There has been rich international debate about the impact of a global economy on the career development of individuals. Perspectives are, in part, influenced by the personal effect global mobility may have had. In this context, global mobility is defined as relocation (voluntary or involuntary) between countries, for work.

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In developing countries, global mobility brings mixed blessings. In some families, individuals working abroad send home much needed income. Similarly, global industries, such as call centers, bring valuable infrastructure, development, and new jobs to national economies. However, over time, the “brain drain,” whether through international mobility or recruitment to locally based multinational corporations (MNCs), may leave a country with an insufficient number of professionals or technical specialists.

In developed countries, the impact is similarly mixed. Unemployed local citizens may express concern that foreign workers have taken their jobs away, either by filling local jobs (often at entry level salaries) or through “offshoring” or “outsourcing” (i.e., moving work to countries with relatively inexpensive labor). Schools and post-secondary institutions have become increasingly dependent on fees paid by international students; however, those students may have difficulty finding local work or may be criticized when they return home as internationally trained competitors in the global economy.

There are also regional differences in the types of workers who become globally mobile. American, Western European, and Australian international workers, for example, would typically be considered expatriates, employed in management, professional, or technical specialist roles; the exception would be students on a gap year, combining world travel with service jobs. On the other hand, workers from developing regions (e.g., Eastern Europe, India, Mexico, Philippines) are typically recruited to fill low-paid, dangerous, or otherwise unappealing positions.

It gets further complicated when highly educated professionals from developing countries leave local gaps when they emigrate or take on lower-skilled but higher paying jobs with MNCs set up in their regions. Well-known examples include the exodus of doctors and nurses from South Africa; doctors, nurses, or lawyers from the Philippines serving as nannies abroad; and Indian university graduates working in call centers rather than pursuing their intended professions. Refer to Careers Without Borders for more information on this topic (Reis & Baruch, 2013).

Aside from social justice considerations regarding global mobility, individuals who migrate for work, permanently or temporarily, have unique career development needs. In recent years, there has been increasing attention on serving immigrant and refugee job-seekers; in many regions, there are government-funded career services for members of these groups. However, in developed countries, career professionals tend to view anyone “from away” as an immigrant; this is ironic, because if their next door neighbor were to commute to work in Kazakhstan, that neighbor would be considered an expatriate. For a concise overview of the continuum of internationally mobile workers, see Reicrath-Smith and Neault (2013).

Global careerists have been described as “those who will live in whatever location suits their purpose at the moment while building career skills that are not organization or location specific” (McNulty & Brice, 2013). However, as there are limited government-funded career supports for people who choose to live abroad, many career professionals have not been trained to work with these clients. The tendency to view global careerists as immigrants may result in erroneous assumptions that, in turn, lead to recommendations that don’t fit with the individual’s life plans or career goals.
Of course, in today’s increasingly virtual workplace, many individuals are working internationally without ever leaving home. Whether employed locally by an MNC or non-governmental organization (NGO) or working from home or a satellite office for an organization based abroad, there are complexities to consider when members of teams work across international borders. Although career professionals are not expected to know details of income tax laws, visa requirements, or licensing/credentialing requirements for every occupation and jurisdiction, it’s absolutely crucial that we know what we don’t know, and where to find the information our clients need.

It’s exciting to see NCDA devote a full issue of Career Developments Magazine to exploring international issues in career development. At a macro level, there is important work going on internationally to define career, develop culturally relevant career theories, address the impact of unprecedented changes and global interconnectedness on careers, and identify competencies required by individuals to manage their own careers as well as competencies required by the career professionals who serve them. There have been international conferences and symposia grappling with the topic and new professional associations formed to bring together career professionals from various countries. For a comprehensive overview of much of this recent work, see the Handbook of Career Development: International Perspectives compiled by Arulmani, Bakshi, Leong, and Watts (2014).

Both the NCDA and the International Association of Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) have long played important roles in championing career development internationally and establishing competency frameworks for career professionals in various regions of the world. Career counselors and specialists are also increasingly concerned with social justice; the unequal distribution of global wealth as well as the devastating impacts of poaching any country’s talented citizens.

At a micro level, however, most career counselors and specialists work with individual clients in specific regional contexts. Our work has traditionally focused on helping individuals establish or re-establish their careers within local communities. However, a global economy has impacted how and where work is being done and internet-based technologies have made very specific local information available, in real-time, to an international audience; it has also facilitated working across borders—sometimes without relocating.

A job opening in a desirable local firm may draw international interest from highly qualified applicants currently located abroad. Similarly, the competent professionals we have attracted to our communities may be wooed away by an international competitor who is, quite simply, not on our radar screen.

