

THE HIDDEN COST OF NEGLECT

Why Dual Career Support is Vital for Talent Retention

**STOCKHOLMS
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DUAL CAREERS: THE GLOBAL TALENT GAME CHANGER

When hiring international employees, it's tempting to consider the job completed once they have been hired, relocated, and onboarded. However, a critical determinant of their long-term commitment is often their accompanying partner's ability to settle into the new life. Many individuals relocate to Sweden with a partner who leaves their own career behind in the home country. Moving to - and remaining in - a new place is a big life decision that involves both parties.

Working proactively with dual career support should be seen as a strategic issue at the highest levels of management. It is way more than merely a nice benefit to add on at the end of a recruitment and relocation process. Taking a strategic approach to this issue is really a win-win situation. It fosters a higher return on investment for the company, strengthens the employer brand, enhances employee productivity and satisfaction, provides essential support to accompanying partners, and contributes to retaining valuable talent within Sweden.

Stockholm and Sweden offer many appealing qualities for highly skilled internationals, including generous parental leave policies and a commitment to work-life balance. Despite this, many newcomers face significant obstacles in navigating Sweden's job market, which often relies heavily on utilizing personal networks. At the same time, Sweden, as many European countries, faces pressing demographic challenges, such as labor shortages and mismatches in the job market. Companies must fill around 120,000 job vacancies over the coming years. Many accompanying partners already living in Sweden possess the very skills that Swedish companies desperately need – presenting another important angle to this issue.

While there are a few support services around to assist internationals in getting into the Swedish job market, it can be difficult to know where to start and how to find the most suitable one. With a little intentional steering, the matching problem would be much smaller. Therefore, dual career support has the potential of solving both talent retention and talent shortage problems, at a very low cost. By offering targeted guidance and support, such as through initiatives like the Stockholm Dual Career Network (SDCN) that we at Stockholms Akademiska Forum founded in 2015, the barriers to successful integration can be significantly reduced. With nearly a decade of experience, SDCN has facilitated the establishment of over 1000 accompanying partners, demonstrating its effectiveness in attracting and retaining global talent to Stockholm.

In essence, investing in dual career support not only addresses immediate talent needs but also strengthens Sweden's competitive position globally, making it a place for professionals worldwide to thrive. It's time to act. Now.



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81%

**WILL LEAVE STOCKHOLM IF
THE ACCOMPANYING
PARTNER DOESN'T GET A JOB**

Survey among SDCN members (2019 & 2023)



WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Swedish companies face a significant challenge in filling approximately 120,000 job vacancies in the coming years (Svenskt Näringsliv, 2024). Hiring new employees entails substantial investments, both in terms of time and finances, and the consequences of high employee turnover increase these costs even more. Therefore, it is imperative that the individuals recruited by Swedish companies are not just hired but are also motivated to remain in their positions.

Underestimated factor and unique opportunity

An underestimated factor in this equation is the situation of the accompanying partner of international employees. Often, internationally recruited employees bring along equally qualified partners who aspire to establish themselves within the Swedish job market. The partner plays an important role throughout the recruitment process, as it is often a joint decision to relocate in the first place. Once the employee is hired, the situation of the partner affects the work performance of the employee. But it also presents a unique opportunity, as it has the potential to add another skilled professional to Sweden's workforce.

The closed nature of the Swedish job market

However, the closed and somewhat conservative nature of the Swedish job market poses numerous challenges, particularly for highly skilled individuals relocating without an existing professional or personal network. It's noteworthy that a significant proportion of job placements, approximately 8 out of 10 (Axfoundation), occur through personal connections. Unfortunately, international experience is not always valued as an asset, and explaining its relevance along with transferable skills can prove challenging. Consequently, many recruiters opt for the "safer" choice, favoring candidates with familiar educational backgrounds or work experiences. Support services for internationals exist, with the aim of broadening professional networks, gaining Swedish work experience through internship, learning Swedish, translating certifications etc. However, not everyone knows about them or which one is most relevant for their specific situation. Receiving guidance for this process will help solve the matching problem in the Swedish labor market.





