisfaction resonates with the following account of a senior officer in the organisation who travels intensively for his job. He notes that being allowed recovery time – from jet lag – was a 'thing of the past': "The travel itself is quite nauseous – you know when people hear you travel a lot they think that's a wonderful job – [but] in reality, spending your time in airports, planes, conference rooms and meetings is not a huge amount of fun - if you have to do it regularly."

Perhaps surprisingly, the number of times a staff member has relocated for their job does not significantly affect their reported job satisfaction or life satisfaction. Moreover, the analysis shows that choice about country or countries of employment does not significantly affect the job satisfaction or life satisfaction of these transnational professionals (see sections 1.8-1.9).

Nonetheless for some staff members the negative consequences of relocation for their health, relationships and wellbeing are pronounced. One respondent describes her experience bleakly as follows: "[Relocation] negatively impacted my spiritual life; [and] caused burnout 3 times (once after working in 3 emergency situations back-to-back). Has resulted in my husband and I living apart nearly our entire marriage, because of his inability to find work in his career where I've been posted."

Conclusions and recommendations

Jason Reitman's film *Up in the Air* (2009) depicts in vivid ethnographic detail some of the elements of travelling business class and elegantly embodying an elite lifestyle on the move. Yet behind the scenes, the protagonist Ryan Bingham's conventional 'home' is a bleak apartment that he barely spends any time in (43 days out of a year to be precise); it is dull and almost entirely lacking in what many of us would consider 'home comforts'. In effect, the film evocatively displays the deprivations of what Sociologists call the 'disembedding' wrought by globalization, that is, the disruption of established relationships between place, home, social and familial ties. International UNHCR staff in this report acknowledge – unlike the fictional Bingham – that life on the move entails costs as well as privileges.

Much research suggests that people who lead transnational lives develop a mobile (non-territorial) understanding of home (Nowicka 2007). However in this study only a quarter of UNHCR staff define home as something that travels with them, that is, they express what Nowicka calls a 'mobile construction of home', which can be anywhere. This finding is surprising given the heightened mobility of international UNHCR staff within the system of rotation.

Notably UNHCR takes care of many of the practical aspects of relocation – namely, transporting family, belongings and household (though typically not providing or finding accommodation), but the social aspects of relocation – mentoring, intercultural training and information about the local context – are less consistently provided (in a quarter or fewer cases) thereby laying the responsibility for adjustment squarely upon the individual staff member on arrival. They have to become self-sufficient, spend a considerable amount of time researching various options prior to accepting an assignment and rely on an informal network of colleagues.

Since compliance refers to the means by which an organisations achieves its goals by means of specific rewards and deprivations, and the orientations of subordinated actors to organisational directives, it provides a useful theoretical framework for analysing the orientations of UNHCR staff, namely the employment relationship.

In this analysis my focus is international working and understanding how employees incorporate rotation into their lives as fundamental aspect of their jobs. Etzioni (1975: 8) contends that the application of the 'wrong' kind of power – for example, economic incentives – when people's commitment is 'idealistic' can neutralize its effectiveness, because it is deemed illegitimate in that context. In this case, material rewards in terms of income and allowances for undertaking rotation may not necessarily adequately compensate for the social costs of doing so.

Practical and financial support is essential for international staff to be able to comply with the system of rotation; yet since most UNHCR staff are motivated by the desire to make a

difference by improving people's lives *and* professional advancement – which are 'symbolic' rewards in Etzioni's framework – then *social* support from the organisation that facilitates and enhances that engagement is more likely to be effective in helping them to fulfil these idealistic and moral commitments.

Pre-assignment visits and training are built into many corporate 'expat' relocation packages to address the so-called socio-psychological aspects of mobility (Kamoche 1997). The high expatriate 'failure rate' whereby many corporate transfers return prematurely due to the inability of themselves (or their spouse) to adjust to a new setting has prompted investment in such measures given the huge costs involved in relocating executives and their families (Okpara and Kabongo 2011). Research in a number of MNCs suggests that premature return affects at least 40 per cent of corporate transfers (Kamoche 1997; Okpara and Kabongo 2011).

Clearly certain executive 'expat' expectations differ widely from international UNHCR staff members' knowledge and expectations of the 'fields' in which they work. Nonetheless the costs of failure of UNHCR rotations – financially, emotionally and socially – are likely have a significant impact on the organisation's effectiveness and ability to fulfil its mandate. I conclude here by proposing three simple measures that would help to make rotation more socially and emotionally sustainable. These are:

- time allowances – both prior to and following relocation;
- pre-assignment information to reduce individual time spent researching new destinations; and,
- effective mentoring to help individuals to make transitions.

The analysis of job satisfaction reveals that satisfaction with support from a mentor or line-manager correlates significantly with a number of other aspects of job satisfaction – satisfaction with sense of achievement, influence in the organisation and work-life balance. Thus, effective mentoring of staff who undertake rotation to help them to make transitions both prior to and after relocation is likely to have an extremely positive influence on staff wellbeing and their ability to work effectively on arrival.

Further research that helps to qualitatively identify 'best practice' in terms of staff wellbeing and effective mentoring relationships in tandem with post-hoc analysis of situations when assignments have failed to achieve individual and organisational goals, would help to identify existing lacunae in the system and cost-effective means of redressing them.

The UNHCR system depends on the resilience and independence of its international staff and their families, yet given the potential fallout in terms of negative consequences when things go wrong – in terms of adverse effects on health, relationships and wellbeing – it is vital to implement measures to make mobility socially and emotionally sustainable.

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