Families of globally mobile workers have unique needs as well (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2011); aside from typical time and strain-based role conflicts, these families must also grapple with mobility-related challenges (e.g., Will the accompanying partner be able to get a work visa? Is there a suitable local school for the children in the family? Is it even possible for the family to relocate together or will the international worker have to commute?). Accompanying partners may need special support to re-establish careers after international moves and also to prepare for repatriation.

Longer term global careerists may have raised “third culture kids” (TCKs) who don’t consider their passport country, or the country they live in, home. TCKs tend to see the world as their potential workplace and may become global nomads, willing to relocate to wherever they can find interesting opportunities.

In some cases, globally mobile workers experience more challenges re-establishing their careers after repatriating than they did when they first moved away. This, of course, differs by country and occupation; however, career professionals need to be aware of the challenges that repatriates may face in terms of having their international work experience and/or foreign credentials recognized and valued (Neault, 2014; Reicrath-Smith & Neault, 2013).

Career development counselors and specialists have an ethical responsibility to work within their competencies. However, where and how do we develop competencies to support clients to access, critically examine, and make decisions about possibilities that may be halfway across the world? Ironically, there has been more published in the business and international education literature than the career literature about the career development and career/life challenges faced by globally mobile workers. Career professionals are being left behind.

This issue of Career Developments Magazine offers an essential foundation for career professionals to learn more about this increasingly large and influential segment of the workforce. To get started in customizing your approach to serving internationally mobile clients, the following tips may help establish where in the world your clients want to work and how you can help them achieve their goals.

REFERENCES
A complete list of references is available upon request from the author.

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Serving Internationally Mobile Clients
Recommendations for Career Professionals

BE OPEN TO POSSIBILITIES.
There are countless career configurations within the global workplace. Although the focus in government-funded services for the unemployed generally requires clients to take the most efficient route to employment, a global careerist may be exploring possibilities, currently working on international contracts, attending school online in another part of the world, or accompanying a spouse who has been temporarily transferred to your area.

USE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS.
Instead of assuming that an internationally trained medical doctor would willingly retrain as a technician to remain in the U.S., explore various possibilities. Questions like “What do you already know about working in the U.S.?“ or “How long can you afford to not be earning an income?” can help you identify an appropriate starting place for your work together.

EXPAND YOUR RESOURCES.
Are you providing only local labor market information or do you also introduce clients to global career trends? Do you know how to get foreign transcripts or professional credentials assessed? It’s unrealistic for you career counselors and specialists to be an expert on every career in every country. However, it is reasonable that you would know where to turn to find the information your clients will need.

BUILD A GLOBAL NETWORK.
It’s so much easier to learn about work in another country if you have a trusted colleague to ask. This is equally true if you are working with an immigrant looking for local work or with a local individual who is considering opportunities abroad.

CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS.
Although your clients will be one source of information for you, it’s not their job to be your cultural informants or country experts. Make time to learn about the places your clients have come from and also the places they are considering moving to next.

ANTICIPATE REPATRIATION CHALLENGES.
Unless an international move is intended to be permanent, it’s important to pave the way to a future return home. Help your clients weigh the pros and cons of keeping local professional designations current and encourage them to strategically maintain evidence of their skills and competencies, as well as local contacts and references.

ADAPT YOUR ACTIVITIES.
Encourage clients to consider global opportunities or, if that’s not viable in terms of their other life roles, to consider global contacts that may be aware of local opportunities. It’s not uncommon for career practitioners to engage clients in identifying their networks. However, it’s not typical to encourage those clients to list key contacts located outside of the country, even though those contacts may be closely connected to colleagues or businesses within your local area.

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS.
Help your clients realistically assess their chances of success in the international arena. Encourage them to test the waters, perhaps through volunteering on a short-term project, studying abroad, or even learning a foreign language. Help them explore visa requirements and the process of registering within their professions. Wherever possible, connect them with a trusted contact in the regions they are considering—someone who will be brutally honest about the viability of their anticipated career plans.

RECOGNIZE FAMILY NEEDS.
International mobility is far more complex than transferring to a new job across town. Your client’s culture will impact how much or little family circumstances will influence his or her career. To support career decision-making for internationally mobile clients, explore who will be consulted about the decision, what type of family support your client is expected to provide, and which family members will also relocate, as well as what types of career supports they may also need.

TRAVEL.
Being “the other” is a humbling experience. Traveling to different countries will help to expand your awareness—both about what you don’t know and also about what expertise others have that you have yet to develop. Attend to the sophistication of technology in the countries you visit, the complexity of transportation systems, the multilingual competencies of the people you meet, and the business similarities, especially in world-class cities due to the proliferation of multinational organizations; such awareness will help you to better support internationally mobile global citizens.

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