Urgent need for strategic interventions

The consequences of the accompanying partner's inability to secure employment in Sweden are profound. The risk of the couple departing increases substantially, resulting in a loss rather than a gain for the city and the country. This not only causes immediate costs for the hiring company, which invested considerable resources in recruiting the employee, but also tarnishes its employer brand over time. This makes the recruitment of new talent more challenging and expensive. Moreover, it undermines Sweden's reputation as an attractive destination for international professionals. Over the past decade, Sweden has experienced a notable decline in the Global Talent Competitiveness Index. This shows the importance of the urgent need for strategic interventions. The image of Stockholm as a world-class hub for tech and innovation and attractive capital for global talents cannot be taken for granted; it requires coordinated efforts to sustain.

An undiscovered goldmine

Tackling this challenge requires targeted dual-career support initiatives, which, in contrast to potential losses, are relatively inexpensive. By assisting accompanying partners in navigating the Swedish job market and facilitating access to social and professional networks, these initiatives yield substantial returns on investment. Indeed, tackling the dual-career issue can be likened to tapping into an undiscovered goldmine, benefiting all stakeholders involved. It fosters retention within the hiring company, accelerates the employment process for accompanying partners, and enhances the city's and country's attractiveness as a favourable environment for international talent. Ultimately, this translates into increased tax revenue, an improved image, and a reaffirmation of Sweden's status as a preferred destination for highly skilled professionals to thrive.

**52 BILLION
SEK**

That's how much labour immigration
added to the Swedish GDP in 2023.

(Svenskt Näringsliv, 2024)

” A holistic and sustainable approach to international recruitment is key to attracting and retaining skilled workforce.

A strategic matter at the highest level

As is pointed out in the Global Talent Competitiveness Index 2023, “talent competitiveness will gain even more importance as a critical element of competitiveness, innovation and geopolitical soft power. This will be true for nations, cities and organisations alike.” Taking a proactive stance in addressing the dual career question is of utmost importance if Sweden wants to continue to compete for a highly qualified international workforce. It needs to be seen as a strategic matter at the highest management level in companies and implemented across various functions such as employer branding, HR, mobility and talent acquisition. A holistic and sustainable approach to international recruitment is key to attracting and retaining skilled workforce.

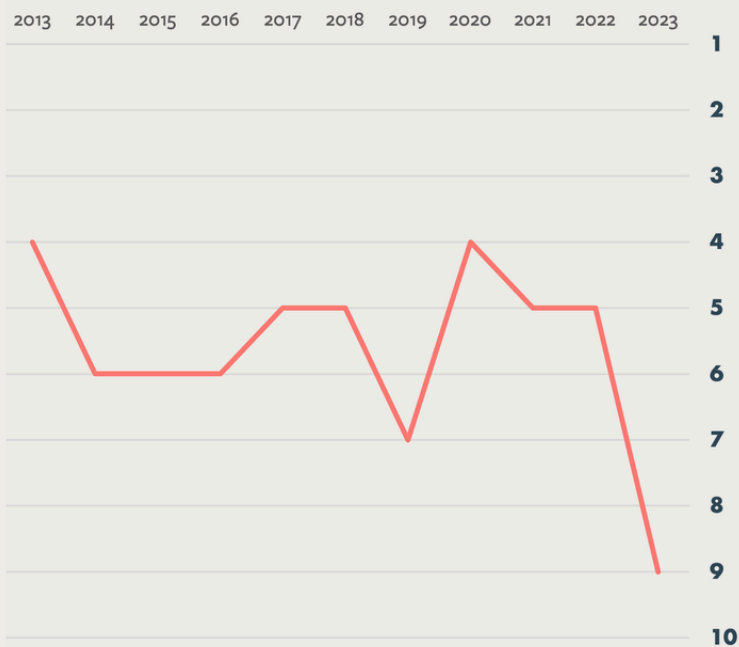
Companies that recruit migrant workers have a 10% higher turnover growth rate than companies that don't.

(Svenskt Näringsliv, 2023)



Over the past decade, Sweden's ranking in the Global Talent Competitiveness Index* has declined from #4 to #9

Sweden's ranking 2013-2023



Top 10 countries 2023

1. Switzerland
2. Singapore
3. United States of America
4. Denmark
5. Netherlands
6. Finland
7. Norway
8. Australia
9. Sweden
10. United Kingdom

*The Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) is a ranking made by INSEAD, Descartes Institute for the Future, and the Human Capital Leadership Institute and is based on a set of key indicators for a country's ability to attract, grow and retain global talent.



THE COST OF NEGLECTING DUAL CAREER SUPPORT

When we fail to prioritize support for accompanying partners, the repercussions can be significant. Here's what we stand to lose:

Employee departure

Neglecting dual career support often leads to employees leaving their positions, resulting in high costs associated with turnover and the need for new recruitment. Not to mention the affects on work performance and project deadlines that can occur.

Limitation in accessing qualified workforce

Neglecting accompanying partners results in missing out on a valuable source of skilled individuals already available in Sweden, leading to recruitment challenges and inefficiencies.

Weakening of employer brand

Neglecting the needs of accompanying partners can weaken both Sweden's and individual companies' employer brands, making it harder to attract and retain talent.

Loss of tax revenue

The departure of skilled professionals not only impacts companies but also results in a loss of tax revenue for the country.

Imagine Surabhi, a highly skilled Software Developer from India who is recruited by a company in Stockholm. Her partner Anirban who is an Electrical Engineer leaves his career in India behind and follows Surabhi to Stockholm. Even though Anirban is highly skilled, he is having trouble entering the Swedish job market without support and a network of his own. This also effects Surabhi, who performs below her capacity due to concern for her partner. After one year of active job-search, the couple decides to leave Stockholm. They get a negative image of the company and Sweden.

The cost of an employee who leaves is around 500 000 SEK - at least. This depends of course on the level of seniority and can be much higher, but as a general rule of thumb we use this number. In addition, the company's employer brand can be tarnished - both because of the person leaving, but also for failing to have a holistic view on the recruitment process and not offering support for the accompanying partner. This is difficult to measure, but according to a study by Harvard Business Review (2016), a bad reputation costs a company at least 10% more per hire and makes it more difficult to recruit new employees in the future.

Costs for the company

- Recruitment and onboarding
- Employee turnover
- Project delays
- Negative employer brand

Costs for the family

- Lost years in the labour market
- Financial costs
- Emotional costs

Costs for the country

- Lost tax revenue
- Admin costs for authorities
- Negative image

On the other hand, **here's what we stand to gain** by providing adequate support for accompanying partners:

Employee retention and contribution

By addressing the needs of accompanying partners, employees are more likely to stay with the company, resulting in a high return on investment. They can continue to contribute to the company's success.

Access to qualified workforce

Supporting accompanying partners means tapping into a pool of qualified talent already present in Sweden, making recruitment easier and more efficient.

Strengthened employer brand

Additionally, both Sweden's and companies' employer brands are strengthened, enhancing their attractiveness to prospective employees.

Increased tax revenue

By supporting accompanying partners, we not only retain skilled professionals but also potentially double tax revenue.

Clara from Brazil gets a job as a Senior Data Engineer at Spotify. The cost of recruiting her to Stockholm is 520 000 SEK. Her partner Alex who is a UX Designer moves with her to Stockholm. Spotify pays 25 000 SEK for Alex to take part in the Stockholm Dual Career Network. Alex gets help navigating the Swedish labor market through SDCN Academy. Clara can focus on her new position and Alex builds their own network in Stockholm. Alex gets a job at a tech scale-up after six months. Clara and Alex decide to stay in Stockholm permanently and spread a positive image of Sweden and the company to friends and acquaintances. Stockholm and Sweden gets to keep two highly-skilled professionals and gain tax revenue from two people instead of one.

Gain for the company

- High ROI
- Employee loyalty
- Project continuity
- Positive employer brand

Gain for the family

- Career stability
- Rootedness in Stockholm

Gain for the country

- Double tax revenue
- Positive image

Overall, the cost of neglecting dual career support is far greater than the investment required to provide such support. It's a low-cost solution with high returns for both companies and the country as a whole.



STOCKHOLM DUAL CAREER NETWORK

Stockholm Dual Career Network (SDCN) offers support services for accompanying partners to international employees in Stockholm. Through SDCN, they gain access to the **SDCN Academy: Unlock Sweden program**, a comprehensive 5-week initiative designed to offer holistic support. The program is outlined to provide the network, information, support, and training necessary to not only enter the Swedish job market, but also to become more rooted in Stockholm – making it feel more like home. The program features renowned speakers and coaches who are experts in their respective fields.

Beyond the Academy, SDCN extends ongoing career **support services on a weekly basis**, as well as regular community events. The importance of the social component cannot be overstated. It provides a crucial support system, offering a sense of camaraderie among individuals who have relocated to Sweden due to their partner's employment, often leaving behind established careers and networks. Establishing a social circle independent of one's partner's workplace is immensely valuable in facilitating a smooth transition and fostering a sense of belonging.

Stockholm Dual Career Network has been providing **dual career support to both universities and companies in Stockholm since 2015**. Founded and managed by Stockholms Akademiska Forum, the collaborative body representing all 18 universities in the city along with the City of Stockholm, SDCN initially focused on assisting accompanying partners of international researchers. However, recognizing the broader need within the community, the network expanded its scope to include companies recruiting significant numbers of international staff, inviting them to join as partner organizations.

” The importance of the social component cannot be overstated.

Would you like to offer dual career support through SDCN? Welcome to contact Stockholms Akademiska Forum!

Since its foundation, Stockholm Dual Career Network has facilitated the establishment of over **1000 accompanying partners**

“There was a time when my partner had to choose from two job offers: one of them being Stockholm and another one from Canada. But there was one deciding factor to opt for Sweden and that was Stockholm Dual Career Network. And here we are now!”



Sheetal Palav moved to Stockholm as an accompanying partner in 2019, when her husband got a job at Truecaller. For her and her husband, access to SDCN played a central role in their decision to move to Sweden. Sheetal now works as Category Marketing Manager at Electrolux.



Dual career support can play an important part in the early stages of recruitment.

“I even had a hard time trying to explain to people what SDCN was because it feels unreal to have people preoccupied with people in our situation. It demonstrates care and good will. We take calculated risk decisions following our loved ones but that means leaving behind a network of friends and a life to jump into the new reality.”

After one year, 90% of the SDCN Academy participants were still in Stockholm, and 75% had an occupation (job, internship or continuing education).

(Out of the 21 participants who took part in the first 2023 cohort of SDCN Academy: Unlock Sweden)



Rafael Escudeiro moved to Stockholm in 2024, as an accompanying partner to a postdoc researcher at KTH Royal Institute of Technology. He has now started a postdoc position himself in Nuclear Physics, also at KTH.

HOW TO SUCCEED WITH PROACTIVE DUAL CAREER SUPPORT

Tips for companies that want to hire - and keep - international employees!

First of all, understand the situation

Understand the need for a holistic and sustainable approach to international recruitment, and that in many cases you are not only recruiting the candidate in front of you, but also a partner. The partner will play an important part in the decision of accepting the offer in the first place, and in the longer run if they will stay. Leaving one's home country to start a new life is a very big step! Furthermore, it's important to realize that this is not 'just' a question for HR officers. The dual career support must be anchored at the top level management as a strategic issue and implemented at all levels as well as across functions, such as employer branding, DEI, talent acquisition and mobility.

Secondly, reach out to Stockholm Dual Career Network!

SDCN has worked actively and successfully with dual career support for a decade, and offer flexible and tailored support solutions for accompanying partners to international employees at all kinds of companies and organizations. Outsourcing the career support allows you to focus on the new employee, and SDCN complements you by taking care of the partner. Attempts have been made by companies to offer dual career support in-house, but access to a diverse and dynamic network of one's own that is not related to the partner's employer is what makes SDCN unique - and also what many accompanying partners have pointed out as one of the best aspects about SDCN.

And lastly, remember to:

- Integrate the career support seamlessly in the recruitment process
- Implement it at all levels and across functions
- Be curious - and generous with your own network
- Follow up as you would with other relocation issues

Bonus tip: Offer Swedish training

While working full-time, employees might not have the time to learn Swedish. Offering Swedish lessons during office hours will not only help them feel more integrated in the social aspects of work, but also increase employee loyalty and the probability of staying in Sweden long term. (And while you're at it, why not invite the accompanying partner as well?)

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Survey among members of Stockholm Dual Career Network (2019 & 2023)

STOCKHOLMS AKADEMISKA FORUM

Stockholms Akademiska Forum is a collaboration between all 18 higher education institutions in Stockholm along with the City of Stockholm.

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STOCKHOLM IS A STATE OF MINDS.